

A Brief History of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Buffalo, Wyoming

November 2016

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod ([LCMS](#)), of which Prince of Peace is a member congregation, was formed by Saxon German immigrants of 1838-1839 who left Germany seeking freedom of religious expression and settled in St Louis and Perry County, Missouri. The Synod was formed in 1847 as the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. The LCMS headquarters, the [International Center](#), remains in the St Louis area, in Kirkwood, Missouri.

The fledgling LCMS established nine communities in Perry County, south of St Louis, of which four remain. These communities are commemorated at the [Saxon Lutheran Memorial](#) in Frohna, Perry County, Missouri. The LCMS also established the very first seminary in the U.S. west of the Mississippi River in a [log cabin](#), a structure that has been preserved at Trinity Lutheran in Altenburg, Perry County, Missouri. Seminary students slept in the cabin's loft and were taught by Pastor C.F.W. Walther, who later became the Synod's first president.



The Log Cabin Seminary expanded into what is now [Concordia Theological Seminary](#), St Louis. The LCMS established a second [Concordia Theological Seminary](#) in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and also operates ten campuses of the [Concordia University System](#), ranging from Irvine, California, in the west to Bronxville, New York, in the east.

“The first permanent Lutheran (and specifically LCMS) work in Wyoming had its beginning in the 1890's through the work of the "Cowboy Preacher," the Rev. J. D. Schroeder. Immanuel, Sheridan began as fruit of his work.”¹ [Immanuel Lutheran](#), an LCMS congregation in Sheridan, Wyoming, 35 miles north of Buffalo, was organized in 1903. Among the pastors who have served Immanuel over the decades, Pastor Nolan Obermueller was installed on 17 April 1949. He served the congregation until October 1963 and then accepted a Call to Fayetteville, Arkansas. He was replaced in January 1964 by Pastor Robert Eckelman, who served at Immanuel until March 1974.

In Buffalo, St Luke's Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church was organized in 1919.² In 1943, St. Luke's joined the Augustana Synod. Eventually, St Luke's became a congregation within the liberal Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).



Grange Building

First Services in Buffalo. A number of Missouri Synod Lutherans began having services in Buffalo under the auspices of Immanuel, Sheridan. Bev Crawford reported that Pastor Obermueller baptized her twins in 1958. Pastor Simonson, active in the Wyoming District for about 50 years, recalled services being held in Buffalo by Pastor Obermueller in 1963. These services were held in the old Grange building on the west side of South Cedar Street, on the south side of the present Buffalo Bowl. The building is still there.

1 <http://immanuelsheridan.blogspot.com/p/our-history.html>

2 <http://www.stlukeselca.com/>

The earliest written history of the congregation was documented in a report that looked back to 1961.³ A 1961 census was taken by a vicar placed for the summer in Buffalo. The census results led to services conducted by Pastor Obermueller of Immanuel, Sheridan. This effort stalled eventually. In 1971, Synod members in Buffalo requested the resumption of services. These were begun in April 1972 in the parish hall of St John the Baptist Catholic Church in Buffalo, with 42 attendees at the first service. Subsequent average attendance was over 30, leading to the establishment of a mission congregation in Buffalo. Work began on a constitution, the name *Prince of Peace* was chosen and a search for land was begun. A young candidate, Pastor Marvin Temme, was sent to Buffalo and was ordained and installed as the congregation's first pastor on 1 July 1973.

A subsequent July 1973 report by Pastor Eckelman picked up the history in 1972.⁴ That first worship service was conducted on 23 April 1972, three weeks after Easter, by Pastor Eckelman for the *Buffalo Lutheran Mission*. The 42 attendees included 14 families. The selection of the name, *Prince of Peace*, occurred on 7 September 1972 upon Synod's approval of an established congregation in Buffalo. Four adjoining lots of land, totaling 1.57 acres, were purchased (see Appendix B). On 22 April 1973, the congregation celebrated Easter Sunday, Charter Sunday and the one year anniversary of the congregation. Pastor Obermueller was the guest speaker. As noted above, Pastor Temme, a graduate of Concordia Theological Seminary, St Louis, Missouri, was installed in July.⁵ This installation was covered extensively, with photos, in the 16 September 1973 Wyoming District edition of the *Lutheran Witness* (we have an electronic copy of same). A list of the called and vacancy pastors and vicars who have served at Prince of Peace is shown as Appendix A.

