

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY IMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH”!

“To GOD Be the Glory!”

Immanuel is where we come to pray, to hear God’s word, to commune, to sing His praises, and to join in fellowship with one another like we’re doing here today.

This is very special day and I’m honored to be part of it. I’ve always considered Augsburg my home church, since - - I was baptized here, - - I was confirmed here, - - and my wife Nancy and I were married here. - -. So, I hope my life-long connection to Augsburg, gives me license to tell stories about “Augsburg’s interesting past!”

Typically, on milestone church anniversaries such as this, we would talk about various “official church acts” such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals and the names of pastors and teachers who served here, etc. - -

But on this 100th birthday of the church, we’re going to look at Immanuel’s history though a different lens, - - through newspaper clippings and old stories that have been handed down from one generation to the next - that as Paul Harvey used to say; - “TELL THE REST OF THE STORY!”

Augsburg church has a long, steady history, - - but down through the years the area AROUND the church has changed a lot. Case in point, GONE - - are the hitching posts, the creamery, the post office, the school, the teacherage, the barn and the store, - - meanwhile, - THE “CHURCH” REMAINS THE SAME!

It’s interesting to read old newspapers - - about not only the church, - - - but about MEMBERS of the Church as well - - such as;

- In 1947, - - AS a cow was being milked across the road from the church, she kicked at a cat, and somehow her hoof ended up in the overalls pocket of the man who was milking her! - - (yes, believe it or not, that incident was deemed important enough to make it in the newspaper!

- Or, during a friendly game of horseshoe, a member of the church got hit in the back of the head by an errant toss? (fortunately, his injury wasn't serious).
- Or, another time when a member of the congregation was rushing to help another member put out a building fire, but while on the way, he lost control of his car and flipped it over on its side. Fortunately, he was able to climb out unscathed.
- Or, when one of Augsburg's pastors ran an advertisement in the newspaper offering a reward for his spare tire that went missing from the back of his Model A Ford. *This was back when rubber tires were really hard to come by, - - so it probably didn't just fall off on its own!*
- Or, this next item which appeared in February of 1937; - - - The headline read - - - "Local Boys are Hard to Beat! The local news correspondent went on to say; - - *The weather is bad, the roads are worse, cars cannot travel, horses and buggies are almost gone, but the boys crank up their tractors and go see their girls JUST THE SAME!*"

These are the kinds of "Paul Harvey Moments" that are NOT found in typical church records!

If you're like me, you were brought up to believe the behavior of our forefathers was beyond reproach, - - but apparently there WAS a little rowdiness that went on from time to time, - - for example;

- In 1878, the church janitor went on record saying THIS during a church voters meeting; "Cutting on CHURCH benches - - with knives - - and chewing or spitting tobacco while IN CHURCH - - IS prohibited!"

Or, in 1923, five years after the new church was built, a vacancy pastor requested that a church elder be stationed in the upstairs balcony to maintain order during worship!

But on TODAY's special occasion - we'd be remiss if we didn't pay HOMAGE to Immanuel's founders for their UNWAVERING Faith and Courage.

When they departed their European homeland, they left behind; friends, neighbors, relatives, their church, their animals and everything else they were familiar with - to sail across a vast ocean for a better opportunity for themselves and their children, knowing full well, they could never go back, because it was too risky and too costly.

It's not easy to go to another country when you don't know the language, - for example; - as one Augsburg family of five was coming across the country by train, - - with a final destination of Vandalia, ILLINOIS, - - (*where they had relatives anxiously waiting to meet them*), - - BUT, - - because of not being able to understand a single word of English, they mistakenly got off the train in Vandalia, OHIO! They eventually did get here, however, and they settled a short distance south of Augsburg, where Bob Lotz lives today.

So, Why Did Augsburg Decide to Build a NEW Church 100 Years Ago?

This congregation was actually founded - 142 years ago, back in 1876, and two years later - they dedicated the first church. Since they also needed a place to educate their children, they built a wall through the middle of the building, with classroom in back, church services held in front.

By the Grace God, the congregation kept growing, and it wasn't long before they needed more room for worship, so they added 2nd floor balcony seating in the back of the church. This was before the building was converted into Augsburg School.

