

NORTHERN KENTUCKY VIEWS PRESENTS

HISTORY OF
ST. JOHN LUTHERAN CHURCH
CAMP SPRINGS, KENTUCKY

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History of the Indiana-
Kentucky Synod

By

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A number of German Lutherans migrated to the rolling hills of northeastern Kentucky in the early decades of the nineteenth century. They came down the Ohio River on flatboats from Pittsburgh and up the river from the growing city of Cincinnati, long before a permanent Lutheran church was established near Melbourne. Their spiritual needs were initially served by itinerant pastors who periodically visited widely scattered preaching stations in the region between the Licking and Ohio rivers.

It was not until 1860 that regular worship services were provided for the Melbourne area Lutherans. In that year the Rev. Christian Dingleday, a missionary pastor, scheduled services in an old schoolhouse on the John Weidinger farm. Then, in 1861, he organized the St. John congregation as a German Evangelical Protestant Church.

In 1866 the congregation erected the church home which was to serve the needs of the parish for the next ninety-five years. They built it next to a cemetery which had been in use since 1847, on land that was donated by Peter and Catherine Schreier (about two miles south of present Silver Grove). The men of the church did the work, utilizing creek-bed stones for the sturdy walls of the edifice.

Thirteen years later, in 1879, St. John acquired additional land adjacent to the church building. There the congregation constructed a parsonage which was used for about a generation and a parochial school which operated for about eleven years. Further, in 1890 they added a steeple to the house of worship, giving it an appearance reminiscent of the "church in the valley by the wildwood," romanticized in verse and song.

Other changes or improvements were made in the congregation's property in the early part of the twentieth century. In 1903 a new frame parsonage replaced the previous pastor's residence. Later, in 1917, the church building was renovated and modernized. New furniture was installed, and stained glass windows were added at that time.

Two traditional policies were discontinued at St. John between 1914 and 1922. First, after fifty-three years of German language services, the congregation began to worship in English in 1914. Second, because of dissatisfaction with "free" pastors who often left the parish on short notice, the church became associated with the United Lutheran Church

in America (as an independent congregation) before calling the Rev. Clemens Schirmer as pastor in 1922.

Prior to the church's 100th anniversary in 1961, a series of further improvements were made in St. John's facilities. Extensive repairs were made on the church building in 1933. In 1951 a unit (of cinder block construction) was added to the church to furnish Sunday school rooms and to house the heating plant. Two years later, the cemetery was enlarged. And in 1958 the sanctuary was carpeted; the educational annex was refined; a lighted, outside bulletin board was acquired; and a drainage system was provided for the church grounds. Some of these developments occurred in the early part of the long pastorate of the Rev. Otto Emmelhainz. He was installed in 1956—the first year in which St. John met its apportioned benevolence in full (the church had joined the ULCA's Kentucky-Tennessee Synod in 1942). Five years later the congregation celebrated their centennial and began work on a new house of worship by demolishing their old stone building. In 1962 a \$75,000 brick and glass edifice, with a seating capacity of 250 persons in the nave, was completed and dedicated.

After 1962, under the continuing leadership of Pastor Emmelhainz, St. John carried on its ministry on the outskirts of Cincinnati's expanding suburbs. Where once it served a small band of German settlers, the Melbourne church provided for the religious needs of nearly 300 souls in an area which seemed destined to develop even greater opportunities to witness to the faith it represented.

Membership as of December 31, 1970: 281 baptized, 207 confirmed, 126 communing.

Previous synodical affiliations: Free Protestant Evangelical Church, 1861-1922; Independent, 1922-1942; Kentucky-Tennessee Synod (ULCA), 1942-1962.

Pastors who served the congregation: Christian Dingleday (1860-1867); Karl Mischi (1867-1868); Carl Rettig (1868-1869), B. Schifterling (1869), Herman Linstaedt (1869-1880), P. Keiper (1880-1881), Charles Lurker (1881-1882), W. Ulfert (1882-1883), Charles Lurker (1883-1885), G. F. Schmidt (1885-1887), K. F. Thieme (1887-1889), Emil Schmidt (1889-1890), C. Bohnen (1890-1894), A. Schoepp (1894-1897), A. Lange (1898-1899), Ernst Drewitz (1899-1901), Christian Schoenwandt (1901-1907), Alfred Ballhorn (1908-1910), F. S. Schumann (1910-1912), A. C. Roth (1912-1915), John Frederick (1915-1920), Clemens Schirmer (1922-1930), William Hoffman (1930-1940), Olan Aughbaugh (1941-1945), Emmett Schmitt (1946-1948), George Derrick (1949-1954), Otto Emmelhainz (1956-).