

1860—History of St. Paul's Lutheran Church—1985

St. Paul's Lutheran Church will be 125 years old on October 28th. It was on this date in 1860 that a Pastor Juengel of Immanuel Lutheran Church at Pleasant Grove rode to California on horseback to conduct the first worship service for a small group of Lutheran settlers.

As the congregation grew, so did the need for services on a regular basis. Encouraged by Rev. Juengel, the group called its first pastor, Theodore Gruber of Perryville, Missouri, the summer of 1863. That fall a parochial school was opened. The children were taught by the pastor, a practice that continued until a woman teacher was employed in 1927. In 1864, the congregation purchased land for a cemetery.

After meeting in homes of members and later renting a place to worship, on April 16, 1866, the congregation purchased an old seminary building located on the site of the present property to serve as a church, a school and a parsonage. A constitution was discussed and adopted and in 1867, the first minutes were recorded. In the summer of 1869 the congregation became a member of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The church incorporated on March 2, 1873. In 1886, property was purchased to serve as a parsonage.

Early members of St. Paul's were of German descent and since German was spoken in the homes, services were conducted in the German language. By 1871, some members felt there was a need of an occasional English service; however, it was not until 1918 that one morning service each month was conducted in English. The transition to English was complete in 1941.

It was on June 4, 1893 when the congregation voted to erect a new house of worship. Construction began the following spring and on November 11, 1894, the building was dedicated. During that summer, the old building that had served the congregation 28 years was razed and a new school house was constructed. A new parsonage was erected next door to the church in 1898.

An extensive remodeling program was begun in 1941. The church building was extended 16 feet at the west end and completely renovated. New carpeting, lights, chancel furniture and pews were installed. The steeple was lowered and a basement excavated to provide much needed room for Sunday School and meetings. The dedication ceremony took place February 1, 1942.

Times changed rapidly during the next two decades. Unable to secure a teacher, the congregation, reluctantly, closed the school in 1952. Other churches in the community were expanding and it soon became evident that as membership and church attendance increased, the congregation required proper facilities. However, additional land was needed for it was agreed that when the time came, any plan would include a new church, educational building and parsonage. The adjoining property to the north was acquired in 1964.

Several years later an architect was employed. In September 1968 the congregation approved a three-phase building program and resolved to construct the educational building first. Designed so the church could be added at a later date, the new facility was dedicated May 14, 1970. The following year, the new parsonage was completed and dedicated on December 5.

During the years that followed, plans to construct a new house of worship were discussed and then dropped due, mainly, to increasing costs and high interest rates. The decision to proceed was not made until in July 1982. The ground breaking ceremony took place on October 11, and the new house of worship was dedicated on June 19, 1983.

The tower housing the bell from the original church was constructed after the old building was torn down. The dedication was October 9, 1983. Other items made apart of the new church were the 1967 Moeller pipe organ and Schulmerich Carillon, the Maas cathedral chimes which were dedicated January 26, 1947 in memory of the four men who died in service to their country during World War II, parts of the stained glass windows, and chancel furniture.

The first organization within the church was the Ladies Aid, founded on April 22, 1904. The Aid was one of the charter societies for the California Zone of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League organized in 1936. On January 7, 1921, the young people joined the International Walther League, an organization known today as the Lutheran Organization. A graded Sunday School was organized April 3, 1927. An Adult Bible Class began June, 1928. A Men's Club organized Feb. 3, 1944; the Evening Guild in January of 1952. The Dorcus Bible Class originated in late 1970's. A monthly fellowship for Senior Citizens began in September 1982.

Last year, St. Paul's enlarged its ministry by means of radio. The first broadcast of Sunday morning services over the local station, KZMO, was on July 29. On September 23, 1984, a Braille Center for the production of religious material for the blind in foreign countries was dedicated in memory of Mildred Kuhlman, who had left a sizeable bequest to the church. Funds from this bequest were also used to build and equip the broadcast booth.

During the 125 years of its existence, St. Paul's has been served by 17 pastors including the Reverends Juengel (1860-1863), Theodore Gruber (1863-1864), G. Lehnick (1864-1865), Gustav Schilling (1885-1870), H. Wille (1870-1874), B. Sievers (1875-1879), J. G. Griebel (1879-1892), Paul Franke (1892-1894), P. D. Mueller (1895-1907), F. W. Mueller (1907-1926), William Karsten (1927), T. A. Weinhold (1928-1933), W. H. Schwab (1933-1949), Ferdinand Reith (1949-1965), Keith Kihne (1965-1969), Martin f. Hofman (1969-1981), and Walter Loeber (1982 to the present).

Membership, today, numbers 480 with 386 communicant members. Beginning with the year 1863, 920 were baptized, there were 317 marriages, and 416 were given Christian burial.