In fact, when Dennis and Evelyn Meseke started school, they remember the 2nd floor balcony was still in place - - above the boys and girl's cloakrooms.

But, what REALLY ramped up momentum for building a new church occurred in 1912, when Immanuel switched its allegiance from the Iowa Synod to the Missouri Synod, which was soon followed by Missouri Synod St. Paul congregation - - peacefully releasing 60 voting members to join Immanuel since they lived closer to Augsburg.

Families were big back then, so the families of 60 voting members could have added up to 150 or more people!

- So, to make room for building a new church, they moved the old church 180 feet north and turned it 90 degrees, facing it east.
- At the same time, they started sending their children to a school one mile south of Augsburg, (which had been gifted to them by St. Paul), so that decision, temporarily at least, freed up 100% of the old church for worship.
- Then, on 15 April 1917, the cornerstone was laid for the new church, which was followed 15 months later by the dedication of a beautiful new sanctuary on July 14th, 1918, exactly ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO YESTERDAY!
- The building committee for new church spec'd. it out to be three and one-half times larger than the old church, at 3,800 square feet, compared to 1,100.

BUT THEN - - just 9 DAYS - - (NINE DAYS) - - before the Cornerstone Was Laid, - - the United States Entered WW I

Initially at least, no one realized the extent of hardship and sacrifice that “That War” would require.

It was a bold decision to go ahead and build a new sanctuary during a WORLD WAR, because resources were scarce, inflation was high, and 10,000 United States troops per day were being shipped overseas to fight on the battlefields of France! By going forward with this building initiative - - the founders of Immanuel demonstrated a profound faith that; “God Will Provide.”

Even though Immanuel was founded by immigrants from other countries, - it has always been a strong supporter of the United States military; ie:

- During WW I, TWENTY young men from Immanuel were called up to serve
- THIRTY-FOUR MORE were called up to serve during WW II
- Alan Harrison, Dennis Meseke & Delbert Sasse served in Korea, and
- Gary Meseke, Bob Lotz & Richard Wollin served in Viet Nam

In total, that adds up to SIXTY members of Immanuel who served their country during times of war, - - plus dozens of others who served during peace time.

After the cornerstone was laid, an architectural firm from St. Louis was hired by the name of Nolte & Nauman, who were known for designing large buildings. Augsburg parishioner, John C. Torbeck, was named local contractor, since he had prior experience with projects of this size, given he was contractor for Immanuel's first church AND the main campus school at neighboring St. Paul.

Building materials for the new church were purchased from Sonneman Lumber Company in Vandalia, then shipped to Shobonier by rail. From there, hauled to Augsburg by horse drawn wagons, *"at great effort through deeply rutted roads!"*

Construction began in earnest in the spring of 1917, and twelve months later, as the new church was nearing completion, - - *"SHEER PANIC SET IN throughout the entire congregation"* when volunteer workers noticed the east and west outer walls were starting to bulge! This potentially devastating news spread like wildfire, and alarmed parishioners feared the very worst, in that their beautiful new "House of God" was about to collapse inward on itself!

According to Keith Torbeck, his grandfather, (as local contractor), had already had a "falling-out" with the architects over this exact same issue, because in his opinion, their design plan did not call for adequate roof trussing!

Immediately after this alarming discovery, the architectural firm was urgently summoned out from St. Louis, and during a "meeting of the minds," it was determined that steel reinforcement rods needed to be installed to more rigidly hold the side walls together.

Now I have a question for the audience, - - would anyone care to venture a guess as to how many of those steel rods were installed? When we go over to the church for the 2 o'clock service, - depending on where you sit, - you should be able to look up and count SEVEN. - - *(NOW FOR A WORD OF ADVICE - - PLEASE DON'T ALL BE GAZING UP AT THE CEILING DURING PASTOR MILASH's SERMON, - - - OKAY)?*

Like most of you, I've been in a lot of churches, and countless other large buildings, but I've never come across another spacious structure like the one next door that has one-inch diameter steel rods holding the side walls together - - !

But, not to worry, thanks be to God, the remedial action that was taken back in 1918, has served the congregation well for the past ONE-HUNDRED YEARS!

