

NORTHERN KENTUCKY VIEWS PRESENTS

HISTORY OF
ST. PETER'S EVANGELICAL
LUTHERAN CHURCH
MILTON, KENTUCKY

Excerpted From

History of the Indiana-
Kentucky Synod

By

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On their church's seventy-fifth anniversary (December, 1970), the congregation of St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church could look back upon a history highlighted by organizational and name changes, relationships with both Lutheran and non-Lutheran congregations, and a long period of independence. Moreover, they could reflect upon a religious heritage that was even older than their small community of faith.

By the late 1870's a number of German Lutheran immigrants had become tenant farmers in Hunter's Bottom, Kentucky, as the area near Milton was then known. In 1878 members of the Detmer family of Rising Sun, Indiana came to this area and encouraged these people to establish regular worship services. Arrangements were made with the Hopewell Methodist Church to use its building on Sunday afternoons. The group's first minister was the Rev. Mueller, the evangelistic pastor of the Lutheran and Reformed Church at Madison, Indiana, just across the Ohio River.

Services continued at the Hopewell Church until 1895, when the Methodists relocated their congregation. At that point, the Lutheran mission began to worship in the Hopewell School (near the present St. Peter Church building).

Early in the fifteen-year ministry of Pastor Schmidt, which began in 1895, plans were made to formalize the congregation. The constitution for the new church, called "The Independent German Evangelical Protestant St. Peter's Church of Hunter's Bottom, Kentucky," was adopted in December, 1895. Three months later, a three-member building committee was appointed. Then a contractor was secured, and, with help of volunteer labor, he had the white frame house of worship ready for dedication on June 28, 1896.

Prior to 1927 St. Peter was led by pastors who also served what became known as the St. John's Lutheran Church in Madison. Until 1919, when Pastor Ahrends directed the two congregations, all worship services were conducted in German. In that year once-a-month English services were introduced, and eventually the use of the German language was discontinued.

During the short term of Pastor Green (1925-1926), a doctrinal dispute arose within both the St. Peter and St. John's congregations. This prompted several members of St. Peter Church to withdraw and led to the establishment of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Madison. St. Paul promptly joined the

Indiana Synod of the ULCA, while St. Peter remained independent, but entered a joint parish with the new Madison congregation.

At the beginning of the Rev. Clark S. Powell's eight-year pastorate, in 1928, St. Peter adopted a new constitution which renamed the church "Hunter's Bottom Lutheran Church." The document also specified that all records were to be kept in English and extended the right to vote in congregational meetings to women for the first time. At about the same time, the high central pulpit in the sanctuary was lowered, and an annual church picnic was inaugurated.

Whereas Pastor Powell received a salary of ten dollars per Sunday, his successor, the Rev. William J. Butt was paid only eight dollars a week (plus two weeks vacation—with pay). The year after Pastor Butt came to St. Peter, in 1937, the church building was severely damaged by a flood. Two hundred dollars was received from the ULCA to cover part of the cost of repairing the structure.

In the Forties, the congregation adopted the *Common Service Book and Hymnal* and began to use individual glasses rather than the common cup for Holy Communion. Also, the cemetery association, which had been formed in 1931, was made a separate, non-church agency.

Two important steps were taken by the congregation during the mid-Fifties, when the Rev. Richard W. Howard was their spiritual leader. First, after about sixty years as an independent church, St. Peter joined the Kentucky-Tennessee Synod (ULCA), in June, 1956. At that time the synod approved the documents which had incorporated the congregation under the name "St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hunter's Bottom" in 1955, and agreed to provide the church with \$2,000 in salary aid for a period of five years.

The second noteworthy development of Pastor Howard's term was the addition of an educational wing to the church building. This unit was dedicated on April 15, 1956 in a service highlighted by a message from Dr. Walter M. Wick, president of the Indiana Synod (ULCA).

After 1960 St. Peter had its own pastor. Unlike some rural parishes, which declined in the Sixties, the small rural church maintained a stable membership in those years. Meanwhile, a succession of three pastors conducted services in St. Peter's picturesque house of worship, overlooking the Ohio River, about four miles east of Milton.

One son of the congregation, Edwin J. Detmer, has entered the Lutheran ministry.