Getting Organized. The congregation was officially formed in 1972 through the Commission on Mission and Ministry of the Wyoming District, and Initial work was aided by Pastor Eckelman of Immanuel, Sheridan.⁶ The first Constitution and By-Laws of the Prince of Peace congregation were filed with the State of Wyoming on 22 December 1972 and adopted by the congregation on 20 February 1973. The named directors were Fred W. Wester, Curtis A. Pitsch and Albert W. Schroder (named agent) The articles were signed by Curtis Pitsch, Albert Schroder, Raymond E. Schroder, and Edgar W. Vorwerk. The Objects and Purposes of the congregation were stated, in part, to disseminate “the Gospel truth according to the confessional standard of the Lutheran Church, in the Book of Concord of the year 1580.”⁷ In a 1985 version of the congregation's Constitution and By-Laws, the Confessional Basis was stated as follows.

This congregation accepts all the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testaments as the verbally inspired, inerrant Word of God, and all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord of 1580 as a true and sound exposition of Christian teaching taken from and in full agreement with the Holy Scriptures. No teaching shall be tolerated in this congregation which is at variance with these Symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, viz:

The Apostolic Creed

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- 3 “Resource Material for the Congregation of the Month: Buffalo, Wyoming” (July 1973) compiled by Rev. Robert Eckelman, undated. Pastor Eckelman served Immanuel, Sheridan, January 1964 – March 1974.
- 4 “A Brief History of Prince of Peace Lutheran” (only the first page of more than one page), no author, undated.
- 5 The present LCMS seminary in Ft Wayne was located in Springfield until 1976.
- 6 Pastor Temme, personal communication, 15 September 2016.
- 7 Articles of Incorporation of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church of Buffalo, Wyoming, filed 22 December 1972 with the Office of the Secretary of State.

The Athanasian Creed
 The Nicene Creed
 The Unaltered Augsburg Confession
 The Apology of the Augsburg Confession
 The Smalcald Articles
 Luther's Small Catechism
 Luther's Large Catechism
 The Formula of Concord



A congregational ledger identified the first Church Council, in 1973, as being Ray Schroder, President; Fred Wester, Vice President; Albert Schroder, Treasurer; Bridget Vorwerk, Secretary; Elders Ed Cook and Ed Vorwerk; Trustees Wally Schulz and Howard Gernant; and Stewardship Committee Curt Pitsch and Dick Mielke. The charter members included:

Carr, Jim and Eunice	Schulz, Walter and Barbara
Glen, Valerie, Laura Leigh	Jeffry, Edward
Cook, Ed and Maxine	Torrence, Georgette
Perry, Teresa	David
Feeger, John and Janice	Vorwerk, Ed and Bridgett
Barbara, Al, Walter	Kelly
Kessler, William and Irma	Warne, Robert and Gayle
William	Connie, Debbie
Mielke, Richard and Leona	Wester, Fred and Bertie
Pitsch, Curt and Janice	Danny
Wendy, Melinda, Teri, Shelly	Woodall, Shirley
Schroder, Al and Florence	Wayne, Matthew
Schroder, Ray and Evelyn	Wyman, Linda
Christy, Rusty	Crystal

Land Purchase. On 10 May 1973 the congregation purchased Lots 17 (on Lucas Street) through 20 (at the corner of Lucas Street and Fort Street) of the Kenitzer Addition from C. Vance Lucas, trustee for the estate of F.E. Lucas; this area was subsequently annexed by the city. See the plat diagram in Appendix B. These four adjoining lots provided a 1.57-acre area with frontage on Fort Street (U.S. Highway 16) about one mile west of the intersection of U.S. Highways 16 and 87 and downtown Buffalo. The purchase was financed with a \$99,737.75 loan from the Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF). Decades later, about 2,200 square feet of the southwest corner of Lot 17 was sold to the adjacent property southwest of the parsonage (Lot 24).

The Parsonage. Prior to the construction of the parsonage, a home was rented in summer 1973 for Pastor Temme.⁸ The 3-bedroom, two-level parsonage is located at the southwest end of Lot 17 and fronts on Norma Drive. Plans were finalized in Fall 1973 for the construction of the parsonage, a Capp Home. Non-Capp labor was provided by the members of the congregation and the parsonage was completed in May 1975.



