

# THE IMMANUEL STORY CONTINUED

## 1975 – 2000

### FOREWORD

In 1975 Fred Kehl compiled a history of Immanuel Lutheran Church. In a brief, easy to read document, Mr. Kehl traced the beginnings of our congregation, the affiliations our congregation has had with larger church bodies, and the struggles and celebrations our congregation has faced in the course of one hundred years of ministry for Jesus Christ in Watertown, Wisconsin. I recommend reading Mr. Kehl's work for information concerning the beginnings of this congregation. He put together a fine piece of work from many sources. This supplement is merely an addition to the work Mr. Kehl began. Only the years from 1975 to 1999 are discussed.

Long before Mr. Kehl wrote his summary in 1976, forces of change were at work in the Christian Church. Generally speaking, the Second Vatican Council of 1960 is accepted as the beginning of dialogues between most Christian denominations. The impact of the dialogue process is enormous and the results of that process are still being felt. Where the founders of Immanuel were intent on beginning and sustaining "a church of our own", Immanuel's involvement in the Clergy Roundtable speaks to a different understanding of the Church of Jesus Christ. Immanuel still bears Christian witness through Word and Sacrament as defined in the Lutheran tradition, but we have learned that by reaching out and working with other Christians, our work is more effective, our members are given the opportunity to witness, and we can learn from the witness of others. Christ's promise that "where two or more are gathered in my name, I am there among them" has proven to be true time after time. This is a spiritual revival from the segregation and inter-denominational fighting that marked Immanuel's early years.

These changes have also inspired two changes in format. First, the chapters are divided chronologically. I have chosen to look at five year intervals for the sake of chapter brevity. Second, the chapters do not bear the names of the clergy. It is too much for the clergy to bear to be responsible for the entire ministry of Immanuel's membership. One of the other changes for which we can be grateful is the increasing ownership of the Church's ministries by the laity. Our ELCA guidelines for committee memberships require fifty per cent lay member participation. Guidelines also require minority and female participation. We are trying to practice the concept of "the priesthood of all believers". Reflecting back on the first format change, it means that periodic review of our ministry by the entire congregation is healthy and desirable. It also lends validity to writing this supplement.

During the past twenty-five years Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church has become part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a merger of three Lutheran Church bodies into one. We reached agreements with the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church, and the Reformed Church in the United States in 1997 that members of one tradition will be welcomed to the Sacrament of the Altar in the other traditions. Pastors of one tradition may be called to serve congregations of the other

traditions. In 1999 the ELCA voted in Assembly to enter the same relationship with the Moravian Church and the Episcopal Church. Dialogue continues with other Christian groups so that the Church, the body of Jesus Christ in this world, can be joined closer together for more effective ministry. The results of more than fifty years of dialogue have been expressed in Watertown through the Clergy Roundtable and their support of the Watertown Food Pantry, the weekly Bread and Roses dinners, and community worship services for special occasions. The exciting news is that the clergy does not make these things happen. The people of God from the participating congregations make them happen. The story that is being affirmed in these pages is the faithful ministry of God's people.

As a part of the Church of Jesus Christ, Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church has always been called to be involved in global ministry. In the second half of the twentieth century the population of unchurched individuals and families; prisoners; victims of disease, famine, war, alcohol and drug dependencies; and natural disasters have risen dramatically in the United States and around the world. Missionaries are arriving in the United States from other countries as well as missionaries leaving the United States to work in other countries. Some of these Christians who respond to Christ's calling to tend his sheep have been martyred for their work in the faith. In this time period, congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as close as Madison, Wisconsin have participated in a program called "Sanctuary". Political refugees from Central and South American countries arrived in the United States illegally because their lives were in danger in their homelands. Churches sponsored these "illegal aliens" until they could safely return to their homeland or bring their families here. In some cases, there was no family left to save.

