

105 years of

MEN SENT BY GOD TO SERVE

A Brief Sketch of
the Pastors who
served
and a short History
of

ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Van Dyne, Wisconsin
1882 - 1987

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Senior Church History
Prof. Martin Westerhaus
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MEN SENT BY GOD TO SERVE

Brief Outline

I. Men Sent to Serve

A. Christoph Dowidat	September 1882
B. Gottlieb A. Thiele	September - December 1882
C. Ernst Haese	January 1883 - June 1885
D. Fr. Eppling	July 1885 - November 1887
E. J.A. Hoyer	December 1887 - July 1888
F. Johannes Rien	September 1888 - January 1891
G. John Schulz	March 1892 - January 1891
H. Gale Maas	January 1948 - August 1951
I. Waldemar O. Weissgerber	October 1951 - December 1976
J. Karl Molkentin	May 1977 - June 1983
K. Randal Schoeman	July 1983 - Present

II. MEN SENT TO SERVE

- A. Early Years 1882 - 1891
- B. Growing Years 1892 - 1947
- C. Changing Years 1948 - 1977
- D. Present 1977 - 1987

MEN SENT BY GOD TO SERVE

It seems that whenever something gets to a certain age, we want to do one of two things. We either want to toss it out because of its age or we want to keep it because it is old. If we chose to keep something old we then may search to try and find out about our item. This certainly is true, just think about some of the antiques in your home.

The same is true about the churches we belong to. We want to know how the church started, who served the congregation and maybe a few statistic, like how many baptisms, marriages, and burials have have taken place in the congregations history. That is the reason for this paper, to find out some information about the men who served Zion, Van Dyne and its history.

The first two men who served Zion where very instrumental in helping form the congregation. The first man we want to discuss is PASTOR CHRISTOPH DOWIDAT. Dowidat was born on June 29th 1843, near Pillkalen in East Prussia, Germany. He was raised in a Christian home and attended school in his hometown. His High School days (Normal School) were spent at Koenigsberg in Prussia. After graduation, Dowidat, taught at Bramen. *AP?*

Mission work began to interest Dowidat so he answered the call to help preach the Gospel for the Wisconsin Synod, coming to America in 1867. Once in America Dowidat enrolled at the Wisconsin Synod Seminary in Watertown. After one year he had completed his training, graduating in July of 1868.

Ch. Dowidat then served the following congregations: Centerville, Manitowoc Co., (6 years and 4 months); First Lutheran, Fort Atkinson, (6 years and 10 months); Friedens Church (9 months); and Grace Congregation (45 years).

It was during Dowidat's 9 month stay at Friedens (Peace) Congregation that the Election controversy began. It was also during this time that Dowidat was serving as the visiting pastor for the area around Oshkosh. Dowidat and a number of families split from Friedens congregation and established Grace. (Note 1.) As visiting Pastor Dowidat had more problems to face. St. John's congregation of Nekimi, Winnebago County also had some problems concerning the election controversy. It was under the instruction of Dowidat that a few families and the pastor of St. John's Nekimi established Zion Congregation, Van Dyne. That is the reason for including Ch. Dowidat in this paper.

Ch. Dowidat passed away on the 24th of August 1925 having reached the age of 82 years 1 month and 26 days. Funeral services were held at Hartford on August 27. Pastor G.E. Bergemann, of St. Peter's, Fond du Lac, President of the Synod preached on Joshua 1:2: "Moses, my servant is dead." Burial was in Oshkosh and Pastors Otto Koch and E. Benjamin Schlueter were officiating.

One of Pastor Dowidat's fellow-workers had this to say about him:

The impress of a life in a community depends upon the character of that life. It was so with our deceased friend. His was a character of sterling worth not only to his immediate associates, but to the community at large in which he had been living during the whole of his life.

In the death of Father Dowidat our Wisconsin Synod has lost a most faithful and active laborer. For half a

century and more, he had been in the preaching of the Gospel...1

Dowidat served the Synod in many ways throughout his life. He served as Secretary of the Board of Regents of Northwestern College and The Seminary. He served as treasurer of the Synod and as a member of the Commission for Indian Missions.

At the time of his death he was survived by his six children. They included Mrs. John Plocher, St Paul, MN; Rev. John Dowidat, Oakfield, WI; Mrs. A. Macauly, St. Paul, MN; Rev. Paul C. Dowidat, Minneapolis, MN; and Mrs. Ad. von Rohr, Hartford, WI. (Note 2.)

The first man to serve Zion, Van Dyne was a man named Pastor GOTTLIEB A. THIELE. Thiele was born on September 6, 1834 in the province of Sachsen, Germany. Nothing more is known about his childhood days. We do know that he attended the Gymnasium at Torgau, the University at Halle, and the Seminary at Wittenberg. We know that while a student at Halle he met Adolf Hoenecke, the famous Wisconsin Synod Seminary Professor.

Really very little is known about Thiele, what we do know comes to us by way of J.P.Koehler's, THE HISTORY OF THE WISCONSIN SYNOD. Koehler writes:

G. Thiele and E. Mayerhoff were two of the four newcomers who remained with the Wisconsin Synod till their dying day and outlived all the old-timers by many years. The former has already been mentioned as a fellow student of Hoenecke's in Germany. Thiele here took charge of Ripon in January 1864, then became a traveling missionary, and after several further pastorates and a short stay in Germany became Hoenecke's colleague at the Milwaukee-Wauwatosa seminary from 1887-1900;...2

We know that after serving in Ripon he went out as a traveling missionary. After that he then had a number of short pastorates. It must have been during those short pastorates that Thiele found himself serving St. John's Nekimi. (We cannot check the records of St. John's Nekimi today because the entire outlay of St. John's burned to the ground in January of 1966.) Thiele was the pastor at St. John's during the 1882 Election controversy. It was he and about 20 members who split from St. John's and established Zion, Van Dyne. He served the congregation for only about 3 months.

