

Jesus Christ,
the same yesterday,
today and forever.

Hebrews 13:8

1897 St. John's Lutheran Church 1997

Remember Rejoice Renew

St. John's Lutheran Church ELCA

Le Mars, Iowa

Celebrating 100 Years



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Remember Rejoice Renew



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Preface

To reminisce about something, to talk about the good old days, to sit around and recall the time that, this is part of what makes us who we are.

Over the past year we have spent time remembering what has happened in this congregation. We have witnessed to the Love of God, in Christ Jesus, driving this congregation to do that which we are called to do. We have spent time remembering the ups and the downs of the life of this congregation. We have shed tears as we recall the heartaches. We have laughed at the special times. We have been uplifted with the joyous occasions. And all of this is good for us and good for the work of the Lord.

Every time we open scripture we are looking at a witness of the work of God among His creation. Every time we read of the accounts of God's people in the Bible we remember the great things God can and does do through His called ones. And I believe that this is something that God wants us to do.

All of this brings us to the reason for this book. The theme this year for our celebration has been "Remember, Rejoice, Renew." The intention of this book is to do just that. It will first give you a chance to remember. To remember not only what God has done through St. John's but to recall what has happened this past year. You may be stimulated to remember events of the past, both the recent and the not-so-recent past. You may even remember things that are not recorded in this book, which will further enhance your celebration.

And when we consider all that has happened; when we are reminded of all that God has done for us and for others through the mission of the congregation, we cannot help but rejoice. We rejoice in what we see. We rejoice in what we have participated in. We rejoice before God. And as you read this book, as you look at the pictures, it is our hope that you will rejoice that God has used this congregation for His witness and His Mission. If you should see a picture that you are in, rejoice that God has used you to proclaim Christ as Lord. If you should see some

who have passed on, rejoice in their life and what God has done through them to bring His love in the world. If you should see one of your family, one of your children, one of your neighbors, go to them and rejoice together. Use this book to help you as you respond to what you recall and remember. And respond by rejoicing.

But our theme also reminds us to renew ourselves. Of course only the Holy Spirit can bring about renewal. And I believe that the best way to renew yourself through the Holy Spirit is to teach others. Take this book and use it to tell the story to others. Show others what has been done in this congregation. Teach them what God does in people. Instruct them in the ways of God as found in this congregation. As you are teaching others you'll be renewed. You will be strengthened to continue in God's mission. You will be filled with God's love.

Remember Rejoice Renew. This book can do and does all these things. It is our hope and wish that as you read through this book, the Holy Spirit will help you remember all that God does for you, that you will rejoice before our Lord and Savior, and that you will be renewed in the Holy Spirit. Let God speak to you in and through this work of love.

Pastor Gary A. Landsness



*Pastor Gary Landsness, Josh Nelson,
Justin Luneburg. Photo January 26, 1997*



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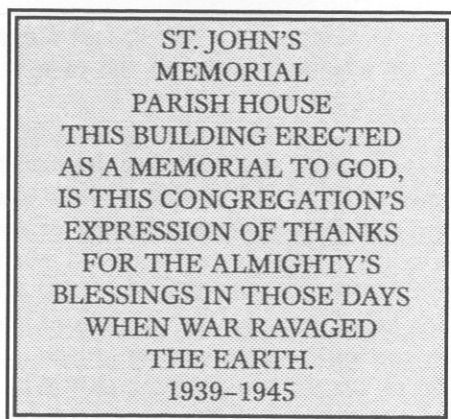


ST. JOHN'S 1908 CHURCH

By Jane Schultz, 1997



Memorial Parish Hall 1949



Memorial Parish House Plaque

stage with lighting facilities, dressing rooms, and storage space for costumes. There was a bowling alley with two lanes in the lower level.

A chapel, with seating for 155, was on the main level. Located on the east end of the chapel was a large bay window with a center stained glass window, "Christ the Good Shepherd." That window now enhances the north entry. Also on the main level were offices, a mother's room, and the foyer.

The Present Church

"It was moved and carried to vote by ballot to determine whether a new church should be built or to do a remodeling job. The vote was 107 for a new church and none for remodeling. It was therefore moved and carried to go on record to build a new church as soon as possible."

—Annual Congregation Meeting, January 4, 1948

While the new church was being built on the site of the 1936 church building, Sunday services, weddings, and

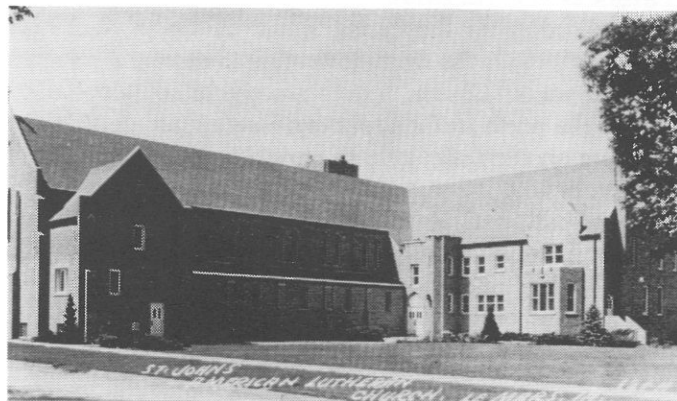
funerals were conducted in the Memorial Parish House Auditorium.

On June 5, 1949, a Cornerstone-Laying ceremony was held. The cornerstone is located on the east side of the church and has three dates—1908, 1936, 1950.

The following names, printed in the January 16, 1949, and March 12, 1950, dedication programs, were members of the Building Committee for both the parish house and church projects: Ole Anderson, William Baack, Alwin Becker, Rev. L.L. Belk (chairperson), John H. Brangwin, Herman Brunken, Earl Cooper, H. Doering, W. Dolieslager, R. Eyres, Glen Gearke, Melvin Gearke, William Gerrietts, Ed Hoppe, Melvin Johnson, John Kleine, Herbert Larson, Leonard Ludwig, Leslie Mann, Henry Meyer, Niels Mortensen, E. Neisius, E.E. Nelson, LaVern Pageler, Les Pecks, Henry Peters, Niels Petersen, Ralph Posthuma, W. Rozeboom, R. Schat, Donald Schmidt, Neil Shive, Harry Stief, Kenneth Thunhorst, Ed Utesch, John Vollmar, O. F. Vollmar (treasurer), Carl Witt, and Reinhard Witt.

The present church was dedicated March 12, 1950.

Both the parish house and church structures are of modified English Gothic design. The face brick is soft shades of light tan with Indiana limestone trim. The entire building project, parish house and church, was financed by the congregation at two-and-one-half percent interest on a twenty year bond issue at a cost of approximately \$300,000. The loan was paid in full five years before the maturity date.



St. John's 1950

Members contributed as they felt able on a voluntary basis and many memorials were given. Members also volunteered their labor and skill to the building projects.

Entering the nave, one is immediately impressed with the beautiful stained glass windows and high-vaulted, beamed ceiling. The stained glass window above the altar is composed of three lancets with the center lancet measuring 15 by 1 1/2 ft. It depicts the main theme, Christ the Ascended King. The four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, two in either side lancet, complete the subject. The nave windows are pictorial in their composition, taking the viewer on a journey of Christ's life. Each of the twenty clerestory windows depicts some of God's people, beginning with Abraham and ending with Luther. The Columbia Stained Glass Co., Milwaukee, Wisconsin,

made and installed all stained glass windows and doors. Rev. Belk and the Gawin Brothers, owners of the glass company, designed the art illustrated in the windows and doors. In 1954 a large plaque, "Sermons in Glass," explaining the windows was placed in the nave.

The altar with its hand carved ornamentation is the dominant focal point of the chancel. From 1950-1993, the pipe organ built by the Wicks Organ Company was in the chancel. Wood paneling around the altar and choir loft, designed by Rev. Belk, was completed in 1958. To the left of the chancel is the sacristy where stained glass windows depict Martin Luther and the nailing of the Ninety-five Theses on the door at Wittenberg. On the opposite side of the chancel is the Altar Guild room.

The many other beautiful stained glass windows throughout the complex were installed in the 1960s. They, too, were designed by Rev. Belk.

The church building measures 110 by 44 ft. In the lower level is a dining room with full kitchen. Seating capacity with tables is 260. The current dining room carpet was installed in 1989. Countless banquets, dinners, receptions, classes, Do Days, meetings, programs, and rehearsals have been held in the dining room!

