

The History of St. John's Lutheran Church

Missouri Synod, Kimball, Nebraska

In 1916, the Iowa Synod Lutheran Church began mission work, which resulted in the St. John's Lutheran Church of Kimball, Nebraska. Those who served as pastors during those early years of the congregation were Karl Fenske, 1916; M. Scherf in 1917; Emil A. Stein, 1918; Gustave Schultz, 1922, and H. Stennfeld until January 1929. Elmer Nagel was the first listed baptism of the congregation in 1916.

This church was divided in January 1929, because some of the parishioners preferred the services be held in German, while other parishioners preferred to hear the service in English. Pastor H. Stennfeld, who served the congregation, left St. John's Lutheran Church to serve as pastor for the new English Lutheran Church, which is the current ELCA in Kimball.



Old St. John's Lutheran Church located on the north side of Kimball

The church property on the north side of town (located on Main Street) remained with the German-speaking members. It was later purchased by the Missouri Synod.

On January 27, 1929, Wilbert Werling, a student pastor in the Missouri Synod, held an evening worship service. Werling was working at the Potter Lutheran Church at that time. He also conducted the first Bible Study class on Thursday evening, January 31, 1929. The topic was: The Bible—The Word of God.

Rev. G. H. Boehnke, pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran congregation of Potter, Nebraska first held service in Kimball during the latter part of August 1929. This service was held in the Fraternal Hall on Second and Chestnut Streets in Kimball, where services continued for several weeks until the church and parsonage on the north side of town were acquired from the Iowa Synod. Services were conducted both in German and English.



**Altar at the old St. John's
Lutheran Church**

In the late fall of 1929, St. John's congregation was organized by Pastor Boehnke, and became a member of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. As the congregation grew, a need for a minister of its own became clear. The congregation, with the Mission Board of the Southern Nebraska District, Lutheran Church, sent a call to Rev. C. P. Pebler. He was installed on March 30, 1930, serving until 1948.

During Rev. Pebler's ministry in Kimball, a parochial school was established. The first teacher was his son, Carl Pebler, in the fall of 1930. Other teachers were Oscar Lutz from 1934 to 1936 and Theodore Hartmann from 1936 to 1942.

Succeeding Pebler was Rev. Albert C. Esch, who served the congregation for about three years. Pastor Esch accepted a call to another state. Rev. G.H. Boehnke, who was instrumental in organizing the congregation in 1929, was called. He was installed the last Sunday in November 1951.

After the first oil well was discovered southwest of Kimball, more oil rigs and people moved into the county. New housing projects began to spring up in the area, as well as expanded schoolhouses and churches.

In 1953 the congregation decided to relocate, and to build a new church and parsonage. A church site, just outside the city limits at that time, on the southwest edge of Kimball, was purchased. The address is now 601 South Locust Street. A building committee consisted of Keith Larsen, Chairman, and members Chester Phelps, Herman Adels, Victor Schneider, R.J. Schukei, and Reuben Fritzler. The groundbreaking ceremonies for the new church took place on April 15, 1956. The new building was dedicated on July 14, 1957. Attendance the last Sunday in the "old church" was 155. Attendance at the dedication of the new church was 452 in the morning service and 369 in the afternoon.

The greater part of the construction of the new building was done by members of the congregation under the supervision of Victor Schneider and later under Pat Lacy. Officers of the congregation at the time were: Elders—Patrick Lacy, Elmer Nagel, and Walter Kellner; Chairman—John Abramson; Vice Chairman Alvin Schukei; Secretary R. J. Schukei; and Treasurer Harold Heidemann.

The building with Norman brick facing, measures 99 ½ feet by 42 ½ feet. Low arches of laminated wood support the roof, and steel bar joists support the floor. The main entrance to the building is on ground level. It has a full basement with a kitchen and a recreation hall which is also used for Sunday School and Bible classes.

More real estate was purchased just south of the church grounds for a new parsonage. The ground was broken on May 10, 1958. The building was completed and dedicated on October 11, 1959.

Pastor Boehnke retired from the active ministry in September 1962. On the second Sunday in May 1963, Rev. Walter Klipp was installed as pastor.

When the debt on the church and the parsonage was paid, it was signaled by a special mortgage-burning ceremony on March 12, 1967.

In the early spring of 1972, Pastor Klipp accepted a call to a congregation south of McCook, Nebraska. The Kimball congregation applied to the seminary for a candidate and in May, Candidate Alvin Jeske of Springfield Seminary was assigned to St. John's. He was installed on August 6, 1972 and served the congregation through June of 1976.

Rev. Richard L. Arndt accepted the call to pastor St. John's. He was installed in October 1976. He left on January 28, 1981, when he accepted a call to the Lutheran Church in Plainview, Nebraska.

The Rev. Herbert Miller of Pine Bluffs, Wyoming served as vacancy pastor until May 31, 1981, when Rev. John F. Hennig of Ft. Collins, Colorado was installed. Pastor Hennig retired from the active ministry on December 31, 1983, but continued to serve the congregation until the installation of Rev. Francis Koessel of Saratoga, Wyoming, on May 6, 1984.

Pastor Koessel accepted a call to Texas and left the congregation in 1994. Pastor Thomas Jacobsen was called to serve as the vacancy minister. The St. John's congregation called Pastor Jacobsen to serve as their full-time minister. He accepted this call and served the congregation from 1994 until May 4, 2003, when he retired.

Pastor Bradley Heinecke of St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Sidney, Nebraska served as a vacancy minister. On June 8, 2003, we installed Vicar Darrel Eggert of the Ft. Wayne Seminary to serve the position of vicar and assist Pastor Heinecke in our congregational needs. Vicar Eggert left in March, 2004. In July, 2004, we installed Vicar Earl Brown of Ft. Wayne Seminary to assist Pastor Heinecke. Vicar Brown left in July 2005.

In April of 2005, Ft. Wayne seminary student Kenneth Mars accepted a call to St. John's Lutheran Church. Pastor Mars was installed on July 17, 2005 and currently serves our congregation.