

125 Years of God's Grace

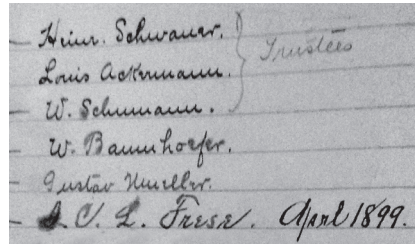


Zion Lutheran Church
1897 - 2022

Zion Lutheran Church Poplar Bluff, Missouri 1897 to 2022

In the 1890s various Lutheran pastors from Cape Girardeau and a German Evangelical Pastor from Loulyma, Arkansas, Rev. N. Hansen, from time to time sought to serve the spiritual needs of the small group of German speaking families in the Poplar Bluff area.

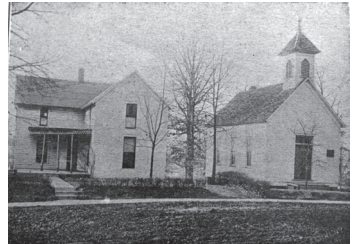
Organized ministry was begun in September, 1896 when the western district mission board of the German Lutheran Missouri Synod sent candidate H. C. Frese to begin regular services. He also promptly started a Lutheran school with 10 pupils. On February 18th, 1897, Zion Lutheran Church was formally organized with 30 souls and 13 communicants.



Handwritten list of trustees and date: H. C. Frese, Louis Ackmann, W. Schumann, W. Baumhofer, Gustav Mueller, J. C. L. Frese. April 1899.

(First Constitution Signers)

Afternoon services were held in the local Christian Church for a brief time. Then the “old Catholic Church” was offered for their use, subject to their repairing it, and morning services were held there for nearly two years. Then a fellow townsman, Dr. E. Kendall generously donated building lots at 9th and Cedar St. to the young mission, and there the members and their friends built the “little church on the hill,” the white Chapel which served Zion for the next 46 years.



The mission grew rapidly to 38 members in 1899. Pastor Frese began serving a mission of 25 persons at Bloomfield in 1898, then one with 22 persons at Grandon, and also one with ten members at Dexter in 1899. Pastor Frese suffered several malaria attacks, however, and the school was discontinued in 1899. In June, 1900, pastor Frese resigned because of ill health and moved to Council

Bluffs, IA.

Candidate Herman W. Bartels became pastor the next month to serve Zion and the Dexter missions and he established his schedule of one German and one English service monthly at each place. But after only six months he accepted a call to Saint Louis. Thereupon Pastor Fuehler was appointed to serve the mission from his parish in Illmo. A Sunday school was started in 1902 with four pupils. In a letter to Rev. Peterson Pastor Fuehler said "I merely served as lückeinbsusser, going there to preach and celebrate communion occasionally, and also some of the pastors of Cape rendered the same service". He also preached only in German.

When Pastor Fuehler left Illmo in 1908 the missions were served by Pastor A. C. Wilder from Cape Girardeau for two years to 1910. A gradual decline of membership to 20 resulted due to the long-distance ministries, and from a lodge membership problem which occurred in Zion's 10th year.

In August, 1910, candidate Walter C. Krueger became the pastor and served for two years. The mission at Zion grew, and the Sunday school flourished as it increased to 26 pupils. Pastor Krueger served preaching missions at Lilbourn, Harviell, Naylor and Carola.

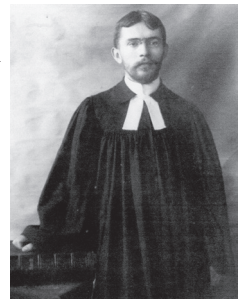
The record of the next year is dim. Officially the period was listed as "vacant", meaning without pastor. A history published in the early 1920s listed Rev. F. H. Rudi of Tilsit, near Jackson, as serving Zion. The memory of a member of Zion and his confirmation certificate show that a German Evangelical Synod pastor, Rev. G. Ditel, of Dexter as serving Zion's members. Zion's church records show no official acts during this period.

Then in September, 1913, candidate William H. Eifert came to serve seven months, but the next April followed a call to Kansas City. An interesting note is that he reports holding English services at Harviell and preaching to gatherings of 200 Persons. In a letter

to Pastor Peterson, he writes “from Poplar Bluff I covered almost the entire SE section of Missouri, regularly preaching at Dexter, Harviell , and then canvased Morehouse, Sikeston, and two or three more smaller communities”. With humor, he said that the train was his main transportation. It traveled along the Mississippi River and one would simply flag the train down at any crossroads. “At night I would light a newspaper and it never failed to coast to a stop in plenty of time.”

