

## THE HISTORY OF ST. PAUL CONGREGATION 1862 - 2012

More than a hundred years ago immigrants from various parts of Germany arrived in this community. They established homes at Newport, Woodland (Willowdell), Webster and other parts of this community. But there was one need that all of them had and that was to worship God. They wanted to thank Him for bringing them safely to the land they had heard so much about. So they gathered in their homes or in barns and they conducted services. They praised God for having been with them on their journey and thanked Him for the land that they could call their own, thus worshipping as they chose.

At first, one of them conducted their services but soon they felt the need of someone to lead them. So they were glad when the circuit riders became available. The first one mentioned in our records is Rev. John G. Schaefer who was serving other churches in Darke and Shelby Counties. He at first tried to form a congregation at Newport but it seems that the response was not enough to encourage him to continue there. He then came to Woodland (Willowdell) and on March 8, 1862, a constitution was written and adopted.

The first elected officers were Elder, Justinus Oehrtman and Michael Metzger, Trustee, Adolph Stiefel; and Deacon, Christoph Beyreis. The constitution was signed by 38 members. But before that time the rites of the Church and the Sacraments were administered. The first baptism recorded was that of a daughter born to Mr. and Mrs. Adolph Christoph Stiefel on January 12, 1859. The Sacrament of the Altar was first celebrated on June 15, 1862, with 30 persons receiving Communion. The first marriage performed was that of Justinus Simon and Barbara Ettinger on March 25, 1866. On October 11, 1862 funeral services were held for George Zacharias, but a monument on the cemetery states that John Nicholas Kelch was buried there in 1855. The cemetery is located one-half mile east of Willowdell and was deeded to the congregation November 27, 1861, by Justinus Oehrtman, Andrew Froebe and Catherine Froebe.

The first church was a frame edifice which was purchased from a disorganized congregation near Versailles, torn down and re-erected at the present site. It was built in 1866. In 1868 a log parsonage was built which was replaced by a frame building in 1878.

Rev. Schaefer and Rev. C. Kraemer and Rev. Bundenthall, served the congregation until 1871 when Rev. G.G. Sutter was called. He served until the fall of 1877. On March 30, 1878, a call was sent to Rev. Wm. Luedeman under the direction of Rev. Dingeldein. On June 23, 1878, it was decided to build a frame parsonage with four rooms and let the log parsonage be sold. On January 1, 1881, the church was destroyed by fire. Some of our former members left St. Paul to organize their own congregation near North Star. Pastor Luedeman served both congregations.

The congregation appointed a committee on January 9 to find the relative cost between a frame and brick church. The committee reported its findings on January 23 and they recommended that, although a frame church would cost less; a brick church should be built. A building committee consisting of Jacob Schellhase, Christ Zacharias, John Stiefel, Christ Simon, Valentine Oehrtman and Henry Ehlers was appointed. The brick were hauled from Minster on bobsleds that winter. That fall a church 50 feet long and 30 feet wide was dedicated. The cost was \$1,474.86. This church was heated by two box stoves and fuel was wood that could be had for the taking. A furnace was installed in 1937. Every winter day was set to cut fuel for the church and a parsonage. The church was built on Lot No. 25, which was purchased from Joseph and Elizabeth Carson on May 4, 1864, for \$25. This is on the corner of High and Chestnut Streets.

In 1887 Rev. F. W. Loewenstein was called as pastor. The first organ was bought at this time and Pastor Loewenstein was the organist. On February 17, 1889, it was decided to build an addition to the parsonage which was used for school purposes. The pastors here taught a summer school and for several years every day of the regular school term of the winter. The name Willowdell was used for the first time in the records on November 30, 1879. On January 10, 1892, a call was sent to Rev. Eugene Schmidt to serve this congregation at a salary of \$300. Rev. Schmidt also served as organist. On September 25, 1892, a call was sent to Rev. Hugo Willert. Clara Willert was appointed organist at this time. Others who served the congregation in this capacity were Sophia Zacharias, Mary Border, William Althoff, Jeannette Wulber, Jacqueline Stiefel, Margery Banks and our present organist, Caroline Schutz. Mr. Althoff served for 55 years.

