

Historically Speaking: Concordia Evangelical Lutheran Church First 100 Years

By James Ackmann & Pastor Karl Frincke

The Gospel of Jesus Christ has been preached and taught in Concordia's midst for the past 100 years. A century of God's grace is reason for rejoicing, praising, and giving thanks. Awakened by the Lord to be part of His kingdom and continually nourished by His Word and Sacraments, Concordia Congregation has responded to the tasks He has given by witnessing in His name during these first 100 years. Here is the story of those blessings of God, and the response of His people.



Concordia Evangelical Lutheran Church of Fort Wayne, Inc. was spawned by St. Paul's Lutheran Church in downtown Fort Wayne (Known as the "Mother and Grandmother of Churches"). The reason for Concordia's establishment came about because of the need for "schooling closer to home", rather than having students make the long trip, usually on foot, to St. Paul's School downtown at the corner of Barr and Madison Streets.

On August 6, 1899, the Eastern District of St. Paul's Lutheran

Church was granted permission by the voters' assembly of St. Paul's to organize as an independent congregation. The following month it was resolved to erect a combined church and school building at the corner of Fletcher and Alliger Streets. Three weeks later the newly organized congregation adopted the name Concordia Evangelical Lutheran Church. On Dedication Day, April 29, 1900, the new church/school (built at a cost of \$9,000.00) was filled to overflowing for three services. [Click here](#) to see some of Concordia's first teachers.



The **Reverend August Lange**, who had served as pastor of St. Paul's Eastern District since 1896, was called to shepherd the flock. He was assisted in his pastoral work by Professor Louis Dorn of Concordia Junior College. The congregation numbered 727 souls and 447 communicant members. A parish school was opened in April of 1900, with Martin Pohlmann and Viola Kolby serving as teachers, and an enrollment of 136 pupils.

In June of 1900 the congregation resolved to join the Missouri Synod. The congregation grew so rapidly in just three and one-half years it was resolved to build a new church edifice on South Anthony Boulevard. The Building Committee consisted of Messrs. Charles Doenges, K. Rodenbeck, Carl Sherer, William Franke, Tobias Schnorr, Karl Krudop, J. Tonne, J. Schlegel, William Haggermann, K. H. Floering, Carl Stein, and Professor Dorn. The

Committee went to work quickly and by June 21 they were ready to lay the cornerstone, and on August 14, 1904, there were once again three services of dedication. The beautiful house of worship with a seating capacity of more than 1,100 was completed at a cost of \$30,700.00.

The School was also growing rapidly and there was now a need for five classrooms. Therefore, in 1914, a spacious new four classroom annex was dedicated.



Upon the death of Professor Dorn 1918, Professor E. Schnedler was appointed assistant to the pastor. Another pastoral change occurred when, after 22 years as pastor of Concordia, Pastor Lange resigned, and **Pastor Walter Klausing** of South Whitley, Indiana, was called and installed. The congregation bought Pastor Lange's property adjoining the church, and Pastor Klausing and his family moved into the new parsonage. In December the congregation presented him with a shiny new Model T Ford sedan.

At the joint German-English Silver Jubilee Service it was announced that the liquidation of the entire debt of \$30,000.00 in the Building fund was assured, every cent being covered by pledges. The Great Depression, however, delayed the liquidation until 1931. The hard times for the nation in 1933 were reflected by

the fact that the Budget Committee reduced pastors' and teachers' salaries for six months, and also requested loans from members.

Extensive repairs to the church properties were made in 1942 at a cost of \$12,000.00. During this project, German services were held in the school, and English services moved across Maumee Avenue to Concordia Junior College. By 1944 the congregation was again debt-free.

The Golden Anniversary celebration was held on May 21, 1950. At that time, it was noted that the congregation was one of the largest in the Missouri Synod, with a total of 2,285 souls. Its first vicar, David Koenig, arrived in that year. A new three manual Kilgen Pipe Organ was installed at a cost of \$30,000.00, with Martin Pohlmann serving as organist at its dedication.



