

Our Church History



The Rev. Eduard Huber

The new Lutheran church in Parkville was formed under the guidance of the Rev. Eduard Huber, pastor of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, Mayfield and Norman Avenue (now United Church of Christ). He was the founder of a number of Lutheran congregations in the latter part of the 1800s.

Because Pastor Huber, who founded St. John's, was a minister of the Evangelical Synod of North America, the American version of the Evangelical Church of Prussia, it is assumed that this was the synodical affiliation of the young church.



The Rev. Louis Rymarski

The first pastor called was the Rev. Louis Rymarski, who served from June 1887 to November 1888. On July 24, 1887, Pastor Rymarski presented a Constitution which was adopted by the 32 charter members. The name of the newly organized church was *Deutsche Vereinigte Evangelische lutherischen-reformierte St. Johannes Gemeinde* (German United Evangelical Lutheran Reformed St. John's Congregation).

1887

June 19, 1887

The first worship service at what would become St. John's Lutheran Church was held June 19, 1887, at Hiss Methodist Episcopal Church on Harford Road. Some 60 people attended. The second service, July 17, had 70 in attendance.

July 24, 1887

St. John's was organized on July 24, 1887, with 32 members.

Sept. 11, 1887

On the day St. John's was organized, the sum of \$1,000 was subscribed by the members to erect a church building. The land was donated by the Miller family, who were farmers in the area. **The cornerstone for the new building was laid on September 11, 1887.** Construction began immediately.

Oct. 1, 1887

St. John's Ladies' Aid Society

The Ladies' Aid Society was organized on **October 1, 1887**, shortly after the church was founded, and for the next 73 years devoted its "efforts and endeavors" in the interest of St. John's Church. It probably was the first official organization of the newly founded church.

The earliest records of the group were lost, but the minutes for 1921 describe a staggering number of activities - from peach and strawberry festivals to bazaars to crab, oyster, sauerkraut, ham, chicken and Harvest Home suppers. The activities for that year produced an income of \$750.

It is especially interesting to note that the suppers began almost immediately after the Ladies' Aid Society was organized, and at that time, there were no kitchen facilities. The food had to be prepared at home and carried to the church for serving. Even after the ladies began to use oil stoves for cooking, there was no running water available. Water was hauled to the kitchen in barrels. The Ladies' Aid Society eventually furnished the first kitchen.

The society was disbanded at the end of December 1960 when they became part of what was then the Lutheran Church Women and is now WELCA (Woman of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America).

St. John's Sunday School

There are two conflicting records concerning the beginning of St. John's Sunday School. One states that it was organized on November 27, 1887, when the first church building was dedicated. The second states that the Sunday School started around the turn of the century.

Whenever it started, there were no departmental divisions, although males and females had separate classes. Heat was provided by a wood stove and light by kerosene lamps.

There was an organ, pumped by hand, and later on there was a small orchestra composed of violins, cornets, trombones, etc., to augment the organ. The superintendent, Mr. George A. Miller, played the organ and was also the secretary, treasurer and custodian.

Shortly after the Sunday School was begun, there was a need for more room. A "social hall" was built on the back of the church, providing a place to hold strawberry and peach festivals and oyster suppers.

Throughout St. John's history, the annual Sunday School picnic was the highlight of the year. In the early years, it was customary for the picnickers to assemble at the church and to march, waving banners and flags and singing Sunday School songs, to picnic groves on various farms nearby.

Later on, picnics were held in the woods adjacent to the church, at Druid Hill Park, Kurtz's Beach, or Bay Shore Park, and finally, in the 1950s and 60s, at Rocky Point Park on the Chesapeake Bay.

In 1955, some 900 people attended the Sunday School picnic, with nine school buses to transport them to Rocky Point. The cost of the picnic, which included peanuts and ice cream for all attendees, was \$152.29.



Nov. 10, 1887

Our church bell is the only item of original equipment still in use. Ordered by Pastor Huber from the McShane Bell Foundry on October 22, 1887, **the bell was delivered by wagon on November 10, 1887.** The bell weighed 620 pounds and cost \$117. There is no inscription on the bell. The McShane Bell Foundry is still in existence and is now located in Glen Burnie, Md.

Nov. 27, 1887

St. John's first church building was dedicated on November 27, 1887.

Dec. 25, 1887

The first Service of Holy Communion was held on Christmas Day 1887, with 28 people participating in the celebration. As was to be the case for many years, all services were conducted in German.