The Parsonage

In the 1960 brochure of the M. Capp Mfr. Co., the parsonage appears to be a version of the

⁸ Pastor Temme, personal communication, 15 September 2016.

“Greenwood” plan on page 35. Funding was provided, again, by LCEF. The three bedrooms and 1¾ bathrooms are located upstairs in 1456 sq-ft. The full-sized walk-out basement provides a 400-sq ft pastor's office, a 2-car garage, a half-bathroom and a 400-sq ft unfinished area in which the washer and dryer reside.

The Sanctuary Building. “When are you going to build the other half?” This is a common question asked jokingly by Buffalo residents about the Prince of Peace sanctuary building. In fact, the design appears to be a post-modern “take” on the colonial saltbox style.



The 1600-sq ft sanctuary provides seating for 90 in beautiful pews. The 1340-sq ft basement has a full kitchen and seats about 60 for meals.



The saltbox style originated in New England and was common in the 1650-1830 period. It is an example of American colonial architecture. The earliest saltbox houses were created when a lean-to addition was added onto the rear of the original tall, two-story house, extending the roof line rearward, sometimes to less than six feet from ground level. (Wikipedia) The saltbox style is characterized by an asymmetrical long pitched roof with one short side and one very long side. To see the familiar old saltbox style, Google “architecture saltbox” and click on Images.

An asymmetrical roof line is also viewed as being post-modern. Post-modernist architecture started in the U.S. In about 1960 and was especially popular in the late 1970s to early 1980s. Post-modernism included a rejection of modernism's plainness and strict functionality, popular from 1935 to 1960. “The functional and formalized shapes and spaces of the modernist style are replaced by diverse aesthetics: styles collide, form is adopted for its own sake, and new ways of viewing familiar styles and space abound.” (Wikipedia) Apparently, the saltbox style was “re-discovered” by post-modernism and appreciated for its asymmetry.

While the angle at the roof ridge is 90 degrees, the short southeast roofline of the sanctuary slopes inward at an 18-degree angle, while the long northwest roofline slopes outward correspondingly at an 18-degree angle. The shorter, inwardly-sloped part of the roof line was probably a post-modern addition to the old saltbox style. The emphasis of form over functionality is a bit disturbing when you stand in the sanctuary next to the shorter sloped wall and its windows: you may start to lean toward the non-vertical wall involuntarily.

The building was designed by (Vernon L.) Drake and (F. Wayne) Gustafson, Architects and

Planners of Billings, Montana, on a contract signed 29 August 1975. Ground-breaking occurred in January 1977. The congregation may have served as the general contractor. A series of contracts with Buffalo companies was signed on 17 December 1976 for the following.

- Electric: Howard Turk dba Kryger Electric
- Carpentry: Gary Ash and Ronald Clements dba G&B Carpentry
- Plumbing: Wayne Larking dba BH Plumbing & Heating
- HVAC: Frickey's Heating & Air Conditioning

The sanctuary building was dedicated on 26 June 1977 with Vacancy Pastor Bernard Staake officiating. Fifteen years later a mortgage-burning ceremony was held, by Pastor Hawley, and the LCEF mortgage on the whole property was paid off officially on 18 November 1992.

A 20th anniversary service was held on 25 April 1993, with Pastor Hawley presiding. A 25th anniversary service was held on 20 September 1998, with Pastor Peters presiding. The latter anniversary service program also showed a photo from the 22 November 1992 mortgage burning ceremony including Geoff Spiering, President, Linda Wyman, charter member, Pastor Hawley, Jerry Christoffer, Elder, and Dick Peters, Trustee. **NOTE:** Easter Sunday 2018 will be the congregation's 45th anniversary.

Some of the activities, above, were captured on 8mm film, transferred to videotape and now to DVD. The video is about 34 minutes with no sound and mostly in color. Contents include the ground breaking in winter, the land (the four lots) with the parsonage in the background, basement construction in winter, framing, building enclosed, roofing, the dedication ceremony, a Sunday School class, and the mortgage burning ceremony.

