

FAITHFUL WITH THE TRUST
GIVEN TO THEM

THE MINISTERS OF ST. JOHN'S

JUNEAU, WISCONSIN

1875-1987

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Faithful with the Trust Given to Them:
The Ministers of St. John's, Juneau, Wisconsin
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In the fourth chapter of his first letter to the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul speaks of his role as a minister of the gospel. In verse 2 he states, "It is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." Those men whom God has entrusted with his Word are bound to preach that saving message to the best of their abilities in service to their Lord and Savior. Not all men have the gifts to do so. Not all men are expected to devote their lives to the full-time preaching and teaching of God's Word. But those who are called by the Lord are given the duty and privilege of faithfully declaring the powerful message of forgiveness and life in Christ.

In a small, rural town in ^{South} central Wisconsin God's Word has been faithfully preached for the past 112 years. This in itself is reason for thanksgiving, but during those 112 years this church has been served by only six pastors. This church is St. John's, located in Juneau, Wisconsin.

Three of the six pastors who have served St. John's have remained there for at least 25 years. I had the privilege of serving my vicar year there and, consequently, became interested in the history of St. John's. By looking at the ministers in St. John's history and by conducting interviews with the people involved I hope to bring out the

blessings which the Lord has bestowed upon these men and their congregations during their years of service.

Philipp Koehler 1875-1881

Pastor Koehler came over from Europe to serve in the United States. He originally planned on being a weaver before turning to the ministry (Kowalke, p. 4). While in Germany he studied at Barmen. Erwin Kowalke gives him this compliment, "Koehler was one of the few pastors of our infant Synod who had a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew" (pp. 8,9). Koehler had a good background to fall back on. He came from a Lutheran congregation at Neuwied, located on the east bank of the Rhine, a city otherwise populated mainly by the Reformed and Moravian. His mother was a firm believer, but his father was the one who tried to push him to become a weaver. Nevertheless, he attended Barmen and graduated in August of 1854. On September 3, he was commissioned in the Lutheran church at Barmen (Koehler, p. 48).

Koehler arrived from Barmen at Milwaukee on December 2, 1854. His first major struggle took place four years later when he moved on to Manitowoc. There he did battle with a German lodge. Eventually he won the congregation to his side and to "an appreciation of his Lutheran preaching and practice" (Koehler, p. 74). Koehler continued to serve there for nine more years.

In 1867 Bethany congregation of Hustisford appealed to the Wisconsin Synod to supply her with a pastor. Synod

gladly complied with the request, recommending Pastor Koehler. Koehler had resigned his call at Manitowoc due to ill health, but was now ready again to assume duties in a more healthful area. He took charge of the church and school in July, 1867.

In Hustisford Koehler also ran into trouble. During his first three years there, some members withdrew because they didn't want to sign the church constitution. At that time these men perhaps felt that this constitution was a bit too binding regarding Christian doctrine and practice and the requirements for church membership. But once again Pastor Koehler weathered the storm and pulled Bethany through this controversy.

In December of 1870 Koehler began serving at Woodland in addition to maintaining his congregation at Hustisford. At the close of 1873 he began to gather and serve a congregation at Juneau. Still he wasn't finished, because he was requested to serve two more congregations. Finally, Bethany called his son Johann to help serve these four new congregations. This situation continued for eight years, until Johann accepted a call to Two Rivers. Johann is perhaps better remembered for his years at Northwestern College and the seminary.

Pastor Koehler was again stricken with poor health in 1884, forcing him to resign from his call in Bethany. His release was granted in March, but the congregation reconsidered and decided to grant him a four-month leave of

recuperation. During this time another son, Pastor Christ Koehler of Town Hubbard, served Bethany. A daughter, Dorothea, taught in Hustisford for many years also.

Pastor Koehler served Bethany for 28 years, up until his death due to blood poisoning in his foot in 1895. Perhaps the highlight of his years in Hustisford was the dedication of a new church in 1893. Bethany's 125th Anniversary booklet pays tribute to Pastor Koehler with this statement, "He had undoubtedly left his imprint on the congregation, for she enjoyed steady growth through these years, by God's grace...; growth not only outwardly, but also in sound Christian doctrine and practice" (p. 10).

