

**FIRST
LUTHERAN CHURCH**

TORONTO
Ontario

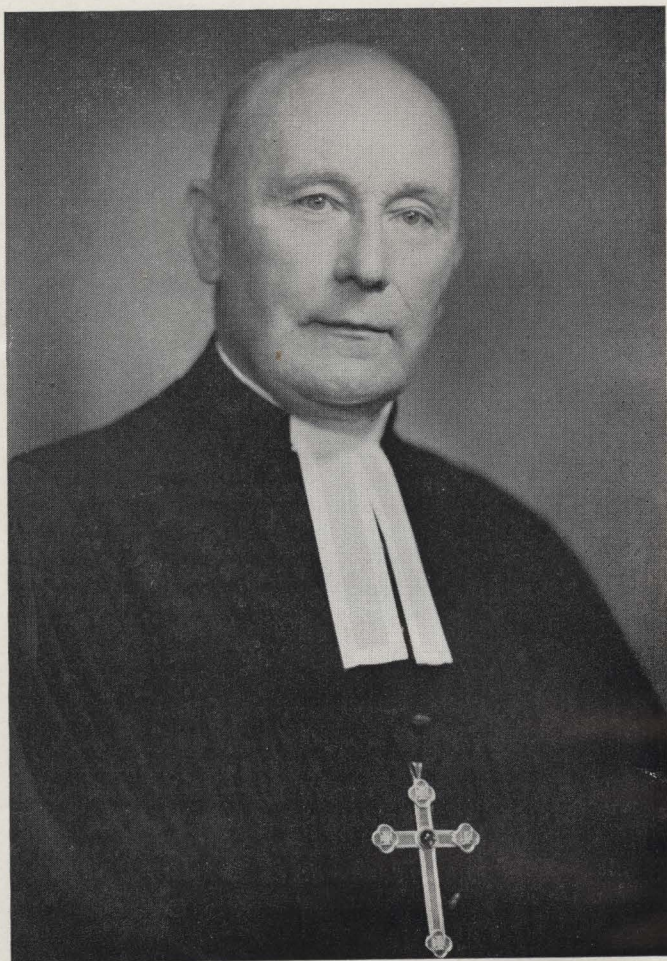


CENTENNIAL

1851 - 1951



Chancel of First Lutheran Church, Toronto.



(Photograph by Ashley & Crippen)

Pastor A. Grunwald, Ph. D.

HISTORY

of

First Lutheran Church

Toronto, Ont.



1850. In the year 1850, before Christmas, several German Lutherans in Toronto agreed to meet every Sunday in one of their homes for divine worship. They read a sermon from an old German Lutheran "Predigtbuch" (sermon book), and concluded with a prayer and hymn. This worship was continued till the spring of 1851, when the attention of the President of the Pittsburgh Lutheran Synod, Rev. W. A. Passavant, was directed to the small Lutheran group in Toronto. He requested Pastor C. F. DIEHL, of Vaughan Township, Ont. (now the parish of Sherwood-Unionville), to survey the Lutheran field in Toronto. On March 23, 1851, Pastor Diehl conducted here the first Lutheran Service (in the First Congregational Church, Bond Street). Approximately 20 persons were present. After the Service it was decided to assemble every Sunday afternoon for worship. Pastor Diehl promised to conduct Services once a month. On the other Sundays Mr. H. van der Smissen held reading Services. Permission was obtained to use for this purpose the Public School building on Crookshank St. During the summer of 1851 Holy Communion was administered for the first time. The formal organization took place on August 9, 1851, when an excellent Constitution was adopted. This document was drawn up in English and German parallel columns, on 57 pages, in beautiful writing. In the preamble it states: "We, whose names are here underwritten, believing that the object for which the Church was established by Jesus Christ, its Divine founder, can only be secured in an associated capacity, form ourselves into a Christian Church. In doing this we receive the Augsburg Confession (unaltered), the Symbolical Books, these great Symbols of the glorious Reformation, as the bond of Union in Faith and Practice . . . But we acknowledge above all human Creeds the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only infallible and sufficient Rule of Faith and Practice, and hereby pledge ourselves to God and to each other to be governed by the following Constitution". Chapter 1, sec. 1, states: "This Church shall be known by the name of THE FIRST EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF TORONTO". — The Constitution was signed by Pastor Charles F. Diehl, Adam Flath, Christian Andreas Schiek, Johann Kirsten, Charles Bender, Carl William Thomas,
- 1851.

