

*Grace upon Grace*

**A 75TH  
ANNIVERSARY  
HISTORY  
OF  
ST. JOHN'S  
LUTHERAN  
CHURCH**

**New Ulm, MN  
1948-2023**



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*Our Ascended Lord Jesus Christ  
fills the universe in order to guide all  
the events of history to His saving  
purposes for us, His Church. To  
Him be the glory*

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ST. JOHN'S—A DAUGHTER CONGREGATION  
OF ST. PAUL'S, NEW ULM

St. John's Lutheran Church is the daughter congregation of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN. On September 15, 1947, the voters of St. Paul's passed the following motion: "St. Paul's congregation favors the founding of another congregation of the Wisconsin Synod in our city."



St. Paul's School 1947  
SE corner of 2nd North St. and State St. The auditorium was in the basement.



To encourage this, St. Paul's set aside the basement auditorium of St. Paul's Lutheran School for Sunday morning services and allowed its members to worship there under the leadership of the ordained professors of Dr. Martin Luther College. Bruce Backer, a student at Dr. Martin Luther College, was the organist/pianist and the offerings of the new congregation were to be kept separate from St. Paul's offerings. The first service was led by Professor Martin Albrecht on October 19, 1947, with 88 in attendance.

### CANVASS OF THE CITY OF NEW ULM

St. Paul's resolved, on November 3, that the entire city of New Ulm should be canvassed to see whether there might be any interest in joining this new Lutheran congregation. DMLC Professors Hoenecke, Albrecht, Voecks, and Jahnke were appointed to head the effort.

With the help of DMLC students, they launched into a marathon, one-day, house-to-house canvass of the entire city of New Ulm. After that, the committee of four had to pore over the results of those surveys and see to it that follow-up calls were made on residents who showed interest in starting another Lutheran church in New Ulm. They reported the results at a meeting of St. Paul's congregation on Monday, December 1.

The favorable reports moved St. Paul's voters to call in the Minnesota District Mission Board to further direct them in establishing the new congregation. The Mission Board met at St. Paul's 11 days later and called Professor Albrecht to be the temporary pastor during the organization until a full-time pastor could be called.

### OFFICIAL FOUNDING OF ST. JOHN'S

January 4, 1948, marked the day the new Lutheran church was founded. Prof. Roland Hoenecke was elected to serve, at least temporarily, as the first "moderator" (chairman). Alvin Rolloff recorded the minutes of the meeting. Pastors Hinnenthal and Schmidt of St. Paul's were present at this inaugural meeting to give St. Paul's blessing. Three months earlier, they had assured any St. Paul's member who wished to join this new congregation a peaceful release from St. Paul's. The first order of business was to distribute the model constitution which they had received from their Minnesota District representative. After studying it and making the minor changes necessary for their particular circumstances, they adjourned with the plan to return in three days to approve it.

On Wednesday, January 7, twenty-seven men represented their families together with the rest of the confirmed members in a standing vote to approve the constitution. These are the charter members who met that evening:

Martin Albrecht	Fred L. Nieno
William P. Backer	John E. Oldfield
Herbert H. Bade	Henry G. Plagge
William Beckendorf	Walter Plagge
William G. Brei, Jr.	Ervin Reiner
Alfred Bruer	Alvin A. Rolloff
William Fuhrmann	Stanley M. Spangenberg
Helmuth Hagen	Clarence Stadick
Roland H. Hoenecke	Willard Tanley
Richard J. Jahnke	Cornelius J. Trapp
Elmer Kitzrow	Victor F. Voecks
Robert Kolb	Francis Warner
Willard Kuester	Clarence Willhite
Oscar Levenson	

The following leaders were officially elected to fill the first offices of our congregation:

Chairman: Roland H. Hoenecke

Secretary: Fred L. Nieno

Financial Secretary: William Brei, Jr.

Trustees: Helmut Hagen, Walter Plagge,

Stanley Spangenberg

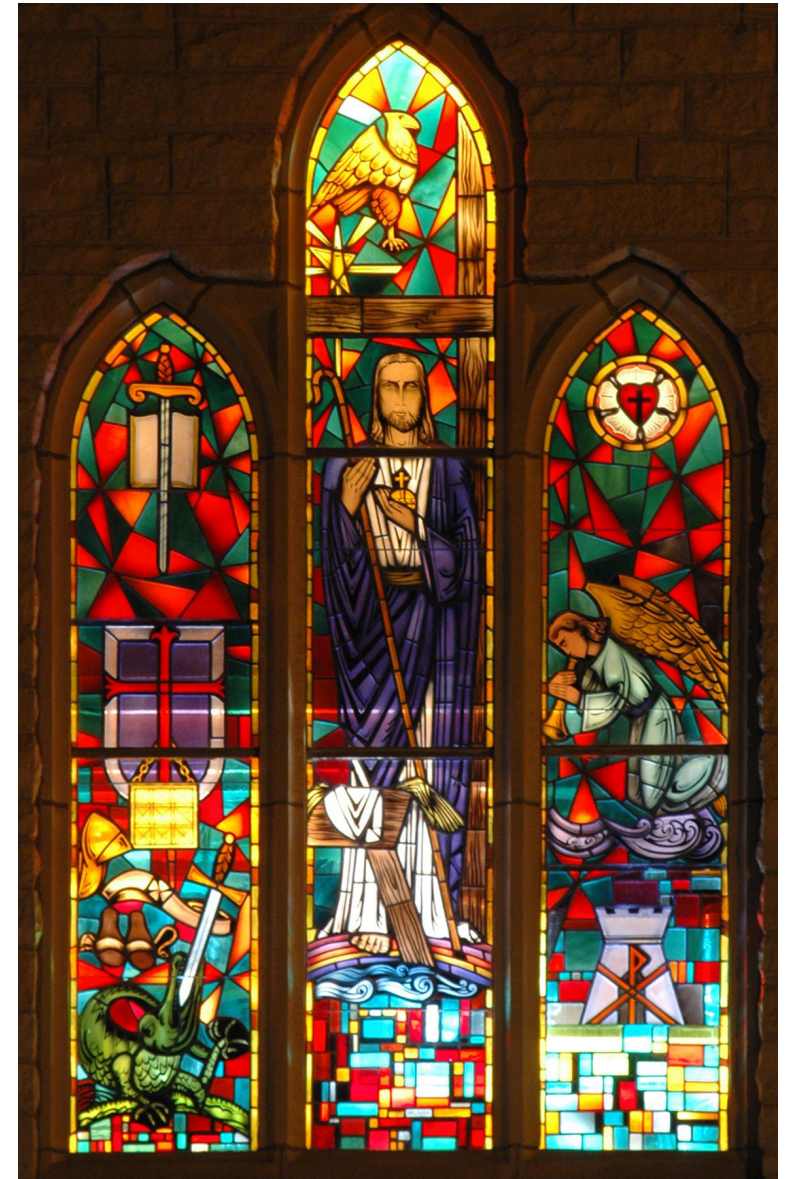
Committee of Ushers: Clarence Stadick, Henry Plagge,

Ervin Reiner, Herbert Bade

### THE NEW CONGREGATION RECEIVES A NAME

When it came to naming this new Lutheran congregation, many excellent names were suggested. They finally settled on the name St. John's. We are reminded of the miraculous son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the Forerunner of Jesus. Jesus said of him, "Of men born of a woman there is no greater (prophet) than John, yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." (Luke 7:28). John was also the name of the apostle who wrote the Gospel of John and the three epistles of John. John means "God is gracious."

You will find the symbol of John, the eagle, on the top of the middle lancet window over the west entrance to the church. The three comforting passages engraved in stone over each entrance are all taken from the Gospel of John, as well.



The stained glass windows over the west entrance.



## 1948-1950 THE CALLING OF PASTOR MARTIN ALBRECHT



The Martin Albrecht Family  
Children from left to right: Ellen, Carol, Kathy,  
Janet (with Mrs. Albrecht), Marianne, and Elizabeth

Professor Pless of Northwestern College, Watertown, WI, was called by the congregation to be its first full-time pastor. About a month later, the congregational voters were notified that he had declined the call. The congregation then extended a part-time call to Professor Martin Albrecht. After consulting with the Dr. Martin Luther College Board of Control, he accepted. The board allowed his college duties for 1948-49 to be significantly reduced. Professor Martin Albrecht served St. John's until June 1950, when Pastor Roland A. Gurgel was called as the first full-time shepherd.

## THE BASEMENT CHURCH

Early in 1948, the congregation directed its attention toward the purchase of land on which to eventually build a church. Two lots on the corner of Washington and Seventh South were purchased from William Stelljes for \$5,500. Although there were fewer than 200 souls at this time, the people of St. John's planned to build a church that would eventually seat 500 worshippers. They hired the Mankato architectural firm of Ernst H. Schmidt and Company to draw up the plans for the entire building. During those post-war years, some congregations would build the basement first and use it as a temporary worship area. Once they retired the mortgage, the congregation could rally its finances for the final phase—the building of the “superstructure.”



This picture of the basement church was taken just before the superstructure was built in 1966. This is the entrance which faces 7th Street South (Lincoln Park).

On Wednesday, May 19, 1948, the congregation assembled for the groundbreaking. Professor Albrecht led the service and Mr. Helmuth Hagen, the congregational president, turned the first shovelful of dirt. In a matter of days, each of five New Ulm businesses began to swarm the site. The Wallner Construction Company excavated the footprint. Next, the Kraus Construction Company poured the footings and assembled the walls. At this point, members offered whatever sweat-equity they could by hauling cement blocks and bags of cement from the New Ulm

Brick and Tile Yards to the site. Finally, the Ulrich Electric Company, the plumbers of W.O. Moll & Company, and Ahrens Brothers (heating) plied their trades.



The cornerstone of the basement church.

On July 11, 1948, the chairman of the Minnesota District Mission Board, Pastor N. Wehausen, drove over from LeSueur to preach the sermon for the laying of the cornerstone. The 1948 cornerstone, one of the two which celebrates God's grace in providing a place to worship Him, was designed by B.J. Krahn of New Ulm.

The cost of the basement church was \$62,000. Almost \$4,000 of that was contributed by the 186 souls at the time of the cornerstone laying. A \$20,550 loan was drawn from the synod's Church Extension Fund to speed the process.

The contents of the 1948 cornerstone include: a Bible, Luther's Catechism, The Lutheran Hymnal, a copy of The Unaltered Augsburg Confession, a copy of the original constitution of the congregation, an early copy of the history of St. John's Congregation, a list of all members at that time, a list of officers who were serving, and a copy of the local newspaper.

Worship was led on a piano at first, then a two-manual reed organ. With an eye on quality worship, the Ernest Vogelpohl Organ Company was commissioned to adapt a used pipe organ with an eye on the proposed church as well. It would be installed in late 1951.

Recognizing the importance of mutual encouragement, the tradition of having a "Get-Acquainted Potluck" began in March 14, 1948. Similarly, an annual church picnic was begun that year. In anticipation of the turnout, the council had to increase its order from 100 to 300 folding chairs.

On February 13, 1948, the congregation decided to support the larger mission of the Wisconsin Synod. It purchased a blanket subscription to the synod's fortnightly magazine, The Northwestern Lutheran. This kept each household aware of unfolding events in home and world missions. Ten days later, on February 23, the congregation formally applied for membership in the Wisconsin Synod.

The Christian education of every family who wished to enroll at St. Paul's Lutheran School was also a priority. St. Paul's Congregation graciously allowed St. John's children to attend its school tuition-free. In gratitude for this, St. John's voluntarily committed itself to begin taking a part in teaching their baptized children the saving Gospel. Already on October 4, 1948, the congregation resolved to pay \$10 per student per year. This would increase over the next 75 years. In 2023, St. John's supports the salary packages of its 4 teachers in addition to \$221,565 per year. WELS parents pay \$1,687.50 in tuition for the first child. St. John's offers \$650 to member children to help offset the family financial burden. St. John's Sunday School was begun on March 6, 1949. This opportunity was especially important for those children who did not receive Bible-based instruction at St. Paul's Lutheran School.

On October 17, 1949, the decision was made to conduct a German service once a month. However, whether it was ever implemented is a mystery.

Our early support of the Sunday morning radio broadcast "Lutheran Chapel" on KNUJ began in 1949.



## 1950-1953 THE ROLAND GURGEL PASTORATE



Pastor Roland Gurgel  
1950-1953

On June 25, 1950, Pastor Roland Gurgel was installed as St. John's first full-time pastor. He was called by us from a WELS congregation in Rib Lake, WI. Pastor Gurgel served as our shepherd from 1950 through 1953. From here, he took a call to Belle Plaine, MN.

During his pastorate, Pastor Gurgel lived at our first parsonage, 517 S. Washington, about a block north of the church. It was purchased for \$14,000. At that time the house had an open front porch, where at least one confirmation student remembers enjoying his class's celebratory picnic of German potato salad, hot dogs, and sauerkraut.



St. John's first parsonage  
(photo taken in 2020)

The Young Peoples' Society was established during Pastor Gurgel's first year here.

