

125 YEARS OF HISTORY

ST. JOHN LUTHERAN CHURCH SEWARD, NEBRASKA

Highlights in Its History

- 1865 Seward County, Nebraska, organized.
- 1867 Nebraska admitted as the 37th state of the Union.
- 1868 The town of Seward platted on the property of Lewis Moffitt.
- 1869 Hermann Diers, later a prominent member of St. John Lutheran Church, opened a store in Seward.
- 1870 The town of Seward legally incorporated.
- A small group of German-American Lutherans held its first worship service in the home of C.F. Kroeger. Pastor Karl Theodore Gruber of Immanuel, Middle Creek conducted services.
- 1871 The county seat transferred from Milford to Seward.
- 1873 Rail service between Lincoln and Seward inaugurated.
- 1876 July 4: the nation's centennial, the group of Lutherans met to discuss formally organizing a congregation.
- 1877 December 10: nine charter members signed the congregation's constitution.
- 1878 December 9: the congregation incorporated under Nebraska law. Congregational officers were three elders, elected annually. Services in the County Courthouse and later in the Presbyterian church.
- 1879 November 9: Dedication of first church, located at Third and Seward. The church was 24 by 40 feet, and 14 feet high.
- 1884 Pastor Friedrich Koenig accepted the call as the congregation's first full-time pastor.
- St. John School opened, with Pastor Koenig teaching 18 students. The congregation constructed a school, attached to the church. Construction costs were \$264.15.
- 1885 April: The voters assembly canceled the insurance on the church building and decided to commit the property to the Lord.

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- 1886 The congregation voted to have one of the services at its annual fall mission festival in English for the "Americans" who would be present.
October: St. John became a member of the Missouri Synod.
- 1887 The first parsonage erected. The following year a barn was built next to the parsonage.
- 1889 St. John expressed interest in locating any future synodical educational institution in Seward.
- 1890 Confirmed children were to attend *Christenlebre*, a program of instruction, for three years after confirmation.
- 1892 Herman Martin accepted the call to serve as the first full-time teacher at St. John School. Enrollment had risen to 51 students, all taught by Martin. Martin taught classes in German in the mornings and in English in the afternoons.

In October the congregation began charging tuition for school children: 75 cents per month for one child, and \$1.25 for two children. Those too poor to pay tuition could attend without charge.
- 1893 May: The voters selected O.E. Bernecker, Herman Diers, and J.F. Goehner to a committee to pursue the matter of a synodical institution in Seward. These men offered 20 acres and \$8,000 to the trustees of the Missouri Synod to locate the school in Seward.

In the fall a special synodical committee selected Seward from a list of competing communities.

Bernecker, Diers, and Goehner were appointed to the school's Board of Control.

Church membership had grown from 74 in 1883 to 145.

St. John dedicated its second church building on October 8, at a cost of \$3607.81. Dimensions: 32 x 56 x 18 feet, with a balcony.
- 1894 January 5: St. John became a charter member of the orphans' home-finding society of Fremont, NE.

November 18: The Evangelical Lutheran School Teachers Seminary (later Concordia University) was dedicated. Classes began under the instruction of George Weller two days later.
- 1900 Pastor C.H. Becker of St. John elected President of the Nebraska District, serving in that office until 1915.

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- 1901 A second teacher added to the school. Enrollment had reached 90 students.
- 1904 Pipe organ purchased for the church.
- 1905 The synodical convention added two years of "normal school" to the curriculum of the teacher's seminary, making it a full-fledged teacher education college.
- 1906 St. John established the "south school" about four miles south of town for members who lived in that area. The "south school" operated until 1942.
- The town school became the "training school" of the teacher's seminary. Professor H.B. Fehner was the supervising teacher. The school was relocated to the campus, approximately where Schuelke and Strieter Halls stand today.
- 1909 The congregation had 340 communicant members and 510 total members.
- 1910 School enrollment exceeded 100 students.
- August 14: St. John's third church, at 4th and Seward, dedicated. A special train brought people from Lincoln, Malcolm, and Germantown (Garland). The Norman Gothic-style church seated 750 and cost \$30,000.
- 1911 St. John hosted the convention of the Synodical Conference.
- 1914 Because of growing enrollment, St. John resumed operation of grades 3-6 of the school. Grades 1-2 and 7-8 remained at the training school.
- 1916 Junior and Senior Walther Leagues established.
- 1918 First services in English during World War I.
- 1921 The congregation's Financial Report showed that \$3,488.61 was spent for congregational expenses and \$3,114.08 was given for work outside the congregation.
- 1929 New school building constructed on Columbia Avenue. St. John and the Missouri Synod shared the costs of property and building which totaled \$30,000.
- 1932 Sunday School established, intended for children of the congregation who didn't attend the day school and for children of non-members.

