

ST. PAUL'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH, SCHOOL, AND PRESCHOOL

NORTH FOND DU LAC, WISCONSIN

1901 – PRESENT

“BLESSED BY GOD'S UNCHANGING GRACE”

Every Member's History

The congregation of believers at St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church recognizes the Lord's abundant blessings to every member, whether young or old, or whether having joined recently or belonging to the fourth or fifth generation of St. Paul's faithful. Every claim to church membership is the same regardless of age or length of membership, because every member is a part of the whole through faith in Christ, our one Lord.

Early History

The village of North Fond du Lac found its origin when in 1899 the Wisconsin Central Railroad located its main shops to the north of the city of Fond du Lac. Some of the workers who settled here were Lutherans, who for the most part, hailed from Waukesha and Stevens Point. Pastor Gustav E. Bergemann, who had become pastor of St. Peter's congregation in Fond du Lac that same year, invited these newly relocated Lutherans to join them for worship and to send their children to St. Peter's Lutheran School.

St. Peter's congregation felt that North Fond du Lac was a promising mission field, and on February 4, 1900, it decided to acquire a site for a church in the newly founded village. The "Land Company" donated two lots on the corner of Lincoln and Illinois Avenue, and the congregation purchased a third lot for fifty dollars. In March, 1901, the decision was made to build a church. When it was completed with partly donated and partly loaned funds, the church was placed at the disposal of the Lutherans in North Fond du Lac.

It was in that church building, on the evening of **December 10, 1901**, that seven men assembled to organize and incorporate themselves as an evangelical Lutheran congregation. They were Louis Simantzig, William Radtke, August Rosenow, William Rosenow, Herman Rosenow, August Carlovsky, and Paul Schumann. Pastor Bergemann conducted the meeting, while Louis Krug, student of theology (who had with students John Rueschel and Robert Wolff, alternately served the young congregation with the Word) served as secretary. A constitution was explained and adopted. The following were elected as elders and trustees: William Radtke, Herman Rosenow, August Carlovsky, and Louis Simantzig, the first three serving as Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer, respectively.

**Paul J. Dowidat
(1902 – 1904)**



In an April 30, 1902 congregational meeting, it was unanimously decided to transfer the title of the church property to St. Paul's congregation, to assume the indebtedness of \$950.00, and to call its own pastor. Theological candidate **Paul J. Dowidat** was called, then ordained and installed on **July 6, 1902**, by his father, Pastor Chr. Dowidat, of Oshkosh. Because at this time the congregation numbered thirteen members, it could only raise \$100 annually for salary. Subsidy was granted by the Wisconsin Synod's Traveling Missionary's Fund (Reise-predigt-kommission).

In April, 1903 a committee was formed to seek a more favorable site for the church building. Following the committee's June report, it was decided to leave the church where it was for the time being.

After one and one-half year's service, Pastor Dowidat accepted a Call to serve in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and left January 1, 1904. Miss A. Krug of Fond du Lac served as Lutheran school teacher until the end of the year. Until July, 1904 there was a vacancy during which time neighboring pastors, especially Pastor Bergemann, served the congregation.

**Arnold Hoenecke
(1904 – 1907)**



The congregation called Candidate **Arnold Hoenecke in July, 1904**, who was ordained and installed by his father, Director A. Hoenecke, professor at our seminary. Pastor Hoenecke served three and one-half years, and was blessed to see membership increase to twenty-seven. On January 1, 1908 he left St. Paul's to serve the congregation in West Allis, Wisconsin. During the ensuing vacancy school had to be dismissed.

