

HISTORY OF ST. JOHN LUTHERAN CHURCH AND SCHOOL
MARION SPRINGS, MICHIGAN

From records that are available, St. John Lutheran Church was built in 1887. Before that date, the people in the congregation gathered together for worship services in one another's homes. In 1887, the Fowler Lumber Company donated 10 acres of land and the lumber to build a church. The congregation was part of the Missouri Synod at that time. Two hundred dollars was borrowed from Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Saginaw to furnish the new church. The note on the loan was dated 1887-1889. Probably, the money was borrowed in 1887 and repaid in 1889. I do not know when the school or parsonage were built.

The first funeral held in the church was recorded in 1890, although regular records were not kept until 1892. There were not many names of pastors recorded in the book during the earliest years. The congregation may have been served by visiting pastors.

Among those names recorded are: Elmer L. Inglehart, pastor, 1892-?; Pastor Mueller, possibly an area pastor; Pastor O.W. Schoenow, 1893-?; Pastor Brandt, student theologian, 1896-? and P.J. Reininga, pastor, 1896-1903.

The next recorded minister is Pastor Justus Lohrmann. My mother, who was his sister, came with him to keep house for him. While she was here, the parsonage burned down. She then went back to her home in New York. Pastor Lohrmann stayed with members of the congregation until another house was built. He then married and his first two children were born in Marion Springs. He probably served the congregation five or six years. He was succeeded by P.O. Peters, 1906-1908, who was pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, located approximately one mile north of here.

After Pastor Lohrmann's departure, St. John Lutheran Church was associated with the Trinity congregation, whose church was built in 1901, and united with the then Michigan Synod, which later became incorporated with the Wisconsin Synod.

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The Trinity congregation was served by a Rev. Paul Schultz and later, (1915-1920) Rev. Gerhardt Ruediger. While Rev. Ruediger was there, in May of 1919, the church was hit by lightning and burned down. The people of that congregation came to St. John. Rev. Ruediger served here until 1920, when he accepted a call to Hopkins, Michigan.

Pastor Otto Gruendemann came in the summer of 1920 and served until June, 1923. The church was then without a pastor until January, 1924. Then, Rev. Paul Naumann came and served until the summer of 1925. He was followed by Pastor Erick LaHaine, who came from Arizona, and served until 1927, when he retired from the ministry.

The Synod president of the Michigan District at that time advised the congregation to recall Rev. Ruediger. He had been a professor at Thiensville, Wisconsin, and was at his farm in Marion Springs, having been given a one-year leave from the seminary. So, the congregation asked him to come and help out here, which he did for the next 32 years. When Pastor Ruediger had been here about a year, he was put out of the Wisconsin Synod, along with numerous other pastors.

Upon Rev. Ruediger's retirement, the church called Pastor Joel Hensel. Because of his fellowship with the Protestant Conference, Pastor Hensel had not received a call after graduation. He was extended a call by the people of St. John in 1959 and he has remained here until the present.

Pastor Hensel teaches grades four through eight in our parish school. Mrs. Loretta Witt teaches Kindergarten through third grade.

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Our congregation has had good years and hard years. The first settlers that came here were very poor, but they worked hard to keep our church and school going. Mr. Otto and Mrs. Rhode are among the oldest members who have attended many years.

There are a lot of memories of days gone by when I was young and started school. We had no electric lights or running water. There was a wood stove in church and in school, and kerosene lights. There was a large chandelier in the middle of the church with a lot of lights and lights on the side of the walls. There was an old pump organ and the bellows leaked. But, in those years it wasn't too bad and the people sang with all their heart. At Christmas, we always had a big Christmas tree and lots of candles. The two school elders would take two long, sturdy sticks and fasten a candle on the end and light it to light the other candles on the tree. It was always a beautiful tree.

There are a lot of things I could write more about, but that would make this too long. All in all, we are thankful that God has kept His word here in our congregation. And, we pray he will keep it here always.

So, with the words, "Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices," I will end this writing.

Eleonore Ruediger