And, while on the subject of CHURCH WALLS, - - have you ever wondered what Augsburg's church walls would say if they could talk? - - It would most likely be of crying babies, - - lengthy sermons, - - the happiness of baptisms and the joys of weddings, - - as well as, - - the heartaches of funerals.

Augsburg's walls would most likely speak of vows made - - of promises broken, and of important decisions being made, like in 1912 when the congregation became affiliated with the Missouri Synod, or two decades later when German worship services were being phased out in favor of English.

Have you ever given thought to how many SERMONS - - have been preached in the church next door?

If you factor in Lent, Advent, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Thanksgiving and funerals, it adds up to 70 sermons per year, on average - - so - - 70 times 100 YEARS equals to 7,000 sermons! - And if we take this a little further - and multiple 7,000, - - times a conservative estimate of a little over four hymns per service, that suggests 30,000 hymns have been sung in the church next door. That's right - - 30,000 Hymns!

These kinds of almost over-whelming numbers reinforce the fact that; "Immanuel Lutheran Church of Augsburg - - IS a House of God!"

One-hundred years ago yesterday was a very important day in the history of this congregation, - when its beautiful new sanctuary was dedicated.

THREE separate dedication services were held to commemorate this special occasion

and for the pastors who are with us here today. you might want to make note of thus next comment because - -

*During those THREE Services - -
FOUR Sermons Were Preached!*

This is how the article appeared in the newspaper:

Augsburg Church Dedicated Sunday

A magnificent crowd was in attendance last Sunday at the dedication of the new Evangelical Lutheran Church at Augsburg.

The new church is a large and very pretty frame structure. It is equipped with "very fine pews," a pastor's study, class rooms and a choir loft. It also has a new pipe organ which was used to good effect in the dedicatory services.

At 10:30 AM, Prof. Streckfus of Concordia Seminary, Springfield conducted the service - - in German.

At 3 PM. an English service was conducted by Rev. Fred Melzer of Steelville.

And at 8:00 PM, Rev. Hussmann of Centralia delivered a sermon in German and Rev. Schwagmeyer, of St. Paul, preached a sermon in English!

I have attended a worship service where a collection plate was actually passed around twice, - (at a NON-Lutheran church) - - but I've NEVER experienced two sermons during one service! - - - Thanks to Dennis and Evelyn Meseke, we have a copy of the bulletin for all three dedication services.

In addition to the steel reinforcement rods, are you aware there is another unique feature of Augsburg Church?

It's pews, which were mentioned in the preceding article, are more than just something to sit on, - - because - - they TOO are unique." They were hand crafted before electrically powered lathes became available, and an architect friend of the congregation once compared the degree of difficulty in making curved pews - to that of building a finely crafted wooden boat by hand.

Today, 100 years later, sixteen-foot, solid oak, CURVED, wooden pews like those next door can still be found, but for around a thousand dollars each.

Have you ever wondered what they used for pews in the old church? You've most likely sat on one, because in an April 1917 voter's meeting, it was decided that pews from the old church should be used in the balcony and choir loft of the new church, so Immanuel's old church pews are still serving the congregation to this day!

How much did it cost to build the new church? Not counting furnishings and with most of the labor donated, it came to \$8,000. *Today it would be "cost prohibitive" to build a new church like the one next door, - - with replacement cost estimated to be over two million dollars!*

Did you know that Augsburg once had TWO general stores, (across the road from each other)? The 2nd one also stocked a few household furniture items! (Can you picture your Grandparents going to a store Augsburg to shop for a new couch?)

Did you know that in 1916, Augsburg School had two classrooms and two teachers? A second classroom was set up in a summer kitchen next to the teacherage, where the lower grades were taught by the teacher's teenage daughter.

In 1921, school enrollment peaked at 92 students, (at two students per desk) all taught by Teacher Henry Kiehl. Religion was also part of the curriculum, and there were no teachers aids back then! Teacher Keihl should be nominated for sainthood, because today, the ideal student to teacher ratio is 20 to 1 - verses his at 92 to 1. - Can you imagine how long the Christmas Eve Program was with 92 students each saying a part?

