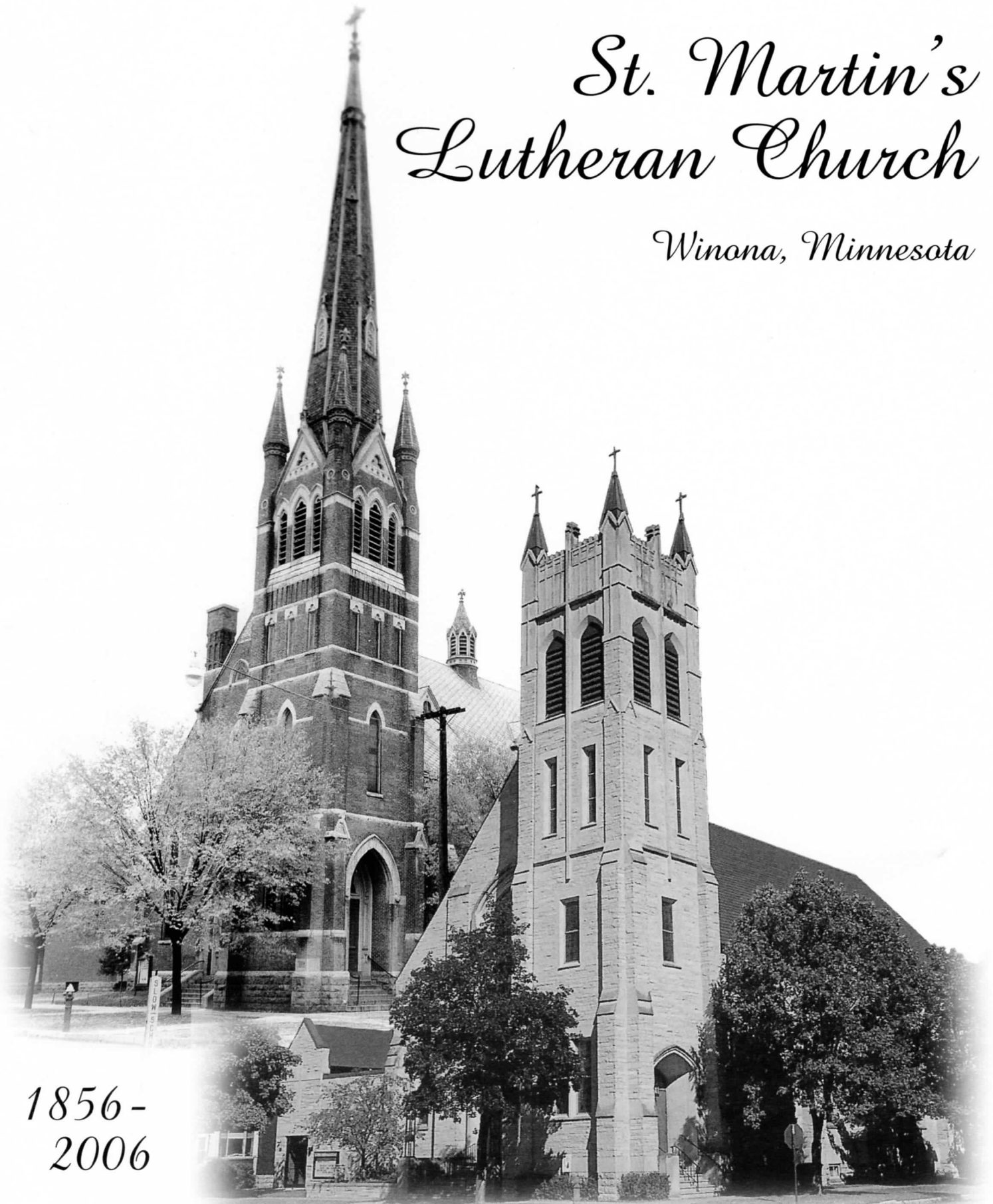
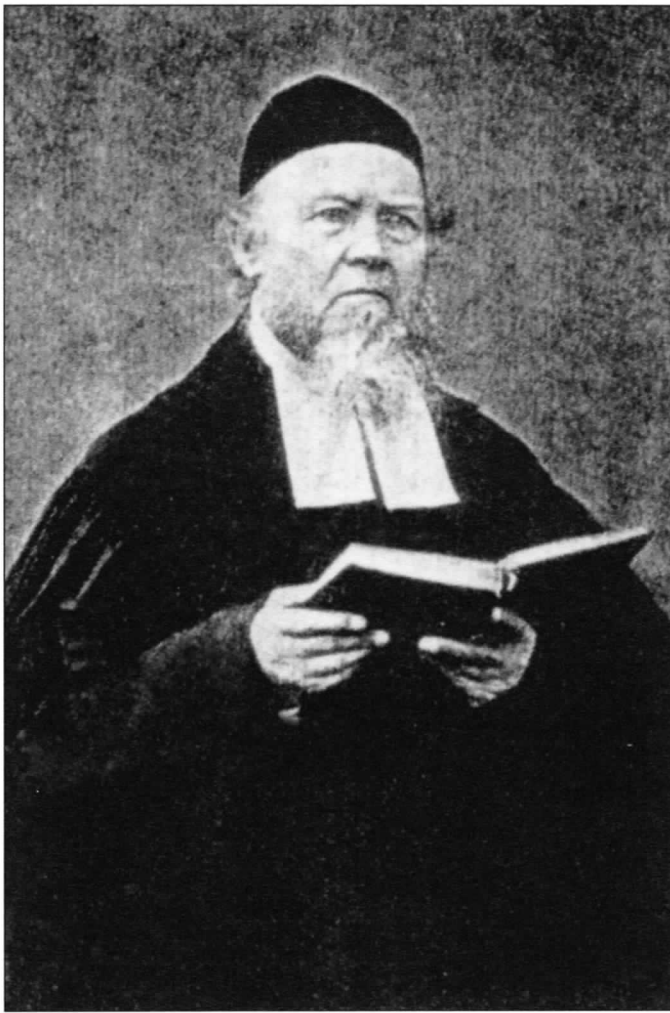