J.P. Koehler tells us more information:

The system at this time was that a number of pastors, under the direction of Pastor Mayerhoff, devoted several weeks each to traveling missionary work; but since that proved to be too haphazard, it was decided to appoint a special synodical missionary again. It took some time before the office was filled. Pastor Thiele became the first incumbent in October 1880 and founded 12 preaching stations in Northern Michigan, supplied the three Marshfield stations, and helped Pastor Bergholz in Marathon county; in time, he also went to Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls. But the strenuousness of three years of such work prompted his resignation in October of 1883.³

After December of 1882 we lose track of Thiele. It could be that during the time, from December 1882 thru 1886 Thiele went back to Germany. At any rate in 1887 Thiele received a call to teach at the Seminary. According to the "Berichte der Wisconsin Synod" Thiele's classes included: New Testament Exegesis, Matthew's Gospel, Reformation History, Liturgics and Catechism. For 13 years Thiele served as Seminary Professor. But during these years Prof. Thiele was not able to complete the courses that were given him to teach. Here is another area where nothing

much is said. J.P.Koehler gives us as much information as is possible to get, we quote:

One of the internal affairs evidently contemplated was embodied in another resolution: 'Since Prof. G. Thiele, in the fairly unanimous opinion of the general synod, is not equal to his position, Synod resolves to remedy this so very important matter by authorizing and instructing the board the board of directors of the general body's preaching seminary either to pension or suitably provide otherwise for Prof. G.Thiele and call another competent man to fill his place.4

Apparently Thiele was not able to fulfill his duties as Seminary professor. This leaves G.Thiele the ^{only} professor ever to be asked to leave the Seminary. In J.Meyer's history of the Seminary he gives this brief account of this whole incident:

In 1887 Pastor G. Thiele, a fellow student of Hoenecke at Halle University, became the successor of Professor Th. Graebner in the faculty. He served until Easter 1900 when he resigned and was pensioned by the synod.5

After the above information is given, that is really all that we hear about G.Thiele except that his name was listed in the list of pastors in the official record of the synod until his death.

G. Thiele died on November 1, 1919 reaching the age of 85 years, 1 month and 26 days. Funeral services were held at Saron's Church with Pastor H. Ebert officiating. He was survived by his wife, Eva Katharina nee' Deuschle, six sons and two daughters.

One more note on G. Thiele. Probably because of his problems as a Seminary professor, Thiele never received much publicity as to where he served and the activities which he did. At the writing of this paper a grandson of G. Thiele just retired from the ministry in the LCMS. His name is Waldemar Thiele, he now lives in Sacramento, CA. Another grandson, served on the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis until his death in 1983.

The next man to serve Zion was Pastor ERNST HAESE. Pastor Haese's life is a real mystery. There are no records of his birth or death. The information that we do have was found in the records of the Wisconsin Synod. Apparently E. Haese came to Van Dyne shortly after he finished his Seminary training. He served at Van Dyne from January 1883 until June of 1885. He served as Van Dyne's first resident pastor. After Van Dyne, Haese accepted a call to Winchester, WI, just west of Oshkosh and served there for about one year. From there he served a congregation in Zittau, Winnebago Co. (just a few miles west of Oshkosh). He served the Zittau congregation from 1887 until 1890. In 1890 Haese accepted a call to Peshtigo and served the congregation there until he received a call in 1901 to serve a congregation in Bonduel. To document how scarce the information on E. Haese is we quote from the 75th Anniversary book of Friedens congregation of Town Hartford, Bonduel, WI.:

On April 14th, 1901 the Reverend Ernst Haese, formerly of Peshtigo, was installed as pastor of our church by Pastor Kionka. During his short stay several additions were made to the parsonage. 6

That really is the extent of information to be found on E. Haese. After he accepted the call away from Bonduel, his name does not appear in the Wisconsin Synod record.

The second resident pastor to serve Zion, Van Dyne was Pastor FREDRICK EPPLING. Little information can be found on Eppling. From Wisconsin Synod records we know that Eppling served David's Star, Kirchayn from 1870 until he received the call to Van Dyne

in July of 1885. During his stay at Van Dyne a strong doctrinal statement was put on record at the Fond du Lac County courthouse. Early in 1887 Pastor Eppling, along with his duties at Zion also served congregations at Eldorado and West Rosendale. Because of the press of duties in serving these three congregation Eppling asked to be released from his call in November of 1887. Wisconsin Synod records tell us that Eppling then served a congregation in Dudas, Calumet Co. Wisconsin thru 1889. After that he no longer is mentioned in the list of Pastors serving the Wisconsin Synod. No record of his death was reported in any of the official organs of the Synod.

The congregation at Van Dyne then called a Pastor J.A.HOYER. Very little information can be given concerning this man. We do know that Zion, Van Dyne called Hoyer from Princeton, WI. When Hoyer got the call he hesitated until, according to the minutes of Zion congregation, Pastor Dowidat "insisted" on his accepting the call. He served the congregation at Van Dyne from December of 1887 thru July of 1888. He then accepted a call to serve a congregation in Minnesota. The minutes of the congregation show that he accepted this call to Minnesota because of "health reasons." Records of J.A.Hoyer do not appear anywhere after his accepting of a call to Minnesota. No record of his death appeared in any of the official organs of the Synod.

Zion, Van Dyne now had to call its fifth resident Pastor. This time they called Pastoral Candidate JOHANNES FERDINAND

CHRISTREICH RIEN. Pastor Rien was born April 30, 1859 in Ruetzenhagen, Prussia, Germany. At the age of 23 he immigrated to America (1882) and settled in Manitowoc, WI. On January 5, 1883 he entered Concordia Seminary, Springfield. After one year of training, on September 9, 1888 J.Rien was ordained and installed as Pastor at Zion, Van Dyne. While at Van Dyne Rien was also called to hold services on the fourth Sunday of each month in Oakfield. Rien served the Van Dyne congregation until January of 1891 when he accepted a call to Escanaba, MI. After that he served congregations in Township Maine, Marathon, Co. and Iron Ridge, WI.