Did you know that in 1935, Rev. Emil Richter, as pastor of Augsburg was instrumental in organizing Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Vandalia?

Did you know that in 1944 Augsburg's church membership peaked at 460 members, which means Immanuel was almost a "mega-church" back then!

Did you know that during the first 50 years of the new church, (between 1918 - 1968), 450 were confirmed? That's an average of 9 confirmands per year!

Did you know that two students from the class of 1932 are still with us today? namely; Grace (Ehrat) (widow of Hilmer Albrecht) and Linda Braasch/Riedle, (widow of Fil Gehle). How rare is it for a small, one room county school like Augsburg to have two pupils from the same class over 100 years of age, - which means they were baptized BEFORE the current church was dedicated! Richard Krug, Harold Schaal and Charles Wasmuth Sr. were in that same class.

One of the largest church attendances ever recorded at Augsburg was on a Sun. evening in March 1941, (during WW II), with 500 in attendance. Rev. Robt Jank was responsible for organizing this special service when he was pastor. In fact, I believe their granddaughter, Donna Coughlin is in attendance here with us today.

It was an impressive patriotic ceremony featuring an Honor Guard of World War I Veterans who marched in, - - down the center aisle in formation. Henry “Henie” Meseke, (who owned a café along Route 51 in Shobonier) trumpeted the National Anthem from the choir loft. Throughout this entire service, John Schaal stood at attention beside the altar with a carbine rifle at his side. He was selected for this honor because it was said; *“He saw much hard service during WW I.”*

PAUSE - On TODAY'S Special occasion, it seems appropriate to ALSO share a few stories that have been handed down from earlier generations - such as -

There was a life-long member of Augsburg who was very much opposed to switching over from German to English church services, (and she wasn't alone)! She was a friend of my Grandmother, and she told her that - - ;

“I was raised German, I was schooled in German, I was confirmed in German, my bible and my hymn book are in German, - and now at my advanced age, I'm being told I'm going to have to learn how to worship in a new language, which I've reluctantly decided I'm going to have to go along with, - - BECAUSE - GOD IS GOING TO HAVE TO LEARN ENGLISH TOO!

In her mind at least, - God spoke German!

- My Aunt Lucille (Knecht) Meseke shared another Augsburg recollection about; “Announcing for Communion” back in the old days”!

Quote, *“Communion Sunday was always extra special because it was only celebrated every other month, and the head of the family had to go ‘announce’ with the pastor ahead of time. Our roads were impassable by car in the winter of 1934, so my dad saddled-up and rode up to Augsburg “To Announce,” but as he and “Old Bird” were approaching the parsonage, as a heavy snow was falling, Rev. Richter stepped out on the front porch and waved to Dad saying; “I know why you’re here Henry, - - so you don’t need to come inside!” My Aunt went on to say; “My Dad, - - is probably the only member of Augsburg who ever “Announced for Holy Communion” sitting on a horse!”*

I suppose it's only fair that since I'm telling stories on others, I should tell one on myself! Some of you might recall that I drove a Model A Ford to school from the 5th through the 8th grade. And not only that, I had five regular passengers, namely; Gale and Ruth Ann, children of Floyd and Mildred (Schaal) Meseke, and Patty and Johnnie, children of Carl and Ruth (Telger) Herring, along with my brother Delbert.

Can you imagine your children riding in an old car, (with no seat belts), driven by an 11 year-old boy who had to sit on a pillow in order to see over the dash?

Well, one day, after we had all climbed aboard after school was let out, I couldn't get the engine started, - it would crank and crank, but it just wouldn't fire. Fortunately, Eugene Schaal "Saved the Day" when he stuck his head in the driver's door window to assess the situation, after which he exclaimed; "*I think it might start if you turned on the SWITCH!*"

I suppose it's only fitting that I went on to become a Factory Representative for General Motors!

The late Reverend Ervin Meseke passed along another story about how Augsburg's early preachers were perceived. He recounted how they came across as proper, straight-laced and very serious. In addition to that, they always wore - long - black - robes, and preached in powerful voices from lofty pulpits.