On the morning of December 31, 1960, a fire started in the rheostat located in the narthex. It burned into and up the back narthex wall. Through the quick reaction of the church staff and Le Mars Fire Department, the fire was extinguished before a great deal of damage occurred.

Parish House Addition

Dedication for the Parish House Addition was held March 10, 1957, the third dedication event within a span of eight years. Costing approximately \$80,000, the addition to the north included sixteen classrooms. A 33 by 23 ft. room on the main level is currently used for Nursery Sunday School students and teachers' opening music service and can be divided into four classrooms with folding doors. A youth room with kitchen was included in the lower level.

The east entrance to the Parish House Addition is dominated by a large cross in stained glass. In the lobby area is a large stained glass window depicting the mission work of the Lutheran Church with the theme "LET THE CHILDREN COME TO ME." The art for the stained glass windows in the Parish House Addition was designed

by Rev. Belk, and created and installed by the Columbia Stained Glass Co.

Additional South Entrance.

Adding a second set of doors on the south side of the parish house was part of a remodeling project in 1966 improving traffic flow. The width of the interior south steps was tripled; the foyer was enlarged by moving the Parish Worker's office near the chapel; and two sets of doors with stained glass windows, between the foyer and narthex, were added. Total cost was \$15,244.03.

Parking Lot and Addition

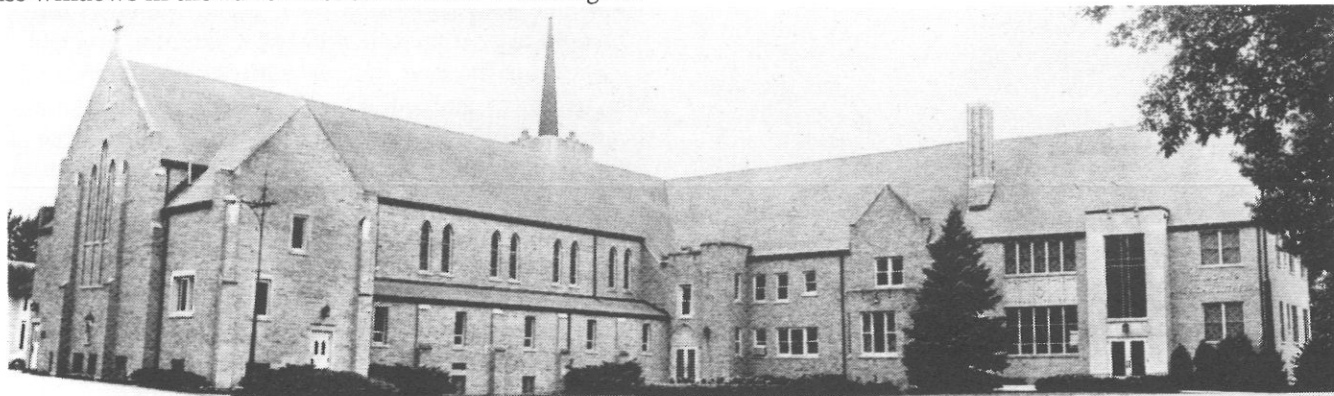
Shortly after Rev. Thomas Lee and Rev. David Kramer began serving St. John's (in 1979), the Building and Planning Committee was formed following the Church Council's approval for a "study" of a parking lot, office space, Sunday School classrooms, and accessibility for all. Members of the Building and Planning Committee were Margaret Adler, John E. Brangwin, William Harms, Fred Hamann, Sandra Ihrke, Lloyd Kallsen, Norman Lang, Don Law, Jim Powell (chairperson), John Rexwinkel, Richard Schultz, and Nathan Summerside.

A parking lot with seventy-five spaces was completed May 1981. It was built north of the church and cost \$43,768.43.

A notice of a special congregation meeting to be held Sunday, June 19, 1983, was mailed to the members of St. John's: "In accordance with Article X of the Constitution and Bylaws, and upon recommendation of the Church Council, notice is hereby given of a special meeting of the congregation to be convened on Sunday, June 19, 1983, at 9:45 a.m., at the church, for the purpose of approving a contract for the building/remodeling project as designed by the Beuttler, Olson, Lee Architectural firm, and proposed by the Building and Planning Committee of St. John's American Lutheran Church, Le Mars, Iowa."

The amount for the building and remodeling project totaled \$336,819. A motion was made and seconded to accept the bids followed by a ballot vote. Results: yes, 114, in favor of proceeding with the project; no, 55, not in favor of proceeding. The motion carried.

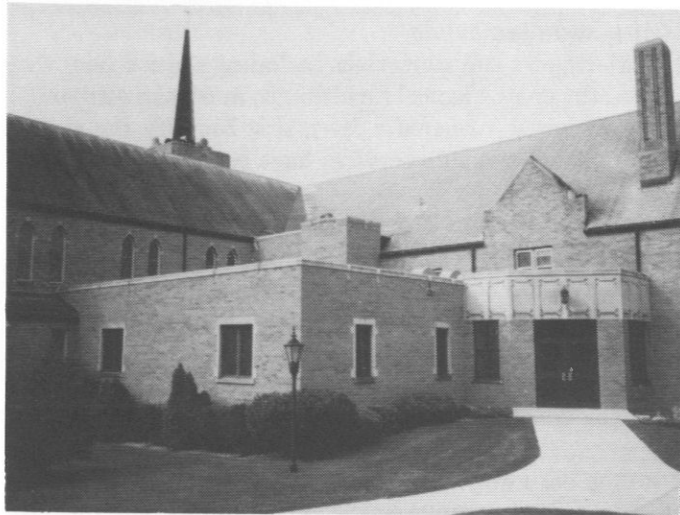
A sidewalk ramp from the parking lot led to the new north entrance, enlarged lobby, elevator, church staff



St. John's 1957

offices, library/lounge, and nursery. Sunday School classrooms were added in the lower level where the bowling alley had been located. A quilting room and choir room were also built in the lower level.

A ground breaking ceremony was held July 17, 1983. Dedication of the addition occurred September 9, 1984.



St. John's 1984 Addition

Redecorating and New Organ

In 1992 work began to build a new pipe organ in the balcony. To support the weight of the organ, reinforcement was needed in the narthex ceiling, under the balcony. After removing the asbestos from the ceiling, four steel beams were placed in the ceiling. The pews were removed from the balcony and a new hardwood floor was added. Acoustics were improved as well as painting and refinishing of woodwork throughout the sanctuary. Including remodeling, asbestos removal, and decorating, the cost was approximately \$22,000 plus \$4,000 for the gold leaf around the arches. The organ was dedicated April 25, 1993.

Air Conditioning

April 14, 1940, is the earliest church record concerning summer heat during worship services when "It was moved and carried, the Vestry Board investigate the possibilities to better ventilate and cool the church during the summer months." At the January 14, 1973, Annual Congregation Meeting, new business included plans to redecorate the sanctuary at an estimated cost of \$5,000. The motion passed. The issue of air conditioning was also discussed. "It was moved *not* to air condition the sanctuary. A written vote was taken after discussion was completed." Results: no-24 (to air condition); yes-90 (not to air condition). Exhaust fans, which pull warm air out of the nave, were added in 1975.

At the Congregation Annual Meeting, January 28, 1996, a motion was made to "approve to construct the air-conditioning with all alternates for a total cost of \$231,765." Results of the ballot vote: 89 yes and 75 no.

At a later meeting of the Congregation Council, the Council recommended that no construction of the air conditioning would begin until \$100,000 was raised in cash. That amount was reached August 1997.

Building and Grounds Committee

The Building and Grounds committee is "responsible for the proper management of the use and upkeep of the facilities." Serving on the committee are Margaret Adler, Kelly Beitelspacher, Curt Buss, Bruce Hanno, Cory Isebrand (Council member), Bernice and Bob Less, Joan Osterbuhr, Dennis Schmidt (custodian), Kenneth Utesch (chairperson), and Lois Winecoff.

Staff

Visiting and offering communion to the shut-ins have always been part of St. John's ministry. Rev. F.O. Bunge, Rev. William Striepe, and Rev. Arthur Grorud served the parish as visitation pastors. Celeste Stahmer served as lay visitor from 1988-1997, assisting Rev. David Kramer and Rev. Gary Landsness.