At the end of 1951 our basement church saw the arrival of a used Ernest Vogelpohl pipe organ. The cost was \$2,500. There was still some work to be done after it was installed, so the formal dedication had to wait until early 1952. The instrument was positioned toward the kitchen end of the basement and used in the basement church for the next 16 years. In 1966 the organ was rebuilt and, for the next 30 years, led worship from the balcony of the superstructure.

During the first two years our children participated in the school Christmas Eve service at St. Paul's Church. However, on December 24, 1950, St. John's began to hold its own children's services.

On the lighter side: A school bell that was donated to St. John's by St. Paul's, Arlington, MN, was intended for use in the proposed superstructure. It seems, however, it was already being used on October 15, 1951, because the council secretary recorded: "...no action taken regarding the ringing of the church bell at seven in the morning." Over the years it seems that other bells took its place. Legend has it that one came from a church in South Dakota and the present bell was given to us when Fort Ridgely Lutheran Church closed.

On July 1, 1952, St. John's articles of incorporation were complete and were accepted by the State of Minnesota.

The emphasis throughout Pastor Roland Gurgel's annual report in 1951 was our unity in Christ, based on God's Word. He was quick to point out that while one might expect God's Word to divide people, as it does in the unbelieving world, God's Word is the reason we believers in Jesus are knit into a close family - in mind and spirit. These statistics at the end of 1951 give us a snapshot of the growing congregation:

**Souls:** 347

**Communicants:** 223

**Voting members:** 69

Church Services	8am	9am*	10am	Evening*	Total
Number of Services	32	14	39	16	101
Total Attendance	2945	2495	11166	4692	21297
Average Attendance	92	178	286	294	211

\*9 AM = summer only. Evening = all evening services through the year, such as Advent, Lent, Ascension, etc.

**Baptisms:** 10 children and 1 adult

**Communion Attendance:**

St. John's members: 611

Average per communicant: 2.8

Guests (mostly DMLC students): 595

**Confirmation Class:** 8 confirmands

*Confirmation Day was traditionally held on Palm Sunday. A severe snowstorm on Sunday, March 18 had it postponed for four days and it was held on Maundy Thursday.*

**Bible Class Enrollment:** 15 members plus college students

**St. Paul's School:**

St. John's children enrolled: 84

Annual voluntary offerings given by St. John's for operation of St. Paul's School: \$1,200

**Sunday School:**

Enrollment: 24

Sunday School Staff:

Prof. Sievert, Superintendent

Miss Myra Rhode

Miss Naomi Voecks

Mrs. Irene Bade

**Mixed Choir:** 36 voices

Director: Prof. Martin Albrecht, DMLC (While Professor Albrecht served St. John's, both as pastor during a vacancy and as choir director, he maintained his membership at St. Paul's Lutheran in New Ulm, until he was called to be a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1962.)

**Ladies' Aid:** 32

President: Mrs. V. Voecks

Treasurer: Mrs. A. Rolloff

Secretary: Mrs. W. Plagge

**Young People's Society:** 31

President: Rob Willhite

Treasurer: R. Hagen

Secretary: Ruth Willhite

**Stewardship of God's Earthly Gifts**

Total Receipts for Jan 1-Dec 31, 1951: \$15,165.25

Current Expenses \$4,118.21

Missions \$1,465.67

Building Fund \$5,955.71

Loose Plate \$3,232.37

Misc. receipts \$393.29

*Example: Bethesda Home, Organ Fund, The Lutheran Hour, Art Glass Windows*

Total New Budget for 1952: \$11,398

Pastor's salary: \$3,000/year

Organist stipends: \$165/year

Janitor's fee: \$360/year



1951 Yearbook



1954-1959

## THE PASTORATE OF ROLLIN A. REIM

On March 7, 1954, Pastor Rollin Reim was installed as our second full-time pastor. A member who arrived at St. John's in 1955 remembered that Pastor Reim was a good preacher and Bible class teacher.



Pastor Rollin Reim  
1954-1959

During Pastor Reim's tenure, Vacation Bible School was introduced. It ran from July 13-24, 1955, with an enrollment of 72 children. A special reception with light refreshments was held to get to know VBS parents after the last class.

In 1958, Professor Albrecht and Pastor Gurgel were speakers at St. John's 10th anniversary celebration. By then the membership had increased to 538 souls—a little more than half of what it is today 65 years later.

On the lighter side, the July 15, 1958, business meeting was recessed briefly to watch Russian satellite, Sputnik III, pass over. At the same meeting the church took out vandalism insurance.

## THE CLOUDS GATHER—BACKGROUND HISTORY

The 1850s and 1860s were the formative years of the Wisconsin Synod. During those decades the Missouri Synod had patiently helped the WELS and other Lutherans see the error of unionism with false teaching churches. That brotherly correction led to nearly a century of wholesome, brotherly cooperation between the WELS and the Missouri Synod. Both synods preached the same Gospel, shared pastors, teachers, communion, mission

work, charitable endeavors, and many other blessings of scriptural brotherhood.

After World War I (1919) there was strong social pressure to join all Lutherans together, regardless of the fact that some of them had departed from the correct teaching and practice of God's Word. While most Missouri Synod pastors and professors remained faithful to God's Word, interest was growing among a few in the Missouri Synod to ignore those biblical differences. Between 1929 and 1950, these men floated out vaguely worded statements of faith in order to find common ground with heterodox Lutherans. Often, these "statements of faith" could be understood correctly, but studiously avoided the controverted issues at hand. The Common Confession, written in 1950, was the latest of these statements. Pastor Reim's predecessor, Pastor Roland Gurgel, had already addressed these concerns in his 1951 annual report. Four biennial conventions had come and gone since then without any resolution of the issue.

In the August 2, 1959, bulletin Pastor Reim wrote:

The pastor will be absent for a week, beginning this Wednesday. He plans to be present for part of the convention at Saginaw in order to support a "memorial" (a resolution) entitled, "A Call for Decision." By this means, a group of Synod members are making what they trust is a constructive effort to restore unity in our Synod in a matter of church fellowship. If the basic principles are Scriptural and agreed upon, we may hope for unit purpose and action. Grave responsibility rests upon our voting delegates. May they subdue every other impulse and be God's men, "valiant for the truth" (to use an expression of Jeremiah 9)!

Two weeks later, upon his return from the convention, Pastor Reim printed this announcement in the bulletin:

CONVENTION NEWS. With numerous press accounts and the KNUJ recorded interviews with Prof. Trapp, it is hardly necessary for anyone to ask, "What happened

at Saginaw?” A more detailed account is coming in the Convention Issue of The Northwestern Lutheran, which you will receive. After that, it might be well to seek opportunity to discuss the import of the various resolutions.

While the Wisconsin Synod in convention had come to the conclusion that their pleas with the LC-MS were falling on deaf ears, most of the delegates were not yet ready to officially break with the Missouri Synod. Some had expressed that, while it would be Scriptural to do so, they wished to wait another two years, until the convention of 1961, in order to allow time for the grassroots members of WELS to ask their questions and come to an understanding of the issue.

In the application of Romans 16:17, Pastor Rollin Reim came to the personal conviction that it was necessary to break fellowship with the WELS. He was convinced that by recognizing Missouri's persistence in allowing open error, but not separating from them, the WELS had become a partaker in their sins.

However, when Pastor Reim arrived home from the Saginaw Convention, he did not tell anyone that he had withdrawn from the Wisconsin Synod. Rather, he conducted worship on Sunday as usual. After the service he announced that there would be a special council meeting the following day. This was highly irregular, since the by-laws of the congregation stipulated that for a meeting of the congregation to be properly called, it must be plainly announced in at least two Sunday bulletins. Because of the short notice, many of the council members were absent. At that meeting Pastor Reim distributed a letter he was intending to send to every household in the congregation. Then he read it to the council. In it he said that after the decision of the Saginaw Convention he had left the Wisconsin Synod. Furthermore, he was about to send a letter to the Minnesota District President to make him aware of his decision. His stated intention in that letter was to take St. John's Lutheran Church out of the Wisconsin Synod and make

it an independent Lutheran congregation, as well. If anyone had any questions about the issue at hand, he was going to hold a series of Wednesday night Bible study classes to answer those questions or concerns.

The Chairman of the council, Prof. Howard Birkholz, who also acted as the secretary, wrote that after Pastor Reim read the letter, the council sat in stunned silence. Whatever merit Pastor Reim may have had in his theological differences with the Wisconsin Synod was now eclipsed by the fact that, until this moment, this was not discussed at all with Pastor Reim's calling body: St. John's Lutheran Church.

When the council was able to catch its breath, they entered into a long discussion with Pastor Reim. At first the council insisted that the District President of Minnesota be present at Pastor Reim's Wednesday night classes in order to give the other side of the story. Pastor Reim insisted that truth has no part with a lie and, therefore, the District President would not be welcome. Upon hearing that, the council decided that Pastor Reim would conduct no such classes. Rather, there would be a meeting with the District President, Pastor Reim, and St. John's.

The rest of August saw a flurry of special voters' meetings at St. John's. When he met with the congregation and the district president, he maintained his stand. Pastor Reim's tenure at St. John's was effectively over before the week was out. St. John's told Pastor Reim that they were aware he had a wife and children, so they extended him the offer to stay at the 517 S. Washington parsonage until the end of September or when the next pastor arrived - whichever came first. The only stipulation was that he could stay there as long as he did not start an opposition church. Pastor Reim humbly thanked the assembly for their kindness. At one meeting the district leadership led a series of Bible study meetings on the topic of church fellowship with special emphasis on the Synod's recent decision. Everyone in the congregation was urged to attend. Professor Martin

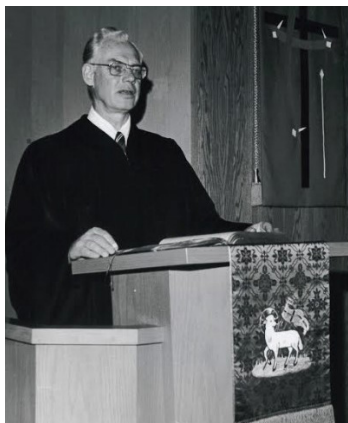
Albrecht again stepped in to cover what would become a ten week vacancy.

The Sunday after being offered the parsonage, Pastor Reim, together with about 17 members of St. John's, immediately began worshiping at Turner Hall. This group grew into Faith Lutheran Church. It is still an active congregation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). Pastor Reim's group purchased the church building vacated by the Friedens Kirche in 1968. It stands on 22 N. State Street, behind the New Ulm Public Library. Currently a CLC pastor from Sleepy Eye conducts services there for an average attendance of around 12 people.

Our pastor was not the only one to leave over the 1959 decision. Pastor Duehlmeier left Zion, Sanborn, and Pastor Egbert Schaller parted ways with Trinity, Nicollet. Even St. John's former pastor, Roland Gurgel, left the Trinity congregation in Belle Plaine for the group that would become the CLC.

## 1959-1978

### THE PASTORATE OF FREDERIC H. NITZ



Pastor Frederic Nitz  
1959-1978

At the congregational meeting on September 5, Pastor Frederic H. Nitz was called on the third ballot to be St. John's third full-time pastor. He left his tri-parish in the Cochrane, WI, area to answer the call to bring healing to the fledgling flock.

Pastor Nitz and Pastor Reim had been good friends from seminary. However, having to navigate the turbulent divisions

between St. John's and their former pastor was no small task. In his conversation and reporting, Pastor Nitz always covered Pastor Reim's departure with Christian charity—usually just mentioning his years of service.

Pastor Nitz was installed as pastor of St. John's on All Saints Day, November 1, 1959. On December 8, his diary revealed his personal assessment:

This congregation is in worse shape than I at first thought. Actually, we did not lose too many to Reim, perhaps about 50 souls. There are, however, a number still on the fence. Several families have left the church to join other churches such as the ELC. One lady even joined the Catholic church. Said she is fed up with all of this trouble. There she finds no dissension, etc. Another thing that is strange here: There are so many members living in so many parts of the U.S. such as California, New Mexico, etc. They were refused transfers to Missouri (Synod) and hold membership by long distance. Another thing that I am disturbed about. There are quite a few on the membership list who are very inactive and have been for quite some time. Quite a few have not been to communion since '56 or '57. Nothing has been done about the matter. The pastor was just too busy trying to keep the doctrine pure. Our attendance is not too hot. Actually, if it were not for the students, I don't think that we'd have more than 100 per service average. We have a handful of members who contribute very well... Actually, I believe the students (from DMLC and DMLA) give more than the majority of the members. There is a lot of work to be done here!

Under God's blessing over the subsequent 18 years, Pastor Nitz, along with the faithful and hardworking members of St. John's, would affect a profound change in the church culture.