Philipp Bender. In a few weeks the following names were added: John Schaefer, Anton Pfaff, Johannes Schlenker, Charles Stephan, Gottlieb Hund, and Joh. Fredrich Schwegler.—

1852. On January 1, 1852, the first Church Council was elected: Adam Flath (elder) and Carl W. Thomas (deacon). In November of the same year three new members signed the Constitution: Louis Joseph Privat, Johann Quehl, and Heinrich Hertel.

1853. In the spring of 1853 the congregation decided to transfer its place of worship to the Temperance Hall. In the summer of the same year Pastor C. F. Diehl resigned. At a congregational meeting, held on July 11, it was decided to make inquiries concerning a suitable site for a church building.

After the departure of Pastor Diehl the congregation invited Pastor JEREMIAH FISHBURN, of Markham, Ont., to conduct periodical divine Services. He accepted the invitation and agreed to preach in Toronto on every fourth Sunday of the

1854. month, beginning October 23, 1853. In the following year a small reed-organ ("Melodion") was purchased for £6.2 sh. On September 4 the first Confirmation was held; the catechumens were: Augustus Pfaff, Helene Pfaff, and Caroline Pfaff.



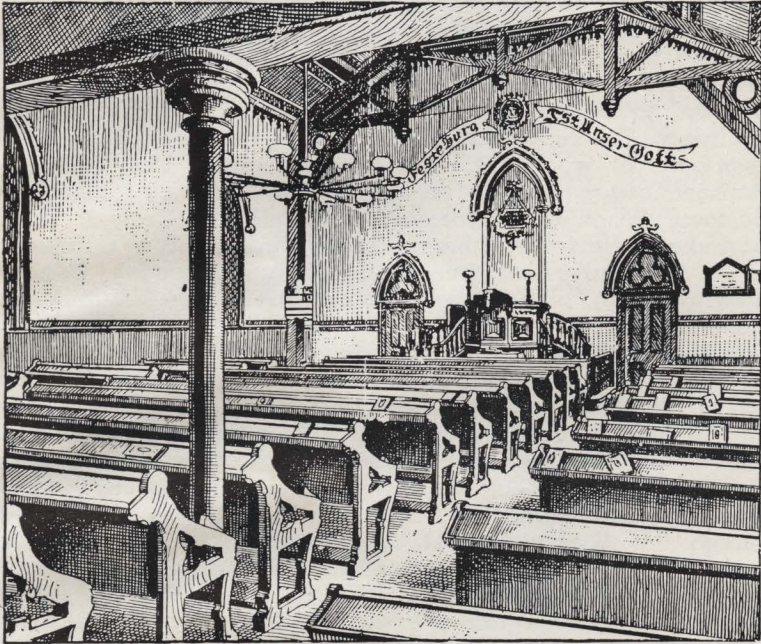
Original Church (1856)

1855. On April 6, 1855, the congregation decided to purchase from Mr. Alfred H. St. Germain the property on 116 Bond Street, at the price of £328. The first trustees were now elected: Anton Pfaff, Carl W. Thomas, and H. van der Smissen. Later, in June, a delegate was sent to the convention of the Pittsburgh Synod (at Canton, Ohio) to plead for a Pastor for Toronto.

Pastor GUSTAV REICHE came and preached here on June 17. On July 1 he was elected and called, and on July 22 installed by Pastor Fishburn. He thus became the first resident and full-time Pastor of this congregation.

1856. In January, 1856, a contract for the erection of a church edifice, at the cost of £735, was authorized by the congregation. The plan called for a wooden structure, 67 by 37 ft., including a parsonage at the west end of the church. The parsonage was ready in six months, but various difficulties delayed the completion of the church. In the meantime pastor Reiche resigned and conducted on November 30 (1856) his valedictory Service. Thereupon Mr. C. H. Gilbert, a candidate of theology, served the vacant congregation till January 11, 1857.