Other vicars who then served were Osmar Lehenbauer (1952-53) and John Dreyer (1953-54). Growth of the congregation necessitated the calling of an assistant pastor in 1954, the former vicar, now **Reverend Osmar Lehenbauer**. Since this was Pastor Lehenbauer's first call, he was both ordained and installed at Concordia. When, the following year Pastor Klausing died at age 63, after 33 years of service to Concordia, Pastor Lehenbauer and Professor Schnedler served as associate pastors.



By this time school enrollment had reached 273 students, with seven full time teachers and two part time instructors. In 1956 Mr. Vernon Schumacher took over the reins as principal, succeeding Mr. Werner Dierks, who had served Concordia for the previous ten years. Approximately 30% of the pupils enrolled were children of non-Lutheran parents. Fifty-six of Concordia teens attended Concordia high school, then on the corner of Maumee and Anthony.

By 1956 the congregation had determined a new course of action ... almost as large an undertaking as when their pioneer ancestors went site seeking a half century earlier. More “lebensraum” (elbowroom) was needed for both the church and school. The congregation purchase its present site on Lake Avenue at a cost of \$58,000.00. Then, on January 22, 1961, a beautiful new school, a brown brick and Indiana limestone structure, was dedicated. Church services were soon held both at the church on South Anthony and in the school gymnasium.

An important language change was also taking place. In 1957 German services were reduced to twice a month. German services continued to be held quarterly as late as 1970.



Pastor Delmar O. Krueger accepted the congregation's call as associate pastor in 1961, upon the retirement of Pastor Schnedler. When Pastor Krueger accepted another call in 1963, he was replaced by Pastor Robert Haltner.

Pastor Lehenbauer's decision to accept a call at the end of 1967 left associate pastor Daniel Teuscher as shepherd of the congregation until July of 1968, when **Pastor Henry Schroeder** accepted the call to Concordia. The Lord led both Pastor Schroeder and Pastor Teuscher to accept calls early in 1970.



After an extended vacancy, the congregation successfully called **Pastor Lowell Thomas** to its pulpit at a particularly challenging time. The voters had decided to concentrate all efforts at the Lake

Avenue location, with worship services held in the gymnasium only. The congregation held its final service at the South Anthony site on August 30, 1970. The South Anthony property was given to the Mission Board of the Indiana District for the establishment of Shepherd of the City Congregation.

Almost immediately the chairman of the congregation, Mr. Norman Widenhofer, called together a group to sit and brainstorm the possibility of erecting a new church building. A Building Committee was established under the chairmanship of Mr. Hartie "Battle" Clements, including Robert Etzler, Richard Grote, Carol Keuneke, Albert Mueller, Herald Panning, Gloria Schaper, Paul Schlaudroff, Vernon Schumacher, Gerald Widenhofer, Norman Witte, Norman Widenhofer, and Pastor Thomas. Arthur Doenges and Henry Frey worked on the committee but did not live to see the building completed. The new facilities were designed by Humbrecht, Sherbondy, & Associates Architectural Firm. The design concept depicts the life of Christ, from the building style of ancient Bethlehem to the small hill



and magnificent bell tower which portray the three crosses of Calvary. Ground breaking ceremonies were held on May 6, 1973; the cornerstone was laid on a cold December 2nd; the first worship services were on June 16, 1974; and dedication was celebrated on September 22, 1974. The entire project was built at a cost of \$600,00.00. Seating capacity is 500, with an overflow area for an additional 200. The unique tower and bells are a highlight and landmark of the new facilities. The three bells were once housed in

the north steeple of the old Concordia Church on South Anthony Boulevard, having been installed in 1904 (at a cost of \$956.00). The congregation voted to move them from the old church to illustrate continuity of Concordia's ministry even though the congregation had changed sites.

Assisting Pastor Thomas in the 1970's were part-time pastoral assistants Pastor Stephen Mazak Sr. and Pastor Otto Mueller.

Concordia Church and School continued to grow by the grace of God, with Pastor Kit Balk serving as assistant pastor followed by Pastor Berneal Fick from 1977 to 1985. Bursting at the seams in 1980, the school added two more classrooms and a new music complex to the existing facilities.