In early 1959, before the controversy, the soul-membership of St. John's was at the all-time high of 527. In autumn of 1961,

Pastor Nitz enclosed this explanatory note with St. John's annual statistical report to the Wisconsin Synod:

Statistic changes at St. John's—Sept. 1959 to Oct. 1961

We lost 209 souls, 114 communicants and 24 voting members through withdrawals, transfers and deaths (2)... At the present time, we have 439 souls, 306 communicants and 66 voting members. Had we not sustained the losses of the past two years, we would now have approximately 648 souls, 420 communicants and 90 voting members... Perhaps these figures would even have been higher by now, but we feel that people have been reluctant to join a congregation that has been torn by strife.

## 1960-1962

### THE STILLING OF THE STORM

It was precisely during the most difficult times that the Lord blessed St. John's with a Gospel-motivated spirit of unity, teamwork, and outreach. We were turning the corner and, by God's grace, the number of souls that were added to our fellowship began growing. Although the congregation had been financially self-sufficient since its inception in 1948, it had taken out loans from the Church Extension Fund and members of the church to pay its bills for the basement church and the first parsonage. From January of 1948 to March of 1961, the principal and interest came to \$88,995.40. In March of 1961, it was finally paid in full. The congregation was, by the grace of God, debt-free for the first time.

In the December 1961 council meeting it was resolved to train high school aged boys to take responsibility in public worship by making them assistant ushers during services.

## 1962-1963

### A SUITABLE PARSONAGE IS BUILT

Pastor Nitz wrote:

For some years already, the congregation felt that a more suitable parsonage ought to be provided for its pastor. Various homes were considered, but none in the area were thought to be suitable.

In August 1961, two lots were given to the congregation with the stipulation that they be used for a future parsonage. These lots were ideally situated across Lincoln Park from the church—at Eighth South and State. In September 1961, the congregation elected a Parsonage Planning Committee.

Early in spring, the Planning Committee presented plans which the congregation accepted. The Planning Committee now continued to function as the Building Committee. Soon the bids of the congregation were accepted. Excavation commenced on June 19, 1962. By the end of July, the entire house was enclosed.

The pastor's family moved into the parsonage on February 7, 1963. Since that time, many projects have been completed by volunteer labor from the members. Other projects are still to be completed by volunteer labor from the members as spare time becomes available. All the wiring, painting, varnishing, landscaping, sodding, and numerous other projects have been done entirely by members of the congregation.

*(St. John's Parsonage Dedication Booklet, June 9, 1963, p. 7)*

Professor Cornelius Trapp designed the parsonage with input from the members. It was a rambler or ranch house with a walk-out basement in the back. In those days, parishioners felt strongly that the parsonage should have a pastor's office off the front entrance. There was a spacious living room for



entertaining and three bedrooms upstairs with a smaller kitchen. The formal dining room had a built-in china cabinet that was varnished by the ladies of the congregation. Unlike the short garage on the alley of the previous parsonage, the new garage was spacious—a double garage of that era. The unfinished basement had a furnace room, a laundry room under the study, and a long space that could be curtained-off for three Sunday school areas. Two unfinished rooms in the basement could be used for extra sleeping space. The record number of people who slept in that house during Pastor Nitz's tenure was 27. Two full bathrooms were provided—one up and one down. At the last minute, a fireplace and outside flue were added because, as the generous donor put it, "A pastor's living room ought to have a fireplace." A long list of donated items follows the above-mentioned congregational "sweat equity". To this day the donated brass cover for the mailbox remains and the brass plate on the front door still announces "St. John's Parsonage." The new parsonage was assessed at \$30,000. The actual expense to the congregational budget was \$22,000. The 517 S. Washington parsonage was sold for \$12,487.25. A bank loan of \$8,500 was taken out to pay the current church expenses during this time. However, that loan was paid off before the new parsonage was dedicated. Another \$1,200 in special gifts was given to help meet expenses as well as \$230 in interest.

The Parsonage Dedication Booklet appropriately ended with the familiar Latin phrase "Soli Deo Gloria!" To God, alone, be the glory!



St. John's Parsonage  
1963

## 1963-1966 BUILDING FOR HIS HABITATION

In 1963, St. John's had 485 members, no debt, and \$6,000 in the Building Fund. Pastor Nitz announced that the council had appointed an Investigating Committee comprised of three men: Mr. Hugo Bilitz, Prof. George Heckmann, and Mr. Charles Steinhauer. These men researched the cost estimates for the proposed superstructure. The committee reported back to the voters by the October 1963 quarterly meeting.

Their report in October led to the voters taking the first serious step of appointing two committees: the Building Committee, which would search for an architect and contractors to recommend to the congregation, and the Building Finance Committee to help assure the ability to pay for the project using Gospel motivation. In March of 1964, Pastor Nitz privately took note of the congregational leaders' early estimates of the proposed sanctuary. They guessed it would be completed at "about \$80,000 or more." As often happens, the actual cost doubled this figure. He seemed somewhat hesitant about their ability, but conceded, "our members don't seem to be too worried."

## A SECOND MAJOR BUILDING PROJECT IN THREE YEARS

On November 11, 1965, Pastor Nitz penned these observations in his diary:

Had a long Building Committee meeting again last Friday from 7:00 to 12:00 p.m. Having another on this Tuesday evening. By then, we hope to have our revised plans ready for the bidders. We hope to have the cost down to about \$135,000. Hope to get started building by March or April... We have \$27,733 in the Building Fund now. We

hope to have \$30,000 in by the end of the year. We have now remitted \$5,830 for missions. Our subscription amounts to \$6,500 this year. I think that we will again go over the top. Our Current Expense Fund is in the red over \$1,000, but we have usually been able to end up in the black by the end of the year. Hope we can do it. If we meet our goals this year, we will have contributed over \$100 per communicant for all purposes. We now have 360 communicants compared to 342 at the end of the year.

## A SOLEMN MOMENT IN HISTORY

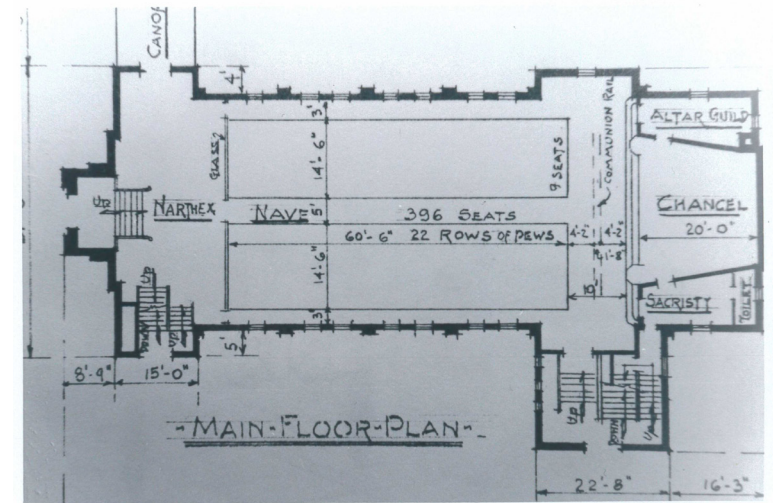
The exciting prospect of a new sanctuary was temporarily laid aside by sobering national news. On Sunday, November 24, 1963, the following announcements appeared in the bulletin:

In view of the tragic death of our president, John F. Kennedy, on Friday, a special joint service will be held in St. Paul's Church at 10:00 tomorrow morning (Monday, Nov. 25). There will be no school at St. Paul's tomorrow because of the funeral of President John F. Kennedy.

The Building Committee (BC) began by interviewing five architects. By May 1964 they had settled on William Schaefer and Associates of Mankato. Preliminary sketches which were intended to be brought before the congregation in August were redrawn and finally presented in April of 1965.

The Building Finance Committee (BFC) began their task by studying the financial performance of the congregation from its beginnings in 1948 to the present 1964. It resolved (1) not to take pledges but to rely on the spontaneous, free-will offerings of all members and (2) to have special Building Fund envelopes and set goals or "plateaus" for the Building Fund periodically - every six months or so. For example, starting with the existing Building Fund balance of \$7,000 in March 1964, the first plateau was \$10,000 by December 31. At that time the BFC

would weigh the recent performance against upcoming challenges and adjust the next six-month plateau accordingly. This worked well. Over the next two years, the congregation either met these plateaus on time or came very close. By the end of 1965 the congregation had raised \$30,000 for the superstructure.



Floor plan for the church superstructure.

There was also a plan to make every household of the congregation a sounding board. To do this, the families of the congregation were divided into about 20 home visitation groups. Twenty couples were to lead these groups in updating them on the progress of building the sanctuary. Each team would share new information, clarify any concerns, answer questions as best they could, and bring member suggestions back to the Building Committee. Special input could be written on survey forms and brought back to the church as well. Of course, having such personal ownership of the project would, naturally, elicit Spirit-led financial support. The Building Committee made very clear that these group meetings were not for fundraising purposes.



Late in 1963 the BC and the BFC came up with the superstructure motto: “Building for His Habitation.” It was inspired by a Bible verse and a hymn verse. In Ephesians 2:20, St. Paul speaks of Christians as being “... built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.” Similarly, the hymn verse that helped frame our building theme is the third verse of hymn 467, “Built on the Rock”, in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (c. 1941).

*We are God's house of living stones,  
Built for His own habitation.  
He through baptismal grace us owns  
Heirs of His wondrous salvation.  
Were we but two His name to tell,  
Yet He would deign with us to dwell  
With all His grace and His favor.*



The 1948 “Basement Church” (white) superimposed on the 1966 “Superstructure”.

St. John’s Trustees and Building Committee signed a contract with Heymann Construction Company to proceed with the building on January 21, 1966. After eighteen years of worshiping in a basement church, the last service was held on April 17, 1966. Like the building of the parsonage, construction was delayed because of rain. It began in earnest in May. In the meantime, services were held in the former auditorium of Dr. Martin Luther College. The dedication was held on December

11, 1966. The total cost of the building and furnishings was about \$160,000. \$75,000 of that was paid in bank loans and \$35,000 in interest free loans offered by church members.



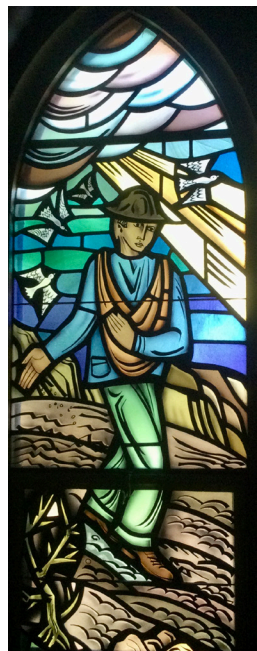
The interior superstructure.

## ART GLASS WINDOWS

The congregation had resolved to purchase stained glass windows with three purposes in mind. Two were practical and one served to proclaim the Word. The glare of the morning sun was particularly blinding for anyone who sat on the south side of the nave. The stained glass helped soften the glare. Secondly, the heat generated by the unfiltered sun was uncomfortable—especially during the summer. Air conditioning wouldn't be introduced for another 30 years. Stained glass windows helped in this regard, too. Finally, the images in the stained glass helped proclaim many of the Bible accounts that the pastor would read and preach throughout the Historic Church Year. A child's mind might not be able to follow the pastor's words, but it recognized images of Jesus. An adult mind might wander only to be caught by the image of a foot crushing a snake or

the martyr, Stephen, lying lifeless among rocks. The Gospel was proclaimed in images as well as words. More than once people have asked the meaning of certain symbols there. Each time, it serves as a great opener for building each other in the faith!

Professor Theodore Hartwig researched the symbolism behind the historic Gospel readings for the church year and offered sketches to an artist at Reinharts Stained Glass Studio in Winona, MN. The window over the west entrance was installed first. By January 8, 1967, the 10 windows along the south side of the sanctuary were installed. Since Christmas was depicted over the west entrance, these 10 illustrated selected Gospel lessons from Epiphany, Pre-Lent, Lent, Easter, and Trinity Sunday.



The Sower and the Seed  
Luke 8:4-15

Special gifts and memorials covered the entire cost. By July all of the windows on the north side of the sanctuary were covered. These 13 windows depicted selected Gospel lessons for the Sundays after Trinity to the end of the Church Year.

About one month later, Pastor Nitz entered this in the bulletin:

Our Gospel lesson and the sermon text for today, from Matthew 7, is depicted in the fourth window from the front on the north side of the nave...A colored picture of the three windows in the front of the church on the south side is being featured in today's *The New Ulm Journal*.

The following week this report appeared:

At the Quarterly Meeting, the congregation voted to have the remaining windows in the church installed with art glass windows. The cost of all the windows thus far installed amounted to \$7,350. About \$2,200 will take care of the rest of the windows. So far about \$4,600 has been contributed for Art Windows. This will leave a balance of about \$5,000 before all the windows are completely paid for.

These would include the window in the working sacristy, the pastor's study/sacristy along with the confessional stairs leading to it, the Psalm 23 window leading out the south entrance, and the two Psalm windows leading up the tower to the organ and choir loft.