To misunderstand that Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church is not part of the suffering and death of those who work with us in the Christian faith is a great loss on our part. Lutherans of the ELCA read the Bible looking at the historical context of the people of God. That historical context points us to times in our history when God has acted to save or to discipline the people of God. From these lessons we look back to Abraham. He understood he was a stranger in a strange land. He was blessed by God to be a blessing to the world. We are called by God that our lives are no different than that of Abraham. We also are strangers in this strange land we call Watertown, Wisconsin. We are those who are blessed to be a blessing.

Let us go in God's peace and serve the Lord. Let the people of God say, "Amen".

Jens Hetzler  
Watertown, Wisconsin  
August, 2001

## CHAPTER 1 1975-1979

One must pick up the threads and themes of a story such as the story with which we are involved. While this narrative is narrowly focused upon a period of time, there is bound to be some overlap from one period to the next.

So first of all, Don and Char Brink were still in Africa; Cameroun, specifically. They began their second tour in 1973, and they would not return until 1976. Don was helping with the construction of permanent structures such as a hospital, and Char was acting as the storekeeper of the mission supply store and warehouse. During this period of time, the Brink children were still growing up. John, the oldest, was studying his Bible and catechism preparing for confirmation. At this writing, John's two oldest have gone through confirmation.

Pastor Clifford Schmidt, who had been called in the spring of 1972, resigned his call at Immanuel to take another call in 1975. This first attempt at a ministry at Immanuel with three clergy staff was relatively short-lived, but it would be attempted again. The congregation decided to call a Lay Minister, Brian Blanchard, to assist with liturgy, and carry on some of the ministries at Immanuel with pastoral oversight. In several ways this solution anticipated the formula of ministry at the end of the twenty-five years. In the 1990's the ELCA would evolve the Associates In Ministry program (AIM). This program trains lay persons to a professional level, prepares them for specific areas of ministry, but does not confer the Masters of Divinity degree required for ordination.

In a further reorganization of the staff, Mr. Jerome Borchardt was hired as Director of Music. He would accept this position in addition to his music teaching duties with the Watertown School District.

At the Annual Meeting in 1976, the congregation voted to sponsor a Laotian family in the Watertown area. This was a period of time when immigration from Southeast Asia was still very high due to the disruption of lives from the war in that part of the world. As usual with high immigration patterns, certain areas of the country became preferred living areas. It may have had something to do with climate and vegetation or it may just have been the preference to stay together as a village or some other grouping where there would be continuity of language and culture. However, at this time, the Milwaukee – Madison corridor became such an area for immigrant settlement. Families started in Milwaukee and spread westward, and Watertown became involved in this resettlement.

Also at the Annual Meeting in 1976, the congregation decided to look at the feasibility of building a fellowship hall and education wing. This decision only anticipated future events, no building project was proposed at that time, but had the effect of forming a committee who were charged with the responsibility of evaluating the church's properties, and beginning to make some plans for the future.

The Annual Meeting in 1976 also saw the congregation ratify a new constitution. There would be several more of these constitution changes in following years as the Lutheran Christians in the United States changed the way in which they were organized. At this period in time Immanuel belonged to the American Lutheran Church or ALC. The ALC was a very strong Lutheran presence in the upper Midwest, coming out of the German and Norwegian traditions. It was mostly made up of rural congregations. Another group, the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), had a greater percentage of urban congregations. A third group, the Evangelical American Lutheran Church, had split away from the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in about 1974. This group was looking for another, larger body with whom they could be associated. Although the merger of these three groups would take another ten years, the work of establishing common ground for a unified body was already taking place.

Immanuel sponsored a visiting pastor during the months of September and October, 1976. Phillip Robinson, Dean of Botswana in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Africa came and ministered here. He learned something of the Lutheran Church in the United States, and we got some first hand experience of the ministries of the Lutheran Church in a war torn nation.

1997 was a year of change for Immanuel. Pastors Christenson and Milius resigned their calls. Lay pastor Brian Blanchard also resigned his call late in the year. Pastor Orlo Espeland accepted a call in June and Pastor Paul Nelson accepted a call in December. For Pastor Nelson it was his first call, and he chose to be ordained at Immanuel. This was only the first of several ordinations at Immanuel between 1975 and 1999.

