Clear Lake Lutheran Church Historical Highlights Revised 02/09/08

1937--- Louis Gerke and Otto Buesking approached Rev William Gustave Polack, who also had a cottage on Clear Lake, about holding services at the Lake. The eight founding families included Dr William and Iona Polack, Louis and Ella Gerke, Otto and Pauline Buesking, Adolph and Ella Brueggeman, William and Bertha Dreyer, Fred and Corinne Gerke, Arnold and Minnie Koeneman and Otto and Clara Schoenherr. They were soon joined by Bertha Cobb, Mrs Ella Federspiel, Ed and Emma Miller, John and Vally Oehler and Herbert and Blanche Tonne. The Clear Lake Lutheran Chapel Association was formed.

FOUNDING FAMILIES

1938---The first service was held July 3, 1938 in the abandoned brick Community School on Route 120, 1 mile southwest of Clear Lake, with 130 in attendance. Average attendance of the ten services held during July and August was 106 with choirs from the Ft Wayne area adding to the worship. The brick school building was on the corner of 120 and 700E and has since been torn down. A Rev A Betz of Auburn led worship once a month in the winter but after 1938 winter services were only held sporadically until 1945. The first year the winter services were held in a small white Mormon Church at 120 and 725 E – the building burned down in 2001. The rent for both the church and the school house was $1 per use.

1939---John and Vally Oehler donated several lots on the hill behind their grocery store on the south side of Clear Lake for a chapel. On March 30, 1939 in the home of Louis and Ella Gerke in Ft Wayne a decision was made to build a chapel

with seating for 150. Arnold Koeneman prepared a plan and on April 15, 1939 they broke ground. “The people had a mind to work!” The basement was dug with a slip scraper. With largely volunteer labor, including a group of 29 carpenters and workers from Ft Wayne who came up the last weekend of April, the building progressed rapidly. Landscaping was furnished by the Koeneman family. On Sunday July 2, 1939 the chapel was dedicated. Cost of the original building was $2,305.41 and $212.85 for furnishings!

GROUNDBREAKING APRIL 15, 1939

ONLY FIVE WEEKS LATER

1940---The Estey electro-pneumatic organ was dedicated in the first anniversary service on June 30. Pauline Buesking served as organist. People were encouraged bring their children and dress informally. Visitors were offered use of the picnic tables and grounds, dressing rooms and ready access to the beach.

1941---More ground was acquired and an outdoor public address system was installed to accommodate those who could not be seated indoors. Chairs were placed on a platform on the east of the building. Every evening at 6 PM sacred music was broadcast over the lake.

1942--- In recognition of his literary achievements, Valparaiso University conferred on Rev Polack the degree of Doctor of Letters. Concordia Publishing House published Dr Polack’s “Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal” a valuable source book on authors and hymns. Dr Polack was an outstanding educator, author, historian, poet and hymnologist. Nine of his translations (nos. 6,7,42,78,150,187,238,266 and 540) and three of his original works, (no 482, 510 (v 2&3) and 640) are in our red hymnal.

FOUNDING PASTOR GUSTOV POLACK

1943 ---Consideration was given to founding a Walther League Camp at the lake. Gas rationing kept some from often coming to the lake. A girl's sextet was formed consisting of Lois Dreyer, Carol Ernsting, Bev Koeneman, Carolyn Meyer, Shirley Ann Preuss and Ruth Strasser. On July 4th the huge rugged outdoor cross and the painting of Christ preaching from the boat were dedicated. Two lots east of the chapel (61&62) were acquired for taxes of $14.72.

1944--- Services at the chapel were broadcast over WGL in Ft Wayne. The gold lettering "The Lord Is In His Holy Temple" was donated by Bertha Cobb (later Zelt).

1945--- Services were only held during the summer months until once-a-month 'off season' services were inaugurated in the fall of 1945, including Sunday School and Bible Class. The first Children's Christmas program was held. Both a summer program and a winter group elected offices. The Clear Lake Lutheran Chapel Association (the summer group) owned the building. Each year the winter group would request the right to use the facility and it was formally granted.

1946--- Pews were installed and summer Sunday School was begun using religious 'sound' films (one was in full color!)