Maintaining the building and grounds of St. John's is the responsibility of custodian Dennis Schmidt. Kenneth Utesch and Judy and D.D. Schmidt are assistants. Past custodians of St. John's include Sharon Anderson, Caroline Barker, Don Beeck, Evelyn Hoyting, Anna Kluver, Tena Knorr, Deloris Kramer, Agnes Kuck, John H. Lubben, Micaiah Lubben, Hilbert Mc Clintock, Henry Meyer, Dennis and Marilyn Plueger, Barney Schomacker, Harry Stief, Ester and Kenneth Utesch, Betty Van Sickle, and Dora Wensel.

Maintaining the parish records of St. John's are Lynne Bogh, financial secretary, and Peggy Linstrand, administrative secretary. Past church office staff includes Sharon Johnson, Joni Ketelson, Norma Mohning Miller, Katie Munday, and Sharon Ufken.

Throughout the years, the office and custodial staff have been assisted by members who donated their time and talent. Answering the office phone, counting the offerings, shoveling snow-covered sidewalks, planting flowers, assembling the Congregation Annual Report, arranging flowers in the chancel, moving chairs and tables, adding inserts to bulletins, and cleaning are just some of the tasks completed by volunteers. *Danke!*

Pastors of St. John's

The Reverend Dr. Belk retired in 1968. During his pastorate, he was assisted by Pastors F.O. Bunge, Harold Tegtmeier, Robert Floy, and Arnold Imbrock.

From 1968 to 1978, Rev. Imbrock served St. John's as senior pastor. Also serving during Rev. Imbrock's ministry were Pastors Paul Tobiason, Donald Deines, William Striepe, and William Reck.

St. John's was served by Rev. Waldemar Gies and Rev. Gary Hunstad during 1978-1979. Both Rev. Thomas Lee and Rev. David Kramer were called to St. John's in 1979. Rev. Striepe continued as visitation pastor until his retirement in 1985. After Rev. Lee took an administrative posi-

tion with the ELCA in 1988, the Reverend Gary Landsness was called to St. John's. Plans were made to observe the retirement of Rev. Kramer scheduled for September 28, 1997.

Years served

1903 - 1935	John J. Vollmar
1935 - 1968	Louis L. Belk
1955 - 1957	Franz O. Bunge
1957 - 1959	Harold F. Tegtmeier
1960 - 1967	Robert D. Floy
1967 - 1978	Arnold F. Imbrock
1968 - 1971	Paul Tobiason
1971 - 1974	Donald Deines
1971 - 1985	William F. Striepe
1975 - 1977	William F. Reck
1978 - 1979	Waldemar D. Gies
1978 - 1978	Gary D. Hunstad
1979 - 1988	Thomas O. Lee
1979 - 1997	David A. Kramer
1987 - 1988	Arthur Grorud
1988 - Present	Gary P. Landsness

Sons and Daughters of the Congregation

Ministers

Peggy Hall	Harry Stief
Eugene Hanson	George Utech
Gary Hunstad	Mark Vander Tuig
Charles Knorr	Stephen Vander Tuig
Hans Lee	Mark Wilms
Curtis Miller	Jean Engelbrecht Zeittlow
Parish Worker	
Norma Mohning Miller	

St. John's Interns

Wesley Baasen	Bob Larson
Beth Graham	Larry Reyelts
Eugene Hanson	Deb Warness
George Krumrey	

Gifts and Memorials

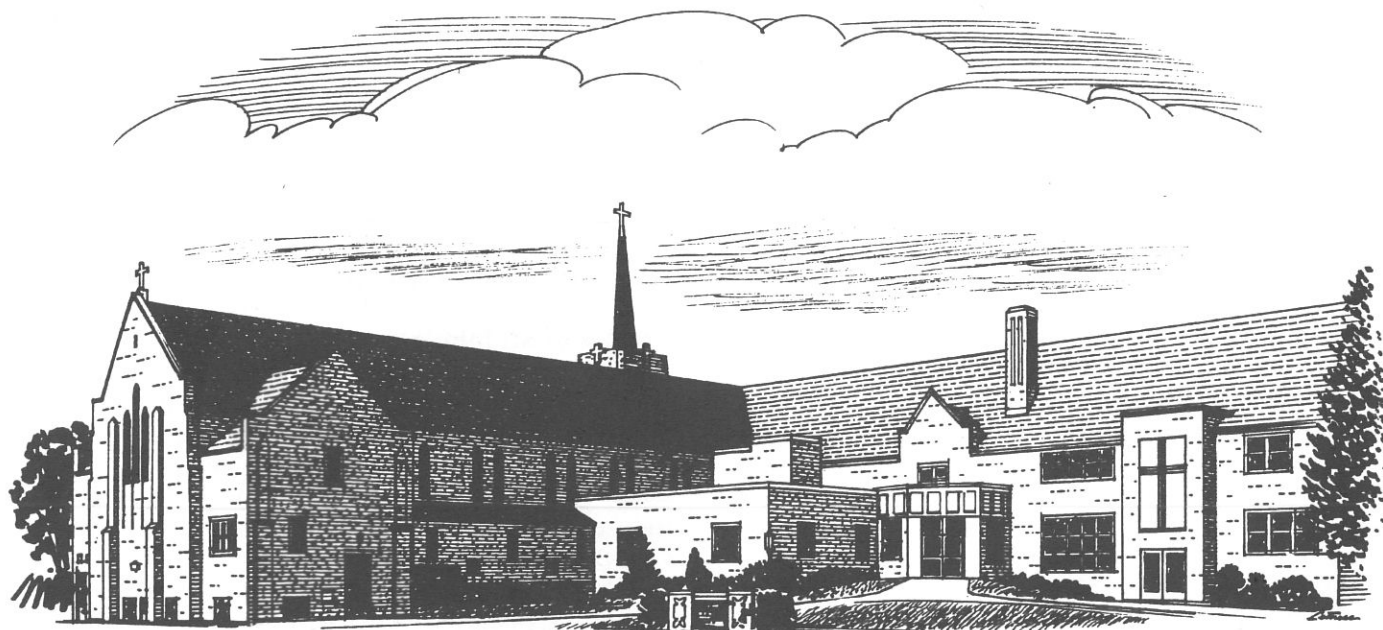
Many gifts and memorials, including stained glass windows, the cross, chancel furnishings, musical instruments, and art work (to name a few), that beautify the church and enhance worship services have been presented to St. John's.

Special mention is given of the memorial gifts presented in honor of five St. John's servicemen who died during World War II. The names of the servicemen and memorials: Harm Kock, pulpit, Russell Rohlfen, altar; Henry Ommen, north pastor's chair; William Bradley, south pastor's chair; and Norman DeJager, lectern. Small brass plaques on each item list the names of the remembered servicemen.

One need only read the list of names on the plaque in the narthex, the plaque on the door leading to the Heritage Room, and the Memorial Book in the foyer to appreciate the immensity of all gifts and memorials.

St. John's 1997

Once located on just Lot Six, St. John's now encompasses one-half of a city block. St. John's Lutheran Church ELCA is a loved, respected, and beautiful house of worship whose doors are open to all.



Lutheran Brotherhood Plymouth County, Iowa, Branch 8073 presented an ink drawing to St. John's in recognition of its 100th anniversary. The drawing, reprinted above, was reproduced from a photograph. The original framed drawing hangs in the church lobby.

Worship Services and Hymns of Praise

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever. Hebrews 13:8

God comes to us and we come to Him during worship service. The Lord gives us strength and blesses us with peace. The following history tells the changes in the worship services at St. John's within the past one hundred years. With changes in language, seating arrangements, hymnals, and order of worship, the Word of God has not changed. St. John's Centennial Hymn, "Yesterday, Today, Forever," written by John Ylvisaker in 1996, presents that message.

Yesterday, Today, Forever

Hebrews 13

John Ylvisaker 1996



1. Yes - ter - day, to - day for-ev - er:
2. Tho the earth is al - ways chang-ing: Je-sus is ev - er the same!
3. E - ven tho my friends for-sake-me:
4. When my pace is go - ing slow - er:



He will be our lov - ing Sa - vior:
All cre - a - tion re - ar - rang - ing: Je-sus is ev - er the same!
E - vil can - not o - ver take me:
And my life is near - ly o - ver:



Lift your voi - ces, raise the strain Je-sus is ev - er the same!