Due to an unexpected considerable increase in the building cost, the small congregation faced now a grave financial crisis. To relieve this situation, the faithful trustee G. van der Smissen, although 80 years of age, went to Germany and collected in Altona \$140.00. This was sufficient to cover the most pressing building debts. A few weeks later this loyal friend and servant of our church was called by the Lord to receive his eternal award. — On August 23 (1857) the new church



Interior of original Church (1856)

was consecrated by Pastor G. Kempe, of Rochester, N.Y. About 150 people attended the Service.

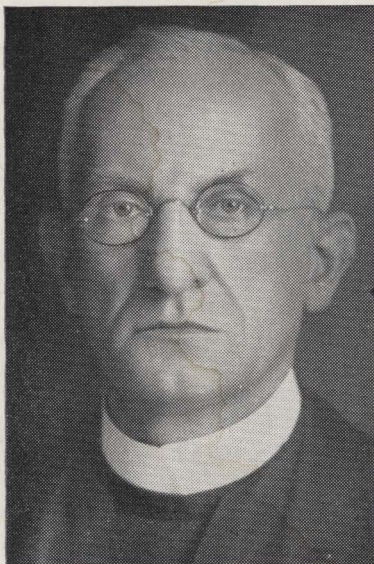
On September 23 (1857) Pastor C. F. W. RECHENBERG, of Albany, N.Y., was unanimously elected and called. On October 18 he preached his inaugural sermon. — During his long pastorate (1857-1870) he organized a Sunday School, founded St. Paul's congregation in Hamilton, Ont., and served as president of the recently established Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Canada.

1860. However, the financial difficulties of the parish, due to building debts, continued. In order to relieve the congregation from the continuous severe pressure of indebtedness, Miss Elizabeth van der Smissen offered to go to Europe to appeal for assistance. On April 19 (1860) the Pastor and Church Council (Jacob Peter Wagner, Christian Traugott, William Wagner, H. van der Smissen, Chas. Boekh) issued to her a credential book of 186 pages. It contains a picture of the church, a brief history of the congregation, and numerous testimonials by outstanding Protestant clergymen of Toronto (Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Congregationalist). Later many more testimonials were added by prominent churchmen in Germany, England, Scotland, and Switzerland. The historical introduction contains some interesting data. It states that the German population of Toronto increased from a few families in 1850 to about 1000 persons in 1857. Due to a prevailing "depression" this number decreased, by 1860, to about 500 Protestants and several hundred Roman Catholics. The congregation had at this time about 100 baptized members, of whom 51 were communicants. Miss van der Smissen commenced to collect first in Germany (Elberfeld, Barmen, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, M.-Gladbach, Crefeld, Bonn, Mannheim, Heidelberg, Berlin, Schleswig, Hamburg, Hannover, a.o.) She proceeded then to Strasbourg (France), Geneva (Switzerland), and finally to Great Britain. In England and Scotland she collected at Hull, London, Edinburgh, Leith, Dundee, Perth, Glasgow, and Manchester. She collected a total of \$1824.84. This sum included 1500 Prussian "Thaler" (£250), £148 from England, and £100 from Scotland. When she returned from Europe, she was officially welcomed by the congregation at an impressive celebration on September 18 (1861). A large number of English clergymen of the city were present, e.g., Rev. Dr. Burns, Rev. Dr. Little, Rev. Dr. Jennings, Rev. Gregg, Rev. Sanson, Rev. W. Reid, a.o. Mr. H. van der Smissen gave a detailed account of his daughter's mission in Europe, and Professor E. Schlueter, of Upper Canada College, on behalf of the congregation, presented Miss van der Smissen with a beautiful Bible which bore a heavy silver plate with an appropriate inscription. This Bible was later, after the death of Miss van der Smissen, returned by her family, and is re-