Professor Hartwig mentioned that he struck a deal with the Reinharts artist. Of each trio of windows, the middle one would be more intricate and purchased for a high price. The artist said he would do the panels on each side for only \$75 each, as long as they were merely Christian symbols. Agreed! The professor returned with symbols. Not just a single symbol of a Bible or baptismal font, but multiple symbols woven into each of the \$75 side panels. The artist momentarily balked. After an amicable discussion, he stuck to the \$75 price tag, with the assurance that he could have access to them for advertising purposes.

Fast forward about 30 years . . . St. John's teacher, Marlene Wendler, took her class to the church to have Professor Hartwig explain the meaning of each stained glass window and why each was displayed where it was.

## A SIGN OF THE TIMES

Early in June 1967, Joan Hoffman had received a letter from her husband, Marine Lance Corporal Allan Hoffmann, indicating that he would leave his service in Vietnam on July 7 and get his discharge. She was looking forward to his return and told Pastor Nitz that she didn't think he was in an area of combat any longer. The Sunday bulletin on July 2 read:

DEATH Word was received on Friday that Allan Hoffman, a member of St. John's, serving in the United States Marine Corps, was killed in action in the war in Vietnam. Arrangements for the funeral will be made after the body is returned to the States. May the Lord continue to comfort and strengthen Mrs. Hoffman in her grief.

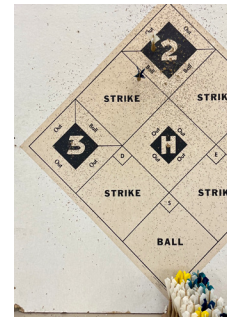
Allan Hoffmann was 24 years old. Joan and he had celebrated their third wedding anniversary in February 1967. The funeral was held at St. John's on July 8. Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord.

## HIGHLIGHTS—LATE '60S AND EARLY 70's

Mrs. Grace Nitz often opened her home to members who were in difficult circumstances. An impoverished family with five children under the age of 6 lost their father in a workplace accident. Their mother had to be hospitalized for several days. Grace Nitz found a bed for each of them in her house until the mother was ready to take them home again. When another mother went to Union Hospital to have a baby, Mrs. Nitz

helped take the burden off the young father who worked long hours by keeping her four children as well.

Approval for St. John's to enter a team in the church Dartball League was granted at the October quarterly voters' meeting in 1965. This was a popular men's activity for several decades. In its heyday the finals were so well attended that fans had to be turned away!



Church dartball league

Up until 1968 ladies from the Ladies Aid took care of the appointments, candles, and sacramental supplies. In 1968 an Altar Guild was officially formed. Pastor Nitz provided a thorough handbook outlining the names, use, and care of the various cloths and altar ware. He also reviewed sections of that booklet during the monthly meetings of the Guild.



Altar Guild



The annual report for 1967 noted that St. John's annual offerings reached a new milestone: it surpassed \$50,000. (Since then increased inflation, staffing, and facilities had raised the annual budget to more than \$1 million in 2023.) St. John's ended 1969 with 635 souls, 429 communicants, 100 voting members and 100 children (about 33% of students) at St. Paul's Lutheran School.

The February 8, 1970, bulletin read: "Various choirs and singing groups from the college and academy will again be singing at our mid-week services. We are indeed grateful to these people and their directors for their services." They included: the Treble Choir conducted by Prof. Roger Hermanson, the DMLC Chapel Choir under the direction of Prof. Ron Shilling, the College Choir under the direction of Prof. Meilahn Zahn, and the Marlut Singers (male chorus). In fact, these groups were not only singing regularly during the Advent and Lenten vespers services. They sang at St. John's and St. Paul's on many Sundays during the school year.



Mr. Merlyn Kruse  
Director of Christian  
Education and Teacher  
1970-1977

During 1970 the congregation purchased the 615 S. Washington house (two doors north of the church) for \$21,000. \$5000 were also needed for necessary fix-ups. It was used as a teacherage for Mr. Merlyn Kruse, who became St. John's first Director of Christian Education and teacher at St. Paul's School. In 2005, that house was sold and moved across town to make room for the church office addition.

July 26, 1970 bulletin:

Today we officially welcome Mr. Merlyn Kruse and Carolyn into our midst. Mr. Kruse was principal and teacher of the upper grades at Immanuel Lutheran School, Hutchinson for the past three years. At present, he will teach grades 5 and 6 at St. Paul's School and direct the grade school band. He will be in charge of children's

singing groups at St. John's. He will also be active in Sunday School, VBS, and YPS work at St. John's. He will also have charge of the children's Christmas Service at St. John's...

1970 was also the year that St. Paul's School moved from N. State Street to its present location on S. Payne Street. On Sunday, October 25, Pastor Nitz announced: "We are all invited to attend the Cornerstone Laying Service of St. Paul's new Christian Day School building (2nd South and S. Payne) this afternoon at 2:30. President of DMLC, Conrad Frey, will be the speaker."



St. Paul's School

The building was completed almost one year later. On September 26, 1971, St. John's resolved to drop Sunday services to enable our members to participate in the dedication services for the new St. Paul's School at 9:30 am, 11:00 am, and 4:00 pm. At those services, St. John's gave \$1,182 to the total dedication offering of \$11,350. St. Paul's School wrote, "May the Lord keep us not only in the fellowship of our common faith, but also in close harmony with each other."

In the early 1950s, the ladies of the congregation would often use trading stamps or promotional coupons to purchase flatware for the church kitchen. A rather different appeal made its way into the February 14, 1971 bulletin:

All of our congregations in the area are being asked to contribute Betty Crocker coupons to be used to obtain a kidney machine for one of our members in Lake Benton. One million coupons are needed. You may place your

coupons in containers in the church or give them to the pastor...

Some may still remember this humorous story that Pastor Nitz mentioned in his diary: "Speaking of Pastor Schmidt (of St. Paul's). They went to California this summer. He stopped for gas at one place. His wife rode in the back seat most of the way and slept a great deal. She has not been too well of late. Well, he gassed up and then left. You've guessed it! 20 miles down the road, the highway patrol stopped him. He had left his wife without knowing it. She contacted the patrol and they radioed ahead. This is the talk of the town now. She really likes to kid him about it and he takes it good-naturedly."

Because of the changing needs of a growing congregation, a resolution was made to revise the Constitution and By-Laws of St. John's in April 1971.

Miss Beth Washow was St. John's second teacher and first female teacher. She was instrumental in beginning a Junior Choir, comprised of pre-confirmation children from the congregation. The Junior Choir practiced on Saturdays at 11 AM. Beth served us faithfully for one year before she was married in 1972.



Miss Beth Washow  
Teacher  
1971-1972



Miss Washow's Choir  
1972

In October of 1971, the voters "decided to allow the production of a congregational pictorial directory." This was our first picture directory.

In November of 1971, the following bulletin announcement appeared:

(The) Young people from St. John's, St. Paul's, and the college have taken a religious census of New Ulm. They are still making some calls on those homes where no one was home earlier. They are also now contacting unchurched families and attempting to interest these people in the saving Gospel... May their efforts also encourage all of us to be 'missionaries' to the unchurched that we might contact.

November 21, 1971 "...the Altar Guild plans on introducing 'chrismons' which are symbols depicting the events of Advent and Christmas." Some of us will remember them adorning the Christmas tree in the altar area.

The 1971 year-end report indicated that our soul-membership reached an all-time high of 732.

Pastor Nitz gave this spiritual caution in the Feb. 13, 1972 bulletin: "The Jehovah's Witnesses are planning a convention in New Ulm and are going from house to house seeking lodging. Please do not be taken in by their appeals. Their teachings are not Scriptural nor Christian..." (2 John 1:10).



Miss Mary Hubbard  
Teacher  
1972-1974

After at least two calls from the field to replace Miss Washow, this news appeared, "We are happy to announce that the Synod Assignment Committee which met at the college this past week assigned Miss Mary Hubbard, a 1972 graduate from DMLC to be our first and second grade teacher at St. Paul's School...Miss Hubbard will very likely move to New Ulm in July..." Miss Hubbard spent



Mrs. Gwen Hirsch  
Teacher  
1974-1979

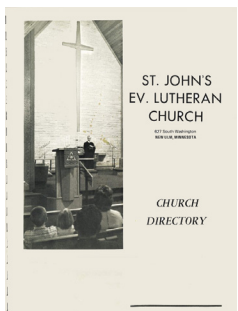
two years here. She married James Hahn the following July and moved to Wisconsin. Mrs. Gwen Hirsch was called to replace Miss Hubbard. Approximately 75% of St. John's school-aged children attended St. Paul's School at this time. She ended her teaching with us in 1979 to follow her husband, Prof. Eldon Hirsch to Martin Luther Preparatory School in Prairie du Chien, WI. In her absence, Mrs. Marcella Lowry accepted St. John's call to teach second grade. She served for one year.

## 1973

### THE SILVER ANNIVERSARY OF ST. JOHN'S

The 25th Anniversary schedule of events designated three successive Sundays in May for the celebration: Sunday, May 6, was the chief anniversary celebration. Professor Roland H. Hoenecke preached for identical services at 8:30 and 10:30 AM. The Martin Luther Academy (MLA) Choir sang and Dorothy Westphal served as the organist. That evening at

7:15, an Anniversary Song Service was led by St. John's first pastor, Professor Martin Albrecht of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI. Also participating were St. Paul's Choir, St. John's Choir, and St. John's Junior Choir. The second Sunday, May 13, was the Anniversary Communion Celebration led by Pastor Nitz. Finally, on May 20, both the 8:30 and 10:30 AM services were An Anniversary Observance of Christian Education. Pastor Philip Janke, of Manitowoc, WI, preached and



St. John's Directory  
Cover  
1973

the Dr. Martin Luther College Chapel Choir sang for the service. The organist was Prof. Bruce Backer. An Anniversary Family Night was held at 8:30 that evening.



Organists Bruce Backer, Ron Shilling, Howard Wessel, Carl Nolte, and Dorothy Westphal 1973

In 1974 the newly-revised Constitution and By-Laws were implemented. Congregational chairman, Prof. Theodore Olson, reported that 100 men had been nominated to fill 25 offices. The Board of Education was newly minted at St. John's. Professor Howard Wessel, the chairman, emphasized the need for a strong Sunday school program for those students who did not receive a full-time Christian education at St. Paul's School. Forty-two children attended in 1974 and 33 children attended Vacation Bible School. New folding partitions were installed in the church basement and an extra Sunday school room was added.

By 1975, 12 tape recorders were distributed to the sick and shut-ins in order to bring Sunday services to them on audio cassette tapes. The 1976 annual report said that 55 services were recorded, 800 copies of services were duplicated, over 750 copies were distributed, and the estimated number of listeners swelled to approximated 900. Some 300 hours of taping and duplicating were donated during the year by Gary Carmichael. Mrs. Myra McFarland and Ron Shilling saw to it that the tapes were distributed.



1976  
UNITED STATES' BICENTENNIAL YEAR  
10TH ANNIVERSARY OF ST. JOHN'S  
SANCTUARY

In his year-end report, Congregational President Theodore Olson wrote:

The tenth anniversary of our superstructure was celebrated on December 10 with special services. To commemorate this anniversary, it was decided to panel and carpet our (church) basement. No doubt you have noticed the completed project. Indeed, a vast improvement in our basement in which so many congregational activities are held!

Nor were God's gift of national blessings neglected. President Olson continued:

Bicentennial service: During the year plans were made for a special bicentennial service to be held jointly with our sister congregation. On July 4 the members of St. John's and St. Paul's held that joint service at Luther Hollow on the DMLC campus, along with a joint picnic meal and afternoon of activities. A most fitting way for us to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the founding of our nation!

St. John's was among the WELS congregations chosen to use a new liturgy called, "A Service of the Word," from 1976 through April of 1977. It was used on non-communion Sundays during the second service only. Members were asked to submit their responses to the WELS Commission on Worship at the end of that time. Though the synod did not adopt it, the eventual result would be a small booklet known as The Sampler and Christian Worship Hymnal of 1993. Such field testing was WELS' first widespread attempt to introduce alternate liturgical settings. Until then, the only source had been The Lutheran Hymnal, published in 1941.

The Board of Education set up The Cradle Roll in 1976. In answer to our Savior's command that we should teach His baptized children "everything I have commanded you," the congregation approved a plan that children, ages 1 to 4, would receive a card and a gift on each of their first four birthdays. These were to remind them of their Savior's promise in baptism and prepare both parents and child for Christian education at St. Paul's School or in St. John's Sunday school.



Mr. Todd Hauf  
Teacher  
1980-1989

1977 marked the 30th year since St. John's founding. After six years of faithful service, Mr. Merlyn Kruse took a call to be a principal in Neenah, Wisconsin. Mr. Craig Kitzrow was welcomed into that vacancy, teaching 6th grade. St. John's enrolled 100 students at St. Paul's School that year. In 1980, Mr. Kitzrow was replaced by Mr. Todd Hauf.

