

History of Christ United Lutheran

It was a struggle for Gordon church

The first 35 years (1876-1911) of St. Paul's, Gordon, is interesting and historic; one sees the struggles of all the churches around the 1800's. One of St. Paul's pastor-historians was Rev. A. R. Glaze, who in 1892 wrote a story of the village of Gordon. He talked of its location, and the naming of the (later) borough in honor of Judge Gordon of Reading (1st name of judge not available). The first congregation for religious worship began about 1854, with people worshipping in a schoolhouse on the outskirts. Notice, there is nothing said about the denomination. Rev. Joseph Adams of Northumberland County, and Presbyterians who organized a union Sunday School.

In 1857 Methodist preaching was taken care of by a Rev. J. A. DeMoyer of the Catawissa circuit. Then in 1859 a Methodist Society formed. In 1860, having a larger number of Presbyterians, a vote gave choice of a building for worship to them and a spot alongside the public school was procured. In 1872 they decreased in membership because of removals, and their building was purchased by the Methodists. Three pastors served there through 1876.

Now the Lutherans began to appear, seeking worship facilities, and with the surviving Presbyterians were served by the Rev.'s Sikes, Curtis and Hackenberg, pastors of the Lutheran Churches at Ashland. Even an Episcopalian priest named Washburn (also of Ashland) served them for a while.

Although a Lutheran Church group was organized in September 3, 1876, the standing church, involved in debt in 1877, was sold and was purchased by the Lutheran denomination for \$6.00. Then the Methodist Society sought shelter elsewhere.

The first Lutheran pastor, Rev. A. D. S. Marcle (1876-'78) was called "at a fixed salary of \$150 per year and horse hire". The very first Holy Communion service was October 28, 1876. First recorded baptisms were October 27. These members seemed to call each other "brother", whether during services or meetings, or whatever. They had "penny" collections, a Ladies Aid Society that must have existed from the outset, although formal organization is listed as the year 1880. Then there were benefit "tea parties" to raise money for various projects. Patrons came by special train put on from Mahanoy Plane in December 6th 1877 (that was really winter, then!) and \$182.25 was netted.

Especially interesting is that a "member was found guilty of using profane language at divers times" and was excommunicated under Rev. Marcle.

Looking back in the histories of the chapel were evidences of building and renovation costs, seemingly escalated for those times (now these prices would shatter our contractors):

Church bell \$160, Fence \$126 (erection of fence, painting of interior-exterior of building, Organ \$250, year of 1880.

Other interesting items: the church was draped in black inside in respect to the passing of Rev. Marcle. General U.S. Grant's passing was honored by 63 taps on the church bell.

The Gordon church now was connected with the Ashland charge, and the 1st three Sundays of a month saw services being held at 3:00 p.m.; the

remaining part of the month, it was Sundays at 5:30 p.m., later being changed to every Sunday. Prayer meetings were held on Fridays.

In December 1881 a fair was held from which \$565 was realized to underwrite removal of the gallery in the church and installation of stained glass windows. Exterior and interior painting again and installing new pulpit furnishings was accomplished. An altar railing was added, and a new chandelier. Total cost was \$1,000. On rededication day \$500 was raised to add to the \$565, and the church was free from debt, October 29, 1882. A Mite Society took care of small debts and included very small gifts from children and adults.

In 1885 talk projected toward separating from St. James, Ashland as two parishes were considered too arduous a task for one pastor. In October a joint council meeting was held and a vote took place to effect the separation. Ten shares of Building Fund stock were secured in preparation for building a parsonage at Gordon. In November, 1885 a house on Biddle Street was obtained for \$1400. In that same month incorporation was made for the present name of St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Gordon, Pa.

In 1886 a pastor was called for \$40 which later increased to \$45, then \$50. Preaching services were morning and evening Sundays. Suppers and contests were held to help erase some of the parsonage debt. By 1887 it became a difficulty to pay the pastor \$35, and in July of that year only \$25 was available.

Some confusion existed with the Union Sunday School (formed in 1876) and the desire of Lutherans to have their own church school. Many things occurred to deter both, finally resulting in the Union Sunday School removing itself elsewhere in Gordon. A Lutheran Sunday School was fully established October 9, 1887 following a quiet spiriting away of furniture, seats, organ and books by the Union group who deposited them all over town. Under a later pastor, 1888, the Ladies Aid Society was reorganized; a Visiting Society was formed along with the following: Young Mens' Society, Young Ladies' Guild—these existing for about three years as they were.

On March 28, 1890 a tragic loss occurred the night Aunt Martha Wilson discovered next door in the schoolhouse an overheated stove. Both the school and church were totally consumed, a mixed misfortune and blessing—valuable property being destroyed, but new and better property obtained. Within 24 hours council and pastor met to determine worship and services. The POS of A Hall was leased at once. A pavilion was erected to hold festivals, and entertainments and other money raising projects were begun.

In October of 1890 a cornerstone was laid for the new building. The Reading Company donated freight charges on building materials. Building cost ran between an unexpected \$9—\$10,000. In January of 1891 the Ladies Society and Young Ladies' Build were given a special vote of thanks for aiding in obtaining building funds. The new church was built, and on September 7, 1891 a dedication service was held. A special train was run from Ashland, St. James Choir presented special music and the Methodist Church of Gordon gave material aid. Between the night before the dedication and that memorable

day, a grand total of \$3,000 was pledged to the \$5,000 already subscribed. It seems that the audience room, seating 350, was filled. (It is also important to say that April of 1890 the first church seal imprint was purchased—and in December of that year Gordon village was entered as a borough. The entire Church Council had signed the petition for incorporation.)