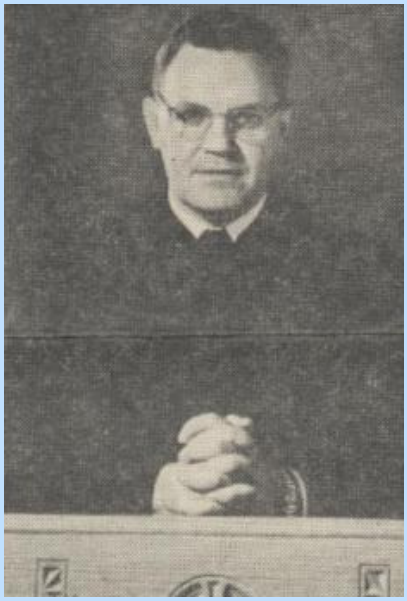
1947--- A vestry for the pastor was added to the west of the chancel "a small room similar to that on the east side." The Ladies Aid Society was organized. A 100' x 150' donated plot across the street from the chapel was set aside as a cemetery (The 1947 minutes give credit to John Oehler who purchased the land from Arnold Koeneman to give to the association, but see note of 1954). An oil burning furnace was added.

1948--- The stone altar, given in memory of Henry and Amelia Tonne was dedicated for use at outdoor services. Average summer attendance for 13 services was 286. The basement was divided into a kitchen and a Sunday School room. On July 4, 1948 the congregation celebrated its 10th anniversary with Dr O.P. Kretzmann, President of Valparaiso University preaching, and, in an afternoon service, honored Pastor Polack for ten years of service. The motto of the anniversary program: "The Church with the Message and the Welcome"

1949--- A heart warming series of sermons prepared by the shores of Clear Lake was published posthumously in 1950 under the title, Beside Still Waters and joined several volumes of poetry and works of history authored by Dr Polack. He also was well known for the hundreds of verses he wrote for greeting cards.

1950--- Founding Pastor, Dr Polack died of a brain tumor on June 5th and after a memorial service at Concordia Seminary in St Louis, a service was held at Clear Lake Chapel on June 7th where he was buried in the newly dedicated cemetery (only the second to be buried there, the first being one day old Craig Kuntz.) In a letter to the congregation Arnold Koeneman expressed regret that "Dr Polack did not realize his greatest dream for the Chapel, to see it grow into a permanent year around congregation with a full time pastor." A marble cross monument and chimes were given in his memory. The Rev Armin Oldsen, then professor at Valparaiso University served his first season as summer preacher and accepted the association's invitation to serve as summer pastor at Clear Lake Lutheran Chapel.

1951--- A summer parsonage on the East shore was acquired by the association for the price of $13,900 and Armin and Evelyn moved in with their four sons. Armin Oldsen was selected as the speaker for the Lutheran Hour, a position he held for three years. His sermons were translated into 56 languages and broadcast throughout the world. Prof Henry Kumnick began serving as preacher for the congregation from September to May.



PASTOR ARMIN OLDSEN

1952--- Average summer Sunday attendance was 517. On Oct 28th a constitution was signed by members of the winter group – the nucleus of what was to become a year round congregation. Monthly potlucks where the church's business was conducted were held from September to May – a practice that was continued until 1968. The congregation was using a Bohn organ. Ed Bohn of the Bohn organ company was a regular worshipper. Rolene Kaufman and Noreen Hess played the organ and piano for winter services.

1953--- Average summer attendance had reached 500 and record attendance one Sunday was just short of one thousand. Often on Sundays throughout the 50's and 60's a different guest choir from Decatur, Defiance, Ft Wayne or Napoleon would provide special music and stay for a picnic and swim.

OVERFLOW SEATING

1954--- Armin Oldsen called as pastor of St Paul Lutheran in Lakewood, Ohio but continued to serve the chapel as summer speaker in July and August. John Oehler claimed that he had purchased lots from Arnold Koeneman for the purpose of donating them to the association but that Koeneman had not given him a deed but had instead deeded the property to the association for a cemetery. A settlement of $114 was paid to the Oehlers and a motion passed, "that John Oehler would no longer be considered the donor of the Clear Lake Lutheran Chapel Cemetery grounds."