## FOND FAREWELL AND WARM WELCOME

Pastor Nitz was ordained and served on the Apache reservation until 1950. He took a call to Trinity, Hendricks, Minnesota, and then served the tri-parish in the Cochrane, Wisconsin, area, before taking the call to St. John's in 1959. The Lord blessed his ministry among us with the healing we needed. God even surprised us by phenomenal growth and expansion during his 19 year pastorate. Finally, the Lord called Pastor Nitz to leave St. John's for a parish in Sun City, Arizona. From July of 1978, the flock spent almost a year calling for another shepherd.

In his Annual Report, the congregational president, Arnold Koelpin, wrote:

The past quarter has been an unusual one in the history of St. John's congregation. For many years we have had the

uninterrupted services of a pastor. Over the past months, however, we have faced the question: when will we get a pastor? The Lord teaches us patience.

Despite our frustrations, we have much to be thankful for. Pastor (LeRoy) Lothert has more than helped us in our vacancy and he has received fine cooperation from many helpers in the congregation. Our church services, Bible class, instructions, meetings, rehearsals, special services, sick calls, etc., continue without interruption. Mr. Kitzrow and Mrs. Hirsch have given their best in the ministry of education.

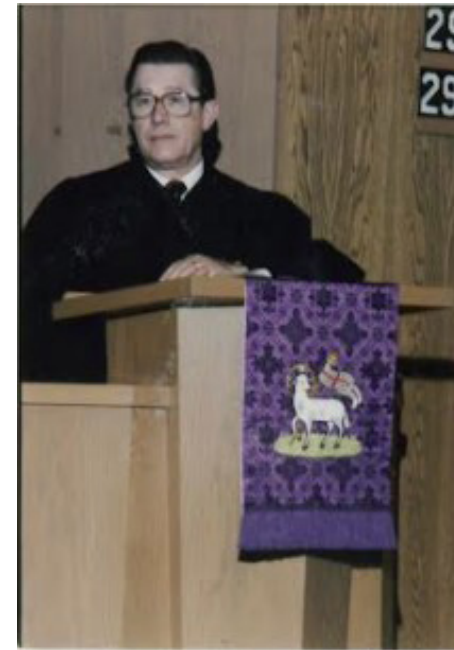
But, above all, we recognize that God has not forsaken us. He has promised his presence to all who call on Him and honor Him as He is, righteous and loving God.



Pastor LeRoy Lothert  
Vacancy Pastor  
1978-1979

During the vacancy, on March 18, 1979, St. John's voted by a large majority to become a part of the Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School Association. MVL was established in New Ulm to fill a void when the Wisconsin Synod decided to move Martin Luther Academy from the DMLC campus to Prairie Du Chien, WI. Jerome Birkholtz became the first principal of the new area Lutheran high school. By 1981, about half of St. John's high school aged students, 27 in all, attended MVL. At first they met in a temporary building behind the nine year old St. Paul's School building on S. Payne Street.

On June 3, 1979, Pastor Norval W. Kock was installed as St. John's fifth pastor. He would serve us until his retirement in 1991. Though some members left during the vacancy, the soul growth of the congregation didn't seem to be adversely affected. On December 26, 1980, the membership reached an all-time high of 900 souls.



Pastor Norval Kock  
1979-1991

The late 1970s and early 1980s were a financially difficult time for our church. Our whole nation was reeling under astronomical interest rates, double-digit inflation, repressed job market, and an onerous recession. The New Ulm worker felt the pinch as well. The debt that St. John's carried into the 1980s was compounded by shrinking offerings. The operating fund debt peaked at \$80,000. A bank loan had to be taken out and \$50,000 in member loans were sought at little or no interest rate. It took more than 15 years to whittle this debt down to only \$8,000. But the proclamation of the Lord's assuring forgiveness made it a light and momentary burden.



Mrs. Jean Schroeder with husband Richard,  
and children Jason and Sarah  
1980-2020

Jean Pape (pronounced “Poppy”) was called to teach 2nd grade by St. John’s in 1980. Pape was her maiden name. We know her better by the name she received one week after she received the call: Mrs. Richard Schroeder...or Jean Schroeder. After the July 26 wedding and a quick honeymoon in the Wisconsin area, the

newlyweds rushed back to New Ulm so she could attend meetings and make home visits before classes in September. She eventually taught first and second grades and continued with us for the next 40 years. The Schroeders are still members of St. John’s today.

On July 25, 1982, Miss Dianne Falkenberg was called as St. John’s teacher at St. Paul’s School. She served us until June of 1985 when she became Mrs. John Wilde. Marlene Wendler accepted the call to replace her. Mrs. Wendler, coincidentally, was born the year our church was founded, worshiped in the basement church while at DMLC, and was married to David Wendler in the new superstructure by Pastor Nitz with Ron Shilling playing the organ. She taught for us from 1985 until 2014 and directed the Junior Choir until Mr. Dretske took over.



Miss Dianne Falkenberg  
Teacher  
1982-1985



Mrs. Marlene Wendler with husband David  
1985-2014

## UNSETTLING CONCERNS OVER RECEIVING THE VISIBLE GOSPEL

At least since Louis Pasteur and Joseph Lister (mid 19th century) came up with the germ theory, concerns surfaced of the sharing of the common cup. It surfaced once again in the early 1980s when the media headlined the “AIDS epidemic” (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). It also served to turn Christians’ focus away from the forgiving blood of Christ to the danger posed by fellow-communicants. The matter came to the elders, who, in turn, studied the matter and reported to the congregation that “AIDS is not transmitted through saliva by using the common cup.” Nevertheless, individual cups were still offered so that the solid comfort of the Gospel could take hold without distraction. While care must be taken, the adversaries of the faith know that fear and suspicion will always be the nemesis of saving faith and brotherly love.



## MEETING THE NEEDS OF SPECIFIC GROUPS



St. John's Sewing Group

The Young Peoples' Society had regular attendance of 8 to 12 high school aged youth. Grades 1 through 8 could join The Boys' and Girls' Club for fellowship, service activities, and fun learning experiences. Adult members were welcomed into the Fellowship Club. These clubs all had a strong devotional underpinning. A Women's Bible Class, which is still active today, was begun in 1983 and met twice a month on Tuesday mornings. It averaged 14 women in attendance. There was also a Wednesday evening Senior Bible Class. The Ladies' Sewing Group met on the first Friday of the month at 1:00 PM.

The 1980s were also the era that saw a proliferation of para-synodical organizations in which St. John's participated, such as The Organization of WELS Seniors (OWLS), WELS/Minnesota Valley Lutherans for Life, and WELS Young Adults (WELSYA) later known as WELS Singles. In 1983 St. John's Ladies' Aid spearheaded an effort to begin a Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School Ladies' Auxiliary among the churches in the area.



One of St. John's Women's Volleyball Teams  
Standing: Irene Brug, Kris Hirsch, Judy Voigt, Colleen Hilbert  
Seated: Pam (Rolloff) Kitzberger, Hilda Jaspersen

February 10, 1983 St. John's joined a Women's Volleyball League. Men's volleyball teams competed as well.

## WORSHIP PATTERNS IN THE 1980s

Saturday worship (7:00 PM) began on a trial basis and was officially instituted in 1983 in order to take the pressure off of the Sunday morning crowds (8:30 and 10:30 AM) and allow time for Sunday school between services. Holy Communion was offered one Sunday each month at each of the three services. In the summer months only the Saturday evening and Sunday 9:00 AM services were offered. For 36 years communicants received the Lord's Supper with the common cup. In 1984 individual glasses were introduced in addition to the chalice.

In the early 1980s the average attendance when DMLC students were in town was between 700 to 800 each weekend. During the summer it would drop to 400s.

## 1983 500TH YEAR OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER'S BIRTH

On October 16, 1983 at 7 PM St. John's observed its 35th anniversary with a song service. November also happened to be the birthday of the great reformer and namesake of our synod. In observance of that we celebrated a "Luther Sunday" with appropriate choral anthems and an English translation of Luther's "Deutsche Messe" (German Mass). Pastor Koch wrote in the annual report, "It was, I think we will agree, an inspiring and memorable worship opportunity."

In 1983, St. John's became a member of Lutheran Institutional Ministries Association (LIMA). This helped our pastors keep contact with far flung hospital calls by occasionally using our WELS hospital chaplains in the Twin Cities. Ever since, our congregation has pledged a per communicant rate to support this ministry. Now this service includes medical facilities and college campuses in Rochester and Mankato.

In the summer of 1985, the daughter of LeRoy and Carolyn Kramer, Miss Debra Kramer, was to become a nurse at our WELS Central Africa Medical Mission. In that same year, Treasure Haus was established to help recycle clothing and other items. Many St. John's members have either served on the board of Treasure Haus or volunteered to sort and shelve donated items. The profits are used to support our Lutheran high school. During its first year it raised \$9,050. By 2023, Treasure Haus has raised over \$1 million for MVL.

## THE PRE-OWNED VOGELPOHL BREATHES ITS LAST

Already in 1975 people understood the need for a new pipe organ. An organ replacement fund was begun with a Dorothy Westphal Memorial. A decade later:

The voters assembly adopted the recommendation from the organists to appoint a replacement committee, to engage Dr. Edward Meyer as consultant and to name the new pipe organ as the project to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the congregation. The organ fund balance was \$3,907 at the time. (*Organ Dedication Booklet*)

In the 1986 Annual Report, Wayne Wagner summed up the situation this way:

Our present organ was originally built in 1919 for a church in Freeman, South Dakota, by H.H. Vogelpohl and Sons of New Ulm. It was electrified and installed in St. John's basement church in 1951. In 1966, the organ was moved to its present location (in the balcony) by the Charles Hendrickson Organ Company of St. Peter and repairs were made when necessary.

The organ is presently in a serious state of deterioration. Some pipes are glued, taped, or wired to stay together and remain usable. Cloth rags are stuffed into the top of many pipes to help keep them in tune. The electrical components of the present organ increasingly are becoming less reliable. The air reservoirs under the pipes have many leaks...

The 40th Anniversary (1988) came and went. The Vogelpohl would wheeze its way to the 45th anniversary (1993). By then the pastoral mantle had been passed from Pastor Koch to Pastor David Kolander.

In January of 1986 the organ committee began a thorough investigation of the congregation's musical needs and in 1987

the voters adopted their recommendations for a new instrument. However, budget shortfall and roofing needs tabled it until 1991 when the voters assembly accepted recommendations to purchase a new organ from the Schanz Organ Company. Strong congregational support for a new instrument translated into \$65,000 toward an approximately \$200,000 organ. The removal of the Vogelpohl and the installation of the new Schantz took place in 1993. On March 7 of that year, it was dedicated at the 8:30 and 10:30 services, with a Hymn Festival at 2 PM that day. The dedication booklet outlines its impressive specifications and range of ability. Thanks be to God, it has served us well ever since!



The 1993 Schanz Pipe Organ

## 1988 40TH ANNIVERSARY

As in past anniversaries, the weekend services of Saturday, April 16, and Sunday, April 17, were the chief services for the occasion. The theme was 2 Corinthians 8:9 "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." Pastor Kock was the officiant at the services and Pastor Nitz came all the way from Sun City, AZ, to preach. The children's choirs were directed by Jean Schroeder and Marlene Wendler. The Senior Choir was directed by Howard Wessel and Bruce Backer was the organist for the occasion. A dinner was served between 11:45 AM and 1:30 PM "in the social rooms of the church." At 2:00 PM a song service was accompanied by Wayne Wagner and Pastor Tom Henning of St. Paul's delivered the message. The same choirs that sang in the morning sang for this service with the addition of St. Paul's Senior Choir, directed by Teacher Fritz Blauert.



Mr. David Zabel  
Teacher  
1989-1997

In 1989 our Director of Christian Education, Todd Hauf, was called from St. John's to MVL. Teacher candidate David Zabel was assigned to replace him. Mr. Zabel taught 7th grade.





Miss Wendy Ristow  
Teacher  
1990-2008

On August 26, 1990, Wendy Ristow was to replace Miss Norma Duesterhoeft who was teaching grade two. A 1982 graduate of DMLC, Wendy had been assigned to teach at the East Fork Apache mission. In 1985 she accepted a call to Pilgrim, Minneapolis, before taking the call to St. John's. Her favorite interests were teaching children and coaching. Now there were four St. Paul's teachers who were supported by and were members of St. John's Congregation: David Zabel, Jean

Schroeder, Marlene Wendler, and Wendy Ristow.

After 12 years of faithful service to our flock and 40 years in the pastoral ministry, Pastor Koch retired to Alexandria, MN, at the end of July 1991. Thereafter, he moved to Watertown, WI, as had Pastor Nitz, who had just retired from Sun City, AZ. After more than a decade in retirement, Pastor and Dorothy Koch moved back to New Ulm to be near their daughter and son-in-law, Professor Steve and Jeneane Thiesfeldt. Pastor Koch was a member of St. John's when the Lord received him into glory. Mrs. Koch is still a member and resides at The Sleepy Eye Care Center.

