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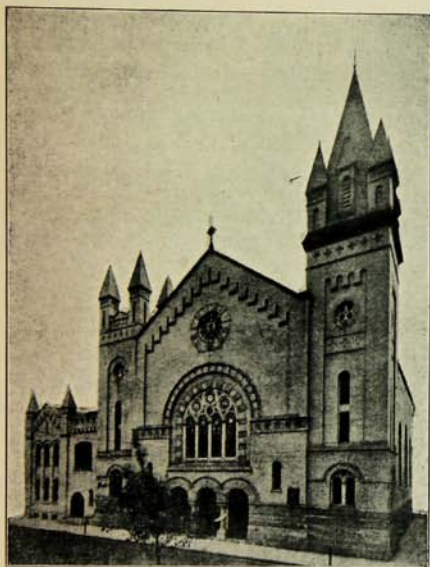
The Story
of the Evangelical Lutheran
Church of the Reformation

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Written by Ruth E. Stachel and published
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Present building (erected 1900), showing old Sunday School addition at the left

BEGINNINGS

ON September 8, 1868, sixty-five years ago, several men and women met at the home of Mr. and Mrs. William Maser, 54 Broadway. They had felt the necessity of banding some of the Lutherans into a closer tie. This was the tie of English speaking people. As yet there was no English Lutheran church in western New York. There were nine members whose faith enabled them to begin in a humble way and plan for the future hopefully.

Why could they be so enthusiastic? First of all, they had the true spirit of the church in their hearts. They recognized the need for a broadened outlook in the English speaking generation of the church. Secondly, these fervent worshippers had been inspired by an act of God in the form of a gift. The Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of New York had held its annual convention in Zion's German Lutheran Church on Grove Street a few days previous to the meeting of the little band. Recognizing the opportunity for growth in the community of Rochester,

and realizing the importance of a growing church, the Executive Committee of the Ministerium appropriated \$400 for the support of a missionary. The only condition was that the new work be started within the year. But within a few days, the faithful few, as stated, had already formed a society called the Evangelical Lutheran Missionary Society. Their purpose was to establish an English Lutheran Church in Rochester.

Ten days later, the tenth of September, the Rev. Reuben Hill of Rhinebeck, N. Y., was called to be missionary, and the president of the Ministerium appointed him to begin his duties on December 1, 1868. C. C. Meyer was "the chief pillar and pioneer" at this time, and he was the right-hand man of Pastor Hill. The enthusiasm of the chosen few spread rapidly; and with the permission of the Zion Lutheran Church on Grove Street, from which the nucleus had come, worship was conducted in the church every Sunday evening until May.

On April 7, 1869, a lease of five years' privileges was obtained from the German school house on Chatham Street. Here on the third floor, which was 40 feet x 60 feet, repairs were made amounting to \$1000. Other churches were interested in giving "the little sister" a chance to grow; helpful contributions were made by St. John's Church of Philadelphia and Trinity Church of New York. The seating capacity of the new room was 350 persons.

Thus, as in the upper room at Jerusalem, "the twelve" on Chatham Street, met together to worship and to plan for the growth of the little community church. This upper room was dedicated on June 13, 1869. The church then numbered 30 members, 12 of whom were received from Zion German Lutheran Church, "the mother church;" the remaining 18 having no church connection. The council of Zion's Church attended the dedication in a body. Just one month later, the congregation was organized.

How proud Reformation may be that the Sunday School has sixty-four years of growth to its credit! For on August 1, 1869, 52 scholars and 14 teachers organized this important side of church life. Within the year it grew to 130 scholars and 17 teachers. The first officers were: Pastor Hill, superintendent; Adam Brasch, secretary; George P. Meyer, treasurer; and John Cass, librarian. It is worthwhile to note that the New Testament was used as the lesson book and that the Sunday School services were held in the afternoon. St. John's Church in Philadelphia gave not only the money to the church, but also the hymn books and the superintendent's desk to the Sunday School.

On October 31 (Reformation Day), in 1871, the congregation met to become an incorporated body in New York State. The Evan-



A morning congregation in front of the first building, about 1888

gical Lutheran Church of the Reformation may well honor the day of Luther's publishing of his ninety-five thesis by choosing this day as the time for the declaration of her individuality. She, too, had become firm in her purpose. The first Board of Trustees was composed of: C. C. Meyer, president; William J. Steinhauer, secretary; John B. Snyder, treasurer; John S. Kratz and William Maser.

THE FIRST BUILDING

Such a growing congregation would inevitably feel the need of larger quarters. 189 members had increased from 12 members in four years. Consequently, a lot was purchased on Grove Street for \$2300, and a building erected for \$8350 on the ground where the present church stands. Just as the nine members had dedicated themselves, and as the thirty members had dedicated the upper room, now the one hundred eighty-nine members dedicated their church on the second Sunday in December, 1872. The Sunday School had more than tripled itself in three years with 384 members. Truly the acorn was fast becoming the oak.

In order to raise the church budget, for many years each seat in the church "cost" a nominal sum, prices ranging from five cents to twenty-five cents a week. So in one bulletin: "The expenses of the church have been assessed upon the sittings. Each person having a sitting assigned, should pledge at least the assessment upon his sitting and as much more as he can give." It was not until 1914 that the free pew system was adopted.

The early missionary work was a very strong foundation for similar work in nearby sections of the city later. Finally on April 8, 1874, Pastor Hill concluded his time of service in the church on Grove Street and accepted a call to Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Rev. Charles S. Kohler came in 1874 and directed his efforts toward the reduction of the mortgage on the new church. The interest of the enthusiastic young church seemed dulled. Perhaps it was a reaction to the steady growth of former years. However, another organization, which is strong even today, was formed on January 28, 1875. Eleven persons met at the residence of Mrs. John Kratz in order to organize a sewing society. One of the charter members is still living. On July 1, 1876, the constitution was adopted and the name, The Dorcas Society, was chosen. In the true spirit of the service shown by Dorcas in the Bible, these women sewed on garments, quilts, Red Cross articles, and other useful things.

The constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Reformation was adopted in 1876 and revised in 1884, with the provision

that there should be “not less than two elders, not less than four deacons, and not less than three nor more than nine trustees.” Rev. Kohler served the church for ten years.

THE HOME MISSIONARY ERA

In 1884, Rev. Hiram Peters took charge, and several years later the Lutherans in Rochester became conscious of the importance of Home Missions. During 1887 mission collections had been taken by



The Reverend Frederick R. Knubel, Pastor

the Sunday School until there was a total of \$113.15, which was given to the church council on January 4, 1888. This initial sum was to be used in establishing an English Mission. The church council accepted the offer. It appointed a committee which immediately suggested the section between St. Paul and Hudson Streets for the work. At this time Pastor Peters accepted a call to Norristown, Pennsylvania. This delayed the work until the next regular pastor arrived four months later.

Confirmed by Pastor Peters, the class of 1888 formed an organization to keep the members in closer contact. It was the first association of its kind since the organization of the church.

From Thiel College came the Rev. J. E. Whitteker (installed December, 1888), who renewed the enthusiasm and energy of the first

workers by recalling their missionary spirit. He stressed missions, and aptly applied his motto: "Divide and conquer." This period may well be called one of recovery and expansion.

The work which had been started in the section of St. Paul and Hudson Streets was continued. After temporary quarters proved inadequate, the chapel became permanently located at Bay and Alexander Streets. It was dedicated as Grace Church on August 25, 1889. "This mission work, from start to finish, was wholly accomplished by the Church of the Reformation. She is the responsible head of English Lutheranism in this place. She must rise up and do her duty in establishing missions."

Several months later work was begun on the west side of the city, and the Church of the Reformation was the first to give toward the support of the mission which later became Trinity Church, Walnut Street, on February 28, 1892. Two missions in one year!

With such a missionary outlook, the Lutheran Mission League had been established on May 4, 1891, of which every Lutheran church in the city, regardless of language, was a part, if interested. About a year later the third English mission was begun in March, 1892. This was St. Paul's Mission on Joseph Street, now at Clifford Avenue and Loomis Street.

