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Church History

HISTORY OF EMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH--TAWAS CITY, MICHIGAN

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On November 2, 1987 ground was broken on a lot adjacent to Emanuel Lutheran School in Tawas City, Michigan. This marked the beginning of the construction of a new church building for the Emanuel Lutheran congregation. After serving the congregation for just over 100 years, the original building is about to be replaced.

Before we look at 1987, we would do well to look back to some beginnings. Let's look back to the beginning of Lutheranism in Michigan. This will give us a foundation for our understanding of the history of Emanuel of Tawas City.

"In 1831 a number of Wurtembergers emigrated to America and settled in Washtenaw County, in and near Ann Arbor. There they soon found their mundane existence. But they were not content with just that. They were still deprived of the one thing needful, the Word and Sacraments. For that reason they appealed to the missionary institution in Basel for the sending of a preacher. In response to that, Pastor F. Schmid arrived in Ann Arbor on August 20, 1833." (Michigan Memories, Things Our Fathers Have Told Us, Bivens, de Ruiter, and Schaller eds. 1985 p. 160.)

In answering this call, Frederick Schmid became the first German Lutheran pastor in Michigan. He organized a congregation in Scio Township west of Ann Arbor. This congregation recently celebrated its 135th Anniversary. During his early stay in Michigan, Pastor Schmid also preached in Detroit, Monroe, Lansing, Marshall, Grand Rapids, and Sebawaing. All totalled, Schmid was instrumental in the founding of nearly twenty churches.

In the early 1840's, two more Lutheran pastors joined Schmid in Michigan. These three men organized the first synod in Michigan. They called it the "Mission Synod," because they planned to do mission work among the Indians. Backed by Pastor Loehe who was in Germany at this time, it seemed as though this

synod was destined to succeed. This outlook soon crumbled when it became apparent that the confession was on paper only. Schmid withdrew and for a time joined the Ohio Synod, finally standing alone until 1860.

1860 is a special year for Lutherans in Michigan. It was in 1860 that Pastor Stephan Klingmann and Pastor Christopher Eberhardt arrived in Michigan from Basel. Pastor Schmid still had hopes for a Michigan Synod. These hopes were bolstered by the arrival of these two men from Basel. In a short time they became a reality. "In the small study of Pastor Mueller in Detroit, eight pastors and three laymen united to organize the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and Other States." (Michigan District History, 1833-1970, Michigan District, WELS, 1972. p.1.) Pastor Schmid was chosen President and Pastor Eberhardt was elected to be the itinerent missionary. The chief purpose as outlined by the new synod was home mission work.

Eberhardt was a tireless, hard-working missionary. He soon had established sixteen congregations in a circuit that covered 360 miles. He traveled to these churches on foot in three week intervals. He took with him Bibles and prayer books, constantly looking for new German settlements. He also journeyed outside of this circuit, going as far north as into the Upper Peninsula in June of 1861. In the fall of 1861, Eberhardt accepted a call to St. Paul's of Saginaw. From there he continued his mission activity in Michigan.

Unfortunately, the greater part of Eberhardt's efforts yielded little results. Although efforts were made to gather those in the fellowship of faith, there were no pastors to serve them. There was no educational system to train ministers.

Pastors had to come from Basel or volunteers had to be utilized.

The competence, morals, confessionalism, and faithfulness of many of these men came into question.

In 1867 things took an upward turn for the Michigan Synod. In that year, Pastor Klingmann replaced the unionistic Schmid as Synod President. He sought a stricter and more confessional position to counteract the United Evangelical influence that had invaded the synod. In an attempt to supply competent pastors, Michigan joined the General Council. This affiliation proved to be a disappointment for Michigan in many aspects. It ~~was~~^{did} lead to a deeper and more intense study of Scripture and the Confessions. Michigan continued to insist on doctrinal purity within the General Council. She rejected the Four Points proposed by the Ohio Synod in 1868. Pastor Eberhardt wrote a piercing and inspirational paper which rejected Chiliasm, altar fellowship, pulpit fellowship, and secret societies.

Because of Michigan's staunch position against the Four Points, the General Council was moved to look more closely into these matters. The "Akron Resolutions" and the "Galesburg Resolutions" of 1872 and 1875 did little to clarify the position of the General Council. Dr. Krauth then presented theses which the Michigan Synod accepted. Michigan feelings toward the General Council improved following these theses.

