

The history of Immanuel Lutheran Church, according to early records, dates back to December 15, 1904, when the first organizational meeting was held at the home of John Skarstad. A group of laymen consisting of Mr. Starstad, J.K. Furaas, Nels Hanson, John C. Dahl, Andrew Sherry, Gust Swanson, Ingebrigt Peterson, and Rev. L.C. Jacobson met, named Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, and affiliated with the Hauge Synod. The first pastor L.C. Jacobson, served four parishes: Immanuel, Zion, Franklin, and West Prairie Hauge. During the first seven years the congregation met in the homes of members. In 1911, a lot was purchased on South Center Avenue and the original church was built. It was dedicated on July 23, 1911, by Hauge Synod President Rev. M.G. Hanson, Red Wing, Minnesota.

During the early years, worship services were conducted in the Norwegian language, but English gradually replaced the ethnic tongue. Occasional Norwegian services were held during the ministries of Rev. Borgen and Rev. Nordsletten.

Hauge services were simple: a hymn was sung; the Gospel read; another hymn was followed by an approximate hour-long sermon; another hymn was sung, announcements were read and the service ended with a closing hymn.

Instead of present-day vestments, Hauge pastors wore suits with a Prince Albert coat, white shirt and white tie. Horse and buggy provided early transportation for pastors. A pastor's salary consisted of congregational offerings placed on the altar four times per year. To subsidize the pastor's salary, thoughtful members provided gifts of hay, oats, wood, potatoes, vegetables, and sometimes, meat. Abundance of certain items depended on the outcome of crops. A special church committee solicited funds from members to cover general church operations. Beginning in the 1940's these practices began to disappear.

Immanuel congregation was served by Rev. L.C. Jacobson until 1912. That year he left to assume duties as manager of the Hauge Synod book store in Red Wing, Minnesota.

A letter of call was issued to Rev. J.J. Jacobson of Grafton, Minnesota. He accepted the call and, in 1913, arrived to serve the four-point parish of which Immanuel was a part. Immanuel continued to grow during the ministry of Rev. Jacobson, a capable pastor, who baptized, confirmed, and married several of our present members. He served until 1919 when he accepted ad call to Highland, Wisconsin. Rev. Jacobson returned to preach Immanuel's fiftieth anniversary festival service on October 10, 1954.

In 1920, Rev. Daniel T. Borgen of Taylor, Wisconsin, accepted a call to Immanuel and faithfully served the congregation twenty-five years until his retirement in 1945.

Rev. Borgen baptized, confirmed, and married many of our present members. His confirmands would begin studying in March and became confirmed in October or November. Much memorization was included in the study of Martin Luther's Catechism and Old Testament Bible History. Some students were confirmed n the Norwegian Language. Following the death of his wife, Rev. Borgen was united in marriage to Ida Skuley in 1937. Rev. Borgen passed away in April 1953. His widow, Ida, is a present member of Immanuel. One son, Rev. Luther Borgen, became an ALC pastor and is presently serving at Dodgeville, Wisconsin. A grandson, Rev. T.N. Borgen, is an ALC pastor at Black Earth, Wisconsin.

In 1921, a 14'x50' addition and full basement were added to the initial structure. The laying of the corner stone was part of mission festival services on October 8, 1922 conducted by Rev. S. Rondestveit, a Westby pastor who was President of the Vernon Circuit at the time.

Following Rev. Borgen's retirement, Rev. Peder Nordsletten of Minneapolis, Minnesota, accepted the call to serve Immanuel in June, 1945. At the time Rev. Nordsletten was carrying on evangelistic work through the Home Missions Department of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. On June 17, 1945, Rev. Nordsletten was installed in all four churches by Rev. Martin Anderson, President of the Eastern District. Membership of Immanuel consisted of 352 baptized souls. Rev. Nordsletten followed the Hauge Synod for of worship, but often invited members to participate n the Sunday service by offering a special prayer.