Pastor Thomas was replaced by **Pastor George Black**, who was installed in March of 1984. In June of 1986, Pastor Daniel Decker accepted the call to Concordia as assistant pastor, and three years later left to serve as missionary in Ghana, West Africa. Deaconess Pam Nielsen was added to the pastoral staff to minister to seniors, assist with shut-in and hospital visitation, and act as an advisor to the Board of Education. She left Concordia in the fall of 1991. On September 18, 1994, Pastor Black accepted a call to Trinity Lutheran Church in Utica, Michigan.



Mr. Randy Einem, formerly assistant principal in Rochester, Michigan, accepted the principalship of the school in the summer of 1989 to lead a faculty of twelve teachers. The enrollment had grown to 283 students, and in response to a need to minister to the younger children of Concordia and the community, a preschool was added in 1988, under the direction of Mrs. Kaylene Bredemeyer who provided leadership for 10 years until retiring in 1998. The preschool presently has an enrollment of over 80 children and a teaching staff of three.

In November of 1989, Reverend Dr. Walter A. Meier III was installed part-time assistant pastor, with a ministry focused on hospital and shut-in visitations and pulpit assistance for three years ending in 1992.

In October of 1990, Pastor John F. Raddatz was installed as assistant pastor, concentrating on youth ministry and evangelism. Serving as a chaplain in the U.S. Army, Pastor Raddatz was called away from the parish for several months during Desert Storm in 1991. In March of 1994, Pastor Raddatz accepted a call to be senior pastor of Christ the Redeemer Lutheran Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma.



On July 1, 1992, Ellen Luepke accepted the position of Director of Senior Ministries, the Stephen Ministry Program, Member Assimilation and Parish Education. Ellen's position has developed into responsibilities of the CARE Ministries, which include Senior Ministries, Stephen Ministry, TeleCare, New Member Sponsor Program, as well as home and hospital visitation and follow-up.

In the fall of 1993, Pastor David Schlie was commissioned as part-time assistant pastor with a concentration on hospital and shut-in visitation, and pulpit assistance until September of 1995.

On Sunday, August 28, 1994, Pastor Jerome K. Mitchell was installed as assistant pastor. Pastor Mitchell's ministry emphases were to be small group ministries, evangelism, and youth. Concordia Congregation also voted to call a Director of Youth Ministries at that time. In March of 1997 Pastor Mitchell accepted a call to be Pastor of Promise Lutheran Church, a mission congregation in northeast Fort Wayne.



On Sunday, August 13, 1995 **Pastor Karl A. Frincke** was installed as Senior Pastor. Pastor Frincke, his wife Susan and children Jonathan, Kara, and David came to us from Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and later Byron Health Center where he served as Director of Pastoral Services, and as a social services case worker. Susan was installed in August of 1995 as a second kindergarten teacher in Concordia School. Pastor Frincke is responsible for WORSHIP Ministries of our mission statement, as well as overall direction of the Pastoral Staff.

On Sunday, October 8, 1995, Mr. Don Henry was commissioned as part-time Lay Minister, with concentration on hospital and shut-

in visitation, and pulpit assistance. Mr. Henry had previously served Concordia as Chairman of the Board of Elders. Don and his wife Becky joined Concordia in July of 1992. In November of 1997, Mr. Henry accepted full-time ministry responsibilities, including administration of the church and school as well as serving as director of GROW Ministries - Bible classes, Sunday School, and all parish education activities.

In June of 1997, Concordia contracted with Mr. Shawn Meyer to serve as Youth Director. Mr. Meyer served in that post half-time for the first year and full-time for a second year, until leaving on August 1, 1998.

The new Youth Director contracted in August of 1998, was Douglas Croucher, a new seminary student who came to Concordia from Lakewood, Colorado. The Croucher family, Doug, his wife Sharon, and children Nathaniel, Caleb and Veronica are welcome additions to the Concordia family.