1955---

1956--- Rev Kumnick retired and moved to Arizona. The Bohn organ was repaired.. The year round parishioners voted to continue as a congregation. Prof Oscar Walle of Concordia College, Ft Wayne served. A vote to decide to accept the Lutheran position on closed communion was passed 13 yes, 6 no and 3 abstentions (triggering the resignation of the president of the association, Mark Kaufman.)

1957--- Pastor Oldsen took a call to be director of Religious Education at Concordia High School, Ft Wayne and began serving Clear Lake Lutheran Chapel on a year round basis.

1958--- The mortgage on the parsonage was paid off and average summer attendance had risen to 605.

1959---The congregation considered building an outdoor pavilion either west of the cemetery, to be built in sections as needed with each section to seat 300 people, or north of the building in front of the outdoor altar. New matching pulpit and lectern placed in sanctuary

1960---

1961---

1962--- 25th Anniversary Season. A 10 foot addition to the north end of the chapel provided a new chancel, sacristy and lounge room; a redecorated sanctuary with indirect lighting and new carpeting; an indoor stairway to the basement (in the north east corner) and added and enlarged rest rooms. The cost was $6,500. Stained glass panels formed the rear wall of the chancel and a decorative wood panel and two wood symbols IHS (Jesus) and XP (Christ) were put in place. Mrs Buesking was recognized for 25 years as the church organist. The motto: “Let no one feel he is a stranger here.” Attendance at the anniversary service on July 29th was 1248. Minnie Koeneman donated an L shaped piece of property bordering the cemetery to the west and south. She also leased to the church (with an option to buy) a 100 X 200 foot piece of land to the west of that property. She later donated the land to the church (see note 1968).

1963---Stained glass windows on the street side of the chapel were given in memory of Dr G. W. Polack by his children and dedicated the last Sunday in August. The marble memorial cross in the cemetery was vandalized and repaired. An organ fund was begun. The front entrance was updated with new doors and an overhanging canopy. The congregation voted to give a tithe of its income to the Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod (opposed by some because earlier the then Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States did not support them as a start-up mission.)

1964---A recommendation for an outside pavilion for the east side of the church to “eliminate the need to carry so many chairs and so that worshipers might be able to see the minister” was discussed but abandoned in 1966. The practice of making copies of ‘Portals of Prayer’ available was begun.

1965--- Pastor Oldsen accepted a call to be pastor of Trinity, Auburn but continued as speaker at Clear Lake Lutheran Chapel. He preached at 9 am in Auburn and then at 10:30 am at the lake. A new Baldwin organ at a cost of $2,200 was dedicated on July 13th. Mrs Denver Eckert of Defiance contributed $1,500 of the cost. A winterized parsonage was purchased at 826 Clear lake Drive and the old parsonage sold. Lot 60 (east of church) was donated to the church by Dwight and Mary Hostetler.

1966--- Winter attendance averaged over 100 for the first time. The possibility of bringing together the summer and winter groups was raised.

1967--- New speaker system installed. Plans for a circular pavilion to the northwest of the chapel “in which all worshippers will be seated together surrounded by the beauty of God’s nature.” were considered and later abandoned.

1968--- On August 31st, 1968 the Clear lake Lutheran Chapel Association transferred ownership of all its property and grounds including the cemetery and parsonage to the Clear Lake Lutheran Church and after 31 years of work ceased to exist as a separate entity. Clear Lake Lutheran Church became a “fully established congregation” and Pastor Oldsen was installed as its first full time pastor. Two services were held (8:30 and 10:30am) “because of the “daylight savings time confusion.” A new winterized parsonage was purchased at 826 Lake Drive at a cost of $29,500. The extra 100’ of property west of the cemetery was donated to the church by the Koeneman family.

1969--- On New Years day in a special service, a plaque was hung commemorating the transfer of all property of the Association to the congregation. On June 1st a constitution with bylaws was adopted and the congregation incorporated as a self supporting congregation of the Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod. The well system was replaced.

1970--- A building committee presented three plans for remodeling. A “Cross Design” was chosen. A stairway to the basement at the back (street side) of the church was also proposed as well as a roof over the door exiting to the east and a wood and glass screen at the rear of the nave.