*St. Martin's
Lutheran Church*

Winona, Minnesota

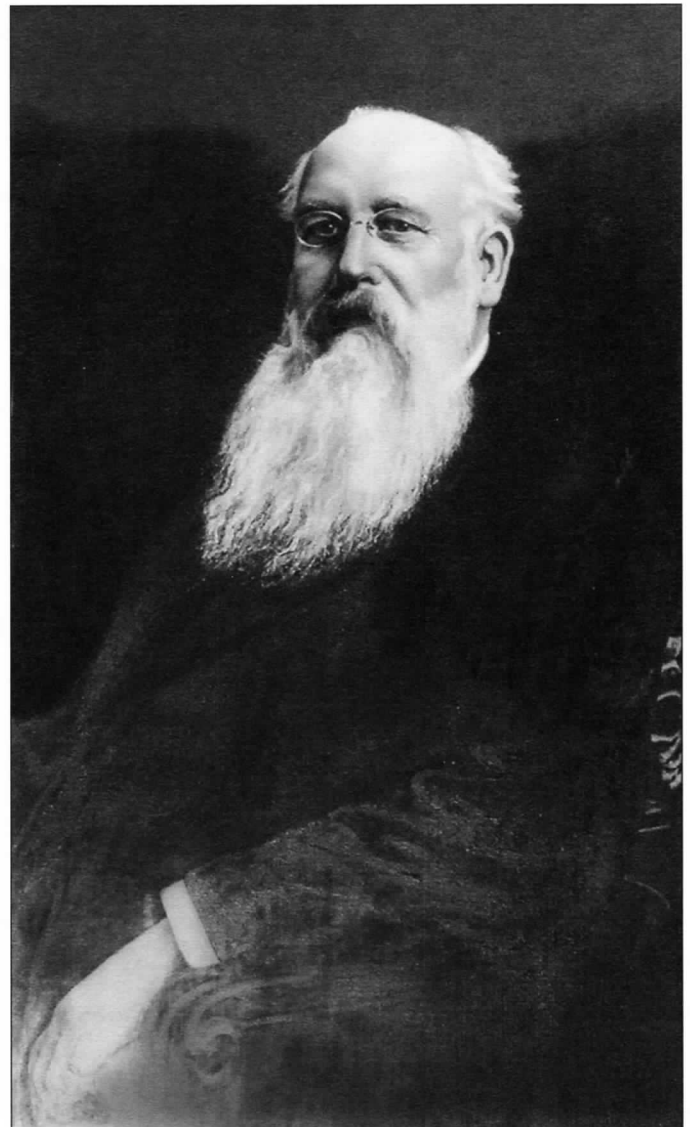
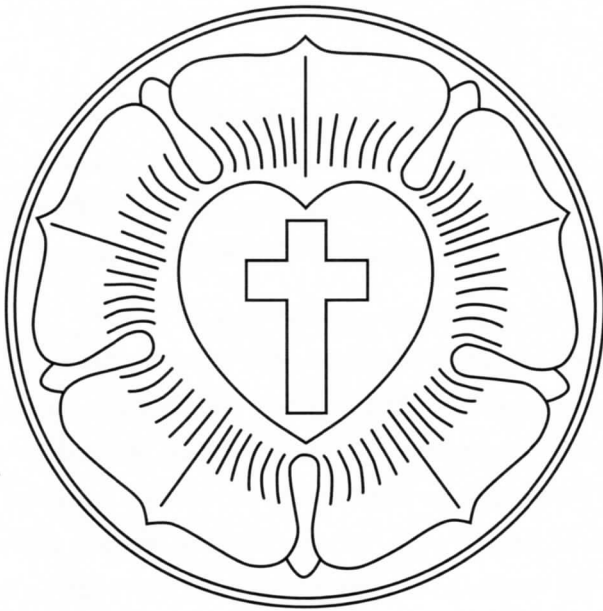
1856-
2006