**Paul Oehlert
(1908 – 1917)**

Candidate **Paul Oehlert** was ordained and installed by his father, Pastor J. G. Oehlert, during the **summer of 1908**. During a special meeting on March 17, 1909, the matter of purchasing a more suitable church site, as well as building a school, was considered. After a chain of meetings it was decided on **September 8, 1909, to trade the old site for four lots on the corner of Michigan Avenue and Harrison Street, and in addition, to pay \$750 in cash to Mr. G. W. Post of Fond du Lac**. It was also decided in that meeting to erect a school on the new site as soon as possible, and to transfer the church building to the newly acquired property. The building committee was composed on August Thalacker, William Radtke, Louis Simantzig, and Pastor Oehlert. Construction of the school building began immediately, William Rosenbaum serving as contractor. On November 14, 1909 the school was dedicated with a German service in the forenoon, in which Pastor Geo. Saxmann of Eldorado preached, and an English service in the evening, in which Pastor Bergemann preached.

From its inception the congregation, recognizing the need, had provided for a Lutheran elementary school. Since the congregation was unable to supply a teacher, the various pastors assumed the responsibility of teaching. In 1910, however, a change was made. In that year Pastor Bergemann was re-elected President of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod. His work increased to the extent that an assistant was necessary. With the consent of St. Paul's congregation, Pastor Oehlert accepted the call as assistant to the president of the synod. So that the school might not suffer under this arrangement, the WELS supplied a lady teacher for the North Fond du Lac congregation in the person of Miss A. Krug.

In **June, 1910, the church was transferred to a new location**. The committee for this included August Thalacker, William Radtke, Louis Simantzig, Albert Zick, Adolph Schmidt, and Robert Krause. Since the church was damaged in transport, it had to be renovated. Only July 31st the congregation again moved into the church building, having held services in the schoolhouse for several weeks. Pastor Pohley spoke in the German service in the morning, and Pastor B. Schlueter in the English festival service in the evening.

On December 10, 1911, the congregation celebrated its tenth jubilee. The guest pastors were President Bergemann, the founder of the congregation, Pastor Chr. Dowidat of Oshkosh, and Pastor Paul Dowidat of Minneapolis, the first pastor of the congregation.

After the Synod had generously subsidized the congregation for eleven years, the voters resolved at the annual meeting on January 5, 1913, to forego further subsidy. A letter was sent to the synodical authorities gratefully recognizing and expressing appreciation for the gracious help of the past.

Hardly had the congregation become self-supporting when it decided on May 18, 1913 to build a parsonage. On July 21st the bid of Ad. Grohskrouz, Oshkosh, for \$2,400 was accepted. The house was dedicated on January 18, 1914. Pastor J. G. Oehlert of Weyauwega preached the sermon at the German festival service.

At the January 4th, 1914, annual meeting it was resolved to begin an English department in the Sunday school, and to conduct one service in English monthly. On March 4th the congregation resolved to renovate the church. The work was begun at the end of June. An altar niche was built, the old altar rebuilt, and a new pulpit constructed by Mr. Ed. Yohann. The ceilings and sidewalls were covered with wallboard, new windows were installed, and the benches, floor, and woodwork were refinished. The congregation conducted services in the

school building during this time. On August 26th, 1914, the congregation joyfully observed the renovation festival in which Pastor G. E. Bergemann preached the German sermon, and Pastor Oehlert the English sermon. During the previous week an Estey reed organ was acquired. Therefore an organ dedication was combined with the renovation festival.

After Pastor Oehlert had served the congregation for nine years, during which time it had, through God's grace, developed inwardly and outwardly (48 voting members, 17 women members), the pastor received and accepted a divine Call from Trinity Lutheran Church in Kaukauna. A farewell service was held September 9, 1917.

**Walter Schumann
(1917 – 1921)**



On September 2, 1917, St. Paul's called candidate **Walter Schumann**, who became the congregation's next pastor. Since it was time for the school term to begin, it was decided to engage Miss Hencke of Eldorado as teacher until the new pastor was installed. **In March on 1919 the pastor was granted permission to teach both German and English in the school.** During this period the constitution of the congregation was also translated and printed in both languages. By 1920 telephone service was installed in the parsonage, and sanitary "waterworks" in the church basement. On October 2, 1921, Pastor Schumann was granted a peaceful release to serve St. John's congregation in Markesan, having served St. Paul's for four years.

