

# ST. MATTHEW EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

*CENTERED ON CHRIST AND HIS WORD*



*FOR 22 YEARS REACHING OUT TO OUR COMMUNITY*

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April 22, 2002  
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In the book of St. Matthew Jesus tells us, **“Therefore 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”** These words from our Savior could be called the motto for a small Lutheran congregation on the shores of Lake Michigan. St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church is not the largest church in the W.E.L.S. but the small numbers of congregational membership have not decreased the zeal to carry out the Great Commission. After examining the history of this small, Christ centered congregation, the only conclusion that can be made is that God has truly blessed this congregation with a heart for lost souls.

### **A Brief History of Port Washington**

Port Washington is located approximately 25 miles north of Milwaukee on the shore of Lake Michigan. In 1833 the federal government closed a treaty with the Sauk, Chippewa and other Indian tribes of eastern Wisconsin, opening the area to settlers. Wooster Harrison recorded the first deed for land in Port Washington on September 7, 1835 under the village name of Wisconsin City. During a severe banking crisis known as the Panic of 1837, Harrison left the settlement for five years. In 1843 Harrison moved back into the area with five other families.

In 1848 the village of Port Washington was incorporated on July 20. Some of the first settlers were Irish, German, Luxemburg, and Norwegian immigrants. Due to severe harvest failures in Germany, over 6000 people immigrated to America between 1854 and 1857 and many settled in Wisconsin with a group coming into Port Washington. The south side of the village was known as *“the Canada side”* because of the Irish settlers who had arrived by way of Canada.

German immigrants were greatest in number and as a result contributed much to its cultural life. The dominant religion was Roman Catholic. St. Mary's Catholic Church was established very early in its history and Roman Catholicism has remained the dominant religion in Port Washington.<sup>1</sup>

### **A Religious Profile of Port Washington**

Reaching out to the community of Port Washington as in any community would be a challenge. Port Washington is predominantly Roman Catholic. The members of St. Matthew who have canvassed the city will often find as many as nine people out of ten identifying themselves with St. Mary's or St. Peter's Catholic Church. Over all there are 12 other churches currently serving the community of Port Washington. The following is a breakdown of the churches in the area:

† Roman Catholic	2
† Lutheran LCMS	1
† Lutheran ELCA	1
† Episcopal	1
† Congregational	1
† Non-Denominational	1
† United Church of Christ	1
† Methodist	1
† Assemblies of God	1
† Baptist	2

### **The Genesis of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church**

The first exploratory service was held on November 4, 1979 with an attendance of 33<sup>2</sup>. Through the request of Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod members the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod began exploring the possibility of locating a mission in Port Washington.

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<sup>1</sup> Information supplied by the Port Washington Women's Club.

<sup>2</sup> This information is taken from 15 years of God's Grace: A Brief History of St. Matthew, a reprint of an article in Topics, an annual devotional booklet put out by the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society.

Rev. Adolph C. Buenger, St. Matthew's first pastor and charter member, for reasons of ill health, moved to Port Washington to begin his retirement. Upon his arrival in Port Washington, he was approached by Pastor Howard Kaiser of Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cedarburg Wisconsin, the chairman of the Southeast District Mission Board, to aid in establishing exploratory services in Port Washington. Pastor Buenger agreed and St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church had begun. Due to his ill health, Pastor Buenger was not able to conduct the preaching duties involved so arrangements were made with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to fulfill this obligation. Professors Richard Balge and John Jeske fulfilled this responsibility on a rotating basis with Pastor Buenger serving the original nucleus during the week and providing the necessary guidance for St. Matthew's beginnings. Pastor Buenger's daughter Aurie Cosentine remembers this time in St. Matthew's history fondly:

At this time we did not have a called pastor, but on Sundays we had guest preachers with my father Adolph Buenger conducting the altar services. This gave us opportunities to hear the Professors from the Seminary and meet with their wives and families. It was a fun and exciting time in the life of St. Matthew.<sup>3</sup>

Services in the beginning were held in the Knights of Columbus Hall located at 107 East Washington Street. The worship area ~~was~~ consisted of folding chairs centered around a small area which had an altar made of two office desks pushed together and covered with white linen. There was a small organ which was rolled out from a locked storage box for use during the services. On the wall was a picture of the current Pope of the Catholic Church and while services were being conducted the picture was turned around to face the wall and a cross was placed in

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<sup>3</sup> This information taken from The 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church Member accounts of the past 20 years

front of it.<sup>4</sup> The Knights of Columbus Hall not only served as the worship facility but also as the Sunday school classroom. Every Sunday morning members would arrive early to set up chairs and make the room ready for worship. After the service everything was taken back down and the room restored to its original condition. This facility served the members of St. Matthew until April, 1985 when the present facility at 1525 Grant Street was constructed.