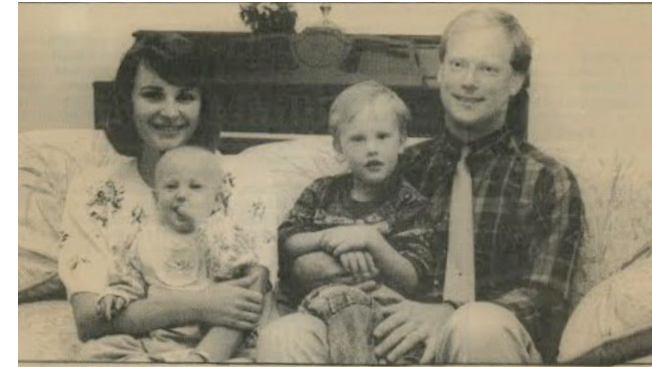
## 1991

### PASTOR KOLANDER—THE SIXTH SHEPHERD

At the first call meeting to replace Pastor Koch, the Voters' Assembly called Pastor David Kolander, who was serving at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Saginaw, MI. He accepted.

During the summer of 1991, Pastor David Kolander, his wife, Luann, and their two children, Ryan and Anna, settled into

the 800 S. State Street parsonage. On August 18, 1991, Pastor Kolander, was officially installed as St. John's sixth pastor.



Pastor David and LuAnn Kolander,  
and children Anna and Ryan

During his first year, St. John's new member welcoming committee visited 38 new families making the total families in the flock 376. By God's grace 1992 saw 61 new communicants. In 1993, the number of communicants rose again by 63. Many of these were transfers in. The annual average at weekly worship had risen to 627 with 70 regularly attending one of the three Bible classes each week. Communion attendance had increased from 400 to over 600 per month. St. John's was beginning to realize that its sheer size was too large for one pastor to handle. It wasn't immediately clear how to support a second pastor. But the congregational debt which was \$39,400 in 1993, was down to \$30,200 in the new year. Until then, Pastor Kolander had to lean heavily on his part-time secretary, Ruth Birkholz, and administrative secretary, Mae Tacke, who was added to the staff in August 1993. Mae was spending the lion's share of her time "computerizing" the congregation.



Ruth Birkholtz  
Church Secretary



Mae Tacke  
Administrative Secretary

Pastor Kolander wrote in his 1993 annual report:

Also helpful to us has been the very orderly transition we have experienced in the use of our synod's new hymnal, *Christian Worship*. This hymnal has preserved our Lutheran heritage of worship, while at the same time enhancing it with samplings of fine songs from other sources—in the language of today. *Christian Worship* gives every indication that it will serve us every bit as well as its well-loved predecessor.

This new hymnal was used among us for the first time on October 31, 1993.

Since St. John's lived in the shadow of Dr. Martin Luther College many professors' families were members. The decision of the 1991 Wisconsin Synod Convention was to join Northwestern College and DMLC on the New Ulm campus by 1995. This blessing sometimes brought with it mixed loyalties and conflicting agendas. Pastor Kolander's listening ear and sage advice brought Gospel healing to troubled souls.

There were 24 confirmands in the class of 1993 and 48 St. John's students attending MVL that year. Providentially, these were the highest numbers in our 45 year history! Large print

bulletins were available for the first time. Rather than a sliding schedule, Holy Communion was held at all services on the first and third Sundays of each month.

As mentioned earlier, the Organ Dedication was on Sunday, March 7, 1993. Pastor Kolander delivered the sermon in the morning services and Pastor Kock, who had done so much in the previous eight years, conducted the altar service. Bruce Backer, who had been a member since 1957, together with Ames Anderson and Judith Kresnicka, served as organists. The 27 voices of the Senior choir were directed by Howard Wessel. That afternoon A Dedication Hymn Festival was held at 2:00. Pastor Kolander proclaimed the Word while Ron Shilling and Wayne Wagner led on the new instrument. This time the Senior Choir was joined by Marlene Wendler's Junior Choir.



Organists Bruce Backer, Wayne Wagner, Ames Anderson,  
Judith Kresnicka, and Ron Shilling

1993 was the year that the St. John's Lutheran Endowment Fund was established. It began with a very modest \$500. Portions of members' estates, special gifts, and interest have brought it beyond \$350,000 today. Each year the Endowment Fund distributes about 4% or 5% of the principle to be used at

the discretion of the Church Council. Sometimes it has been used for special needs which arise during the year but were unforeseen. At other times it has served as a rainy day fund, making up for a budget shortfall, or an unfulfilled commitment at year's end.

## 1994 TWO PASTORS

In February 1993 there were 11 all member meetings to discuss the challenges we faced in serving the spiritual needs of a flock numbering 1,000 souls. The Congregational Ministry Committee (CMC) responded to those meetings in September by recommending to the Council that we call a second pastor. The Council, in turn, recommended the proposal to the Voters' Assembly, which passed it with a 49-4 margin in January 1994.

One month later, Minnesota District President, Larry Cross, held an all member meeting to assess the kind of pastor that could best serve our purposes. From there he would consult with his Vice Presidents and draw up a list of four or more potential pastoral candidates for our call meeting.



Pastor Jeff Bovee  
1994-present

On March 20, Circuit Pastor Tom Henning chaired the call meeting that gave a unanimous vote to call Pastor Jeffrey Bovee from St. Paul's Lutheran in Menomonie, WI. The Lord met our needs on June 26 when Pastor Bovee was installed as St. John's first associate pastor. Pastor Bovee recounts how Norman Wieland driving his pickup truck at the head of a small caravan of families helped pack them up. Off they went from Menomonie to New Ulm! That meant that another parsonage would be necessary. Jeff and Val, who was pregnant with their

first child, Allison, moved into their temporary, DMLC home, at 231 S. Highland. upon their arrival in June. Pastor and Val consented to be the committee to search for a second parsonage. While shopping at Runnings, the Bovees met Nick Roman who was a realtor and member of the congregation. Nick directed them to a house at 510 S. Jefferson. St. John's purchased their second parsonage for the very reasonable price of \$88,000 and there weren't any realtor fees. The Bovees were moved in by November. Now the Trustees' plate was filling up with the upkeep of a church and three homes. In September a series of seven all member meetings were held in order to introduce the members to their new pastor and to review the reasons for increasing the pastoral staff. Nearly 200 were in attendance. Once the Bovees were settled in, they hosted an open house. About 100 members attended.

Since the pastoral sacristy (off the altar area) was really the only pastor's office in the building, two pastors' offices were built in the church basement. The earlier custom of meeting the pastor in an office in his home was diminishing. Meeting with our pastors at the church seemed less intrusive, more convenient, and more comfortable. The relatively new technology of voicemail was introduced at the church office at this time as well.

Under God's blessing, St. John's was turning the corner as far as the budget was concerned. The contract for the new organ was paid up. We exceeded our mission commitment to the WELS by \$3,000, the Home Operations offerings increased by 15%, and the proposal for the 1995 budget comfortably crossed the \$400,000 mark for the first time.

By year-end, the average weekend attendance (761) made the 10:30 service so crowded and the time for fellowship so rushed that it was necessary to expand the weekend services to four: one on Saturday night and three on Sunday morning. This is the schedule we have to this day.



An all-time high of 55 students from our church attended MVL and 83 children were enrolled in Sunday School. At this time 133 St. John's children were enrolled at St. Paul's School—a decrease of two from the previous year. Besides studying portions of Holy Scripture, timely topics such as a Scriptural view of euthanasia, abortion, and AIDS continued to be woven into the Adult Bible Class curriculum.

## 1995 GROWING PAINS ONCE AGAIN

A new adult Bible Class was added to the midweek classes in 1995. It was held at 9:30 on Sunday morning by a college professor at St. Paul's School, since every room in the church basement was filled with our 88 Sunday School enrollees. The need for more room to operate was being studied by a new Worship Facilities Planning Committee. Their list was large: expanded worship space, suitable offices, more classrooms, church library space, fellowship area, and off-street parking. Surrounded by a block of homes, St. John's was landlocked. Informational meetings and surveys were planned for the spring of 1996. One obvious result was the decision to expand our property as more properties on the block become available. On December 23, 1996, we purchased the house at 617 S. Washington for \$92,000. This house was used for additional Sunday School rooms. The Sunday Adult Bible Class, formerly at St. Paul's School, met in the basement as well. There was still "The Wolf House" on S. Washington, next to the church. In 1996 Mr. Wolf said that he was willing to sell his property to the church by trading it for the residence at 1327 N. Minnesota Street. So we did.

Because of a generous gift, central air conditioning was installed in the church building during 1996. This raised the comfort level of our packed sanctuary markedly. Thanks be to God!

## 1998 GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY—50TH

The theme of our 50th was the title of a favorite new hymn, "Not Unto Us," arranged for the "new" WELS hymnal. The arranger was Pastor Kurt Eggert, who was also the coordinator of the Christian Worship hymnal project. In the course of 1998, six anniversary services were held. Since January 4, 1948, was the actual day of the founding of our church, WELS President Karl Gurgel preached on January 4, 1998. On May 8 there was a Means of Grace Sunday. The service theme on May 15 was: Fellowship and Service in the Body. A congregational meal was held at Martin Luther College at noon. September 27 was Missions and Worker Training Sunday. Pastor Thomas Trapp, the first baptized "son" of the congregation, preached the message. Finally, there was A Service of Praise on November 22. A booklet of Bible readings for the year was included in the golden anniversary booklet to further acquaint more members with the Word of Life.



Prof. Martin Schroeder  
Church Library, 1993

Bible classes soon expanded to five with three classes on Thursday, a new Women's Bible Class on Friday as well as the 9:30 Sunday class. Total attendance was 95. Sunday morning averaged 47 of the 95. Friday day care was provided for the 13 to 15 children who came with their moms. Often MLC students who had no classes that hour were hired. Martin Schroeder became the first librarian for the church library—



an idea that was germinating already in 1991. The choir in 1998 had grown to 40 and was under the direction of Roger Hermanson. The year 1999 ended with a midnight service both to bid farewell to the old year and old millennium and to welcome Y2K in the Lord's name and under His blessing.

## DO WE STAY OR DO WE GO?

The late 1990s saw slow progress towards building expansion. Although several property purchases had been made on our side of S. Washington, things didn't seem to fall together as we had hoped. There was also resistance from one neighbor. Other neighbors were being told that St. John's was going to buy their houses out from under them. Chairman Gene Slettedahl and others on the committee met with all concerned parties and assured them that, in pursuing our expansion plans, we wanted to be good neighbors. At Christmastime, Dr. Ann Vogel in her inimitable way, quietly delivered small packages of mugs, hot cocoa, and goodies to each of our neighbors and wished them a Merry Christmas. In a star-crossed attempt to put the plan to paper, an architect was hired to present his proposal for a church addition based on what we thought we could reasonably afford. Before the meeting, he met Pastor Kolander at the door and said, "Wait 'til you see what we've done! You're going to love it!" Then, he excitedly unfurled the concept drawing and proudly held it out for Pastor's approval. Uncharacteristically, Pastor Kolander's countenance fell. It was a somewhat modern appendage on the side of our neo gothic church. To be fair, the congregation didn't give the architect much to work with—monetarily or conceptually. It was a lesson that would eventually teach us that we could accomplish more under God's blessing.

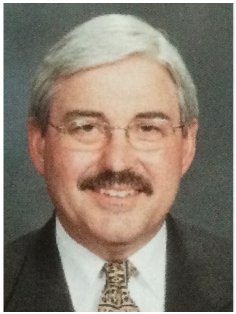
In frustration the congregation began to consider the possibility of selling the church and moving to a new location. There was talk of building up near North Highland, in the direction of the MLC soccer fields, but the diocese had other plans.

There was a vacant lot on the south end of town, but it was in a depression behind Perkins—across from the scrap metal recycling plant. Or perhaps we could purchase and convert the vacant Do-It Center near the railroad tracks behind HyVee... location, location, location. The more we searched, the more we appreciated the beautiful sanctuary and setting God had given us over a half century ago. Finally, in 1999, the Voters Assembly, with 58 in attendance, voted to stop looking elsewhere and make our present location work.

As it turned out, the Lord blessed our decision, but not always in the way we expected. For instance, the next house we needed (605 S. Washington) went on the market, but was snapped up before St. John's could put down a bid. As it turned out, the new owner was a second career pastoral student at MLC. Greg and Ardis Tobison, who purchased the house, joined our church and with the assurance that when they left New Ulm for the seminary, they would sell it to St. John's. The "Tobison" house was purchased in 2001 and used for temporary Sunday School rooms. In 2004 and 2005, when ground was broken for the church addition, the Tobison House became the temporary offices of the church. In 2001 we were also able to sell the 617 S. Washington residence and garage buildings. After making arrangements with the City of New Ulm, the Goldschmidt Moving Company of St. James loaded the house onto a huge flatbed trailer and moved it to the north end of town. The move was made in the middle of the night. One wonders what some poor fellow might have thought as he drove away from the B & L Bar, only to be confronted by a two-story residence lumbering toward him on Broadway. The detached garage at 617 was moved as well, giving us the temporary relief of some off-street parking.