- tained in the archives of the church. The parish now liquidated all its debts, and the remaining \$125.00 were invested in government bonds. On May 31, 1863, the first pipe organ was donated by Mr. Johann Betz.
- 1863.
1870. On April 2, 1870, Pastor Rechenberg resigned. During the ensuing vacancy Pastors C. Stark and G. Schmidt served the parish. A call was then issued to Pastor JACOB CORNELIUS SCHIMMEL, who commenced his pastorate here on June 11,
1871. 1871. To the consternation of the congregation he resigned after a few months, on October 8, 1871. — There was another long vacancy, during which candidate FR. JELDEN conducted the Services. After his ordination he became formally pastor of the parish on October 1, 1872. On this day the "Frauenverein" (Ladies' Aid Society) was organized, with 9 ladies as charter members. The total expenditures of the congregation during this year were \$663.61. — On August 31 (1874) Pastor Jelden resigned, and discontinued his pastorate here on September 16. The congregation immediately extended a call to a former pastor, Rev. J. C. SCHIMMEL, of Hamilton, Ont., which he accepted on October 4. In the following year (1875), on February 3, a Young People's Society was organized.
1876. 1876 the congregation celebrated the 25th Anniversary of its foundation. — On August 7, 1877, Rev. R. von PIRCH became Pastor Schimmel's successor. He introduced English evening Services, especially for the benefit of the young people. In
- 1877.
1878. 1878 a new organ was installed. The perennial financial difficulties became so grave at this time that the congregation was forced to take a mortgage of \$600.00 on the church building. — For the first time the Services were now advertised in the local newspapers. In 1881 The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Canada convened in our church.
- 1881.
1882. On July 5, 1882, Rev. E. GENZMER succeeded Pastor von Pirsch. During his long and fruitful ministry the parish made slow
1887. but steady progress. — In 1887 the envelope system of membership contributions was introduced. In the following year the parish seriously considered establishment of a branch congregation in the west end of the city. This project, however, did not materialize. In 1889 Mr. H. van der Smissen, one of the venerable fathers of our parish, passed away. On Sunday, November 17, after the Service, a dangerous fire caused heavy damage to the interior of the church edifice. The parish received \$1026.73 insurance compensation for the fire damage.
- 1889.
1892. In 1892 a Sunday School branch was organized in the western part of the city, in the home of Mr. A. C. Wegener. In 1893 the parish received a legacy of \$1500.00 from the late Mrs. Maria Feuerbach. This money was used to rebuild the old parsonage into the present Sunday School hall. The pastor moved into a rented house.
- 1893.

At this point reference should be made to a very interesting report about our church in "Robertson's Landmarks of Toronto", Fourth Series. With permission of the publishers, we quote (pages 550 to 556) the most important parts of the report. — "EV. LUTHERISCHE KIRCHE. Gottesdienste: Deutsch, morgens 11 Uhr; English abends 7 Uhr. Sonntags-Schule, im Sommer, morgens, 9½ Uhr; im Winter, nachmittags 3 Uhr. Sitze frei. — This is the information bulletined on a wooden shield fastened on the front of an unpretending little church . . . It is a roughcoated frame building . . . built in Gothic style, and in the plainest conceivable manner. There are two neat little porches in the front gable, between and above which is a large window . . . Under the same roof and directly connected with the church, into which it opens, is a small house used as a parsonage . . . There are two aisles in the church . . . In the middle of the room there are long, plain wooden seats, painted yellow . . .; shorter seats of the same kind are ranged on the opposite side of the aisles . . . The walls are painted, the ceiling in blue and pink stars, plentifully spread upon the panels in between the heavy trusses that hold the building intact by means of strong iron rods. The entire room is devoid of ornamentation, and is almost painfully severe in its appearance; . . . the building . . . is heated by two small stoves . . . The chancel is a very small affair, surrounded with a heavy balustrade, into which are cut two gates; within it are the altar, two cushioned arm chairs and a reading desk; with all this there is just barely room for a minister to move about. The pulpit is reached by winding stairways, at the top of which are two doors . . . during Lent the altar and pulpit are covered with black, but at other times with scarlet. It is a good piece of workmanship, substantial, massive and rather graceful; it conveys the idea of strength and firmness and solidity which is in thorough accord with German characteristics. On the wall back of the pulpit is a painted Gothic panel within which is . . . a sort of elongated Maltese cross, with pendants. On this is inscribed in German letters, 'Ehre sei Gott in der Hoehle, Friede auf Erden und den Menschen ein Wohlgefallen . . . (Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will to men).' To the right is a very fine portrait steel engraving of Martin Luther . . . To the left of the motto is a bulletin board for the hymns, and above this one half of the first words of Luther's great . . . hymn is painted in fanciful German gilt letters on a dark red scroll, the other half being on the opposite side. The words are: 'Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott' . . . the choir sits on one side, the other side being reserved for little boys. The organ is an old-style single manual with 10 stops and 19 pipes . . . The entire building seats about 225 . . . The whirling March winds of 1886 were whistling keenly . . . as the writer found his way down Bond Street to the German church . . . Promptly at 11 o'clock an organ voluntary was played, the door of the