On Sunday, January 11, 1998, Pastor Kenneth Wise was installed as pastor of Concordia to work alongside Pastor Frincke, with an emphasis in the SHARE Ministries--evangelism, new member assimilation, small group ministries. Pastor Wise, along with his wife Sue and children Matthew and Amy, came to us from Redeemer Lutheran Church, Seymour, Indiana. His particular duties were to head up Concordia's Outreach (Share) ministries. Pastor Wise was instrumental in establishing quarterly Special Mission Projects, to give members opportunity to choose and support specific mission endeavors. Pastor Wise accepted a call as senior pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Clinton Township, Michigan, and left Concordia in June of 2003.

Concordia's Next Hundred Years

A \$1.6 million expansion project was begun in July 1998, which

added a new multipurpose room to the church family center, six new classrooms, a school administration suite, renovations to the school kitchen, church rest rooms, nursery expansion, and a new handicap accessible entrance to the church.



Beginning in 1995 Concordia's elementary school ministry grew by adding a second class at each grade level. This endeavor eventually resulted in an enrollment of about 420 students, pre-school through grade 8, with a faculty of 27 teachers. Robert Boyd was called to be Principal. He left his Principal position in Lincoln, IL and began to lead Concordia's school ministry in 2000, as Concordia began its second 100 years of history. His tenure ended in 2010 and Claron Hanefeld served as Interim Principal.

Additional staff were hired in the 1990's and into the 2000's: a Business Manager, a part time Facilities Manager and a part time Director of Children's Ministries (Ginger Leinhos from 2002 to 2008, followed by Mrs. Danielle Simmerman, 2009 to 2010, and Mrs. Lisa Slack, beginning in 2010).

A contemporary service was begun in January of 2002 and held in the school gym. It featured music by keyboard, guitars, drums, various other instruments and vocalists, led by David Frincke. A large video screen was installed to project announcements, the order of worship and song lyrics using PowerPoint. The service was warmly and enthusiastically received. Attendance has steadily increased through the years.

In 2002 the church office suite was extensively expanded and remodeled to include five offices, a small conference room, a reception office and a large general office and work area. New coatroom facilities were also included in the project, as was the shell of a new music room on the West end of the church

courtyard. This project made a way for congregational volunteers, under the leadership of the Board of Properties, to expand the nursery into the vacated coatroom, finish the interior of the new music room, and convert the former music room into two Eighth Grade classrooms. Also in 2002 a new Music Room was built into the church's center courtyard. The church offices were also renovated and expanded to serve the congregation's needs.

December 2003 saw the departure of Reverend Edmund Lim. Originally from Singapore; Pr Lim came to the Ft. Wayne seminary for additional studies. He was certified as an LCMS pastor and was so instrumental in the founding and expansion of the Midwest Chinese Ministry, based at Concordia. He accepted a call to St. John's Lutheran Church in Melbourne, Australia, after 10 years of ministry as a Missionary at Large of the Indiana District. He and his wife Yin Leng and children: Wei, Shien, Shi Hui and Zun Yi left Ft. Wayne in spring 2004. Afterwards Seminarian Dennis Wenzholz and his wife Kimi took over leadership of the Ft. Wayne Chinese group.

The 2003-2004 school year heralded the completion of the school expansion to two classes of every grade.



On Sunday, January 4, 2004, **Pastor Kevin Wendt** was installed as Pastor of Concordia to work together with Pastor Frincke. Pastor Wendt's emphasis is in the SHARE Ministries – outreach, evangelism, small groups, and new members. Pastor Wendt, with his wife Jennifer and children Amanda, Andrew and Aaron, came to us from Abiding Savior in St. Louis County, Missouri.

Concordia Lutheran Church has always been involved in mission outreach in one way or another, especially through various youth mission trips. Beginning in 2004, the Lord began leading the

congregation to distant lands in the mode of God sending Abraham in Genesis 12: "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you." Concordia's pastors and laity followed the Lord's guiding hand by sending mission teams to China, Peru, Thailand, New Orleans, USA, and Ethiopia. [Read more](#) about these mission trips.