**Leonard Koeninger
(1921 – 1928)**



Pastor Leonard Koeninger was installed **on December 4, 1921**. At a meeting held on June 11, 1922, it was decided to have two English services each month, to be held on the second and last Sundays. In November, 1923, the congregation began to have German and English services every Sunday.

A quote from the 1922-23 church handbook: “At present the congregation numbers over 80 voting members and 20 contributing women.” Since the congregation had grown to this extent, it seemed advisable to give the pastor help in teaching the school. Mabel Uhlmann taught during the 1923-24 term, and Florence Hanisch served as teacher from 1924-28.

The 25th anniversary of the congregation was celebrated **December 5, 1926**. Pastors G. E. Bergemann, Walter Schumann, and Paul Oehlert were the guest speakers. A special offering was gathered for a Building Fund: \$1,015.

Since Miss Hanisch resigned as teacher, Mrs. Augusta Moerer, from Clements, Minnesota, accepted the call to teach and served until 1931. After serving St. Paul’s for seven years, on June 25, 1928, Pastor Koeninger was released to serve First German Lutheran Church in Manitowoc.

Kurt Timmel
(1928 – 1932)



Pastor Kurt Timmel, called from Sugar Bush, WI, was the next pastor of our congregation. It was during his pastorate, October, 1929, that the Men’s Club was organized.

When Miss Moerer’s health would not permit her to continue on as teacher, Miss Kemnitz was called to teach during the school year 1931-32. In May of 1932 the congregation decided to call a male teacher from the graduating class at New Ulm, MN. Teacher Emanuel Arndt, St. Paul’s first male teacher, assumed his duties in September, 1932, and faithfully served until July 1, 1939, when he began to serve a congregation in Milwaukee.

At a special meeting on August 30, 1932, Pastor Timmel asked the congregation to release him to serve Trinity Lutheran Church, Watertown, WI.

Carl Lawrenz
(1932 – 1944)



During **Pastor Lawrenz’** labors here, **St. Paul’s congregation purchased the vacant St. Michael’s Episcopal Church** property, on the corner on Illinois Avenue and Winnebago Street.

The transaction occurred on **August 1, 1939**. Plans for extensive remodeling of the edifice and parsonage were prepared by F. J. Stepnoski and Sons, architects.

The building committee consisted of Arthur Boelter, Chairman; George Langacker, George Radtke, Henry Schmolesky, Henry Scholl, Harold Wockenfuss, and Pastor Lawrenz. The cornerstone was laid on September 8, 1940. Four dedication services took place November 10, 1940, with Pastors Bergemann, Oehlert, Koeninger, and Timmel speaking at the various worship services. The congregation had 127 families, and 324 communicants.

Teacher Adair Moldenhauer succeeded Mr. Arndt, assuming his duties in September of 1939. On July 30, 1944, Mr. Moldenhauer accepted a Call to serve a Lutheran school in Crete, Illinois. Pastor Lawrenz also accepted a Call, August 1, 1944, to serve as professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Thiensville.

The school year in 1944 began without a teacher or a pastor. St. Paul's congregation was very grateful for the services rendered by Miss Geraldine Boelter and Mrs. Koester who served in the school during the interim. Teacher Arthur Kempf came to St. Paul's late in September, 1944, and served until June, 1946.

Willmar Wichmann (1944 - 1948)



Pastor Wilmar Wichmann assumed his duties at St. Paul's in **November, 1944**. In April, 1945, it was decided to call a second teacher for the school. Lucille Sommer accepted the Call, beginning her service that September.

A Pipe Organ Fund was begun in February, 1946.

Mr. Myron Hilger assumed duties **as teacher and principal on June 16, 1946**, having been called from Trinity Lutheran Church, Town of Liberty, near Manitowoc. Permission was granted by the voters to Mr. Hilger to organize a Parent-Teacher Association in April, 1947.

Pastor Wichmann asked to be released to serve Grace congregation, Neenah, on June 8, 1948.

Bernard G. Kuschel
(1948 – 1985)



On **July 19, 1948**, **Pastor Bernard G. Kuschel** was called from Daggett, Michigan. Pastor Robert Reim, who served as vacancy pastor, conducted the installation service with assistance from Pastors E.G. Behm and H. Marcus Schwartz.