Again, the mission experienced long-distance ministry as their care was assigned to Pastor C. J. Steyer of Corning AR for the next six years. During this time, a low was reached as far as membership with only 13 communicants listed during 1916. By 1920, it had climbed back to 22 communicant members. Rev. Steyer said, “I served Poplar Bluff from Corning once a month. I travelled per train, catching the ‘number 4’ which connection was good”.

The Rev.H. O. Bruss came from mission stations in southern Alabama to become Pastor of Zion in Poplar Bluff and St. Matthews in Corning, Arkansas, in October of 1920. This dual parish arrangement existed for the next 43 years through his ministry and that of the next 4 pastors. Pastor Bruss also served the parishes of Lafe and Waldenburg, Ark for the next two years. He noted that the advent of the automobile made this much more convenient.



The Dirks’ home next to the church was purchased for a Parsonage in 1921 and the following year, the 25th anniversary of Zion church was noted.

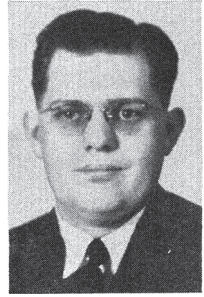
During the 22-year ministry of Rev. Bruss, it’s slow but steady increase in the number of people attending Zion was evident with the increase of



(Approximately 1944 or 1945)

communicants rising to 86 from 22, in about 1940. Under the category of clubs, classes and Sunday school, Rev.Bruss listed the following: Sunday school, Bible class and Ladies Aid Society, as being organized in the Zion Lutheran Church.

A surge of interest in the community about it filled the people of Zion under the leadership of pastor Erich Peterson who came in June, 1942. By January of 1945 a Lady's Aid group, men's group, and the Walther league were mentioned as meetings. A radio devotional on KWOC was started, and Lenten services were scheduled for Wednesday evenings. In June, 1943, the lots at Main and Relief streets with the help of the Home Mission Board, were purchased for \$3000. Three additional lots lying to the rear of these were purchased for \$2000 in 1945. Plans for the new church were adopted in 1944, designed by architect Theodore Steinmeyer of Saint Louis, and a decision was made to build the soon as priority authorities would grant the materials. Professional builders were hired to construct the church, however, male members of the congregation helped in whatever way was possible during the construction.



The property on Cedar Street was sold in December, 1945, and worship services were held in the Kinyon school for the next 20 months. Ground was broken for the new church on July 11th, 1946. Worship services were begun in the completed basement on August 10th, 1947, and on November the second, 1947, the dedication of the church took place. The cost of the new church was \$51,400. The cost of the lots had been paid in full prior to the beginning of building. This was the 50th anniversary of the congregation and communicant members numbered 130.



Less than two years later, the Parsonage was built beside the church on Relief St. Dedication was on June 26 1949. Brief was the pleasure of the Peterson family in their new home, for in December of that year, Pastor Peterson followed a call to Saint Peters Lutheran Church, E Detroit Michigan.

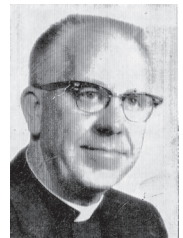
During the pastorate of Rev. Alton F. Wedel from June, 1950, to December, 1954, a radio ministry “the call of the cross” brought the gospel to many through its weekly broadcast. A complete program of Christian education was established with the opening of Zion Lutheran school in September, 1952. The school building on Charles St, immediately adjacent to the church, was dedicated on September 19th, 1954. See the complete history of the school later.



The Rev. A. S. Gedwillo shepherded the people of Zion from February, 1955 to February, 1957. He was succeeded by the Rev. Eugene Pennekamp who served from October, 1957 to June, 1963.



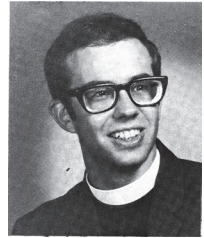
During Rev. Pennekamp’s ministry, Zion experienced its largest increase in membership, rising from 151 two 225 communicants. The dual parish relationship with Saint Matthews Lutheran Church in Corning, AR continued, but it was during this time that both parishes explored the opportunity and desirability of each calling their own pastor. Following a long vacancy, during which Pastors Harold Belsheim of Sikeston and G. Gragdon Smith of Dexter served as interim pastors, the Rev. Lester H. Kuker assumed the



pastorate in August, 1964, to serve Zion in Poplar Bluff, Missouri.

