

Building of the Brick Immanuel Lutheran Church

This year, 2024, Immanuel Lutheran Church is celebrating two milestones, 150 years as a congregation and 100 years of worshipping in the brick structure located at West 5th and South Washington Street in St. Ansgar. The brick church is the third building used by the congregation. First was the church/parsonage building two blocks west of the current location, purchased in 1874. It served as both the home of Pastor Weigner, Immanuel's first pastor and his family and a church and school. In 1882 an unused wood frame church and four lots were purchased from John N. Rhames. This wooden building served the congregation for over 32 years. The congregation was growing and the wooden building had reached its capacity.

May 13 1923, the congregation voted to replace the wooden church and elected 9 men to serve as the Building Committee. They were tasked with finding plans, hiring an architect and overseeing all aspects of the construction process. The building committee included Herman A. Borchardt as president and Pastor Paul Brammer as secretary. Other committee members included Herman A. Rosel, Herman E. Falk, Otto Simmering, August C. Janzow, Richard C. Mueller, Otto Boening, Oscar G. Schroeder.

The men visited several churches in Iowa and Minnesota, some still under construction. Eventually they decided the new church in Blue Earth, Minnesota, would be a good choice for Immanuel in St. Ansgar. The plan and a picture of the Minnesota church was shared with the congregation June 13th and met with general approval. They selected Schippel & Schmidt, Architects from Mankato, Minnesota, to design the plans and submit blueprints.

October 7, 1923 the congregation approved the plans for the new church. It would face east, just like the old wood church. The building would be 48 x 93 ft overall and seat 450 people comfortably. The outside would be brick.

Nov 21, 1923 – “The other day we staked out the exact location of our church, facing it East, as we had planned. There is a 20 ft alley platted East of the parsonage running North and South.” Plans needed to change and the location switched to facing the north.

December 11, 1923 the contract for construction was awarded to Schradle and Clark of Austin, Minnesota. The construction of the new brick church would begin

in the spring of 1924. In December, members of the church started hauling rock, gravel and sand to the church property. The steeple and coal shed were removed from the wood church and it was moved into the middle of 5th Street. The congregation would continue to hold services there until they could formally move into the new brick building.

Farmers brought their teams to town and used slip scoops to excavate the basement. As items arrived at the railyard, the men would manually transfer the items to their wagons and haul the materials to the church site. The volunteer labor helped lower the final cost of construction.

January 25, 1924 the building committee selected Twin City Brick Company of St. Paul, Minnesota, and the "Autumn Leaf rag faced" brick. 80,000 bricks would be needed. March 5th, they signed a contract with Ford-McNutt of Minneapolis for art glass windows at a cost of \$2150. Forty windows were ordered and 26 would include inscriptions.

F. H. Bercker of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a dealer in designing and manufacturing of church furniture, was awarded the contract in the middle of March. The furniture ordered included the altar, pulpit, hymn board, pews and organ panel.

Other contracts were issues to Superior Lighting of Des Moines for lighting; Campbell Heating for the furnace; George P Smith Co of Charles City provided the millwork. St. Ansgar Power and Electric did the wiring. Mascon City Stone Company provided the Bedford Limestone.

Work progress rapidly and on May 29, 1924 a special service was held for the Laying of the Cornerstone. Members sat on chairs and benches on the main floor of the new church as Pastor Brammer blessed the cornerstone which included a box containing a history of the church, its constitution and by-laws, hymn book, catechism, church papers, a list of members of the church and its various societies and organizations, a copy each of a state, county and local paper, specimens of present day currency, a list of national, state, county and local officials, etc., which were placed in the stone. Immanuel's orchestra provided the music for this service.

The old church was sold to Mrs. Herman Borchardt. Once it was no longer needed to be the church, it was moved to eastern St. Ansgar and it still stands today as an apartment house. The old school was sold to George Kuehl and served for a time as part of the East End grocery store.

Wangerin Organ Company of Milwaukee was selected to provide a 2 manual pipe organ with pedals. The order included the metal and wood pipes, a detached console and bench, a blower and it used electro pneumatic action. The organ was delivered and installed in September 1924.

The bronze tower bell was purchased from Mc Shane Bell Foundry Co of Baltimore Md. The bell was donated in honor of the 50th anniversary of the congregation by Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Bartlet. The bell was ordered October 14, 1924.

The Dedication of the church, bell and organ was held November 9, 1924. The dedication service began at the old church, where a farewell service was held. From there the congregation headed by the architect, the contractor, the officiating pastors, the building committee, the deacons, the choir, and the Sunday School, proceeded to the new church.

After a hymn by the congregation, the general contractor handed over the keys to Pastor Brammer, who opened the door. Accompanied by the joyful peals of the new bell, the people soon filled the large church to its utmost capacity. In the afternoon, the 50th Anniversary Service was held to just as large a crowd. That evening, Prof. William Kirchhoff of Cedar Rapids, gave an organ recital and dedication.

The total cost of the church was \$43,866.92. Many changes have happened over the past 100 years. An education unit, the gathering space, remodeled kitchen and basement, redecorating, upgrades to the organ, heating and lighting are some of them. The building has aged well but still needs ongoing maintenance and the church will be starting a major overhaul on the outside of the building starting in 2025.

Immanuel Lutheran will be celebrating the centennial anniversary of the church building November 10th at their regular service scheduled for 9:00 am.

Wooden church used by Immanuel Lutheran Church from 1882 until 1924. It is now an apartment house in eastern St. Ansgar.





Brick Church built in 1924.