

CELEBRATING
125
YEARS

October 8, 2023

**Choir and Organ at St. Paul's:
A Tentative History**

"Sing to Him a new song."

Psalm 33, v. 3.

Part Two: The History of the Choir

In 1948, St. Paul's Lutheran's congregation in Decatur was celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. Its commemorative booklet *Fifty Years of Divine Blessings* contained the following statement:

"Choirs have come and gone at St. Paul's Lutheran Church. Difficulties of one nature or of another hindered their development. It is certainly the hope and prayer of the congregation to have a choir which can sing good Lutheran music to the praise of our Lord Jesus Christ."

At that time, there were 85 communicant members in the congregation. There were twenty-one married couples along with plenty of children and various single persons. It was not a large congregation so there would have been problems maintaining a choir. Fortunately, today St. Paul's has a congregation large enough to support a choir, and its members are faithful to their musical ministry.

Although organists and choirs are crucial components of worship services, the various anniversary booklets produced have said little or nothing about the organists and choirs. This essay is a tentative compilation of bits of information found in previous anniversary booklets, records of the church, and the memories of long-term members of the choir.

The writers of *Fifty Years of Divine Blessing* not only lamented the lack of a choir, they also decided to do something about it. In the anniversary year of 1948, in a Voters meeting, the congregation voted to sponsor a choir and provided money for music and other expenses. Mrs. Violet Hartwig was appointed to be the first choir director. She also helped establish a children's choir. She continued to

serve as choir director at least through 1964. The church bulletins stopped listing the choir director beginning in 1965. During the 1960s we know that the junior choir was practicing on Tuesday nights until 1966 when the junior choir met for practice at 4:00 while the senior choir practices at 7:15 on Wednesdays. Around the middle of 1974, the calendar stopped listing practices for the junior choir which probably means the junior choir stopped meeting.

Unfortunately, there is a gap in the succession of choir directors from no earlier than 1965 and no later than 2001. Long term choir members recall that Bill Brunner served as choir director on for two separate periods of time. Between Bill's two directorships, Hugh Wilson Morgan served as choir director. The only dates we have are for Bill's second time as director. He was director from 2001? to 2014. During those years he was the director of both the choir and the brass ensemble. What we don't know is how long Bill served his first tenure as director or how long Hugh Wilson Morgan was choir director. After Bill retired as director in 2014, Jackie Landers served as director until 2016. At that point Mary Morgan became director and is still directing the choir and handbells to this day.

Pastor Reinhardt, at the end of his pastorate, suggested that it was time for St. Paul's to establish a contemporary music service. That led to the decision to begin such a service in 2003. The first contemporary service was in November 2003. The worship band was named "Audience of One" and the contemporary service was named CrossLife. Bill Klein served as worship Leader. Services were held in the ARC. Tricia Scheler served as keyboardist for "Audience of One" praise band from 2006 and as director of Childrens' Music. A complete history of CrossLife will be chronicled in a later article.

If anyone has additions or corrections regarding this history, please contact Ron Fritze at rfritze@wowway.com or 256 497 2413. Any corrections or new information will be gratefully accepted. Also, if you are interested in joining the choir or worship band, new members are very, very welcome. And it is good fellowship too!!!