About 10 miles ^{north west} east of Hustisford lies the small town of Juneau. Although the majority of Pastor Koehler's work was done in Hustisford, he was still instrumental in starting the church in Juneau. The first services were held in 1873-1874 in the home of William Hilgendorf, about three miles south of Juneau. In the spring of 1874, they rented a church in Juneau in which to hold services, resolving to purchase a lot on West Oak Grove Street. Later that same year the lot was acquired, and a new church was dedicated on December 1. The first regular meeting of the congregation took place on January 4, 1875. 10 members adopted a constitution, with six more also signing a little later. To begin with, \$300 a year was needed to support a pastor and a teacher. Johann Koehler assisted his father, who himself served until 1881.

Philipp Koehler gave St. John's the start it needed in establishing the congregation which has grown to almost 1400 souls today. During this time he was also busy with many synodical duties, too many to list in this paper. Pastor Koehler was certainly faithful to the trust given to him!

Theodore Hartwig 1882-1891

Theodore Hartwig was the next man to serve at St. John's, arriving straight from the seminary. He was installed on June 4, 1882. When Hartwig arrived the church decided that it no longer could afford to support both a pastor and a teacher. Gottlieb Muche, the first teacher in St. John's history, therefore lost his job in 1882, and Hartwig taught four days a week for nine months. He was the first to teach English in the school, obtaining permission from the school to do so. Pastor Hartwig also served St. Peter's congregation in nearby Oak Grove from 1882-1886. He also was involved in synodical affairs, serving as one of the "synodical scouts" who came to Arizona to study the lay of the land with Pastor Koch of Columbus in anticipation of working with the Apaches. It must have been a busy time for him during these years.

Under the leadership of Pastor Hartwig the congregation grew visibly and soon made preparations for expansion. In 1890 the present property was purchased, and a new church and parsonage were built there the following year. The old church wasn't torn down but was moved and used as the

school. The dedication took place that year on October 18, although Hartwig had left Juneau by then.

In 1891 Pastor Hartwig took a call to Helenville. There he served until 1895. I'd like to end his story on a happy note, but it wasn't to be. In a letter from a present-day member, I learned that in the minutes of the meeting of March 3, 1895, Pastor Hartwig resigned and was granted a peaceful release. The father of the man who wrote me remembered that Hartwig was shamefully treated by some very outspoken members, possibly leading to his resignation. This, however, does not detract from his accomplishments in Juneau, where he also was a faithful worker in God's kingdom!

Christian Sauer 1891-1925

I learned a great deal about Christian Sauer in a letter from his grandson, Pastor Theodore Sauer of Manitowoc. Christian was born in 1859 in Town Herman in ^{Dodge} Washington County. His father, John Jacob, was pastor of Zum Kripplein Christi congregation there. Christian received his prep and college training at NWC. He graduated from our seminary, although he did mention spending a year at Concordia in St. Louis. J. P. Koehler was a classmate of his. They graduated from NWC in 1877, and from the seminary probably in 1880. While at Northwestern, Sauer was the editor of one of NWC's first newspapers, *Der Student*, which appeared weekly for three months in 1874 (Kowalke, pp.

230,231). In 1879 he was one of 12 graduates who founded the alumni society of Northwestern (Kowalke, p. 245).

Pastor Sauer's first congregation was St. John's of Montello. He served there from 1884-1891, and St. John's didn't join the Wisconsin Synod until 1889. In 1891 Sauer took the call to Juneau, whose vacancy was being served by Watertown professors until his arrival.

Sauer was installed on October 11, and a week later he took part in the dedication of the new church. He also taught school for four years, being helped by a former pupil for the first year and then by a young lady until 1895. Pastor Sauer served a vacancy at St. Peter's in Oak Grove from May, 1911, until June, 1912. During his ministry English services were begun in Juneau in 1914. They were first held on the third Sunday of the month in a 7:30 p.m. service.

Pastor Sauer served in Juneau for 34 years, the longest pastorate of the century. When he left in 1925, the congregation numbered 476 communicants. That same year St. John's celebrated its 50th anniversary as a congregation.

St. John's in Ixonia called Pastor Sauer from Juneau in 1925. Here he served for almost 11 years. It's interesting to note that his Ixonia congregation did not become a member of the Wisconsin Synod until 1940, so Sauer was probably serving an independent congregation during his ministry there. In 1935 he retired and moved to Watertown. In March

of 1941 he died, having been active in the ministry for 55 years.