One of the first tasks undertaken was to reorganize the congregation's ministries to implement the constitution changes. This implementation was completed by the end of 1977. The Worship and Music Committee purchased five hundred copies of the Lutheran Book of Worship. This was one of those projects in which the ALC, the LCA, and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod combined their efforts to arrive at a mutual form of worship and, hopefully, grow closer together in a unified Lutheran Church.

At the Annual Meeting in 1978, the congregation voted to build a new organ for the sanctuary. The Hendrickson organ would be completed in 1982 and dedicated in 1983, but it was decided that the organ located in the choir area behind the pulpit was no longer adequate for Immanuel's worship. The new organ would be located in the balcony and the balcony would naturally become the normal location for the choir to sing. There are exceptions to the choir singing in the balcony. The most notable is the Annual Candlelight Concert. This tradition has been going on for more than forty years now as part of the Advent preparation for Christmas for the entire community. The purchase and construction of the organ as well as the purchase of the handbells in 1979 have all been very meaningful additions to the regular worship at Immanuel, but have also been important additions to Immanuel's witness through the Candlelight Concert.

In 1978 the pastors began teaching Sunday School for adults as their schedules allowed. It was called Adult Forum, and it is still in existence. Lay adults have more

responsibility to determine the agenda for the group, but this is the place to learn about and discuss current issues and Christian ministries to the conditions of this world. It is also a place where issues confronting Immanuel's members as Lutheran Christians are discussed and some sense of congregational opinion is voiced.

The Annual Meeting of 1979 was another busy one. The congregation voted to adopt the practice of communing young people enrolled in the fifth grade. Instruction was provided during Lent and these persons became communing members on Maundy Thursday, the day we remember Jesus' command to eat and drink in remembrance of Him. The question of when anyone is prepared to receive the sacraments, the Sacrament of Baptism or the Sacrament of Holy Communion, has always been an issue for discussion. The selection of fifth grade is arbitrary, but by the fifth grade, young people can understand the importance of communion, and have an appreciation for the gift that this sacrament represents. The Lutheran Church still teaches that in the Sacraments God comes to God's people in tangible ways with gifts that set us apart from the rest of creation. We are set apart to be God's presence in this world, to be the means by which creation is reconciled to God.

The congregation voted to sponsor the relocation of a Laotian refugee family to Watertown in 1979. This relocation of a family out of the Milwaukee area was the next logical step in the process of bringing these refugees into American social structure.

In April Immanuel celebrated its first Easter Vigil. This Saturday night service originally was two hours in length and rolled over into Easter morning. Over time this service has been brought back to the 6:00 p.m. Saturday evening service and condensed to the normal one hour time frame, but it is still a service in which we recall our baptismal vows and wait with joy for the great Easter news "He is risen".

Finally in 1979, Immanuel elected again to have three ordained pastors. Brent Christianson was called to come and work with Youth and Family ministries.

## CHAPTER 2

### 1980-1984

Arrangements were made with WTTN radio to broadcast part of the 8:00 a.m. service as it was taking place in 1980. This has been a benefit to members who cannot get to church for some reason during the weekend.

Pastor Nelson began teaching the Bethel Bible Series to members in 1980. The Bethel Series was different from other Bible studies in that those who studied were expected to learn and then teach others. It was a self-perpetuating Bible study series. A number of Immanuel's members found the series very worthwhile. As one might expect, it was also a very time consuming series as well.

It should be noted that during this period, war materiel support from the United States to the government of El Salvador was at its peak. Officially the United States was supporting the Central American governments against Communist guerrilla bands based out of Nicaragua. Some of the arms were used against El Salvadorans who were demanding social and land reform. Elements within the Church in Central America were a leading force in favor of reform and many church people including nuns and priests were raped, tortured, and killed. In 1980 Bishop Oscar Romero was shot to death as he celebrated Mass for his outspoken views. The assassination, martyrdom, of this particular bishop brought into full focus the brutality that the El Salvadoran government was practicing on its own citizens.