ministers study opened, and Pastor Genzmer entered habited in a black gown . . . The minister, always called 'pas'or' in German, took his place at the altar with the service book in his hand. Following a motion of the book the congregation rose while he said, 'In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost' . . . Then a hymn was announced, the congregation sitting during the singing, and the music and its execution at once attracted and interested everyone. The hymns sung in this church were written in the 16th century, and consequently are devoid of that superficial, vapid character pertaining to the majority of modern hymns. The sentiment is always dignified, reverential . . . There is no rollicking, rickety, namby-pamby waltzing up and down the scale, but harmonious and truly musical progression with soul in it. The



Pastor P. W. Mueller



Pastor E. Hoffmann, D.D.

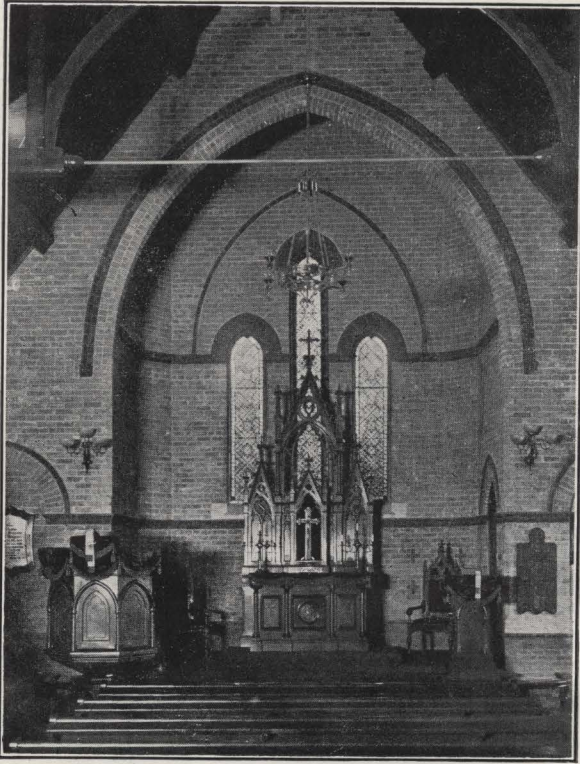
serious cast of the Germanic nature pervades the religious services . . . Everybody sang; even the little children followed the hymns and sang . . . At the conclusion of the sermon the pastor knelt by the pulpit and repeated the Lord's Prayer . . . The choir sang an anthem while the collection was being taken, the minister descended to the altar, one stanza of a hymn was sung, a short prayer said and the benediction pronounced . . . the choir again responded, and the congregation went out. There are possibly 2,500 Germans in the City of Toronto . . . very many are Roman Catholics, and the Lutheran church is therefore the only Protestant German congregation in

Toronto . . . For thirty years the little church has pursued the quiet, unobtrusive, even tenor of its way, and it has been the spiritual home of many who have gone out of its simple courts to the everlasting home". — These quotations are only a very brief extract of the lengthy report which deals with the history of the congregation, and describes in all details the first and second church edifice, the Service, the Lutheran rite, etc.

