

First Lutheran Church HISTORY...

In 1852, Janesville was a growing city of some 4,800 people and known as one of the best farming sections of the Midwest. A small group of Norwegian Lutherans gathered together to form a congregation. From 1852 to 1872 the congregation met in area homes and Protestant chapels. It was under the leadership of Rev. Claus F. Magelssen that the first church was built on the corner of Madison and Laurel Avenue on the west side of Janesville at a cost of \$2,500.00.

Pastor Magelssen's departure in 1881 brought Rev. Thorvald Thorvildsen who also served the Orfordville congregation. During this time, Sunday School began using the English language. A choir began in 1897 and the Young People's Society in 1904. It wasn't until 1907 that the congregation had its own pastor when Rev. Wilford A. Johnson was installed. By 1910, the congregation numbered 136 people.

In 1913, the first ordination service was held for Thorvald C. Thorson who served the congregation for the next 15 years. During his service the church grew rapidly and it became necessary to build a larger more modern house of worship. In 1925 a new brown brick church was erected on the corner of North Jackson and Ravine Street which housed a congregation of 420 and by 1927, 535 people called First Lutheran Church their church home.

The great depression hit the area but the congregation grew in spite of the fact that many members were without jobs or money. By 1942, we had grown to 900 members and the Rev. Myron C. Austinson led more continued growth whereby there were now 1,565 members by 1948. It was clear that a yet larger building was necessary and the congregation embarked on an expansion program that brought us to the facility we are currently occupying.

A \$700,000 lannon stone church was built here on eleven acres and was dedicated on September 11, 1955 with a membership of 2,116. In 1956 the Rev. Sylvan R. Moe was installed and after 8 years of service, another great need was acknowledged and a \$450,000 educational unit was added. By 1977, the 125th anniversary of the church, the membership had grown to 3,421 and was considered one of the largest churches in the city. In 125 years of activity, 13 pastors, 5 assistant pastors, 7 associate pastors and 8 interns had led our church to a growing Lutheran faith that would stand the test of time.

Since the late 70's other pastors have served our congregation including Senior pastors - Rev. Moe, Rev. Huff, and Rev. Melvin along with several associates. Members have come and gone, but the ministry of First Lutheran Church remains and we continually pray that our facility and our people will reach people locally, nationally and globally.

In ~1995 the construction of two large Senior Living Apartments consisting of 86 units was erected on the property. The parsonage was converted into an adult daycare facility run by Lutheran Social Services and Cedar Acres. Lutheran Social Services of Southern Wisconsin is now housed on the third floor of our building where assistance is given to people of all age, race, religion and need. A childcare (Child's First) also operates out of First Lutheran Church caring daily for 55 children ages infant through four. Other support groups meet throughout the week such as recovery groups, grief groups, Weight Watchers, ECHO theatre productions, 4-H, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and more. We've assisted the Rock County 4-H fair with parking for several years and have made the fair a community opportunity to know us through our food booth, emergency shelter and parking.

The future of First Lutheran Church is unknown, but the faith that has carried us more than 150 years is guided by faithful people, strong leadership and grace. We hope you've chosen to continue to make history with the members of First Lutheran Church that will make our ministry a legacy of faith!