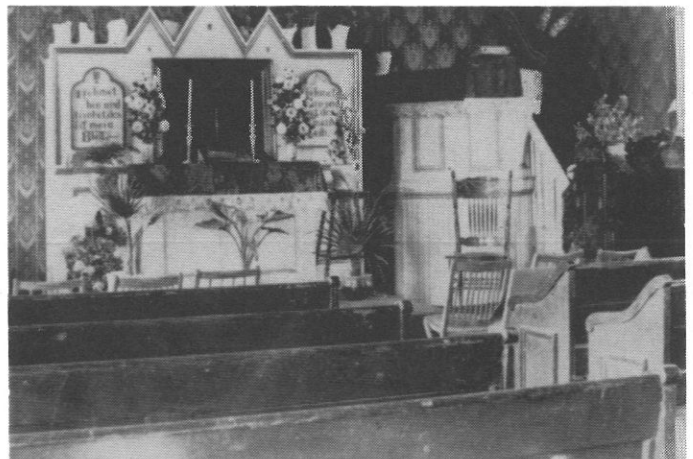
Sing to the Lord a glad re - frain: Je-sus is ev - er the same!

Worship services were held only several times a year for the members of Evangelical Lutheran St. John's Congregation beginning in 1897. They were served by missionary ministers who traveled from church to church in Northwest Iowa. Because the preachers' stops were not on a regular schedule, two members of the young congregation conducted informal worship services. "Many years ago when St. John's church ground was going to revert to the railroad company, on account of a proviso in the deed that if no services were held the property would revert to the company, and the congregation had dwindled to next to nil, and there was no preacher, John Pageler and Barney Schomacker held regular services and were on some occasions almost the only attendants,"—Obituary of John H. Pageler (b. 1843 d. 1923).

St. John's has been blessed with musicians who accompany our hymns of praise. Kathrina M. Wilters (b. 1879 d. 1919) was St. John's first organist. Whenever worship services were held, she played the reed pump organ. (No photo of Kathrina M. Wilters could be located.) The

hymnbooks were written in German.

Rev. J.J. Vollmar, the first resident pastor, was called to St. John's in 1903. Several of Rev. Vollmar's hand-written sermons were recently found. Attempts were made to



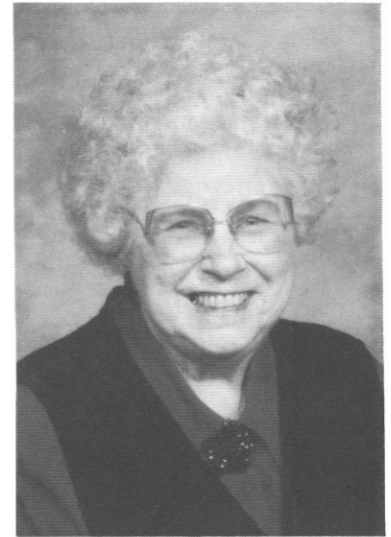
St. John's Sanctuary circa 1899



Kathryn Vollmar



Johanna Schultz



Anna Witt

translate *der Pfarrer's* messages, but each failed. *Ich bedauere das sehr. Schade!*

St. John's second organist was Kathryn Bauman Vollmar (b. 1883 d. 1971). Following her March 8, 1905, marriage to Rev. Vollmar and move to her new home in Le Mars, Mrs. Vollmar played the reed pump organ for Sunday services in the first church and later in the new 1908 structure. She also accompanied the Senior Choir directed by her husband. Records were not found concerning the number of years Kathrina Wilters and Kathryn Vollmar played the organ.

The first Lutheran English hymnal with music was published in 1908 by the English District of the Joint Synod of Ohio and Other States. However, the congregation preferred to use the German hymnal.

Johanna Hacker Schultz (b. 1897 d. 1995) began playing the organ in 1912 and served as St. John's organist for a total of thirty-seven years within the span of 1912-1963. During an interview January 24, 1995, with a member of the Centennial Heritage Committee, Mrs. Schultz recalled church services. She stated that many years ago women sat on the south side, men on the north side during church, and communion was served four times a year. She also remembered how offerings were taken at church.

The offering was collected in the *klengelbeutel*, a black bag, with a bell, fastened at the end of a long, slender, lightweight pole. As the deacon passed the bag along in front of everyone in the pews, (being careful not to poke anyone or knock off a woman's hat), the offerings were dropped into the bag.

A new Hinners pipe organ was purchased in 1914. Four hundred dollars toward the purchase price of the organ was donated by the Ladies Aid. The organ was equipped with electrically operated bellows. When there was a power failure (a common occurrence), it would be pumped by hand by the custodian.

Anna Siebens Witt was the Head Organist from 1922 until 1959, a total of thirty-seven years.

The *American Lutheran Hymnal*, copyright 1930, was the result of a movement that originated in the Evangelical



Sanctuary circa 1908

Lutheran Synod of Iowa and Other States. It was compiled and edited by an Intersynodical Committee. Starting in 1930, St. John's used the brown hymnal for worship services during the next thirty years. The Ladies Aid purchased fifty additional hymnals for the congregation in 1939.

The 1908 church was enlarged and remodeled in 1936. The custom of men sitting on one side and women sitting on the other side was no longer practiced in 1937, but there was concern with other seating arrangements. "It was suggested that the ushers try to move the children closer to the front of the auditorium for the church services, giving the adults



Marie Lubben



Minnie Frerichs

more room in the back part of the auditorium. This was thoroughly discussed. No action was taken,"—Quarterly Congregation Meeting, April 11, 1937.

Marie E. Johnson Lubben (b. 1898 d. 1972) and Minnie Frerichs (b. 1904 d. 1974) were St. John's organists during the 1930s. They played the Hinners pipe organ.

By 1937, the German language was no longer used at church services in many parts of the country. However, once a month, it was still part of St. John's. On the first Sunday of each month, an English service was held during the early (first) service and a German service was held during the late (second) service. On July 7, 1937, the Vestry Board discussed the worship services held on the first Sunday of the month. It was suggested that the English service be shortened to allow the German service to begin promptly at 11:00 a.m.

Both German and English worship services continued to be held at St. John's until the early-1940s. Minutes from the December 8, 1942, Vestry Board illustrated a bold move: "German Services be confined to festive days, at the decision of the Pastor." The pastor was the Reverend L.L. Belk. Soon thereafter, German services were discontinued.



Sanctuary circa 1945

While the present church was being built, an electronic organ was purchased for temporary use during services held in the Auditorium of the newly built Memorial Parish House. A pipe organ for the 1950 newly constructed sanctuary was built by the Wicks Organ Company at a cost of \$6,000, using some of the pipes from the 1914 Hinners organ. The organ and choir loft were located in the chancel.

Joyce Steinbach Hagen served as St. John's organist

from 1952 to 1972. She also served as the Director of the Senior Choir, High School Choir, and Catechism Choir, as well as Director of Music during this period of time.

The *Service Book and Hymnal* of the Lutheran Church in America was published in 1958 by the churches which later formed The American Lutheran Church. On January 22, 1961, members from St. John's and



Joyce Hagen

several area Lutheran churches met at St. John's to become better acquainted with the liturgical service printed in the new red hymnals. Use of the *Service Book and Hymnal* continued until 1979. St. John's began printing the order of worship service in bulletins in 1964.

Head Ushers and Assistant Head Ushers were elected by the congregation, and there was a crew of ushers who assisted them each Sunday. The deacons who were elected to the Church Board had the responsibility for "church decorum (dignity, always present, good conduct, things run smoothly) and usher crew" as stated in the February 7, 1957, Church Board minutes. The deacons served as acolytes, rang the church bell, collected the offerings, and ushered at all funerals. The ushers were encouraged to fill the nave before seating anyone in the balcony. Seating arrangements were again a concern in 1967 when the Church Board "agreed that occasional reminders should appear in the bulletins that the last three church pews are for parents with small children,"—Church Board September 11, 1967, minutes.

There were some significant changes in worship service during the 1970s. To accommodate those who planned to spend Sunday "out-of-town" during the summer months of 1970, Sunday services were held at 6:30 a.m. in addition to the 8:30 and 10:45 a.m. services. For a short time in 1973, worship services were held Thursdays at 9:15 p.m. for those unable to attend on Sundays. Then, during the summer of 1980, Thursday evening worship services were again held, but only for several weeks.

A note of interest to the fashion world of the late 1990s: listed in a 1970s newsletter was a suggestion that men wear suits or sports coats with neckties and women not wear slacks or pantsuits to church. Wearing mini-skirts to church was also discouraged.