At the beginning of 1949 it was decided to have one German service a month, insulate the pastor's study, and put a new roof on the parsonage.

In June, 1949, Miss Sommer accepted a call to serve St. Peter's School, Fond du Lac. Audrey Ruddy was called to succeed Miss Sommer in the lower grades.

At the 48th anniversary, held November 27, 1949, at which Prof. Carl Lawrenz was guest speaker, the congregation received an offering to pay off the final building debt. It had seemed like quite a burden to assume a debt of \$35,000 when the congregation moved to its new location.

At the January annual meeting of 1950, the congregation voted to purchase a new Wicks Direct-Electric Action pipe organ at a cost of \$5,615, plus the cost of the pipe chamber, grill, and electrical wiring. The organ was delivered in November, used for the first church service on December 3, 1950, and officially dedicated on February 18, 1951. Pastor Wilmar Wichmann, under whose pastorate the organ fund was begun, was the guest speaker. That afternoon, Mr. Wayne Schmidt, a Northwestern College student, presented a sacred concert.

A third teacher was added to the teaching staff in 1956. According to the 60th anniversary booklet: "As soon as the third teacher was added, it became apparent that the expansion of the educational unit was necessary, since the State Industrial Commission limited the time that the congregation is permitted to use the church basement as a third classroom." Three acres of land were purchased on Chapman Avenue, and in April of 1960 the congregation voted to plan and erect a new four-classroom school "as soon as possible." Funds began to be gathered.

The school teachers in 1963 were Mr. Hilger, Mrs. Vetter, and Mrs. Jeffers. The next year it was decided to have two teachers instead of three.

On November 25, 1973 a special service commemorating Pastor Kuschel's 25th year at St. Paul's was held. Pastor Harlyn Kuschel, his son, was the guest speaker. That same year Deagan Chimes were installed on the organ. A new congregational constitution was ratified in 1975, and in 1976 the congregation celebrated its 75th anniversary. The interior of the church was refurbished as a special thanksgiving project.

In 1979 continuing water problems in the church basement were relieved when a \$4500 excavation and tiling project on the north side of the building was completed. The restoration of the front exterior of the church also took place at a cost of \$2000.

Communion with individual cups was added to the monthly schedule in 1981, offering members another opportunity to receive the Lord's Supper. It was also decided that year to close the doors of St. Paul's School. The last graduating class from the "old school" was comprised of Diane Schmolesky and Lisa Williams. Mr. Hilger's Call was necessarily terminated after having served as principal for 34 years. Over the next years a number of children from St. Paul's Church attended Redeemer Lutheran School in Fond du Lac, their tuition being paid by the congregation.

On December 31, 1985, New Year's Eve, Pastor Kuschel conducted his final worship service after more than 37 years of dedicated and faithful service to St. Paul's family of believers. A retirement service was held on January 12, 1986, after 43 years in the ministry. His son, Pastor Kieth Kuschel, was the guest preacher.

**Thomas H. Behnke
(1986 – present)**



Pastor Thomas Behnke accepted the Call to serve in North Fond du Lac, moving here with his wife, Karen, from Miami, Florida, where he had been conducting exploratory work among the Hispanic community. His **installation** was held on **May 25, 1986**, with his father-in-law, the Rev. Marvin Zank, of Medford, Wisconsin as guest preacher, Circuit Pastor Marvin Putz conducting the installation, and Vacancy Pastor Randal Schoemann serving as liturgist. Pastor and Mrs. Behnke were blessed with two children, Hannah and Andrew.

On January 10, 1988, the Lord called Myron Hilger home to heaven, at the age of 65 years, after 41 years of faithful service to St. Paul's as principal, teacher, organist, soloist, and choir director.

The Wicks pipe organ (installed in 1951) underwent substantial renovation in 1989. Some of the pipes were revoiced and electronic circuitry was installed at a cost of \$9000. James and Debra (Schmolesky) Bakken were guest organists at the organ re-dedication service on November 26th.