Paul and Jo Schilling set up a schedule for Alcoholics Anonymous and Al. Anon. to meet at Immanuel. These meetings were set up in the old school house. Paul and some of his colleagues got permission to set up the basement in the school house for that purpose. While attendance has gone up and down, this ministry is one that Immanuel is still justifiably proud.

Pastor Christianson and another couple from Immanuel went to St. Louis and became trained as Stephen Ministers. They brought the information and training back to Watertown and other members began receiving training and working as Stephen Ministers in 1981. These people were trained in Listening Skills, Crisis Intervention, and just how to be effective supports for others going through stressful times in their lives. Active ministers, those ministers who were working on assignments with someone, met with Pastor Christianson and other ministers about once per month to talk about the situations and make some decisions about what needed to happen next. The program was intended for members at Immanuel, but others from the Watertown community also were involved with our trained ministers.

Pastor Nelson resigned his call in 1982, and the congregation voted to call its first female clergy person, Pastor Gwen Saylor. A female pastor was something of a new experience in Watertown. Her primary responsibilities were Parish Education and Evangelism. She came in with energy and enthusiasm and left a model Parish Education program nine years later.

In 1982 a group of concerned Watertown citizens came to the Clergy Roundtable with a plan to open a food pantry for the Watertown area. The issue was given some study and Immanuel offered to use the north office in the choir loft as a storage and distribution center. The rules were pretty simple. A family could only be given food once per month because of the numbers of persons needing food. Food was given based upon how many persons were in the family. The dedication of these people has made the Watertown Food Pantry one of the largest stocked and best operated pantries in the state. It has grown considerably and gained much more momentum. As Immanuel expanded into the new Education Wing, space was left in the basement for the operation. The space expanded, and had to expand again because Scout Food Drives, Postal Service Food Drives, and other efforts to collect food for the hungry in Jefferson and Dodge Counties were so successful.

At the Annual Meeting in 1983, the Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church Endowment Fund was established. Growth through the first ten years was slow but steady. Thanks to several members' estates the Endowment Fund has grown more rapidly in the last seven years. As only the interest from the Fund can be distributed the Endowment Fund has become a more widely used and substantial source for finances without having to apply for approval in the budget process.

At the Annual Meeting in 1984, another constitution was approved. Once again, this was an attempt to adapt Immanuel more closely to the ALC model. It was about this time that Immanuel began hearing about a concept called "inclusivity" or "inclusiveness". The idea was that Lutheran worship and Lutheran church organization had crystallized over time such that God, as an example, was always referred to as masculine. There are many references in the Bible to God as a mother or feminine. Even Jesus entering Jerusalem for the last time talked about gathering those people under his wing as a hen gathers her brood. The feminist issue was not the only concern. Racism was another issue the church was trying to confront head on by trying to open the Lutheran tradition to other cultures. Watertown has had Bethesda Lutheran Homes for many years as well as other group homes for persons with mental and learning challenges. Immanuel's members began to think again about being sensitive to these people and how we might share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them.

Shortly after the Annual Meeting the Madison Sanctuary Committee was formed to provide refuge for those illegal aliens from Central America fleeing for their lives.

Pastor Brent Christianson resigned his call in April and Pastor Tom Kent was called in July to provide leadership for the youth ministries. In 1984 Doug Bisbee began studying at Wartburg Seminary. There has been a member of Immanuel at seminary ever since Doug began his studies.

## CHAPTER 3

### 1985-1990

Finally, in the late spring of 1984 the old school house was razed and ground was broken for the new Education Wing. For the following school year Sunday School was held across the street, in corners of the church, and at St. Bernard's School. The Education Wing became a focus point for the congregation. The pastor's offices were in what is now the Library, in the rooms at the foot of the steps from the Library, and in the areas that are now the Lounge and part of the entry. Moving into the present offices was a great relief to clergy, staff, and Immanuel members as well.