On April 18, 1985 a special service was held for the laying of the cornerstone and the congregation moved into their new worship facility. The members immediately recognized the continuation of our Lord's Great Commission and one of the first official acts was to amend the constitution of the church to include a job description for a Sunday School Superintendent. This was just one of the many ways that St. Matthew carried out its mission to educate the children in the word of God and to reach out into the community.

### **Shepherds of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church**

#### **Pastor Daniel W. Simons**

In May of 1980, a graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary was assigned as St. Matthew's first resident pastor. On July 6, 1980 Daniel W. Simons was ordained and installed as pastor of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Mission.

Pastor Simons assumed the responsibility over 42 communicants, 57 souls and 25 families<sup>5</sup> and faithfully served St. Matthew from June of 1980 until February of 1990. Pastor Simons' years were marked with the typical spiritual leadership of a faithful shepherd. Duties such as

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<sup>4</sup> Information supplied by Tony Branda, Charter Member of St. Matthew Lutheran Church

<sup>5</sup> Recorded by Pastor Buenger on April 7, 1980 in his request for a full-time pastor.

confirmation classes for both adult and children, Sunday school, Sunday morning and midweek Bible classes, and the Sunday worship services.

In 1985 while under Pastor Simons St. Matthew constructed a new worship facility and was removed from synod operating subsidy. In other words, 1985 was the year in which St. Matthew became self-supporting and mission status ceased. On August 25, 1985, to commemorate this achievement, Pastor Howard Kaiser, Chairman of the Southeastern Wisconsin District Mission Board, wrote in a letter addressed to the members of St. Matthew:

This is a joyful day in the young history of St. Matthew, Port Washington, as you dedicate your new house of worship to the glory of God. During a short span of five years, the Lord had blessed you with land, construction of a new parsonage, and now, this move into your permanent new church. He has blessed you with steady growth in membership so that, since the beginning of this year you no longer need operating subsidy. May the Lord continue to guide and lead you in the years ahead. With the Psalmist we join you in declaring, "Great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever-. Praise the Lord".<sup>6</sup>

It would seem that the construction of a new worship facility and the removal of St. Matthew from the synod's operating subsidy were the highlights of Pastor Simon's years of service. But a study of the congregational reports during these years reveals an important aspect of the influence of God's word and that is a zeal for reaching out to the lost souls in Port Washington. The following is an example of the "not so ordinary" evangelism that had taken place.

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<sup>6</sup> Letter addressed to the members of St. Matthew dated August 25, 1985

Every visitor is noted by a visitor card and then evaluated as to visitor or PROSPECT for membership. Prospects are then visited the next day or as soon as can be arranged by Pastor Simons. All prospect cards are saved and then entered on computer so that they are not lost by "falling thru (sic) the cracks." ALL visitors are sent a card to thank them for worshipping with us. All new faces, children and adults, from Vacation Bible Story Time, Sunday School, Adult Bible class on Sunday Morning and on Tuesday morning at Bible and Coffee Break Time, all are kept track of on computer. Most of these names end up on our mailing list. These people are kept informed as to new Bible classes, new Bible subjects, or vbst [Vacation Bible Story Time], and Sunday School.<sup>7</sup>

The Evangelism Committee also reported:<sup>8</sup>

- Raised \$1200 for an audio tape ministry. (We wear out lots of tapes). The need for tapes is growing.
- Raised \$1356.85 for a new G.E. Video camera. Our Sunday morning services are video taped. Tapes go to the Heritage Nursing Home and shut-ins.
- Raised \$750 for lithographing our six by nine full color post card.
- Raised \$2000 for a computer and printer for our Pastor. With this equipment he puts every Sunday sermon in print, and they go all over the world. Some go to Japan, some to Germany, but most stay in Wisconsin.
- We also have committed to us \$500 for a second six by nine full color post card for a pre lent mailing. Approximately 7000 cards go out in the community.
- I have at this time the entire city of Port Washington on a computerized bulk car. rt. sort, non profit list.. . When I am done we should have a mailing list of ALL -- Port Washington, Saukville, Belgium, and Cedar Grove, Wisconsin.
- We have also raised approximately \$3500 for food to the needy. The recipients all know that it was done in the name of their Savior thru (sic) all the members of St. Matthew.