Miriam Tollefson Mitchell (b. 1936 d. 1985) was the organist from 1972-1984. In 1972, worship services included a traditional wor-



Miriam Mitchell

ship service (8:30 a.m.) and a contemporary worship service (10:45 a.m.). Two-hundred-fifty copies of *Contemporary Worship II* were ordered.

For nearly seventy-five years, the common cup was used at communion. Each communicant, those who had been confirmed, was served wine from a chalice. During some of the early years, no music was played or sung during the distribution of communion and services were held only on festival days. As the years passed, communion was served more times a year. Throughout 1971 communion was held on the first Sunday of each month at 2:00 p.m. with both the common cup for those sitting in the south pews and individual cups for those sitting in the north pews. Individual cups only were used on the third Sunday of each month at the 10:45 service. Announcement cards were handed to an usher before one entered the nave. Beginning the following year, the Sacrament of Holy Communion was given through bread and individual glasses of wine or grape juice, only.

On September 25, 1977, a special meeting was called by Congregation President Carl Schelin for the purpose of voting on the proposal to install a new pipe organ in the balcony at a cost of \$125,000. The result: 76 voted yes for a new organ; 153 voted no; and there were three spoiled ballots.

In 1979 St. John's had two new pastors, Rev. Thomas Lee and Rev. David Kramer. The church also had a new hymnal. Donations of \$7.50 for each copy of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (green hymnal) were requested and 490 hymnals were ordered. Many of the hymnals were purchased by the ALCW. For several months, hymns were sung from the green hymnal while the liturgy from the red hymnal was used. Worship services began full use of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* September 23, 1979. Additional hymnals were purchased and are used during present worship services.

Three hymns in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*—No. 152 "Look, Now He Stands," No. 255 "Lord, Receive This Company," and No. 466 "Great God, Our Source"—were written by George Utech, son of the Congregation.

By 1979 the Sacrament of Holy Communion was given two times a month on Sundays as well as at church festivals. Beginning October 21, 1979, communion was no longer given to a Table of twelve to fourteen people who all knelt at the altar railing and then departed from the altar following a blessing. Also, those who partook in the Sacramental Meal no longer had to leave the altar through the sacristy to return to their seats. Instead, Continuous Communion, a way of affirming that we are one family coming to the Table of our Lord, began being served and a blessing given after all had received communion. Several bulletins during the remainder of 1979 included illustrated maps detailing the directions for the procedure.

Additional changes for worship services took place during the next decade. In 1980 a group of thirteen newly confirmed youth were trained to be acolytes by Norma Mohning Miller. Rev. Kramer began giving Children's Sermons in 1980. At the 1981 Annual Meeting, an



Sanctuary 1996

amendment to the Constitution by-laws was passed, "Early Communion. Preparation for Holy Communion will normally be provided for persons as young as 10 years of age." Also in 1981, new pew cushions were added, and pews located by the pillars were shortened improving accessibility for worshippers. In 1982, St. John's first used female ushers.

St. John's celebrated its 85th anniversary in 1982. A mission statement was written and a banner/quilt based on the statement was made. The large banner was placed on the balcony wall where it hung for several years.

Sandra Dahlman Curry served as St. John's organist from 1984 until mid-1986. Sandra later served St. John's music ministry as assistant organist and Director of the Cherub, Chancel, Handbell, and Junior Handbell Choirs.

Saturday evening worship services began in 1986 during the months of June, July, and August. By 1992 Saturday services were held throughout the year at 5:30 p.m. and continued during the Centennial year in addition to the 8:15 and 10:45 a.m. Sunday services.

Helen Bonnema Mitchell began substituting as organist in 1985 and assumed the duties of organist from the summer of 1986 until June 1987.

Susan Hill Ihnen joined the music staff in 1981 as assistant organist. She was St. John's organist and Minister of Music from 1987 until 1994. The Terrible



Sandra Curry



Helen Mitchell



Susan Ihnen

Parable Players directed by Craig Ihnen began giving Children's Sermons in 1988, and continued until 1994 when the Ihnen family moved to West Des Moines, Iowa.

A memorial gift of a baby grand piano was donated to St. John's in 1989 and placed in the nave. It is used to accompany choirs, soloists (both vocal and instrumen-

tal), and the congregation during Hymn Sings. Hymn Sings began July 1989 and are held each July.

The congregation realized a need for a new organ. The 1989 Congregation Council appointed the Organ Committee: Arliss Anderson, Sandra Curry, Sandra Ihrke, Richard Schultz (chairperson), Nathan Summerside, Deanne Tibben, Jake Van Oort, and ex-officio members Jim Brownmiller, Susan Ihnen, Pastor David Kramer, and Brian Michaelson.

On April 28, 1991, a special congregation meeting was held to vote on the Organ Committee's recommendation. A proposal for a new pipe organ to be located in the balcony at the cost of \$326,400 was made and seconded with discussion following.

An amendment to the motion—that two-thirds of the funds be available in cash before building the organ—was seconded and passed by a hand vote count, 128 yes, 95 no. A second amendment was proposed that two-thirds of the money be pledged rather than having cash on hand was seconded but failed by a hand vote count, 115 no, 96 yes.

A ballot vote was taken on the organ proposal as amended with the count as 128 yes votes, 128 no votes. Council President Nancy Curry Dill broke the tie vote by voting yes to the organ proposal. The needed two-thirds of cash on hand was quickly raised by donations. The remainder of the money was borrowed through member loans.



Organ

Organ construction began in 1992 and the J.F. Nordlie Company organ was dedicated Sunday, April 25, 1993. With donations, the organ debt was paid in full May 1996. All organ expenses, including balcony work, totaled \$341,703.

Charlene Stoneking Lubben began serving as assistant organist

in 1991, playing at the Saturday services. She continues in that position. Within the past forty years, other assistant organists include Marge Gile, Gary Hunstad, Martha Bunge Pageler, Shari Solberg Sitzmann, Jeannette Tobiasson, and Becky Weidauer. Student organists have also given their talent during worship services.

A *Hymnal Supplement*, (maroon hymnal) published in 1991 by GIA Publications, was first used during worship services in 1992. A Clavinova digital piano was a memorial gift to St. John's in 1994.

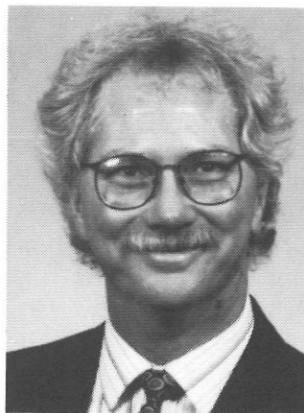
Joining St. John's music staff during 1994 were Paul Crandell, Minister of Music, and Kay Bruhn Koch, organist. Past Directors of Music include Bob Becker, Joyce Hagen, Frank Summerside, Wayne Mitchell, and Susan Ihnen.

As St. John's moved into the next one hundred years, there were changes within the ELCA. At the ELCA Churchwide Assembly August 14-20, 1997, the delegates approved "full communion" with the Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church of America, and United Church of Christ.

While there are many descendants with ties to the culture of St. John's founding fathers, the membership includes many different ethnic backgrounds. The membership of St. John's Lutheran Church ELCA on July 14, 1997, was 1,568.

Choirs

Choirs have added their beautiful music to the worship services since the early 1900s when Rev. Vollmar directed the Senior Choir. St. John's is blessed with musi-



Paul Crandell

cal talent! Rejoice!

Members of St. John's choirs have been outfitted with choir robes since the early years. A choir robe cost \$4.25 in the late 1930s. Small wooden crosses were purchased by the Vestry Board and presented to all members of the Junior Choir in 1939. Members of the Women's Chorus



Charlene Lubben



Kay Koch

made their robes, blue skirts and white tops, in 1950. Seventy choir robes and seventy sets of stoles were purchased in 1968. The price was \$1,625. On June 23 of that year, the Chancel and Senior choirs wore their new robes which featured V style stoles in liturgical colors worn during the appropriate church year season. In 1989, fifty adult choir robes and fifty sets of stoles were purchased. The cost of the robes and stoles, one hundred dollars each, was paid by memorials, choir member donations, and Worship Committee budgeted funds. First used at Christmas 1989, the robes are currently worn by Singspirations, Senior Choir, and St. John's Handbell Choir.