St. John's Constitution

The Constitution adopted by the 32 charter members of St. John's Lutheran Church specified that members must be 21 years old and contribute a minimum of \$4 per year. Additionally, the Church Council had to approve a person for membership, or the congregation could approve a person by at least a two-thirds vote. The council itself consisted of nine members who had to be elected yearly. Congregational meetings were to be held four times a year, and Holy Communion was to be celebrated at least four times a year. Confirmation "shall not take place before the 13th year and a public examination shall precede Confirmation." Older church members surely will remember their dread of the public examination on the Sunday before their Confirmation!



The Rev. Karl Buff
1888-1892

1888

After serving slightly more than one year, **Pastor Louis Rymarski was replaced on November 18, 1888, by the Rev. Karl Buff**, St. John's second pastor. His pastorate lasted for four years.



The Rev. Dr. Hans Pape
1892-1893

1889

In 1889, the Miller family donated a plot of ground 80 feet wide on the Harford Turnpike (road) and extending 891 feet north-west. Except for the part of the plot where the church was located, most of the rest of the ground became the church cemetery.



The Rev. Henry Gyr
1893-1899

1892

In November 1892, Pastor Buff was followed by the Rev. Dr. Hans Pape, St. John's third pastor, who served only one year. After he left, there were three pastors in the next 13 years.



The Rev. Richard Jungfer
1899-1906

1893

The Rev. Henry Gyr ministered from December 1893 to September 1899, as St. John's fourth pastor.

1899

The Rev. Richard W. Jungfer served from October 1899 to March 1906, as St. John's fifth pastor.

St. John's Cemetery

No records exist as to when or who the first person was buried in the cemetery, but there are gravestones that date to the early 1900s.

In 1944, four more acres were added on the northeast side of the original property bordering a new street, Neifeld Avenue. This land would become the site of the parking lot, church park, and two parsonages.

There are four former pastors currently buried in the cemetery: Pastors Jungfer, Wiebking, Yingling and Smith. The Cemetery Committee, made up of church members, keeps the records of burials and oversees the upkeep of the cemetery. Currently all the lots have been sold.



The Rev. August E. Ernst
1906-1908

1906

Until the arrival of St. John's sixth pastor, the Rev. August E. Ernst, in July 1906, all services, including weddings and funerals, Confirmation and Sunday School classes, were conducted in German. Pastor Ernst was the first pastor to preach in German and English.

On October 16, 1907, the 20th Jubilee was celebrated and was quite a success.

1907

Sometime in 1907, St. John's address became 2nd Toll Gate, Harford Road. (There was a toll gate located across the street from the church where St. Ursula's parking lot is now.) In 1910 the address was changed to Arbutus Heights, Harford Road.

The Rev. Frederick Hahn-Zumpf
1908-1909

1908

Following Pastor Ernst's departure in 1908 came the Rev. Frederick Hahn-Zumpf, our seventh pastor, who stayed less than one year. The Rev. Richard Uhlhorn was our eighth pastor from February 1910 to April 1912.

The first Confirmation class to have been taught entirely in English was received on April 12, 1908.

The Rev. Richard Uhlhorn
1910-1912

1910

After Pastor Uhlhorn's arrival in 1910, all services were conducted in English. It had taken four years from the time of Pastor Ernst's first sermon in English for the switch from German to English to be completed.

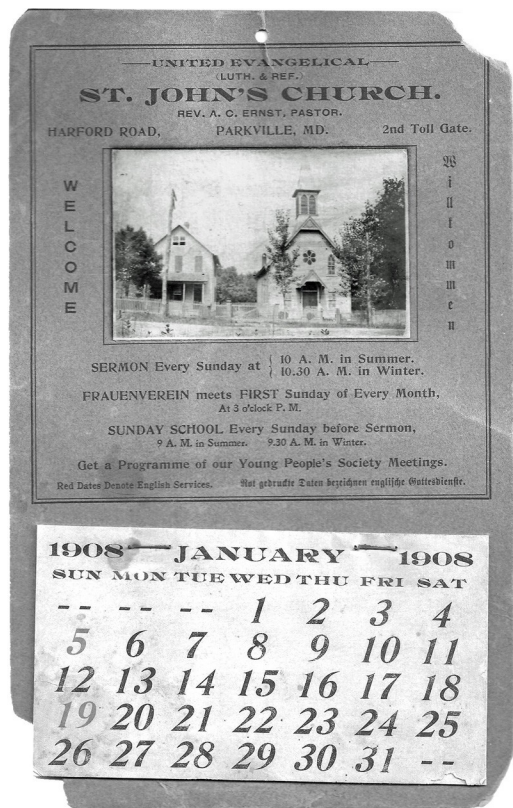
1911

St. John's Parsonage Fire

On March 4, 1911, a fire of unknown origin burned to the ground the St. John's parsonage. At the time, the parsonage, home to Pastor Uhlhorn and his family, was on Harford Road, south of the present church building, as can be seen in the picture on this calendar from 1908.

Because the only water in those days came from wells, the Hamilton Volunteer Fire Company had to run a hose uphill from the well at the Hiss Methodist Church parsonage, on the other side of Putty Hill Avenue. The hose reached only to the end of St. John's then-wooden church building, separated from the burning parsonage by only a narrow driveway. A bucket brigade on the St. John's Church roof kept that roof from burning also.

In the excitement of trying to salvage things from the parsonage, a mirror was thrown out the window while pillows were carefully carried down the steps. Workers also found a five-gallon can of gasoline under the building but got it out before it exploded. When the parsonage fire was finally out, only the chimney was left standing, and that, too, eventually fell.





The Rev. A. William Ahl
1912-1916

On Thanksgiving afternoon, November 28, 1912, St. John's celebrated the 25th anniversary of its founding.

The Rev. Henry Schleuter
1916-1918

St. John's Rumor

Through the years there has been a persistent rumor that a pastor was "escorted" out the front door of the church during a worship service.

An article from the Baltimore *Sun*, found in our archives and dated in early 1918, speaks to a controversy at St. John's.

The article states that the congregation voted to oust Pastor Schleuter over the fact that he appointed a new secretary of the Sunday School instead of reappointing the long time secretary, Mr. George Miller. Mr. Henry Rader, president of the Church Council, went to court to force the pastor out.

The council had invited a guest pastor from Baltimore City to preach and conduct services on a certain Sunday, but the article states that "Pastor Schleuter is determined to conduct the Sunday services, congregation or no congregation."

No further information as to the outcome of the court case has been found, but it seems as though there might be some truth to that old rumor.

Interestingly enough, Pastor Schleuter is one of only four pastors for whom there exist no pictures in the archives.

1911

In April of 1911, a month after fire destroyed the original parsonage, a house and lot were purchased at 3005 Putty Hill Ave. for a new residence for Pastor Uhlhorn and his family. This parsonage remained as the home of our pastors until 1954.

Also during 1911, the church was wired for electric lights, the steeple was struck by lightning, and the offering envelope system was initiated.

1912

The Rev. A. William Ahl arrived April 21, 1912, becoming St. John's ninth pastor.

1914

In March 1914, the congregation changed the church name to St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church. This was accomplished through an amendment to the Constitution, to change the original unwieldy German name to that which is still used today.

1916

In October 1916, the Rev. Henry Schleuter became the 10th pastor of St. John's.

1918

St. John's Affiliation

It is not clear if St. John's had any real synodical affiliation during its first 30 years, even though it incorporated *Lutheran* in its name.

What seems to have been its independent status changed on January 1, 1918, when a congregational meeting authorized the secretary of the Church Council, Mr. George Miller, to submit an application for the church to be admitted to the Maryland Synod of the United Lutheran Church in America. St. John's was approved for acceptance during the Maryland Synod Convention held in Frostburg, Maryland, on December 2-4, 1918.

The church has remained affiliated with the synod and its successor bodies ever since. Currently, St. John's is a member of the Delaware-Maryland Synod, part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, one of the nation's largest Protestant denominations.



The Rev. William E. Saltzgiver
1918-1923

1918

Pastor Schleuter's departure was followed by the arrival of St. John's 11th pastor, the Rev. William Saltzgiver, on August 1, 1918.

Pastor Saltzgiver stayed for five years, and during his tenure, the church began to experience gains in membership, expansion of the physical property, and increases in the organizational life of the congregation.

- **In 1918**, the church had 150 baptized members, with total yearly expenses of \$950 (a little more than \$14,700 in 2012 dollars).
- **By 1922**, the baptized membership had grown to 266, and the yearly expenses were \$3,958 (\$54,752 in today's currency).
- **In December 1918**, the mortgage was paid off on the parsonage.
- **On February 1, 1921**, St. John's became self-supporting - there would be no further support from the Board of Home Missions.
- A Constitution was adopted for the Sunday School, and permission was granted by the Church Council to form a Men's Brotherhood.
- **In 1921** the Men's Brotherhood built a new Sunday School building, and Sunday School was held in this building for the next 30 years. When a new Sunday School building was dedicated in 1951, the existing building was converted into offices for the church staff, with a kitchen in the basement.
- In January 1923, new stained glass windows in the church were dedicated.