The Sauer name is a familiar one in our synod. Christian had three brothers also serving in the ministry: Timothy, who served many years at St. Paul's in Appleton; Martin, who served at Trinity in Brillion; and Alfred, who served at St. Martin's in Winona, Minnesota.

The Lord certainly made use of Christian Sauer in the spreading of his kingdom, especially in the growth of the congregation in Juneau. Almost one-third of St. John's history saw Pastor Sauer leading them in worship. His 34 years at Juneau are still fondly remembered by many! 1925-?

Martin Nommensen 1925-1954

Pastor Martin Nommensen succeeded Pastor Sauer in 1925. His second wife, Esther, is currently still a member of St. John's and the source of much of my information concerning Pastor Nommensen's life.

Martin was born in Milwaukee on November 10, 1895, to Pastor Bendix Nommensen and his wife Hermine, nee Haberkorn, a great aunt of missionary David Haberkorn of Japan. Martin was the eighth child and last son in a family of 11 children, four boys and seven girls. One of his sisters died in infancy, and one brother died of typhoid fever at the age of 20 while a seminary student at Springfield. The three remaining sons all became pastors in the Wisconsin Synod. Their father was a firm disciplinarian, of Danish

extraction, being born on the island of Foehr in the North Sea. He was pastor of St. Lucas congregation in Milwaukee for a long time, and most of the children were born there and attended St. Lucas school. Even then it was a large congregation, for Martin's confirmation class numbered more than 70 children!

During Martin's seventh-grade year his father coached him in Latin. Immediately after confirmation Martin was enrolled at Concordia for his first year of prep--a year that proved to be a difficult one for him. He was a good student, and the school had an excellent Greek department which gave him a fine background for the seminary. Already there the difference in synods became apparent. Martin stated that the Wisconsin synod boys were generally regarded as being in the rear echelon, partly because the Northwestern students were given a complete prep and four-year college education before seminary, while the Missouri Synod did not require a full prep or college education, thereby shortening the length of study. They said that our emphasis on this type of education catered to the worldly.

Martin showed an early aptitude for music, especially organ. He was given organ lessons at an early age by a Chicago organ teacher, Prof. Mittelschulte. At the age of 12 he sometimes played the organ for Pastor Brenner at a small country congregation somewhere on the south side. He received 50 cents for each service, which in 1907 wasn't bad.

*St. Johns,
Oak Creek,
(New Coles)*

Upon graduation from Concordia he enrolled at the seminary, which at that time was a building on the corner of 60th street and Lloyd in Wauwatosa. He thoroughly enjoyed his seminary life and his fellow students. A group of them slept on the third floor in the attic with very little heat. He told of snow or rain coming down on their covers some nights, but he never seemed to mind. Martin had a positive and happy outlook on life.

During the summer Martin found work in the canning factory at Hustisford. Soon after that Pastor Kirchner of the Bethany parish in Hustisford had medical problems and needed help with his work. Since Martin had had some experience in filling pulpits in and around Milwaukee, the seminary sent him to Hustisford. He couldn't have been much more than 20. During this time Martin lived with the pastor's family. Later that year Pastor Kirchner died, a new pastor was called, and Martin returned to the seminary.

Martin often made remarks on the very unique way the seminary had of examining its students for graduation during his days. At the end of the last year, a day was set aside in the school for oral examinations, and the fathers of the students were invited to sit in on these exams. Each professor would then question his class on the subject he taught. Nothing was ever said about a public graduation.

After completing his seminary training, Martin was assigned to Martin Luther (then called Jackson Drive) congregation in Oshkosh. He lived in a nearby boarding

house, with a salary beginning at about \$85 a month. We have to keep in mind that these were World War I times. Eventually he acquired enough furniture to move into the parsonage next to the church, and in June he married a girl from Milwaukee who was teaching at Grace school.

