

CELEBRATING
125
YEARS

St. Paul's is Celebrating its

125th Anniversary

October 8, 2023

In preparation, Ron Fritze and Beth Hornish are leading us through our history in preparation for this grand celebration. Anyone wishing to participate in its planning may contact Craig Baker!

St Paul's First Pastor

“Christ wants the principal end of the ministry to be the glory of God and the salvation of man.”

Martin Luther



William Gerhard Hussmann (1872-1926) was the first pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Decatur, Alabama. Born on 18 July 1872 in New Orleans, his parents were Henry and Caroline Hussmann. When he reached high school age, he was sent to study at Concordia College in Fort Wayne, Indiana from 1886-1893. In those days, Concordia College in Fort Wayne was a

combination high school and four year college. Both the high school and the college had dormitories for residential students. Its offerings included a curriculum that prepared students in the Biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew needed to study at the seminary. After graduating from Concordia College, Hussmann went to study at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. Upon his graduation from Concordia Seminary, he was ordained at his hometown of New Orleans on 27 September 1896.

Pastor Hussmann was installed at his first parish, Trinity Lutheran Church in Hanceville, Alabama, on 4 October 1896. Two months later, he married Emma Caroline Lauff in New Orleans on 2 December 1897. While he served at Trinity, he began to provide pastoral care for the Lutherans in Morgan and Limestone counties as well. These duties necessitated considerable travel by horse and buggy on bad roads. When St. Paul's in Decatur was formed on 9 October 1898, the congregation issued calls for a full time pastor. After several candidates turned down St. Paul's call, the congregation issued a call to Pastor Hussmann which he accepted. He was installed as pastor on 29 January 1899. His acceptance of the call from St. Paul's may have been facilitated by his wife, Emma, being one of the original twenty-five founding members of St. Paul's congregation.

Besides his pastoral duties, Pastor Hussmann was an avid supporter of Christian and secular education. From the beginning of his ministry in 1899, he and the congregation ran a school for the children of the congregation and the neighborhood. The school house was Hussmann's parsonage which had a large room that served as a classroom. Keep in mind, this was an era when one-room schools were common. The school proved so popular with both the congregation and the neighborhood that its enrollment was larger than the size of the congregation. In addition, Hussmann's assignment at St. Paul's included serving the Lutherans living in Athens and Limestone County although there was not established congregation there.

The Hussmann family began to grow along with the congregation. The couple had two daughters and one son. Their first born was Paula Mary on 25 September 1898 and she never married. Herman was born next on 12 March 1901 and was followed by the second daughter Freda who was born on 4 January 1903. She married a Jones. Sadly, tragedy struck the Hussmann family when Emma died of malarial fever 18 October 1903. Her death was followed by Pastor Hussmann's resignation in 1904 citing poor health. He was only 32 years old. At that time he returned to New Orleans to take care of some family problems there including the probate of his mother's will.

His connection with St. Paul's, Decatur was not quite over though. He returned to Decatur, and on 17 July 1905 he married Elsie Catherine Rex, a member of the congregation. Keep in mind, Elsie was marrying a widower with three small children. She and Pastor Hussmann would go on to have six children of their own—three boys and three girls between 1907 and 1918. All were born in Centralia, Illinois.

Pastor Hussmann returned to the ministry on 29 October 1905 when he went to serve St. John's Lutheran Church in Lake Charles, Louisiana. From there he moved to accept a call from Trinity Lutheran Church in Centralia, Illinois on 11 November 1906. He served Trinity until his death on 12 February 1926 at the relatively young age of fifty-three. His widow, Elsie Hussmann, lived on until 1961. The cause of Pastor Hussmann's death is not known but throughout his career as a pastor, he showed himself to be hard working with many irons in the fire. Given that type of wear and tear and the considerably less advanced state of medicine in the first decades of the twentieth century, his early death is understandable although still sad. Still, he helped provide St. Paul's of Decatur with a strong start as a congregation.

Ron Fritze and Beth Hornish

Please see the next page for opportunities to help us celebrate!