The Welcome, a monthly paper, was issued for ten years, beginning October, 1888. The Young Men's Society of the Church of the Reformation mailed 1200 copies for two years. Then the missionary alliance canvassed the city to discover the church denominations of the people. There were 1500 Lutherans without a church membership! As a result, the Mission League took over *The Welcome*, and 1000 copies were mailed to Lutherans each month gratuitously.

In Reformation the funds of the Young Ladies' Society were sufficient to send a young man to college for a year during 1888. It is remarkable how the church and Sunday School grew during this time of external missionary expansion, in spite of the fact that the mission enterprise took some of the best teachers, many scholars, and many regular members as members of the new missions. For instance, "the first three months of the year *before* we took up our mission work, the general average of our (Sunday) school was 189; the first three months of the year *after* we took up our mission work, the general average was 219!" (from *The Welcome*.) Reformation was drawing in faster than she could give out!

We discover also from *The Welcome*, that in February, 1890, "the Sunday School was filled to overflowing, the average attendance being 250." There was an overflow in the church at the same time so that

some felt that "it will be necessary to devise some plan for increasing the seating capacity of our church." This was done by removing the organ from the gallery to the front of the church, and by putting pews in the gallery.

When Rev. William J. Miller assumed charge in 1893, he found a faithful and earnest congregation with a growth of nearly twenty-five years. He found the youth in that congregation active. Five years after the New York State organization of the Luther League, the Luther League began in Rochester in 1893. Two years later there were fifteen societies numbering 860 members in the city, two of the societies being at Reformation. In 1895, "taking the Young Ladies' and the Young Men's Societies together, the honor of the largest membership of one church—a total of 139—would go to Reformation." This is an enviable record for today!

THE PRESENT BUILDING PLANNED

At an annual congregational meeting during December of the same year, it was resolved to build a new church. After \$30,000 had been successfully raised by subscription, there was some discussion as to the best location of the church. There was a strong movement among the members to move to East Avenue at Matthews Street, but the church finally decided in May, 1898, to locate permanently on the old site.

Pastor Miller's energy and hopes for greater service are illustrated in an excerpt from his fourth pastoral letter: "We have not been idle as a church; we have done much, but we could have done more."

A unique and unusual play was given by the Lutheran Workers in the Lyceum Theater in November, 1897. The subject was the life and work of John Knox and the Reformation accomplished by him in Scotland. A prominent Methodist layman who attended said: "It remained for you Lutherans to show Rochester what a church entertainment should be, and how to make it a success."

A few brief notes from the church directory of Reformation will show the similarity and difference of the church proper, then and now: "Services—Sunday morning and evening, Wednesday evening; Sunday School at 12 noon; teachers' meeting on Wednesday; societies—Dorcas, Lutheran Workers, Young Men's Lutheran Association; Board of Trustees and Church Council—J. F. Dinkey, president; choir—five members; church—614 members."

Activity was continued in the church. After a meeting in New York City of all the Lutheran women in the State to form the Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the Ministerium of New



Sunday morning, October 15, 1933

York, a local society was formed in Rochester about 1899. At the beginning of the year, a devotional service, held before the church service, began another series of Luther League meetings, definitely designated as "Luther League." Also, there was a reunion of the confirmation classes of 1886 to 1897, with a program. The church council was so well pleased with this idea that it donated ten dollars toward the expenses.

Soon the parsonage was moved across the street from the church. In March, 1899, a committee was appointed to take the initial steps in getting plans for a new church. They decided to build, without a Sunday School, for \$40,000. It was encouraging to know that Pastor Miller refused a call to Buffalo so that he might "see the new church firmly established, and its membership so largely increased, that to build the Sunday School will be a necessity within two years."

During the building of the new church, Temple Berith Kodesh graciously let the Church of the Reformation use the Temple for services for several months, beginning in April. "It affords us much pleasure to be of service to you during the construction of your church, and we trust you will be perfectly at home in our Temple." We admire this gracious spirit.