The new church courtyard garden was completed in the spring of 2004, thanks to many members who gave many hours of planning, planting and pruning. Remodeling of the old school restrooms was done by our members and completed in the summer of the same year.



The **Reverend Doug Croucher** accepted the call as our third pastor and joined the staff in December of 2004. He was in charge of our GROW ministries and our Youth Program.

Ellen Luepke, retired in December of 2004. She served Concordia in many capacities: Church Secretary (1988 – 1992), Director of Senior Ministry & Parish Education, and finally as Director of Care Ministries, which, among other duties, included the Senior Ministry, Telecare Ministry, CARE Corps, Stephen Ministry, and Bible Class leading. Her contributions to Concordia's mission and ministry and her dedicated service for the past 16 years are immeasurable, and she will be deeply missed.



In 2005 Mrs. Kim Pape was hired as the Director of Care Ministries, succeeding Mrs. Ellen Luepke, who retired in 2004. Kim also led the Seniors Ministry (OWLS).



Senior Pastor Karl A. Frincke retired in March 2011 and **Pastor Don Sandmann** served as Interim Pastor until March of 2012.



Our Senior Pastor is **Douglas Croucher**. He was called in March of 2012 as our Senior Pastor.

Pastor Croucher was an Associate Pastors here at Concordia Lutheran Pastor since 2004. Primary areas of responsibility revolve around Youth Ministry, Bible Studies and Small Group ministry.

Pastor Doug was grew up in the wonderful town of Chardon, Ohio. After High School, he attended Concordia Ann Arbor in Michigan graduating with a Education Degree in May of 1986.

His first call was to Saint John in Oxnard California where he served as 8th Grade Teacher and Youth Director, from 1986 through 1995. While serving there, two life changing events occurred: 1. In 1989- when he went on his first mission trip. This mission changed him and his ministry forever! 2. In 1990- God brought into his life the love of his life~ Sharon McGee. Over the years God blessed them with three children~ Nathanael, Kaleb, and Veronica.

In 1995, he took a call to serve Bethlehem Lutheran in Lakewood Colorado. There he served as an 8th grade teacher, lead youth ministry, coach sports, and lead two mission trips to Mexico. In 1998, he felt led to become a pastor. So he packed up his family and began his studies in 1998.

While studying for the Pastoral ministry, he served here at Concordia as the Youth Director from 1998-2002. Again, youth mission was one of his core principles as they built homes and proclaimed Jesus in Mexico.

After completing his studies in 2002, he received a call to serve Our Savior Lutheran in Newark, Ohio. In November of 2004, Pastor Doug returned to Concordia.

Concordia thrived in mission and numbers through the first decade of the twenty-first century. His people focused their work around the Mission Statement that was slightly modified and summarized pointedly: *Engaging People with Jesus*. This mission continued to be supported with the familiar ministry targets of WORSHIP, GROW, CARE, SHARE.

Pastors Serving Concordia



August Lange (Sr. Pr) 1900-1922



Louis Dorn 1900-1918



E. Schnedler 1918-1961



Walter Klausning (Sr. Pr) 1922-1955



O. Lehenbauer 1954-1968



Osmar Lehenbauer (Sr. Pr) 1954-1967



Delmar Krueger 1961-1963



Robert Haltner 1963-1966



Henry Schroeder (Sr. Pr) 1968-1970



Daniel Teuscher 1966-1970



Lowell Thomas (Sr. Pr) 1970-1983



Kit Belk-1977



Berneal Fick 1977 - 1985



George Black (Sr. Pr) 1984-1994



Karl Frincke (Sr. Pr) August 1995-
March 2011



Dan Decker 1986 - 1989



W. A. Meier III 1989 - 1992



John Raddatz 1990 - 1994



Jerry Mitchell 1994 - 1997



Ken Wise 1998 - 2003



Kevin Wendt 2004 -2011



Doug Croucher 2004 -2012



Douglas Croucher (Sr. Pr.) March
2012 -

**CONCORDIA: A FORGIVENESS CENTER WHERE GOD AND
PEOPLE COME TOGETHER TO
WORSHIP, GROW, CARE, AND SHARE**