Pastor Rien died on September 18, 1939 reaching the age of 80 years, 4 months and 18 days. Funeral services were held at Iron Ridge on September 20. Pastor Ph. Koehler preached the sermon from II Cor. 12:9. August Pieper and Fr. Zarling officiated. The Dodge-Washington pastors served as pallbearer.

While serving at Van Dyne, Pastor Rein was married to Caroline Rowe on October 28, 1888.

After January of 1891 the congregation at Van Dyne was again without a Pastor. It was during these years that there was a severe shortage of pastors. But in March of 1892 Pastoral Candidate JOHN GEORGE SCHULZ was called to Van Dyne.

Schulz was born on December 31, 1866 in Winona, MN, the son of Christoph and Aline Strathamann Schulz. He was confirmed at Wilson, MN by the sainted Pastor Hillemann on February 27, 1881. At the age of 16 Schulz entered Northwestern College and then the

Seminary at Wauwatosa. Pastor Schulz never graduated from Seminary because in the 1890's Synod was so short of Pastors that they sent Schulz out to serve. The plan was to send someone in his place so that he could come back to the Seminary to finish his schooling, but this never was possible.

On March 27, 1892 Pastor John Schulz was ordained and installed as pastor of Zion, Van Dyne and St. Luke's, Oakfield by the sainted Pastor George Saxmann of Eldorado. Pastor Schulz served Zion, Van Dyne for 55 years from March of 1892 until January 1, 1948. In January of 1948 he retired and moved to North Fond du Lac where he lived until February 28, 1948. John Schulz died on February 28 shortly after he and his wife prayed "Christi Blut und Gerechtigkeit."

Funeral services were held on March 3 at St. Paul's, North Fond du Lac. Pastor E. Benj. Schlueter preached the sermon based on the words of the "Nunc Dimittis". Pastor Kuschel of North Fond du Lac served at the altar and Pastor Wm. Wojahn served at the grave. Pastor Schulz is buried at Zion Lutheran Cemetery, which is only a short distance from the church he served for his entire ministry. Pastor Schulz reached the age of 82 years, 1 month and 28 days.

Schulz married Caroline Geske of Fall Creek on September 9, 1904. She died after an operation on January 25, 1920. One son, Frederick died at child birth. Pastor Schulz remarried on November 24, 1921 to Lydia Hoelzel. The Schulz's adopted a daughter, Ruth, who still lives in Milwaukee at the writing of this paper.

Not enough can be said about John Schulz. Maybe to get some idea of what this man was like we will quote from the Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter:

During his long pastorate at Van Dyne, the Rev. Mr. Schulz made many improvements to the property and instituted many changes. He added an English service to the original German observance and arranged for the instruction of Sunday School pupils in English only. The pupils formerly were taught in the English and German language. The retired pastor was also known as a lover of flowers and devoted much time to the cultivation of gladiolas, having always had a large bed of the blooms on the church property. He also kept bees.⁷

As we mentioned earlier Pastor Schulz was installed as Pastor of the Oakfield congregation. For 18 years he served them as their Pastor. In St. Luke's 75th Anniversary booklet they say this about Pastor John Schulz:

He (Pastor Schulz) was actually minutely removed from being a "pioneer preacher" for there were no cars or telephones, and Van Dyne was 25 miles away. He usually took the train to Oakfield, for at that time there were six passenger trains per day going either to or from Fond du Lac.

But schedules could not always be met. He is known to have "pumped" a handcar from Oakfield to Fond du Lac. He came on bicycle and on horseback. Often one of the "Forestaehers" drove to Fond du Lac with a horse and buggy or sleigh depending on the weather, to get him. Often the congregation did not know if he was coming at all, and patiently waited in the church for a couple of hours. He is known to have sent telegrams to one of the "Forestaehers" advising him of difficulties. But, his faithfulness was paramount and he gave Oakfield the best 18 years of his life.⁸

After 55 years of faithful service by one man, the congregation at Van Dyne needed to call another Pastor. This time Pastor GALE ARTHUR MAAS was called to serve.

Maas was born September 1, 1921 in Milwaukee, the son of Arthur F. and Lydia C. Gieschen Maas. He was baptized shortly after birth by Rev. W.A.Hoenecke at Bethel Lutheran in Milwaukee. Maas attended elementary school at Nazareth-Bethel Lutheran school. He was confirmed in 1934 at Bethel by Pastor W.A.Hoenecke. Concordia College was the place that Maas spent his High School years, from 1935 - 1939. After graduation he enrolled at Concordia College from 39-41. In 1941 Maas enrolled at Northwestern College graduating in 1943. He enrolled at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduating in December of 1945. (This was during World War II when the Seminary graduated early to avoid the draft.)

Maas was ordained and installed At St. John's (Maiden Park) Bay City MI, by Pastor W.Nolting. He served at Bay City until 1948, when he then accepted a call to Zion, Van Dyne. Maas served Van Dyne from January 1948 until August 1951. From Van Dyne Maas went to Immanuel, Shirley, WI. He served that congregation from 1953 until 1958. While at Shirley a new parsonage was built and a Christian day school was started. Pastor Maas took a call to St. Luke's, Knowles, WI and served that congregation from 1958 - 1959. Maas then took a call to Emmanuel, Forestville, WI and served one year(1960). From 1961 until the present Pastor Maas has been serving Zion Lutheran in Morton, MN. On March 25, 1987 he observed 25 years of service Zion in Morton. While at Zion, Morton a new parsonage was built.

Maas was married to Lillian Abraham while serving Zion, Van Dyne on August 14, 1948. Pastor Wm. Wojahn married them at Zion.

This union has been blessed with two children: Daniel and Stephen.

Maas writes concerning his ministry: "enjoying it immensely and still working well enough in the Lord Jesus for his Kingdom and gospel among the people here in Morton."

Zion's next Pastor was called from Minocqua, Wi., in August of 1951. Pastor WALDEMAR OSWALD WEISSGERBER would be the next man sent by God to serve.