At first Pastor Nommensen was not real happy with the progress his congregation was making. It was an almost entirely German congregation. Being a college town there was a need for an English congregation to attract the young people. Soon Jackson Drive became an English congregation. Pastor Nommensen also served a very small country congregation several miles from Oshkosh in West Rosendale. He went there by train on Saturdays for confirmation class and often walked several miles from the depot. He used a livery horse and buggy on Sundays for services. Also, while canvassing in and around the Pickett area where there was no Lutheran church, he found a goodly number of people interested in starting a church of their own. Soon he had a nucleus of people gathered, and they held services in the public school. But Pastor Nommensen could not convince the mission board to become interested in this promising mission, and they would not allow him any funding for serving this new field. By this time Martin and his wife had a baby boy, and on the salary he was getting he could not afford to pay expenses out of his own pocket. Finally he confronted his little flock with a plan. If he resigned his charge in Oshkosh and became their pastor, they would

have to provide him with the basics for living. To this they happily agreed.

So Pastor Nommensen and his family left Oshkosh and moved into a home provided for them. During that first year they were blessed with ample provision and a rapidly growing church. No salary was involved, but Pastor Nommensen published church papers for various congregations near and far. This provided the only ready cash. At this time a new baby was also on the way. Meanwhile the church was able to make plans for their own church, but again the mission board refused to put forth any money. Later on a congregation in Milwaukee became concerned and loaned them some money. After a while the little congregation in West Rosendale disbanded, and most of the members joined the new church in Pickett.

As the Nommensen's awaited the birth of their second child, a very snowy winter blew in. Pastor Nommensen decided to send his wife and their little son to Oshkosh to stay with friends so that they would be near the hospital when the baby was born. Pastor was in a meeting when the call came through that the birth wasn't too far off. Since there was no train or cars ready to brave the snow, he chose the next best thing--a railroad handcar! So Pastor Nommensen and the section boss who managed the handcar pumped the handcar all the way from Pickett to Oshkosh. They had to constantly watch for freight trains and at times

had to pull the handcar off the tracks, but they made it. They just missed Winfred's birth, but not by much.

Pretty soon the congregation was able to build a red brick church for itself. At the next district convention when the whole business of the Pickett problem was presented, the delegates applauded Pastor Nommensen's actions and voted in a new mission board.

During Martin's time in Pickett he was contacted by members of Immanuel in Oshkosh--not a member of synod but still being served by another protestant denomination. These people were German Russians who visited Martin's service and asked him to meet with them. Eventually this congregation was led to join our synod.

While the growing and prospering Pickett congregation made plans to build a parsonage next to the church, the call came from Juneau in 1925. At first Pastor Nommensen wasn't inclined to accept the call, but the district president encouraged him to take the call to help Juneau through some rough times. Never one to refuse a challenge, Martin decided to accept the call.

On July 5, 1925, Pastor Nommensen was installed in Juneau by Pastor Koch of Columbus. Two days later he spent the morning visiting 18 members. In July Mr. Rohde, the teacher, resigned. There seems to have been a great deal of strife and bad feelings between some of the members and the called workers. Perhaps the word got out. During the rest of the summer several calls for a teacher were sent out, but

all were returned. The low salary might have been part of the problem. With no teacher there to teach, Martin and his wife taught the upper grades that first year. Pastor taught in the morning, and his wife taught in the afternoon. Pastor often told of getting up very early on winter mornings to fire up the coal stoves that heated the small and cramped classrooms. Finally the new school was built in 1927 to give St. John's more room in which to operate.

In 1937 Pastor Nommensen's wife, who had had medical problems for some time, had a cerebral hemorrhage and died very suddenly at the age of 39. An infant daughter had also died earlier. Martin Jr. and Winfred were in prep school at Northwestern, and Carl was only 9 years old.

In 1941 Pastor Nommensen married his second wife Esther. She had been teaching school at St. James in Milwaukee. Together with the boys they did a great deal of work on the old parsonage, fixing it up into a very comfortable home.

When the war came Esther went back into the classroom teaching grades one to four. To this a kindergarten class was soon added. Esther's salary was \$30 a month.

In 1943 Elisabeth was born, increasing the family to six. Elisabeth is now the wife of Missionary Charles Flunker. In 1950 St. John's celebrated its 75th anniversary. The church had grown to 825 communicants and 1096 souls. During his years in Juneau Pastor Nommensen

also served St. Peter's of Oak Grove as interim pastor whenever the need arose.