1921



The Rev. Carl C. Wiebking
1923-1955

Born in Baltimore in 1890, Pastor Wiebking was educated in Baltimore public schools and the Martin Luther Preparatory School and College in Nebraska. In 1923 he graduated from the Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia and was ordained by the Maryland Synod.

At the age of 33, he accepted the call of St. John's to be its new pastor. It was his first pastorate, and as it turned out, it was to be his only pastorate, culminating with his retirement, after 32 years, in 1955. He was honored with the title Pastor Emeritus upon his retirement.

1923

June 1923 ushered in a new era at St. John's with the arrival of the Rev. Carl C. Wiebking, St. John's 12th, and longest-serving, pastor.

When Pastor Wiebking arrived, there were approximately 120 adult members. By the time of his retirement in 1955, the confirmed membership had grown to 1,202, and Parkville had burgeoned from a small rural village to a large suburb adjacent to Baltimore City.

Mildred Jacobs
1.231 x 1.76"

Mrs. Mildred Jacobs

Choir Director and Organist
1923 - 1963

In the fall of 1923, Pastor Wiebking organized the first adult choir, and Mrs. Mildred Jacobs was hired as the director and church organist. She remained in the position for 40 years - eight years longer even than Pastor Wiebking, St. John's longest serving pastor. At the time she was hired, there was only one service, but when an 8 a.m. service was begun, she formed a Junior Choir to sing at that service.



St. John's Handbells

Throughout his 32 years of service to St. John's, Pastor Wiebking was known for his love of bells. At his death in 1961, he left a bequest to the church. The money eventually was spent on handbells, which were dedicated to his memory and are still in use today.

1923

1924

Pastor Wiebking was instrumental in establishing activities for youth in the church and community. **Boy Scout Troop 112 was organized in 1924** and remained in existence for 82 years until 2006. At the time it was disbanded, it was the oldest active troop in the Baltimore Area Council.

Also in 1924, the basement of the education building was rented to the Baltimore County School Board for use as classrooms for first grade students.

1925

In 1925, the men's and women's Bible classes were organized under the jurisdiction of the Sunday School.

1929

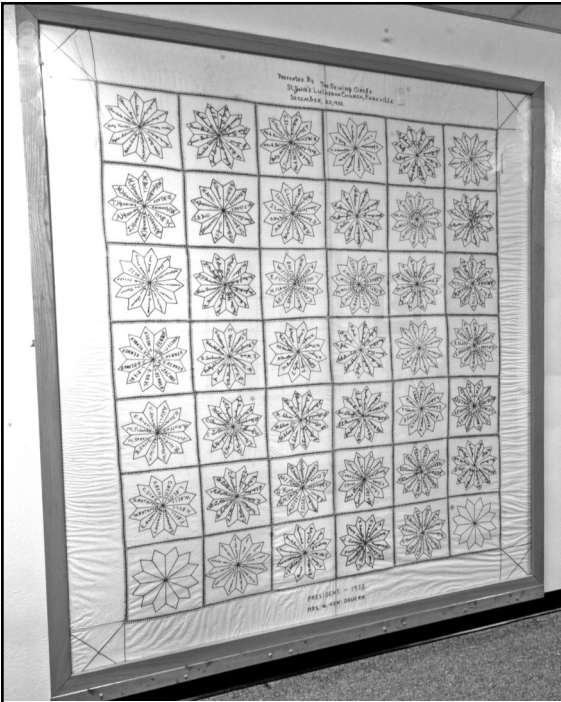
The first Vacation Bible School was held in June 1929.

1930

The early 1930s brought the establishment of a youth group called the Luther League to help teens in the church identify with the church and to provide an opportunity for them to gather socially. One of their activities was the formation of a club called the Dramatic Players. They put on plays and charged 35 cents for adults and 25 cents for children. Since this was the time of the Great Depression, the proceeds were given to the church to use for the poor.

1932

The year 1932 saw the completion of the first of two building programs accomplished during Pastor Wiebking's 32-year tenure. In the first, a basement was constructed under the sanctuary, and the church building was lengthened by ten feet at a cost of \$28,000. This was a bold venture by the congregation because the country was still in the throes of the Great Depression. The \$14,000 mortgage for this new addition would be paid off 10 years later in 1942.



St. John's Historic Quilt

This quilt, which hangs on the third floor, outside the Sanctuary, was made by the Ladies' Sewing Circle in 1933. It won a white ribbon (3rd place) at the Maryland State Fair. Each quilt section contains names of members of the congregation and their families. The group became the Needlecraft Club, then the Busy Bees. The frame was made by Philip Lindenmeyer and Ellsworth Weant, parishioners.



The Rev. