

As we celebrate the Centennial of the founding of our congregation, it is fitting that we review the outstanding events and praise our God for His many blessings. St. Luke's history has been malded by the untiring efforts of its faithful pastors and leaders and their consecrated devotion to the divinely inspired Word of God.

~~MMMMMMMMMMMM~~ Two missions had been started by the Rev. John Frederick Busche, a member of the German Reformed Synod of North America, under the auspices of the Young Men's Mission Society of the Protestant Reformed Dutch Church, of which Messrs. Mortimer De Mott and John Olcott were leaders. The Harlem Mission which later became St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church was begun in July 1845, and the Bloomingdale Mission, from which our congregation was founded, began in March 1846.

The Reverend George William Drees, St. Luke's founder, was persuaded to come to the United States in 1846 by the Rev. F. C. D. Wyneken of Baltimore, Md., a prominent Lutheran churchman who toured Germany seeking theological candidates to accept calls to the fast growing Lutheran churches in America. Upon his arrival in New York in July 1846, Candidate of Theology Drees was met by two clergy of the Dutch Reformed Church who induced him to remain and begin his mission work here. Within four weeks, the Rev. J. F. Busche, having accepted another call, persuaded Candidate Drees to take charge of the Bloomingdale ~~MMMMMMMM~~ congregation which by now had grown substantially and the Harlem mission. Candidate Drees was accepted into the communion of the ~~MMMMMM~~ German Reformed Synod of North America and ordained at their synodical convention in October 1846. The congregation began to flourish,

a parochial school was begun and on July 31, 1847, the congregation was incorporated as "The German Evangelical Church of Bloomingdale in the State of New York", (Relig.Inc.vol.2,pg.163). Land was purchased and building plans begun but financial difficulties together with unchristian attitudes toward the pastor developed by the middle of 1850 to a point where Pastor Drees resigned.

Encouraged by his loyal and enthusiastic followers, Pastor Drees founded our congregation with a service held in one of the library rooms of Columbia College, then on 50th street, on Sunday, September 1, 1850. On the following Sunday, the new congregation worshiped in ~~MINNISON~~ a rented room of a building on the north-west corner of 35th Street and Ninth Avenue (built 1840) which is still standing. In the years that followed the congregation grew slowly but firmly, united in true Christian zeal. A Sunday and parochial school were immediately reinstated. It is to be remembered that the enforced union of the Reformed and Lutheran church bodies <sup>into the "Evangelical Church"</sup> in Germany in 1817, the tercentenary of the Reformation, gave rise to many difficulties which were transferred with the people to this country. Confessional distinctions were theoretically erased, but ~~the~~ system ~~was~~ failed when applied in a country which permitted freedom of conscience and congregational autonomy. Confessionally Pastor Drees was a Lutheran and, therefore, in September 1852 he requested and received a peaceful dismissal from the Reformed Church and Synod and joined the Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of New York. The congregation/<sup>also</sup>joined ~~the~~ ~~MM~~ ? ~~MM~~ this synod in December 1853. In the same month a Sunday School Society was formed consisting of the members of the church council which society in March 1854 was <sup>reorganized and</sup> expanded to include the teachers and named Sunday School Teachers' Society the object of which was to systematically assist the pastor in the education of the youth.

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For many years our Sunday school was ~~was~~ a member of the American Sunday School Union, but this membership was severed in March 1855. The parochial school, which ~~remained~~ until the end of 1858 was instructed by the pastor, received the following year and until its close at the end of 1904 the services of professional lay teachers. which thereby ~~maintained the mission~~ permitted the pastor to devote the required time for pastoral acts and canvas work. By 1854 the congregation had outgrown its quarters on 35th Street and for the next seven years diligently sought ways and means to move, and did so to a building then known as ~~a~~ 655 8 Ave. By 1854 the need for larger quarters was apparent but the modest means of the members ~~prevented~~ bet. 46 & 47 St. delayed action for many years. In the meantime they set about systematically to collect the required funds and at the same time ~~negotiated~~ negotiated with St. Matthews for assistance. A gore of land on the southeast corner of 9th Avenue and 46 Street was acquired which in turn was transferred <sup>Oct. 1860</sup> to ~~Dr.~~ Jacob Astor in return for a plot slightly east of it. This second plot was sold in 1863 to purchase the land ~~in~~ 43 Street between 8 and 9 Avenues upon which was moved the Bloomingdale Baptist Church purchased by the congregation at that time.