Division I, those children in nursery through second grade, moved right in to their space on the second floor of the Education Wing. Division II, those children from third through sixth grade, gradually moved into the education wing as it was finished off. This group still uses the Fellowship Hall underneath the sanctuary for group worship before being dismissed to their classrooms. Division III, or the Confirmation students, used the basement of the Education Wing even when it was more dungeon than classroom area. Seventh grade confirmation students use the basement area for their Wednesday confirmation classes. The eighth grade students use the second floor area for their Wednesday classes.

Pastor Espeland resigned to accept another call in 1985. A congregational survey was completed in 1985 prior to calling a new Senior Pastor. After a careful search, the congregation called Pastor Ron Mach in 1986. Pastor Kent resigned to take another call, and the congregation called Pastor Jeff Forbes as a youth pastor. All things considered, 1986 was a busy year for clergy moves.

These were a few difficult years while the congregation struggled to pay the mortgage on the new education wing. The project cost nine hundred thousand dollars, and the principal and interest payments were hard to meet from time to time. It was during this time that the congregation began borrowing from the local banks on a short term basis to meet bills during the course of the year when income from offerings were not enough to meet the congregation's obligations.

The congregation moved forward along with the rest of the American Lutheran Church into the merger with the Lutheran Church in America and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church into the present synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1987. Immanuel became part of the largest Lutheran Church in the United States and one of the largest Lutheran Churches in the world.

In 1988, a Caring Chain was started to help keep our members in touch with one another. In the event that members were hospitalized or just not in church for a couple of weeks, phone calls would be made to check up on those members to let them know that they had been missed.

Doug Bisbee finished his course of study at Wartburg Seminary and was ordained in 1988.

Pastor Sayler was instrumental in organizing the Women's Center in Watertown in 1988, and for the first few years of its existence it was also housed at Immanuel in what is now our Lounge. This organization has been very active in assisting women in the Watertown area understand and deal with a broad range of issues facing women in this society. The issues have ranged from teen pregnancy and family planning to abuse counseling and support for women during court proceedings.

1989 was another year of change. Pastor Forbes resigned to take another call and the congregation decided to call a full time lay Music Coordinator. Bill Bravener was called to that position in 1991.

Lowell Halvorson was ordained in the summer of 1989.

Potent of Kenosha, an architectural firm, made some drawings of our sanctuary to make the worship area more handicap accessible in 1989. The project was not completed. However, some changes were made to worship at Immanuel including the removal of the first row of pews for better wheelchair access and use of a free standing altar along with station communion.

## CHAPTER 4

### 1990-1994

In 1990 Pastor Sayler accepted a call to Wartburg Theological Seminary to teach Old Testament. The call was to start in the fall of 1991.

During 1991 Iraq invaded and occupied the nation of Kuwait. In response to this situation, the United States eventually sent troops to Saudi Arabia first in a defensive, blockade posture called Desert Shield and later in an aggressive posture called Desert Storm. Two members from Immanuel were involved in these actions. Thankfully, they came home safely, but this period of time was stressful in examining our faith and beliefs resolving them in the face of imminent war and potential world war.

Pastor Ron Mach also resigned his call in 1991 to accept a call as the Assistant to the Bishop of the South Central Synod. During the congregation's study period the Synod assigned Immanuel two interim pastors, Terry Berg and Paul Lee. Our entire office staff was also reworked at this time.

Bishop Enslin suspended our pastor search process in the spring of 1992 with a rather unique proposal. He suggested that Immanuel might wish to consider a clergy couple to fill our two vacancies. As a result, Immanuel called Richard Heins and Gail Brodersen-Heins.

In the fall of 1992 Immanuel held its first Talent Show and Ice Cream Social. This event has become a popular Youth and Family annual event. The Masters/Mistresses of Ceremonies change each year as well providing some surprising demonstrations of talent at that level.