REV. KRAUSE

*Sola Gratia
Sola Fides
Sola Scriptura*



REV. VON ROHR

One Hundred Years

*(A reprint of the 1956 Centennial Book
of St. Martin's Lutheran Church,
Winona, Minnesota)*

Great men and great institutions sometimes arise from hardship. St. Martin's Lutheran Church, which this year celebrates 100 years of service to the Lord with great thanksgiving, endured a painfully difficult beginning.

The first decade of this congregation was a struggle for survival – of the congregation, that is, not of the faith of the small band of Lutherans who had joined together to hear the Word of God in the then new city of Winona. They abided in the faith, and because of it so did our Church.

Little, unfortunately, is known of these beginning years. It was the spring of 1856 that some 15 adults first came together under the leadership of the Rev. L. F. E. Krause of the Buffalo Synod who had traveled here from Wisconsin.

There were perhaps seven families, but their names are not known to us definitely. First "Vorsteher" were Tobias Leeb, Nicolaus Wenk and John Bartels. It is believed that most if not all of the families who comprised the congregation 10 years later were in the organizing group in 1856; for the founders were deeply devoted and persevered in the faith.

On a half lot now designated as 352 E. 5th St. and purchased for \$130 they built a small edifice, 18 by 30 feet, and it was dedicated shortly before Christmas 1856. Pastor Krause guided the infant congregation for only a

year. From 1857-61 St. Martin's was served partly by Pastor A. Brandt from Hart and partly by pastors of the Buffalo Synod from Milwaukee and vicinity.

The congregation did not grow with the city; instead it became smaller.