If there is anything notable about the 10 years Pastor Simons served St. Matthew Congregation it is the love for souls that has developed by the work of the Holy Spirit due to his faithful shepherding with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In February of 1990 Pastor Simons accepted a call to serve Salem Lutheran Church in Milwaukee Wisconsin.

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<sup>7</sup> Report given by Norbert Netz to the voters of St. Matthew January 15, 1989

## **Vacancy Pastor**

Pastor E. C. Renz served St. Matthew from February 1990 until July of 1990 until Pastor Donald Thompson accepted the call to serve.

## **Pastor Donald Thompson**

Pastor Donald (Don) Thompson arrived in July of 1990. Soon after Pastor Thompson began to serve St. Matthew began to participate in more synodical events. The WELS connection began to be viewed on a regular basis. They began to participate in synod-wide campaign. The congregation began to develop a mission mindset.

In 1992 St. Matthew started a WELS fair booth at the Ozaukee County Fair with six other WELS churches. Pastor Thompson became involved with the Ozaukee County Jail Ministry, just another way to reach out into the community for lost souls. The church started the adopt-a-grandparent program at Heritage Nursing Home with a bus service to church on Sunday mornings. Another item of outreach was started by participating in Port Washington's Fish Day Parade to make St. Matthew visible in the public eye. In 1998 the congregation began a Christmas for kids program and has continued holding such an event each year since.

After the arrival of Pastor Thompson to St. Matthew the need arose to reevaluate itself as a result of the congregations' changing needs and the spiritual opportunities in the community. Under the guidance of Pastor Thompson a vision statement<sup>9</sup> was crafted. It stated:

- 1) That all members take a course in friendship evangelism and be active in reaching their friends, relatives, associates and neighbors.

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<sup>8</sup> Report to the voters January 15, 1989



- 2) That a lighted church sign and a steeple be erected as soon as possible, preferably before the end of 1993.
- 3) That paid weekly advertising begin in 1994.
- 4) That yearly canvasses be made to identify every unchurched souls in Port Washington.
- 5) That St. Matthew offers multiple Bible Studies throughout the year, as well as specific curricula for growth in the Word and doctrine, and training for Christian ministry.
  - a) That a midweek service be conducted year-round on Monday evenings.
  - b) More and more of our members are working in service related industries
- 6) To effectively reach as many unchurched as possible
- 7) That giving to the current building fund be promoted as a high priority among our members and organizations, and that an educational wing be built as soon as possible.
- 8) That St. Matthew, by God's grace, double its membership and its church and communion attendance by 2005.
  - a) Port Washington is a growing community. People are moving out from Milwaukee and Brown Deer looking for safer places to live. Most will be looking for new church home.
- 9) That St. Matthew actively promote Christian day-school and high school education through support of Our Savior Lutheran School in Grafton and joining the Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School Federation.

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<sup>9</sup> This "Statement of Vision for St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church," was presented to the May, 1993 Voter's

10) That we make a concerted effort to go completely self-supporting at the beginning of 1994.

It is clear that the love for souls that was established at the founding of St. Matthew was still present. But as the community of Port Washington began to change so also did the vision of congregation.