Well, one Sunday, Ervin's parents (Geo. & Lena) invited Pastor Herrmann and some of their neighbors over for a noon meal, but Rev. Hermann didn't show!

After waiting for what seemed like an eternity, the phone rang, and it was their pastor explaining why he was running late, after-which, little five-year old Ervin went running through the parlor exclaiming to all the guests who were present that; "We STILL can't eat because - - (and he said this in German) "*Gott hatte einen platten Reifen*," which when translated means; - "GOD - - had a flat tire!"

It's ALSO fitting that ERVIN went on to become a Lutheran pastor!

And Speaking of Pastors - - We Would Certainly Be Remiss if We Didn't Also Remember Them on This Special Occasion - -

Seventeen pastors have served the congregation in the present church next door, and a total of twenty-four have served Immanuel since the congregation was first founded, so we'd be negligent if we didn't also pay tribute to them.

Like each one of us, they brought with them their human foibles and unique personalities, - - but as a collective group, they proclaimed the pure Gospel Message. Collectively, they accepted their Divine Calls to come to Immanuel Augsburg, to serve God and His followers, and to each of them, Immanuel Lutheran church at Augsburg - - ALSO meant something special!

And how can we reminisce about Augsburg's past - - and NOT bring up the topic of CHURCH PICNICS!

It seems quite apparent to me, - - at least, - - that THIS congregation absolutely LOVED church picnics, (OR AT LEAST THEY USED TO) - -. I say that because they had SO MANY;

They had; - - a Grade School picnic, a Sunday School picnic, Walther League picnic, Ladies Aid picnic, Men's Club picnic, and for several years even the Church Choir had their own picnic!

Church picnics were very popular social events back in those days, and according to a newspaper article in June of 1938, one-thousand-five-hundred people attended the Augsburg church picnic!

One local family even set a record by attending THIRTEEN different church picnics during the summer of 1956, since back in those days, Augsburg, St. Paul and St. Peter congregations all sponsored multiple church picnics!

A number of you might remember this family, - - namely Herman and Irene Gabel and their daughters Beverly, Denise and Sharon. They lived on a farm several miles southeast of Augsburg.

While telling stories, - - we lost a dear friend and life-long member of Augsburg earlier this year when Allen Sasse passed away, and I have a couple fond memories of him that I'd like to share with you from back when we were in school.

He was one year ahead of me, and he rode a pony to school by the name of "Teddy," but one day Allen got thrown off. So, he got up, dusted himself off and proceeded to walk the rest of the way home, however, when he got there, here ole "Teddy" was standing by the barnyard gate waiting for him, - - - BUT - with Allen's saddle hanging upside down under his belly!

Another recollection I have of Allen was an innovative plan he devised to finally settle an age-old dispute among Augsburg boys as to whether Chevy or Ford cars were the best! He was in 5th grade at the time, and in those days the only playground equipment we had was a merry-go-round, teeter totter and a softball diamond out in Teacher Mueller's cow pasture. - - - *(And by the way, Teacher Paul R. Mueller was THE ABSOLUTE BEST! What a BLESSING he was to this congregation and to so many of us as his former students!)* - - Continuing on, - - when we were in school, we didn't even have a rope to play tug of war, so the solution Allen came up with to determine which car was best, - - was - - if your Dad had a Ford, you pushed on the merry-go-round in one direction, while those whose Dads had a Chevy pushed on it in the opposite direction - -. The only problem was, if your Dad drove a Plymouth, you weren't allowed to participate! I don't remember which brand won the most often, but I always thought Allen deserved a lot of credit for coming up with such a creative solution.

- Without a doubt, MY biggest revelation while researching the history of Augsburg Church was - - - "How MUCH the Ladies Aid Society DID, - *(and still DOES)*, for this congregation!"

Case in point, - - on their 35th Anniversary, (back in 1978), it was published in the newspaper that the Augsburg Ladies Aid had made 605 quilts! Using a conservative estimate of 150 hours per quilt, that adds up to - - an astonishing 90,000 Hours of Volunteer Service, (for just this one very worthwhile cause)!

To reinforce the enormity of such an accomplishment, if you vertically (not horizontally, but vertically) hung 605 quilts end to end on a clothes line - - it would need to be three-quarters of a mile long!