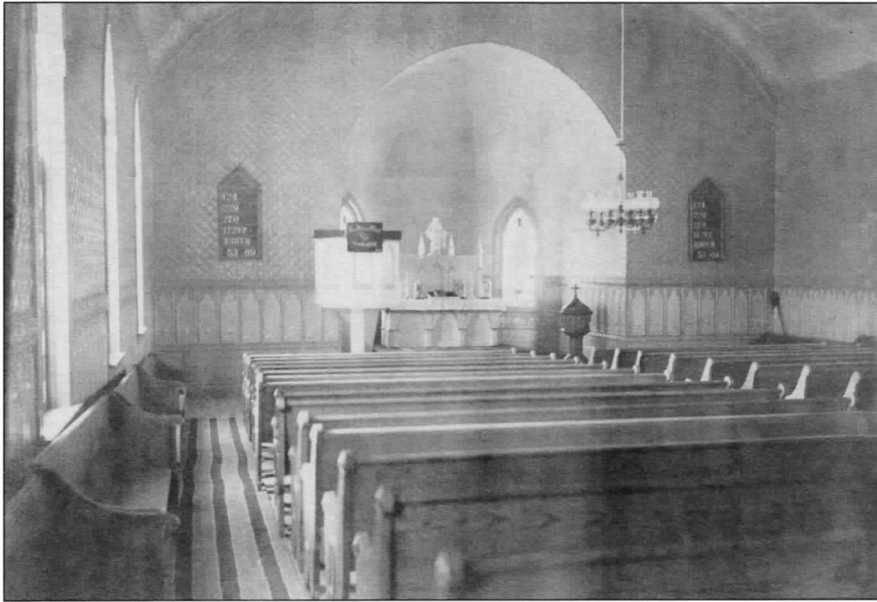
In 1861 Pastor Krause returned, but only for three years. In 1864 the congregation again was without a pastor. Indeed, these were difficult times.

The Rev. Philip von Rohr, who was to become pastor two years later, many years afterward said of these early days, "We must mention Mr. Tobias Leeb, one of the elders of the church, to whose untiring fidelity it is due that the congregation remained in existence. Even if no minister was here he would go to church with his family and read a sermon to them and a few others who also remained true."

Mr. Leeb would come to church Sunday after Sunday, a small organ under one arm and a book of sermons under the other.

The preceding facts and statements constitute virtually the entire recorded history of the first decade of St. Martin's. The seed of faith had not blossomed into full fruit in this pioneer city, but, as it was soon to be revealed, only the guiding and abiding hand of a vigorous and devoted pastor was needed to make it so.

In 1865 the president of the synod proposed Pastor von Rohr, then a young minister at Toledo, Ohio. He accepted the call of Tobias Leeb, Nicolaus Wenk, E. Rother, Christian Henning, A. Zuelke, Fred Burmeister



Inside of Second Church

and Fred Buchholtz, and was installed June 27, 1866. In making the call to the young minister, the tiny congregation had been encouraged by a Mr. Fiebranz of Milwaukee, who had business interests here and offered to pay \$100 of the \$350 annual salary.

At the annual meeting shortly after the installation, Leeb and Rother were named "Vorsteher" and Buchholtz, Zuehlke and Christoph Schulz trustees.

During the first week or two of Pastor von Rohr's ministry here, he established a parochial school, with six pupils, and a branch of the congregation at Wilson, to which he assigned one of the seven families (N. Wenk), reducing thereby the number of his communicant members, which had been 21. The Wilson branch, which paid one-third of Pastor von Rohr's salary of \$350 a year, was to be served as a branch for six years.

From this time on, not only did St. Martin's abound in faith, as it had since its humble beginning, but in numbers and material growth.

By June 1867 it was obvious that more room was needed, and it was decided to purchase property at Broadway and Liberty street. The price was \$275. The next spring the first church – of which no photograph now can be found – was moved to the rear of the present site and an 18-or 20-foot addition added.

Three years later – in 1870 – the second church, 36 x 80 feet and of frame and brick veneer construction was built at a cost of about \$5,000. The congregation then

numbered 60 families. The ladies society furnished the carpets and the young people the baptismal font at a cost of \$125. To help finance the construction, the congregation borrowed \$1,000 at 12 percent interest in advance.

The congregation joined the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States in 1877.

In 1880 two lots at the northwest corner of 5th and Chestnut streets were purchased for \$800 and a one-story school building was erected at a cost of \$3,200. First teacher at the school had been Joseph Mueller, a nephew of Pastor