On May 31, 1896, it was decided that English services were to be held every four weeks. On July 26, 1896, a call was sent to Rev. Emil Krueger. On November 22, 1896, permission was given to Rev. Krueger to give instruction in the English language. The German was

discontinued altogether during the pastorate of Rev. W.W. Wernle. Because of ill health Rev. Krueger asked for his release which was granted to him February 6, 1902. At this meeting it was decided to unite with Emmanuel Congregation at Versailles and give Rev. Carl Betz, who was pastor there, a call to serve both congregations. On September 20, 1904, the call was sent to Rev. H.D. Tableman, but his health did not allow him to serve us very long and he was released on September 2, 1905. On October 1, 1905, Rev. William Spiegel was called to be our pastor.

On February 11, 1906, it was decided to build a tower to the church and enlarge the north end by building an altar niche and sacristy. The brick necessary for this were hauled on bobsleds from Fort Loramie and dedication services were held in the fall of that year. The church had been beautified by installing stained glass windows, a new altar and pulpit and a bell pealed forth an invitation to everyone to come and worship the Lord. On January 26, 1908, it was decided to erect a school building. On August 8, 1909, a Hinners pipe organ was bought for the sum of \$750. On November 20, 1910, Rev. J.C. Einfalt was called as pastor.

The records of our congregation were kept in the German language through the year 1917. The secretaries up to that time were J.C. Schilling, Johann Bruening, J.A. Martin, G. Frederick Trittschuh, and F.H. Althoff. Three sons of the congregation entered the ministry and dedicated their lives to God's service. Rev. M.C. Hecht, who served at Marion and Dayton, Ohio, Rev. F.J. Schellhase, at Pomeroy, Mt. Healthy and Youngstown, Ohio; and Rev. G.A. Schellhase at Coldwater, Ohio and Detroit, Michigan.

The fiftieth anniversary of our congregation was celebrated in 1912 with Rev. Loewenstein and Rev. Speigel as guest speakers. On January 19, 1919, a call was sent to F.J. Mittermaier, who was to graduate from the seminary in June. Although Rev. Mittermaier received numerous calls, he remained here as pastor until August 17, 1930, when a release was granted to serve St. Jacob's congregation at Anna. On January 1, 1920, it was decided to build a new parsonage and to sell the old one.

This is the parsonage that is in use now and it has been improved several times since. In 1986 the bathroom fixtures were replaced and storm windows were installed. In 1921 we contracted with the Ft. Loramie Light and Power Company to furnish electricity for the church and parsonage. The duplex envelope system of financing was introduced in 1923. On October 26, 1930, a call was extended to Rev. W.W. Wernle. He served until September 1, 1944, longer than any other pastor. Rev.

Wernle not only led us in spiritual matters, but also helped to keep our church properties in good condition. In 1937, the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our church was celebrated. Guest speakers were Rev. F.J. Schellhase, Rev. Fred Roepcke, and Rev. G.A. Schellhase. Rev. Ralph Ground sang a solo at the evening service. On September 5, 1944, Rev. J.C. Pilch was called as pastor. He served here until January, 1950.

A building fund was started with gifts of \$1,000 from Mr. and Mrs. Edward Utz and \$933.50 from the estate of Mr. and Mrs. August Ehlers. On March 14, 1950, a call was sent to Rev. Ralph House. The 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary was celebrated August 10, 1952 and former pastors, including Rev. W.W. Wernle, F.J. Mittermaier, J.C. Pilch and Wilfred Bockleman participated.

A planning or building committee was appointed February 9, 1953. They recommended we build a new church and this was approved by the congregation March 22, 1954.

We started building our new church on Lot No. 24, purchased from Adeline Greer on July 7, 1875 for \$20. Lots No. 22 and 23 were purchased December 19, 1896, for \$15 from the heirs of David Christian. They are now being used for parking. The west side of land belonging to the congregation, a tract 29 x 4 rods, was purchased from Daniel B. and Elizabeth Kershner in 1870 for \$225.