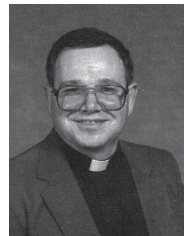
A new Allen organ was installed in the church in 1967. The interior walls of the church were covered and textured in preparation of the 20th anniversary of the dedication of the sanctuary. Rev. Alton Wedel returned as guest preacher. An additional lot adjoining the school property was purchased. The 75th anniversary of the congregation was noted in special services April the 16th, 1972. Zion now numbered 300 members with 250 communicants.

In 1976, Pastor Kuker accepted a call and Zion again called for a resident pastor. In April, 1977, Rev. Hubert Riethmeier accepted the call to be pastor. During his ministry Zion continued to grow in numbers with strong emphasis on evangelism and Bible study. The adult Bible class increased greatly during his ministry. In March, 1982, the congregation had its mortgage burning ceremony. At this time, the congregation purchased a burned-out home at North Main and 5th streets, renovating it and converting it into a daycare facility. See more on the daycare facility later.



The bell, which had been the regular “call to worship,” in the little church on Cedar and 9th Sts. and later installed in the current church building, fell in February of 1982. No one was hurt, the main roof was not damaged and the other damage was small. Attempts to repair the bell were short termed, as it again cracked. Dale and Wanda Gaebler pursued finding one of satisfactory size and sound. There was a smaller one that had been used to maintain our desired “call to worship” and the current bell was installed at summer’s end in 1984.

Pastor Riethmeier accepted a call to St. Louis in 1984 and Rev. Wittmaier was installed in August of 1984. Shortly after his arrival as pastor, plans were implemented to observe the 90th anniversary



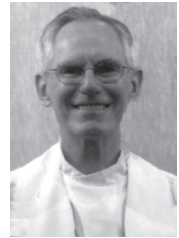
of the congregation. The redecorating of the sanctuary was a way the congregation remembered and thanked God for the 90 years of grace. At the time of the 100th anniversary commemoration in 1987 the congregation numbered 403 baptized souls and 309 communicative members. A quilters group was organized and met regularly at the church.

In 1988, a group wishing to form a preaching station near Wappapello Lake, requested that status with Pastor Walter Fehrman as pastor to be approved. Some members of the group were members of Zion at that time.

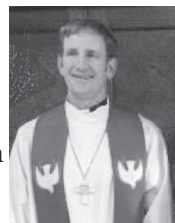
Pastor Wittmaier received and accepted a call to Rolla, Missouri in 1997. Candidate Larry F. Feldt was called to be Zion's pastor on his graduation in 1998. On August 9th, 1998, he was ordained and installed at Zion, Poplar Bluff. He served as pastor until June, 2003 when he accepted a call to Denver, Iowa. During his time here pastor was involved in many organizational beginnings.



During the vacancy, Pastor David Disen was the interim pastor at Zion and Semenary students served Sunday service. Rev. Marty Reed accepted our call and arrived in late summer of 2004. Because he and his family wished to provide their own housing, the parsonage was used as offices for pastor and the church secretary. In August of 2021, Pastor Reed and his family moved to Kansas to take a new call.



Pastor Sponaugle from Dexter MO. served as our vancancy pastor. Arrangements were made with Faith Lutheran Church in Dexter to combine both congregations in a dual parish situation. Pastor Sponaugle was duly called by Zion Lutheran Church in Poplar Bluff, MO. and installed as our pastor on November 7, 2021.



Zion Lutheran School

Zion Lutheran school with started in September, 1952, with kindergarten and the first grade, in the basement of the fellowship hall of the church. A grade was to be added each year. Miss Ruth Baumann was the first teacher and remained eight years, serving as teacher and principal. The first year, she taught both first grade and kindergarten. When the second grade was added, an additional teacher was added for 1/2 day. As time went on teachers were added as needed. She oversaw the first 8th grade class graduate from the school. Under her zealous and winning leadership, a fine reputation for Lutheran Christian education was built.



The number of students quickly grew, and the anticipated date of building a new building was adjusted, the school building was then erected on Charles St. Classes moved into the building in late September of 1954. The building consisted of four classrooms, an all-purpose room and office, lounge and the usual utility and service facilities.

Mr. Norman Hoppman was the second principal of the school, serving from 1961 to 1964. As principal, from 1960 through the spring semester of 1962, two additional 8th grade classes graduated. Then with the decline in enrollment and the resignation of a full-time teacher, the 7th and 8th grade classes were dropped. Zion school continued to provide kindergarten through 6th grade.