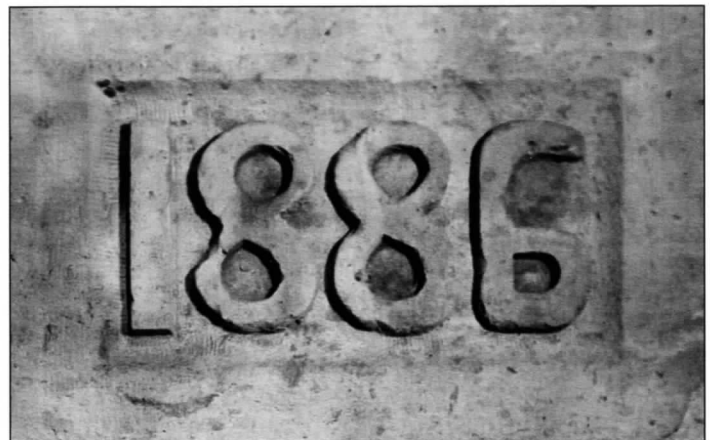
von Rohr, who was succeeded by O. Gebhardi. And in 1881 M. F. Walz was installed as a second teacher.

It was Teacher Walz who two years later – in 1883 – took charge of a subscription campaign for a new pipe organ which cost \$1,300.

By 1885 the growing congregation again needed more room. Three proposals were considered: 1. Begin a branch congregation in the West End and enlarge the existing edifice; 2. Enlarge the 15-year-old edifice, and 3. build a new church. There was no building fund.

A church historian reported some years later, "The members of the congregation showed great willingness to give richly from what they had. Our members had learned that giving to the church did not make one poor." They decided to build a new church.

The old church was sold for \$75 and moved away, but during the construction of the basic building in which we still worship today, services were conducted in the old structure.



Plans for this, the third and largest edifice, drawn by C. G. Naybury and Son and early in January 1886 the contract was let to Munck and Lohse for \$14,600. Total cost was somewhat above \$19,000.

It was dedicated December 12, 1886. The following day the Winona Daily Republican reported in part:

“At 9:30 the congregation assembled at the old church and listened to a short address by the pastor, Rev. Philip von Rohr, whose remarks were in the nature of a farewell to the old church. A procession was then formed. The service was opened by the choir singing ‘Crown the Feast with Flowers.’ Rev. B. Nommensen of Fountain City read a selection of Scripture, being ‘Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple.’ Pastor von Rohr gave a prayer and the school children sang ‘Hosanna to the Son of David,’ ‘filling the church with the great song.’ Professor A. Ernst of Watertown, Wis., preached the sermon to the 1,500 attending. In the afternoon Rev. A. Babenroth preached, and in the evening Professor A. Grabner of Milwaukee preached – in English. ‘Collections of the day,’ the newspaper reported, ‘amounted to \$375... The church presented a beautiful appearance’.”

Improvements continued. To accommodate the needs of the families at the West End a branch school was established at the corner of King and Minnesota streets in 1890. The lot was purchased for \$800 and the building was erected at a cost of \$1,200. Classes at the West End school were conducted by the assistant pastor, according to an early history of the church, this constituting the first reference to an assistant pastor. In 1891 a second story was added to the school at 5th and Chestnut streets, and in this the young men of the congregation were instrumental.

The 40th anniversary of the congregation – in 1896 – was a great occasion, being also the 10th anniversary of the dedication and the 30th anniversary of the ministry of Pastor von Rohr. Professor A. Hoenacke of Milwaukee, Rev. Gerhart of Arcadia, Rev. A. Froehlke of Lewiston and the Rev. Gausewitz of St. Paul spoke.

The pastor could report, “Thus we see that the blessing of our Lord has been with us all these years. The congregation now numbers at least 500 families and nearly 1,400 communicants. During the course of my ministry here I have baptized 3,213, married 766, buried 735, instructed and confirmed 1,228. We may

well give thanks to the Lord...”

Great preparations were made for the 50th anniversary, in 1906, a half-century ago. A new altar and pulpit were installed, galleries were placed on either side of the church, increasing the seating to over 1,200, a new roof was laid and the church was redecorated. Cost was about \$1,300. The Daily Republican described the altar and pulpit in great detail, reporting that “it is claimed they are the finest to be found in any church in the Northwest.” It added, “The old altar and pulpit will be turned over to some other church.”

Speakers at services were the Rev. A. Nicolay of Fort Atkinson, Rev. A. Koch of Columbus, Wis., Rev. A. Babenroth of Milwaukee, Rev. A. Froehlke of Neenah, Rev. R. Ziegler of Barre Mills and the Rev. C. Gausewitz, the latter speaking in English at the evening service, the third of the day.

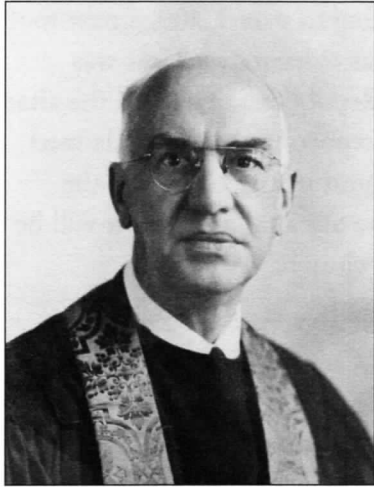
The church indeed was healthy, but its pastor was not. In the summer of 1905 he had vacationed in the West because of ill health and not long after the 50th anniversary of the congregation he and Mrs. von Rohr sailed for Europe to consult specialists. He was still ill with cancer when he returned. A few weeks later Dr. Will Mayo came from Rochester on a special North Western Railway train and performed an emergency operation on the dining room table of the parsonage which prolonged the old pastor’s life for some time.

But two weeks after he christened a grandchild from a wheelchair he died. That was Dec. 22, 1908, and he was 65.

During the 42½ years of his ministry, he had, as the newspaper said, been a “man zealous in good works and a mighty leader in the cause of righteousness.” His loss would be felt throughout the entire nation for he “had become a national character in the work of the Lutheran Church.” The pastor had been president of the Wisconsin Synod for nearly 20 years. He also had been a part-time instructor at Winona High School, a member of the first Board of Park Commissioners and a trustee of the Woodlawn Cemetery Association.

On his death, the Winona Ministerial Association resolved, “The long and beneficent life and ministry of Doctor von Rohr was, under God, a blessing not only to the church of which he was pastor, but to all our churches.”

Among his eight children (five had died) was one Elfrieda, who already had become the wife of the minister who was to succeed this sturdy Lutheran as pastor of St. Martin's.



The Rev. Alfred Sauer

The Rev. Alfred Sauer was one of 17 children of John Jacob Sauer, who was a Lutheran minister in Wisconsin and Minnesota after emigrating from Germany. He was born when his father, and second wife, were at Bremen, near Plainview. At Northwestern University, Watertown,

Pastor Sauer was captain of the football team in his senior year, captain of the baseball team, captain of the military company, editor of the college literary paper and valedictorian.

When he graduated from Lutheran Theological Seminary, Wauwatosa, in 1905, he received a call to be assistant to Pastor von Rohr, the president of the synod. He was installed July 29 of that year.

Pastor Sauer was only 23. A year later when Pastor von Rohr sailed for Europe, the young assistant was left in charge of the large congregation. And only a few weeks before, with the old pastor's encouragement, he had married his daughter.

Two years later Pastor von Rohr died, and on Jan. 17, 1909, Pastor Sauer was installed by the Rev. August Vollbrecht of Fountain City.

It was a tremendous opportunity for the young minister, for the fields were white with harvest. German immigrants were pouring into the Winona area. "The pastor didn't have to look for new members in those days." Pastor Sauer often modestly recalled later. "The immigrants, coming from a pious background, came to town and looked for the minister."

Despite this, however, regular worship services in the English language were installed in 1910.

When Pastor Sauer first came to St. Martin's he taught at the West End Parochial school and also preached at

Minneiska and Minnesota City. His interest in the schools of the church was an abiding one, and he constantly worked to raise their educational standards. Nothing pleased him more than to note how many St. Martin's graduates became valedictorians at Winona High School or religious leaders in the congregation.



West End School

In 1911 a 20-by 50-foot addition was built to the West End school at a cost of \$1,800.

On the 10th anniversary of his installation in 1915, the congregation numbered nearly 900 families, an increase of 337, voting members numbered over 500 and souls nearly 3,000. Societies had been formed and revived. Sunday Schools had been started at Sugar Loaf and East Burns Valley, the last debt of the congregation had been paid in 1912 and a fund had been started for another new organ. Statistically, in 10 years there had been 816 baptisms, 313 marriages, 384 funerals, 826 confirmations and 25,700 at Communion.