Michigan's optimistic feelings toward the General Council were short-lived. In 1884 two of the English pastors of the Council preached in the local Presbyterian church. Michigan presented a formal protest which was tabled until 1886. Even then nothing was done to correct the situation. Michigan sent no representatives to the 1887 convention and in 1888 withdrew from the Council.

Despite this setback, Michigan was forging ahead. In 1887 a Seminary was dedicated on August 28th on a two and one half acre plot of land on Court Street. Plans were being considered for Michigan to join the Synodical Conference. At this time, Michigan's "Der Synodal-Freund" began to be published. Mission work in Michigan continued to flourish.

In 1892 the Michigan Synod officially joined the Synodical Conference. In that same year, they merged with the Minnesota and Wisconsin Synods for practical purposes. This was not a year made ~~of~~ only of successes though. Pastor Eberhardt died and the synod lost a great man.

Also during this year, Michigan was requested to change its Seminary into a Preparatory school. Although the synod voted unanimously to do so, a small group, led by members of the faculty, objected. The Joint Synod failed to take a strong position in this matter.

The breach between the two groups grew larger and larger. A peace conference in 1895 proposed a three year turnover from Seminary to Prep school. At the Michigan convention of 1895, a minority group protested and brought charges against the administration of the Michigan Synod and the Seminary before the convention of the Joint Synod at St. Paul in 1895. The Joint Synod upheld the charges and the split developed.

At the convention of the Michigan Synod in 1896, it was resolved that ties with the Joint Synod be severed and a separation from the Synodical Council be maintained. The opposing pastors kept ties with the Joint Synod and the Synodical Conference.

The Michigan Synod assumed a union with Augsburg in 1897. This union had no future since the Augsburg Synod was very tolerant

of false doctrines and practices. By the year 1900, the union of Michigan and the Augsburg Synod had dissolved.

After some of the leaders in the controversy had left the Michigan Synod, Michigan began to realize its mistake in leaving the Synodical Conference. Efforts were made to bring about a reconciliation. There were many obstacles that had to be removed. The Seminary was declining steadily. Finally, on August 10, 1907, the Seminary closed its doors. It is difficult to pinpoint the underlying source of this decline, although many theories have been circulated.

For three years the Seminary remained closed. Things began to change for the good during these three years. Michigan rejoined the Joint Synod of Wisconsin in 1909. It was resolved that the Seminary be reopened as a preparatory school in that same year.

Focus now centered on an amalgamation of the four existing synods. In 1913 a proposal was made by the Joint Synod to this effect. A constitution was adopted at the 1915 convention and was ratified in 1917. The official name of the new synod was to be "Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States." It consisted of six districts: NW Wis., SE Wis., W. Wis., Minn., Mich., and Neb. Later added were the Pacific NW district and the Dak.-Mon. district. The Ariz.-Cal. district is the latest addition to this synod.

Into this broad history flow many lifelines. These are the individuals and the congregations which make up the Michigan District. Emanuel Lutheran Church of Tawas City is one of these lifelines.

Mission activity was begun in Tawas City in 1877 by Pastor W. Reuther of Bay City. Tawas proved to be an area fertile and ready for development. The first congregations was founded on

August 5, 1877 at East Tawas, Michigan. Pastor Reuther served Emanuel for one year, holding services once a month from April to October and every other month during the winter. Services were held in the homes of members on an alternating basis. On those Sundays when Pastor Reuther was not present, services were held and a Deacon read the sermon.

It is not known how many people belonged to Emanuel at its inception. Excerpts from The History of the Lake Huron Shore indicate this number to be approximately thirty-eight. The names of twenty men are included in the earliest records of the church. These men saw the need for a permanent pastor, and in 1878 called Pastor John Haas to serve the mission. This request was channeled from Tawas to Pastor Klingmann in Ann Arbor and on to Pastor Haas.