The cornerstone was laid on July 1, 1900, and the church was dedicated in December. Pastor Miller, who had been true to his promise to stay, finally resigned on June 30, 1901.

CONGREGATIONAL EXPANSION

Assuming his duties on October 15, Rev. Franklin F. Fry was installed as the sixth pastor on October 27. Almost a year later the new Sunday School project was considered and the cornerstone was laid on November 23, 1902; the Sunday School was dedicated on April 19, 1903. Also at this time there was a consideration of "the withdrawal of this congregation from the New York Ministerium and joining the Synod of New York and New England."

In August, 1905, the Young Men's Lutheran Association of the church requested that a church paper be established. The association also discussed the plan of securing a Parish House for the church. The Taylor home, east of the church, was purchased and furnished for \$8000. "The young men entered with much enthusiasm into this project."

After a house-to-house canvass and visitation by the clergyman of the city, "it seemed widely recognized that the work done was of

such value that it ought to be made more permanent and complete." Therefore the Ministerial Union thought it advisable to record "the religious and church affiliation or preference of every family in Rochester." Pastor Fry was on a committee, and the Church of the Reformation helped in this project. In a few months a card system was installed for keeping the records of membership in the church.

By a motion in the church council, the ushers were to count the attendance at church services and report back to the council. Begun in April, 1909, this practice has continued ever since.

On November 15, 1910, Rev. John Dimpfl of Yonkers, New York, accepted the call to become assistant pastor, and he continued to serve faithfully for six years. Beginning September 17, 1911, and continuing until May, 1912, Reformation took part in the "Men and Religion Forward Movement," to get men into the church and to keep them interested. This movement included one hundred American cities as centers. Later a permanent Men and Religion Committee was appointed, which kept in touch with the Y. M. C. A. and Y. W. C. A., and called on the sick.

There was some discussion about the practice of using the common cup in the communion service. Some of the members thought it was not sanitary. After a favorable trial, the individual communion cup service was adopted in 1912.

Several new activities were observed at this time. The Pastor Fry Bible Class in this same year, 1914, asked that the women be given the privilege of voting in the church since they "take an active part in all matters pertaining to the church and contribute freely to the finances." The Dewey Avenue Mission showed an increased number of members in 1915. This summer, also, a summer vacation school was opened under the supervision of the young women of the Y. W. C. A. division in Reformation. Later in the year, at a congregational meeting, the free pew system was adopted. This resulted in the first Every Member Canvass, held in 1916. Rev. M. F. Walz served as assistant pastor for eighteen months, beginning in March.

Toward the end of the year we find: "Our church has a fine missionary record for the past five years. We are not only quoted in Lutheran circles but also in other denominations." And the pastor's annual letter states: "Without dramatic features, the year just closed is one of the best in the history of the congregation." There were 117 new members, resulting in a total membership of 1296. Individual praise was earned by the choir boy who "by reason of his merits" attained "the highest distinction by the end of the month." His name was inscribed upon the Choir Boys' Roll of Honor, and he received

honorable mention in *The Survey*, his name accompanied by his photograph. This practice began in December of 1916. Also something unusual this month was the city-wide Father and Son Banquet held in the church parlor.

The congregation gave its services to the war. 119 young men and 2 young women answered the call of the country. There is one gold star in the service flag, for Corporal Wallace Kaner. Meanwhile the women at home served for the Red Cross in their society meetings.



Sister Louise Stitzer, Deaconess

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the church was carried on in an appropriate way: cancellation of the church mortgage amounting to \$22,000; a generous gift to the Church of the Redeemer for a new building, \$2,000; our proportion to the National Lutheran Commission on War Work, \$3,000; basement alterations in the church and street improvement, \$3,500. This was raised, from March 1st to the 23rd, by a campaign. Truly, this was a Jubilee offering.

This same year, 1918, was notable for the church at large. The merger of the United Lutheran Church in America was approved in a convention of the Synod of New York and New England in our church. This became a fact on November 14, and has greatly increased the understanding and fellowship within the church.