And Pastor Sauer was still preaching at Minnesota City and the young pastor indeed was busy. Although he served without complaint, many years later, in his autumn years, he once gave this advice to a young pastor, "I would advise him not to take over a large congregation alone."

At this time the local newspaper described St. Martin's as the city's largest Protestant congregation and Pastor Sauer as "dean of the Protestant clergy."

His annual salary, incidentally, was \$100 a month at this time.

On the 60th anniversary of the congregation, June 25, 1916, a new Austin organ was dedicated. This organ, still the musical instrument of the church, has 1,757

pipes, 30 stops and a console of three keyboards. Professor C. Rupprecht of Chicago was the dedication organist.

The tremendous growth of the congregation naturally occasioned some problems. For example, as early as 1914 there is mention of the need for a new congregation in the West End and it was decided to start a building fund for that purpose. It was some years before the movement culminated. Peaceful release of about 165 families to the new congregation of St. Matthew's was given in March and June of 1920.

In June 1921 St. Matthew's was permitted to collect for its new church as soon as St. Martin's had paid its debt on the new \$14,000 brick parsonage (built in 1919 on the third lot west of the church to replace an old frame house adjacent to the church). That payment, however, was not accomplished until 1924. St. Martin's then immediately resolved to establish a recreation hall and schoolhouse fund.

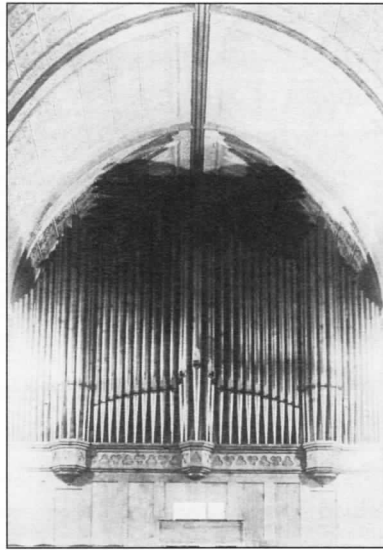
On the congregation's 75th anniversary, June 14, 1931, the present St. Martin's School structure, which had



St. Martin's School



Bowling Alleys



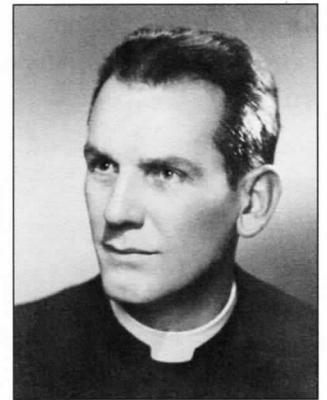
Austin Organ

been erected at a cost of \$75,000, was dedicated. T. W. Zuberbier was the first principal there.

In addition to classrooms for children from kindergarten through ninth grade, it contains a kitchen, auditorium-gymnasium and four bowling lanes.

St. Matthew's is not the only "child" of St. Martin's. In 1936 a group of Lutheran families at Pickwick, some of whom belonged to St. Martin's, were organized and formed a new congregation. Together with the First Lutheran Church of Minnesota City, which Pastor Sauer had served from 1905 to 1936, the newly organized St. Luke's church at Pickwick called a pastor in 1937.

It was in 1943 that Pastor Sauer was given an assistant, his first in 35 years. It was his son, the Rev. Alfred von Rohr Sauer, a grandson of Pastor von Rohr. Pastor Sauer had just lost his wife, who had borne him two other sons. The son helped his father until 1948, when he accepted a Professorship in O. T. Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo. and the Rev. Wilmer G. Hoffmann, a student at the St. Louis Seminary, became assistant pastor.



Rev. Alfred von Rohr Sauer

These were the autumn years of this second long-time pastor of St. Martin's. He was virtually in excellent health until not long before his death. His almost-daily walks from the parsonage to Winona General Hospital – about three miles round trip – were a Winona tradition. While his son was assistant, he and his wife lived with the pastor; when the family left, the pastor took his meals with another son, David, and his family.