After serving 29 years in Juneau, Pastor Nommensen accepted a call to Hillsboro. Martin served for 11 years before retiring. His son Carl helped from time to time when Martin's health began to fail him. During his last years in the parish his eyesight, which was never good, did not allow him to drive, so Esther quit teaching in Wonewoc and did the driving for him. Martin finally retired in January of 1966, but served vacancies steadily during his retirement. He preached his last sermon at age 80. On January 12, 1981, Martin died at the age of 85 and is buried in the Juneau cemetery.

I had the opportunity to interview Mrs. Nommensen and ask her about her husband's ministry. Martin had told her a great deal about his early years of service. He was influenced to enter the ministry by his brothers and father, and never really thought of anything else. One of his sisters taught in Milwaukee when Esther did, and she had a hand in getting them together after Martin's first wife had passed away. The kids took to her pretty well, grateful that they no longer had to "bach" it any more on their own.

Martin's biggest challenge while serving in Juneau in Esther's view was trying to get the congregation more mission-minded. But he served there during the Depression, so this wasn't an easy task. The low salaries and the upgrading of the parsonage were also areas of concern for

him. One of the enjoyable parts of his years in Juneau was watching the church grow. It doubled during his stay--from about 400 to 800 communicants.

Perhaps the opportunity for more mission material helped prompt Martin to take the call to Hillsboro, even though they were both comfortable in Juneau. There wasn't a school in Hillsboro, and Esther still wanted to teach. She enjoyed Juneau so much that today she has moved back into town.

It's obvious by the amount of space I've used for my comments on Pastor Nommensen that I consider him to have been a very faithful servant of the Lord, not only at Juneau, but wherever he served. Wherever he went, congregations prospered. They prospered by God's grace, and God blessed them through his servant, Martin Nommensen!

Carl Mischke 1954-1979

Pastor Carl Mischke arrived from Goodhue, Minnesota, in November, 1954. He was the youngest of eight children, having grown up in a farming community. His father was an active layman in the church, and his pastor, Walter Sprengler, was an active pastor in recruitment. They both had a great deal of influence on his entering the ministry. As he saw it, it was either the ministry or farming.

Pastor Mischke's first call out of the seminary was as an assistant at First Lutheran in La Crosse. Since they still had German services and he was one of two in his class

who knew German well enough to preach it, Pastor Mischke wasn't surprised by the assignment. He served there for two years before taking a call to serve a dual parish in Goodhue--St. Peter's and St. John's. They had a total of about 250 members, but no Christian day school. He served here for about 5 and a half years.

When the call came from Juneau, Pastor Mischke received some advice from Henry Nitz, the president of the Western Wisconsin district. Pastor Nitz pointed out that he would have an opportunity for a wider circle of activity in Juneau, going from two churches totaling 250 communicants to one with over 800. Plus he was ready for a challenge.

When he arrived in Juneau, Pastor Mischke found that there was a good deal of work to be done on the physical plant of St. John's. The parsonage, teacherage, and church all needed some work, and finally the congregation decided to build a new parsonage. In 1969 \$400,000 was spent in the building of a new church, and a new home was built for the school principle. The old teacherage was moved to a new site also.

Pastor Mischke was 32 years old when he arrived at St. John's, following Pastor Nommensen who was over 60. This might have contributed to the slight hesitancy with which the congregation received Pastor Mischke at first. There was a sort of "wait-and-see" attitude for about the first six months, perhaps waiting to see how the "young guy" would do. Pastor Mischke found the members themselves eager to

serve--as long as someone told them how and where to serve. Once the members got used to Pastor Mischke, things went pretty smoothly the rest of the way.

Mischke's years in Juneau were busy ones, as far as building projects go. Not only did they build a new parsonage and church, but St. John's also had two additions added to their school. The first one took place in 1956, and the second one in 1966. All this building was rather ironic, because Pastor Mischke said building was something he really never wanted to do. He himself thought they should have torn down the old 1927 school building before building on, an opinion which many may echo today. Even though he may not have liked to be involved in building programs, Pastor Mischke successfully led St. John's through an active period of outward growth.