1895. On February 15, 1895, Pastor Genzmer resigned. On April 8, 1895, Rev. P. W. MUELLER was called to this parish. He realized that the old primitive wooden church building was no longer a suitable and worthy house of worship for a large city. A new church edifice was urgently needed. But the parish was small and financially very weak. Nearly all members were convinced — it could not be done. But the Pastor persevered. He succeeded in inducing Mr. Th. Heinzmann to subscribe a large contribution towards the building fund. Now the others took courage; Heinzman's example inspired them, and they rallied to the support of the building project. Thus on July 9, 1898, the corner stone was laid to the present building, which was consecrated on October 16, 1898. The dedication was headlined by the text: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace" (Haggai 2, 9). In the following years the parish developed very favourably. Two legacies, from Mr. Th. Heinzmann and Jakobi, were used to pay off the mortgage on the church. In 1901 the Synod convened in our church. In 1902 the congregation purchased a fine parsonage, the Heinzmann residence on 213 Carlton St., for \$4350. This parsonage was later sold (during the ministry of Rev. C. F. Christiansen). In 1903 alternate English and German evening Services were introduced. During the 13-year pastorate of Rev. P. W. Mueller the congregation reached the summit of its external evolution. After his appointment as professor at the University of Toronto he retired from the ministry here on March 22, 1908. Later he was called to McMaster University, and served simultaneously St. Paul's Church. On July 5, 1908, Rev. A. C. REDDEROTH, Ph.D., was called to become Rev. Mueller's successor. During his brief ministry the balance of the mortgage (\$1200) was paid off, and the present organ installed (dedicated October 2, 1910). In 1910 the Synod convened here to observe its 50th Jubilee. About 50 pastors and 25 lay delegates were present. The Synod was welcomed at the City Hall by the Acting Mayor, and later driven round the city by the courtesy of the City Council. — The Ladies' Aid Society had at this time about 90 members, and rendered considerable financial help to the parish. At a Bazaar on November 29 and 30 (1910), f.i., they raised \$950.00. — On April 21, 1912, Pastor Redderoth resigned.

1912. On November 10, 1912, Rev. E. HOFFMANN, of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Kitchener, became the Pastor of our congregation. He came at a time when an inner crisis began to weaken our parish seriously. As he tried to overcome this danger, in less than 2 years the war broke out in 1914. The Church now rapidly lost ground. The Pastor made the following entry in the Record of the Church: "The congregation experiences a crisis which threatens its very existence". This process of disintegration continued relentlessly, and the strength of the parish in all phases of its work slowly dwindled down. Towards the end of 1920 Rev. E. Hoffmann, D.D., resigned to become president of our Theological Seminary in Waterloo.

1920. Rev. E. Hoffmann's successor became Pastor C. F. CHRISTIANSEN, of Denbigh, Ont. (1920). In the first year of his ministry the Van der Smissen Memorial Parsonage was sold and replaced by the present smaller building in the east end of the city. The general disintegration of the parish continued. Only 11 children were confirmed during his time. When he resigned on March 31, 1927, the congregation seriously considered dissolution. But strongly encouraged and financially supported by the late Emil Nerlich, the parish decided on September 11, 1927, to call the present Pastor, ALBERT GRUNWALD. On October 23 he was installed by the President of the Synod, and on October 30 he preached his inaugural sermon on the text of Ezekiel 37, 1-14. As soon as sufficient parochial life and strength was rehabilitated, a large-scale Building Fund Campaign was organized, from June 16 - July 7, 1929, under the direction of the Presbyterian C.B.C. Bureau, Philadelphia, Pa. Approximately \$28,000 were subscribed in 4-year pledges.
1927. In 1930, after long negotiations, a merger was effected between our congregation and St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Glen Morris St., of which Rev. P. W. Mueller was Pastor. On May 27, 1930, our parish accepted the "Articles of Agreement" for the proposed merger, together with a new Constitution (the "model" Constitution for congregations, recommended by the United Lutheran Church). On June 12 (1930) the act of the official amalgamation took place at a joint meeting of the two congregations in our parish hall. On Sunday, June 15 (1930), the merged congregations assembled in our church for an impressive Service of thanksgiving, at which Pastor P. W. Mueller preached his farewell sermon. He followed McMaster University to Hamilton, Ont. The church edifice on Glen Morris St. was sold to the Russian Greek-Orthodox Church for \$10,000. The mortgage of over \$3,000, granted to the Russians by us at that time, has been repaid, and was used to pay off the mortgage on the parsonage.