Weissgerber was born April 27, 1902 in Marinette, WI., the son of Oswald and Bertha Miller Weissgerber. He was baptized on June 1, 1902 by the sainted Pastor F. Stromer at Trinity Lutheran, Marinette. He attended Merryman Public school in Marinette, WI., for grades K-4. After that he then attended Trinity Lutheran School and was confirmed by Pastor H.C. Westphal on April 16, 1916. His first year of High School was spent at Marinette. A member of Trinity Congregation then made monies available for anyone who wanted to go into the ministry. With this money available Weissgerber enrolled at Northwestern Prep for the rest of his high school days. In 1920 he began training for the ministry at Northwestern College graduating in 1924. He then entered the Seminary at Wauwatosa, graduating in 1927.

Weissgerber's career as a pastor began as a vicar at Brewster Nebraska from February - August 1926. He came back to the Seminary and then was assigned to Tutor at Michigan Lutheran Seminary from September 1927 - June 1929. Once again he received a call this time to serve a small congregation called Zion in

Lansing, MI. He served here from July 1929 - January of 1934. Weissgerber then served Trinity of Minocqua and First of Woodruff from January 1934 until October of 1951. It was in October that Weissgerber received the call to Van Dyne. He was installed by Pastor W. Pless of Good Shepherd congregation of Fond du Lac. Weissgerber served at Van Dyne until January 1, 1977.

Pastor and Mrs. Weissgerber retired to North Fond du Lac and lived there until Weissgerber died. Weissgerber died on January 30, 1978 reaching the age of 75 years, 9 months and 3 days.

Funeral services were held at Zion, Van Dyne, the church Weissgerber served for 25 years. Prof. Irwin Habeck, a classmate of Weissgerbers preached the sermon on Psalm 23. Pastor W.H.Zickuhr served at the altar and Pastor Karl Molkenntin read the committal service. Burial took place at Minocqua, WI.

Pastor Weissgerber was Secretary of the Northern Wisconsin District Mission Board from 1956-1962. He also served on the Winnebago Lutheran Academy Board for a number of years. Weissgerber married Evelyn Tonn of Lansing MI on January 5, 1930. The couple was blessed with four children: Mrs. Anita Perlwitz, Kenosha; Mrs. Bethel Schumacher, North Fond du Lac; and Paul, Kenosha, WI.; one child died at birth. All of the above mentioned children are still living at the writing of this paper. Also Evelyn Weissgerber still resides in Fond du Lac at the writing of this paper.

If I may take a moment, I would like to comment on Pastor Weissgerber. For 18 years of my life he served me. As a confirmation pastor he was strict. Memory work was done near to

perfection. During our recess time in catechism Weissgerber would run with us, throw the frisbee and even play jarts with us. (Keep in mind now that Pastor was 70 years old at this time.) I remember one time in catechism class he was challenged to a foot race by one of his students. He told us that he would run but he had to get a new pair of shoes first. He did and he ran. I can not recall who won the race, but I do remember it was a good race.

Weissgerber was also a man who would keep track of everything. He was always writing things down and not just once but twice, in order not to forget. He encouraged this writer to enter the ministry. In fact, as I was going to instruction class he sent my name into Northwestern College. I was receiving information about Northwestern for about six years before I was of college age. What was said by the Oakfield church about Pastor Schulz can be repeated here about Pastor Weissgerber. "He (Weissgerber) gave Zion, Van Dyne 25 of the best years of his life."

Once again after a fairly long pastorate the congregation at Van Dyne needed to call another man. This time they called Pastor KARL FREDRICK LOUIS MOLKENTIN.

Pastor Molkentin was born on May 6, 1918 at Milwaukee, WI, the son of George and Mamie Krueger Molkentin. He was baptized and confirmed at Christ Lutheran Church in Milwaukee. He graduated from Christ Lutheran School in Milwaukee in 1931. For the next 4 years he attended Concordia College, Milwaukee before

transferring to Northwestern, Watertown in 1935. In 1929³ he graduated from Northwestern and in 1942 from the seminary at Mequon.

Because calls were scarce he taught grades 1-4 at St. Paul's Lutheran school in Green Bay for the 1942-43 school year. On October 3, 1943 he was ordained and installed at Chandler, Arizona to serve the mission field of Casa Grande, Coolidge and Florence; and also Chandler, Mesa, and Tempe, plus serving as camp pastor at William's Air Force base at Chandler, the Prisoner of War Camp at Florence^e, and the Japanese Relocation Center at Rivers, Arizona. On January 1, 1947 he was installed at Mancos, Colorado, also serving Cortez, Dove Creek and Ignacio. In May of 1948 he was called to serve at Valentine, Nebraska. After three years he also received the additional charge of Midway, South Dakota. In October of 1955 he was called to serve St. John's, Oak Creek, WI. While here he organized and built a Christian Day school, as well as doing the same in Valentine, NE. On December 29, 1974 he was installed as pastor of Mt. Calvary Lutheran, Tampa, FL. During his stay in Florida he also began a new mission at Zephyrhills. On May 1, 1977 he was installed at Zion, Van Dyne by Pastor W.H. Zickuhr. He served Zion until his retirement in June of 1983.

On September 9, 1943 Molkentin was united in marriage to Irmgard Lawrenz at St. John's in Lomira. This union was blessed with four children: Theodore, Franksville, WI; Mrs. Thomas Knickelbein, Ann Arbor, MI.; James, Genesee Depot, WI.; and Mrs. Sharon Kneser, Rice Lake, WI. Pastor and Irmgard Molkentin now

reside in Florida and are presently serving a vacancy at Coral Springs, FL.

Once more in its history Zion was permitted to call another man to serve them. This time as they had ^eone or twice in the past they called their pastor through the assignment committee of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The Lord gave the call to Pastoral Candidate RANDAL W. SCHOEMAN. Schoeman was born on December 15, 1953 in Milwaukee, the son of Mr. and Mrs. El Roy C. Schoeman. He attended schools in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Nebraska. He was confirmed at Dalton, WI by his father. His high school years were spent at Cambria-Friesland High and then he entered Northwestern College in Watertown. Schoeman graduated from NWC in 1979 and enrolled at WLS in Mequon, graduating in June of 1983.