Rev. Nordsletten will be remembered for his genuine sincerity and complete faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

By 1960, Immanuel congregation felt a need to expand its ministry to holding two worship services every Sunday. On January 6, 1960, the congregation voted to form a one-point parish. Following this reorganization, Rev. Nordsletten chose to serve the three country parishes until his retirement in 1962.

Upon retirement, Rev. Nordsletten continued serving the Lord by substituting for other pastors, conducting special prayer meetings, and collecting and personally delivering clothing to needy Indian families in the Dakotas. His personal sacrifice will be remembered by all who knew him. Pastor Nordsletten passed away in June of 1974. He was the father of Mrs. Charles Lee, a member of Immanuel.

To meet the many new challenges of Immanuel, a call was issued to Pastor James Homme, who accepted and served from 1960 to 1963. During his pastorate, several changes evolved. Immanuel affiliated with the American Lutheran Church in 1961. Along with other ALC congregations, Immanuel purchased the official red hymnbook which included a Liturgy that permitted parishioners to respond in the Sunday worship of God. Pastors wore vestments. Obstacles resulting from the various changes in Immanuel were overcome through the joint efforts of a cooperative church council and a competent pastor. The Hommes were the first family to occupy the new parsonage purchased by Immanuel located at 223 West Oak Street. Pastor Homme left Viroqua to establish an ALC mission church in Port Washington, Wisconsin.

Following Pastor Homme's departure, a call was issued to Pastor C. David Jacobson, who accepted and came to Viroqua in late summer, 1963, and served until June 1968. Pastor Jacobson worked faithfully with the Immanuel congregation through problem times of expansion until the day of ground breaking services for the new church building.

In 1965, a Parish Study Committee was organized to evaluate Immanuel's needs. In 1967, it was decided to move ahead with a building program, and a fund drive was to purchase the Allness property on West Broadway on which the present church building was constructed. Architects William Schafer and Associates, Minneapolis, were chosen to design and supervise the project. It was decided to build on a cooperative basis by hiring a supplier, Shoenrock & Sons, Inc., and his crews, who specialized in reducing costs by helping in all phases of the church construction. Joint efforts of the general supplier, plus members, supervised by Foreman Melvin Runice and co-worker Leland Olson, Soldier Grove, produced a functional building at reasonable cost.

Ground breaking ceremonies for the new church were held June 9, 1968. The same day Pastor Jacobson conducted his final service at Immanuel. Much credit is due Pastor Jacobson for guiding Immanuel through the initial steps of the building program. Pastor Jacobson received and accepted a call to St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Rome, Wisconsin in 1968.

As Immanuel's construction preceded, the Sunday worship services were conducted by seminarians from Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa. In the fall of 1968, more permanent arrangements were made with seminarians Gaylord Odegaard and Charles Sheppard to preach and teach Confirmation. In December 1968, Student Pastor Sheppard accepted a call to Immanuel and became interim pastor until his graduation, ordination, and installation in June, 1969.

Pastor Sheppard played an important role in the Immanuel construction project. His enthusiastic attitude provided vital leadership for the many willing workers who cleaned, scrubbed, painted, scraped brick, finished trim, built kitchen cabinets, provided altar furnishings, and poured cement. Immanuel is indebted to the shepherd who undertook a king-sized job to see a building program a reality.

Immanuel Congregation moved into its new facilities on Advent Sunday, November 30, 1969. Members and pastor continued working to complete and furnish the structure in readiness for dedication to God's Glory on July 19, 1970.

In April 1978, Pastor Sheppard resigned but remained until June to accept a call to Bridge City, Texas. A call was issued and accepted by Pastor Allan Ness, Owatonna, Minnesota. He arrived in Viroqua in August, 1978. Sunday worship services were conducted by Student Pastor Allen Oman during the interim between Pastor Sheppard's departure and Pastor Ness' arrival.