A period of growth in religious education is noticed from 1921 on. Boy Scout Troop 61 was formed with great enthusiasm. Part of

the forward-looking program was the Wednesday evening church night. Families met at the church, each individual attending his own meeting, whether it was Boy Scouts, Girl Reserves, Dorcas Society, Lutheran Workers or Men's Brotherhood. Later in the evening all could assemble at the church service. One year later a Girl Scout troop was organized.

During the Lenten season of 1921, the outstanding feature was a reunion celebration which was unusual. Since 1868, more than 2000 persons were then living in or near Rochester who were at one time members of the Church of the Reformation. Services were planned so that all of these people might have an opportunity to come back to Reformation for a visit.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COMES TO THE FORE

The organization of religious education and its steady growth in the church have been the result of a fortunate call. Rev. F. R. Knubel accepted the call to become Assistant Pastor and Director of Religious Education at the Church of the Reformation upon his graduation from the seminary and subsequent ordination. He was installed September 25, 1921. An enlarged religious education program resulted in the organization of a new department in the Sunday School, a new Luther League, and a young peoples' Leadership Class to train prospective teachers and young people for leadership. The week-day instruction consisted of Light Brigade, Standard Bearers, Boy Scouts, Boy's Club, a Junior and a Senior Girl Reserves and a Daily Vacation Bible School.

The first deaconess to come to Rochester was Sister Louise Stitzer. She had been Training Sister at the Baltimore Motherhouse and accepted the call to Reformation in 1922. She has become the patient ministering angel of the congregation, beloved by everyone. Now our congregation had "its ideal three-fold ministry according to the principles of the United Lutheran Church"—the pastor *preaching*, the assistant pastor *teaching*, and the deaconess *healing*.

With a complete staff and progressing church, a modern Sunday School building with adequate equipment was needed. Religious education through the educational, recreational and social activities demanded a more complete building. A committee, appointed in 1922, began to work out a solution. In 1925, the congregation approved the plans; in 1926, a campaign brought pledges for \$153,000; and in 1928, the new building was started. Also at this time generous gifts made possible the "building" of a new church auditorium inside. These gifts were a new pipe organ from John J. L. Friederich in memory of his wife; the redecoration and renovation of the entire church and furniture in memory of Mr. Friederich (who died shortly after the

gift of the organ), by his heirs; and the remodeling of the front church doors in memory of Frederick Luther, by his parents.

In November, 1926, Pastor Fry resigned to accept the call to become Executive Secretary of the newly organized Board of American Missions of the United Lutheran Church, to take effect the following May. His long and faithful ministry had been successful as an era of expansion.



The new Parish House and Church School was dedicated in 1929

With a record of six years of faithful service as Associate Pastor and Director of Religious Education, Rev. F. R. Knubel was called to the pastorate in June, 1927. By a coincidence he was installed on September 25, the exact date of his installation as assistant pastor. At the annual congregational meeting, three months later, Rev. E. F. Rahn was called to become Assistant Pastor and Director of Religious Education. Once again the church staff was complete in its three-fold aspect, together with an efficient church secretary, Miss Grace A. Light, who took charge in 1925, and Mr. Arthur G. Young, who also returned at this time, after being away from Reformation several years.

A NEW CHURCH SCHOOL AND PARISH HOUSE

The new Church School and Parish House, which had grown from the efforts and prayers and gifts of the people, finally became a reality and was dedicated on April 21, 1929. This was a great step forward in the program of the church. Three objectives, proposed by the pastor in 1930, were good guides for this program: First, "an increased sincerity in our services;" second, "new life in our organizations;" and third, "a wider missionary vision."

Pastor Rahn resigned as assistant pastor in January, 1932, to accept a call to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was sincere and faithful in the performance of his tasks within the congregation.

A friendly visitation committee of 150 volunteers called in the homes of the congregation to receive suggestions from the members and to give them any information concerning the church in October of 1932. It was found to be worthwhile and helpful to the members and was conducted again this year.

THE PICTURE TODAY

At the present time in the history of the congregation, there is a membership of over 1300 in the church, and an enrollment of over 700 in the Sunday School. The Church Staff consists of Rev. F. R. Knubel, the pastor, Sister Louise Stitzer, the deaconess, and Miss Grace A. Light, secretary. The organist and choir master is Mr. Norman Peterson, Mus. B.