A committee was also appointed to update the constitution again in 1993 in order that Immanuel's constitution would be more compliant with the ELCA model. This effort required significant dedication of time and energy from the committee. They worked very hard at making sure the differences between the two constitutions were clearly explained.

Pastor Rich had been a pastor in Milwaukee for some time and at least in part to his efforts, Immanuel entered into a partner ministry with Cross Lutheran Church in 1993. Cross is an inner city congregation with an active youth ministry. Pastor Joe Elwanger is a very respected voice for social ministries in the City of Milwaukee, and we have been blessed in this partner ministry since it began.

A new Bible study series came out in 1992 called Search. The Bible study was done by book and short term study periods were used rather than the three years required by Bethel. This proved popular and more convenient for the congregation.

Our new constitution was implemented in 1994. There was almost an immediate amendment to the constitution leaving a place on the Church Council for a person

representing the Youth. This representative is a confirmed person but usually still in high school.

Kathy Hoffman became Immanuel's Parish Nurse in 1994. There is a health cabinet made up of several members, and they keep the congregation aware of health issues through printed materials, blood pressure checks between services each month, some special presentations, and healing services held a few times each year.

In July, 1994 our Luther League youth and adult sponsors shared a bus with the Luther League youth of Waupun and went to the Atlanta for the ELCA Youth Gathering. It was the first time our youth had gone to any kind of event like this and it was an important event for them to attend. It was also fun. The rest of the congregation got into the fun by participating in some of the fund-raisers such as the cake auction at the Annual Meeting and aluminum can drives. These events have become annual events since 1994.

Dean Kirst entered Wartburg Seminary in 1994. Dean was another member, like Lowell Halvorson, who started a second career from Immanuel.

Finally in 1994, the elevator was installed in the education wing. This addition made it possible to have Christmas programs on the second floor of the education wing as well as other events for the Division I Sunday School students that might not have been accessible to family members in wheelchairs. The elevator also made it possible for wheelchair access to the Fellowship Hall via the ramp between the Fellowship Hall and the basement of the education wing. The response to this addition has been slow but sure. We have seen more participation by members in wheelchairs in worship and in some of the other fellowship events such as the Talent show.

## CHAPTER 5

### 1995-1999

It seemed that we had just finished our Annual Meeting in 1995 when our partner church, Cross in Milwaukee was burned to the ground. An electrical short was responsible for the fire. What had been an “occasional” partnership came home to Immanuel of Watertown and Immanuel became deeply involved with that inner city congregation. Pastor Ellwanger wrote to Immanuel regularly to reassure us that their congregation had been brought closer together by that fire, that their ministries to Milwaukee were continuing, they were grateful to Immanuel for our faithful support through finances and prayer, and that their rebuilding project was continuing. His message that Cross’ ministry in the name of Jesus Christ would not be interrupted by a thing so small as a fire was a real inspiration. The witness that congregation showed in that struggle was tremendous.

Bill Bravener began a small fund after the Synod Convention to purchase a new worship supplement. The name of this book that made such an impression on our Music Director was “With One Voice”. By the end of 1995 Immanuel had purchased enough of the books to be able to begin using the hymns. We continued to explore the hymns in 1996, and eventually began using some of the orders for worship.

Rachel’s Day, a day for remembering children who are victims of war, famine, poverty, and abuse was first observed in May 1996. The term is a reference to the verses of Jeremiah where Rachel weeps for her children who are no more. This annual celebration took on additional significance in 1999 after the nationwide rash of school shootings by school age children.

A “Mom’s Group” was organized in 1996. This was an early example of “small group” ministries that Immanuel has begun to build. The group has a certain fluidity about it in that members can come and leave, but the basis is still talking about raising children.

A group of our high school students went to Milwaukee in the summer of 1996 to work on a Habitat for Humanity project. They stayed at the newly rebuilt Cross Lutheran Church in Milwaukee for a week and had time to go out on the town for some fun as well. This exposure to inner city living was an important event for these students. Other groups have gone since this time and it has proven to be a safe, worthwhile event.