The choirs had rules and regulations developed by Rev. Dr. L.L. Belk during the 1950s and 1960s:

- 1) The choirs are service groups of St. John's Lutheran Church, and as such, are subject to the jurisdiction of the church board.
- 2) Membership in the choirs shall be limited to those who are willing to sacrifice their time for regular rehearsals, and for such extra rehearsals as the projects of the choir demand; and who prove by their regular attendance that they are interested in rendering this service.
- 3) New prospects are expected to be present at three consecutive regular rehearsals, and participate in two regular services before being considered active members.
- 4) Only active members are eligible to participate in any special projects undertaken by the choir.
- 5) Choir members are expected to conduct themselves in all dignity and order during rehearsals as well as during the worship hour. Failure to comply with this rule shall be sufficient grounds for losing membership in the choir.
- 6) Officers shall be elected by the choirs annually, and quarterly business meetings shall be held to transact such business as the group finds necessary.

Choir participation expanded in the 1950s and 1960s. The Senior Choir performed a Christmas Cantata, Handel's "Messiah," and Easter anthems during these years. They also went Christmas caroling for shut-ins and the residents of care centers. During the May 25, 1997, Centennial Celebration, a Senior Reunion Choir sang "With a Voice of Singing." Ben Kornelis serves as St. John's Senior Choir Director and Kay Koch is accompanist.

Under the leadership of Bob Becker and Joyce Hagen, a Chancel Choir (high school youth) began in the 1950s. Later, Frank Summerside became the director. Children's participation increased greatly during this time also. As the catechism program was expanded to five years (six years for a brief period), a Catechism Choir also was formed in addition to the Junior Choir. A Cherub Choir was organized by Norma Mohning Miller in September 1957 with thirty members. With the expansion of the choirs, the Ladies Aid and Brotherhood purchased some of the choir robes. The Junior and Children's choirs were separated from the catechism program and became part of the music department in 1971.

Present children's choirs include Alleluia Choir, Dawn Richards, director and Kathy Frerichs, accompanist; Chorister Choir, Cindy Johnson, director and Charlene Lubben accompanist; and Junior Choir, Denice Leners,

director and Shari Sitzmann, accompanist. During the Centennial year the Alleluia Choir added the ringing of bells to their songs.

Twila Borchers, JoEllen Cronin, Kathy Frerichs, Marlys Frerichs, Elvira Nielsen, Sandy Olson, and Mary Klopp, piano accompanist, organized Singspiration Six as part of St. John's music ministry in 1978. The name was changed to Singspirations in 1995, and they have represented St. John's at many community events. Cristi Bauerly is the accompanist.

The 1984 addition to the church provided a choir room in the lower level where practices are held for several choirs each week. A new piano in the choir room was a recent addition.

For many years, a single trumpeter, including Dave Renken, Paul Lubben, and Chris Bates, would stand near the organ in the chancel playing a trumpet fanfare and accompaniment to the congregation on Easter Sunday worship services to the strains of "Jesus Christ is Risen Today."



*Dave Renken playing trumpet and accompanied by Kay Koch.
Photo September 28, 1997*

Multiple brass instruments were first used in worship services at St. John's in 1987. Dave Renken (trumpet), Kris Rollinger (trombone), Marta Hemmingson (French horn), and Erin Lang (trumpet)

were accompanied in performances by Helen Mitchell, organist.

With the reorganization of St. John's Music Department under the direction of Susan Ihnen, Minister of Music, the Brass Choir was organized in the fall of 1987 with Dave Renken as director. In 1989 James Schroeder



Brass Choir directed by James Schroeder

joined Dave Renken as co-director, a position they both continue to serve. Performances include special worship services and an extended half-hour prelude performance at the Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship service.

Brass Choir members from St. John's since 1987 include Bruce Borchers, Preston Crandell, Kirsten Harden, Niels Harden, Curt Harman, Marta Hemmingson, Ann Kindwall, Erin Lang, Paul Lubben, Curtis Nelson, Adam Powell, Dave Renken, Beth Renken, Kris Rollinger, Ellie Schnepf, Kristin Schroeder, Erika Seaton, Chris Stelzer, Paul Utesch, Stephanie Young, and Steve Young.

Also organized in 1987 was St. John's Handbell Choir. Original members were Phyllis Bates, Lynne Bogh, Sandra Curry (director), Cory Harman, Kathy Frerichs, Marlys Frerichs, Iris Hemmingson, Audrey Kindwall, John and Lorene Rexwinkel, Dianne Rotta, Ellen Russell, Beth Strub, and Margaret Swenson. As well as playing at worship services, the Handbell Choir played at several weddings and community events during the past ten years. Marcia Young is the current Handbell Choir director. A Junior Handbell Choir, composed of catechism students, played during 1994-1996 and was directed by Sandra Curry.

The Men's Chorus was organized in 1989 and included Steve Anderson (director), Ross Harden, Jerry Ihrke, Roger Klopp, Stan Lubben, John Rexwinkel, Kevin Richards, Ray Seaton, Mike Schmidt, and Mat Trotzig. Terri Pauling is the accompanist. They have also sung at several community events.

Music has been performed by St. John's choirs, small groups, and soloists for the visitors waiting to be guided to "Bethlehem." Throughout the afternoons of each Bethlehem Revisited-1982, 1984, 1987, 1991, 1995-Christmas music has been enjoyed.

Through the Artist Series Committee, several guest organists and choirs presented concerts and workshops at St. John's during recent years.

Members of the Alleluia Choir, Brass Choir, Choristers, Handbell Choir, Junior Choir, Men's Chorus, Singspirations, and Senior Choir provided special music at worship services during the Centennial year. Worship services throughout the year were also enriched with music performed by many individuals, vocalists and instrumentalists. Singing the Centennial Hymn by the congregation was also a part of the Centennial Celebration.



Alleluia Choir, front row, from left: Ashlee Draayer, Kelsey Peyton, Caitlin Bauerly, Michael Leonard, Nicholas Cronin, Zachary Lancaster; second row: Emily Nieman, Jenelle Michaelson, Ben Beitelspacher, Jason Cook, Ben Strub, Brodie Rowe; third row: Shayla Rowe, Morgan Harden, Ashley Knapp, Allen Oetken, Joe Beitelspacher, Colin Richards, Craig Draayer, Devin Dowling; back row: Kathy Frerichs, accompanist; Dawn Richards, director. Photo October 20, 1996



Choristers Choir, front row, from left: Rachel Landsness, Kelsey Bauerly, Amanda Knapp, Jennie Hansen; second row: Brian Stelzer, Brandon Shostak, Ian Richards, Zackary Strub; third row: Keshia Anderson, Jared Hansen, Adam Michaelson, Matthew Peyton; back row: Charlene Lubben, accompanist, Laura Peters, Cindy Johnson, director. Photo October 24, 1996



Men's Chorus, front row, from left: Stan Lubben, Ray Seaton, Steve Anderson, Mat Trotzig, Mike Schmidt, back row: John Rexwinkel, Paul Crandell, Jerry Ihrke, Roger Klopp. Photo October 4, 1997



Singspirations, front row, from left: Lynne Bogh, Kathy Frerichs, Marlys Frerichs, JoEllen Cronin; back row: Cristi Bauerly, accompanist, Lorene Rexwinkel, Twila Borchers, Rachel Westhoff. Photo April 27, 1997



Senior Choir, front row, from left: MaryAnn Schmidt, Marlys Frerichs, Cindy Johnson, Sally De Boer, Kathy Frerichs; second row: Margaret Adler, Rachel Westhoff, Arliss Anderson, Ben Kornelis, director; back row: Ross Harden, Mark Stelzer, Garth Johnson, Paul Crandell. Photo May 25, 1997



Handbell Choir, front row, from left: Bev. Nelson, Jane Snyder, Teri Herrig, Jeannette Davis, Dianne Rotta, Lisa Brangwin, Marcia Young, director; back row: Kathy Stelzer, Ellen Russell, Sue Stream, Phyllis Bates, Audrey Kindwall, Sandra Ihrke. Photo April 24, 1997

A Junior Choir photo was not available.



St. John's Parish Education

Then children were brought to Him that He might lay His hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, Let the children come to me and do not hinder them: for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 19:13, 14

Parish Education – The Early Years

Matthew 4:23 tells us that Jesus traveled all through Galilee teaching and preaching the Good News about the kingdom of Heaven. Martin Luther believed that education was the foundation of the church and that all people should be able to read and study the Bible. For this reason he wrote the catechism, so that parents could teach their children.