Addition to the Sanctuary Building. During the calendar year 2015 a 680-sq ft extension was added to the southwest end of the original sanctuary. The objectives of this extension were to provide a Fellowship Hall for adult Bible study and meetings, provide bathrooms on the same floor as the sanctuary, and provide a sacristy for communion vessels and supplies. Groundbreaking occurred on 19 April 2015. The construction labor was supplied nearly 100% from the congregation. Geoff Spiering supervised construction, while Mark Bunker served as the foreman of the day-to-day efforts of the 5-man construction crew, all members of which were in their 70s. God is good: it worked and there were no accidents. Along with the addition, the roof of the entire building was replaced and the outside of the entire building was repainted. The fully paid for addition was dedicated on 31 January 2016. The 640-sq ft basement portion of the addition is finished but not yet dedicated to a specific purpose.



Fellowship Hall





New roof and new paint. The walk-out basement of the parsonage is shown in the right-hand side of this photo



Size of the Congregation. As noted above, 42 people in 14 families attended the initial mission service in April 1972. Across the years 1973 through 1988, membership varied between 56 in 1973 and 150 in 1983-1985, with an average of 103 members.⁹ Attendance averaged 53 members (51%). In the summer of 2016, membership stands at 116, with 96 confirmed. Throwing out the high attendance on Easter Sunday 2016 and one low attendance Sunday in the summer, weekly attendance in the first half of 2016 averaged 55 (47%).

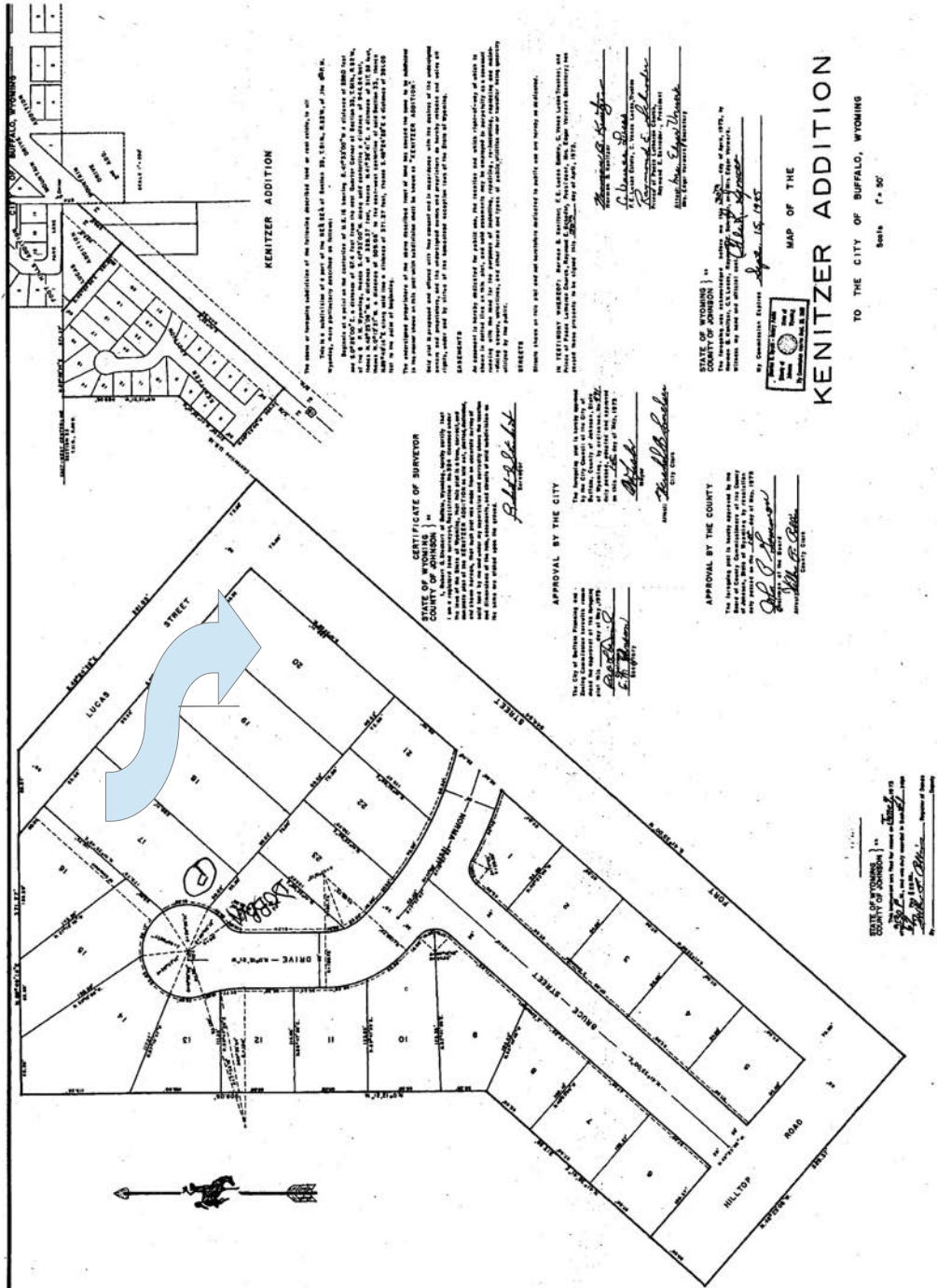
⁹ "Quantitative Study of the Church Growth of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church" covering 1973 through 1988.