Members of the committee were William Schutz, Henry Grisez, Leonard Althoff, Lester Wulber, Louis Hecht, and Ralph Stiefel. Under the vigorous leadership of our building committee and Pastor House, we prayerfully began our work. The plans were made by Freytag and Freytag of Sidney. Louis Hecht was named chairman and Henry Grisez, who was experienced in construction work, was named building supervisor. No fund-raising schemes were employed and all that was needed was an appeal to Christian people to do something for their Lord and Savior and it seemed that the funds and labor necessary to get the work done was always at hand. No matter how much help was needed it was always supplied by members of the congregation and also by others who were not members. All the labor except the labor of laying the brick and blocks was supplied in this way. The cornerstone was laid with appropriate services September 12, 1954. A Wurlitzer organ, new pews, altar, lectern and art windows were installed. And so with thankful hearts our congregation gathered on September 18, 1955, in gratitude to God who had so wonderfully guided us, to dedicate this church in His name and His service, a debt-free church.

Many things have been added since that time. The kitchen has been furnished, the balcony floor was raised, the aisles were carpeted, a

sound-proof ceiling was put on in the basement, and tile on the basement floor. Liberal contributions to our building and cemetery funds have been made by members and non-members.

On October 8, 1955, Pastor House was released to serve Zion Lutheran Church at Loudenville. On April 15, 1956, a call was sent to Pastor David Frey of Olean, Indiana. He served St. Paul's Congregation as pastor for 4 years. Mrs. Frey was choir director. On November 21, 1961 a call was sent to Rev. Stephen Northup of Bucyrus, Ohio. He, with his family, arrived here in January of 1962. It was during his pastorate that St. Paul celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary on September 23 and September 30, 1962.

*This part of the history (1862-1962) was written by  
Albert Schellhase.*

Pastor Northup continued to serve St. Paul until September, 1964, when he accepted a call to go to St. Paul's, Bellevue, Ohio. St. Paul was without a pastor until June 1965.

At this time, John Stevens, a Capital University Seminary graduate, was called and he came to serve. During his stay, the pastor's study and office in the church were decorated and equipped with office furniture. The new *Service Book and Hymnal* was adopted for use by our congregation. He left St. Paul to serve St. Paul's, Haskins, Ohio in October, 1968.

In July, 1969, Pastor George Keeler, a native of Barberton, Ohio and a Capital University Seminary graduate, began his pastorate at St. Paul. While waiting for him to come, aluminum siding was put on the parsonage and the ceilings in the downstairs rooms of the parsonage were lowered and the rooms painted. In 1972, a stainless steel cross was placed on the church bell tower as a memorial to Albert Schellhase. Pastor Keeler accepted the call to serve at East Palestine, Ohio in August 1975. The redecorating of the church sanctuary, including wallpapering the walls, painting the windows and registers, and laying beautiful new blue carpeting over the entire floor are was completed in September 1975.

On January 4, 1976, Pastor David Meyer and wife, Donna, arrived at St. Paul from Palermo, North Dakota, to serve in St. Paul's parish. Mementoes from the cornerstone of the old brick church and a few new ones were put in a new stainless steel box made by Frank Kuhn. A Rededication Service was held in November, 1980, 25 years after the dedication of the cornerstone in 1955, and this box was placed in the cornerstone of the present church. It was decided this box was to be

opened and its contents revealed at some future date. On March 6, 1976, St. Paul enlarged its property ownership through the acquisition of lots #11, #12 and #13 from Sylvester and Ethel Wulber. New storm windows were installed in the church in February 1982.

In 1902, Emmanuel Lutheran Church of Versailles, Ohio joined St. Paul Lutheran Church of Willowdell in a 2-point parish, both churches being served by the same pastor. They remained this way until August 26, 1984, when Emmanuel had a closing service. The church was sold to the Baptists with Emmanuel's members finding church homes elsewhere.

Retired Pastor Willis Yarian and wife, Marcella, came from Coldwater, Ohio to serve St. Paul congregation in September 1984. While with us he organized our church membership roll which resulted in 132 baptized members and 104 confirmed members. During his stay at St. Paul he and Marcella created a spiritual atmosphere that served our congregation well. At this time St. Paul's parsonage was completely renovated and redecorated under the capable leadership of Kenneth Wulber. New windows, new electrical wiring, and light fixtures were installed. Installation of walls and new dry walling was done along with wallpapering and painting and redecorating the walls. New bathroom fixtures in the upstairs bathroom and downstairs shower were installed. New kitchen cupboards and a new kitchen door replaced the old ones.

New carpet was laid in the living room and dining area and new drapes and curtains decorated the windows. All the woodwork trim and doors were removed, refinished and put back again. On the outside of the parsonage some needed painting was done. The roof was repaired, aluminum siding was put on where needed, and the basement door entrance was enclosed. The back porch was cleaned, painted and other needed work done to it. Practically all the labor was donated by the members of St. Paul's congregation and most of the furnishings were donated by church members. "Thanks" is given to those people who did anything or in anyway helped give our parsonage the "new look."

On September 1, 1986, Ilene Mattson arrived to make St. Paul's newly decorated parsonage her home. She came to us from Trinity Seminary, Columbus, Ohio to serve as Intern Pastor for one year. She fulfilled her duties under the leadership and supervision of Pastor Arnold Behrends of St. Paul Lutheran Church, North Star, Ohio. Preparations were made to celebrate the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Willowdell, on June 28, 1987. Vicar Mattson left us on August 16, 1987 and Vicar Rick Stieve from Trinity Seminary, Columbus started serving St. Paul in late August, 1987.

A church directory with colored photos of all church members was printed and distributed throughout the congregation in 1988. Also in 1988, our youth group along with St. Paul, North Star visited Mackinaw Island, Mackinaw, Michigan.

We want to “thank” our present church organist, Caroline Schutz, for faithfully serving our congregation in this capacity since May 1, 1955.

For these 125 years, St. Paul may not have built up as large a membership as she would have liked, but St. Paul has willingly and earnestly brought the message of salvation to the people of this community. Through all its sorrows, griefs, hard and difficult times, it has survived, because God has been with us. He has bestowed His love and blessings on all of us. We pray that we may continue to be blessed by God, Our Father, in the years to come. And in return, we will continue to thank God for the many blessings He has bestowed upon us.

*This part of the history (1963-1987) was written by  
Carl and Rebecca Schellhase.*

St. Paul continued to be served by Vicar Rick Stieve until August 1988. He was replaced by George Thum from Evangelical Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio as Vicar in late August 1988. Vicar George Thum came to Willowdell with his wife, Martha and children, George Jr., Jacob, Aaron and Joel. During the Thum’s service at St. Paul’s material was donated and Martha Thum headed up sewing sessions to make pew pads for the sanctuary pews. Vicar Thum served until August 1989.

Jean Sigman came from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina and served as St. Paul’s fourth Vicar. Jean and her husband, Doug and four children, Jennifer, Rebecca, Heather and Martin arrived in late August 1989. During Vicar Sigman’s year of service, a beautiful large oak cross was donated and added to the chancel of the church as a memorial to Leona C. Oehrtman. The cross was dedicated to the glory of God on June 3, 1990. Vicar Sigman served St. Paul until August 1990.

All four Vicars each served St. Paul for one year as an Intern Pastor and were under the leadership and supervision of Pastor Arnold Behrends of St. Paul Lutheran Church of North Star, Ohio.

These four years were interesting and learning experience for all. Each Vicar brought a unique style of leadership and knowledge of God’s word. Their direction and guidance helped to maintain our goals for the church.

After Vicar Sigman left St. Paul in August 1990, the Congregation decided that a part-time pastor would better fulfill our needs. Pastor Hilbert Piel accepted the call as our part-time pastor. Pastor Piel had been deeply involved with rural churches and the rural scene for many years and came to St. Paul on November 4, 1990, spending 25 hours a week at Willowdell on parish work. Pastor Piel was very active in introducing education to the Congregation. He taught *Life With God* classes and a two year Bethel Bible Teachers Training Class. The Bethel Teachers Training Classes were followed with a Bethel Bible Series class taught to the congregation in 1998.