## A FOND FAREWELL FOR PASTOR KOLANDER

Our building plans were just beginning to congeal, when, in early 2001, both of our pastors received a call at the same time. Pastor Bovee was called by Peace Lutheran Church in Holiday, Florida and Pastor Kolander received a call to Christ the Lord Lutheran Church in Brookfield, WI. After prayerful consideration, Pastor Bovee declined his call. But Pastor Kolander was led to serve in Wisconsin. Once again, we thanked our loving God for a decade of blessings through His faithful servant. We gave thanks, too, that Pastor Bovee provided a link with our recent past and solid, evangelical continuity. The congregation said farewell to the Kolanders on the first Sunday in March.



Pastor Wayne Laitinen  
2001-2016

Pastor Wayne Laitinen, who had served at Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Oklahoma City for 10 years, took the call to St. John's. His wife Carol, a daughter of Ted and Lois Hartwig, had grown up in St. John's since 1955. They were married here in June of 1978. Upon his installation in July of 2001, their children, Jeremy and Becky, were attending MLC. Dan was attending Luther Prep in Wisconsin and the youngest, Anna, enrolled in fourth grade at St. Paul's Lutheran School.

As far as living accommodations were concerned, the congregation generously gave the Laitinens three options: (1) live in the 800 S. State Street parsonage rent-free, as previous pastors had, (2) purchase the parsonage from the church, or (3) receive a housing allowance and purchase a different house. In December 2002, they purchased the parsonage at the assessed price of \$145,000.

On September 11, 2001, Pastors Bovee and Laitinen were attending a pastoral conference at the Schwann Center in northern Wisconsin. As synod Vice President Wayne Mueller was leading us through a Bible study on abortion, euthanasia, and other end-of-life topics, the phone in the lodge kitchen rang incessantly. Finally, MVL program director, Jerry Kieselhorst, managed to enter the kitchen and pick it up. He interrupted the speaker and told us that a plane had flown into the World Trade Center. Within minutes, 40 pastors were huddled around a 19" TV set watching as the second plane hit and the towers collapsed in a cloud of dust. Once home, special midweek services were held at St. John's and St. Paul's to plead for God's mercy, to give Gospel comfort to the bereaved, to heal the injured, and to save our nation. The Laitinens had lived through a similar disaster in Oklahoma City when the Murrah Federal Building was blown up in 1995. The Lord of history used both disasters to turn people from their vanity and seek their Redeemer.



Lisa Goeglein  
Church Secretary  
2002-present

In 2002 Ruth Birkholtz, who had been doing secretarial work at least since the time of Pastor Nitz, passed on her knowledge of the office to Lynnda Kalk and soon after that to Lisa Goeglein. For the past 21 years Lisa has been the welcoming voice on the phone, has published the bulletins, newsletters, reports, and kept records for the administrative pastor. Since secretaries often kept the workings of the church in their heads, Lisa made her work easily transferable. Over the years she has recorded office schedules, the operation of equipment, and has kept them updated in a binder on her desk.

In former years a church could get along with elected, part-time treasurers and financial secretaries. However, with increasing governmental red tape, keeping track of bills and regulations, this was almost becoming a full time job. In 2002, Mae Tacke passed on her administrative bookkeeping duties to Wendy Lambrecht. It was a lot to learn, but Wendy mastered our bookkeeping for the next 20 years. Since her retirement in 2020, Mike Thom has been serving us very well as our bookkeeper to the present.



Wendy Lambrecht  
Bookkeeper  
2002-2020



Mike Thom  
Bookkeeper  
2020-present

## LONG RANGE PLANS COME TO FRUITION

In his 2003 Annual Report, Joel Boehlke, the chairman of the Trustees wrote: "The biggest change has been the houses to the north (of the church). This year we were able to purchase the 609 S. Washington property (a.k.a. "Hartwig House") which allows for the plans to move forward for a much needed addition to the church."

The Building Committee (BC), comprised of Earl Heidtke (Chairman), Larry Black, Karen Grunwald, and Lance Hartzell, brought together the congregational input and hired Professional Design Group to create a three-dimensional model and digital photos so that a concept and proposal could

be adopted by the congregation. The next step would be to secure the financing for the \$2.8 million dollar project. The interest rate was 5.5% at this juncture. The Building Finance Committee (BFC) under the co-chairmen of John Micheel and Darvin Raddatz (Dar served one year before moving to the elders) also included John Paulsen (secretary), Roger Burdorf, Joyce Diels, Carolyn Kramer, Perry Meyer, and Elaine Neitzel. As with the building of the original superstructure, cottage meetings were held in January. At these meetings every member had a chance to learn about the project, ask questions, offer advice, and, most importantly, join in asking for God's blessing upon this building to His glory! The theme of the project was "Building for Ministry."

In preparation for the addition, the (Tom and Donna) "Hartwig House" at 609 S. Washington, was slated to be demolished. It was a very heavy, double-brick construction. But at the last minute a buyer stepped forward, offered to purchase it for \$1, and to pay to have it moved from the property. Sold! This one was moved down S. Washington in broad daylight. The negotiation of the overhead lines and routes were once again prearranged with the City of New Ulm. Even so, the 2½ story edifice only made it a couple of blocks down S. Washington when we discovered that a rather large tree branch, overhanging the road, blocked the way. That branch just happened to be attached to a tree in the boulevard in front of the city attorney's house! There was a difference of opinion between the city attorney and the mover as to whether the branch should be cut then and there. The mover called a tree service. A man from the tree service arrived, chainsaw in hand, jumped up on the roof, and cut the branch. After blocking the road for 45 minutes, the house finally moved on! But not without sacrifice. The City of New Ulm had the license of the tree service suspended for several months.

The summer of 2004 marked the sale of the remaining parsonage, 510 S. Jefferson, to Pastor and Mrs. Bovee. With the houses on S. Washington moved, now St. John's could



concentrate its building and grounds resources to one, large building: The Lord's House.

The whole project (\$2.8 million) had been divided into two phases. Phase one was the new narthex, bathrooms (upstairs and down), elevator, office suite (five offices, a media room, and a conference room), furnace room in the mezzanine, basement library, and Sunday school rooms along the north wall of the basement. A covered carport allowed passengers to enter by the north doors by way of a cloistered walkway. The cloister walk is reminiscent of the one at Martin Luther's Augustinian monastery in Erfurt. By July 2004, members had committed to giving over \$1 million over the course of three years for phase one. Based on this, the voters permitted the congregation to borrow \$1.2 million toward the total of the first phase (\$1.62 million).

The second phase would include a hallway all along the outside of the north side on the sanctuary level. It would open into a large fellowship hall for congregational meals with a kitchen along the alley. Below would be a choir rehearsal room and room for more Sunday school classes. At present, the second phase is still pending.

On a bright August Sunday morning in 2004, the congregation moved outside to watch Pastor Bovee turn a shovelful of dirt and ask for God's guidance in our endeavor. The same Heymann Construction Company that built the superstructure in 1966 was contracted to build phase one of the addition in 2005. Before long, the footers were poured and the footprint of today's office complex began to take shape. To give the architecture a seamless continuity, Lannon stone was quarried from the same parts of Halquist Quarries in Lannon, Wisconsin, as we used for the 1966 building project. Stone masons were sought who could replicate the patterns of the various sized stones. Masons capable of this construction were hard to find. Before the first trowel of mortar was slung, each one went home and studied photos of the patterns in the old structure. On one occasion a

mason's grandchildren were driven to the church to watch their grandpa resurrect what, to many, is a dying art. By the grace of God, His people want to give Him their very best!

## PHASE ONE DEDICATED—GOD GIVES GOOD GIFTS TO HIS PATIENT CHILDREN

One year later, September 18, 2005, our congregation gathered to dedicate a new church addition. Pastor Aaron Christie, our guest preacher, reminded us that, although the addition is a wonderful gift, we must thank God even more for the church composed of people whose hearts He won by the blood of His Son. God be praised! Our ministry to those souls was made so much easier!

As it turned out, the offerings for the building project received just under \$1 million dollars in the two years ending in 2005. For that reason the line of credit did not have to be used until January 2005. We also were blessed to lock in our loan before the prime rate rose 11 times by another 2.75%.

## BASEMENT RENOVATION

In the fall of 2005, a group of members broke up the concrete "altar" area that was used in the old basement church. Now the whole basement floor was one level. Trustee Rod Karnitz sealed the basement floor and a renovation made for a comfortable fellowship area and large Bible class room. The 9:30 Sunday Bible class which had migrated from St. Paul's School, to a house basement, finally found a home there. It is not uncommon to comfortably seat 70 in those classes. Ever since, the renovated

church basement makes for a clean, spacious gathering area for congregational meals and funeral gatherings as well.



Mrs. Karen Grunwald  
Teacher  
2005-2022

The church secretary's oak desk and drawers and the large oak conference table in the conference room were made by the woodworking skill of inmates at a correctional facility.

Karen Grunwald began teaching for us at St. Paul's in 2005. Her help with serving the church in VBS, planning the church addition, and many other areas of service enhanced or Gospel ministry. She taught here for 17 years.

## STAFF MINISTERS

The year 2005 also began St. John's participation in helping train those who were studying to be staff ministers at Martin Luther College. Ben Strackbein, who is still a member here today, was among them. The congregation decided to call a staff minister to assist the congregation in connecting members with service opportunities in the congregation. Our first staff minister was



Mr. Kelly Emde  
Staff Minister  
2011-2019

Kelly Emde, who served us from 2011 until 2019. Kelly was a second career staff minister. In the late 1970s he worked at an airlines credit union. Airline people were amazed that he could remember long strings of numbers after just glancing at them. With the gift of keeping all those numbers in order, they suggested that he would make a great air traffic controller. You will remember that President Reagan fired federal air traffic controllers who walked off the job. Kelly was hired at that time. He "brought in" President Bill Clinton once and George

W. Bush twice - once as governor of Texas and again when he was president. But the best use of that gift was memorizing members' names. It was especially evident when he greeted people before and after services.



Mr. Jim Dretske  
Staff Minister  
1998-present

James Dretske served us as Director of Christian Education (DCE) and an upper grade teacher from 1998 until 2020. As our Director of Christian Education, Jim was instrumental in keeping us aware of developments at St. Paul's School. He also engineered the tuition offset program for St. John's families with children attending St. Paul's School. From 2020 to present, Jim has served us as a staff minister. In the middle of taking pictures for an update to the church pictorial directory, the Life Touch Company went the way of many companies during the COVID economy. Jim jumped in right away and started snapping pictures of our members to compose a book of our own.

We thank both of our staff ministers for their tireless efforts and selfless service among God's people!



67  
The cloister walk under an autumn snow circa 2015.

## THE ESSENTIAL WORK OF OUR WOMEN

Throughout the ages, women have been an integral part of the Christian community as well. The essential work of the Ladies Aid and the Altar Guild were mentioned earlier. The Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS) also became a strong presence at St. John's. Soon after it was established in our synod (1962), our ladies joined and distributed "mite boxes" so each household could collect small change that added up to a huge blessing to missions on other continents! Large LWMS rallies found our women (and their husbands) making annual getaways to other cities to listen to missionaries and their wives relate fascinating accounts of how "the Word of the Lord grows." One of our women wrote an article every month in The Fortress (St. John's Newsletter) to keep us apprised of the mission work our synod is doing at home and abroad. A Women's Choral Group was begun in the 1990s by Lu Kolander. About a dozen ladies of the congregation augmented the other choirs in beautifying our Savior's worship with treble voices through the first decade of the new millennium. During the summer months when Bible classes were recessed, moms with small children scheduled a Friday playdate in one of the many parks in the area. One of the women always begins with a devotion and prayer.

## LIGHTING, AUDIO VISUAL, AND ACOUSTICS (LAVA) COMMITTEE

Since the 1990s the pastors had switched from a microphone planted on the altar, lectern, and pulpit to a lapel mic. In the 2000s we switched the lapel mic to a flesh colored wire over the ear. It was becoming painfully obvious, however, that the original 1966 speakers hung from the side beams were insufficient to carry a clear uniform sound throughout the worship area. To broadcast services on the public channel, we wanted the full sound of the congregation, not just the pastor's voice. For the

same reason, we hoped to mount cameras in places that would offer the TV viewers more than just the pastor's head shot. The extended narthex which came with the church addition, was sometimes used for overflow seating during large services. Thursday Bible classes were held there as well. For that reason, the new narthex needed both a projection screen to see the service and the audio. Likewise, the basement could be used for church overflow or a Bible class at the same time as worship. It, too, needed a sound system and screen that could alternately be used jointly or independently with the church. John Paulsen and his committee took up the complicated task. Contracting with Sims Sound and Video of Winona, they came up with a plan to cover all of these needs for \$67,416. Because the finances came slowly over the years, the project moved slowly at first. Like the organ project, once it was completed, many who had grown accustomed to the old technology admitted that the upgrade was a long time in coming... but far superior. A high quality sound system, like a good pipe organ, is worthy of a God who gave us His only-begotten Son! And for practical purposes, a generation which fills its homes with high-grade audio-visual images will soon grow weary with the inferior static used to convey God's Word to them. The Gospel of Christ deserves our very best!

