



PAINTING OF OUR FIRST CHURCH

The artist is Mrs. Antonia Gaganek, a political refugee from Czechoslovakia who immigrated to Canada with her family after the Russian invasion of her country. She was well known in her native land for her Christian art works often used in the Sunday school of her home church. Linda Malila became a close friend of Mrs. Gaganek during her work with the immigrants of First United Church of Vancouver. Mrs. Gaganek became impressed with the story of the little country church and presented this painting to the Tovio Malila family in 1974.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have helped in the preparation of this history for our church. We wish to thank John Pahl for his wonderful work on the early church. He was able to translate the original Swedish records and compiled much of the data used for the early years. Later Pastor Dean Beckwith would assist in compiling the basic data for the later years. There were two additional histories of the congregation and these were by unnamed members of the congregation. Much of the personal information on the Pastors was taken from *The Augustana Ministerium: a Study of the Careers of the 2,504 Pastors of the Augustana Lutheran Synod/Church 1850-1962 by Conrad Bergendoff; Augustana Historical Society, 1980, Rock Island, Illinois*. The remainder of the details has been gleaned from the archives of the church council minutes and the minutes of the annual congregational meetings. We have made every effort to give an accurate account of our history.

Ken Kingsbury

2024

HISTORY OF IMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH

ALLEGAN, MICHIGAN

In the 19th century, Sweden was a poor peasant society consisting of many small farms. Around the middle of the 19th century these Swedish farmers had several bad harvest seasons in a row. There simply was not enough food to feed everyone and people were going hungry. This was the motivation for 300 thousand Swedes to migrate to the United States between 1868 and 1893. Sometime around 1840 some were beginning to settle into what would later become Watson Township in Allegan County. The organizational meeting for Watson Township took place on February 16, 1842 in the home of Eli Watson.

The Southwest portion of the township consisted of a considerable amount of rich level land which was ideal for those who were accustomed to tilling the earth. It was also a big asset for these early settlers that they were linked to Allegan, Grand Rapids, and Kalamazoo by two railroad lines that crossed Watson Township east-west providing ready access for the sale of their crops. In 1867, Mr. Charles Anderson came from Sweden and settled on land in sections 32 and 31 in Watson Township. By 1913 he was the owner of a total of 120 acres. His land was near the Abronia Railroad station.

The Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad cut diagonally through the Southwest corner of Watson. The Abronia station was near the intersection of what is now 112th Avenue and 20th Street. The land was ideal for farming complete with some great timber that supported an early saw mill on the Schnable Brook. The Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad Company ran east to west mid-way between what is now 116th Avenue and 114th Avenue and would eventually have a station in Kellogg. Mr. Anderson contacted several of his Swedish friends telling them about the rich advantages of the area and by 1878 there were eight families that made this area their permanent home.

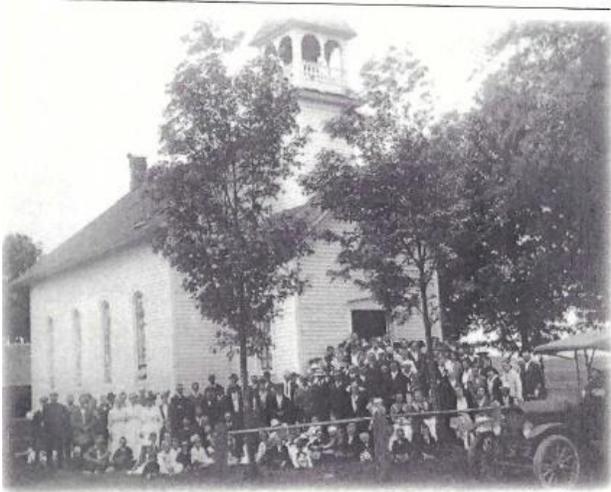
Nels Johnson and his family arrived about 1870. By 1871 they were joined by John Peterson, Svan Peterson, Alexander Johnson, John Johnson, Samuel Egg, Andrew Egg, and others. John Strand came in 1875 and Gustav Sandahl came with his family in 1876. These pioneer Swedes brought with them their strong Lutheran faith with their Biblical knowledge, a strong regard for the Sacraments, and a profound love of their church.

In the fall of 1877 Pastor Gustav Lundahl from LaPorte, Indiana began to offer worship and other pastoral services to this small but faithful community. Pastor Lundahl was born November 14, 1843 in Kil, Sweden and ordained June 29, 1873 in Paxton, Illinois. He received his education through Augustana College and Augustana Seminary and served congregations in LaPorte and Hobart, Indiana. Hobart was a good 133 miles from Allegan, so it was a major trip in the horse and buggy days of that period. On August 4, 1878 these devote Swedish Lutherans met in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Sven Peterson to organize as Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sandhem. However, it seems that no one knew exactly how to make it official.

The Peterson home is located approximately ½ mile east of 24th Street on 114th Avenue. Since this was a novel experience for this small group of Swedish Lutherans, they invited Rev. N.A. Youngberg of Lisbon, Michigan (now Kent City) to come and assist them in the organization of their congregation. The congregation became official on August 28, 1878. It was a gathering of eight families and nine single men. They adopted the constitution of the Augustana Synod. The name Sandhem may have been due to ties of several members to the Sandhem Lutheran Church of Sweden. The first elected officers of the new congregation were August Strand (Chairman) and Samuel Egg (Secretary), John Johnson, John Peterson, Charles Holmes, and Charles Anderson (Trustees), and John Peterson also served as Treasurer. Four families became the charter members of this new congregation and they are; John Strand and his wife, Johanna; Sven Peterson and his wife, Christina; Gustav Sandahl and his wife, Christina; August Strand and his wife, Eliza; plus nine single men; John Peterson, Andrew Nelson, Andrew Egg, John Johnson, Magnus Hanson, Charles Holmes, Charles Egg, E, Forsman, and John Hanson. This new congregation originally met in member homes regularly for Bible Study and the sharing of God's Word prior to the construction of the church building. Later Mr. Charles Anderson donated a parcel of land just south of 114th avenue on 22nd street for a church cemetery (1380 22nd Street, Allegan, Michigan) and it was dedicated on March 4, 1879. Today this is known as Immanuel Lutheran Church Cemetery (Sheep of the Good Shepherd). Ironically, the one year old child of the Andersons, Malvina

Olivia Anderson was killed in a railroad accident near their home on June 2, 1879 and became the first person to be buried in the cemetery.





By January 15, 1881 this devote group of Swedish Lutherans began to collect the funds necessary for the construction of a church building and on January 4, 1883 the first building committee was formed. They purchased a plot of land for the church from John Strand for the sum of \$25. It was here on Hooker Road (2156 114th Ave., Allegan,



Michigan) mid-way between 21st Street and 22nd Street that the old country church building was constructed that same year for \$1,025. When the building was completed and dedicated the debt was a bit over half paid. The first official Baptism in the new church was that of Selma Cecelia Anderson on August 4, 1883. She was born March 10, 1883 to Charles and Ulrika "Hilda" (Pehrsson) Anderson. On May 23, 1906 Selma married Anders Sandahl and they would have four children before her death from heart failure at age 56 on November 11, 1939. She is buried in the church cemetery next to her husband. The first wedding occurred on March 6, 1876 in the home of Sven Peterson when Samuel Egg was united with Miss Matilda Strand. The service was conducted by Rev. Lundahl from LaPorte, Indiana.

. The first Sunday School was organized January 26, 1880. During this early stage the Sunday School would meet in member's homes and in the school house.

1887-1893 Rev. Gustav Alfred Ostergren & Rev. Hakan P. Quist

Pastor Ostergren was born March 6, 1854 in Erikberg, Sweden and came to America with his family in 1868. He received his theological education from Augustana College (1880-1883) and Augustana Seminary (1884-1886). He was ordained June 27, 1886 in Minneapolis, Minnesota and would serve congregations in Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Muskegon, Michigan (1886-1894). It was during this period in Muskegon that he also served as the supervising pastor of Immanuel.

Pastor Quist was born July 2, 1849 in Rinkaby, Sweden and came to the United States in 1865. He received his theological education at Augustana College and Augustana Seminary in 1872-1876. He was a pastor in Grand Rapids 1886-1891 and served as a missionary to South Dakota Territory 1891-1894. By 1895 the church had their first organ. This was a Moline Organ and the cost was \$75. This organ was still in use in 1953. The first confirmation class taught by Pastor G.A. Ostergren was confirmed in 1889. The students were Frank Peterson, Frank Anderson, Emma Johnson, Alfred Johnson, Maria Nyberg, and Betty Carlson.

1894-1902 Rev. Carl Albert Carlstedt

Pastor Carlstedt was born October 10, 1850 in Malmobual, Sweden and came to America in 1873. He received his theological education at Augustana Seminary (1889-1891) and was ordained June 21, 1891 in Chicago Lake, Minnesota. He began his ministry in Republic, Michigan (1891-1894) and then moved to Muskegon, Michigan (1894-1903). It was during his ministry in Muskegon that he was also the supervising pastor for Immanuel. Pastor Carlstedt would then go on to serve congregations in Wisconsin and South Dakota.



In 1899 the Young Peoples Group (Luther League) of the congregation began the collection of funds for a bell. The bell was forged in Saint Louis and shipped to Allegan to be installed in the church belfry at a cost of \$160.75. The bell was brought out to the church building from Allegan using Allen Dunfield's team of horses and was first rung on January 1, 1900. The sound could be heard for miles around.

1902-1905 Rev. Johan (John) Alfred Eckstrom

Pastor Eckstrom was born July 6, 1862 in Skede, Sweden and came to America in 1881. He received his theological education at Augustana College (1882-1887) and Augustana Seminary (1887-1889). He was ordained June 16, 1889 in Moline, Illinois and would serve congregations in Nebraska, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Michigan. It was while he was in Grand Rapids, Michigan (1901-1905) that he would also serve as the supervising pastor of Immanuel. Pastor Eckstrom would go on to serve as the Treasurer and Vice President of the New England Synod and received his Doctor of Divinity (D.D.) from Upsala College in East Orange, New Jersey.



In August 1903 the congregation celebrated their twenty-fifth anniversary.

1905-1906 Rev. John Johannes Nelson Alexis

Pastor Alexis was born April 4, 1852 in Slattakra, Sweden and came to America in 1868. He received his education at Augustana College (1873-1879) and Augustana Seminary (1880-1882). He would serve congregations in Nebraska, Colorado, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey prior to coming to Whitehall, Michigan in 1900. During his time at Immanuel Pastor Alexis served both Whitehall, Michigan and Allegan, Michigan. Upon leaving Immanuel, he would serve a congregation in Skanee in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.



The formal organization of the Luther League (Young Peoples Society) occurred on 18 March 1906. At that time there were 24 charter members of this Youth Group.

1907-1908 Rev. Johan Theodore Otto Olander



Pastor Olander was born August 8, 1866 in Jonkoping, Sweden and was ordained June 18, 1893 in Moline, Illinois. He came to America with his family in 1882. He and his wife, Anna, had a total of ten children and eight would live to adulthood. He received his theological education from Augustana College and Augustana Seminary graduating in 1893. He would serve congregations in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Nebraska. In Michigan he served congregations in Calumet, Muskegon, Iron River, Beachwood, and Allegan.

1908-1910 Rev. Carl Eckstrom

Pastor Eckstrom was born October 19, 1873 in Hvetlanda, Sweden and came to America in 1892. He attended Martin Luther College in Chicago and received his BA degree from Augustana College in 1901. He received his B.D. degree from Augustana Seminary in 1904 and was ordained June 5, 1904 in Lindsborg, Kansas. He apparently was a senior pastor in Grand Rapids (1905-1911) while serving Immanuel. He would serve churches in Minnesota and Montana later.



The first Ladies Aide Society was formed on 24 January 1908 with 18 ladies as charter members. Their first meeting would be held in the home of Gustav Sandahl. They would be a strong organizational and fund raising force for many years. Mrs Gustav (Christina Sara Johnsdotter Sandahl) Sandahl would serve as the first president of the Ladies Aide Society with Mrs. Nels (Mary Nyberg Parsons) Parsons as secretary and Mrs John (Anna Nilsdotter Swanty) Swanty as treasurer of the group. The photo at the left is that of Christina Sandahl. At their first organizational meeting the group pledged to

help and support the congregation in its experiences, to visit the sick and help the needy, to give to the children's and old people's homes, and to gather money for home and foreign missions as much as they were able.

In these early days many would come to church in a horse and buggy so a 20x60x8 Horse Shed was constructed to the south side of the church building in 1909. This Horse Shed would remain until 1941 when Mr. Carl Henrickson would tear it down and establish a lawn on the site.

1911-1922 Rev August L. Beausang

Pastor Beausang was born February 28, 1859 in Kungley, Sweden and came to America in 1880. He received his theological education from Augustana College (1884-1886) and Augustana Seminary (1889-1892). He was ordained June 5, 1892 in Lindsborg, Kansas and served as pastor in Massachusetts (1892-1896) and Pennsylvania (1896-1910) before coming to Whitehall, Michigan (1910-1927). It was during his time in Whitehall that Pastor Beausang served as the supervising pastor for Immanuel.



In 1911 the Ladies Aide Society had organized a project to upgrade the front of the church with the assistance of the Luther League. They would raise the worship area and had the walls wallpapered. Prior to this time the congregation had an old fashioned German style high raised pulpit. So they also purchased a new pulpit (\$45) and pastor's chair (\$20) with the help of funds from the Luther League. In 1912 an altar was constructed in Allegan using materials from the bottom portion of the former pulpit. The Ladies Aide provided the first altar cloth or paraments. The beautiful altar painting, *The Right Comforter*, was purchased by the Luther League and the Ladies Aid in 1913 at a cost of \$60 for the painting and \$8.50 for the frame. In 1915 the stained glass windows were installed at a cost of \$172. An American and Service flag were purchased for the church in 1918. William Sandahl and Martin Swanty were serving in the US Army at that time. A Baptismal Font was purchased in 1917 by Mr. and Mrs. John Swanty. This Baptismal Font would later be dedicated to the memory of their son, Martin Swanty, who died in Germany March 15, 1919 and is buried in the Sheep of the Good Shepherd Cemetery. Currently this Baptismal Font is in the Old Church at the Historical Village at the Allegan County Fairgrounds.

The World War I began in 1914 and the United States entered by declaring war on Germany on 6 April 1917 and on Austria-Hungary on 7 December 1917. The Armistice ending World War I was signed on 11 November 1918. It was also during 1918 that the Spanish Influenza epidemic hit the world and by 1920 it caused over 500,000 deaths in the United States. It seems the Immanuel Lutheran congregation was spared from the dreaded disease.

In 1918 The Luther League entertained the Synodical District Luther League for the first time. They would repeat this event in 1928. Over the years the Luther League has been a strong force behind the witness and mission of the congregation. The Missionary Society (a division of the Ladies Aide Society) was organized in the home of Mrs. Malcom Bergholtz on 26 October 1922. The first officers were; President-Mrs. Peter Witkop, Vice President-Mrs. Joe Haveman; Secretary-Mrs. Ernest Swanty; Treasurer-Mrs. Gust Carlson.

In the early 1920s the congregation discussed the possible adoption of the English language and on 3 October 1922 we have the first church secretary's report written in English. This would also be the time when the language used for the worship service would also change from their native Swedish to the language of their new homeland, English.

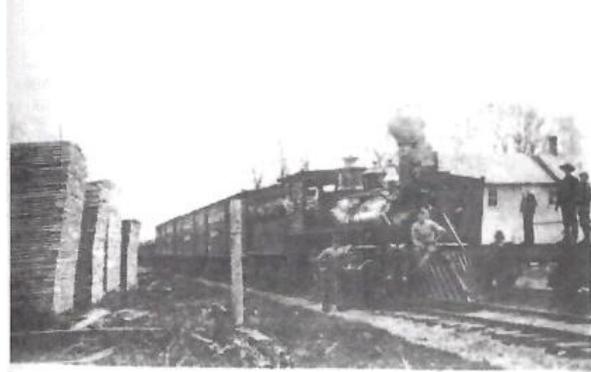
The decision was made in 1922 that the congregation would build a parsonage with the idea of calling a full time pastor of their own. However, this would not come to fruition until 1927.