Appendix A
Called and vacancy pastors and vicars at Prince of Peace

Pastor	From	Installed	Departed	To
Marvin L. Temme	CTS*, St Louis	Jul 1, 1973	Jan 1977	Zion, Fairmont OK
Bernard Staake	Vacancy Pastor from Immanuel, Sheridan	Feb 1977	Jul 15, 1978	
William F.A. Dietz	CTS, Ft Wayne	Jul 16, 1978	May 1980	Faith, Gering NE
Bernard Staake	Vacancy Pastor from Immanuel, Sheridan	June 1980	Feb 7, 1981	
Thomas Sass	First Lutheran, Chickasha OK	Feb 8, 1981	Sep 1, 1986	Resigned
Nolan Obermueller	Vacancy Pastor	Sep 1, 1986	May 30, 1987	
Daniel T. Alsop	CTS, Ft Wayne	Jun 14, 1987	Jul 15, 1991	Trinity, Boone IA
Ronald Garwood	Vacancy Pastor from Immanuel, Sheridan	Jul 1991	Jul 18, 1992	
James F. Hawley, Sr.	Redeemer, Mandan ND	Jul 19, 1992	Aug 25, 1996	Retired
Vicar William W. Stratman	St John's, Lovell WY	Sep 1, 1996	May 25, 1997	Seminary
James F. Hawley, Sr.	Vacancy Pastor, Buffalo WY	May 25, 1997	Aug 2, 1998	Retired--again
Kirk L. Peters	CTS, Ft Wayne; ordained at PPLC	Aug 2, 1998	Nov 30, 2012	St Matthew, Hazen ND
Duane R. Simonson	Vacancy Pastor, Buffalo WY	Dec 1, 2012	Apr 30, 2013	Called
Duane R. Simonson	Buffalo WY	May 5, 2013	Oct 30, 2016	Retired--again
Vicar Matthew Koterba	CTS, Ft Wayne	July 2015	July 2016	Seminary
Gerald D. Heinecke	Candidate, Utica, MI	11/06/16	Present	

*CTS: Concordia Theological Seminary

Appendix B Land Purchase



KENITZER ADDITION

The name of temporary subdivision of the foregoing described land as set forth, to wit:

This is a subdivision of a part of the NE 1/4 of Section 28, T.18N., R.28W., of the 6th N.

and is a subdivision of a part of the NE 1/4 of Section 28, T.18N., R.28W., of the 6th N.

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and is a subdivision of a part of the NE 1/4 of Section 28, T.18N., R.28W., of the 6th N.

CERTIFICATE OF SURVEY

STATE OF WYOMING)
COUNTY OF JOHNSON)

I, the undersigned, being duly qualified and sworn, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the original record of the survey of the above described land as shown on the plat of the survey filed for record in the office of the County Clerk of the County of Johnson, Wyoming, on this 15th day of May, 1975.

Witness my hand and the seal of the County of Johnson, Wyoming, at Buffalo, Wyoming, this 15th day of May, 1975.

County Clerk

City Clerk

City Clerk

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APPROVAL BY THE CITY

The foregoing map is hereby approved by the City of Buffalo, Wyoming, on this 15th day of May, 1975.

City Clerk

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County Clerk

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County Clerk

County Clerk

County Clerk

STATE OF WYOMING

County of Johnson

County Clerk

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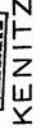
County Clerk

County Clerk

KENITZER ADDITION

TO THE CITY OF BUFFALO, WYOMING

Sheet 1 of 50



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