## PASTORS' RESPONSIBILITIES

With the expansion of boards and committees came more meetings for the pastor to attend. One of the blessings of having two pastors was that they could each attend one half of the meetings and spend some time with their families. One exception would be the board of elders, where the care of souls must be a priority for both pastors. Already in 1993, Pastor Kolander's burden was shared by Pastor Bovee. From 2001 until 2017, when Pastor Laitinen retired, there was a similar "division of labor". Pastor Laitinen was considered the administrative



pastor and worked primarily with the Boards of Trustees and Stewardship. Pastor Bovee was the education and evangelism pastor. His artistic talents (as a second career pastor, his first career was as an artist), and guitar accomplishments seemed a good fit with the Youth Group. More than once he joined other artists in the congregation to teach children the techniques of drawing or painting objects in God's story of creation and redemption. Strapping on his guitar always seemed to be a hit during the Vacation Bible School sing-alongs, too.

There were crossovers as well. Pastor Bovee was open to the idea that St. John's could use the vast talent in our church to hold Community Lectures over the course of several years. Generally we would try to find topics that could be presented on an evening or a Saturday in our church—something that might be a draw for people in our community: Science and the Bible, Communication in Relationships, Stories in Stained Glass, The Theology of the Cross, or Fascinating Facts about the Jewish Temple. Free and open to the public, our goal was always to show an application to sin and grace. Sometimes the presenter was from our congregation or a faculty member at MLC. At other times, we had WELS pastors or laypeople come from afar. Scott Barefoot, a WELS layman who struggled with homosexuality and found cleansing in Jesus' wounds, came to speak on Leaving the Gay Lifestyle. While airing a half-hour interview on the radio, Scott and Pastor Laitinen were in the studio with the technician who led the interview. The first 15 minutes comprised the "get-acquainted" segment. Then we broke for a two minute commercial before talking about the actual substance of Scott's upcoming lecture. During the break the announcer asked, off air, "So... your lecture will be on Leading the Gay Lifestyle?" Scott and I looked at each other awkwardly. Obviously the announcer hadn't read our memo correctly. Finally, Scott broke in, "No. My lecture is LEAVING the Gay Lifestyle," which elicited a wide-eyed response from the announcer. After successfully navigating the next 15 minutes,

the announcer turned off his microphone, buried his head in his arms on the desk and heaved an audible sigh. I half-expected some unfriendly visitors at Scott's lecture. However, the church was filled with friendly people from New Ulm and Courtland.



Mrs. Laura Balza  
Teacher  
2014-present

Laura Balza was called by St. John's in 2014 to teach grades 3-4 and be our worship coordinator. With her ability on the organ and knowledge of church music she has also been a valuable member of the Worship Committee.

## 2015 REMODELED BALCONY

It is a well-known adage that "the Lutheran Church is a singing church." Next to theology, Dr. Luther treasured music as the highest gift of God. Nowhere is that more evident than at St. John's. Not only has God given us first-rank organists, choir directors, and choral voices, it is impossible to recall all the pianists, woodwinds, brass, and percussion that have regularly supported the full-throated singing of our members. It may seem like an extraneous detail to single out the remodeling of the church balcony in 2015. But it was essential to make a suitable space for these musicians to continue. Three timpani would find a permanent home there. The choir would move from a flat surface to graduated levels in order to project properly and to see the altar service. The Steinway grand piano, which stood in the Backer household for two generations, was refurbished and found a welcome home in that balcony. With all of that, there

was still room for the occasional small ensemble or a harp. The heavy rail which obstructed musicians' sight to the nave was replaced and additional lighting brightened the shadowy areas.

## 2016-2018

### PASTOR GUENTHER TAKES UP PASTOR LAITINEN'S MANTLE



Pastor Rob Guenther  
2018-present

Pastor Laitinen retired from St. John's at the end of 2016. St. John's called 12 pastors over the course of 18 months. Elder Brian Dose worked with Pastor Bovee as the primary preaching assistant during that time. Finally, Pastor Rob Guenther, of Grace Lutheran Church in Kenai, Alaska, accepted our call. Previous to his eight years in Alaska, Pastor Guenther served from 2004-2010 at Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. Rob, Becky, and their sons, Josiah, Jacob, Judah, and Joel moved to town on July 1, 2018. Pastor Guenther was installed on July 8.

## 2019

### HANDBELLS AT ST. JOHN'S

Just before our country's Covid lockdown, St. John's purchased a three chromatic octave set of handbells. Under the direction of Becky Berg, they were used for the first time in the fall of 2021. Typically, the handbells are played from the front of the church as preservice music or an offertory during the service. Handbells have given opportunity to musicians and non-musicians alike,

to play together to God's glory. We thank them for bringing to mind the words of familiar hymns with a refreshing new sound.

In 2020 St. John's annual offerings topped the \$1 million mark for the first time. May we be found to be wise stewards of all the Lord has bestowed upon us - physically and spiritually!

Two of our teachers were called in 2019: Kindergarten teacher, Christine Baganz, and 5-6 grade teacher and Jr. Choir director, Emily Stoering. Although both of them had experience in the classroom before, 2019-2020 was not an easy year to teach. We thank them for their faithful service!



Mrs. Christine Baganz  
Teacher  
2019-present



Mrs. Emily Stoering  
Teacher  
2019-present

## A COVID HISTORY OF ST. JOHN'S

*[ Submitted by Pastor Rob Guenther ]*

On March 6, 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Minnesota. By March 11 the World Health Organization had declared a pandemic upsetting the nation and soon upsetting our regular worship. On March 13, Governor Tim Walz declared a "peacetime emergency" and limited gatherings to 250 people. On March 15, he declared the closure of K-12 schools. Shortly after, he closed bars and restaurants, added

a statewide "mask mandate" for all indoor gathering spaces, and all in-person social gatherings were prohibited, including worship. By January of 2021, schools and churches reopened, but with masking and social distancing regulations. And by March of 2021, restrictions were being lifted. Houses of worship were allowed to worship at 100%, but social distancing was still required. Finally, by May 28, it was announced that all restrictions were lifted.

The congregation was understandably divided on the issues of how best to deal with these challenges for more than a year and the elders had many difficult discussions trying to figure out how best to navigate the challenges of following government guidelines while continuing to connect all of our members to the Means of Grace. With the initial restrictions of numbers, worshipers were asked to sign-up online to attend one of the services so that numbers and social distancing could be maintained. One member offered to pay the first \$1,000 towards any fines we received if we ignored "the rules." Another purchased face masks for the pastors in the proper "liturgical colors." Examination and Confirmation services were limited to the confirmands and their immediate families. Others were invited to join the live stream of the services online.

When in-person worship was prohibited, the pastors remained busy recording sermons, splicing them into previously recorded services, and posting them online. (Pastor Bovee once joked that he had preached the best sermon of his life... only to discover that he had not hit the "record" button and had to start again.) The number of "homebound visits" greatly increased as pastors visited many members in their homes bringing devotions and their traveling communion sets. An online Bible Class led by Professor Paul Koelpin on the Book of Isaiah regularly drew over 100 members in an online Google Meet format. (Members were eager to connect with one another and see each other, even if it was digitally.) One of the blessings of the pandemic was an increased online presence reaching many people well beyond

the state of Minnesota. Online attendance continues to remain strong both for worship and for Sunday and midweek Bible Classes.

While a number of members received their eternal victory during the winter of the pandemic, very few funerals were held as many families wanted to wait until restrictions were lifted to gather family members together to receive comfort from God's Word together in person. On Sunday, March 28, 2021, St. John's had a choir of over 60 people ("socially distanced") sing "The Hallelujah Chorus" which was recorded to be played back in our Easter services on April 4. What a joyful noise was made to the Lord!

Finally, on May 29, 2021, with no social distancing required, St. John's returned to "filling every pew shoulder to shoulder." Hymnals and Bibles were returned to the pew racks. And with great rejoicing the pandemic restrictions were behind us. We thank God for not only keeping us safe through the pandemic but for also maintaining our unity as brothers and sisters in Christ through a tense and difficult time. To God be the glory!

## MORTGAGE BURNING

The church's debt was paid and the mortgage was burned in the services on February 22 and 23, 2020.

## THE INTRODUCTION OF THE CHRISTIAN WORSHIP HYMNAL—2021 EDITION

Many of us still remember when Pastor Kolander announced the introduction of Christian Worship—the Lutheran hymnal developed by our synod in 1993. How quickly 30 years sped by! Pastor Guenther announced that the 2021 edition would begin to be used after Thanksgiving in 2021. A year and a half later,



we are becoming comfortable once again with the best of our Lutheran heritage and fresh forms with sound scriptural words.



Mr. Phil Scriver  
Teacher  
2022-present

The most recent addition to our teaching staff is 5th and 6th grade teacher, Phil Scriver. He was called in 2022.

2023

## 75TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

**May 6 at 10:30 AM**

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus Concert

**August 6 at 8:00 & 10:00 AM**

75th Anniversary Services  
Commissioned Concertato on  
*Lord Jesus Christ the Church's Head*  
Composed by John Behnke  
Guest Preacher Pastor David Kolander

**September 10 at 3:00 PM**

Organ Recital

**October 15 at 10:30 AM**

Martin Luther College Choir Concert

## 75TH ANNIVERSARY PROJECTS

**Musical Proclamation** - Renowned Lutheran composer John Behnke was commissioned to write a concertato on the hymn, "Lord Jesus Christ, the Church's Head." The piece will be debuted by the St John's choir at our August 6 anniversary service, and then made available for other groups across Christendom. Generous gifts from members have already been received for this project and it is fully funded.

**WELS Ministry Education** - We have been blessed to have nearly 200 sons and daughters of our congregation prepare for public ministry at MLC and WLS. Many have gone on to serve as pastors, teachers, and staff ministers in our synod. Currently, more than a dozen of our members are studying to serve in those capacities. In addition to our prayers and encouragement, we want to support them financially. An open-goal endowment fund is being established to help us do that for many years to come.

**Sanctuary Renovation** - As part of an upcoming larger renovation, we are gathering an anniversary offering with a goal of \$75,000 to beautify God's house. Our 57 year-old sanctuary has aged well, but new floor tile is needed and the pews could use some touch up and fabric changes. The plan also calls for more flexible seating in the front, a contemporary color palette, and improved accessible options.

## A NOTE TO THE READER OF THIS BOOK

Thank you for reading the 75th anniversary history of St. John's Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN. It has been enriching to leaf through our congregation's bulletins, newsletter, and reports. They are a testimony to God's grace and favor upon the struggles of His humble Flock. We pray that by scratching the surface of our story, you, too, will appreciate what great things our Savior has done. By no means has the subject been exhausted. There are, no doubt, saints and stories we should have included that were overlooked. Your corrections and suggestions are welcome. With guidance from our pastors, St. John's hopes to make this a living document - something that will be updated from time to time and may be accessed online by anyone. This is but a small sampling of the fruits of the Spirit among those who were built upon the teachings of the apostles and prophets who, in turn, rest upon Christ, our Cornerstone. It is your congregation's fervent prayer that, by faith in the merits of Christ alone, the name of every reader is written in the most important book of all: The Book of Life.

Wayne A. Laitinen  
St. John's Archivist  
wayne.laitinen@gmail.com  
(507) 217-7119  
June 18, 2023

*Soli deo Gloria*

## THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED AT ST. JOHN'S

### PASTORS

Professor Martin Albrecht	1948-1950
Pastor Roland Gurgel	1950-1953
Pastor Rollin Reim	1953-1959
Pastor Frederic Nitz	1959-1978
Pastor Norval Kock	1979-1991
Pastor David Kolander	1991-2001
Pastor Jeffrey Bovee	1994-present
Pastor Wayne Laitinen	2001-2016
Pastor Rob Guenther	2018-present

### DIRECTORS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Mr. Merlyn Kruse	1970-1977
Mr. Craig Kitzrow	1977-1980
Mr. Todd Hauf	1980-1989
Mr. David Zabel	1989-1997
Mr. James Dretske	1998-2020

### TEACHERS

Miss Beth Washow	1971-1972
Miss Mary Hubbard	1972-1974
Mrs. Gwen Hirsch	1974-1979
Mrs. Marcella Lowry	1979-1980
Mrs. Jean Schroeder	1980-2020
Miss Dianne Falkenberg	1982-1985
Mrs. Marlene Wendler	1985-2014
Miss Wendy Ristow	1990-2008
Mrs. Jeneane Thiesfeldt	1997-1998
Mrs. Karen Grunwald	2005-2022
Mrs. Laura Balza	2014-present
Mrs. Emily Stoering	2019-present
Mrs. Christine Baganz	2019-present
Mr. Phillip Scriver	2022-present

### STAFF MINISTERS

Mr. Kelly Emde	2011- 2019
Mr. James Dretske	2020-present