As was stated earlier his first call was to Van Dyne, WI. He was ordained and installed on July 3, 1983 by his father El Roy C. Schoeman. Pastor Schoeman was married to Donna nee'Riebe on October 25, 1980. This union was blessed with three children to present: Joshua Andrew (8-11-81); Stacy Marie (4-15-84); and Jacob Randal (12-16-86). Pastor Schoeman is presently a member of the Executive board of the Winnebago Lutheran Academy Association and Pastoral Advisor of the Winnebago Land Circuit of the LWMS.

With the above sketch of each one of the Pastors that served Zion, Van Dyne, we now look into the history of the congregation as it was served by these 11 men.

EARLY YEARS 1882-1891

The history of the church has always been throughout the centuries a history of controversy. The same is true of Zion, Van Dyne. Already in the 1860's a Wisconsin Synod congregation was organized on the Ridge Road (St. Paul's--merged with St. Peter's, Eldorado). From here a sister congregation was founded in Nekimi, and for a time those congregations were served by the same Pastor. This came to an end in 1876 when each congregation called their own pastor.

In the years 1877 and 1879 the doctrine concerning election of grace caused a heated controversy throughout the (members of) the Synodical Conference. From the Proceedings of the Wisconsin Synod Convention in 1883 we learn that the congregations at Oshkosh, Green Bay, and Nekimi through agitation and antagonists (Schmidt) within these congregations were asked to make a confession that would contradict the Word of God and the teachings of our church, and thus tear them away from synod. Those that remained faithful to the revealed Word of Truth and the confessions of our Synod organized new congregations. Thus Pastor G. Thiele from Nekimi and about 20 members organized a new Wisconsin Synod congregation in Van Dyne, Wisconsin.

On September 25, 1882, a new Lutheran Church was organized in the Village of Van Dyne, Wisconsin. Those present chose the name Zion and elected as members of the council: August Bergman - President, Carl Knack - Secretary, Johann Nimmer - Treasurer. Pastor G. Thiele, former pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church, Nekimi, and Pastor C. Dowidat, Visitor, from Oshkosh, were present at the organizational meeting. The congregation was

established because of the so called "Gnadenwahlstreit" (Doctrine of Election Controversy). This controversy was chiefly between the Ohio and Missouri Synods, thus involving St. John's, Nekimi. Those signing the first constitution as charter members were: August Bergmann, Carl and William Knack, Carl Darkow, Johann Nimmer, August Nimmer, August Luebke, Gottlieb Beduhn, Albert Nimmer, Carl Nimmer, August Konstantin, August Giese, Herman Nobel, John Abraham, Carl Schulz, Albert Miller, August Leichtfuss, Carl Tank, Carl Finder, Fred Wachholz, and Anton Kolterjahn. The first Pastor called to Zion was Pastor E. Haese who arrived in Van Dyne by January, 1883, and served until June 1885. Pastor E. Haese also served a second congregation in Winneconne, WI, along with the congregation in Van Dyne. During his pastorate the church was incorporated (January 4, 1883). In the fall of 1882 a lot on which a house stood was purchased from Matthew Hefti for \$600. The house served as a church. On September 2, 1883, a resolution was passed to begin construction of a church. A building committee was elected and the following served: August Bergman, Johann Nimmer, Herman Nobel Carl Darkow and Carl Knack. The new church was dedicated early in 1884. A resolution was made to purchase land for a cemetery on March 7, 1884. The old house on the property was made ready for the new pastor.

In July of 1885, Pastor Fredrick Eppling from Kirchayn, WI, accepted a call to Zion. Pastor Eppling received a salary of \$300 in 1885 (\$200 from Zion, \$100 from Synod). It was decided to build a schoolhouse on the property in September of 1885, the

dimensions being 30ft. long by 20ft. high. The congregation again was determined to lay out the cemetery. Three members had land suitable for a cemetery: Carl Knack, Carl Darkow and August Nimmer. The one chosen would be given \$30. The congregation came to no decision, so Carl Knack offered his land for a cemetery. On October 24, 1886 the cemetery was formally dedicated. Pastor Eppling received a call from West Rosendale to serve that congregation along with Zion in 1887. It was then decided that Zion, Eldorado (Ridge Road), and West Rosendale would better be served by one pastor. Pastor Eppling asked to be released because he could not serve three congregations. Eldorado then decided that they would call their own pastor, with Zion and West Rosendale remaining together. It was during Eppplings pastorate that a strong statement of doctrine was made concerning their affiliation with the Wisconsin Synod. This statement was recorded in the Fond du Lac County Courthouse on July 3, 1887.

After Eppling left, the congregation sent a call to Pastor Graves of Praire du Chien, WI. He declined the call because the congregation would not furnish the fuel (firewood). Pastor J.A.Hoyer from Princetun was sent the call, but he hesitated, because of health reasons. On the insistence of the visitor, Pastor Dowidat, Pastor Hoyer was solemnly installed on December 21, 1887. Pastor Hoyer's stay in Van Dyne was a short one, because he accepted a call to Minnesota in July of 1888 for health reasons, along with not having to teach school.

The congregation then sent a call to pastoral candidate Johannes Rien, who was installed on September 9, 1888. After a

year at Zion, Pastor Rien received a call to Rome, WI. The congregation decided not to release their young pastor. It was during Riens pastorate that Zion congregation saw its first Christmas tree in the church, as well as the first Bible class for children and adults. The congregation at Oakfield sent a call to Rien, to hold services every 4th Sunday. He accepted this call, to serve both congregations. The congregation purchased a bell in October of 1891. In connection with the bell a long list of rules was set down as to how and when the bell should be rung. The first bell ringers were Fred Freiberg and Carl Finder. In December Pastor Rien received a call to Escanaba, MI, but the congregation urged him to stay and Pastor Rien sent the call back. The congregation in Escanaba sent the call to Rien a second time. This time he accepted the call, and the congregation in turn gave him a peaceful release.