A second threat of fire during Pastor A. R. Glaze's ministry (1891-96) added to the new church roof leaking with resulting wall damage. Insufficient heat from only one furnace necessitated action determining the placement of another furnace in addition. The floor around the heating pipes caught fire, and the timely discovery by neighbors prevented another great loss.

In 1903 the last indebtedness then, was paid. In March, 1904 a pipe organ was installed, and new carpeting covered the auditorium floor. Salary was \$40 with room or house rent. Lawson Hubler's home was the parsonage. In November 30, 1904 Mr. Andrew Carnegie donated \$600, a gift toward the \$1200 cost of the organ.

By this time Rev. E. E. Schantz was the 9th pastor. Salary was \$50. He was discouraged that no suitable house was available to move into, and rented temporarily on "the green". His outlook was dark at the beginning for at his first service only ½-dozen men were among the handful of worshippers. But he worked—and worked, organizing once more the Mite Society and making the Birthday Bank active. With this small bit of optimism, and the purchase of the George Dornsife property on Hobart Street, things looked better. The pastor wished and intended that the Mite Society care especially for the parsonage. However, there was a \$50 gift from the owner which brought the price of the property down to \$850.

All kinds of financial obligations were met. A pastor between Pastor Schantz, and by then Pastor C. R. Myers had been preaching trial sermons, and was called to St. Paul's. His household goods were shipped to Gordon, but in the meantime he made so many demands the church council could not grant, he remained only several hours, leaving on the very next available train, never again to take up active work in Gordon.

Pastor Paul Froehlich, 1910 became shepherd eventually, and although the names are too numerous to discuss, many other pastors came and went as the years passed. Things changed, circumstances altered situations but the church went on. In 1913, St. Paul's was already aiding 10 avenues in Benevolence and Christian service. There boomed a Mothers' Department, a Fellowship Bible Class, Junior Society of Christian Endeavor, Young Peoples' Society of Christian Endeavor, Ladies' Sewing Circle, Boys' Brotherhood, Teacher Training, Catechetical Classes and Sunday Church School.

An evangelist, John Warden, in Feb. 1911 stimulated growth in attendance with his stirring messages. Lent saw 100 persons attend the nightly services.

Into the life of practically every chapel in Christ's United Lutheran Church there were unions and jointures, 2-church and 3-church parishes, and certainly no group of churches could have been more experienced that most of these 5. But Gordon had been on its own

for a while in spite of the attempt to make it a double parish with Port Carbon.

The Mite Society gave initial child memberships at .05 cents per month, adults .10 cents and it grew to 138 members which at that time was truly a proportion. It overwhelmingly supported financial ventures, one being installation of a bathroom, 1910, at a cost of \$359.

It is also interesting to note that the Junior Endeavor Society (comparable to the existent Luther Leagues groups) had memberships which permitted a Lookout Committee, Flower Committee, and a Social Committee.

In the advertising on the "history of St. Paul's Lutheran Church" (1876-1911) published for Homecoming Week, September 3-8, 1911, one gets a feeling of nostalgia. Dating oneself perhaps, but nevertheless a nostalgic memory meandering back to "the good old days" an observer sees a oneness with support of Ashland and Gordon merchants. Who knows how many more other denominations, outsiders, farmers and dairymen—something in these histories survives all that, in spite of time or trouble.

Interesting Notes:

Church hymnals were adopted in 1877; Frame annex to newer church 1914; \$100 increase on Salary 1914; \$100 increase on Salary 1916; Rev. Arthur C. Harris ministry began Feb., 1922, Salary \$200; Son of congregation enters ministry 1912-Ralph Wagner. Another son of congregation enters ministry 1925 Adam P. Bingaman (dcd). A Kings' Daughters was organized; Jr. Luther League; Daily Vacation Bible School 1822 (In June, for first time, large classes).

The Church Visitor magazine began publishing in 1922. One of the notes was the fact that in the first 50 years of the life of the congregation, 14 pastors served.

A quote from a copy of The Church Visitor hangs in the mind and makes one contemplate: "I haven't got to make over the universe; I've only got to do my own small job and to look up often at the trees and hills, and the sky, and be friendly with all men."

The Rev. Arthur C. Harris held the longest pastorate in the church's history.—February 5th, 1922-October 1, 1951. This came to a close at the 75th anniversary celebration.

He commented more than once on having the longest continuing Daily Vacation Bible School in the county. Under his leadership, modern day in St. Paul's began to take shape in an emergence, even through World War II.

A new parsonage was built, The Church Bible School room was completely renovated, and the addition placed later was in the form of a boiler room and kitchen, Young Peoples' Bible Class room, a completely remodeled new pulpit, new lectern, and a Mollar Organ (the former was about 40 years old). A Schulmerich Tower music system and earphones were dedicated, too with the others on December 24, 1944 to the Glory of God, and in honor of the men and women of the church who served in the war. All material improvements costs \$58,710 and the entire contributions during 29 years were \$248,015. 100 per cent Benevolence was paid.

In the near future, St. Paul's will receive some "lifting" with resetting and pointing of bricks, soon, and the interior boasts a lovely childrens' department.