Aside from the building program Mischke also faced more challenges at St. John's. When he arrived in 1954, he found that the congregation was still using the old "dues" system for stewardship. Something like \$104 a year was expected from every married couple. This system was done away with, and Pastor Mischke set about to raise the stewardship sights of the people. As a church St. John's was contributing only about \$3000 a year to the synod, which worked out to only about \$5 per communicant. When Mischke himself became a district president and first vice-president of the synod, the members of St. John's had a direct line to the working

of the synod. This in itself was a great boost in making them more synod minded.

Pastor Mischke found that by moving to a larger congregation he didn't necessarily run into many new things, just more of everything. For example, the number of shut-ins increased, and now he had three services each Sunday. Two services were in English, and one in German. For a while Mischke even had three services during Lent. It was during his years at Juneau that St. John's began the vicar program. Prof. Wayne Mueller was the first vicar to serve the congregation to help lighten the load. Last year I had the privilege of being the 18th vicar in St. John's history.

As with any congregation, there were things that disappointed Pastor Mischke and things that pleased him during his ministry in Juneau. The "lethargic" or "apathetic" members found in every congregation made no exception of St. John's. But the internal growth of the church and the growing confidence of the members in doing the Lord's work pleased their pastor very much. There was a great deal of change--cautious and conservative though it was--but still the church grew with the times. The communicant membership also topped the 1000 mark during these years.

Pastor Mischke found the community of Juneau to be a very pleasing one. It was close to NWC, and within an hour's drive of both Madison and Milwaukee. Since he grew up on a farm in South Dakota, Mischke was right at home in

the farming community of Juneau. He enjoyed the respect of the townspeople and the envious position of being the largest church in town. St. John's is still the "king of the hill" in Juneau today. The other three churches in town belong to the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, and the Church of Christ.

Pastor Mischke received more calls than he could remember while at Juneau. Among them were calls to First German in Manitowoc, Siloah in Milwaukee, and St. Matthew's in Benton Harbor, Michigan. He also received a call to NWC and one to the seminary--the call eventually accepted by Pastor Joel Gerlach. President Carleton Toppe of NWC once mentioned to Mischke that he had "found his niche" in Juneau, and Pastor Mischke must have agreed. Finally he felt it was time for a change when the synod presidency was offered to him. It wasn't that tough of a decision for him, because he didn't have any basis of comparison for the call. He had filled out Naumann's term, and now felt that he could best serve the Lord in this new field. He left Juneau in 1979.

President Mischke has adjusted to his new role, although he readily admits that it can be frustrating at times. He's now part of the "establishment," situated on the other side of the desk. He sometimes misses being "one of the boys," but he realizes that he's now involved in a totally different ministry. The routine is different, there's more travel involved, but also most of his evenings

are free to enjoy. Still there's much more responsibility riding on his shoulders in his present office.

President Mischke is very optimistic about the future of the WELS. He thinks the synod is on the right track in developing a more positive image by stressing evangelism-- what he calls the "word of the future." He does recognize the tight call situation both at DMLC and the seminary, and he admits that the next couple of years might be trying ones. The special Lenten offering Mischke referred to as only a "band-aid," but quickly added that it was better to do this "rather than bleed to death." In his view it all depends on what we do as a synod. We can sit back and conduct only a "maintenance" ministry, simply fixing the problems in our present congregations, or we can surge ahead as a synod into fields as the Lord has commanded us. President Mischke feels confident that our synod's work will be accomplished if we recognize how much work still needs to be done.

For over 40 years Carl Mischke has been in the Lord's service. But he'll be the first to admit that it's been a privilege to serve his Savior, and he in turn has received many blessings from the Lord in return. 25 of his years were spent at St. John's in Juneau, helping them grow particularly in their knowledge of the synod's work. President Mischke now serves in a broader aspect, still proving faithful to the trust given to him!

David Priebe 1980-

St. John's stood vacant for 14 months before David Priebe finally accepted the call. Needless to say, the congregation was very happy to have him. Pastor Priebe has been serving St. John's since 1980.

Priebe lists Pastor Carl Gurgel, then pastor in his hometown of Fond du Lac, as an early influence in his decision to study for the ministry along with Pastor Carl Leyrer, then dean at NWC. But he also is a self-proclaimed "product of the divine rut," meaning that he simply followed his friends along through prep and college to the seminary before he finally became convinced in his vicar year that the ministry was for him.