1971--- Major remodeling of the entrance, expansion of the nave with transepts to the east and west and an expanded chancel area to the north to form a cross shaped building with beautiful stained glass windows by City Glass of Ft Wayne, a new kitchen under the east wing, and a remodeled “fellowship hall” were completed at a cost of $75,000. Herman Muesing was the chairman of the building committee, the architect was John Dickerson and the General Contractor was the Behrmann Construction Company. The area under the west wing and chancel area was open and provided room for outdoor seating and picnic tables. A new natural gas furnace was installed and 21 new pews were purchased. The entire chapel was covered with aluminum siding and a high, white aluminum spire was placed on the old belfry tower. Wiring for the hard of hearing was also installed. Herb and Blanche Tonne underwrote the entire cost of a new west entrance. A rededication service was held Sept 5, 1971.

NEW ENTRANCE

1972--- Four stained glass windows in the main section of the church, with a four season theme designed by Rev Oldsen, were given as a memorial for Mrs Minnie Koeneman, a charter member.

1973--- The parking lot was paved.

1974--- On August 11 the congregation observed Rev Oldsen’s 25th year as pastor. Rev Oswald Hoffman of the Lutheran Hour was the preacher. New communion ware and baptismal font were purchased.

1975---

1976--- The construction loan from 1971 was paid off and a mortgage burning ceremony was held. The church grounds were decorated for the bicentennial of the United States.

1977--- A retirement dinner for Rev Oldsen was sold out at the Potawatomi Inn with over 500 guests. The parsonage was sold to Rev Oldsen and he was made Pastor Emeritus in recognition of his long service. On October 23rd, Rev Loren J. Shiley was installed. Church office equipment was purchased and church bulletins were begun.

1978--- The proceeds from the sale of the parsonage ($32,500) and $7,586 from the general fund were invested into Pastor Shiley’s new residence by means of a second mortgage of $40,366. The parking lot was paved.

1979--- The fortieth anniversary of the church was celebrated.

1980--- A new Rogers combination pipe and electronic organ was installed in time for Christmas at a cost of $33,000. A Bell Tower committee was formed. After three years of discussion a new constitution was adopted. In June the Clear Lake LWML received its charter from the international organization.

1981--- Various plans were drawn up and discussed for new entrances and a bell tower. The vestibule was repaired and the tower replaced at a cost of $5,262. In June the congregation celebrated Pastor Shiley's 30th anniversary in the ministry. However a letter criticizing Pastor Shiley was circulated – issues included the repayment schedule on his house loan and his influence on the organ purchase, and a controversy erupted with strong feelings expressed on both sides.

1982--- After a period of dissension and turmoil that split the congregation, the Board of Directors asked Rev Shiley to resign effective May 30, 1982. Rev Shiley declined to do so. A ballot was distributed to all members and 115 voted to ask Rev Shiley to leave and 84 wanted him to stay with 33 abstaining.

1983--- On Jan 7th the locks on the church were changed and Pastor Shiley was denied entrance. CLLC sold 200 chairs to Bob Moore. When the LCMS Commission of Adjudication issued a ruling in favor of Pastor Shiley, he notified the congregation of his intention to return to the pulpit on July 17th. However, this offer was met with the cancellation of services on that day. On July 28th, with Dr E.H. Zimmerman, president of the Indiana District of the LCMS, present as an observer, the congregation, by a vote of 104 to 0 (the Shiley supporters boycotted the meeting), voted to officially remove Rev Shiley. Some of the members had left with Pastor Shiley in January and met in Moore's Barn as a preaching station. On July 31st they voted to establish what would become Peace Lutheran in Fremont. Rev Melvin Zilz became interim pastor at CLLC. The back patio was enclosed for an office for the pastor. On April 13 the Clear Lake Ladies and LWML group and a Clear Lake Men's and LLL club were organized.

1984--- Rev Zilz continued to serve until Rev Herman Reese was installed as the new pastor in December. Twenty five robes were purchased for the choir (Keith Gnagy, director).

1985---

1986--- The free standing bell tower was finally erected. The bell tower was designed and constructed by Bill Scheumann, a member of the congregation. The 900 pound bell, donated by Barbara Spears in memory of her husband, John, was cast in 1895 and electrified by I.T. Verdin Co. Cincinnati, Ohio.

1987

1988--- The church struggled financially throughout the 80's. Service time was changed from 10 am and set for 9 am Worship and 10 am Sunday School.

1989--- The congregation celebrated its 50th anniversary on May 22 with Melvin Zilz preaching and July 24th with Armin Oldsen preaching.