Pastor Piel spearheaded a committee to review and update St. Paul’s Church Constitution. A newly revised and updated Church Constitution was presented and adopted by the Congregation in 1992. This revised Constitution provided for the formation of an Executive Committee and outlined duties of all Church Council members.

In 1991 the church’s official name for continued corporation existence was changed from the old German name: THE EVANGELISCHE LUTHERISCHE SAINT PAULUS GERMEINDE to ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF WILLOWDELL, YORKSHIRE, OHIO.

St. Paul’s Congregation has always been especially generous with gifts to the church or supporting the many projects to maintain our church. A new piano and choir robes were generously donated and dedicated to the glory of God in 1991. In 1993, green altar paraments, oil candles for the candelabras, communion and advent wreath were dedicated to the glory of God. In 2001, blue altar paraments were also given as a memorial and a Paschal candle in 2002. St. Paul has been active in mission work in the community by helping people and causes where needed through assistance and fund raising projects.

The Congregation in 1994 approved changes to our service by having the Sacrament of Holy Communion the first and third Sundays of every month.

In 1995, St. Paul’s Congregation embarked on many projects to enhance the accessibility and maintenance of the church facility. A new back door, window wells, sidewalks and driveway were installed. The Congregation also approved a new asphalt shingle roof on the Sanctuary. The new roof was completed in 1998. New etched glass front doors to the Sanctuary were installed in January 2000. St. Paul Congregation began construction and installation of an elevator on the east exterior wall with the doors opening into the narthex and the basement to start in September 2002. Redecorating of the church interior was completed with

new wallpaper in the sanctuary, narthex and overflow room. The church office was also painted and carpeted. A wooden cross carved from the original church doors by the Adult Sunday School Class was hung on the narthex wall. A project to refinish all the church sanctuary pews was completed in 2001.

The St. Paul Lutheran Church newsletter, *The Messenger* became a reality in 1996 with the newsletter prepared on a monthly basis with news items, projects, and letters from the Pastor and members of other church happenings. *The Messenger* is distributed to all members and surrounding churches as a means of communicating the mission of St. Paul's Congregation.

Due to the congregational size it was decided that two sentences needed to be deleted from our Constitution to allow members to hold various offices back to back. The Congregation approved these changes in 1997 (ratification at the 1998 Congregational Meeting). The Articles of Incorporation were repaired and reframed for display through a generous donation.

The Reverend Carl Johnson held an Evangelism Workshop at St. Paul in the spring of 1998. This community project headed by St. Paul was held for all churches connected with the Versailles Council of Churches. The workshop was a preliminary step in preparing a community church census survey that would provide information for the churches to assist the un-churched in finding a house of worship.

Pastor Piel retired in June of 1999 and the Congregation held a special retirement dinner in his honor. Pastor Piel served and guided our church in a devoted loving way bringing about many necessary changes to make this church stronger and more able to serve the Lord.

Pastors from the district synod office supplied pastoral requirements. Our emergency pastoral needs were to be handled by Pastor Laura Shreffler of North Star Lutheran Church and she was then appointed to serve as our interim pastor until we determined how we were going to fill our pastoral vacancy. A shared ministry with St. Paul Lutheran Church of North Star was discussed and investigated as to its feasibility. The Congregation voted unanimously to approve a shared ministry with St. Paul Lutheran Church of North Star. The parsonage was to be rented since a pastor would no longer use it.

Our worship service time was changed in January 2000 to 9:00 a.m. with Sunday School at 10:15 a.m. The Rev. Suzanne Dillahunt installed Pastor Laura Shreffler on January 16, 2000. St. Paul Congregation also voted to stand on the first verse of the opening hymn.

A Spiritual Gifts Seminar by Pastor Neil Bosse was held on February 24, 2001 with a large attendance from various churches in the community. Pastor Laura Shreffler followed with a Spiritual Gifts Bible Study.