The 90th anniversary of the congregation was celebrated with a special festival service of praise on September 15, 1991. The Rev. Bernard Kuschel was the guest speaker, while his son, the Rev. Harlyn Kuschel, pastor of Zion Lutheran, South Milwaukee, was the worship leader. A fellowship potluck dinner followed.

At its quarterly meeting on July 10, 1988, the voters decided that a study should be made to determine the feasibility of beginning/reopening a Lutheran elementary school. Mark Hawley became the chairman of the "School Exploratory Committee," and later of the "School Study Committee." Over a two year period, matters concerning enrollment, transportation, staff, curriculum, student services, facilities, furnishings, and finances were studied in depth. Cottage meetings with members were held to gain insight and impart information. In its June 21, 1991 final report, the Study Committee stated that it felt opening a school was feasible, with God's guidance and grace. It also recommended that a new school, with five classrooms, office, locker

rooms, and gymnasium/fellowship hall be constructed. Preliminary drawings were done by Tesch-Tesch & Associates, and approximate costs were given by Capelle Bros. & Diedrich, Inc, Fond du Lac.

The Study Committee recommended a plan of action to implement the opening of a school on November 9, 1991. During 1992 cottage meetings were held once again to determine financial support and to gather survey information. One year later, on November 8, 1992, the congregation voted to build and open a Lutheran elementary school, and to begin classes, if possible, the following fall. An "Implementation Committee," with five subcommittees, was formed to put the plan into action, headed by Neil Butt. Dozens of members put in hundreds of hours of work!

On February 28, 1993, divine Calls were issued to two full-time and one part-time teacher. On August 22, 1993, Mr. Greg Obermiller, Mrs. Dawn Hinn, and Mrs. Susan Jahns were installed into the teaching ministry at St. Paul's new school.

A service of thanksgiving and dedicating the new school building to the Lord was held on September 26, 1993. Pastor Glen Schmiede of Eastside Lutheran Church & School, Madison, was the guest speaker. The service was held in the gymnasium/auditorium. The first kindergarten class in the new school graduated from eighth grade in the spring of 2002.

A major renovation of the exterior of the church building on Illinois Ave. took place in August of 1995 when the "Cream City" brick exterior was sandblasted by the Jeff Eckert and Allan Hansen families, adding greatly to the beauty of the structure which had served the congregation well for 61 years.

A new constitution was ratified by the voters on September 7, 1997. The congregation's third pictorial directory was completed in the spring of 1999, helping members to get to know one another better. At the end of the year 2000 there were 708 baptized souls and 558 communicant members.

St. Paul's "Little Pioneers Preschool" for three and four year-old students opened in the fall of 2001 by God's gracious and guiding hand. Mrs. Holly Schwefel was its first teacher, followed by Mrs. Susan Wright in 2002.

On September 20, 2001, the congregation celebrated with thanksgiving its 100th anniversary. The celebration service and dinner were held at Winnebago Lutheran Academy, a larger venue. Pastors (and brothers) Harlyn and Kieth Kuschel, sons of the congregation, brought God's Word to joyful members during worship.

In 2003 a Facilities Exploration Committee began meeting to determine whether or not we would be able to continue effectively reaching out with the gospel to the community by means of the church building on Illinois Avenue. We had outgrown our facility, and there was no possibility of expanding on the land we owned. Those with disabilities were not able to access the church, fellowship hall, and restrooms. The possibility of building and attaching a new church and offices to the existing school, six blocks away, was explored.

After a thorough study, the voters determined that the best solution for continued gospel outreach was to build a new church, fellowship hall, kitchen, meeting rooms, offices, add two classrooms to the school, and expand the parking lot. Cornerstone Consulting was hired in 2004 to guide the congregation in its stewardship appeal and capital campaign.