1990--- In January Rev Herman Reese was called to St Luke, Rensellaer, IN. The Fremont parsonage was sold for $49,000. Rev Gilbert Meseke installed as a part-time interim pastor to be renewed on an annual basis. The Church undercroft was enclosed for a Sunday School room.

1991--- The funds from the sale of the parsonage were placed in a 15 year 9% Lutheran Church Extension Fund CD for future use (It was due to mature at $181,797 in Feb, 2006 but because a $10,000 withdrawal was made in 1998 to help pay for a new roof the final amount was $161,000).

1992

1993--- A light for the parking lot was installed in memory of Betty Stegelmann who many years earlier had almost been denied entry to the US because she was blind in one eye.

1994--- The patio garden overlooking the outdoor worship space was landscaped in memory of Rudolf and Marie Stegelmann.

1995--- Stained glass windows donated earlier by the Fremont Bank were installed in the chancel, replacing the colored windows and reredos (curtain). A new well was dug. Kenneth Redmann served as a vicar under the supervision of Rev Meseke.

PASTOR GIL MESEKE LEADS OUTDOOR WORSHIP

1996--- Pastor Kenneth Redmann ordained and installed.

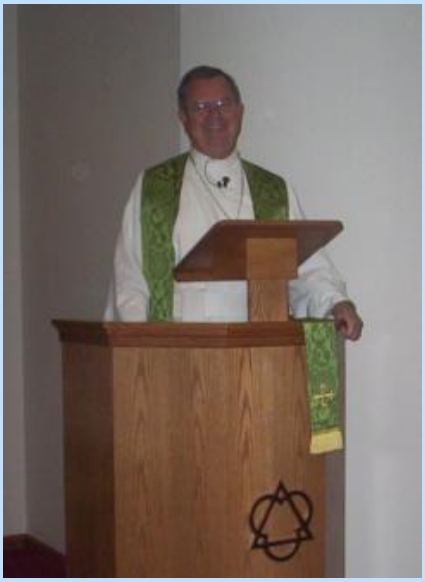
1997--- CLLC became a member of the Lutheran Foundation (created with funds from the sale of Lutheran Hospital in Ft Wayne) entitling the church to annual partnership grants of $10,000 and the opportunity to apply for other grants.

1998 ---The Chancel renovation project was completed at a cost of $8,500, primarily with memorial funds given by more than 30 families. Dedication service held May 31st. A decision was made to put a new roof on the church at a cost of nearly $10,000. Teenagers attended the national youth gathering in Atlanta.

1999--- The first annual Valentine's "Honey Ham for Your Honey" dinner sponsored by the Alpha group was held. Pew cushions were installed and a new piano purchased. On Sept 18-19, 52 members participated in a strategic planning process entitled "Faithful Christians-Faithful Congregation" to cast a vision for the future of CLLC.

2000--- In April the congregation voted 62 to 33 to purchase the 41.5 acres across from the church bordering on Outer Drive and 850 E for $164,000. In August five acres were sold to the Clear Lake Conservancy with an option for them to purchase six more which they later executed. Again controversy developed over the direction of the church and Pastor Redmann accepted a call from the Lutheran Church of the Cross, Port Charlotte, Florida. Don Rauhut served as vacancy pastor.

2001--- Pastor Mark Gaertner was installed on Sept 9th two days before the 9/11 terrorist attack.



PASTOR GAERTNER INSTALLED SEPTEMBER 9, 2001

2002--- The question, “What can be done to replace this old basement carpet?” led to the formation of a Site Development Committee. A survey was taken to determine the needs for change and expansion.

2003--- On April 27th, at the suggestion of the Site Committee, the voter’s decided to modernize the kitchen and member, Matt Fredericks, was hired to do the work and it was dedicated on Oct 5th. That was just the beginning of the changes. The vision that guided the process, “Growing as a Place of Welcome and Grace,” led to plans to make the church accessible to all ages with an inviting portico, an enlarged and welcoming narthex, a renovated fellowship hall, an elevator, ground level entryways, handicapped accessible restrooms, pastor and secretary offices and increased space for storage and education. On October 26th the voters viewed schematic drawings for a 4,200 sq ft expansion (this included a 600 sq ft portico), authorized architect Tom Meyers to complete construction documents, chose to apply for a matching grant of $208,850 from the Lutheran Foundation (granted and presented at the ground breaking in 2004), and decided to apply for the assistance of the Laborers for Christ.