In 1980 a call was extended to Pastor Paul Johnson. Pastor Johnson served Immanuel's needs until 1988 in which time he accepted the position of Assistant to the Bishop in the La Crosse Area Synod. Rev. Dr. Steven A. Fossum was then issued a call and served Immanuel until his retirement in July of 2003. Pastor Fossum was instrumental in much growth for Immanuel with his involvement in many community activities that ministered to a variety of people. His love for children and music also contributed to the growth. Pastor Fossum was instrumental in much growth for Immanuel with his involvement in many community activities that ministered to a variety of people. His love for children and music also contributed to the growth. Pastor Alice L. Hamm was the interim minister, as well as former Pastor Charles Sheppard, until the time when Pastor Kathy Ingbritsen was called in mid-October of 2004.

Events of Interest 1921 - 2004

- 1921 Church named Immanuel Norwegian Lutheran Church
- 1946 Immanuel joined the Vernon Circuit
- 1947 Considered giving women the right to vote at business meetings.
Agreed to pay organist \$150 annually to replace annual offering
Discussed selling old parsonage and purchasing a new one
- 1949 Constructed basement under portion of church at cost of \$2,711.01 and 30 days
- 1952 Organized Local Lutheran Brotherhood group
Pastor allowed two weeks of vacation time
- 1953 Established position of Financial Secretary
- 1954 Women given right to vote and attend meetings
Initiated building fund
Introduced envelop system of stewardship
Celebrated 50th Anniversary
- 1956 Pastor no longer held position of President of congregation
Glen Mullen elected first President
Purchased electric Hammond organ
Hired a choir director
- 1957 Combined positions of Financial Secretary and Treasurer - same appointed by Trustees
Purchased typewriter and mimeograph machine
Printed Sunday worship service bulletins
- 1960 Voted to establish Immanuel as one-point parish (Yes vote - 65, No vote - 43)
Purchased Clarence Hanson residence for parsonage for \$18,000
- 1961 Margaret Peterson first women elected to Church Council
Started parish paper
Dedicated new parsonage
Sold Immanuel's share of old parsonage (\$11,500) to Franklin, Zion and West Prairie

- 1963 Introduction of Bethel Series Teachers' Training
- 1964 Changed form of church administration from trustees-deacons to a church council
Celebrated 60th Anniversary
- 1965 Ordination of William White
Sugar Creek Bible Camp proposed
- 1966 Organized Dartball teams
Bethel Home included in budget
Approved proposed Bible camp
- 1967 Purchased Halvor Allness property on West Broadway for site of new church building
Hired Dr. Dybvig to conduct fund drive
Land purchased for Sugar Creek Bible camp
- 1968 Acceptance of architect's plans submitted by Schafer & Associates
Engage Schoenrock & Sons, Inc. as general suppliers
- 1969 Purchased land behind new church from Halvor Allness for \$1500
Benefit auction sale held
Vote purchase of organ from Wick Organ Company for \$5500
Held special service at old church to retire altar and other furnishings; caravan to new church
site followed by short service
- 1970 Dedication of new church
Received gift from Good Shepherd: Sculptured copper altar cross made by
Mrs. Paul Leo, Dubuque, Iowa
Four weeks vacation granted pastor
Rented old church to Day Care Center
- 1971 Installed colored glass on baldachin window
Erected signs directing public to new location
Attempted Thursday evening worship services
Voted to lower age for receive communion to Grade 6 and membership by
confirmation after study with voting right at age 16
- 1972 Installed lighting for cross
Blacktopped parking lot
Accepted pictorial directory contract
Soundproofed pastor's office
Tiled cry room for more soundproofing
- 1973 Sold old church property
Participated in the Key 73 program
- 1975 Purchased grand piano
Built storage shed
Conducted "Pony Express" Stewardship Drive
Shared in support of Vietnamese refugee family
Purchased bus for \$1150
- 1978 Purchased and began to use green Lutheran Book of Worship hymnals