GROWING YEARS 1892 - 1947

The congregations at Van Dyne and Oakfield jointly decided to called a pastor. They called pastoral candidate John Schulz from Milwaukee. Pastor Schulz was solemnly ordained and installed as pastor of Zion, Van Dyne and St. Luke's, Oakfield on March 27, 1892, by Pastor H. Saxmann of St. Paul's Ridge Road. The congregation adopted a new policy whereby they would collect church dues from each member. This resolution is recorded in the minutes of January 1, 1894. Each member was placed into a class system according to how much land he owned.

The lowest class pays \$ 6	Those owning 80 acres \$13
Those owning 20 acres \$ 8	Those owning 90 acres \$14
Those owning 40 acres \$ 9	Those owning 120 acres \$15

Those owning 60 acres \$12

Evidently the church never had benches, but by a congregational resolution adopted in July of 1894, they were to purchase the needed benches. The main reason for purchasing the benches was that the congregation instituted the custom of annually celebrating a Mission Festival. In the early years the congregation would invite the sister congregation from the Ridge Road. As time went on Mission Festival began to increase in importance for Zion. Along with inviting the Ridge Road congregation they also invited the Mixed and Male Choirs from St. Peter's in Fond du Lac. Then in 1895 the congregation invited its young sister congregation from Oakfield to join them in their festive day. With all the festivities Pastor Schulz was generally put in charge of contacting guest speakers. Mission festival has been a practice at Zion since around 1890 and continues up to the present. The custom of inviting the neighboring congregations was a practice which began early in this congregation and continued until a few years ago. This event went so far as dropping services for each other's Mission Festival.

In the early part of 1900 the congregation decided to build a new house for its pastor. The new house was built on the site of the old one. The old house was sold to John Kind for \$135. The building committee reported that the house was completed by July of 1900, and a deficit of \$600 remained.

The first organ at Zion was purchased April 27, 1902, from the Hiner and Albertson Company. Before the congregation purchased the organ they appointed Johann Nimmer as "Vorsinger"

to lead the congregation in singing. The new organ was dedicated June 1, 1902. Martha Darkow was the first organist. Pastor Schulz received his first call in 1902, to Nebraska. The congregation urged their pastor to remain. The year 1902 was a year of firsts because it was in this year that Zion celebrated its first Christmas Eve service. Pastor Schulz received a call to Lomira, WI in December 1903. The congregation felt that it could not allow their young pastor to leave at this time. Schulz returned the call and remained at Zion. Notable in the history of the congregation thus far is that Zion sent a delegate to Synod convention as far back as 1883 and they continue to do so even to the present. It should also be noted that the members of Zion were always willing and did contribute for the building of houses on both the Northwestern and Dr. Martin Luther College campuses. In the year 1910 Pastor Schulz received \$525 for an annual salary. This was for his pastoral duties as well as teaching school. Arnold Koelpin, a son of the congregation received a Sunday's collection in 1916, to help him pay for his theological education. Pastor Schulz asked for a one week vacation, his first in 18 years. In the January 1, 1920 meeting, the congregation decided that an English service be held on the last Sunday of the month, In March of that same year it was decided to continue with the English services.

In 1922 the parsonage was refurbished. Along with that went the discussion of what ought to be done with the present church building. The congregation discussed whether the church should be rebuilt, thoroughly repaired or just repair the most needed

things. It was decided to paint and paper the church and paint the benches.

In 1925 the Ladies Aid Society of Zion was formed. The purpose of this organization as stated in their constitution is to "help support the congregation, to practice charity, also outside of the home congregation especially within the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod, to further the Kingdom of God, and foster a social life in a true Christian spirit." That "true Christian spirit" was shown by the ladies, during the years 1926 to 1947. They held annual Ice Cream socials. The proceeds would then be turned over to the church building fund.

The members had worshipped in their house of God since 1883. After 46 years of continuous use, the congregation decided that a new church should be built. Each member was given monthly envelope for their contribution toward a new church. Then in the January 1935 meeting a committee was chosen: E. Finder-President; H. Babler-Secretary; A. Babler-Financial Secretary; E. Nimmer-Treasurer, C. Beduhn, F. Umlauf, O. Kolterjahn, H. Knack, and A. Knack. The committee worked hard and long. They proposed ideas for the renovation of the church. The first proposal was to build an addition of 19ft. to the front and 20ft. on the back of the original church. Along with these proposals the committee also decided to change the windows which were to be of Gothic style with stained glass. They were also to check on the price of a basement. On May 24, 1935 the church was vacated by the congregation. Until the remodeling was finished, Sunday worship was held in the schoolhouse. The contractor in charge of the work

was Hillsburg and Neuman of Oshkosh. Work began and progressed quickly, with the members doing much of the work. Some of the older members still tell of the digging of the church basement. The work was all done by members using their teams of horses to go under the church, digging, as they went along. A new altar was placed in the church, along with a new pulpit and communion rails. The window of "Christ Knocking at the Door" was purchased by the Aid Association for Lutherans Branch #348 for \$330. The Ladies Aid purchased the two windows on either side of the altar. The windows in the main auditorium of the church were purchased for \$50 each by Frau Johann Abraham, Carl Beduhn, Caroline Bergmann, Carl Finder, Louise Finder, Charles H. Klug and Family, Ida Knack, August H. Nimmer, Emil Nimmer and Family, and Johann L. Nimmer. In the Fall of 1935 the church was ready for use. Three rededication services were held - a German Service at 10:00 AM with Pastor G.E. Bergemann from St. Peter's of Fond du Lac preaching, an afternoon service at 2:30 PM with Pastor K. Timmel from Trinity of Watertown, WI, preaching English, and an evening service at 7:30 PM with Pastor E. Benjamin Schlueter from Grace of Oshkosh, WI. Special music was sung by the choir and the organist was Mrs. Emil Nimmer. The Ladies of the congregation prepared their first meal in the newly completed church basement. Over 900 people were served at the noon and 6:00 PM meals. The renovation of the church included additions to the front and rear of the church. A new steeple was placed on the church while a new altar and furnace were installed. This festive day of dedication was not soon forgotten by anyone who was in attendance.