According to church records, fifteen pastors have served Emanuel. They are: Pastor Reuther, 1877-78; Rev. Haas, 1879-82; Rev. Asall, 1882-85; Rev. Mueller, 1885-86; Rev. Asall, 1886-1897; Rev. Karrer, 1897-1900; Rev. Emmel, 1900-06; Rev. Henning, 1907-18; Rev. Kehrberg, 1918-28; Rev. Eckert, 1928-30; Rev. Voss, 1930-36; Rev. Roekle, 1936-51; Rev. Heyn, 1951-54; Rev. Newman, 1954-62; and Rev. Rockhoff, 1964-Present. During the vacancy between 1962-64, Emanuel was served by Rev. Reuge of Lincoln with assistance from the staff of Michigan Lutheran Seminary. Vicar Reinhardt Kam also assisted for a year during this time.

Services and meetings were conducted in the German language. The first English sermon was preached in 1901 by Rev. Bast of Bay City on Mission Festival. Beginning in 1918, one English service was held each month. In 1938 the first meeting was held in English. Although some ^mmembers disputed, "Our God is a German God," Rev. Schmelzer preached the last German sermon on September 23, 1951.

From its beginning, Emanuel was a member of the Michigan Synod. She joined the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States when it was formed in 1892. The first congregational constitution was written in 1891 and revised into English in 1951.

For the first three years, services were held in the homes of various members. It soon became apparent that a church building was needed. In 1880 a house was purchased and remod^eled to be used as the church. This house served as the church for two years until 1882.

In 1882 plans were made for the construction of a permanent church. The cost of the structure would be \$1,194 including cabinet work on the alt^aar and pulpit, and painting of the entire building. It was necessary for Emanuel to borrow \$600 for this project. The twenty-nine voting members voted unanimously to go through with this project. In 1885 song books for visitors were purchased and a bell was added to the church. The bell was rung three times at half hour intervals before the service according to German custom. This church building served Emanuel to the present time.

Further additions and replacements were made over the years. New pews and two stoves arrived in 1890. The Ladies Aid donated the first electric lights in 1908. A reed organ was given to Emanuel by Salem of Scio Township, Ann Arbor. This organ was replaced by a pipe organ in 1919 when an addition was built onto the church. Stained glass windows were dedicated in 1929, all from individual donations. One window cost \$85 at that time. In 1932 the original bell cracked and was replaced. A bolt of lightning destroyed the steeple in 1941, but it was immediately rebuilt. In 1948 a Consonata electronic organ was purchased, and a Vibrachime carillon added in 1952. A variety of changes occurred

in the interior of the church. Carpeting, new pews, and a sound amplification unit were all installed in the last twenty years.

This building served Emanuel for 106 years. Recently though, it has begun to show its age. The Church Council decided that it was necessary to propose major repairs in 1984. A monetary figure of \$100,000 was set to accomodate these repairs. This figure was met and exceeded in one year. At that time, discussion turned to the possibility of building a new church. A questionnaire was distributed to the members in April, 1985 to seek their input into the viability of building a new church.

The results of this survey were found to show that the majority favored a new church. The repairs needed to restore the old church were just too many. Added to this was the fact that the old church did not have a basement, fellowship area, running water, or restrooms. It was also difficult for the older or handicapped people to climb the steps in order to enter the church. Plans were accepted to go ahead with the construction of a new church. It was requested that the 110th anniversary of the congregation be celebrated in the old church in 1987.

On May 11, 1987, a special voters' meeting was called for the purpose of determining the scope of the project and to establish a flexible building program that would allow for a variable project cost. Six^{Council} members and the architect, Doug Kueffner, attended this meeting. Mr. Kueffner presented a brief comparison between phase building and a base bid with alternative additions. After considerable discussion, a recommendation from the Council members was accepted to go with the base bid and alternative idea. These "Add" alternatives would be added as funds became available. The "Adds" were to be decided on by the time a contractor was hired.

Further discussion considered what the base bid should be.

It was finally decided that the following items should be included in the base bid:

Church, narthex, Balcony, Rough-in of Multi-use
and toilet rooms, Chancel Furniture, Stained glass,
Gravel parking/drives, and Miscellaneous site work
(\$580,525)
New Roof on current School
(\$57,000)
Architectural and Engineering Fees
(\$66,000)
Church and Pastor's Office
(\$20,000)

TOTAL--\$720,000.