1923-1925 Rev. Henry George Hanson

Pastor Hanson was born September 16, 1888 in Upsala, Minnesota and was ordained June 9, 1918 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He received his B.A. Degree from Augustana College in 1914 and his B.D. degree from Augustana Seminary in 1917. He served congregations in Minnesota, Illinois, and Grand Rapids (1920-1930).

In 1923 the congregation had need of a secondary building for their non-religious activities and Mr. and Mrs. Peter Berggren donated their old store building in Kellogg for a church hall. This building was on the west side of 21st Street next to the old Railroad Depot and the cement block Creamery building. Kellogg had become a major stop on the old Interurban Railroad around 1913. Eventually the old Kellogg Store building was demolished, and the Kellogg Railroad Station would be transferred to the Historical Village on the Allegan County Fairgrounds. But the Old Kellogg Creamery would continue to serve as farm equipment storage in 1945 when Floyd Kingsbury

purchased the farm upon which these buildings stood. By this time a new Kellogg Mercantile Building and residence was established on the east side of 21st Street. However, this building no longer exists either as of this date (2023). The photo is of the Kellogg Station in the early days. 1923 is also the year that the congregation dropped the “Sandhem” from their name and changed it to Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kellogg.



KELLOGG, MICHIGAN IN THE EARLY DAYS.

At the Congregational Meeting in 1923 the decision was made to increase the number of Deacons and Trustees that made up the Board of Administration from three each to five each. The congregation also decided to begin using a pledge system for paying their church dues, thus initiating a stewardship system. In 1925 the congregation purchased a church seal that is in the church office to this day.

1925-1928 Rev. Alfred B. Peterson

Pastor Peterson was born July 20, 1891 in Ogden, Illinois and ordained June 10, 1923 in Rockford, Illinois. He received his B.A. degree from Augustana College in 1920 and his B.D. Degree from Augustana Seminary in 1923. He served other congregations in Idaho, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Nebraska. It is interesting to note that on the clergy files for the Augustana Synod that Immanuel is first listed as being in Kellogg, Michigan. Pastor Peterson became our first full time called Pastor.



Mr. and Mrs. John Swanty purchased the land just to the west of the church building and donated it to the church for the purpose of building a parsonage. Dr. Peter Peterson, President of the Illinois Conference of the Augustana



The Parsonage

Lutheran Church was present on March 15, 1927 for the ground breaking ceremony and the dream made back in 1922 was approaching completion. The parsonage cost \$4,500 with a bit more than \$1,000 contributed by non-members living in the Kellogg community. Most of the labor for

construction of the parsonage was provided by members of the congregation. Construction was completed by the end of 1927 and Pastor Alfred Peterson was the first Pastor to take residence in the parsonage. Immanuel Lutheran Church was now the owner of ten square rods of land that included the church building and the new parsonage.

In 1926 the Dorcas Society (aka the Ladies Missionary Society) put on a pageant called *Christ in America* and used the proceeds from this event to purchase four dozen folding chairs which they donated to the church. Over the years these chairs were put to very good use at special events and especially at the annual Smorgasbord held in August of every year. Most of these chairs are still ready for service today and are stored in the basement of the new church building at 631 Grand Street.

1928-1929 Rev. Elof George Carlson

Pastor Carlson was born November 13, 1881 in Ostra, Sweden and ordained June 13, 1909 in Red Wing, Minnesota. He came to America in 1900 and did his theological studies at Augustana Seminary graduating in 1909. He served congregations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, and was Senior Pastor in Sparta, Michigan (1927-1929).

The name of the congregation once again changed to Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church of Allegan. It was beginning to recognize that their identity and community outreach was leading them more and more toward the city of Allegan.

In August 1928 the congregation celebrated their fiftieth anniversary.

On 29 October 1929 the stock market crashed and thus began the period known as the Great Depression

1930-1940 Dr. George Alvin Fahlund was Senior Pastor (right) and Rev. Emil Alexis Andreen served as Assistant Pastor (left)

Pastor Fahlund was born October 19, 1877 in Galesburg, Illinois and ordained June 16, 1907 in New Britain, Connecticut. He received his B.A. degree from Augustana College and did some graduate work at Boston College prior to receiving his B.D. degree from Augustana Seminary. Later he received a D.D. (Doctor of Divinity) Degree from Augusta College in 1924. In 1930-1946 he served as a Senior Pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids and in 1946-1953 he served as



Superintendent of the Home for the Aged in Grand Rapids.



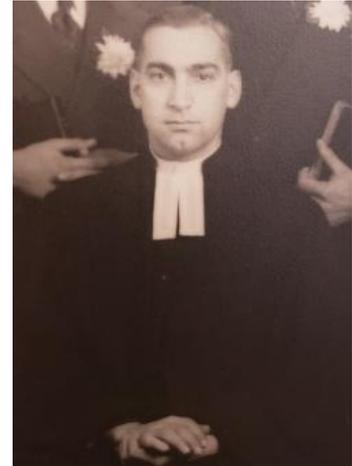
Over the years of 1930 to 1951 Dr. Fahlund often served as senior pastor of the congregation with assistant or student pastors living in the parsonage. Pastor Alexis Andreen served as an Assistant Pastor and is listed in Synod records as a Missionary Pastor. Pastor Andreen was born March 28, 1875 in Swedona, Illinois. His father was a Lutheran Pastor and died when Alexis was only five years old. Pastor Alexis Andreen received his theological education through Mount Airy Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia (1900) and Augustana Seminary (1902). He was ordained June 15, 1902 in Ishpenning, Michigan and served congregations in Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas, Washington, and of course, Michigan. Pastor Andreen is listed as retired on the clergy rolls in 1928 prior to coming to Immanuel.

The old wood store in the front of the church was replaced by a furnace in the basement in 1930 at a cost of \$327.60. This would also be the year that the first choir was formed by Mrs. Andreen and the Ladies Aid gathered to make the first choir robes. In 1934 the Luther League was a very active group in the mission of the church with twenty-five members. In 1936 electricity was added to both the church and the parsonage. On July 23, 1937 the Luther League purchased the old Kellogg Store for their activities.

In 1939 Germany was beginning to invade several countries in Europe and on 7 December 1941 the Japanese made a surprise attack on the U.S Navy base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The United States immediately declared war on Japan and the following day included Germany and Italy, thus beginning World War II. Germany surrendered unconditionally on 7 May 1945. Then on 6 August 1945 the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. The second atomic bomb was dropped on 9 August 1945 on Nagasaki, Japan. By 14 August 1945 the Japanese signed an unconditional surrender thus ending World War II.

June 2, 1940-August 30, 1942 Rev. Clarence Theodore Seburg served as Assistant Pastor

Pastor Seburg was born March 1, 1909 in Minneapolis, Minnesota and was ordained June 26, 1938 in Brooklyn, New York. He received his theological education from Augustana Seminary in 1938. He was called to serve as Pastor of Immanuel and preached his first sermon here on June 2, 1940. It was while he was serving as Pastor at Immanuel that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Pastor Seburg resigned as Pastor of Immanuel on August 30, 1942 and signed up to become a Chaplain for the U.S. Army from 1944-1946. After the war he would serve congregations in Wisconsin, Illinois, and South Dakota.



On February 26, 1941 the name of the congregation was officially changed to Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church of Allegan, thus removing the word Swedish from the name. At this time they were still associated with the Augustana Lutheran Synod but the feeling was that the word "Swedish" tended to scare new people off. It was in 1941 that the old Horse Shed would be demolished by Mr. Carl Henrickson who was living in the parsonage at the time. He removed all the debris and established a lawn where the old shed had once been.

1942-1944 Rev. Gustaf Edmund Lindsten



Pastor Lindsten was born August 30, 1870 in Tingsas, Sweden and ordained June 17, 1900 in Burlington, Iowa. He arrived in America in 1892. He received his B.A Degree from Augustana College in 1897 and his B.D Degree from Augustana Seminary in 1900. He served congregations in South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, and Minnesota before coming to Michigan. He suffered from rather poor health when he came to Immanuel. He and his wife and five children were living in the church parsonage. Pastor Lindsten would resign in the summer of 1944 and after his death that December the family would remain living in the parsonage until the congregation called Dr. Conrad Hoffsten in 1949. Pastor Lindsten passed away December 7, 1944 in Grand Rapids and would be buried in Benton Lutheran Cemetery in Crooks, South Dakota thus becoming the first Pastor to die while serving as Pastor of Immanuel.

1944-1949 Rev. Alexis Andreen served as Assistant Pastor



Pastor Andreen would once again serve Immanuel as her pastor. At a special congregational meeting on 1 April 1948 a plan for a parish hall was approved and shortly thereafter a crew of a dozen men gathered to lay the foundation for the hall just to the rear of the church building. With all the labor provided by members of the congregation, the new Fellowship Hall would be dedicated on 13 September 1948 at a cost of \$6,500.00. Obviously these Swedish Lutherans didn't believe in wasting any time and they certainly held fellowship as an important part of their church life. Thirty metal folding chairs were given by the various societies of the congregation, Silverware and dishes by the Ladies Aid Society, and three screen doors by the Missionary Society. Wesley Lee donated \$500 toward an electric range and a used refrigerator was donated by Lois Johnson. A used piano was given by Twyla Will and the new Fellowship was ready for operation. At the April 1, 1948 special Congregational meeting it was decided to sell the old Kellogg Hall for \$251. The annual August Smorgasbord quickly became a tradition as a means of celebrating the origins of the congregation. People soon began to come from miles around to enjoy the Swedish cooking.

March 1,1949 - March 5, 1951 Dr. Rev. Conrad Emanuel Hoffsten

At a special Congregational meeting on March 1, 1949 Immanuel called Pastor Hoffsten to be their full time pastor. His salary was to be \$1,500 per year plus the parsonage and free telephone. During this period it was customary for the pastoral call to be for one year and would be renewed annually.

Pastor Hoffsten was born March 26, 1876 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania and was ordained June 16, 1901 in Jamestown, New York. He received his B.A. Degree from Augustana College in 1897 and his B.D. Degree from Augustana Seminary in 1901. The Doctor of Divinity Degree was conferred upon him in 1922 from Wittenberg University. Pastor Hoffsten served congregations in New York, Illinois, and Canada before coming to Michigan. He also served as Chaplain in the U.S. Army during World War I. In Michigan he was Pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran in Detroit (1928-1940) and Immanuel Lutheran in Allegan (1949-1951).

When Pastor Hoffsten was called as senior pastor he and his family moved into the church parsonage in June. He came to Immanuel Lutheran from Winnipeg, Canada. He died on March 5, 1951 having been admitted to Allegan Health Center and was buried in Chicago.

For the year 1950 the total income for Immanuel was \$2,531.07. This included \$300 from the Ladies Aid, \$300 from the Luther League and \$50 from the Women's Missionary Society. It was customary for the income from these groups to be included in the general income. Total expenses for that year would amount to \$2,199.78. It should be noted that ushers were elected annually at the congregational meeting.

The Korean War had started 25 June 1950 with the invasion of South Korea by the communist army of North Korea and the war ended on 27 July 1953.

1951 Dr. George Fahlund & Rev. Linus Aron Herman Interim Pastors

After the death of Pastor Hoffsten the congregation was once again served by interim pastors. The special congregational meeting on March 15, 1951 the congregation gave the Board of Deacons the authority to arrange for student pastors from Augustana Theological Seminary to serve the congregation on a month to month basis for \$125 per month. They also decided to have Sunday evening worship services at 7:30pm until such time as they were able to call a



regular pastor. Pastor Herman was born September 15, 1883 in Kelvened, Sweden and ordained June 13, 1915 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He served congregations in Illinois and Iowa before coming to Michigan. In 1943-1947 he was Pastor in Bay City, Michigan and in 1947-1954 he was Pastor in Kent City, Michigan. He would serve as supervising pastor for Immanuel. Pastor Herman submitted his resignation as Vice Pastor on October 3, 1951 and the congregation called Pastor A.G. Benson to be their full time pastor. The congregation sought and received a grant from the American Board of Missions of \$500 to assist in this call. Pastor Benson would receive an annual salary of \$2,000, the right to live in the parsonage, and free telephone service.

1951-1953 Rev. Arthur Godfrey Benson

Pastor Benson was born July 30, 1889 in Port Byron, Illinois and was ordained June 18, 1922 in St. Paul, Minnesota. He received his B.A. degree from Augustana College and his B.D. Degree from Augustana Seminary in 1922. He came to Immanuel

from Wataga, Illinois. In the January 1953 Annual Report he had this to say in his pastoral report: *I, as your pastor, have . . . seen and heard that God, in His mercy and love, has blessed the Immanuel Lutheran Church of Allegan . . . May we individually sacrifice for God, and leave to posterity a well built and well organized church where our children can learn to worship God in a spirit of love and devotion.*

The quarterly *FAMILY ALTAR BOOKLET*, published by Augustana Book Concern was to be provided to every family at a cost of 5 cents per booklet. At the January 1953 Annual Meeting it is noted that the Women's Missionary Society (WMS) held weekly Wednesday evening prayer meetings alternating at three homes; the Peter Witkop home, the Evar Carlson home, and the parsonage. The celebration of Holy Communion was increased from three times per year to six times per year during 1952. Membership at the end of 1952 was 87 adult members and 18 children. It is interesting to note that the Sunday School had 38 students (twenty obviously were non-members) and eight teachers. Pastor Benson acknowledged that he was having significant health issues during 1952 and when it was necessary to call a visiting pastor to fill in for him that he paid for this service out of his own salary. Wellington Witkop and Elmer Sandahl assisted with the services. Pastor Benson resigned in December 1952.

In addition to his time at Immanuel he would serve congregations in Minnesota and South Dakota. Rev. Benson was called as senior pastor of the congregation but had to resign in 1953 due to health issues.

1953-1957 Rev. Wesley Samuelson served as Senior Pastor from Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids. Rev. Carl Erik Holmer also supplied (picture)

Pastor Holmer was born September 20, 1880 in Alfsborgslan, Sweden and came to America in 1890. He received his B.A. degree from Augustana College in 1907 and his B.D. Degree from Augustana Seminary in 1910. He was ordained June 12, 1910 in Rock Island, Illinois. He would serve churches in Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Manistee, Michigan (1925-1942)



By this time the small congregation had grown substantially and on Sunday 30 August 1953 the congregation held a special 75th Anniversary celebration. The weather apparently was beautiful and there were over 250 people in attendance. There were many renovations in preparation for this event sponsored by the Ladies Aid Society. The sanctuary walls were re-plastered in a light pink and white,

the woodwork and benches were painted white, the altar railing was closed at the ends and an opening made in the center, new carpeting was installed in the center aisle, the picture in front since 1913 was replaced by a dorsal curtain in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Gustav Sandahl, a new altar cross and two candlesticks were given in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Sven Peterson, and new lights were installed in memory of Mr. and Mrs Charles Johnson.

The guest speaker that morning during worship was Dr. C.O. Bengston, President of the Illinois Conference. A special luncheon was served in the Fellowship Hall and at 3pm everyone gathered again in the sanctuary for a special celebration. A Roll Call was given of the twenty-five Confirmation Classes held since the congregation was formed and only two were not represented (1944 & 1948). The Brief History booklet was written by Mrs. Selma Anderson.

During this period Mr. Donald Peterson, who was a teacher in the Allegan Public School system, moved into the parsonage and served as a Lay Preacher. Pastor Samuelson would often officiate at evening Sunday services and provided Holy Communion. Beginning August 8, 1954 Rev. Holmer, also from Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids, began to serve as Vice Pastor. Pastor Holmer and Don Peterson would preach on alternating Sundays. This would initiate a period of growth for the congregation that would continue through 1978.