Sometime in the late 1920's Zion Ev. Lutheran Christian day school (German School) was closed. It seems that when Pastor Schulz stepped down and suggested a lady teacher the congregation would not stand for a female teacher so the school closed. The congregation was still interested in Christian education. In 1940 Zion Sunday School opened its doors to educate its youth. Sunday School was taught for many years in the schoolhouse, but when the enrollment became too large, the congregation decided to have Sunday School in the church basement.

Between the years 1937 and 1947 matters at Zion were very routine, except for the fiftieth anniversary of Pastor Schulz's ministry. This was celebrated in jubilant fashion. Then in July of 1947 Pastor Schulz informed the congregation of his plans for retirement. For 55 years Pastor Schulz served Zion, Van Dyne as its Pastor and Teacher.

The congregation then called a new pastor. The first call was to Pastor Arthur Krueger of Milwaukee. Krueger declined. A second call was sent to Pastor Gale A. Maas of Bay City MI. Mass accepted Zions call. Pastor J. Schulz preached his farewell sermon at Zion on New Year's day, January 1, 1948.

CHANGING YEARS 1948-1977

In early January of 1948 Pastor Gale Maas was installed as Pastor of Zion Ev. Lutheran Church by Pastor Arnold Koelpin of Caledonia, WI. At the annual meeting of the congregation in 1948, a number of changes were discussed. Modern plumbing was to be installed in the parsonage. A nomination committee should be set

up as a new system of electing the council. Another change was that when going to communion, the husband and the wife should go together. (The custom had been that the men took communion first and then the women followed.) A new liturgy (TLH) would be practiced. And finally the question of church dues was discussed. Pastor Maas introduced the envelope system. The envelope system would encourage weekly giving. This matter was tabled until the next meeting. At the next meeting the envelope system was adopted. The proposed budget for Zion under the new system was \$3,500, with a total of 185 communicant members for the year 1950. The Pastors salary for that year was \$2,300. The pastor also reported that at the end of the year the congregation would receive a printed annual report. A new constitution to replace the old german one was adopted on July 10, 1949. A new organ was purchased in August of 1950 for the amount of \$2,427. The organ was dedicated on October 1, 1950. Pastor Maas received a call to Emmanuel, Forestville in 1951. He read the congregation the call and then told them that he felt the Lord wanted him to take the call. The congregation gave him a peaceful release. At a special call meeting dated August 17, 1951 Pastor W.O.Weissgerber was sent the call.

Pastor Weissgerber answered the call and was installed on October 7, 1951, by Pastor W. Pless of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Fond du Lac. For a number of years the routine work of electing council members and other related church business was carried on. In 1955, the congregation decided to remodel the kitchen and paper the livingroom walls of the parsonage, thus

completing the remodeling which started in 1952. It should be noted here, that at this time the new Winnebago Lutheran Academy was being built, and Zion pledged between \$4000 and \$5000. Zion had been a supporter of Winnebago from its start. Zion was also one of the charter members of the Academy Association.

The church building was painted in one day by 22 men in the summer of 1955. The white bulletin board which stood on the west side of the church was built by Mr. John Freiberg and paid for by memorials. It was put in place in 1956. In October of 1956 Weissgerber received a call to a dual parish at Bruce and Cameron, WI. The congregation asked their Pastor to decline the call. Pastor Weissgerber did send the call back and remained at Zion. In 1957, a furnace committee was appointed to study the need for a new furnace. They reported, and a gas furnace was installed for \$1,460. The German service which was being held monthly was cut back and held only six times a year. This action took place in 1957. It should be noted here that 1957 was the 75th anniversary year, but it was overlooked. The congregation then celebrated the anniversary in the fall of 1958. The church council was in charge of arrangements. The Ladies Aid was in charge of the fellowship meal. The morning speaker was Pastor Arnold Koelpin of Caledonia, WI, a son of the congregation, the organist was Prof. T.W.Zuberbier of Winnebago Academy. In the afternoon service, Pastor Gale Maas preached the sermon and Cora Nimmer was the organist. During the service Mrs. Cora Nimmer was recognized for 42 years of service as organist. Pastor Weissgerber was the liturgist for both services. A second call

was received by Weissgerber, this time to Apostles Lutheran, Milwaukee in 1959. Once again Weissgerber returned the call. A new roof was placed on the church and school in 1959. In March of 1961 Pastor Weissgerber received another call, this time to Zion, Zeeland, North Dakota. Weissgerber once again returned the call and in turn the congregation gave their pastor a raise. His salary was now \$3,900. In 1961 the congregation built a two car garage and cemented the basement. In 1962 the service time was changed. Instead of the 10:00 AM service year round, the service would start at 9:00 AM during the summer months. A fourth call was received by Weissgerber this time to Huilsburg, WI. He once again remained at Zion. In the annual meeting of the congregation Mrs. Ada Knack donated a piece of land to double the size of the cemetery as a memorial to the Knack Family, on the condition that the congregation maintain the Knack Family plot on the west end of the cemetery. In that same meeting a perpetual Care fund was set up and adopted by the congregation. At the same time the congregation appointed a committee to look into purchasing new pews. The committee reported with a sample of the pew and a price tag of \$2,084. The congregation had tile laid on the floor at the same time. In February of 1965 Weissgerber received yet another call, this time to Calvary, Glenwood MN. He once again returned the call. Also in ¹⁹65 the parsonage furnace was converted from coal to gas. The pastors study was completely remodel^ed in 1966. In 1966 the congregation decided to drop German services entirely, thus ending a tradition which had been part of the congregation for 85 years. A special service and celebration was observed in

1966 for the long and faithful service of Mrs. Cora Nimmer. She had played the organ for 50 years. In March of '66 Weissgerber received his 6th call this time to Sturgeon Bay, WI. He returned the call once again. Another tradition of 80 years was broken when the congregation decided to discontinue the dropping of its service when St. Paul's, Ridge Road had their Mission Festivals. The budget for 1967 was \$14,494. In 1967 Weissgerber received another call this time from the Nebraska District Mission board. Weissgerber felt this was a call for a younger man and decided to send the call back. The unified budget system which Zion uses today, was adopted by the congregation in 1974. Congregational business went on as usual from 1974-1976. In October of 1976 Pastor Weissgerber announced his retirement from the ministry effective January 1, 1977. On a cold January 9, 1977 the congregation held a retirement service for Pastor Weissgerber. Prof. I.Habeck of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (a classmate of Weissgerber's) preached the sermon on Ps. 23. Pastor W.Zickuhr served as Liturgist and Mr. Jeff Wegner was the organist.