It was also decided that further additions would be made when funds became available. Taken from the old church would be the bell, organ, and stained glass windows. Currently it is undecided whether to take the altar^a ware or purchase new equipment. As of December 31, 1987, \$241,000 has been collected for the new church.

A ground breaking service was held on November 2, 1987. The new church will be built next to the Day school, four blocks north of the current church. The new church will be connected to the school. ~~construction is~~ scheduled to begin any time this month.

With the building of the new church came the matter of what to do with the old building. It was decided that the building could be leased or sold to any interested buyer. When a group of Seventh Day Adventists approached with an offer to lease, several members with deep-rooted backgrounds objected. They couldn't see people of another faith worshipping in the building that their fathers had built. At the present time, it is still undecided what should be done with the old church when the new one is finished.

As was mentioned, Emanuel also supports a Christian Day School. This school was started in 1883 with Rev. Asall in charge of instruction. For the first ten years, the school was located just to the rear of the church. For twenty-two years the pastor taught the children. In 1905 Miss Katie Kleeman was called to

to assist. When more subjects were added, a male teacher was also called. In the 104 years of the existence of the school, over forty teachers have served Emanuel. The Present staff consists of Principal Dennis Friske, grades 5-8, Elaine Howell, grades 1-4, and Cathleen Starke, Kindergarten.

Plans to replace the original school were made in 1892. The project was completed in 1893. The lumber for the new school was cut locally. The first English textbooks were used in 1896. School was held for 160 days that year. Classes were added to the curriculum and new benches donated in 1906. An addition to the school was built in 1940 to include bathroom facilities. An oil furnace was donated by the Ladies Aid in 1951. In 1960 Emanuel broke ties with Zion Lutheran (Missouri Synod) in the educational department. The school was then moved to its present location on North Street. The new school cost approximately \$63,000 at that time. A remodeling project in 1974 improved classrooms and added an office and receiving area. The original school was razed, and the lot was used for church parking area.

The first parsonage was purchased and remodeled in 1898. On July 5, 1903 a fire which began in the horse stable destroyed this parsonage. A new one was built immediately ~~and~~^{at} the cost of \$1,825. Bathroom and sewer facilities were installed in 1937. The kitchen area was remodeled and some floors retiled in 1951. An oil furnace and new chimney also were installed in that year. Further improvements were made in 1975 and 1985.

Lutheranism in the Tawas area actually began in the early 1870's. Although records (and memories) are sketchy regarding exact details, it is believed that organized Lutheran congregations held meetings before the missionaries arrived. The first Lutheran church in the Tawas area was built in East Tawas. This represented

the early beginning of the Zion congregation.

In time, belligerent German members brought about internal strife. The dispute centered not on doctrinal matters, but on the location of the church building. One group wanted the church in the country, while another wanted it in the city. After some argument, a split occurred and the members which later founded Emanuel began to meet in homes in Tawas.

Zion members built a church two miles north of Tawas on Plank Road. Later they built a brick building where it still stands on Second Street, two blocks west of Emanuel. Many members of Zion left that church over disputes of enforcement of strict church policy regulations and joined Emanuel. In many cases, families were even split. Evidence of the hostility can be found in that Zion referred to Emanuel as "die andere Deutsche gemeinde" or the "opposition gemeinde." A soothing effort was made in 1890 which lasted until 1961 when the two Synods suspended fellowship.

Over the last 111 years, God has abundantly blessed Emanuel. Currently he provides a pastor, three teachers, and faithful laymen. Thirty-five men from Emanuel served in WW I and twenty-six men and one woman served in WW II. Eighteen people saw action in Korea or Vietnam. Ten members have entered into the ministry, not including myself, and five have become teachers.

The church records of 1987 list 556 souls with 438 communications. There were seventeen baptisms (two adults) and nine confirmations (four adults.) Three weddings took place and six members joined the Lord through death. Total enrollment for the 1987-88 school year was fifty-one. The Sunday school has five regular teachers and five substitutes. Emanuel also has a choir of fourteen members and a very active Ladies Aid. There are also groups for the young boys and girls which are led by volunteers.

It has been 111 years since God formed Emanuel.. The construction of the new church shows that he is still watching over his people. The Gospel will continue to be preached in Emanuel as long as the Lord wants it to be. May he always bless that Gospel so that those who hear it might be blessed on account of their faith in Christ.

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