St. John's Lutheran Church in Le Mars has taken very seriously its responsibility to teach God's word to all who would hear it. If only one generation fails in passing on God's word, then the message of the Good News will falter. Our history is rich with evidence of our congregation's work in education.

During Pastor J.J. Vollmar's ministry, Sunday School, Ladies Aid, and Senior Choir were the primary activities of the church. It was during his ministry that St. John's built its foundation of religious education.

In the mid-1930s the religious education program of St. John's grew tremendously. Materials from our church publishing houses were the basis of a strong program. The use of coordinated material provided a well-rounded education for all who participated through the years. The program was all-inclusive in Bible history, church history, catechism, and worship. St. John's program became a model for the national parish education department of the American Lutheran Church. National parish education committee members visited St. John's to observe the Sunday School and catechism programs.

Mrs. L.L. Belk began a teacher training course of study. Some teachers attended training sessions at our church colleges and were taught by college professors and national parish educators. Teacher training was continued at our local parish and area workshops. November 1941 Sunday School minutes report regulations on who could serve as teachers. A teacher must be a communicant member of the church, shall possess a thorough Christian character, shall be present every Sunday morning if possible and on time, and shall attend teachers' meetings. There are Sunday School teachers meetings' minutes from April 1937 to December 1957 on file.

A goal of five hundred children attending Sunday School was reached on April 26, 1953. More than 200 adults attended Sunday School at the same time. Attendance of more than 700 in Sunday School became a common occurrence during the 1950s and 1960s. Sunday School was held year round. Attendance awards were presented, then in 1951 that was changed to Christmas gifts. The awards and gifts were Christian art and literature.

In the early days of our congregation, the Sunday School offerings financed the Parish Education Department. All materials and supplies were purchased with money from the



Photo June 12, 1997

offerings. The Sunday School also contributed regularly to the building fund. The church board was anxious that the church should enjoy the baptismal altar, the new communion railing, and the railing at the head of the two front pews. The church board suggested that instead of turning over a regular payment to the building fund that year, the Sunday School funds be used to assist in that project. It was moved, seconded, and duly carried that the Sunday School undertake that project in connection with the Luther League.

Adult Bible Class offering the first Sunday of each month went for landscaping around the parish house after the completion of the building in 1949-50. Missionary sponsorship was another important part of the Sunday School program.

In August 1962 the present parish education committee structure was formed. Prior to that time, the Sunday School staff served as the committee and made all decisions concerning the parish education departments. The committee reported to the church board.—Audrey Kindwall and Norma Mohning Miller.

Cradle Roll

Since 1948 St. John's has provided Christian education for children from birth to three years of age in the Cradle Roll program. Beginning with the baptism of their child, parents receive information for three years. Members of the Missionary Study Circle addressed and mailed the Cradle Roll material shortly after the program began and continued until 1951. The church office mailed the information during the next several years until 1976 when volunteers again took over this task. Since 1991, Darlene Gronemeyer has volunteered to address and mail the Cradle Roll material to approximately forty-two families each month. The present Cradle Roll material, "Nurturing God's Child," is from Augsburg Publishing House.

Catechism Program

Catechism classes, taught in the German language by Rev. J.J. Vollmar, began at St. John's in 1903. The first class of confirmands included George J.H. Helms, Bertha M. Klohs, Martin Mammen, Anna S. Ruhsen, and Freda

L.J. Stoll. These adults were confirmed in 1904. Later during Rev. Vollmar's pastorate, there were catechism classes on Saturday mornings (older students) and confirmation classes (younger students) on Thursday afternoons. Classes were for four years, beginning in grade four and coinciding with the public school year.

Catechism report cards were issued until the early 1950s. No classes were confirmed in 1906, 1914, 1930, and 1970. Records cannot be found concerning the years 1906, 1914, and 1930, but confirmation was changed from eighth grade to occur during students' ninth grade in 1970. The catechism program was five years in length until 1980. Classes were changed from Saturday mornings to Thursday nights also during that year. Ninth grade catechism students participated in bi-monthly week-end retreats during a few years in the 1980s. Another change occurred in the fall of 1996 when an adult monitor was present to remind students to be on their best behavior. *Luther's Catechism*, first published in 1529, has been studied by all St. John's students.

During St. John's Centennial Celebration, the catechism program included students in grades seven, eight, and nine who met from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on Thursday evenings during the school year. Two parents participated with each class weekly. Each student had two community service projects to gain insight into the church in action. Ninth graders were required to attend three church committee meetings during the year to better understand the operation of the church. Each ninth grade student had a Congregation Council mentor. Confirmation was held for twenty-five ninth graders during a Passion Sunday Centennial Celebration worship service March 23, 1997. Rev. David Kramer and Rev. Gary

Landsness officiated during the rite of confirmation.

Photographs of St. John's confirmation classes begin on page 23.

Choralation Celebration

Choralation Celebration began for catechism students in February 1995. The readings for Choralation Celebration were planned by the director, Barbara Shostak, and found in various anthologies. Choralation Celebration presented their first reading during worship service March 5, 1995.

The 1996-1997 members presented their message at a Centennial worship service and to area churches during the year.



Choralation Celebration, from left: Bethany Jones, Brigitte Peyton, Kari Justice, Brad Powell, Teresa Shostak, Bret Powell, Kim Elliott. Photo May 24, 1997



Vacation Bible School Staff, front row, from left: Cindy Johnson, Valerie Schettler, Kari Justice, Sara Tyler, Teresa Shostak, Brigitte Peyton, Arlene Tapper, and Pastor Gary Landsness; second row: Michelle Schettler, Jillian Alons, Lori Palmer, Julie Albert, Diane Chindlund, Judy Peters-Schulz; third row: Jennifer Christiansen, Malea Christiansen, Alison Hanno, Julie Hensel; fourth row: JoEllen Cronin, Belinda Ladenthin, Lynette Borchers, Kymberly Rich, Vicki Borchers; back row: Judy Renken, Patricia Kramer, Chris Knapp, Kay Michaelson, Josh Nelson, Kim Palmer, Dianne Rotta. Photo June 12, 1997

Vacation Bible School

Daily Vacation Bible School began in July 1949 with morning sessions for three weeks. Refreshments were prepared by members of the Ladies Aid in the church's new kitchen. Attendance ranged from 160 to more than 200 including staff and students. Vacation Bible School sessions were changed to two weeks of morning sessions in 1954 with 243 in attendance. During some years, attendance was 400 or more.

In the mid 1980s, Vacation Bible School sessions lasted all day for one week in early June. In 1991, VBS was held for three days, 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and children brought their own lunches. Beginning in 1992, only morning sessions were held.

Because of a severe winter in Le Mars resulting in several "snow days" in the public school, the 1997 Vacation Bible School was held June 9 to June 13, one week later than in recent years. Vacation Bible School included children from age three through seventh grade and used the material, "Adventure Fair God's Kids in Action!"

There was an average attendance of 226 students, teachers, and staff who enjoyed Bible lessons, arts and crafts, and games. Cookies, provided by members of the congregation, and Kool Aid were refreshments.

Christmas Programs

For many years, children presented a program on Christmas Eve. The first formal program was held in 1920

with recitations and the singing of Christmas carols. Several of St. John's members recall receiving Christmas stockings filled with fruit and candy when they were youngsters. Those treats were provided by the Ladies Aid. That tradition of Christmas treats continued for thirty years.

During the ministry of Rev. Vollmar, Christmas pageants with elaborate decorations on a stage were held on Christmas Eve with children telling "The Christmas Story." In 1951 the Primary Sunday School Department held a Birthday Party for Jesus on the Sunday afternoon before Christmas. Family members were also invited to the Birthday Parties for Jesus. The annual event continued for more than twenty years.

In the mid 1970s, Sunday School programs held on Christmas Eve were discontinued. Instead, the programs were presented on a Sunday preceding Christmas Day. Christmas Eve services centered on "Family Christmas Worship."

On December 22, 1996, the Nursery Sunday School Department presented a Christmas program during worship service with music, and readings presented by Choralation Celebration. A nativity set donated from Nursery Sunday School offerings was presented to the church in honor of the Centennial. The three-piece nativity set was made and painted by Sally Winchester, Parish Education arts and crafts director, and Melissa Beeck.