Between 22 April 1954 and 17 June 1954 Senator Joseph McCarthy conducted the infamous McCarthy Hearings in which he accused several Army officials, members of the film industry, and other public figures of being communists. On 17 May 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court declared racial segregation in the schools as unconstitutional. This would be the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.

At a special congregational meeting held on September 1, 1955, Dr. O. N. Anderson, President of the Illinois Conference, met with the congregation and made the suggestion that they consider relocating to the city of Allegan. He promised that the Board of American Missions would help in several ways including paying for a full time pastor for a period of five years. Peter Witkop is recorded as saying: "It ought to be clear now to all that we must go forward or fail as a congregation".

At the January 7, 1957 annual meeting the congregation called Mr. Kenneth Johnson, a theology student sponsored by Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids, to serve as our lay preacher at a salary of \$50 per week and full use of the parsonage with utilities. The Conference gave Mr. Johnson permission to administer the sacraments during this call. He would begin his ministry at Immanuel on April 14, 1957.

1957-1958 Rev. Wesley A. Samuelson (pictured left) served as Senior Pastor and Mr. Kenneth Johnson served as Assistant Pastor. Mr. Johnson was a theology student at this time.



Pastor Samuelson was born February 10, 1914 in Cadillac, Michigan and was ordained June 9, 1940 in Rock Island, Illinois. He received his B.A. Degree from Augustana College in 1936 and his B.D. Degree from Augustana Seminary in 1940. He was serving as the senior pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids from 1948 through 1979. He received a Doctor of Divinity (D.D.) in 1971 from Carthage College.

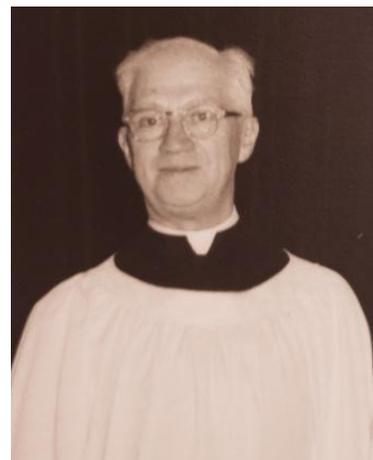
The Senior Luther League sponsored a fund raising and a new Hammond Electric Organ was purchased May 17, 1957 for \$1,240.66. The old organ which had served the congregation since 1895 was sold for \$40.00. In 1959 Ruth Kitchen became the organist having taken over from Selma Anderson. Selma served as the organist for 15 years. The Women's Missionary Society merged with the Ladies Aid Society on July 25, 1957 and pledged to commit at least 25% of all income in support of missions. On January 26, 1958 the Ladies Aid had a special evening worship service celebrating fifty years of their organization.

And 1957 was the year that the United States would launch their first earth satellite.

November 1959-January 1963 Rev. Robert Edmund Byquist

Pastor Byquist was born August 2, 1892 in Bloomington, Illinois and was ordained June 8, 1930 in Rock Island, Illinois. He received his B.A. degree from Augustana College in 1927 and his B.D. degree from Augustana Seminary in 1930. He served congregations in Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin prior to coming to Immanuel

Pastor Byquist was called as the Pastor of the congregation in November of 1959 and moved into the parsonage with his wife, Rosalie Byquist. He would receive an annual salary of \$3,600.00 plus \$600.00 for mileage and free use of the parsonage with all utilities.



Pastor Byquist came to Immanuel from Hammond, Indiana and was retired at the time. However, he served the congregation on a full time basis for the next four years.. Upon leaving Immanuel they moved back to his home town of Bloomington, Illinois where he died on November 12, 1970 at age 78. Before he left, the congregation became affiliated with the Lutheran Church in America in 1962.

In the Fall of 1960 a proposal was brought before the church council by Mr. George Spencer and Mr. Kenneth Kingsbury for Immanuel Lutheran Church to relocate to the city of Allegan. At the time Mr. Kingsbury was a theology student at Western Michigan University and Mr. Spencer was his Father-in-Law. At this time several of the members were from Allegan and it seemed that most of the newer members were coming from there.

At the January 10, 1961 annual congregational meeting the council made this a recommendation to the congregation as a whole and they overwhelmingly endorsed the idea. This was a major move for this well established country congregation, but they were willing to look to the future mission of the church. A Survey Committee was formed to explore the question if we should remain in our current location or relocate. The Committee was to seek guidance from the Board of American Missions in the quest. Elected to this committee were, Elmer Sandahl, Tovio Malila, Axel Swanty, George Spencer, and Richard Kitchen.

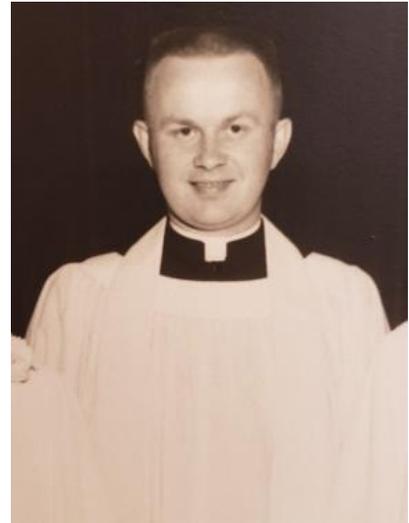
At the January 14, 1962 annual congregational meeting it was voted upon and approved to begin celebrating the Sacrament of Holy Communion on the first Sunday of every month in addition to special holy days.

The plan to relocate was approved at the January 1963 congregational meeting and a new Building Committee was formed to help implement the planned move. A special building fund was established for this purpose. With this dream in mind the congregation would call a young pastor out of seminary to lead them through the difficult steps required to bring the dream to fruition. It was also decided to eliminate the role of Deacons and Trustees and form a single Church Council with eight members plus the pastor.

At a special Congregational meeting on April 7, 1963 we voted unanimously with 57 votes to call Rev. Rodney Hill as our pastor. He will graduate from seminary in June.

June 1963-February 1968 Rev. Rodney Hill

Pastor Hill moved into the parsonage beside the country church and began very quickly to work with and prepare the congregation for their proposed move to Allegan. By 10 January 1965 the congregation submitted their application for Parish Development with the Board of American Missions with the LCA. Average attendance for the previous year (1964) had grown to 63. The congregation began using the LCA educational materials for Sunday School (SS), Confirmation Class, and Vacation Bible School (VBS). The congregation began to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion on the first Sunday of every month and special holy days for a total of fourteen times each year. Active groups within the congregation at the time were the Junior Luther League, Senior Luther League, The LCW, and the Fellowship Club. At the end of 1964 our Baptized membership was 161 and our average worship attendance was 63 (39%)



On 28 August 1963 Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his "I Have A Dream" speech in Washington D.C. On 22 November 1963 President John Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Hostilities had been simmering in Viet Nam and on 2 August 1964 the North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked a U.S destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin which officially brought the United States into the Vietnam conflict. The conflict would radically expand until at the Paris Peace Accords on 27 January 1973 the United States agreed to withdraw all U.S military forces. This was accomplished by 29 March 1973. Two years later South Vietnam would surrender to North Vietnam and thereby officially ending the war.

At the January 18, 1966 Congregational meeting Pastor Hill would make the following statement in his report: *Let the venture of faith of Immanuel for 1966 be firmly seen in our committing ourselves to a new location.* Several committees began working in earnest with the LCA Board of Missions in this endeavor. We approved the purchase of a Mimeograph machine. Membership at the close of 1965 was 144 and the average worship attendance was 61 (42%).

A building fund was established rather quickly and Mrs. Axel (Mildred) Swanty was called upon to serve as the financial secretary. Members of the Building Committee consisted of Mr. Elmer Sandahl, Mr. Axel Swanty, Mr. Toivo Malila, Mr. Richard Kitchen, Mrs. Robert (Betty) VanMelle, Mrs. William Lynn, and Mrs. Walter (Doris)

Byers. The building fund and plans grew slowly, but steadily. In 1966 Mrs. Imogene "Gene" Clegg became the first woman to be elected to serve on the Church Council. At a special congregational meeting on May 15, 1966, with a vote of 44 Yes and 13 No, the church approved the purchase of a parcel of land (five acres) in the city of Allegan. This land was located on Grand Street just west of the Allegan City Airport and cost \$3,500.00.

At the January 17, 1967 Annual Congregational meeting the Senior Luther League and the Junior Luther League merged into a new group called *The Mighty Few*. At this same meeting the Fellowship Group dissolved due to lack of participation.

The year 1967 marked the 450th anniversary of the Reformation where Martin Luther posted his 95 *Theses* on the Church door of Wittenberg Church on October 31, 1517. The congregation of Immanuel took this opportunity to participate in several major religious events in Allegan. First the congregation would join with The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd for a series of mid-week Lenten services. Next the congregation would join The First Presbyterian Church of Allegan for the 450th Anniversary Celebration using a 20th century Folk Mass service. Finally the congregation would play a major role in the December community Christians United Service of Prayer and Scripture Reading. This was also the year that the congregation made a down payment on the property that would eventually become their new home. Membership at the close of 1967 was 153 and our average worship attendance was 53 (35%).

In February 1968 Pastor Hill would resign to accept a call to another congregation in Wyoming, Michigan. However, his love and attachment to Immanuel would continue and upon his retirement later he would move back to Allegan and once again become involved in the life of the congregation. During this short period Pastor William A. Diehl served as our vice pastor.

31 March 1968-1977 Rev. Kenneth Johnson

On 31 March 1968 Rev. Kenneth Johnson was called to serve as Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church and a new



parsonage was purchased for the family at 410 Marshall Street. Cost for the new parsonage was \$22,500. Pastor Johnson



had served as Lay Pastor in 1957-1958 while completing his theology education and he had been serving as senior Pastor in Melrose Park, Illinois prior to this call to Immanuel. In his first year at Immanuel the baptized membership grew to 151 with an average worship attendance of 67 (44%). The average Sunday School attendance doubled to 56. Richard Kitchen became the Sunday School Superintendent with ten teachers. July 21, 1968 the name of the congregation was legally changed to Immanuel Lutheran Church of Allegan Michigan, deleting the word Evangelical in the name. The youth group reorganized as *All Saints* and would have between eight and twelve attending the monthly meetings. Income grew for the year by 38% up to \$11,339.

In 1969 the membership grew to 166 and Joanne Kingsbury became treasurer of the Building Fund. By the end of the year this fund had a balance of \$11,802.53. During the year our membership grew to 166 and our income was \$13,73 in the General Fund and \$11,803 in the Building Fund. June 8, 1969 the congregation agreed to hire Mr. Schmidt of Grand Rapids as our architect and Mr. Orie Martin of Caledonia as the possible General Contractor. At this time the estimated cost for construction would be between \$75,000 to \$80,000.

On June 14, 1970 the dream started to become a reality and the plans for the new church were accepted. It would be a 5,400 square foot building with a sanctuary that would hold over 180 people. The building would have a Fellowship Hall, five classrooms, a kitchen, and offices for staff. The estimated cost was \$120,000 and would be funded as follows: 1) \$6,000 from the Building Fund, 2) \$50,000 from a local bank, and 3) \$64,000 from the Board of American Missions. Final plans were approved on October 18, 1970.

The Carlson Construction Company of Otsego became the final choice to build the new church for an estimated cost of \$97,000 in April of 1971. When the new church building was completed the final cost came to \$117,760. By that time the congregation had already raised \$28,280.34 as their down payment on the building. The first worship service in the new church building at 631 Grand Street in Allegan was on Sunday December 19, 1971 and the dedication service was on 16 January 1972, some 94 years after the formation of the original congregation. The mission of Immanuel Lutheran Church would continue and expand. At the January 19, 1971 Congregational meeting we agreed to sell the old parsonage. It was sold under a Land Contract for a total of \$13,000.00.

At the first Annual Meeting held in the new church on January 20, 1972 Pastor Johnson made this beautiful statement in his report: *The strength of any church is the unity that exists among all its members. This unity does not come about by itself. It must be the work of the Holy Spirit in all its members. When the Holy Spirit is allowed to convict of sin, the separation is taken away that often comes as a wedge to separate members of the church. Love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. And love draws us together around our blessed Lord, crucified and risen from the dead for us. That kind of love harmonizes all kinds of disharmony. Isn't it true that we can thank God that we have seen this kind of harmonizing going on within our congregation during this past year? It is not perfect, but, by God's grace we seek to show love to Him and to one another.*

At that same meeting it was decided to have a member of the Youth Group attend the council meetings with voice but not vote. A proposed budget for 1972 of \$23,340 was approved and it was decided to begin having Lay Readers and Lay Worship Assistants participate in the worship services. At this time the pastor's salary and benefits amounted to 75% of the total budget. In 1973 it was also decided to begin using *Faith Giving* as part of our stewardship program rather than the older pledge system. Our first worship service in the new church building was on December 19, 1971

The sermon for the Dedication Sunday was given by Dr. Frank Madsen, President of the Michigan Synod of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA). The Liturgist for that Sunday was Rev. Wesley Samuelson, Senior Pastor at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids. Pastor Samuelson has had a long history of service to the congregation at the old country church. The Lector for this Dedication Sunday was Rev. Rodney Hill who was the former Pastor of Immanuel and now serves as Pastor of Ascension Lutheran Church in Wyoming, Michigan.

The last Baptism performed in the old country church was for Jacqueline Renee Penny on May 30, 1971 and the first Baptism in the new church building on Grand Avenue was for Nicole Lynn Zoll on January 16, 1972. The first wedding was for Sandra Jo Clegg and Thomas Winters. The first funeral conducted in the new church would be for Mrs. Elinda Witkop who passed away on 8 April 1972. Elinda had been a faithful and longstanding member from the old country church and was a great help in the transition.

The year 1972 was very busy in many other projects for the new congregation. The parking lot was paved and security lights were installed. The lawn was sodded and a sprinkler system installed. New tables and chairs for the Fellowship Hall were purchased along with two stoves by the L.C.W. Also new choir robes were purchased

and the P.A. system was installed. The baptized membership in 1972 was 181. With all this going on the congregation adopted the following motto: *With God All Things Are Possible*. The sign still (May 2024) adorns the rear wall of the sanctuary.



With the new church building came new changes in the worship service. The congregation followed through with having Lay Readers read the Scripture lessons during worship and having a Lay person serve as Worship Assistant in the distribution of Holy Communion. The old country church building was sold for \$8,000.00 to a family that would convert the fellowship hall in the rear of the church as their residence.. The membership grew by forty-two new members, Ken Kinsey assumed the position of Choir Director, and the church parking lot was black topped. 1972 was indeed an exciting year in the life of Immanuel Lutheran Church. This would also be the year that an Adult Bible Study group was initiated.

By the end of year 1973 the baptized membership of the congregation had grown to 132 adult members plus 44 child members for a total of 176 Baptized members. A part time secretary was hired and the parking lot was extended. The first six years at the new church location were marked by phenomenal growth and excitement. Pastor Johnson served the congregation well during this period and Immanuel quickly became involved in the community of Allegan in several ways.

Apparently the congregation was experiencing financial difficulties during this period and Pastor Johnson called a special Congregational Meeting on October 7, 1973. He expressed it this way: *The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the dire state in regards to the financial standing of the church. We were behind by about \$8,000 and at risk of having our utilities cut off.* At a second Special Meeting on December 2, 1973 it was decided to refinance the church loan at a lower interest rate through Aid Association for Lutherans (\$50,000) and the Board of American Missions (\$33,000).

At the end of 1974 the baptized membership was 178 with an average attendance of 88 (49%). By the end of 1975 the congregation had grown to 221 Baptized members and average worship attendance was 114 (52%). And with a sigh of relief, the congregation was finally solvent financially. A church secretary was hired and the pastoral salary plus benefits was down to 58% of the budget. 1975 became the first year for written reports at the annual meetings from all the organizations of the congregation and we began to publish a monthly newsletter. The old church bell was removed and

brought to the new church to be put on display. The congregation formed a basketball team and had three bowling teams.