On January 10, 1859, the present legal name, "The German Evangelical Lutheran St. Luke's Church in the City of New York", was officially adopted. The City of New York records show an incorporation of the congregation of April 4, 1863 and again on April 20, 1863, the original of the latter being the last and presently possessed by the church.

English classes were begun in the parochial school in 1859 and in the Sunday school in 1862

Our constitution was revised on Jan. 26, 1870 and again on Feb. 15, 1892. In the 1870 revision, that the pastor be the chairman of the congregation was ~~mmmmmm~~ changed. Unfortunately Reverend Drees took this change as a personal insult and in June tendered his resignation which was accepted with the provision that he remain fourteen months ~~mmmmmmmm~~ or until he received another call.

Pastor Drees' successor was the Rev. William H. Buettner of Utica, New York, who began his ministry in July 1871 and left in July 187<sup>4</sup>. During Pastor Buettner's short stay, our ladies society was organized and incorporated in the spring of 1872 as "The Ladies' Aid Society of St. Luke's"

The Rev. P. C. Kuehn served our congregation as supply pastor for the next two months and in September 1874, the Rev. Frederick George/William Busse, of Poughkeepsie, New York, was installed. The congregation having outgrown its forty-third street edifice, now undertook plans for a new building. Within six months from the time authorization was granted the trustees to sell the old building, plans for a new structure were under way and before these could be completed, The Forty Second Street Presbyterian Church, between 7th and 8th Avenues, was purchased, refurnished and dedicated the end of August 1875.

With the renewed pastoral and physical stability, the congregation could turn its attention to other matters with greater ease and in the expectation of revitalizing the parochial school, endeavored to purchase property just east of the church building for the erection of a <sup>parish house and</sup> school building. This met with failure as, ~~the~~ after negotiations, the vacant property was not available for sale. Undaunted, the congregation resumed full responsibility for the school in 1878.

In contrast, the Sunday School was very successful and from 1862, two sessions were necessary; the morning session in English and the afternoon session in German. In a large measure this was due to the able and consecrated leadership of one of the elders of the church

Because of an unfortunate difference of opinion among the members of The New York Ministerium concerning church rights, our congregation severed its connections with this synod on June 21, 1880, having been a member since 1863. Pastor Busse soon thereafter joined the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church. Our congregation remaining independent until this day has nevertheless actively and liberally supported the institutions of this synod. It was among the founders of Concordia Collegiate Institute, Bronxville, N. Y., The Bethlehem Lutheran Childrens' Home, Staten Island, N. Y., Wheatridge Sanatorium, Denver, Colo., and many other insitutions of mercy.

The pastor and church council having felt the need for English services for many years induced the congregation to take this step and in December 1894, regular Sunday evening services in the English language were introduced with the Reverend Professor Henry Feth of Concordia Collegiate Insitute officiating.

Joy and sorrow were mingled in less than one month, when the congregation after/having celebrated his twenty-fifth anniversary as pastor of the church, Pastor Busse was suddenly taken to his Heavenly Home on Nov. 12, 1899.

The congregation called The Reverend Frederick William Koepchen, pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church, Meriden, Conn., in January 1900 and installed him as their pastor two months later.