Calls were sent out to Pastors L.Loethert, E.Mahnke and K.Molkentin respectively to fill the vacancy. The Lord led K. Molkentin to accept the Lord's Call.

PRESENT 1977-1987

Pastor Karl Molkentin was installed on May 1, 1977 by Pastor W. Zickuhr of St. Paul's Ridge Road. In anticipation of the new pastor's arrival the congregation readied the parsonage, by repairing steps, remodeling the upstairs bedroom and updating the

plumbing. The congregation felt that it was also time to remodel the basement of the church. The first step was to dig around the basement walls of the church and lay drainage tile. This was done during the summer of 1977. With the news of the basement being refurbished the congregation decided to dispose of the schoolhouse which had been a part of the church and its property for 92 years. The congregation asked for sealed bids for the purchase of the schoolhouse. (Today the schoolhouse does not stand far from its old location. It now stands on the property of Mr. Robert Eder.) The remodeling of the church basement was completed in early April 1979. By October the modern bathroom facilities were completed. In 1980 the church council undertook the revision of the constitution. Pastor Molkentin received a call to St. James, Evanston IL in April 1980. Molkentin returned the call and remained at Zion. At the April 1981 meeting of the congregation, it decided to observe its 100th Anniversary of proclaiming the Gospel of Salvation with the theme THANKING GOD FOR 100 YEARS OF GRACE. The church council chose a general chairman in the person of Mr. Gary Dittloff. The Anniversary Committee decided to observe four special Sundays of Anniversary observance. The first special service held on September 12 was called CHRISTIAN EDUCATION SUNDAY. This Sunday was a remembrance of education in our congregation as well as remembering each one's confirmation vows. Sunday September 19 was ANNIVERSARY SUNDAY. At the 10:00 AM Pastor Carl Voss, President of the Northern Wisconsin District preached and dinner was served to nearly 300 people. At the 2:00 PM service Pastor James Babler,

whose grandparents were former members of Zion preached the sermon. The church was filled to overflowing for both festive services. September 26 was MISSION FESTIVAL SUNDAY in which Pastor Joel Sauer, Chairman of the Northern Wisconsin District Mission Board preached. Finally on October 3 Zion celebrated COMMUNION AND REDEDICATION SUNDAY. On this Sunday the congregation used the Centennial Communionware which was a gift to the congregation from the congregation. The anniversary offering amounted to \$2,500 which was set aside as a Centennial Scholarship fund to help those who would go on to a Lutheran High School, college, or Seminary.

Zion purchased a new Hammond organ in July of 1981 for the cost of \$2795. In the fall of 1981 a new lighted bulletin board was constructed and paid for partially by AAL funds from branch #348. In March of 1983 Pastor Molkentin announced to the congregation his plans of retirement to the congregation. He told the congregation that he would stay on until a replacement was called. After a few calls the congregation decided to send its call through the Assignment committee of the Seminary.

Pastoral Candidate Randal Schoeman was assigned to Zion, Van Dyne in the spring of 1983. On July 3, 1983 Schoeman was ordained and installed by his father, El Roy C. Schoeman, as pastor of Zion, Van Dyne. In preparation for the new pastor minor remodeling was done in the parsonage. And since 1983 the upstairs rooms of the congregation were remodel^{ed}, a new well was dug and the bathroom remodeled.

In the past 105 years of Zion,s history 508 persons have been baptized, 475 have been confirmed, 186 couples have been married, and 257 persons have been given Christian burial.

At present Zion has a membership of 220 with 166 being communicant members. There are 38 voting members who have elected a council of: Roger Gruendemann - President; Ronald Leeman - Secretary; Roger Jansen - Treasurer; Elmer Seffern - Financial Secretary; Mike Nitz and John Pollack - Trustees. Zion has been and still is a member of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod since 1882. The church operates a Sunday School with an enrollment of 43. Since 1978 Zion has a cradle roll of 23 young children. Zion is also a charter member of the Winnebago Lutheran Academy Association and contributes regularly to the upkeep of the Academy in Fond du Lac, WI. At present Zion has 2 students enrolled at the Academy.

Thus you have the history of Pastors and congregation of a small but vital church - Zion, Van Dyne, Wisconsin.

PREACHING CHRIST CRUCIFIED FOR 105 YEARS

ENDNOTES

1. ----- Northwestern Lutheran, September 20, 1925, p. 301.
2. Koehler, J.P., History of the Wisconsin Synod, p. 91
3. Koehler, J.P., p. 195
4. Koehler, J.P., p. 207
5. Meyer, J.P., Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, V60:170-238 p. 197
6. ----- 75th Anniversary Book Friedens Lutheran, Bonduel, WI. 1953, p. 21
7. ----- Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter, Obituary Page, March 1, 1948, p. 13
8. ----- 75th Anniversary Book St. Luke's Lutheran, Oakfield, WI. 1967, p. 6

Note 1 More on the Election Controversy can be found in a paper entitled "GRACE AND PEACE: THE ELECTION CONTROVERSY IN OSHKOSH" a Senior Church History paper written by Paul W. Alliet in 1975. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library.

Note 2 More on Pastor Dowidat can be found in a paper entitled "CHRISTOPH DOWIDAT: CONFESSOR AND FAITHFUL PASTOR" a Senior Church History paper written by Mark Grubb in 1978. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library.