- 1979 Enclosed front entrance to church
- 1980 Pastor Allen Ness resigned, and Interim is Pastor Warren Schulz. Pastor Schulz suffered a heart attack. Pastor Albert Mattheis came in to fill in.
Open house for new library
- 1981 Pastor Paul Johnson accepted call as new pastor. Pastor Johnson suffered heart attack.
Part time secretary hired
- 1982 Mortgage for church paid off
Immanuel choir was organized again
Pew cushions purchased
New offices for secretary and pastor
- 1983 New lawn mower purchased
Joint Lenten worship with United Methodist Church and St. Mary's Catholic Church
Doris Gerlach resigned as church office secretary and Shirley Jones was hired to replace her.
- 1984 New electronic typewriter and plain paper copier purchased
Church membership increased by 31 members
Youth league was formed
Sunday school enrolment was 106 students
- 1985 Bishop Schumacher resigned as Bishop of the Southern District
New sign purchased
Pool party was big success. Suggested that it should be an annual event.
- 1986 New church directory completed. 50 windows replaced, new siding and roof replaced
- 1987 New Youth Committee formed. Immanuel choir re-established. Dick Iverson named as new Director of Sugar Creek Bible Camp
- 1988 Paul Johnson resigned to take Assistant Bishop position. Rev. Dr. Steven A. Fossum hired as new pastor. ELCA organized and became functional.
- 1989 Front entrance of church made handicap accessible
- 1990 Persian Gulf war. Vilas Hanson contribution received from his estate to resurface, expand and put up new lights on parking lot.
- 1991 Sunday school rooms painted. Ramp at back of church rebuilt. Sunday school growing.
- 1992 Consideration of hiring a parish worker. Display cases put up for family pictures. Bishop April Larson was elected at Synod convention. New church directory completed. Parking lot addition. Annual meeting changed to 1st Sunday in February.
- 1993 New computer installed. An additional Communion is implemented during the second service on the second Sunday of each month. Sunday school time changed to 9:45 - 10:45
- 1994 Pastor Fossum celebrates 25th anniversary as minister. Immanuel is largest contributor to Sugar Creek's Steer Project. Sunday school classes take turns having breakfast with Pastor
- 1995 New organ purchased. New signs purchased. Stained glass windows donated.
- 1996 Stained glass windows purchased. New storage shed purchased. Viroqua's Sesquicentennial.

- 1997 Nathan & Diane Martin hired as Parish Assistants to Pastor Steve Fossum. W-ELCA purchased new dishwasher, two stoves and a freezer. Parish nurse position added, Denise Ward appointed. New computer purchased.
- 1998 Congregation has grown to almost 1,000 since Pastor Steve Fossum joined us 10 years ago. Nathan & Diane Martin resign to further their education in ministry. Tami Fossum hired as new Parish Worker. New church directory completed.
- 1999 Corrine Witte - church treasurer and Shirley Jones - church secretary, resign. Immanuel served as host church for Community Thanksgiving Dinner. Sunday School garden planted. First Immanuel Sunday School quilt. Ann Skaaland hired as full time Secretary/Treasurer. Kevin Thompson hired as custodian.
- 2000 New carpeting installed in church. Immanuel host church for "World Day of Prayer". Vacation Bible School combined with Good Shepherd. Nine youth from Immanuel attended the National ELCA Youth Gathering in St. Louis.
- 2001 New carpeting installed in Library and Pastor's office. Committee's developed for churches 100th anniversary celebration in 2004.
- 2002 Sec/Treasurer position was expanded to Parish Administrator. Wednesday night services were held during the summer months. Sarah Iverson was hired as part time Parish Assistant to help with Pastor's work load. The sign on the highway was refurbished by parishioners.
- 2003 A new water bubbler in the Narthex was donated. A brand new John Deere lawn tractor was donated by a parishioner. Pastor Steven Fossum retired in July. Air conditioning was installed in the fellowship hall. Immanuel committed to two Saturday mornings to work at the Farmer's Market for World Hunger. Directory pictures were taken to prepare for the 100th anniversary in 2004. Nine youth attended an ELCA Youth Gathering in Atlanta. W-ELCA purchased 8 round tables and 60 new chairs for the fellowship hall. Interim Pastor Alice Hamm was hired in October.
- 2004 Updating of the constitution was completed. Pastor Charles Sheppard came back to serve as interim pastor for a short time in August. 100th Anniversary plans are for 3 major events in August, October and December. Pastor Kathy Ingbritsen accepted the call to minister starting in mid October.