The Golden Anniversary of the congregation was appropriately celebrated by a special service which was preceded by several months of refurbishing of the building. On August 27, 1900, St. Luke's first Young Peoples Society was formed. The year 1902 saw the introduction of an English Bible Class as a supplement to the Sunday School, a Saturday School for instruction in religion in the English language and basic German reading and writing. A church paper "Altes und Neues" was also instituted in this year and continued until 1928 in which official reports, financial statements, important announcements, historical briefs and editorials were recorded. (105)

Traffic problems had reached a point for some time necessitating the widening of forty-second street. After a ~~long and protracted~~ protracted delay, the church in 1911, removed the outside steps and trees at the same time modernizing the interior at a considerable expense. (206)

World War I, 1914-1918, saw 88 members of our congregation in the armed services of our country and our school rooms acting as a Service Men's Center served by members of our societies, young and old.

Divine services in the Polish language were instituted in 1908 and continued regularly until our removal from 42nd Street. Services for the deafmute were instituted in 1916. (270)

English Services on alternate Sundays began spring 1918???

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The members of St. Luke's ~~MMMM~~ for decades felt that their particular mission in Christendom was to serve the itinerant as well as parochial souls of the Times Square area and as forty-second street rapidly became more unsatisfactory and their building less safe, they had for years seriously considered moving and investigated every legitimate offer of purchase. On July 11, 1921, after legal requirements were met, the voting members authorized the sale of the property and the final service was held on January 1, 1922. From this date until the spring of 1923, Sunday services were held in the Selwyn and Times Square Theaters and communion and special services in the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer on West 44 Street. (57)

The present ~~man~~ location was purchased in the same block and on the same side of the street where seventy-two years earlier our congregation had purchased land upon which it had hoped to build. Plans were approved and building begun in the spring of 1922 and the cornerstone laid by the president of the congregation on October 29th. Dedication of the beautiful new building complex took place on September 16, 1923. (157)

The problems and confusion attending relocation having now been resolved, the church began with renewed energy to resume its parish work. They paused in November 1925 to celebrate their Seventy-Fifth Anniversary and thank and praise God for his manifold blessings and reconsecrate their energies anew to the spreading of the Great Evangel. Life's details constantly change and every successful living thing must adapt itself or stagnate. ~~MM~~ So with St. Luke's, the need for the German Department of the Sunday School having all but vanished, it was discontinued in January 1929. So also, in January 1931 ~~MMMM~~ two Sunday morning services were introduced, one in English and one in German which was retained until September 1936. (247)

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The great depression effected our congregation seriously. The poorer members of the neighborhood moved to places where they could find work or doubled up with their relatives in the suburbs to better withstand the financial burden. Business and social a reason for and factor in St. Luke's location visitors/to the city decreased considerably and ~~MEMBERSHIP~~ ~~MEMBERSHIP~~ mission and parish work would have become discouraging were it not for the loyal support of the "old timers".

The pastor's work in maintaining contact with such a widely scattered congregation had slowly and then suddenly become in the Spring of 1935 a physical impossibility. The congregation therefore/called an assistant, Candidate Albert L. Neibacher of Windsor, Connecticut, who assisted at the English Services, revitalized the Sunday School executed an exhaustive canvas of the neighborhood and devoted his remaining time to young peoples work.

A month after the sudden death of Pastor Koepchen on September 8, 1936, the congregation ~~MEMBER~~ presented a call to Mr. Neibacher. On October 23rd, Pastor Albert L. Neibacher, was ordained and installed at a beautiful and overflowing service.

February 1937 saw the introduction of a permanent vested choir as the gift of a member of the church and Christmas of that year our first Candle Light Service which has become one of our beautiful traditions. Social and gymnasium ~~family~~ programs were reorganized in/1937 for the underprivileged children of the neighborhood and the Junior Christians of Saint Luke's, a society to retain the confirmees, was organized in the Spring of 1938.

The celebration of our Ninetieth Anniversary in 1940 was marked in addition to appropriate services with the publication of a history of the congregation written by Pastor Neibacher and the erection of a Baptistry and Altar in memory of the late Pastor Koepchen.