Priebe's first call was to Abiding Word in Orleans, Ontario, Canada, a church with mission status. He didn't know what to expect approaching this call. He had a family, was entering a new country, leading a church fighting for survival. He went two months without services, canvassing door-to-door for interested prospects. But through seven years of service in Orleans God blessed his congregation and helped it grow, enabling Abiding Word to finally build their own church.

After the building of the new church, Priebe felt that things were going well--"almost too well," as he put it. It's then that the call to Juneau came, and Priebe felt the urge to change. Juneau had a Christian day school for his kids, relatives were nearby, and the challenge of a larger

congregation seemed appealing. From a tiny mission church with hardly, if any, funerals or weddings to a church with over 1000 communicants in the heartland of the Wisconsin Synod. But this was part of the attractiveness of St. John's.

Pastor Priebe was received warmly by the congregation, and he was thankful for the firm foundation Pastor Mischke had left for him. He found St. John's to be a very harmonious group, a good mix between young and old, urban and rural, white and blue collar workers. But he also learned that a larger congregation requires much more of his time and energy, which isn't always easy to balance with time for his family. He often finds it a challenge to simply cover the bases in church business, and there isn't much time for personal reading and study. This is the most disappointing part of leading such a large flock, but Pastor Priebe is very concerned about the work of the church and accepts the challenge of finding time for both his family and his congregation.

At the same time Pastor Priebe admits to enjoying the pace of the ministry, the feeling of being needed. He feels comfortable mixing with his fellow Christians at St. John's, and he strives to get them to see their needs as a congregation so that they may respond in an appropriate way. Because of his predecessor's influence, Priebe finds the members to be very knowledgeable of our synod's activity and

very supportive of it. St. John's has come a long way in this area since its beginning as a church.

Pastor Priebe considers Juneau a good place to raise his children--one son and three daughters. Crime is virtually non-existent. As far as other church bodies go, there still isn't much competition. The only other church body comparable to St. John's in the area other than our own WELS churches is St. Stephen's in Horicon of the LCMS, but there too no major controversies or "clashes" have arisen. During his years in Juneau the church has added about 100 communicants and 200 souls, leaving those totals today at about 1100 and 1400. In almost seven years at St. John's Pastor Priebe has yet to receive a call to another parish, although he did receive seven calls while in Canada.

Priebe has also served in other areas while at Juneau. For a time he was on the board of the Lutherans for Life organization, and he currently serves on the Board for Parish Education and is chairman of the Madison Institutional Ministries board. Whereas these duties take up more of his time, Priebe enjoys serving on them and working with his peers to help keep his perspective on the ministry in general.

One major project just completed this past winter at St. John's was a \$700,000 school addition which featured a new gymnasium. This project had been in the hopper already since 1978, so a great deal of planning had to go into it. With a school enrollment of almost 200 kids this addition

was sorely needed, and Pastor Priebe did his part in leading the congregation through this phase of expansion.

The vicar program has continued at St. John's since 1968, and Priebe enjoys working with future ministers of the gospel. The variety which comes with having a new vicar each year keeps things interesting, and the extra help is always appreciated.

To Pastor Priebe the ministry is unique, because it deals with serving people by proclaiming a message of life--not simply for this life, but for the life hereafter. As he puts it, "It's not a service for life, rather, eternal life." The ministry emphasizes keeping our final goal always in view. As long as Pastor Priebe continues to preach the way to that goal--through faith in Jesus Christ--he will continue to remain faithful to the trust given to him!

In a town of just over 2000 people, a church today of almost 1400 souls has been in existence for 112 years. Six men have served that church, guiding it through the good times and the bad times. From meeting in a member's small home to now being the largest church in town, St. John's of Juneau has seen changes during its history, and it has seen growth. The growth in numbers is the most obvious, but this church has also grown inwardly. They've grown in the knowledge and understanding of God's Word and its meaning for them as God's children.

The Lord has seen fit to use only six men to lead this congregation on its path of service. On their own there may have not been anything special about these men. But God chose these men to guide his flock at St. John's. In his eyes they are special. They are his servants. They have proved faithful to the trust which the Lord has given them!

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Interviews:

Personal interviews were conducted with the following:

President Carl Mischke on February 5, 1987

Mrs. Esther Nommensen on February 28, 1987

Rev. David Priebe on March 2, 1987