In 1997 while under Pastor Thompson, St. Matthew set out to reach even more unchurched people in the Port Washington community by starting a Christian Child Care. The desire for this came about as a result of statistics that Pastor Thompson presented to the congregation in about 1996. The statistics showed that since about 1986-87 St. Matthew had not grown. St. Matthew had stayed around 200 souls, sometimes a few more, sometimes a few less. What the statistics also showed is that in 1986 or 1987 St. Matthew had about 70 children confirmation age and under. But by 1996-97 St. Matthew had only 30 children confirmation age and under. There was a steady decline over that 10 year period. In other words St. Matthew had become a graying congregation. Pastor Thompson told the congregation that if they want to be a congregation that serves primarily elderly people, they wouldn't have to do anything different. But if they wanted to attempt to reach the young and not be just a congregation primarily for elderly people, perhaps they should consider doing something about it.<sup>10</sup> As a result of this statistical information a committee was formed to begin looking into starting a Christian Day Care. Over several months childcares and pre-schools were visited, data gathered, and recommendations were made for the beginning of a child care with a preschool in the child care.

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meeting.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Pastor Thompson March 25, 2002

Over the next year St. Matthew formed a building committee for the child care, plans were drawn up and Builders for Christ were contacted to begin construction. This was unusual because BFC did not normally perform work on congregations that were self supporting. Pastor Thompson stated that the relationship St. Matthew developed with BFC was nothing more than a blessing from God to aid the church in its outreach efforts. Pastor Thompson states:

We were again extremely blessed in that there was only one mission congregation that wanted to use the services of BFC. In previous years, they worked only with mission congregations. At the same time we were contemplating a child care and talking with BFC, we also decided to go completely self-supporting. We became the first congregation that BFC helped out that was not a mission nor had lost buildings through storm, fire, or some other calamity.<sup>11</sup>

Again we see the desire of St. Matthew Congregation for lost souls. The child care was built with the expressed purpose of reaching out to the lost and unchurched. It was built and organized as an outreach tool. St. Matthew viewed the childcare as a feeder for Our Savior's Lutheran Elementary School in Grafton. Their hope was to reach as many children as possible with the Gospel and educate them about the love of Jesus Christ. In 1998 the doors were opened and 90 percent of the children attending were from unchurched families.

When asked about the success of the child care as an outreach tool Pastor Thompson responded:<sup>12</sup>

There are a couple of other reasons for the child care's success.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

- 1) St. Matthew moved from dependency on synod interest support to go completely self-supporting. It was a step of faith in many ways. But the freedom from financial dependence gave us plenty of room to spread our wings and fly in areas we couldn't have dreamed of just years before.
- 2) Once it was decided to start a child care, the Lord blessed us with a fantastic building committee that understood the special needs for children and St. Matthew's other shortcomings with space. Thus what was built was not only a great child care, but office space and a Sunday school addition as well. The building committee of Ken Becker, Wayne Wirtzema, John Waldhuetter, Emil Wetzell, Ade Hansen, was absolutely fantastic, as was our architect. These men, and numerous women who also served in various capacities, were tremendous gifts of God. God had them all assembled in the right place at the right time in order for this project to succeed.
- 3) We began calling for a child <sup>care</sup> administrator in the January of the fall before we opened. Call after call was returned and we starting to become frustrated. But <sup>God</sup> blessed us in several ways.
  - a) Sandi Hadfield was called to be an interim leader until a fulltime administrator was found. She did tons of great work in the beginning.
  - b) Don and Susie Snider did tons of great work and getting the child care started and helped out in many many, many ways.
  - c) After we were frustrated in our calling attempts, even turned down on call day at MLC, the Lord provided us with a gal who was living right under our noses of whom we were unaware, but was yet extremely qualified -- Delores Schuetze. When

Delores accepted the call, she also understood its purpose as a mission arm, a place where God's word is center and the focal point of all that is done. Delores was a God-send in every sense of the word and deserves much of the credit for making the child care such a Christ-centered, nurturing, and loving place.

- 4) In the early days of discussion and planning--child care or preschool, what should we build--when and how, is there really a need--yes or no, what's the mission of the church--to share god's word with the unchurched and nurture believers, the congregation was always kept abreast of what was going on. As a result there was almost complete congregational support for the project. Any project of this support needs the backing of its members. God blessed us with that support.
  