Vacation Bible School staff, front row, from left: Verna Van Oort, Shirley Oetken, Melissa Beeck, Jo Ann Janssen, Eric Lauters; second row: Jake Van Oort, Jolene Hamann, Shirley McNaughton, Sally Winchester, Dennis Schmidt, Charlotte Jost; back row: Beth Renken, Bethany Jones, Nicholas Knapp, Dan Paugh, Dawn Richards. Photo June 12, 1997



*Kurt Kellen (Joseph) and Katie Sorensen (Mary).
Photo December 22, 1996*



*Nursery Sunday School Department Christmas Program.
Photo December 22, 1996*

Bethlehem Revisited

After viewing slides on "Bethlehem Revisited" during an April 13, 1982, meeting, the Parish Education Committee decided to have this presentation instead of other Christmas programs that year. Two Centennial Celebration "I Remember Stories" written by Bev Bremer and Barb Powell best describe Bethlehem Revisited. Excerpts from their stories:

Bev Bremer

Bethlehem Revisited, A Tradition

"Although the event was set for one Sunday afternoon in December, preparation went on for nearly a year in advance. Endless hours were spent in research to make the event as 'Biblically correct' as possible. During the summer, grapes and apples were grown and made into juice. Volunteers made special paper for the census takers, while others sewed costumes,

gathered props, and built sets. Hundreds of volunteers used their talents to make the project a success. It was truly a team effort.

Transforming St. John's into the City of Bethlehem complete with live animals, a temple, city well, jail,

shops for weavers, potters, and bakery, a stable, and an inn was a monumental task. It seemed impossible. By Sunday noon all was as ready as could be considering no one had a clue about how many people would come. Everyone was overwhelmed when thousands of sojourners arrived. Their presence brought the city to life—much as it was 2,000 years ago when



*Debra, John, and Daniel Ahlers portray Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus.
Photo December 17, 1995*

all came by decree of Caesar Augustus to be enrolled. Although the city was crowded, hot and noisy—there was a hush in the stable. Later in the inn while eating fresh fruits, nuts, dates, and cheeses, the guests had many positive comments about their journey."

Bethlehem Revisited, under the Parish Education Department, has been held in 1982, 1984, 1987, 1991, and 1995. Bethlehem Revisited coordinators include Eunice Easton, Iris Hemmingson, Barb Powell, and Linda Rollinger.

Barb Powell

Bethlehem Revisited

"The first time I was involved in Bethlehem Revisited was during the first presentation in 1982. At that time, my young family and I simply became characters in the event, not really knowing what it was all about. It did something to me as I saw how thrilled the visitors were to have the Christmas Story told in this way. What impressed me most was the emphasis by the coordinators on authenticity and that this was St. John's gift to the community.

Each time Bethlehem was presented, we were increasingly involved in different ways. By the fourth



Shepherds, from left: Michelle Schettler, Jennifer Anderson, Julie Powell, Mary Buhman. Photo December 17, 1995

Bethlehem, I had helped on several different committees, and at the closure of this one, I committed to being the 1995 coordinator. I spent the next five years organizing files, committees, and developing new ideas. One year before Bethlehem, the coordinator begins in earnest on the full-time job. As the official planning year began, it was really thrilling to watch the 'old hands' explain the project to new members. You could feel the pride that was being exhibited. Over 500 parishioners were involved in presenting Bethlehem to 4,000+ visitors. It gives as much to the members of St. John's as it does to the community because we become so united in this project.

Our family has indeed grown up with Bethlehem Revisited. Our children have gone from being children playing at the well or students of the Rabbi to being Wisemen and Guides. What a wonderful teaching tool St. John's has for its parishioners, young and old. We learn to work, laugh, and give to each other and beyond."



King Herod's Court. Photo December 17, 1995

Bethel Series Bible Study

Bethel Series Bible Study, an overview study of the Bible, began in 1975. Bev Bremer, Joe and Eunice Easton, John and Carol Elkins, Iris Hemmingson, Theodore Hoffman, Hap and Sylvia Holman, Evelyn Kallsen, Mary Klopp, Herman Miller, Margaret Nelson, Rev. William and Loree Reck, Jim Schultz, Janell Schultz, Ruth Summerside, and Ron Utesch enrolled in the Bible study entitled "Adult

Christian Education Foundation" written by Harley Swiggum, Madison, Wisconsin. After two years of study, the second phase of the program began in 1978 with one hour weekly classes, seven week sessions, taught by the trained teachers and attended by many members.



A reunion of Bethel Bible Study Series teachers, from left: Evelyn Kallsen, Bev Bremer, Iris Hemmingson, Rev. William Reck, Loree Reck, Theodore Hoffman. Photo March 23, 1997

Parish Education Overview

Sunday School was held year round until 1981. During the latter part of the 1930s and through the next two decades, all Sunday School students gathered in the church for opening worship service to sing a hymn followed by responsive reading printed in *Songs of Praise*, copyright 1935. Following the opening service, students and teachers would go to their respective classrooms which included the parsonage, pastor's office, and a nearby house. Rev. Belk taught the Adult Bible Study Class in the nave. After the Memorial Parish House dedication, Sunday School classes met in the fifteen individual classrooms. A rapidly growing congregation necessitated additional classroom space. Classes were held in every available space, including the bowling alley. In 1957 an addition to the Parish House provided sixteen classrooms. To provide even more Sunday School and catechism classrooms, the bowling alley was removed during the 1984 addition. Classroom space continues to be at a premium.



Since the mid-1940s, LaVern Pageler has counted and recorded the Sunday School offerings. He is pictured with his wife, Martha. Photo February 26, 1995.



Norma Mohning Miller

Photo 1979

Norma Mohning Miller began work as St. John's Parish Secretary in 1950. After extensive training and education, Norma was certified as a Parish Worker in 1965 and continued in that position until her retirement in 1985. Under her leadership, St. John's parish education continued its excellent program.

Following the retirement of Rev. and Mrs. Belk, Margaret Nelson, and later, Barbara Jane Nielsen were the Teacher's Training Class instructors, providing a solid foundation for the teachers.

Sunday School superintendents beginning in 1951 include Melvin Gearke, Dale Johnson, Lorene Siege, Greg Thompson, and Jo Ann Janssen.

During the Centennial year, Sunday School and Adult Education Class attendance averaged 215. "Rejoice!" was the material used for students age three to ninth grade. A High School Sunday School class was taught by Pastor Landsness. The book of *Revelation* was taught by Pastor Kramer during Adult Education Class. Each third grade Sunday School student received a Bible from the Parish Education Department.

St. John's Day Camp (an outreach program of the Lutheran Bible Camps) began July 19, 1993. During the past five years there has been an average attendance of twelve.

The duties of the Parish Education Committee, as listed in the 1997 Operating Manual, are "to establish objectives,

set policies for, and supervise the total educational program in the Congregation, including personnel for Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Confirmation Classes, Adult Bible Classes and all other educational classes."

The committee members are Craig Bauerly (Council member), Jeannette Davis, Jo Ann Janssen (Sunday School Superintendent), Connie Kellen, Terry Klemme, Becky Klohs (chairperson), Chris Kluemper, Pastor Gary Landsness (advisor), Courtney Peyton (youth representative), Julie Renken, Judy Peters-Schulz, and Glenda Wiener.

The 1996-1997 Sunday School staff included Glenda Wiener, Donna O'Neill, LaVonne Wiener, Rhonda Justice, Julie Renken, Ann Draayer, Diane Kramer, Patricia Kramer, Christena Knapp, Sheryl Oetken, Roma Lancaster, Cheryl Schettler, Jennifer Anderson, Kristen French, Courtney Peyton, Jo Ann Janssen, Julie Hensel, Judy Peters-Schulz, Cindy Johnson, Deb Anderson, Kay Allen, Jeannette Davis, Connie Kellen, Eliese Hoffman, Kay Anderson, Becky Lauters, Carol Janes, Judy Renken, Dianne Rotta, Sharon Utesch, Linda Luneburg, Bev Bremer, Tim Kass, Steve Powell, Tony Peyton, Sue Kolker, Kay Peters, Barbara Shostak, Martha Pageler, Dawn Richards, LaVern Pageler, Kathy Stelzer, Joan Severson, Luella Liebenow, Brian Michaelson, Diane Chindlund.

The 1996-1997 Catechism staff included Mary Buhman, Stuart Christians, Pastor Landsness, Kay Michaelson, Diane Paugh, Cheryl Peyton, Mat Trotzig, and Pam Tyler.

St. John's continues its excellent parish education program with dedicated volunteers and staff.



Sunday School students and teachers took their turn ringing the church bell on Centennial Celebration Sundays.