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- 1938 School reorganized under congregational control although it remained the student teaching location for Concordia. The congregation's teacher, F.H. Wolter, became school principal.
- Pastor Iddo C. Heinicke elected president of the Nebraska District and held that position until 1949.
- Unified budget system adopted.
- 1942 Adult Bible class formed.
- 1944 December 3: The voters "resolved that all guests at the Lord's Supper be permitted to attend as they are seated without reference to sex". Formerly, men and women received communion separately.
- 1945 Kindergarten added to the school program.
- The Sunday worship schedule was two English services and one German. Communion was to be celebrated twice a month.
- 1946 Lutheran Women's Missionary League founded.
- The congregation authorized the calling of a full-time assistance pastor.
- 1947 St. John joined the Lincoln Mission Society, which carried out mission activities in Lincoln.
- 1955 German services were to be held only on the third Sunday of the month.
- The congregation dropped the word "German" from its name.
- 1956 Dedication of a school addition: four classrooms, gymnasium, and lunchroom.
- 1964 Six classrooms added to the school.
- 1966 School enrollment reached 432.
- 1968 Bethel Bible Study program began.
- Fourth church located at Columbia and Hillcrest, dedicated.
- Sunday school enrollment reached 466.
- 1971 School principal made a full-time position.

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- 1973 Ninth grade added to the school.
St. John passed the 2000 communicant-member mark.
- 1974 Evening School of Religion began - short-term courses offered on a weekday evening.
Marlys Rempfer installed as Youth Work Director.
October: resolved to close the downtown church after August 10, 1975, the 65th anniversary of the dedication of that church.
- 1976 Third church razed.
- 1977 April: Request for a vicar to provide pastoral assistance.
May: George Heider was assigned.
June: Board of Elders members authorized to serve as communion assistants.
November: Chair of the congregation authorized to appoint a building committee.
- 1978 Average church attendance for the year was 1,556.
October: adopted a proposal for the West Entrance Addition.
- 1979 January: Elders recommended that St. John participate in resettlement of refugees in Seward County. By year's end St. John had resettled two Vietnamese families.
March: accepted bid of \$261,193 for the building addition.
November: The Social Ministry Committee officially named the Social Ministry Board.
- 1980 April: Dedication of the building addition.
October: Articles of incorporation approved for the St. John Lutheran Church Foundation.
- 1981 February: ad hoc committee appointed to develop a program to liquidate an operating debt of \$140,000.
March: St. John joined the Nebraska Association of Congregations for Concordia College.
April: approved several staff reductions because of deficit and debt problems.
April: voting age for communicant members at St. John became the same as the legal voting age.

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- 1982 August: joined the Personalized Missionary Support Program of the LCMS, which led to congregational support for missionary Mark Kempff.
- 1983 May: adopted an amendment to the congregational constitution that women could serve as officers and board members except for the positions of pastor, chair of the congregation, or Board of Elder member.
- 1985 March: approved the tenured position, Director of Christian Nurture and Youth.
- 1986 Special fund drive, called "Kill the Giant", created to retire the operating debt of \$156,896. By January 14, 1987, members paid or pledged \$159,413 to this fund and paid off the operating debt of the congregation.
- The Social Ministry Board sponsored a Thanksgiving dinner at church for members and people from the community.
- 1988 January: Crossways Bible study program adopted.
- April: Capital use fee established for school children.
- 1990 Building committee established.
- 1991 Ninth grade to be discontinued at the end of the school year.
- November: authorized the beginning of a child development center once start-up funds had been secured.
- 1993 The Elders called for the "Christ Care" program of small-group discussion groups.
- 1995 Stephen Ministry program established after Iva Mae Roettjer and Marlene Block completed training as Stephen Ministry leaders.
- 1966 The congregation resolved to study synodical documents related to the role of women in the church.
- 1997 The Child Development Center moved to newly-obtained facilities located at Columbia Avenue and Main Street.
- 1998 Addition of portable classroom unit to make available additional office space.
- 2000 Installation of a new sound system in the church and new telephone system in the church and school.
- 2001 Adoption of a phased-in, partial tuition policy for students at St. John School.