GROUNDBREAKING FOR 2004-2005 EXPANSION

ARCHITECTS OF THE EXPANSION

HARRY PATTERSON LABORERS FOR CHRIST PROJECT MANAGER AND BOB BRUICK CONGREGATIONAL LIAISON

2004--- On January 25th the voter's celebrated the completion of the land purchase with the 'burning of the mortgage.' Then they authorized the addition of a basement on the west side to the planned addition. Sub contractors for the expansion were chosen and on March 21st a groundbreaking ceremony was held. On May 1st the laborers for Christ began arriving in their RVs to encamp across the road. Because of the construction schedule, Vacation Bible School was held at Shuman's High Hope Camp. Construction progressed rapidly under the general supervision of LFC Project Manager Harry Patterson and Bob 'the builder' Bruick. Arnie Tonne coordinated volunteers and Tim Knoblauch and Larry Cutshall co-chaired the fund raising committee. Ron Kane, as bookkeeper, kept track of the financial process. Bob Winzeler designed and fabricated a recognition plaque with a cross at the center. A stained glass window (with an image of the open tomb to complement the Christmas star window on the west side) was donated primarily by the Arnold Tonne family. On Sept 12th the voters decided to add a new furnace and air conditioner for the sanctuary and remodeling of the fellowship hall to the project. Although the project was not completely done, a service of dedication was held on October 17th.

2005--- Although the building project grew beyond original projections to a 7091 square feet (5,338 sq ft of new construction and 1753 sq ft of remodeling), generous grants, pledges and gifts were received which will enable the

$500,000 project to be completely paid for without incurring long term debt. A “Celebration of Completion” service in thanksgiving to God for the beautiful facility was held on July 17th. A new advent wreath given in memory of Mary Kate Beuchel, Bill Geary and Alice Retcher was dedicated.

JULY 17, 2005 COMPLETION CELEBRATION

2006--- Because the building project was paid for with “new money” the parsonage/building fund CD (see 1991 note) was reinvested with LCEF. 4 feet of the east edge of lot 60 was sold to a neighbor who had inadvertently built the edge of his garage on the church’s property. The 35th anniversary of the ordination of Pastor Mark Gaertner was celebrated with a special service on July 9th with the pastor’s son, Evan Gaertner preaching. A pictorial directory of the Clear Lake Lutheran Church “family and friends” was completed. The Stegelmann memorial garden was redone, the church garage was given a facelift, a closed circuit TV and DVD given in memory of Lavonne Cutshall were installed, and aisle candles given in memory of Jack Webber were purchased. A conference table and chairs given in memory of Carl Mueller were placed in the church lounge. The Board of Directors voted to expand the cemetery and install a frontage fence to replace the hedge. A generous gift from Al and Sue Korte enabled the congregation to not only put in an iron fence and gate but also a stone retaining wall and crushed gravel approaches. The congregation voted to purchase the new Lutheran Service Book. On October 29th the congregation celebrated the successful conclusion of the building fund drive with a potluck.

2007--- CLLC began supporting foreign missionaries directly through the Together In Mission program. After our first missionary, Nathan Scheele decided to return to the states, support was shifted to Rev James May in Togo, West Africa. The cemetery expansion and improvements were dedicated on June 10th. Our Vacation Bible School again attracted almost 70 students and 27 volunteer workers under the direction of Kathy Shuman. In October the sacristy was remodeled. A lectern was given by Jane Pepe.

Clear Lake Lutheran Church is a remarkable church. The generous outpouring of support from many members and friends will enable the church to continue to grow as a place of welcome and grace. The congregation has weathered storms, enjoyed the sunshine of happy days, and under the guidance and blessing of God looks forward to the future, trusting in His mercy and grace.

This history is a work in process and has been compiled by Pastor Gaertner from previous endeavors and primary sources. If you have corrections, additions or suggestions for changing the material please let him know. Interesting stories and tidbits are welcome. Perhaps by the 75th anniversary of the beginning of the association (2012), or the building of the church (2014), or the 50th anniversary as a “fully established church” of the LCMS (2018/9) a full narrative history can be written.