And quilting wasn't the only project the Ladies Aid was involved in, - they also;

- Made rag rugs
- Served lunches at farm sales
- Held bake sales
- Sponsored a Bazaar Stand at the church picnic, (including cakewalks)
- Catered meals for anniversaries, weddings and funerals
- Hosted community dinners and sold church cookbooks
- Cooked apple butter for children's orphanages
- Gave quilts away to families victimized by fire and other calamities
- Sponsored seminary students at Concordia Springfield
- Served luncheons at LWML meetings and Central IL pastor conferences

What a wonderful Blessing the Ladies Aid Society has been to this congregation!
DON'T YOU ALL AGREE?

One doesn't normally think of a church bell as being an evangelism tool, but the steeple of Augsburg's church reaches high into the prairie sky, and the ringing of its bell can be heard for miles around when the weather conditions are right.

As a young boy I fondly remember Augsburg's church bell ringing every Saturday evening at 6 o'clock. It was tolled seven times - (once for each day of the week). which was a carry-over tradition from the European home villages of our ancestors. Neighboring St. Paul and St. Peter congregations did the same thing every Saturday evening.

The harmonious sound of church bells echoing across a peaceful Fayette County prairie on a Saturday evening was intended to serve as a reminder to go to church on Sunday morning. Sadly, because of a changing rural environment, with the advance of noisy farm machinery and sound proof tractor cabs, this 100-year-old tradition was discontinued in 1978.

Before closing, I have a “show and tell” I’d like to share with you. Courtesy of Robert Gehle, we have several original quarantine placards from the Wilberton Township Townhouse that, 100 years ago, were used to alert Augsburg and St. Paul families when anyone in the neighborhood came down with a highly contagious, potentially fatal disease.

Before penicillin and various other vaccines were discovered, an entire family was quarantined if anyone in the family was diagnosed with; Diphtheria, Influenza, Typhoid Fever, Small Pox, Whooping Cough or Scarlet Fever. Quarantining an affected family was all that they knew to do, - in their desperate attempt to prevent such deadly diseases from turning into full-blown epidemics.

According to parish records, during the first 50 years of the new church, - - (between 1918 and 1968), 242 funerals were conducted. - Unfortunately, a disproportionate number of them were for children.

These brightly colored placards like these were affixed to the mail boxes or front door posts of any quarantined family. Sadly, if anyone in the family DIED from one of these very contagious diseases, the grieving family was not even allowed to have a public funeral, - - for fear of spreading the disease even further!

In closing, - - - it has been said that church histories are written by the people who lived them - - - and recorded by those who want to know more about the legacy they’ve inherited. As friends and members of Immanuel, you can take comfort in knowing that yours is a rich tradition, made so by the faith, determination, courage, and character of those who have worshipped in the church next door for the past one-hundred years!

Yes, Immanuel has faced its share of challenges, (*like in 1918 when the new church almost collapsed inward on itself*), but the Lord never left its side, and today, the stately edifice next door serves as a testament to what God can accomplish when His people accept His will - and follow His path.

In His infinite wisdom, God decreed that His children should gather in His name, at this place, and the opportunities that lie ahead give hope and confidence that this congregation will continue doing the Lord's work at this place for a long time yet to come. It is only fitting that this congregation was named Immanuel, meaning; "God With Us"!

I hope you'll find this book about the history of Immanuel Lutheran Church at Augsburg to be informal and informational.

The stories captured within - - - belong to those who created them. This is their narrative, which I pray was presented in an accurate and respectful way.

The praise is theirs, - - - the errors and omissions are mine!

And MUCH is owed to so many of you who contributed to it.

I hope you'll enjoy reading and that you'll find it interesting!

Before I step away from the podium, I want to take this opportunity to thank the members of the 100th Anniversary Committee, consisting of; Rev. Joshua Frazee, Francis Collier, Dennis Lange, Dennis Meseke, Lee Schaal and Art Schukar. They were very supportive and a true pleasure to work with.

May God continue to richly bless this unique and wonderful congregation!

HAPPY 100th BIRTHDAY IMMANUEL!

Thank You