

GOOD SHEPHERD EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH 20TH ANNIVERSARY – 1975 - 1995

It was apparent early in the history of Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church of Downers Grove, IL, that there was strong support among those involved in the founding of the congregation for the establishment of a Lutheran elementary school. In the congregational meeting of January 2, 1976, it was reported that five children whose parents were members of the Downers Grove church were enrolled in the school of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) congregation at Palos Heights.

In the meeting of September 12, 1977, a resolution was adopted that Good Shepherd operate a Lutheran elementary school, the school to open in the fall of 1978. A male principal-teacher was to be called, preferably a man with experience.

Furthermore, this meeting resolved that a “teacher/aide” was to be engaged from among the members of the congregation or from a congregation in fellowship. This person was to be primarily a kindergarten aide but to serve otherwise when deemed advisable by the principal. The financial support for this school was to be the responsibility of the entire congregation through its overall operating budget.

In February of 1978, it was agreed to postpone the start of the school until the fall of 1979. In the meeting of March 14, 1979, a call was extended to Mr. Ronald Zahn of Owosso, MI, who accepted and became the first principal and full-time teacher of the Good Shepherd School. During the middle months of 1979, Mr. Zahn traveled between Owosso and Downers Grove several times in an effort to get the school off to a smooth start.

Mr. Zahn, a native of Oshkosh, WI, graduated from Doctor Martin Luther College (DMLC, currently Martin Luther College) of new Ulm, MN, the WELS teacher training institution. He also has a Master’s Degree in Education from Michigan State University. At the time, he had eighteen years of teaching experience. He came to Downers Grove with wife, Joan, and their four children.

Mrs. Julie Skeels was the “teacher aide” at the start and served in that capacity for the first 2 years of the school. She remained until the congregation obtained a second full-time instructor in the fall of 1981.

The school opened on September 4, 1979, with kindergarten starting on September 10. On opening day, eighteen children were enrolled with all grades represented except 2nd Grade. These eighteen had been enrolled in several different schools the previous year.

The education-fellowship plant covered 2,269 square feet and included an office-storage room, lavatories and a pullman kitchen. Twenty-six school desks and chairs were obtained from the Elmhurst School District for \$3.00 each. The school day was to begin at 8:30 AM and close at 3:15 PM with kindergarten ending at 11:00 AM.

There were a number of problems at the beginning. The construction was not entirely complete. Therefore, each pupil had to bring a plastic cup since there were no drinking fountains. Not all textbooks had arrived so the unmounted chalk boards were very much used. The village fathers, in granting permission for the operation of the school, had somehow been under the impression that they were dealing with a Sunday School. Some special restrictions were therefore placed upon the children at first when they were outside during recess period.

In the fall of 1981, Miss Margaret Ungemach, a native of Kenosha, WI who had graduated from DMLC that June, was added to the staff as instructor for Grades Kindergarten through 4th. Miss Ungemach served Good Shepherd most efficiently for 8 years.

In the fall of 1983, an aide was again obtained, this time Mrs. Susan Grosz, a member of the congregation. She was to direct most of her attention to pupils at the kindergarten level. Sixteen years later, Mrs. Grosz continues to serve in that capacity.

In the summer of 1985, an addition to the physical plant was constructed which added 3,500 square feet of floor space. This addition was built in part to provide a more ample kitchen, additional lavatories, a cry room and more efficient facilities for the Sunday School as well as a work room. A library room was provided for the school as well as an all-purpose room which could be used for physical education classes. Members were so cooperative with their assistance during the summer construction period that the elementary school did not lose one day of school time.

From a one-teacher/one-classroom facility for all grades, Good Shepherd now houses 3 full-time teachers plus a kindergarten aid and 2 pastors who instruct catechism and church history. With a steady growth in enrollment (currently at 56), the "all-purpose room" now serves as the kindergarten room and the 1985 addition has been divided into 3 classrooms: Grades 1 and 2, Grades 3 through 5, and Grades 6 through 8. Kindergartners attend school full-time on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

Mr. Zahn taught at Good Shepherd for 11 years before moving to Michigan to serve in a sister congregation in 1991. Mr. Zahn was replaced by Mr. Joel Zink of Freeport, IL. He served for 2 years as principal/teacher. Currently, Mr. Scott Schmudlach holds this position. Mr. Schmudlach, a 1985 graduate of DMLC, taught 7th Grade at Bethany Lutheran School in Manitowoc, WI, before moving to Downers Grove with wife, Julie, and their 2 small children (they now have 3 children) in the summer of 1993. In addition to his principal position, Mr. Schmudlach teaches Grades 6-8. Mr. Schmudlach has 14 years of teaching ministry experience.