Mr. Hoppmann was succeeded by Mr. Elroy Heimsoth in August of 1965. Mr. Heimsoth was installed as Minister of Religion at Zion Lutheran Church and school. As Minister of Religion, his major task became that of principal and teacher at the school and as congregational organist and choir



director. He served in several capacities until 1991 when he was called to a congregation in Jackson, MO. In the following years, the school underwent several changes in staff and classes offered. Ultimately, the grades were decreased to 1st through 4th grades and pre-kindergarten was added. In 1993 Kris Schultz accepted a call as principal and teacher at Zion Lutheran school.

Difficulties occurred due to the decreased number of Lutheran students at the school and the difficulty of getting Lutheran trained teachers. In 2004, the congregation voted, with heavy heart, to close the school at the close of the school year.

Zion Lutheran Day Care Center

The daycare at Main and 5th St. In Poplar Bluff started in 1982. Mrs. Carolyn Wells was the first director and stayed until 1992. Children received care both full time and part time and in 1987 there were 54 children enrolled with an average of 35 children using care each day. This growth resulted in an overcrowded condition in daycare. As a result, in 1988, an expansion consisting of a large dining area and the completion of a part of the basement for indoor play area was completed.

Upon Mrs. Wells' retirement in 1992, Mrs. Cindy Howell was named director and continued until the close of the day care in 1999.

Closing Prayer

Gracious Heavenly Father, we look forward to the coming of Your eternal Kingdom in all of its glory and fullness to earth. Just as you have blessed Zion Lutheran Church with 125 years of life as an assembly of your people, so continue to bless the Saints of Zion with your Holy Spirit to carry on your ministry of proclaiming the gospel of forgiveness of sin through your son, Jesus Christ. Sanctify your Saints at Zion in the truth of your word. May you continue to supply and equip us with your grace to guide and keep us and make us ever watchful for the day of

*Your Son's return,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

Amen

Pastors Who Have Served

H. C. Wm. Freese	September 1896	to June	1900
Herman W. Bartels	July	1900 to January	1901
A. Fuehler	February	1901 to October	1908
A. C. Wilder	November	1908 to July	1910
Walter C. Krueger	August	1910 to May	1912
F. H. Rudi	June	1912 to August	1913
Wm. H. Eifert	September	1913 to April	1914
C. J. Steyer	July	1914 to March	1920
H. O. Bruss	October	1920 to June	1942
Erich C. Peterson	July	1942 to December	1949
Alton F. Wedel	June	1950 to December	1954
A. S. Gedwillo	February	1955 to February	1957
Eugene Pennekamp	October	1957 to June	1963
Lester H. Kuker	August	1964 to October	1976
Hubert Riethmeier	April	1977 to April	1984
Gerald L. Wittmaier	July	1984 to	1997
Larry Feldt	August	1998 to June	2003
Marty Reed	August	2004 to August	2021
Justin Sponaugle	September	2021 to Current	

Teachers Who Have Served

Ruth Baumann Thies	1952-1960	Richard Kube	1977-1978
Mrs. Lester Hoefker	1953-1955	David Dennis	1978-1978
Edith Gaebler	1955-1957	Diane Thalacker	1979-1981
Mrs. Leroy Heaton	1956-1957	Ronda Horenkamp	1980-1984
Ethel Ellwein Garrett	1957-1959	Patricia Riethmeier	1982-1983
	1962-1963	Michelle Hagemeyer Petersen	1981-1989
Lois Oswald	1958-1960	Lois Bramstadt	1983-1983
Mrs. Griffin Carr	1959-1971	Nancy Haskins	1983-1984
Norman Hoppmann	1960-1964	Gail Karlish	1984-1988
Mrs. Norman Hoppmann	1960-1961	Sandra Dietzel	1984-1987
Lynette Johannpeter	1961-1961	Raymond Kaaz	1988-1989
Joyce Hoch	1961-1962	Cindy Gaebler	1988-1989
Geraldine Doty Long	1963-1996	Lisa Lipke	1989-1990
Joyce Klimek	1964-1965	Joanie Hays Mattli	1990-1994
Elroy Heimsoth	1965-1991	Donna Shackelford	1986-1993
Mrs. Don Scoggins	1970-1970	Kristi J. Schulz	1993-2004
Mrs. Donald Hamm	1970-1972	Cindy DeWitt	1995-2004
Joyce Juergensen	1971-1972	Fawn Luecke	1996-2004
Margaret Bode	1972-1976	Annette Wells	1999-2004
Elaine Sylvester	1974-1975		
Alice Moehlenbrink Barbour	1975-1979		
Christine Gaebler	1976-1980		