Rev. Wilmer G. Hoffmann

The last few weeks of his life were spent at Winona General Hospital, and a nurse said later, "When patients grow feeble a vast residue often comes out of their subconscious revealing what their life was really like; from the pastor's inner being radiated nothing but kindness and love." He died May 17, 1955, at the age of 73, not long before the 50th anniversary of his installation as assistant pastor. During his half-century, Pastor Sauer baptized 3,316 children, confirmed 2,284, married 2,463 couples and buried exactly 2,000. At the time of his death there were 1,100

families and 3,000 souls. During his 42 years, Pastor von Rohr had baptized 4,089, confirmed 2,032, married 991 and buried 950.

Shortly before he died, Pastor Sauer commented on changes he had observed. He said, for example, "People are more interested in church and religion than they were when the century began. Young people are the same today as they were when I came to Winona. Although they have greater temptations, their morals are just as good."

During his lifetime he was active in the community, too. He was resident director of Winona State Teachers College for four years beginning in 1937, a period during which the new college library was erected.

This centennial year marks the culmination of a physical improvement program extending back over 10 years. In 1943 a memorial gift was made to start a remodeling fund, but it was not until 1948, under the leadership of Pastor Sauer, that a five-year plan was adopted to raise about \$30,000. In January 1951 the congregation decided to begin the first of the three phases of renovation: 1. heating and providing a church basement; 2. redecorating and renovating the interior of the church; 3. renovating the exterior.

On March 21, 1954, a rededication was held following the completion of the first two phases at a cost of about \$83,000. The Rev. Irwin Habeck, Milwaukee, Vice President of the Wisconsin Synod, was speaker.

Later that same year it was quite evident that something had to be done since the congregation was in debt from its building program, and contributions were not meeting running expenses. On Sept. 9, it was decided to launch a Centennial Stewardship Campaign, which proved to be one of the most successful ventures of faith. Although the goal of \$320,000 dollars was not

reached, yet \$245,000 was pledged for a three-year period to meet the ever rising day-by-day costs, for support of Synod, and to finance such physical improvements as the renovation of the church, improvements to the parsonage, teacherage, school, and purchase of a second parsonage. This campaign marked an increase of giving of nearly 50%, and its influence is still being felt in increased church attendance, and the willingness to serve the Lord in kingdom work.

With such faith and courage, the congregation in January, 1956, approved contracts for the third phase of the renovation: Refacing of the brick exterior of the church with stone and redesigning and lowering of the steeple, long the tallest in the city. A new red tile roof was later approved, making the total contract about \$155,000.



Renovated Interior - 1956



School Days of Yesteryear

St. Martin's now is served by the Rev. Harold Backer and Associate Pastor Hoffmann. Pastor Backer was installed, Feb. 13, 1955, and preached his first sermon on Feb. 20. He came to St. Martin's from Mount Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church, La Crosse. Before this he had appeared in 1954 as guest speaker for the Centennial Campaign which was to begin.

Pastor Hoffman, upon his return to the Seminary for his final year of studies in 1949-1950, accepted the call back to St. Martin's, and was installed by Pastor Sauer on Aug. 27, preaching his first sermon on Sept. 3. In addition to Pastors Sauer and Hoffmann, three vicars or students supplied St. Martin's with valuable help. Mr.



Rev. Harold Backer

George Luecke, 1949-1950, now missionary in India; Mr. Donald Sellnow, 1952-1953, now Pastor in Rapid City, S.D. and Mr. Robert Carter, 1953-1954 a tutor at Northwestern Lutheran College, Mobridge, S.D.

Since the installation of Pastor Backer, a stewardship program of several phases has been launched. In 1955 lay representatives three times visited the 1100 families of the congregation. There were 3,000 souls.

Last year, too, a second parsonage was purchased, at 306 E. Howard St. occupied by the Rev. W. G. Hoffmann, associate pastor, and his family. The congregation also enlarged its teacherage at 221 E. Sanborn St. which it had purchased in 1950.

In this vigorous spirit, then, St. Martin's continues to seize the spiritual opportunities of the mid-20th Century with greater numbers, greater resources and better facilities than the small band of sturdy Lutherans of 1856, but with the same Word.



Senior Choir - 1938



Senior Choir during the 50s