Miss Grace Wessel filled the vacancy left by Miss Ungemach in the summer of 1989. Miss Wessel, a 1989 graduate of DMLC and native of New Ulm, taught Kindergarten through Grade 3 till 1992. She went on to pursue a Master's Degree in Church Music. Miss Wessel was replaced by Mrs. Jill Kaiser, a 1991 graduate of DMLC and native of Winona, MN. Mrs. Kaiser served for 5 years before her husband accepted a call to start a new school in Salt Lake City,

Utah. During Mrs. Kaiser's maternity leave, Mrs. Rachel Diehm, a WELS member from the Chicago area, was called to serve as temporary teacher. Miss Joanna Behrens, of Bay City, MI, and recent graduate of Martin Luther College, took over as "lower grade" teacher for Mrs. Kaiser in the fall of 1997 until God called her to heaven on January 29, 1999.

With Miss Behrens' absence, Mrs. Michele Cavalea and Mrs. Barbara Koch stepped up to become full-time instructors. They were team-teaching Grades 3-5 on a part-time basis. Now, Mrs. Cavalea instructs the Kindergarten through 2nd Grade while Mrs. Koch has Grades 3 through 5. Mrs. Cavalea had been a member of Good Shepherd Church and was called to serve in the school in 1989. She is a 1973 graduate of Concordia Teaching College (now Concordia University) in River Forest, IL. She has 21 years of teaching experience. Mrs. Koch had also been a member of Good Shepherd and was called to teach in 1991. She is a 1980 graduate of DMLC and has 14 years of service in the teaching ministry.

Good Shepherd School has 2 pastors on staff to instruct Catechism and church history. Pastor David Rutschow has been involved with the school since its inception in 1979. Pastor Rutschow graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1970 and was called to serve as pastor for Good Shepherd Church in 1977. He had been serving in a sister congregation in Peoria, IL for 6 years before moving his wife, Pauline, and 2 children to Downers Grove (they now have 3 grown children). Pastor Rutschow also serves as President for the Southeastern Wisconsin District of the synod. He has 29 years of ministry experience. Pastor Daniel Witte began his service with Good Shepherd Church in July of 1992, one month after graduating from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and marrying Debbie Frisque. He teaches Bible and Catechism to the 7th and 8th Graders. Pastor and Mrs. Witte currently have 3 pre-school children. Pastor Witte has 7 years of ministry experience.

Good Shepherd has been blessed with a number of congregation members and school parents who are able and willing to render various forms of instructional assistance in physical education, competitive sports, music and academics. These countless hours spent by volunteers have greatly enhanced the education of the children.

A School Committee was formed in 1977. This committee directs its attention exclusively to the elementary school and consists of 2 members and 1 chairman, all members of Good Shepherd Church. They are elected by the voting members of the church and serve a 2-year term. Our current committee consists of Dave Rardin, Chairman, Kurt Bohlman and Mark Eiting.

Good Shepherd engages in athletic, academic, and artistic competition within our school and with 8 other schools of the Chicago Area Lutheran League (CALL). Athletically, the school offers softball, soccer, basketball, track and field and a few years of cross-country. Off-site facilities such as YMCA and the Lincoln Center are used for physical education and sporting events, as well as for entertainment events. Academic and artistic competition include forensics, mathematics, spelling and geography bee as well as music recitals, art and science fairs. The nationally known and accepted standardized *Metropolitan Achievement Test* is used. Good Shepherd pupils regularly score far above the national average.

Graduates have produced an admirable record in various schools. Many have chosen to attend worker training schools within the WELS. At the present time, 11 graduates attend high school at Luther Predatory School in Watertown, WI and 1 graduate is at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, MI. Another graduate is enrolled at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI, and another is at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN.

The school symbol is AMNOI, an original Biblical word for “lambs.” It is the prayer of staff, school committee and congregation that the lambs who have attended Good Shepherd Lutheran School during the past 20 years remain throughout their sojourn here on earth faithful sheep in the fold of the Good Shepherd, whether it be as active lay members in WELS and ELS congregations or as full-time professional servants in the “Green Pastures “ of the Good Shepherd.

Graduates of Good Shepherd Lutheran School

Class of 1980

Todd Zahn

Class of 1981

Randy Niles
Erich Schaser

Class of 1982

Erik Pless
Mark Scott

Class of 1983

Becky Pesek
Christopher Wiley

Class of 1984

Aaron Miller
Kevin Niles
Paul Rutschow
Kristin Schaser

Class of 1985

Beth Beringer
Martin Wegner

Class of 1986

Heidi Thompson
Aislinn Wiley

Class of 1987

Sean McLelland

Class of 1988

Richard Hull
Chuck Rhodes
Kristin Rutschow

Class of 1989

Christine Grosz
Tom Kriewall
Kurt Schaser

Class of 1990

Pam Hull
Mark Kowalke
Adam Nemeth

Class of 1991

Caresse Broker

Class of 1992

Ray Fjeldheim
Kristina Krug
Cathy Rhodes
Annette Rutschow
Gretchen Wiley

Class of 1993

Kevin Mehnert
Joe O'Malley

Class of 1994

Eric Latsch
Nathan Krug
Mark Zager

Class of 1995

Alex Belobraydich
James Garrison
Jesse Garrison
Kari Guldberg
Eric McLelland