

HISTORY OF ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Time marches back to the year 1885 when a few German settlers of the Hartsburg area met with Pastor Reinhold Lange of Emden and organized St. John's Lutheran Church of Hartsburg. A formal constitution was adopted on June 28, 1885, and the following eleven men signed it: Cornelius De Vries, Kriene Janssen, Tonjes Meyer, Peter Remmers, Fred Manninga, Hinricus Ahrens, Harm Alberts, Christian Haman, Gottlieb Schlipp, Hans Boege, and Hinrich Ruehaack.

The small flock held Sunday School and Church services on Sunday afternoon in Mangas Hall for four years. Conditions at that time were very trying, with crop failures, and unimproved roads. Pastor Lange often traveled to Hartsburg with a horse and cart and sometimes walked. The little congregation grew and erected a small frame church in 1889, where the Grace Conrad home is today. When it was 25 years old, it boasted 66 families and held a gala celebration. The Ladies Aid Society was organized in 1910 with 22 charter members. Only one, Mrs. Rena Streetmeyer, church organist for many years, is with us now.

A parsonage, across the street from the present church, was purchased for Pastor Lange, where he lived until he retired (1924), having served St. John's nearly forty years.

The congregation increased in membership and a more roomy building was needed. Under the able leadership of Pastor Michael Scherf, the present church building was erected.

Serving on the building committee were: William Cross, Henry Leesman and George Rademaker. The day of dedication, April 25, 1926, was surely a momentous occasion.

The church continued to grow under the guidance of Pastor August Rettberg for 22 years (1927 - 1949). The German language was discontinued; the 50th anniversary was fittingly observed; the church completely redecorated, and organizations for the young people, Luther League, and the men, Brotherhood (1948) came into being.

Pastor J.F. Drewelow (1949 - 1955) was the fourth resident Pastor of St. John's. The liturgical service and Sunday Messenger were introduced; Sunday School Kindergarten Class organized; vestments for the choir purchased and the 65th anniversary of the congregation observed.

With a core of dedicated church workers and Pastor E.J. Volkmann (1956 - 1961), much was accomplished during the fifties: Women's Missionary Society and Junior Missions organized; heating system installed in the church; modern parsonage erected east of church (1959); church again redecorated and a glorious 75th anniversary celebration.

St. John's was alive and active during the sixties. With the gentle guidance of Pastor Donald Kumpf, (1962 - 1967), and Pastor Harold Grafe, (1967 -), a successful stewardship program and L. I. F. E. program (Lutheran Ingathering for Education) were carried out; basement redecorated; walk lights and the Lighted Cross installed, and exterior of building tuck pointed.

The church membership of St. John's now stands at 391 baptized and 296 confirmed members. Looking back over 85 years we speak as Samuel "Hitherto Hath The Lord Helped Us".