During 1977 Chuck Hopkins became the sponsor of the newly reorganized Luther League youth group. Among other activities for 1979 they planned to send several members to the Michi-Lu-ca Youth Camp in Fairview, Michigan.

Pastor Johnson submitted his resignation November 10, 1977 and his final sermon at Immanuel was December 11, 1977. He left Allegan to begin a new building program for Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

December 1977-May 1978 Rev. Martin Theodore Ringstrom served as Interim Pastor



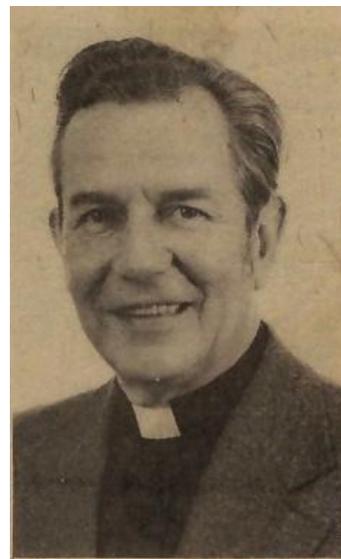
Pastor Ringstrom was born November 3, 1908 in Bertrand, Nebraska and was ordained June 10, 1934 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He received his B.A Degree from Augustana College in 1951 and his B.D. Degree from Augustana Seminary in 1934. He would serve as Pastor in congregations in Montana, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, and Michigan. In 1961-1962 he served as President of Luther College in Iowa. In Michigan he was at Bay City and Niles prior to coming to Immanuel. Pastor Ringstrom passed away on January 31, 2009 age the age of one hundred years old.

The congregation received a gift of Series E Bonds from the Lawrence Berg estate in honor of the work by Pastor Johnson. The value of this gift was \$2,446.22

1978-1982 Rev. Luther Livingston

At a special Congregational Meeting on February 26, 1978 a call was approved for Pastor Luther Livingston to become our pastor with a vote of 75 yes and no negative votes. Pastor Livingston had been conducting services in Allegan periodically since Pastor Johnson left and preached his first official sermon on May 14, 1978 as the newly called minister. The Livingston family moved into the parsonage in June 1978.

Pastor Livingston was a native of Seattle, Washington and earned his bachelor's degree from



Augustana College. He served as a Navy Chaplain during World War II and was ordained after the war. He received a Master's degree and his PhD from the University of Iowa while serving congregations in that state. He was in great demand by several congregations, the seminary in Chicago, and nine different synods of the Lutheran Church for his financial expertise.

Pastor Livingston was immediately involved in the Centennial Celebration of the church with their 100 year anniversary on August 28, 1978. And on August 20, 1978 there was *"A torch relay from the old church in the country into the present site of Immanuel. . . . Our last runner (Mrs. Edie Sartini) will be lighting the Centennial Candle from the torch"*. The actual Centennial Celebration was held on August 27, 1978 with several previous pastors in attendance. A *"time capsule was placed next to the church cornerstone"*.

A new group called *The Mixers* was formed for seniors and retirees. The purpose was to provide the opportunity for this group to gather on a regular basis for fellowship and often there were guest speakers and some outings were arranged. Emphasis upon admitting young people to The Lord's Table for Holy Communion was also established and thus children age ten or in fifth grade began to receive the Sacrament.

In 1979 the congregation was blessed in so many ways. Immanuel received a very generous gift from David and Louise Carlson in the form of a land contract deeded to the congregation valued at \$17,850. Then the congregation received a beautiful organ from Pastor Livingston's former church, Faith Lutheran Church in Homewood, Illinois. Through the use of several memorial contributions and tributes to individuals the congregation filled the pews with the New Lutheran Book of Worship (The Green Book). And the roof over the old Fellowship Hall was repaired and replaced through efforts of several men in the congregation. The following year (March 1980) Immanuel Lutheran Church was honored to host the Michigan Synod Convention held on the campus of Western Michigan University. This was a special honor for a congregation our size.



About this time plans were beginning to form to provide stained glass windows for the sanctuary depicting the Glory of God and the Life of Christ. The windows were designed by Bill Kreeger, a member of Immanuel Lutheran Church. Bill had a Christian art studio in his pole barn and that is where the designs were put together. The project was engineered by Dennis Johnson, also a member of Immanuel, and the work of cutting the glass and placing the pieces carefully in place was carried out by several members of

the congregation in the Johnson basement. Once completed, there were a total of nine absolutely gorgeous windows installed in the sanctuary to the Glory of God. The eight windows along the east wall include *The Creation Window* (Genesis 1), *The Flood Window* (Genesis 6), *The Ten Commandments* (Exodus 20), *The Christmas Window* (Luke 2), *The Baptismal Window* (Matthew 3), *The Crucifixion Window* (Mark 15), *The Resurrection Window* (John 20), and *The Ascension Window* (Acts 1). The large window on the south wall above the wooden cross is *The Second Coming of Christ Window* (Matthew 24:30) and consists of 1,299 pieces of glass. At this same time the *Jesus Blessing the Children Window* (Matthew 19) which currently is high on the north wall of the Fellowship Hall was created. Much later (18 August 1991) the beautiful *Sacramental Window* was added to the Fellowship Hall in memory of Pastor Livingston. Thus, at the present time, our church building is adorned with eleven absolutely beautiful stained glass windows that serve to lift everyone's spirit. Over the years the congregation has held several events to allow the wider community to come and appreciate this beautiful witness to God's activity in our lives.

In March of 1981 the Youth Group (Luther League) had several young people that attended the Lutheran Camp in Pleasant Hill. This was also the first year that the Youth had a float in the annual County Fair parade. They worked for seven weeks building the float in the hangers of the Allegan Airport, which was managed by Lou Thierwachter. The float was called *God Needs People* and it won first place complete with a trophy and \$100 prize. The congregation also had a booth at the fair and it won second place that year. The congregation would continue having a booth at the County Fair for roughly 20 years.

During this period the congregation chose to establish a senior housing project in 1981 and the beginnings of Grand Ravine Senior Housing was initiated. The idea was to build 32 housing units for low income seniors on the land at the north end of the church property. Along with local support and a forty year HUD mortgage loan of \$1,600,000.00 the 32 unit project would be dedicated to the Glory of God on 1 August 1982. Management of the property would be assumed under the Lutheran Social Services of Michigan (LSSM) with Lou and Barb Thgierwechter as the first local managers. Toivo Malila would become the first chairman of the GRSH Board of Directors. The remaining members of the Board of Directors at that time were Craig VanMelle, Gene Clegg, Ron Zeigler, Jeanine Johnson, Diane Eichinger, and Pastor Luther Livingston. Francis Hanson would serve as treasurer.

The average worship attendance each Sunday during 1981 was 111 and in 1982 this rose to 123 every Sunday. Among the groups that were active during this period in

addition to the Luther League were the Senior Retired Group that met monthly, the Lutheran Church Women's (LCW) group that held monthly meetings and sponsored several fellowship gatherings, and the Men's Breakfast Group that met monthly for breakfast and fellowship. Often the Men's Breakfast fellowship would be followed by a continuation on one of the local golf courses.

In 1982 the congregation was able to pay off the second mortgage on the church building with the Board of American Missions. The LCW once again sponsored one of their famous Swedish Smorgasbords for the community which raised \$1060.00. They also raised \$399.30 with the Christmas Bazaar and an additional \$143.99 through the Flea Market. These funds would sponsor several missions including the Christmas Dinner for senior members of the congregation. During 1982 Pastor Livingston broadcast a five minute devotional on the local radio every Saturday.

Pastor Livingston resigned from his ministry at Immanuel effective 30 November 1983. He had accepted a call to serve as Assistant Pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids. He passed away on 20 February 1986 and is buried in Immanuel Lutheran Cemetery (Sheep of the Good Shepherd) in Watson Township. His wife, Bernadine Livingston, passed away 5 November 2017 and is buried next to her husband. After his death the Grand Ravine Senior Administration Center was named the Luther Livingston Center in his memory.

1983-1984 Rev. Dennis Remenschneider

Pastor Remenschneider was the founding Pastor of Hope Lutheran Church in Plainwell and served as interim Vice Pastor during this period. Pastor Panning of Grand Rapids agreed to serve as the interim pastor. The congregation continued to grow with the addition of 13 new members and an average worship attendance of 129. A new commercial refrigerator was purchased for the kitchen using funds from the LCW Smorgasbord Dinner and matching funds from Lutheran Brotherhood Insurance. Several people had donated through their estates including stocks and bonds from the L. Berg Estate valued at \$31,602.75 and a land contract donated by Louise Carlson.

June 1984-August 1992 Rev. Daniel Ward

Pastor Dan Ward began his ministry at Immanuel Lutheran Church in June of 1984 and began working immediately with this active and vibrant congregation. Pastor Dan came to Immanuel from Epiphany Lutheran Church in



Mount Clemens, Michigan. He would move into the parsonage at 403 Davis Street with his wife, Susan. They purchased this property from the congregation for the sum of \$38,000 and financed by Immanuel on a Land Contract.



By the end of 1984 the congregation would begin the restoration of the old church records. Attention was also directed to the Immanuel Lutheran Cemetery in Watson Township and among other items a new fence was constructed to prevent the cattle from freely roaming through the cemetery grounds. By the end of 1984 the congregation had assets that included thirteen different stocks valued at \$40,077.50, Bonds valued at \$2,116.00, and three land contracts that generated \$723 in monthly income. A total of twenty-eight individuals joined the congregation that year. The LCW would sponsor a Father-Son Banquet, World Day of Prayer program, an Annual Smorgasbord, A Christmas Bizarre, An Advent Wreath Workshop, a Christmas Dinner for the Senior Retired Group, Family Christmas Caroling, and other engaging programs. The annual income for the congregation in 1984 was \$74,693 with expenses of \$72,898.

Lou and Barb Thierwechter would resign as managers of the Grand Ravine Senior Housing project and Norma Knobloch was appointed as the new local manager of the complex. On 1 December 1984 the congregation came together in the Fellowship Hall to celebrate the fiftieth wedding anniversary of George and Marion Spencer. They were married 16 December 1934. During the year 1984 the congregation would install sliding doors in the Fellowship Hall to better accommodate the Sunday School classes held there. And the Old County Church building would be purchased from the Houseman Estate for the sum of \$10,000.

In 1985 the Worship and Music Committee which included Ken and Joanne Kinsey, Sari Hammon, and Bonny Kinnernen attended a special seminar on *New*

Horizons in Worship at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. Upon their return it was recommended to the congregation that we begin celebration the Sacrament of Holy Communion twice every month. The proposal was accepted. The congregation hired Priscilla McKenney as the church organist. The congregation agreed to the purchase of sixty more shares of Mid-Con stock for the cost of \$2,400. On 9 June 1985 Bishop Heine was present for a special service for the burning of the church mortgage. Former Pastor Ken Johnson was also present for the special occasion. At this special service for the burning of the church mortgage through Aid Association for Lutherans, the match was lit by Toivo Malila.

This would be the year that the congregation would adopt the following mission statement: *As God's people of victory in Christ, this congregation seeks to witness to the salvation offered in Christ through the Holy Spirit. This is a part of our inclusive ministry directed to all peoples of all ages, in all walks of life, by proclaiming and witnessing to the LORD Jesus Christ, to the Word of God, and by celebrating the Sacraments. We see this witness flowing through regular worship, study, acts of loving service, and in an insistence for just treatment of all of God's people. Through study of the Scriptures and growth in daily prayer we propose to build up Christian unity with others in our community, in our homes, at church, at work and in all of life.*

It is noted that during 1985 the average attendance in Sunday School was 55 and we had 60 young people participate in the Vacation Bible School program in August of 1985. The congregation would approve the sale of shares in the Midcon Stock to help stabilize the budget for that year.

As part of the Lenten worship program in 1985, the David Royer family provided the *Focus on the Family* video series. The videos were presented after a light meal in the Fellowship Hall and they seem to have been well attended. Emily Booth provided the church with a Paschal Candle, an oak stand, and funeral paraments as a memorial to her husband, Norwood Booth. 1985 was the year that Pastor Ward was appointed to the Southwest Michigan Synod Stewardship Committee.

Ross Hammon passed away in his home on 23 January 1986 at age 17. The family were members of Immanuel and Ross had recently been confirmed. His father had passed away in 1983 and both were buried in the church cemetery. His mother, Caroline Hammon, chose to use the memorial monies for her son to provide a photo stand where photos of the confirmands could be posted. Later in 1986 a pictorial directory of our church families was created to help everyone become better acquainted with one another. A special Midsummer Festival was held in which Pastor Willington

Witkop was the special speaker. Pastor Witkop was raised in the old country church on Hooker Road (now 114th Avenue) and he regaled everyone with his stories of his boyhood days at the old country church. Pastor Witkop was serving as pastor of a Lutheran Church in Springfield, Illinois at the time. It was also in 1986 that the congregation purchased a 1984 GMC van to be used to help members of the congregation that needed transportation.

In 1986 the congregation began to experiment with different liturgical services and customs. They began to use Setting Two in the Green LCA Hymnal and started to use the continuous communion table whereby the members of the congregation would come and receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion one by one at the front of the altar area and, after individual prayer, would circle around back to their pew. The Communion Blessing would finally be declared to the congregation as a whole. Lori Querback was hired as the worship organist and the Children's Choir came under the direction of Cyndi Krug with Sari Hammon as the Accompanist. The Youth Group that year would spend a week-end at Michi-Lu-Ca Church Camp among other interesting activities. Pastor Ward and Susan adopted their son, Mitchell Adam Ward born on 23 July 1987. That December the congregation presented a live nativity scene on the front lawn of the church and it was very well received by the community. Several young people were among the members portraying the Biblical Characters of the Holy Birth.

It was also in 1986 that a good deal of work was performed on the cemetery. Irene (Kent) Johnson said that she was tired of seeing cows grazing and walking through the cemetery so she had a fence surrounding the cemetery installed. She also had the wrought iron entry erected with the naming of the cemetery as *Sheep of the Good Shepherd*. And for the first time Immanuel would celebrate Thanksgiving Eve with The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd. Pastor Ward became very active in the Allegan community by serving on the Review Board for the Intermediate School District, the Board of Directors for Grand Ravine Senior Housing, the administration Board for Wings of Hope Hospice, and as Vice President of the Allegan Ministerial Association. Average worship attendance during 1985 was 135 with a Baptized membership of 298 (45%).

The new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) became official on 1 January 1988. This became the motivation for several changes including the Order of Worship, a new Sunday School curriculum, an early morning worship service, and a mission statement to help guide the congregation in future years. The LCW participated again in the local Bridgefest program by serving a lunch at the Griswald Auditorium. They earned \$307 and with matching funds from Lutheran Brotherhood they placed

\$614 in the new carpet fund. A new computer was purchased with Bob and Amy Nally setting up the programming and entering the data of our congregation in the new program. Office furniture was purchased at a VERY reasonable price from the Haworth Company of Allegan.

Beginning in January 1989 the church council appointed a committee consisting of Pastor Ward, Loretta Cavanaugh, Sue Bierlein, Jim Horwath, Florence Middleton, and Craig VanMelle to work on the church constitution in an effort to bring it current with the new ELCA. The new carpeting was installed in the Fellowship Hall and the surrounding hallway, the Pastor's office, and the nursery. The final payment was received on the Land Contract for the old church on Hooker Road (now 114th Avenue). The LCW was again very busy this year with a Soup Supper in March, a Garage Sale in May, and the annual Christmas Bazaar in December among other events. As always the LCW would use their funds in support of several local and international ministries.