Chancel of First Lutheran Church before 1932

1932. In 1932 the congregation decided to recondition and improve the old church edifice with the proceeds of the Building Fund. All efforts to sell the building had failed. Although the structure remained generally unchanged, many major and minor repairs, improvements, and alterations were made, for instance: new slate roof; new copper steeple-cross; new electric wiring and fixtures; new pews (from St. Paul's); new painted windows; new ceiling; new chancel appointments (marble altar, erected in memory of George Paulikat by his family; hand-painted mural decoration; reredos; offering table; prayer desk; statue of Christ; pulpit and statue canopies; communion rail; chancel panelling; hymn boards, carpet, etc.); heavy linoleum floor covering in the nave; new vestry furniture; new doors in the front of the church, vestibules, and vestry; concrete steps at both entrances; organ repaired and new motor installed; walls of building inside and outside reconditioned; all woodwork painted; parish hall and basement (including kitchen) thoroughly repaired and improved; and many other repairs and changes.

On Sunday, October 2, 1932, the rebuilt church was rededicated in a solemn Service. The President of Synod (Dr. J. H. Reble), Rev. P. W. Mueller, Rev. S. Saarinen (of the Finnish congregation), Rev. V. Bondo (of the Danish congregation) participated in this historic Service.

1938. On June 9, 1938, the University of Toronto conferred on Pastor A. Grunwald the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



Present Church.

1944. In the fall of 1944 a new modern heating plant was installed, to which later an oil burner was attached.

Looking back upon the hundred years of the history of our church, we observe that 13 pastors have preached the Word of God and administered the holy Sacraments. They have baptized 1450 children, confirmed 572 catechumens, administered the holy Sacrament of Communion to over 18,000 communicants, and solemnized 915 marriages. — During the ministry of the present Pastor (since October 23, 1927) there have been 344 Baptisms, 207 Confirmations, 425 Marriages, 119 Burials, and Holy Communion has been administered to 5416 communicants.

Our church is not only by far the oldest Lutheran Church of Toronto, but in the true sense of the word—the Lutheran mother church of this city. Already in 1858 we gathered the Lutherans in Hamilton, Ont., and founded St. Paul's Church. About 21 years ago we directed our attention to the Finnish Lutherans in Toronto, and in 1931 we rendered all possible assistance to Pastor S. Saarinen when he organized the Agricola Finnish congregation. We granted this congregation free hospitality till they eventually obtained a building of their own. In a similar manner we helped the former Hungarian congregation. In 1949, beginning January 2, we established under the guidance of Pastor K. Raudsepp, within our parish, an Estonian congregation. In the same year, beginning February 13, we founded with the help of Pastor A. Gaudins an affiliated Latvian congregation. Both groups received during the first year free hospitality. They are now becoming regular congregations of the Synod. In 1951 we made successful efforts to guide the Lithuanian Lutherans of Toronto into our Synod. We are conducting Lithuanian Services and hope that this group soon will become an organized congregation.

Thus during a century our church has faithfully laboured for the coming of the Kingdom of God, and has in this city with dignity represented the oldest and largest Protestant Church of the world.

May it please the Lord of the Church to bless and sustain this venerable old parish!

First Lutheran Church,
Toronto, Ontario,
Rev. A. Grunwald, Ph.D., Pastor.

With grateful hearts you will review one hundred years of history of your congregation. With joyful hearts you will enter your beautiful sanctuary on Anniversary Sunday to sing praises unto the Most High.

FIRST LUTHERAN! Yes, first — to organize. That was a hundred years ago, when Toronto was a small town; since then seven more Lutheran congregations have been established in your great city. As in the days of old, so today First Lutheran occupies a unique position. Your background and qualifications enable your congregation to serve the many and diverse people who have come and will continue to come to your rapidly expanding city. A metropolis like Toronto draws people.

Opportunities to serve in these days of ours are many, and the responsibility is great, grave, challenging, and overwhelming. If only all members would know and realize this. It's YOUR church — it's YOUR opportunity — it's YOUR responsibility. Look at your dear and blessed Saviour, how he loved, served, suffered, died, and rose again. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly". Jesus and His Church have no greater need in the world today than loyal Christians.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Canada extends to First Lutheran Church, which was represented at the organization meeting of the Canada Synod in 1861 at Maple by its Pastor, the Reverend C. Rechenberg, first President of Synod, and Professor E. Schlueter, its cordial greeting and best wishes on this your One Hundredth Anniversary. "My beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord".

Sincerely yours,

J. H. REBLE, D.D.,

President of the Canada Synod.