- 5) Early in the 1990's there were some plans drawn for a Sunday school addition. The plan went over like a lead balloon. Yet just a few years later, a larger plan at much greater cost and with a much larger vision took off like a rocket. Why? What made the difference? All credit goes to our gracious Lord who assembled a host of people in our congregation at the right time and in the right place: Don and Susie Snider, Carroll Fink, Emil and Lorriane Wetzel, Wayne and Cari Weitzema, Wayne and Connie Wetzel, to name a few, were all new members who weren't there in the early 1990's. Then you had Ken and Charlotte Becker, Tony and Bette Branda, Brad and Sandi Hadfield, Jim and Jan Petrie, Adi Hansen, Steve and Patty Hansen, to name a few, who were stalwarts of the congregation and did so much behind the scenes work. But all these people shared one thing in common. They understood the purpose and mission of our church. They knew that we didn't exist for our own self-supporting and nurturing means. They understood that we were here to reach out with God's word to other lost and dying churches, and they wanted to see the church grow if God would

so bless it. These people understand their mission. They trusted God. They weren't afraid to dream big and create a bigger vision. Boy, did God bless their efforts. It was a real privilege for me to be a part of God's work, to be associated with so many wonderful, God-fearing men and women!!! It was a total team effort with God as the coach and everybody else doing their part and fulfilling their assigned role. Thus my personal theme for this whole episode in St. Matthew's history is that passage from Ephesians 3 how God can do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine. Too often we sinners just think too small when we have such a great God.

Even though the child care was a great success St. Matthew did not experience any visible growth in membership numbers. However, we can not always see the power of God at work. When asked if St. Matthew experienced any growth from the blessing of the child care Pastor Thompson said:<sup>13</sup>

Not right away. At first we were disappointed until we realized that the congregations that grew as a result of a child care were also the ones that had a Christian day school. Parents who learned to trust the love and support of the child care would obviously want that love and care to continue in Christian elementary school. Once enrolled in the elementary school, the parents would have to enroll in an adult instruction class and then the family would join the church. Since we didn't have the blessing of a Christian elementary school, Delores and I talked much about what we could do to have a bigger impact upon the parents before they pulled their children out of St. Matthews child care and send them off to a public school or Our Saviors. I would guess that would still be the challenge for St. Matthew if it seeks to grow from its child care. However, don't ever

forget that our main purpose for starting the child care was not to grow, but to reach out with the word to the unchurched. As you see Delores and the staff sharing Bible stories, devotions, and Christian songs with kids and counseling parents, the child care has achieved its primary goal far beyond what I had expected. Indeed, the Lord does immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3).

The child care statistics:<sup>14</sup>

☺ 1998	26 children (last four months of the year)
☺ 1999	46 children
☺ 2000	66 children
☺ 2001	72 children
☺ 2002	68 children (first quarter of the year)

Altogether 278 children were taught the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As of yet there have not been any new families to join St. Matthew because of their children attending the Christian child care. But the seeds of the gospel have been planted and we must remember that visible results will appear only in God's good time.

Pastor Thompson served the children of God at St. Matthew Evangelical Church for 12 years and in June of 2001 accepted a call to serve another congregation in Jupiter Florida. He was replaced by Pastor Martin Wildauer.

#### **Pastor Martin Wildauer.**

Pastor Martin Wildauer has continued where Pastor Thompson left off. Arriving in Port Washington in July of 2001, Pastor Wildauer settled into St. Matthews and began his pastoral duties. Where the congregation already had in place a program to visit prospective new members

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Information taken from correspondence with St. Matthew Christian Child Care Administrator Delores Schuetze

Pastor Wildauer continues to make weekly visits to the prospects, conducts Bible information classes, and at present, is working hard on building a bridge from the Christian child care to the sanctuary. It is a goal for Pastor Wildauer to establish relationships both with the Christian parents of St. Matthew's children as well as the unchurched parents of the child care.

### **In Conclusion**

The mission mindset that St. Matthew Lutheran Church has developed over the 22 years of its existence is one of:

- † Proclaiming Law and the Gospel, to lead sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ for life and salvation;
- † Strengthening believers in faith and sanctification through the Means of Grace and Christian education for all ages;
- † Equipping believers as disciples, stewards and witnesses for sharing the Gospel of Jesus with our fellow man at home through personal and congregational efforts;
- † Helping believers to reach our fellow men throughout the world with the message of the Gospel through Synodical mission efforts;
- † Encouraging individual believers to extend their love and compassion to all sinners and saints.

May God grant continued blessing on this body of believers as they strive to carry out his Great Commission in bringing the Gospel to lost souls in and around their community.