Our organ received another voice in 1996 when a zimbelstern was added. Occasionally the organist will play a piece of music that is enhanced by what sounds like a five-tone wind chime. It is used sparingly, but it is there.

A crew of workmen from Oliver Construction was hired to complete the classrooms and the new home of the Watertown Food Pantry in the summer of 1996. This \$56,000 project brought to a close twelve years of construction of the educational facilities. A number of people should be recognized for their vigilance in completing this work.

The Church Council, in 1996, made a priority of paying back the mortgage to Aid Association for Lutherans. There were still outstanding member loans to pay back. However, the entire congregation demonstrated their faithfulness in giving and in prayer that paid back this substantial debt earlier than scheduled. One side effect of paying off the mortgage has been that our Endowment Fund has grown considerably since then. I would not suggest that money has been just turned over to the Endowment Fund rather than going to some capital project, but the habit of giving sacrificially, the habit of tithing, the habit of thinking of one's church as a place that needs money too, has helped develop other areas of our ministry. The Endowment Fund has received several large bequests from deceased members which has accounted for most of the growth. It has also received some smaller donations from members and groups.

In 1997 Dean Kirst was ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. He accepted a call in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. As Dean left Wartburg another member, Carrie Mack, began her seminary career. Something that Carrie and Dean shared is that they became part of the ELCA from other Lutheran traditions. Immanuel has proven to be a place where men and women of faith are nurtured, where they can hear the promises, where they experience the freedom of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and they respond by offering their lives to teach and preach that same Good News. This, too, is an important ministry that Immanuel shares with the Church. We also need to thank God for the faith of the people who have come forth from Immanuel.

One of the last events in 1997 was the resurfacing of the church's parking lot between Eighth and Ninth Streets. The project was only proposed halfway through the year and yet it was accomplished and paid off by the end of the year. It may not seem like much, but it is another example of the love and dedication of Immanuel's members.

At the Annual Meeting in January of 1998 the congregation once again took up the question of accessibility to worship. A committee was formed to take up that task. At the same time another task force was formed to evaluate youth ministries at Immanuel. There were some serious questions about whether the young people of Immanuel are receiving the attention they need and deserve.

Jefferson County began a chapter of Habitat for Humanity in 1998. Immanuel has members on that board, and has found ways of assisting with construction as well. While the Jefferson County chapter has focused on new housing instead of rehabilitation of older homes, it still marks development in the area of affordable housing in our area.

In the fall of 1998 a series of hurricanes struck the Caribbean area. The Dominican Republic and other islands were devastated, but the largest storm was Hurricane Mitch. Mitch hit the Central American countries very hard, and impoverished nations were left with thousands of homeless, devastated crops, destroyed infrastructure, and very few options to rebuild. Volunteer groups from the United States donated money and goods to the victims of all of these storms, but one man from Watertown went and assisted with the reconstruction of a village. He went in February, 1999, came back and spoke to the members at Immanuel about his experience.

The report of the Youth and Education Task Force was given at the Annual Meeting in January, 1999. The task force recommended hiring another full time staff person for Youth ministry. No action has been taken on that recommendation.

A report was offered by the Accessibility/Updating Committee about the progress of plans to make our worship space more accessible at the same meeting. The committee had not concluded their work at that time, but was expecting to come forth with a recommendation by the end of 1999.

Planning began even in 1998 for Immanuel's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The congregation is looking forward to a new accessibility project, a celebration dinner, a Fair, and other events to celebrate what we have done and to renew our dedication to ministering to the Watertown area in the future. During the fall of 1999, the congregation voted to move forward with the Accessibility/Updating project. The plan called for construction to begin the day after we celebrated Confirmation on Pentecost, and the project would be complete by Labor Day.