There are three main agencies for religious education: First, the Sunday School; second, the Daily Vacation Bible School; and third, the Week-day Organizations. The educational groups, which meet every week are: The Light Brigade (3 classes), Standard Bearers, Junior and Senior Confirmation Class, and Boy Scouts. The Luther League and the Young Peoples' Society meet on alternate Sunday evenings.

Educational and social groups which meet every month are: Men's Brotherhood, Dorcas Society, Lutheran Workers, Women's Missionary Society, Koinonia (Young Women's Missionary Society), Ruth Circle, Reformation Circle, Naomi Circle, Committee on Evangelism, Social Service Committee, Adult S. S. Classes, Teacher's meetings, Sunday School Association, and Mother's Auxiliary. The Pageanteers were organized for religious drama.

The last few years have been years of continual progress in organization life. There has been a renewed emphasis on the spiritual aim for which the Church of Christ stands. This has been accomplished, as the Pastor has pointed out, through young people's work, social service, and an increased number of congregational workers.

The Church of the Reformation may well thank God and continue to pray for guidance in her next sixty-five years, to establish firmly the will of God in her activities, to make her members perfect in Christ, and to let her light shine to the uttermost parts of the earth.

CHURCH OFFICERS

It has been impossible for the author, within the limits of this book, to record the faithful services of laymen and women that have been the very sinew and strength of the human side of our congregation's life. We hope that some day we may be in a position to publish a documented history that will allow such record. There is room here merely to give the names of those who have filled the following official positions:

CHURCH COUNCIL MEMBERS—1869-1933

(In the order of their election)

C. C. Meyer	Samuel J. Kuenzie	Harold G. Buck
Daniel Wittlin	Delbert Marsielje	Heiby W. Ungerer
J. William Maser	Basil Shorer	John W. Luther
John Kratz	John F. Dinkey	Clarence Rankin
Alfred Neuner	Frank Dublin	William M. Friederich, Sr.
Adam Brash	Adam Altpeter	Thomas Weaver
Frederick C. Lauer, Jr.	Albert Schild	Frederick M. Simpson
John B. Snyder	Charles E. Reuter	Herman Steffen
William Steinhäuser	August Klein	LeRoy Agne
Frederick Traugott	Frederick W. Moll	W. H. Hartwig
Jacob Suter	Charles G. Kallusch	Henry W. Miller
Godfrey F. Tallanger	Christian Seel	Howard C. Field
Jacob Hoehn	Jacob Luehm	Fred B. King
John N. Gugelman	Charles T. Huber	Harry D. Cole
G. W. Arnold	William Schlenker	Alfred O. Stigberg
John M. Miller	Clarence C. Bellis	Carl H. Hennrich
Jacob Lauer	F. E. Theodore Manz	Robert H. Carroll
Albert Weniger	Henry Goetzman	Albert S. Charles
P. Weber	Silas O. Weniger	Gerhard A. Ellestad
Charles Wichman	Howard T. Young	Jules A. Hagstrom
Louis P. Herzberger	Edward G. Weden	William M. Friederich, Jr.
John J. L. Friederich	William H. Stackel	Joseph Martin
Phillip Schaefer	David G. Thulin	Nathaniel G. West
Louis P. Beck	Carl Goeddertz	Paul J. W. Miller
Edwin Englehardt	Frederick Schlottman	Elmer G. A. Sahs

SUNDAY SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

William Arnold (1875-76)	Rev. M. Walz (1916-17)
John Miller (1876-85)	J. George Meier (1917)
Philip Schaefer (1885-1902)	(assistant 1916, and 1917-19)
Dr. F. F. Fry (1902-09)	David Chindblom (1917-19)
(Philip Schaefer, assistant to 1904.	William H. Stackel (1919-21)
Charles Reuter, assistant to 1909)	Rev. F. R. Knubel (1921-27)
William H. Stackel (1909-16)	Wilmer H. Hartwig (1927-)



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