

# **Eternal Love Evangelical Lutheran Church: A Brief History**

Eternal Love Evangelical Lutheran Church.

How was this name chosen? What does it mean?

The name is to reflect the message of the Christian faith – that God's love for us is eternal.

Even though the human race has failed to live as God requires, God has not turned his back on it. Even before we were born God determined to make life with Him possible for us. How can unholy, sinful and rebellious people live with the holy God? God's love found a way. In love God sent His own Son – Jesus Christ – to save the fallen world.

Jesus lived for us, died for us, and defeated death for us as the Savior from sin that God provided. It was a great sacrifice that required great love.

God loved us from eternity. His love will make our eternity blessed. ETERNAL LOVE. It is the reason for the Christian's hope and joy. It is the story of our forgiveness. It is the message we proclaim. It is the name of our church.

-- The Love Letter, November 1988, Number 1. First edition of the Love Letter.

The name of this church is certainly unique. However the mission is not. The mission of this church is the same as the mission of Christians from the time of Christ. Jesus Christ himself gave us the mission in his great commission. "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). The members of Eternal Love Lutheran Church have expressed their mission in this way:

## **Mission Statement (2004)**

Eternal Love Evangelical Lutheran Church

exists to give glory to God

by reaching out to our families,  
our communities and the world  
with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We — as God's people — will seek ...

- to faithfully study God's inspired Word,
- to accurately preach and teach the Holy Scriptures, and
- to regularly receive the Sacraments according to Christ's Institution

so that we — led by the Holy Spirit — may grow in faith, love and service.

This mission statement reminds us that we give all glory to God for gathering and equipping his believers. God has accomplished great things among the members of Eternal Love Lutheran Church. God accomplishes great things wherever his gospel is preached. As we consider the history of Eternal Love, remember that it is the history of God converting unbelievers to believers, gathering those believers, and using them to strengthen each other and call even more unbelievers to faith in Christ. To God be the glory!

## **A New Mission in Appleton**

In the summer of 1988, the Northern Wisconsin District Mission Board called Pastor Robert Balza to be a community missionary in southeast Appleton. In 1988 there were already five Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod churches in the city of Appleton, Wisconsin. Why

Appleton? Two main reasons. One – Southeast Appleton was growing rapidly at that time. The second reason for planting a new church in Appleton is summed in an article about the new WELS church by the local newspaper, the Post-Crescent. “The other five WELS churches, Balza says, are at capacity and the demands make it difficult for pastors to do mission and evangelism work.” (The Post Crescent, October 15, 1988, section A-8)

Pastor Robert O. Balza was installed as a community missionary on October 23, 1988 at Riverview Lutheran Church in Appleton. There was no core group of WELS members to start with. Eternal Love started with no members. Pastor Balza began by contacting the people in the community at their doors or on the phone.

What did he find? The following statistics are from an article published in the first Eternal Love newsletter, called the Love Letter, from November 1988. This is from a survey of 500 homes in October 1988. The background of the community was 51% Roman Catholic and 24% Lutheran (8% being WELS Lutheran). However, 30% of the homes did not attend church regularly. There were many people who needed a church home whether they knew it or not. The most important survey question was, “How do I get to heaven?” Only 28% said “faith in Christ”. 72% said “my good life” or did not know. Many in the community needed to hear the message of free forgiveness and eternal life through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

After Pastor Balza had gone door-to-door for six months, the first worship service was held at Horizons School on April 23, 1989. 300 people attended. 100 were unchurched! The Lord had blessed the preaching of his Word.

Of course, worship attendance went down after the opening service. For the remainder of 1989 the Sunday worship attendance was in the 50’s.

### **A Congregation Forms and Builds**

On October 8, 1989 thirty-seven people formed Eternal Love congregation. These Christians worked together to carry out the mission of reaching their community with the gospel. God’s blessings continued as the congregation officially incorporated in the state of Wisconsin in April 1991. The voters meeting of April 21, 1991 put Eternal Love on the map in some ways. The following resolutions passed:

- *Founding: A resolution that a congregation of Christians incorporate in Appleton Wisconsin as Eternal Love Ev. Lutheran Church. VOTED: All voted in favor.*
- *Constitution: A resolution that we accept our constitution and bylaws. VOTED: All voted in favor.*
- *Calling of Pastor: A resolution that Eternal Love call Pastor Balza to be our Pastor. VOTED: All voted in favor.*

While Eternal Love was on the map as being a church, it did not have a permanent facility yet. The congregation worshiped in Horizons School four years before worshiping in their own building. The congregation first worshiped in their new building on Palm Sunday, April 4, 1993. Dedication took place on October 17, 1993.

The congregation, with the help of WELS Builders for Christ, added on to their worship facility in the summer of 2001. This addition, dedicated October 28, 2001, created classroom and office space that was soon filled.

In September 2004, one of the classrooms began to be used for a half-day preschool. The congregation called Mrs. Rae Scherschel during the January 25, 2004 voters meeting as the preschool teacher.

### **Growth**

From its formation, Eternal Love has grown steadily in membership. What has contributed to this blessing and what are the goals of these members? I asked the communicant members to fill out a survey in July 2004. 64 people returned the surveys.

36% of those who responded said that the worship style and music influenced their decision to join Eternal Love. You can see the other dominate reasons why people joined. So what is different about the way worship is conducted at Eternal Love?

The order of service is very rarely page 15 or any other page in the front of the hymnal. The order of service is prepared to fit the theme of the service. It will normally have many of the same parts as a typical order of service, but the wording of the confession and absolution or the prayer of the church or the invocation will be changed to fit with the theme for the day. This also allows visits to better follow along in the worship.

Music is another difference. On most Sundays, hymns from the hymnal will be used. However, beginning in November 1996 a new group formed to lead the musical portion of worship. This "praise ensemble" works with the pastor to choose, play, and lead the congregation in singing contemporary songs. Currently this form of worship is being used once a month. The choir also sings anthems on a regular basis using a wide range of musical styles.

The members of Eternal Love are united in their mission. 75% of those who responded said that outreach, proclaiming Christ, is their goal as a member of Eternal Love. Outreach is done in many ways. Mass mailings, telephone surveys, door to door visits, personal invitations, billboards, and radio and newspaper advertising have all been used to reach the community with the gospel. It is interesting to note that the number one thing members want to do better is outreach.

It is also interesting that the thing this congregation is well known for is an outreach event – Vacation Bible School, or the Summer Bible Adventure. It began in August 1989 at the parsonage with an average of 25 in attendance. The VBS during July of 2004 had an average of 115 children. The members put their time, talents and treasures to work to teach students about God's great love.

### **The Future**

What does the future hold for the members of Eternal Love Lutheran Church?

Challenges include keeping a small friendly church feel even as the church is no longer small. Opportunities also abound because the church is no longer small. What does the Lord Jesus have planned for these Christians in Appleton, Wisconsin before they join him in heaven? He alone knows. As they are strengthened by his Word, may they continue to carry out their mission to reach “out to our families, our communities and the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

### **The Video Documentary**

The video documentary was put together using interviews with Pastor Robert O. Balza, Robert and Barbara Miller, and Kim Runkel. The interviews were conducted October 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2004. Other materials used were from the Eternal Love church library, minutes of council and voter’s meetings, bulletin files, newsletters, and electronic files.

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