**Michael L. Kampman
(2005 - present)**



By 2004, the congregation had grown to over 800 members. Because of a desire to serve our members and reach out to others in a responsible and timely manner, the voters decided it was time to call an associate pastor. Through the Synod Assignment Committee, a divine Call was extended to seminary graduate **Michael Kampman**. He was installed on **July 17, 2005**, with Northern Wisconsin District President Douglas Engelbrecht serving as guest preacher. Pastor Kampman and his wife, Kristin, were blessed with four children: Kaitlyn, Caleb, Isabelle, and Marcus.

In April of 2006 the congregation's voting assembly made the decision to proceed with design and construction at the cost of 2.7 million dollars. A Building Committee, chaired by Alan Geisthardt, was formed and began working directly with Jim Pankow, Inc., of Plymouth. Ground was broken on May 21st. A great number of volunteers, moved by the gospel, put many hours of "sweat equity" into the project. Our first services in the new church at 1010 Adams Avenue were held on August 4 & 5, 2007. We dedicated the new building and everything in it to God's glory on September 9th, 2007. Seminary President Paul Wendland was the guest preacher.

A musical "note": Our organ is an Allen Organ model Renaissance Quantum Q325 installed by Brook Falls Organ and Piano Co, Inc., Butler, WI. Its three-manual console has 50 stops that produce 200 voices.

Stained glass: The windows were designed and produced by the Studios of Potente, Kenosha, Wisconsin. The silk screen borders around the windows match the borders displayed in the windows of the old church. The cost of design, construction, and installation was \$48,500.

The "old church" at 601 Illinois Avenue, which had been sitting vacant, was sold in December, 2011. Because the adjacent parsonage at 607 Illinois Avenue was part of that sale, a new parsonage, used by the associate pastor and his family, was purchased that same month by the congregation. It is located at 161 Broadway Street in North Fond du Lac, near the church and school.

Our gymnasium, originally built in 1993 along with the school, underwent a major renovation in late 2014 and through the first half of 2015. The walls were furred out and insulated, a new wooden floor was installed over the tile, new basket supports were mounted, and retractable bleachers were put in. Once again, with the help and blessing of generous volunteer labor, the cost of the project was under \$130,000. The new gymnasium was dedicated to God's glory on October 11th, 2015.

The following men and women have staffed St. Paul's School and Preschool faculty over the years: *First school:* A. Krug, Florence Saxman, Miss Henke, Mabel Uhlmann, Florence Hanisch (Wackenfuss), Augusta Moerer, Marion Kemnitz (Wegner), Emanuel Arndt, Adair Moldenhauer, Geraldine Boelter, Mrs. A. Koester, Arthur Kempf, Lucille Sommer (Heidemann), Audrey Ruddy (Opitz), Mrs. James Palzl, Charlotte Fenske, Yvonne Schmolesky, Marjorie Bolduan, Mrs. F. E. Vetter, Mrs. Ronald Jahns, Marion Jeffers, Myron Hilger. *Second school:* Greg Obermiller (principal), Dawn Hinn, Susan Jahns, Ann Rautenberg, Rebecca Miller, Holly Schwefel, Susan Wright, Gwen North, Jennifer Wodack, Kathrine Raddatz, Aaron Hartwig (principal), Benjamin Raddatz, Marlee (Pyscher) Hill, and Steven Lehman.

Soli Deo Gloria!

“Soli Deo Gloria!” Glory to God alone! While the names of pastors, teachers, and members have been mentioned in this history, there are many more who have played an integral part in the founding, development, and strengthening of St. Paul's Lutheran Church. Yet, we confess that all humans are but instruments in the hand of the Master Builder. He gave us the Church's Head, the Lord Jesus. He gave us the unchanging Word, the Bible. And the Lord has given us the time, the various talents, and the bountiful materials and treasures it takes to serve him as his witnesses to the world.

Our prayer is one of thanksgiving. It also includes a request. We ask the Lord of the Church to bless richly our dear congregation of believers as it continues its second century in his unchanging grace.

*Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away.
Change and decay in all around I see;
O thou who changest not, abide with me.*

(Hymn 588 v. 2, *Christian Worship*)

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” Hebrews 13:8.