## CHAPTER 6

### 2000

Many celebrated New Year's Eve, December 31, 1999, as the end of one millennium and the beginning of the next. There was a great deal of television coverage of the event from the International Dateline to Hawaii. In Watertown church bells rang including the bell at Immanuel to welcome in the new year.

Art Turke and Gloria Poth led our Anniversary Committee. The theme for the year was "Honoring our Heritage, Looking Forward in Faith", and we had an outstanding year. Many people worked to put our Anniversary celebration together, and there were many events and opportunities throughout the year.

Immanuel's Anniversary Fair was held in January on the weekend closest to the actual signing of the corporation papers of Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church. Among the events and activities were bible stories, quilting, games, singing, and, of course, food. Marguerite Kerstell and Orrin Bisbee put together photographs and other historical documents as a mobile display that moved and was shown at several times throughout the year. That display was a centerpiece for the year.

Bill Kraemer led a committee that put together historical pieces for "Temple Talks", in *The Messenger*, and in the Sunday bulletins. These pieces covered many aspects of Immanuel's church life from short "Did you know . . ." questions to a full explanation of Immanuel's usher societies. Bill started these pieces in December, 1999. It helped to encourage interest in our anniversary activities. These historical pieces were also a highlight for many members during our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The last event marking our anniversary was the Candlelight Concert. Pieces were selected from previous Candlelight Concerts honoring our heritage, and also looking forward in faith. It was a moving moment because it one of the first opportunities for members of the community to come and worship in our newly remodeled sanctuary.

There were other outstanding moments the committee put together. In July the First Brigade Civil War Band led our 9:30 a.m. worship on the front lawn of the church. The street was torn up and our sanctuary was in the middle of remodeling, but the worship experience was wonderful. In November, we celebrated our anniversary with a dinner at Turner Hall, and we had quite a turnout.

We continued to move forward with our programs and other ministries as well. Pastor Matt Dollhausen was called and began working with us in July. Bread and Roses, the community dinner held Thursday evenings continued to grow, and some nursing services such as blood pressure screenings were made available as well as access to the Food Pantry.

## AFTERWORD

As a student of history and a Christian I am interested in things such as entering a new millennium, defining our congregation's role in the community in the twenty-first century, and what is the social environment in which our congregation is expected to do this work. Our anniversary theme was "Honoring our Heritage, Looking Forward in Faith", but how are we to do this? More simply my questions are what heritage do we honor, and to what do we look forward?

For almost four hundred years the United States has been a refuge for people seeking freedom of religion. Part of our heritage in this country has been what has come to be known as "The Lively Experiment", that is, can a country survive without one recognized state church. As Americans, we do not even think about this question any more. We accept that each person has the freedom to worship as that person sees fit. Sometimes that person chooses not to worship at all. It has also led to the creation of churches in the United States that could not rise anywhere else in the world. Sadly, that freedom of religion does not translate into higher incidence of worship in the United States than in other countries. Christ's message is still most powerful among people who are poor, hungry, and oppressed. Many poor people in the United States are wealthy compared to those who hear Christ's message and treasure it in Africa, South America, and Asia. America's poverty problem is still real and growing. But we live in a land where Jesus' voice is drowned out by a consumer culture broadcast on radio and television. Worse, Jesus' voice is ignored as an irrelevance to one's own personal life, a call that should be avoided because of the inconvenience. The same phenomena can be observed in almost every European and North American country.

As part of this American heritage we celebrate Clara Barton and the creation of the Red Cross, a worldwide organization. We celebrate the abolition of the institution of slavery within our borders and continue to pray for the end of racism, sexism, ageism, and all other forms of discrimination practiced in the world. Are we prepared to bring that acceptance and reconciliation into our congregation?

Another part of the American heritage is also something called "Yankee Ingenuity". A land of individuals brings forth creativity and a knack for overcoming obstacles. Can we raise the issues of peace and justice for the world, and find the faith of Abraham and Moses and Paul to raise our voices and lives dedicated to bringing Christ's kingdom out of the earth to the earth?