In August 2001, a special reception was held for Hans Thilo of Germany. Hans was from an area of Germany that many of St. Paul church member's ancestors had migrated. He was very gracious and patient answering all questions for a very large audience.

Saturday evening services began on November 3, 2001 at 6:00 p.m. with Pastor Laura Shreffler officiating. The additional Saturday evening worship service uses the *With One Voice* and *Word and Praise* hymnals.

A committee was established to begin preparation for the celebration of the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Paul Lutheran Church founding on November 17, 2002.

*This part of the history (1988-2002) was written by  
Doug and Pat Crowell.*

St. Paul Lutheran Church - Willowdell continued its history of being a faithful House of God. It has continually provided the message of God and His salvation to the people of the surrounding community. While our membership has not grown the way we had envisioned, we place our hope and trust in God to continue provide for this church and all its members. We pray that God will continue to direct our paths in our service to Him.

St. Paul's through its benefit meals have continued to provide aid to those needing assistance in the community. These meals are held four times a year to provide funds for someone in need or to a special church project.

Pastor Laura Shreffler has continued to serve St. Paul's congregation faithfully as its Pastor. The church provides two worship services, one on Saturday evenings at 6:00 p.m. and the main worship service on Sunday at 9:00 a.m.

*The Messenger* Newsletter continues to be prepared and distributed on a bi-monthly basis to all members as a means of providing the news and forthcoming events of the congregation.

The congregation endeavored to make the church and its facilities accessible for all. The elevator was completed in early 2003 and dedicated to the Glory of God on April 27, 2003. The upstairs restroom

off the narthex was remodeled to allow access for anyone attending church.

An oak communion table was donated to the church for Saturday evening service use on January 25, 2003.

A hand-carved processional cross was dedicated on February 13, 2005. This cross was meticulously carved by St. Paul's own woodcarvers. They work diligently to provide this beautiful cross for our services. The congregation greatly appreciated their efforts.

Our members continued to support changes in the church facility. A new exterior sign board was purchased and erected in front of the church in 2006. A white stone cross was erected on the exterior wall of the elevator and new white altar paraments were given as memorials. The sign, stone cross and white altar paraments were dedicated to the glory of our Lord on November 5, 2006.

The new Lutheran hymnals; *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, were purchased and used for the first time on February 2, 2007. Hymnal racks were made and installed on the back of the sanctuary pews by church members

In 2008, the church basement walls were repainted and decorated.

We held a celebration for Pastor Piel for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his ordination on September 27, 2009. Family, friends of Pastor Piel and congregation members celebrated this special occasion with a brunch after the church service.

Our faithful organist, Caroline Schutz retired on May 30, 2010, after serving St. Paul's for 55 years. Caroline glorified our Lord with her God given talent.

A Community Prayer and Praise event was held in the church sanctuary on May 1, 2011. Special praise music was performed by the Schlecty family. All in attendance enjoyed the music and praise of our Lord. A carry-in meal followed the event.

The basement restroom renovation began in May, 2011 and was completed in December, 2011. The newly remodeled basement restroom is now more accessible for all during church basement functions. The

congregation continues to review and update the church to make it more convenient and comfortable for everyone attending St. Paul's.

St. Paul Lutheran Church stepped into the technological age by having a website established on October 13, 2011. The site was designed to provide our church information to anyone searching for a church home. The website address is [www.stpaulwillowdell.com](http://www.stpaulwillowdell.com). We appreciate the help and support of the site's Web-Designer, Chris Hecht.

Memorial funds were designated for new flooring in the basement. New carpet and tile flooring was installed in January 2012.

Current accompanists for our church services are: Arianne Henry, Rebecca Shreffler, and Alex Niekamp.

A new church directory for St. Paul Lutheran Church is planned for early 2012, while a committee has been established to plan for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of St. Paul Lutheran Church founding on April 29, 2012.

*This part of the history (2003-2012) was written  
by Doug and Pat Crowell.*