It was also during 1989 that the congregation would experiment with having two worship services, but they discontinued this by the end of the year. A special pictorial directory of the congregation was created and placed in the narthex. Pastor Ward was elected as chairperson of the Financial Support Committee for the North/West Lower Michigan Synod of the ELCA. Our Sunday School program proved to be very successful with sixty-two registered students and an average attendance of fifty. The VBS in July had ninety-nine participants. Our baptized membership had grown to 322. The Luther League Youth would have a *Worker-Bee* at Grand Ravine Senior Housing for landscaping, cleanup, and minor repairs to some of the units. At the Allegan County Fair the LCW would sponsor the Church Booth this year.

In January 1990 the Lutheran Church Women (LCW) planned and served a Luncheon for Christian Unity Week at the Methodist Church. Other ecumenical projects included a joint Ascension Day worship service at Hope Lutheran Church in Plainwell and a Thanksgiving Eve worship service with The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd. Early in 1990 "The Rev. Roger Prehn, Assistant to the Bishop . . . led our council and congregation through the Emmaus Walk, a process of the Synod and congregation to evaluate and set forth plans for the near future".

A new Rogers Essex 655 Organ and a sound system was purchased using special donated funds and dedicated to the Glory of God on 3 June 1990 (Pentecost Sunday). The cost was \$19,941. We then had a special organ recital on September 30, 1990 by Mr. Ron Krebs. *Tithers by the Millions* became the stewardship campaign program for the year with an emphasis upon tithing as an ideal way of life and response to the Gospel of

Jesus Christ. The church conducted monthly Wednesday evening worship services at the Allegan County Medical Care Center. At the time we had four members that were residents of ACMCC.

Two families celebrated very special events during 1990. Celebration for George and Myrtle Eichinger was held in the Fellowship Hall on their 50th Wedding Anniversary and later there was a 40th Wedding Anniversary celebration for Milton and Joyce Schafer. The mid-week Lenten Services that year were shared with Hope Lutheran Church of Plainwell and the Thanksgiving Eve Services were held with the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd in Allegan. The LCW participated in their first Women's Retreat in October at Pleasant Hill Camp in Gowen, Michigan with twenty-three ladies represented from Immanuel. The Luther League once again sponsored the Easter Breakfast, a tradition that they have maintained for several years.

During this year the congregation supported the Allegan Ministerium Food Bank and members participated in the CROP Walk. We had an Alzheimer's Support Group and a Teen Parenting Class (twenty weeks) that met regularly in the Fellowship Hall. The Seniors Group met the second Tuesday of every month and the Good Years Group had outings on the third Saturday of every month. The Youth Group (Lutheran Tin Cans) was formed and became very active. . They had a swim party at Otsego Middle School, had an Allegan City Clean Up event, a twelve mile bike trip along Lake Michigan, a Shipshewana Picnic Day, a bowling party, and trips to Michi=LuCa and Cedar Point.

The member mailboxes were built by Jim Horwath in 1990. The people that purchased the old country church building refinanced their loan and paid off our land contract. It was decided to celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion every Sunday during the Easter season (six weeks). In June we had a special Hand Bell concert at the church and we tried having a special Healing Service on Thursday evenings. Average Sunday school attendance had grown to eighty-seven and the youth would again have a Live Nativity scene and there were thirty-five people that went Christmas Caroling. The congregation gave out forty Christmas Food Baskets. Pastor Ward was elected President of the Allegan Ministerium.

The Baptized membership at the end of 1990 was 332 and the average worship attendance was 131 (39%). It is especially noted that we had 224 present for Easter Sunday worship services. During 1990 the congregation sold two hundred shares of the Abbott Lab stock (part of the gift from the Lawrence Berg Estate) for \$41,077.49

On 2 August 1990 Iraq invaded the smaller country of Kuwait thus initiating what would be called the Gulf War. As an immediate response the church council decided to sell their Abbott Stock which was tied to Iraq. This stock had been a gift to Immanuel from one of Pastor Ken Johnson's former parishioners in Illinois so the congregation voted to give a 10% tithe of the proceeds to Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids where Pastor Johnson was serving at the time. After this was satisfied, the remaining \$35,000 was reinvested in other programs and \$2,000 was used to retire some congregational debts. The new Holy Communion stained glass window was created and installed in the Fellowship Hall in memory of Pastor Livingston. Several members of the Livingston family were present for the dedication.

The congregation won Honorable Mention honors in 1991 at the Allegan County Fair for their



booth *Welcome Home Sons and Daughters* and again in 1992 with the booth named *Children of the Heavenly Father*.



At the January 27, 1991 Annual Meeting the congregation adopted the new constitution which conformed to the new ELCA recommendations. During 1991 the congregation witnessed to their faith in a multitude of ways. We participated in the Adopt-A-Highway by regularly cleaning a section of M-222, we held monthly worship services at Allegan County Medical Facility, we contributed to the Allegan Food Bank, we contributed to the Sunset House, we dedicated the Sacramental Stained Glass window in the Fellowship Hall, we offered two eight week sessions on Parenting for low income families in the community, we started the SEARCH eight week Bible Study program, we held monthly meetings for the Alzheimer's Association Support Group, and committed to full support for the North/West Lower Michigan Synod benevolence program. Pastor Ward made his presence known in the community by serving as President of the Allegan Ministerium and as a member of the Synod Financial Support Committee.

The church library was established as a memorial to Arnie Piirtola. Regular monthly meetings were held by The Seniors Group, The Good Years Group, The Pairs and Spares Group, The Senior Youth Group, and the Junior Youth Group. Mary Kay used our building for weekly meeting for much of the year. The LCW hosted a Citizens Against Crime program in April and the VBS held morning sessions for the first time.

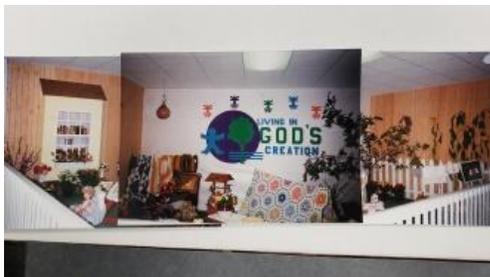
At the close of 1991 our membership totaled 310 and the average worship attendance was 125 (40%). 1991 also saw the Organ Fund paid in full

At a special congregational meeting on March 29, 1992 the vote to have the Sacrament of Holy Communion at every worship service was approved. The congregation also approved the purchase of the Waterman property as an investment. The VBS program was *Growing Together in Jesus* and the average attendance was sixty-six. The Sunday School held a Bike-a-Thon on the Kal-Haven Trail that raised \$345.50 for disaster relief in Florida. In August Pastor Ward submitted his resignation to accept another call and Pastor Steve Kauffman from the Lutheran Home in Grand Rapids served as our interim pastor for the next eight months. The SEARCH Bible Study program continued with lectures given by Miriam Tiarney and the individual classes were led by Marne Sieber and Donna Ziegler. Even though we were without a regular pastor, we still held a special twentieth anniversary celebration of our new church building on September 20, 1992. We ended the year with a membership of 293 and average attendance for Sunday worship was 115 (39%).

At the January 24, 1993 congregational meeting we voted to call Pastor Timothy Nilsen as our full time pastor with 63 voting for and 23 voting against. Part of the agreement was that the congregation would assist Pastor Nilsen in the purchase of a residence for he and his family. We also decided to install new carpeting in the sanctuary and repair the outside lighting system that had been hit by lightning.

April 1993-1995 Rev. Timothy Nilsen

Pastor Nilsen came to Allegan and became the Pastor of Immanuel in April 1993. The congregation continued their participation in the Allegan County Fair in 1993 with the booth called *Living in God's Creation* (picture) and in 1994 with the booth called *Give Us This Day*.



For stewardship in 1993 we held Cottage Meetings and it was noted in his pastoral report at year end that the response was "disappointing". Less than 40%

of the congregation responded. We ended 1993 with 309 members and attendance had dropped to an average of 104 (34%).



In February 1995 there was a very special ceremony at Immanuel for thirteen couples who renewed their marriage vows. The ceremony was followed by a

Sweetheart Dinner at the Red Brick Inn in Plainwell. During this year of 1995 the Luther League sponsored a *Kids Hour* for children to gather after church for games and other fun events. They also held some special meetings for *Teen Issues* which was relatively successful.

At the annual meeting on 13 November 1994 it was voted on and approved that Pastor Nilsen would assume the mortgage on the church parsonage at 170 Park Avenue in Allegan. At that same meeting the decision was made to sell the church van as it was no longer being used for the purpose for which it was originally purchased and the maintenance was becoming an issue.



Brochures were mailed out to residents of Allegan and seemed to have resulted in a few new families attending Immanuel during the year. The LCW formed the Lydia Circle with monthly daytime meetings, the Men's Group was formed to compliment the evening meetings of the LCW, and in January of 1994 a special Building Committee was formed to explore the possibility of expanding our church building.

Pastor Nilsen served on the Board of Directors for the Grand Ravine Senior Housing Project, was a member of the Allegan Ministerial Association, a member of the Board of the Allegan/Ottawa Alzheimer's Association, and a member of the Synod Ministry Leadership Support Committee. During 1994 the confirmands and their parents assumed the care and upkeep of the church lawns and the funds normally allocated for this purpose were used to send several confirmands to church camp. Several young people attended the fantastic Youth Congress in Chicago and the Immanuel Booth at the County Fair won 8th place this year. At the close of 1994 our membership stood at 310 with an average worship attendance of 109 (35%).

In February of 1995 Immanuel held a special worship service of Marriage Renewal of Vows for three couples followed by a Sweetheart Dinner at the Red Brick Inn in Plainwell. On May 21-23, 1995 Rick and Sue Bierlein represented Immanuel as delegates to the Michigan Synod Assembly. It had been several years since the congregation had Lay Delegates at the convention. The Evangelism Committee recommended that we have greeters at the worship services and this program was initiated this year. The congregation also agreed to the purchase of the supplemental hymnals *With One Voice* and memorial funds were used for the purchase. The Annual Church Picnic was held 20 August 1995 at Littlejohn Lake Park with an outdoor worship service and had about 70 people in attendance. Bill Cronkhite started

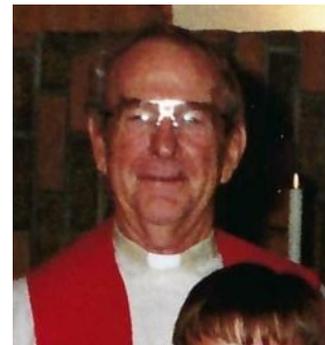
sponsoring a day at the White Caps Baseball game. For the stewardship program this year it was decided to send out mailings rather than having the regular home meetings. The LCW held a Fall Retreat at Camp Geneva in Holland and made the decision to develop a Prayer Chain. They also decided to donate forty-four teddy bears to the Allegan EMS to give out to children in traumatic situations.

Average worship attendance during this period was as follows: in 1993 the average was 104; in 1994 it was 109; and in 1995 the average worship attendance was 105.

Pastor Nilsen submitted his resignation on 12 November 1995. In his resignation letter he indicated that there was some dissatisfaction with his ministry at Immanuel and therefore it would be best for him to move on. At that special congregational meeting the congregation decided to sell the parsonage at 170 Park Avenue. Mike Melms submitted a report from the Congregational Call Committee that indicated there is a shortage of possible candidates for full time ministry in the Synod at this time. However, the name of Pastor Ned Elsass was presented as a possible interim Pastor. Pastor Elsass is a retired Pastor living in Buchanan Michigan and would be open to serving for Sunday worship and two days of ministry in the church and community.

1996-1997 Rev. Dr. Ned Elsass - Interim Pastor

Pastor Elsass was born 14 November 1928 in Wapakoneta, Ohio. During the Korean War he served as US Naval Chaplain aboard the USS Phoenix and the USS Freeman. He served as Pastor with several congregations in Illinois and Michigan before he retired in Baroda, Michigan where he passed away on March 2, 2005 at age seventy-six.



As part of the 7 July 1996 Congregational Meeting, Pastor Elsass made the following observation in his Pastoral Report: *It is no secret that there have been disagreements among you, some strife and discord, but overall it's been my impression that there is a cooperative effort to get on with the work of the Lord and to be about His business in the community. Some members have transferred because they felt they could no longer be a part of the life and mission of Immanuel..... This past eleven months, thirty-one new members have joined our congregation.....(and) During my eleven months I have discovered that there is a deep commitment to mission at Immanuel.*

In the summer of 1996m, the VBS was held jointly with several other local congregations at the Unity Christian Reformed Church. Immanuel handled the registration and Karen Jalbert served as the VBS Coordinator. There was an estimated attendance of three hundred students. Our Bonding Company urged and we agreed to initiate using at least two people to count the worship offerings.

Immanuel added a new worship service at Allegan County Medical Facility on the second Sunday of each month at 2:00pm. This is in addition to the service of Holy Communion served at ACMF in the evening on every second Wednesday. Immanuel is the only congregation that offered the Sacrament of Holy Communion at the facility in addition to the regular 2nd Wednesday evening service at 7pm. Tuesday mornings at 9:30am Immanuel held Bible Studies at Grand Ravine Senior Housing. At the 1996 Easter Luncheon we had a program presented on the *Clown Ministry* followed by the traditional Easter Egg Hunt. In May of 1999 we held a Pig Roast Family Celebration where booths were set up representing each Committee. The event was considered a huge success.

Up until this time the congregation made use of pew cards during the worship service to obtain the names and information on visitors to Immanuel. The decision was made to change this procedure and a new Guest Book with stand was set up in the Fellowship Hall near the entry to the sanctuary.

Attempting to move into the computer age the congregation updated their system with a new computer system at a cost of \$3,200 which included the *POWER CHURCH PLUS* accounting and membership program. They also purchased a new printer/copier at a cost of \$3,000. Much of this cost was covered using memorial funds. The LCW met every second Tuesday of the month for a Bible Study using *Lutheran Woman Today* as a resource. The meeting also included a short business meeting and fellowship time with snacks. Among many other mission efforts, the LCW donated fifty comfort teddy bears to the Allegan EMS. New Chrismons were made this year for our Christmas Tree.

The young people had two groups this year. They formed a Kid's Hour to provide some fun things for the youth of the church after worship. They scheduled such fun things as games for both inside and outside, swimming parties at the home of Jim and Sandi Horwath, bowling parties, roller skating, and other fun events.

At a special congregational meeting held on 15 June 1997 the congregation voted on two important items. The first was to update the Constitution of the congregation to bring it in line with the Northwest Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in

America (ELCA). The second was to call Rev. Peggy Adams as our new full time pastor with a vote of 82 yes and 5 no.

1 August 1997-30 September 2002 Rev. Peggy Adams

Pastor Adams came from Saint Paul Lutheran Church in Greenville, Michigan and began her ministry at Immanuel July of 1997. She was the first female pastor to serve this congregation at a time when it was a struggle for women to serve as clergy in the church.

Pastor Peggy was born in Portsmouth, Ohio in 1934 and raised in an ALC Lutheran church there. She began studies at Capital University in Ohio about 1954 but discontinued her studies when she married. In the 1970s she finally received her Bachelor's Degree in Social Work from Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. She became a therapist, ran the local Suicide and Crisis Line, and helped establish the first women's shelter in the area. She initiated some early theological education from the Seminex (Seminary in Exile) in Saint Louis, but decided to stop to take care of her children. She received her first Master's Degree from National Louis University in Chicago around 1982. After raising her six children she would attend the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago where she received her Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree about 1987.



By the end on 1997 we had thirty-six new baptized members that joined the congregation and the average worship attendance was 112. On Easter Sunday of 1997 we had 178 people worship with us. The VBS that year was held at Immanuel and was considered a great success. We had a difficult time with the booth at the Allegan County Fair that year and ended up with sixth place honors which still had a prize of \$130. This would be the year that the congregation decided to purchase *The Home Altar* as a daily devotional book to give to the members that wish to have such a guide.

1997 would also be the year that the congregation decided to try using the Stephen Ministry program. Stephen Ministers are lay members of the congregation that are trained to provide one-on-one care to those experiencing a difficult time in life. This would include grief, job loss, divorce, chronic or terminal illness, or relocation.

The LCW was very active during 1997 with such projects as the giving of Comfort Bears to the Allegan EMS, made 115 quilts and 44 sewing kits for Lutheran

World Relief, collected soap for Lutheran World Relief, sponsored a Women's Retreat, and did special fund raisers for other projects. There was a special Congregational Meeting for the purpose of possibly hiring a part time Youth Leader, but this failed to pass due to lack of funding. The Archives Committee arranged for a larger safe-deposit box to store the microfilm of the older church records while the originals were stored in the safe. The congregation increased the worship services at the Allegan County Medical Care Facility to every other week and continued the weekly Bible Studies for the residents at Grand Ravine. During the Sunday Worship services the congregation experimented with the idea of Holy Communion by intinction every other Sunday. And, after many years of dedicated service, Loretta Cavanaugh resigned her duties as Altar Guild Chairperson and Dawn Doornhaag accepted the responsibility. The congregation held a special meeting and voted to purchase the Waterman property to the east of the church for the sum of \$78,000 and planned to use the rental income to cover the church mortgage.

A replica of the church building was constructed by Dick Kitchen and placed in a special display on Marshall Street along with other churches and county buildings during the holiday season. A special gift of \$10,000 was given to Immanuel from the estate of Florence Johnson Bradford (an aunt of Betty VanMelle) and it was decided to place the money in the building fund. New Acolyte robes were purchased at a cost of \$326.75 and were partially funded by the LCW. In 1999 Lori Querback had to step down as our church organist because she needed to devote more time in support of her daughter at their family church. Lori was a huge asset to the worship life of Immanuel and her absence left a hole. However, the congregation was blessed to learn that two ladies from Martin were interested in the position so Lorraine VanDenBerg and Darlene Leep stepped in the save the day. During this year Pastor Rodney Hill and his wife, Arlene, retired from the ministry and chose to become members of Immanuel.

At the February 15, 1998 Special meeting the congregation voted to create an *Archives* Committee in the By-Laws of the church constitution. The purpose of this committee was to *maintain membership records, Preserve church history, church photos, and a Memorial Book*. During 1998 there was a special Worship Ministry Workshop in Lansing Michigan titled *Bread for the Journey* attended by Gean Clegg, Betty Evans, Ken and Joanne Kinsey, and Pastor Peggy. Later that year there was a three day seminar in Valparaiso Indiana titled *Institute of Liturgical Studies* attended by Betty Evans, Donna Ziegler, Ken and Joanne Kinsey, and Pastor Peggy. The church booth at the County Fair was called *Grandpa's Farm* and took the Blue Ribbon this year. The Stewardship Committee initiated the Simply Giving automated form of giving.

The congregation began to have struggles and the average Sunday worship attendance began to decline. During the year 1998 the average worship attendance was 108, for 1999 it dropped further to 102, and by 2001 the average worship attendance had dropped to 85. It was a period of noticeable dissention within the congregation.

The congregation continued with their booths at the Allegan County Fair and took Second Place honors in 1998 with *Memories Begin Here* and First place honors in 1999 with the booth named *Grandpa's Farm*. Immanuel Lutheran Church would continue to have booths at the fair through 2002. In May of 1999 at the Synod Assembly Al Moeller gave a great talk about the work of the Synod Lutheran Men in Mission (LMM) program. Al was serving as the Vice President of the Synod Group at the time. In September of 2000 the LCW held a special Tea in celebration of thirty years of *Women in Ministry*. The event had several women pastors from the surrounding area attend and it was a great success. Pastor Peggy was presented with thirty Gold coins valued at one dollar each and the other female pastors were all given a Gold coin at the Luncheon held in their honor. During 1999 Pastor Peggy was the Treasurer of the Allegan Ministerial Association, served as a member of the Ethics Committee for the Allegan General Hospital, and served on the Synod Mutual Ministry Committee and Synod Response Team.

During the year 2000 the regular Building Committee began to explore and discuss the possibility of expanding the church building. We were already beginning to have issues with the tenants in the two rent houses at 633 Grand (The Big House) and 645 Grand (The Small House or cottage). Both were behind on their monthly rental payments and the tenant in the Big House ended up skipping out without notice leaving the building in a real mess. At the November 14, 1999 Annual meeting we didn't have a quorum so the meeting was rescheduled for December 5, 1999. At the end of 2001 the congregation had \$63,581.44 in CDs and other investments. By the close of 2000 the average worship attendance had dropped below 100 for the first time in the New Church Building. It was an average of 89.

At the beginning of 2001 the congregation formed a special Building Committee with the purpose of adding a Fellowship Hall to the north end of the church and a special building fund was established with that in mind. The plan submitted to the congregation called for a 6,900 square foot two story addition with an enlarged kitchen, an open fellowship hall, offices for the Pastor, office for the secretary, a counting room, and a full basement with enclosed classrooms. In 2001 the two rental properties were being managed by Nancy and Dick Montgomery and they reported to the congregation that they were having difficulty keeping good tenants and keeping the property in good

repair. It seems the tenants were rather destructive of the property causing a good deal of expense and the rents were not coming in on a timely basis.

At the special February 11, 2001 congregational meeting it was decided to combine all the church funds into one common checking account but still maintain distinct records for the funds other than the General Funds. Gean Clegg finished and presented the History of Immanuel Lutheran Church. During February of 2001 the congregation hosted the Red Cross Blood Drive.

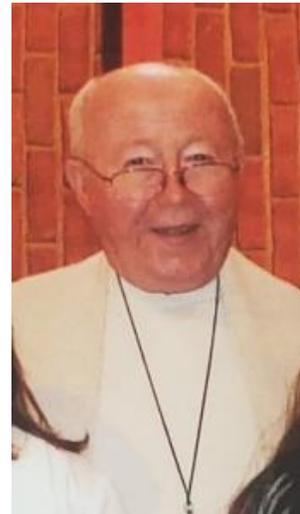
On September 11, 2001 the world was shocked when terrorists hijacked four passenger planes. Two planes were flown into the Twin Towers of New York City and they were totally destroyed. A third plane was flown into the Pentagon Building in Washington DC causing extensive damage. The fourth plane was brought down in Pennsylvania by the brave passengers before it could reach whatever it's intended destination could be reached and damaged. This event would eventually bring the United States into a war against the *Taliban* and Al_Qaeda in Afghanistan and Iraq.

At the November 11, 2001 Annual Meeting the congregation approved a change to the constitution to allow two congregational meetings per year. This was to split the discussion of the budget into one meeting and all other business for the second meeting. The idea was that the single meetings were too long. We also hired the Tom Byrne Firm to lead us in a fund raising campaign for the Building Fund Program. By the end of 2001 there was \$130,000 in the fund and an additional \$178,000 pledged for the expansion of our church building. During 2001 we had four adults in addition to Pastor Peggy that attended the Global Mission Event in Denver, Colorado. We also had five High School youth attend the four day Youth Gathering in Lansing. Our booth at the Allegan County Fair (*The Quilting Bee*) took second place honors with a reward of \$150. The church council approved a special "Helping Hand" Fund to be used at the disgression of the Pastor for those in need. We ended the year 2001 with a baptized membership of 229 and an average worship attendance of 85 (37%).

At the February 10, 2002 Congregational meeting we approved the fund raising for phase I of our building project to construct a 6,900 square foot addition on the north end our our church building. Pastor Peggy submitted her resignation from Immanuel to be effective 30 September 2002 and Pastor Dean Beckwith accepted the call to serve as the Interim Pastor for Immanuel. Upon leaving Immanuel Pastor Peggy would serve as a Hospice Chaplain, Senior Pastor for Saint James Lutheran Church in Llano, Texas and finally as Associate Pastor for Palm Valley Lutheran Church in Round Rock, Texas.

2002-2005 Rev. Dean Hal Beckwith

Pastor Beckwith was born October 27, 1939 in South Haven, Michigan. His mother passed away in his early childhood so he was adopted by his Uncle and Aunt. He did his undergraduate work at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio and received his Master of Divinity Degree from Hamma Theological Seminary, which is a part of Wittenberg University. Prior to coming to Immanuel Lutheran Church at age sixty-three, Pastor Beckwith served at King of Kings Lutheran, Good Hope Lutheran, and Saint Mark's Lutheran in the Michigan and Illinois area.



On August 18, 2003 the Special Building Committee recommended to the congregation that we hire CL Construction Company in Holland Michigan to design and build the approximately 6,900 square foot addition to the north side of the church building. At that time the estimated cost was \$420,000 and would include a new Fellowship area, a new kitchen, a new entry way with a portico, new office space, and reverse the orientation of the sanctuary. Jim Horwath (Building Chairman) worked closely with Joanne Kinsey (church council president) to obtain a mortgage for at least \$235,000 at 5.75% to help fund the project.

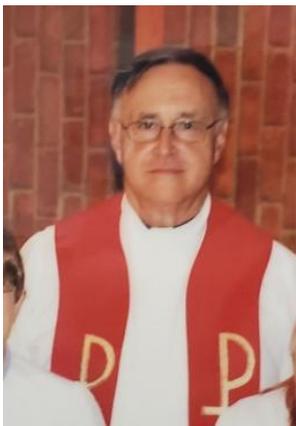
During 2003 the LCW assembled infant layettes for the Maternal Support Project. These layettes were made from homemade items along with items they purchased and were used by infants born to low income families. On October 25, 2003 the LCW held their Annual Bazaar offering various crafts, baked goods, and white elephant items. During the bazaar the ladies provided a luncheon with Swedish meatballs and noodles along with desserts. They made \$1,053 which they applied toward the purchase of a 14 cubic foot commercial freezer for the kitchen.

For the year of 2003 the records show that the congregation had a total income of \$93,619 with expenses of \$87,510 from a membership listed as 249 baptized members. On 29 June 2003 the congregation celebrated their 125th Anniversary (August 28, 1878) with a full church for worship that Sunday. Pastor Beckwith served as liturgist and the Sermon message was given by Pastor Dan Ward. Pastor Ward had served as the Pastor of Immanuel from 1984 to 1992 and shared some of his experiences with the congregation. At that time Pastor Ward was serving as Senior Pastor of Saint John's Lutheran Church in Poughkeepsie, New York. Following the sermon, local Allegan historian and author, John Pahl, gave a talk on the history of the old Swedish church in

Kellogg. His research and history of the early church have been a valuable resource to Immanuel. At one point Senator Patty Birkholz presented a Special Tribute to the congregation honoring Immanuel's 125th Anniversary. The Tribute detailed major events in the life of our congregation and was signed by Senator Birkholz, State Representative Fulton Sheen, and Michigan Governor Jennifer M. Granholm. After the special service there was a Smorgasbord on the church grounds.

The new Fellowship Hall on the north side of the church building was dedicated 24 July 2005. The total cost for the construction ended up being \$480,000.00 and at the time of the dedication the fund raiser by the congregation had raised almost half of the amount needed (\$235,000.00). The remainder was covered by a twenty year mortgage of \$245,000.00. As part of the renovation the orientation of the sanctuary was reversed by moving the altar area from the north wall to the south wall. With this new Fellowship Hall the congregation began the coffee fellowship hour prior to the worship service and this idea was very warmly received by everyone. The new Fellowship Hall also became a great place to continue the Thursday meetings of the Senior Citizens Day Group. However, with the dwindling number of young people the Luther League decided to join with the Youth Group of The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd with meetings alternating between the two congregations. The LCW also made good use of the new gathering area to sponsor several activities during the year. Total membership at the end of 2005 was 257 Baptized members and an average attendance of 84 (33%).

In August 2005 the decision was made to have the Sacramental Stained Glass Window at the front of the church (south side) moved to the new Fellowship Hall near the entry doors. After his retirement from the ministry at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Pastor Beckwith continued to lead the Wednesday morning Bible Study class for several years. He passed away on October 18, 2021 just before his 82nd birthday in South Haven, Michigan



2006-May 26, 2011 Rev. Ronald Bessert

Pastor Bessert was born in 1944 and served congregations throughout Michigan prior to accepting the call

to become Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church Despite his age he became a very active part of our ministry to and in the Allegan Community. He passed away August 30, 2021.

A major project completed during 2006 was the paving of the church parking lot. At the end of 2007 the membership is listed as 259 with an average attendance at Sunday worship of 82 (32%). During this year the two rentals (633 Grand & 645 Grand) brought in a net income of \$6,505.00. It was also during 2007 that the altar area was refurbished (\$8,271.00) and a new sound system with a digital projector and motorized projection screen was installed ((\$3,178.00). A nine foot cross was added to the south wall made from Michigan Cherry wood and donated to Immanuel by Wolverine Hardwoods of Allegan. The cross on the sanctuary roof was replaced in August 2007 with a ten foot cross of steel and aluminum made by Larry VanHusen of Hamilton.

There were some changes made to the worship services in 2006. The congregation continued with two services every Sunday, but the church began to experiment with a contemporary liturgy at one of the services. During this year a monthly Senior Citizens Day was organized by Pam Hopkins which included luncheons and special field trips. The LCW continued to support several local and international mission programs through their fund raising events. And in December of 2016 the church put on a Live Nativity Scene in the front lawn of the church. This was well advertised and seems to have been a hit with the local community.

Pastor Bessert received a new pacemaker which improved his personal health in 2007. The Youth Group had a sleigh ride which everyone seems to have enjoyed. The net profit from the two rental properties for 2007 amounted to \$6,565.48. The average Sunday worship attendance for 2007 was eighty-two. At the congregational meeting on February 10, 2008 the decision was made to give ten percent (10%) of the General Fund *and* Building Fund income to the Michigan Synod as our ongoing benevolence commitment to the greater mission of the ELCA. At the February 10, 2008 Congregational Meeting Pastor Bessert made the comment that the year 2007 was noted as a year of financial struggles. In 2007 the LCW discontinued their monthly meetings and the Senior Citizens Day was cut back from weekly meetings to every other week due to lack of interest. Serious discussions were made regarding the possible sale of the two rental properties. At the end of the year the congregation once again would present a Live Nativity Scene on the front lawn during Advent of 2007.

In the annual report for the year 2008 Pastor Bessert makes reference to the fact that he still experienced some health issues which at times interfered with his ministry at Immanuel. The Ash Wednesday and mid-week Lenten services were cancelled for 2008 due to the poor health of Pastor Bessert. Having a good deal of extremely bad winter weather during February didn't help matters much causing several other cancellations. This would also be the year that the church made another leap into the new computer age with the establishment of the church web page. Memorial funds were used for the software updates. The congregation made the decision to help the Alternative Education School by hosting a Christmas Dinner for the students. This proved to be quite successful with 92 students attending and thus became an ongoing tradition. The average worship attendance for 2008 was eighty-one and the net income from the two rental properties amounted to \$4,917.

On June 20-21, 2008 the LCW held their annual Rummage sale which was deemed very successful again. With the addition of matching funds from Thrivent they were able to donate \$2,377.50 to a dozen charitable organizations.

During 2008 the Sunday school program had an average of fourteen students and the VBS program (*Power Lab - Discovering Jesus Miraculous Power*) was declared a success. On July 13, 2008 the congregation held a special 130th anniversary celebration. Also in July and August the congregation initiated a special *Fun Night* for all youth through 8th grade which included a dance and pizza. About a dozen young people attended these events. The VBS program for that summer was rather successful with approximately sixty kids participating. In December the congregation had a Live Nativity Scene with an open house luncheon on December 14, 2008. They finished the evening with a special Christmas program presented by the Sunday School children called *A World of Christmas Customs*. Then on December 19, 2008 everyone went Christmas caroling.

At the October 20, 2008 council meeting it was suggested that the congregation could save \$13,420 per year with the following changes: 1) Eliminate the paid secretary, 2) Eliminate the paid custodian, and 3) eliminate the paid choir director. It was suggested that perhaps we could find volunteers for these positions. Also it was suggested that we should eliminate the second worship service on Sundays.

At the February 8, 2009 Annual Meeting the congregation decided to initiate a Saturday Morning Men's Breakfast with a short Bible Study. The Wednesday Morning Bible Study and the Briarwood Assisted Living Bible Study continued to be successful. In the spring of 2009 the congregation held a Spring Prom for the students of the

Alternative Education High School. It was very successful. The church council approved the change of our casualty insurance from Lutheran Trust Insurance Company to Church Mutual Insurance Company. Holiday Florist began providing live flowers for the Sunday worship services at a total cost of \$12.50 per Sunday. A decision was made to cancel the VBS program for the year due to lack of support.

July 14, 2009 Kari Fast became an intern at Hope Lutheran Church in Plainwell



and she was to spend part of her time working with Pastor Bessert and the congregation of Immanuel Lutheran Church. She was certified by the Michigan Synod to officiate for Baptism and to celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion. Hope Lutheran Church was to pay Immanuel \$160 per month to cover her work at Immanuel. At the July 27, 2009 council meeting it was recommended that the Scripture lessons for the coming Sunday be shared on the new church web site and that the words to the hymns be posted on the Powerpoint used for the worship service. At

this council meeting, retired Pastor Rod Hill was serving as the church treasurer and reported that through June our expenses exceeded our income by \$6,456.33.

By August 2009 the congregation was really struggling financially and the church council made the decision to transfer funds from other accounts into the general fund to cover the expenses. The sum of \$1,340 in the Memorial Fund was part of that transfer. This was the memorial for Helen Hight who passed away on June 6th and her husband, Roy Hight, was on the church council at the time and approved this transfer. At the time there was a total of \$7,753.09 in the Memorial Fund. Roy and Helen would again be the benefactors of Immanuel in 2016. Funds were also transferred from the Building Fund to pay the IRS and property tax bills. During 2009 the congregation actively participated in the Angel Food Ministry which was a joint ministry in Allegan to provide food for those in need. During this year the congregation was able to use individuals that were required to do community service as a means to accomplish some necessary work projects. The average worship attendance for 2009 had dropped to 75.

In 2010 and 2011 the congregation began having difficulty collecting the rents from the tenants in the rental property at 645 Grand Street. In 2010 this tenant became unemployed and was several months behind on the rent before they were no longer tenants. In January of 2010 Lou Thierwechter agreed to become manager of the rental properties with the hopes of turning around the 2009 negative income on the properties of \$6,198. By April 19, 2010 the tenants in 633 Grand Street were evicted for failure to

pay their rent in several months. The tenant in 645 Grand Street had vacated the property with a back due amount of \$1,935. By June 21, 2010 the council made the decision to sell the property at 645 Grand Street.

New altar linens were purchased in September 2010 with money from the memorial fund of Helen Casselto. On October 10, 2010 the congregation began to have just one worship service on Sunday at 10am. This was to be a blend of traditional and contemporary worship practices. The Sunday School would meet at 9am and there would be a coffee and fellowship hour for adults at that same time. The constitution was changed at the November 14, 2010 Congregational Meeting to allow email and other electronic notification of meetings for those willing to accept such notification. The annual Holiday Dinner for the Alternative Education students was held in December with one hundred students participating. And the congregation ended the year 2010 with a net loss of \$4,320 on the rental properties.

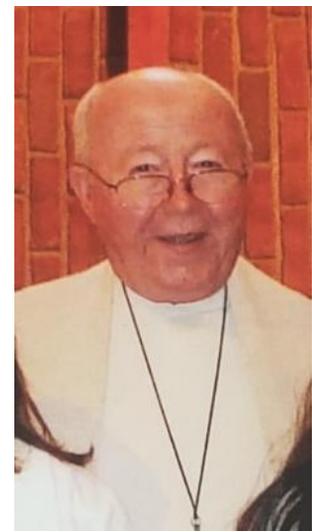
Early in 2011 the members of the congregation began giving Stewardship Talks during the worship services and the Simply Giving program was recommended. The mid-week Lenten offerings for 2011 of \$914.15 were donated to the Wings of Hope Hospice program of Allegan.

At the Annual Congregational Meeting held on February 13, 2011 it was decided to have only one worship service on Sundays. The average attendance had dwindled to an average of 80 and this seemed to be a logical move. The worship service would be at 10am every Sunday with a fellowship period before the service. The two rental properties had a loss of \$2,496 for the year 2010. Pastor Bessert mentioned in his annual report that there was a noticeable amount of dissention within the congregation over the ELCA vote to allow clergy in a same sex relationship to serve as local pastors.

Pastor Bessert submitted his resignation to the church council at the 18 April 2011 meeting, to be effective 26 May 2011.

June 2011-2012 Rev. Dean Beckwith served as Interim Pastor

Pastor Beckwith accepted a contract to become the Interim Pastor of Immanuel beginning June 2011. The agreement was that he would spend twenty hours per week in ministry with the congregation.



During that summer the Youth Group at Immanuel decided to join forces with the youth of The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd and the youth of the First Presbyterian Church of Allegan. They began to meet every other Sunday at alternating locations. The LCW held their annual Rummage Sale on June 10-11 and the unsold items were picked up by Martin Recycling Center. On Sunday evening October 23, 2011 there was the Marty Miller Christian Concert in the sanctuary and on November 11, 2011 the congregation gave a special dinner for all the area Veterans in Allegan County. It was well attended. During this period the congregation sent out 240 Christmas cards to the Battler Creek Veterans Hospital. Finally the congregation again put on the Holiday Dinner for the students of the Alternative Education School with 107 in attendance. Worship attendance for the year 2011 once again declined to an average of sixty-five.

In 2012 the tenant at 645 Grant Street ended up in jail and obviously was not able to continue renting the property. In addition to this the congregation paid \$3,593.00 to renovate the property. The property at 633 Grand Street remained rented at the rate of \$595.00 per month through January 2012. At the February 18, 2012 Special Congregational Meeting it was noted that the *Big House* (633 Grand Street) needed major renovations and was radically infested with fleas. The decision was made to demolish the *Big House* and sell the *Small House* (645 Grand Street) at an asking price of \$18,500. The Small House sold on September 14, 2012 for \$16,150 with a net after closing fees of \$14,938.

Pastor Beckwith indicated that his health was not allowing him to serve as he would like and as of June 17, 2012 he would only officiate for Sunday worship. To help as much as possible a group was formed consisting of Maryann Fusillo, Donna Moeller, Michele Radke, and Pam Hopkins to visit the homebound members and offer the sacrament of Holy Communion. October 8, 2012 the church council approved the use of memorial funds to install special name plates for the stained-glass windows which were made and engraved by McFarland's Jewelers in Allegan. Finally, at a special Church Council meeting on December 17, 2012 the vote was made to call Rev. Alex Steward as the pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church effective January 1, 2013. The call was for Pastor Steward to work 75% of his time at the church and possibly find additional employment in the Allegan area for the remaining 25%.

1 January 2013 – August 2015 Rev. Alex Steward

Pastor Alex Steward began his call to Immanuel Lutheran Church on 1 January 2013 and was ordained at the church on 13 January 2013. In August of 2013 Immanuel Lutheran Church held a fantastic *Fine Arts Exhibition*. The featured artist was the internationally renowned Chinese Christian artist He Qi (pronounced Huh Chi). The exhibit also included sixteen artists from the Southwestern Michigan area and three were actually members of Immanuel. This included a photography exhibit by Tina Steward (wife of Pastor Alex Steward) and Lorraine Piirtola with her works in pen and ink and glass painting. Marsha Meeks provided part of the evening entertainment with her work on the Ukulele. The event was titled a *Gift to Allegan*.



The joint youth program had a reasonable amount of success, but the Episcopal Church had to back out due to financial difficulties. The group assumed the name YOUTH (Young Organization Under The Highest). During 2012 YOUTH had a total of 50 Bible Studies, 2 Live Concerts, they had several guest speakers, went on a Kayak trip, and went Christmas caroling. The outstanding balance on the church mortgage at the end of 2012 amounted to \$139,221.

In March of 2013 Pastor Alex sent out letters to everyone still on the membership rolls that have not attended worship services in a very long time inviting them to Holy Week services. The church council approved a program recommended by Pastor Alex to enter the Great Lakes Script Program and his wife, Tina Steward, agreed to coordinate the program. This program offers *Prepaid Merchandise Gift Cards* that can be used as cash for families in need. In May of 2013 the Church Council decided to begin posting the monthly offering and expenditures in the Sunday bulletin and the monthly newsletter. Also 1,300 flyers were sent out to the local elementary schools promoting our Family Night and the upcoming VBS beginning on June 3rd. Also in June the congregation held a special *Faith Five Course – Holding Your Family Together* by Dr. Rich Melheim. Forty people attended this session. In August the decision was made to begin using the Scripture Lessons for the following Sunday as the text for the Wednesday Bible Study. The decision was also made to continue having a booth at the Allegan County Fair and this year's theme would be *Wheels, Squeals, and Entertainment Appeal*.

Pastor Alex informed the council that he intends to work as a substitute teacher in the local schools beginning that Fall. He also informed the council that he had become involved in two local community organizations. The first was *Great Start*

Collaborative of Allegan County and the second was *Small Town Allies – LGBTQ*. At the December 16, 2013 council meeting it was approved to open the church building to the *Creative Coffeeshouse Event* on January 25, 2014 sponsored by the local LGBTQ group. The vote was 5-yes and 2-no.

By the end of 2013 the church council worked with Pastor Steward in adjusting the membership numbers for the congregation to reflect the actual situation. A total of sixty-three inactive members names were removed from our rolls. The congregation began having weekly Bible Study classes at the Briarwood Assisted Living Residence every Wednesday afternoon. In 2014 some water pipes froze and broke causing considerable damage. The insurance company paid the congregation \$7,900.00 to cover the damage. The average Sunday worship attendance for 2015 was 47.

At the Annual Congregational Meeting on February 16, 2014 the church adopted a new Mission Statement and included three vision statements. They are listed below:

Mission Statement - *We are Called to love, serve, and share God's Word.*

Vision Statements - 1) *Be a loving presence to those in our lives by opening our hearts to all.* 2) *To serve others by being an example of Christ in all we do.* 3) *To share the Word of God through worship, education, community service, and intentional living.*

During the year 2013 the congregation would refinance the church mortgage to take advantage of lower interest rates. The new interest rate was 2% and this saved the congregation \$200 per month in mortgage payments. At the Allegan County Fair in September there was renewed interest in having a church booth exhibit. On October 31, 2013 the congregation would host their first *Trunk or Treat* in the parking lot and it was rather successful. It is a great way for the young people of Allegan to celebrate *All Hallows Eve* (Halloween) in a safe manner. The winter Holiday Luncheon for the Alternative Education students had to be cancelled twice due to inclement weather and it was decided to have it in the spring instead. During 2013 the congregation began the practice of having bread for Holy Communion rather than the wafers.

In the reports for the February 16, 2014 congregational meeting Karen Jalbert, the church treasurer, reported that the church cashed in two of the four CDs to help cover expenses. Income for the year 2013 was \$89,283 and the expenses amounted to \$121,906 for a net loss of \$32,623. In his pastoral report, Pastor Alex mentioned that *"We have witnessed both worship attendance and financial commitments decline."* In January 2014 the church cashed in the second CD for \$3,000 and placed the funds in the general fund. At this time there were two CDs left in the amounts of \$3,700 and \$4,800. In February of

2014 Pastor Alex began a four week study on *How the Bible Began* and he started the Bible and Brew program at The Grill House. At the March council meeting it was agreed to use the excess insurance funds to pay bills in the general fund.

On April 16, 2014 (the day before Maundy Thursday) the congregation held a Seder Fest Meal organized and led by Martha Meeks. The midweek Lenten services were rather successful with from 22 to 35 attending the services. Pastor Beckwith contacted the council with a request to purchase the Brass Altar Cross that had been in the old country church for his private chapel. He offered \$200 for the cross and the council agreed to the purchase. Pastor Alex held a series of Cottage Meetings with 31 attending. The annual rummage sale in May was successful once again with over \$800 in sales and another \$750 from the Chicken BBQ sponsored by Thrivent Financial. Apparently in June someone wrote a rather negative letter to the editor in the Allegan County Newspaper and Pastor Alex wrote a response. His response made enough of an impression that some people came to see the church. In September 2014 the congregation had a County Fair booth themed *Reflecting on the Past and Moving Toward the Future*. At the November 16, 2014 Semi-annual Congregational Meeting it was announced that Thrivent Financial would begin allocating each Thrivent member \$250 twice per year to be used toward a community mission project or necessary work on our church building. It was also announced that Immanuel would be receiving a \$6,000 grant from the Michigan Synod Committee on Renewing Congregations.

Upon the recommendation of the Stewardship Committee at the 2 March 2015 church council meeting it was approved to sponsor the *Simply Giving* program. It was also recommended that the congregation have regular quarterly committee meetings. The Sunday School would begin meeting every other week year round thus eliminating the need for the VBS program.

During the 2015 Lenten season the mid-week worship services were held at The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd. The responsibility for providing the soup supper meal before the service was alternated between Immanuel Lutheran and The Episcopal Church. The Sunday school program at Immanuel fell to only two students. May 16, 2015 the LCW held their annual Rummage Sale which has always been successful for the congregation with the majority of the funds raised being used for various mission functions. They also had a meal with BBQ chicken and hamburgers provided by Thrivent and several side dishes provided by the LCW.

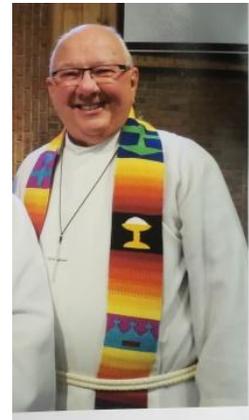
In June of 2015 the church cashed in their final CD. At a special council meeting on 17 June 2015th Pastor David Spague from the Synod office attended. The financial

situation was discussed and options presented. President Denny Gorr pointed out that we are normally behind about \$2,000 every month and our average worship attendance is down to 35 per week. This is a 31% drop from two years ago. The point was that the congregation was no longer able to meet the salary and benefits for Pastor Alex.. Pastor Alex would then serve Trinity Lutheran Church in Richmond for six years and at the time of this writing (2024) he was a Hospice Chaplain in Grand Rapids.

With the suggestions made by Pastor Sprague the congregation considered a shared ministry with the local Episcopal and the Presbyterian churches. The program was called LEaP (Lutheran, Episcopal and Presbyterian). For the time being Pastor Paul Kehle agreed to be a supply pastor and Pastor Dean Beckwith agreed to lead the Wednesday morning Bible Study and help with necessary pastoral duties.

September 2016 – June 2017 Rev. Paul Kenhle served as Interim Pastor

On All Saint's Day (November 1, 2015) there was a Walk-through tour of the church cemetery in Watson Township with a new brochure of the cemetery provided by Pam Hopkins. By the end of 2015 the church archive materials were all brought up from the basement and organized in the old choir room by a small group lead by Pam Hopkins. On December 17, 2015 the congregation held the annual Holiday Christmas Luncheon for the Alternative Education students with 105 in attendance. A group went Christmas caroling beginning at the Allegan County Medical Facility.



By the beginning of 2016 it was evident that the congregation was in dire financial difficulty. According to the Annual Reports the income for 2015 was \$35,150.00 and the expenses were \$110,344.00 for a net loss of \$75,194.00. A special Congregational Meeting was held on 14 February 2016 where the Council President, Mr. Denny Gorr made the following observation: *This past year was a difficult year, to put it mildly.* With a lot of prayer and anxiety the council made the recommendation that the congregation release Pastor Steward from his call to Immanuel because the congregation was no longer able the meet his salary. The congregation reluctantly agreed and Pastor Kenhle and Pastor Beckwith began to serve as supply pastors.

Three difficult months later the church council called another VERY special congregational meeting on 22 May 2016 to make an amazing announcement. A

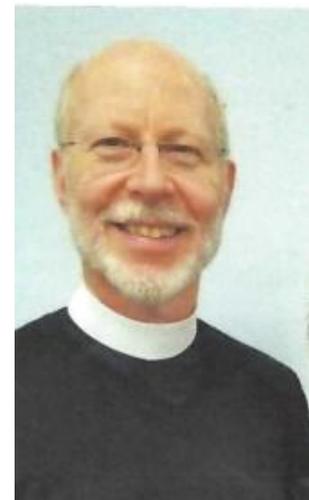
previous member of Immanuel, Mr. Roy Hight had passed away in Pennsylvania on 16 April 2016 at the age of 70 and the church was informed that he and his wife, Helen Hight had left a substantial investment fund in their estate to Immanuel Lutheran Church. This inheritance consisted of two separate Thrivent investment funds with the first amounting to \$238,000.00 and the second amounting to \$118,899.23 for a total of \$356,899.23. It would seem that the prayers of the congregation were fulfilled in a most unexpected way through the love and faith of Roy and Helen Hight. After some discussion the congregation voted to pay off the current church mortgage of \$99,689.17 thereby saving the congregation from the \$1,115.00 monthly mortgage payment. It was also announced that someone in the congregation had donated \$10,000.00 to be used to repair the church parking lot. The total cost to complete this project was \$25,677.00 and the congregation voted to make up the difference with part of the Hight Thrivent Investment funds.

In May of 2016 the LCW again held a successful Rummage Sale with a chicken BBQ and side dishes provided by Thrivent Financial. *Music and More* special music program was presented with the local community invited with three Christian bands involved. Thrivent Financial sponsored the hot dogs, chips, and cookies for the event. On November 20, 2016 the congregation approved the repair of the front roof at a cost of \$32,000 (31 yes – 0 no), purchase a new stove for \$8,200 (21 yes – 10 no), and replace the hanging lights in the sanctuary for \$7,700 (21 yes – 10 no). The congregation had \$249,338.54 in the Thrivent Fund for the use of the congregation. At the end of 2016 the congregation made the decision to give 10% of all General Fund and Building Fund income as their benevolence to the Synod for their mission work.

The average attendance for the year 2016 was fifty-one and for the year 2017 it was forty-nine. Over the 2017 year the Thrivent Fund showed a net loss of \$6,368.82. The stock market didn't treat us very nicely that year. At a special Congregational Meeting held on July 16, 2017 the congregation voted to call Pastor Dan Ward as their permanent supply pastor beginning in August.

July 31, 2017 – 2021 Rev. Daniel Ward served as Interim Pastor

Pastor Dan agreed to be the permanent Stated Supply Pastor of Immanuel on July 31, 2017 and would officiate for all worship services, give one day per week to visit shut-ins, those in the hospital and new members, and be available for church functions. The *Simply Giving* stewardship program



seems to have been successful because by the end of 2017 20.3% of the income came from this program. At the 19 November 2017 it was decided to only have one regular Annual Congregational Meeting. Maryann Fusillo completed her training at Calvin College Department of Nursing and officially became our resident Faith Community Nurse. Upon her recommendation the church purchased an AED (Automated External Defibrillator) and it was mounted on the wall in the fellowship hall. Jim and Sandie Horwath sought approval to build and install a *Blessing Box* in the front lawn of the church. It would be installed April 13, 2020.

For the years 2018 through 2020 our Thrivent Fund performed very well. During the year 2018 we showed a net income in the fund of \$30,775.13. This definitely made up for the rather poor showing the previous year. For the year 2019 we again showed a positive net income of \$21,745.35. And for the year 2020 we once again had a rather nice net income amount of \$22,713.61.

The year 2019 was a rather busy year with some good and some bad going on. However, as it turned out, even the bad was good in the end. Pam Kraai offered to take on the project of producing a pictorial directory of the congregation and this was completed by the end of 2019. She prepared it in the form of a booklet that could be easily amended and it is still working well for the congregation to this day (2024). We did have a major disaster hit the beginning of the year with our pipes freezing again and they burst causing a great deal of damage to the south end of the church. The cost to repair the damage amounted to \$30,217.22 and the congregation decided to add further improvements that would insure that we would not have this issue in the future. The additional costs amounted to \$19,224.00 for a total repair cost of \$49,441.22. The insurance company paid the church a total of \$63,266.88 based upon their estimate which meant that the total project was covered with a bit to spare.

At the Annual Congregational Meeting at the beginning of 2019 it was decided to refurbish all the pews and add padding to both the seat and the back. There was a special fund raiser for this project and over half the costs (\$15,006.00) were covered by these special donations with the remainder of the costs covered from funds in the Thrivent Investment fund. Other purchases made during 2019 were new altar paraments and the special AED (Automated External Defibrillator) machine that was installed in the Fellowship Hall. On December 19, 2019 the congregation held their Christmas Luncheon for the students of the Alternative High School. At the December 1, 2019 Annual Meeting the congregation approved the updated church constitution in compliance with the Synod and the ELCA. We also initiated the use of the Tithely online giving program

Early into the year 2020 the entire world was turned upside down. Signs of the dreaded Covid 19 virus began to show up and a special church council meeting was called on March 14, 2020 to discuss what we as a congregation needed to do. It was the unanimous decision of the council that all in person contact must be avoided for the protection of everyone. Pastor Ward decided that he would produce video worship services from his home and share them on the internet through Facebook and YouTube. He also started to give daily devotional videos. In order to continue with the necessary financial support, monthly letters were sent out sharing with the members what was going on and including a return envelope for offerings that were sent to a P.O. Box. Generally speaking the majority of the congregation was supportive of these measures. However, we did lose two families due to disagreement with this effort. A new online program quickly came along called ZOOM and the congregation began to use this tool for council meetings and Bible Study. By the end of 2020 Covid had become the third leading cause of death within the United States behind Heart Disease and Cancer.

It was also at this 14 March 2020 meeting that the council agreed to the purchase of an additional acre of land on the south side of our cemetery for expansion. The funding for this purchase was donated by the VanMelle family in honor of Betty VanMelle. The cemetery known as *Sheep of the Good Shepherd* (Immanuel Church Cemetery) was a favorite project of hers.

Beginning on May 24, 2020 Pastor Ward worked out a way to video a service from the sanctuary and with the help of Lori Querback (the organist) Debbie Valenti (member of the Praise Choir), and Susan Ward operating the camera, we began to add just a bit more normalcy to the worship life of the congregation. However, it was still decided to cancel the Thanksgiving and Christmas services because of the risk still prevalent. On June 21, 2020 Pam Kraai donated a beautiful Cremains Funeral Pall to the church in memory of her husband, Denny Kraai. Pastor Ward told the church council that he would commit to stay with Immanuel through the pandemic and do whatever was necessary to help lead us through it. He spent hours reading all the reports that came out of the Synod office and the CDC and shared these recommendations through the council. He expressed that his goal was help us follow all the recommended safety procedures to protect our members and the community and at the same time do whatever we can to maintain our spiritual community. It was a difficult period to say the least.

On October 19, 2020 the Quilter's Group was able to send out close to 400 quilts to Lutheran World Relief. It was also decided by the Stewardship Committee that the church would send out a letter as part of the annual fall stewardship program. For the

Annual Congregational Meeting to be held on December 12, 2020 it was decided to print a packet of all the reports and have members drive by the church parking lot December 1st through the 5th to pick them up. Everyone was to wear a mask and Denny and Meri Gorr agreed to pass them out for everyone. The meeting itself was held online using the ZOOM program.

At the February 15, 2021 the pandemic was going on for almost a year and Pastor Ward began live streaming the worship service on Facebook. He had a very limited number of individuals to help him in this effort as a precaution. It was decided to have a special Ash Wednesday service online and members were allowed to come to the church parking lot between Noon and 1:30 to receive the imposition of ashes while remaining in their cars. Denny and Meri Gorr assisted Pastor Ward.

At a special council meeting in March of 2021 it was decided to once again hold in-person worship services with the following precautions. Everyone would wear a mask, families would sit 6 feet apart, everyone would use hand sanitizer prior to worship, there would be no fellowship hour or Sunday School and we would only sing two verses to the hymns. It was also decided to delete the normal advertisement for Easter services in the local Allegan Gazette. For that first month the average attendance was about 30. The Wednesday morning Bible Study started back up with Pastor Dean Beckwith leading the discussion and in June 2021 the Bible and Brew group began to meet again. Pastor Ward submitted his resignation to be effective the end of June 2021.

July 19, 2021 – December 31, 2021 Rev. Dennis Smith served as Interim Pastor

Pastor Dennis Smith, a staff member of the Southwestern Michigan Synod office, began as the Interim Pastor July 19, 2021. In that year (2021) the Constitution of the Church was brought current with the Synodical recommendations and, since Pastor Smith was chairman of the Synodical Constitution Committee, he gave insight for the final touches. We received final approval from the Synod office on December 20, 2021.



At the August 16, 2021 council meeting it was brought to our attention that the new Delta strand of the Covid virus was an issue so it was decided to continue wearing masks. At the October 12, 2021 council meeting it was decided to discontinue all singing as the virus was very prominent and since it is spread airborne this was a necessary

precaution. During this period the council had serious discussion about the possibility of entering a joint ministry with Hope Lutheran Church of Plainwell..

The Henrickson family gave final approval to sell a one acre plot of land to the south of the current church cemetery for expansion. The congregation approved a budget of \$30,000 to complete the new addition to the cemetery renovations which included purchase of the land, landscaping, legal consultation, survey fees, fencing, new road preparation, and GPS marking of the new grave site plots. This was at a special meeting held on August 29, 2021.

The Quilters managed to make over 400 quilts that were sent out through the Lutheran World Relief ministry. Due to all the turmoil all over the world from the Covid pandemic the Thrivent Investment Fund ended the year 2021 with a major loss of \$45,444.89.

At the end of 2021 the total cost for refurbishing the pews cost \$20,043 and the income from the pew campaign amounted to \$17,201. We used the Thrivent fund to make up the difference and it would also be used to make up any shortfall in the new cemetery project.

At a special Congregational Meeting held on October 24, 2021 with 38 members present it was unanimously approved to call Pastor Christopher Laughlin as our pastor. It was agreed that he would spend 2/3rds of his time working with the congregation and the other 1/3rd of his time would be devoted to his role as Chaplain in the U.S. Army.

January 2022 - Present Rev. Christopher Laughlin

Pastor Chris Laughlin grew up in Audubon, New Jersey, just outside of Camden and across the Delaware River from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He received his Bachelor of Arts Degree from Warburg College in Waverly, Iowa in 2005 and his Master of Divinity degree from Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania in 2009. While on internship in western Pennsylvania



(outside of Pittsburgh), he met with his future wife, Rachel, who was a student at the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina. They were married May 23, 2009. In 2010 he accepted a call to serve as Pastor of Hope Lutheran Church in Marlette, Michigan while also serving as Chaplain in the US Army Reserve, and his wife served as the pastor of Saint Matthews Lutheran Church in Bridgeport, Michigan. In 2017, Pastor Chris volunteered for a one year active duty assignment as a basic training battalion chaplain at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri while Pastor Rachel accepted the call to serve as pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Portage, Michigan. When his orders ended in May 2018, Pastor Chris returned to Michigan and accepted the call to Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church in Constantine, Michigan.

Pastor Chris Laughlin accepted a call to Immanuel Lutheran Church in Allegan on January 1, 2022. It was determined that he would spend 2/3rds of his time serving Immanuel (all of his ministry had been less than full time to allow for his duties as an Army Reserve chaplain). During his time at Immanuel and as of this writing, Pastor Chris has served as an instructor at the US Army Chaplain Center in Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and as a total force integrator chaplain at the First Army (Support Command) at the Rock Island Arsenal in Illinois.

At the March 21, 2022 council meeting we received word that Allegan County was finally declared to be in the “Low Risk” group for the transmission of the Covid Virus for the first time. Thus it was decided to make the wearing of a mask during worship service optional. At the next council meeting it was voted to begin passing the collection plates and take the noisy offering again. The fellowship hour prior to worship was also reinstated. With the threat of Covid waning, the congregation began to slowly resume a sense of normalcy. At the end of 2022 income for the congregation had increased by 28% with 16.7% of that income coming from online giving. We still ended the year with a negative income of \$15, 593, but this was \$20,000 less than expected. So it was a good year. The loss was covered by withdrawals from the Thrivent Fund. The Thrivent Fund rebounded once again and our net income for 2022 was \$21,780.67 and the net income for 2023 was \$26,530.19.

In the Spring of 2023 the congregation purchased a new *Congregational Record Book* and Pastor Chris along with a committee of volunteers brought the church records current. In May of 2023 the congregation was recognized by the Synod Office at the annual Synod Assembly for our mission support. In June of 2023 the new driveway was completed for the new section of the Church Cemetery and the Church parking lot was resealed. To cover the costs for these special projects the congregation withdrew \$23,349

from the Thrivent fund. However, at the end of the year the Thrivent Fund made a net income of \$26,530 so we ended up in the plus column.

The year 2024 was a very exciting year in the life of Immanuel with several special projects and growth. First of all, tracking our average worship attendance for this period we started in 2021 with an average of 35 (this was during the Covid Pandemic). In 2022 it bumped up to 43. 2023 saw an average of 44 and for 2024 our average attendance jumped up to 51.

January 2024 – Memorial funds from the Lyn Kingsbury Memorial were used to have a special Holy Water Font placed at the entrance to the sanctuary. May 2024 – Pastor Chris was asked to give both the Invocation and the Benediction at the Memorial Day service held at the Oakwood Cemetery in front of the Chapel. Immanuel invited everyone to a luncheon afterwards and we had between 40 to 50 come to the church. In July 2024 Ken Kingsbury wrote a sixty-two page history of the congregation in honor of our 146th anniversary on August 28th, 2024.

During the course of this year we started a new program called *God's Garden*. Several members of the congregation would gather for one hour every other week to work on the landscaping of the church yards (God's Garden). This proved to be very successful and we plan to continue in the Spring of 2025.

The new cemetery project was completed and the final cost came in just under the budget of \$30,000.00. After some allowance for the driveway the new cemetery area added 577 new burial plots. The old cemetery section has 227 plots with only six plots currently available.

Perhaps the biggest project involved the refurbishment of 38 original wood frame windows. This included the installation of new Anderson windows to all the Stained Glass Windows on the east side of the sanctuary plus all the Sunday School Rooms and the Quilting Room. The total cost for this entire project came to \$35,580.68. The Thrivent Fund was used to fund both the cemetery and the window projects.

At the beginning of the 2024 fiscal year the congregation began to scan all the documents from the church council and the annual meetings and archive them digitally on the computer. And finally, at the annual congregational meeting on December 8, 2024 the congregation voted to gradually increase the pastoral compensation package so that at the end of a three-year period Pastor Chris would change from a 2/3 call to that of a full-time pastor. His plan is to retire from his duty as a US Army Chaplain on December 31, 2026.

In 2025 our average worship attendance grew from 51 in 2024 to 55 in 2025. Gross income for the congregation rose to \$126,884.15 and it was not necessary to withdraw funds from the Thrivent Investment account to cover expenses. The church cemetery was paved and, due to the discovery of some individuals being buried in the wrong location in the old cemetery, the church council voted to close that portion of our cemetery to any future reservations. Stricter plotting procedures were enacted for the marking of new graves and six plots were the first to be reserved in the new section. Several young people attended church camp this summer for the first time in several years and special youth fundraiser meals were instituted to support the youth ministry. At the November 2025 council meeting the congregation removed fourteen inactive members which left 16 baptized and 72 confirmed members for a total membership of 88 at the close of 2025.

On January 22, 2025, long time very active member Mike Melms passed away. In his will he left \$33,203.88 to Immanuel with the request that, if possible, these funds be used to erect a digital sign in front of the church to replace the old stand-alone sign. At the December annual congregational meeting the sign was approved at a total cost of \$38,565.00 with the additional funds to be taken from the Thrivent investment account. The sign was erected in January of 2026.



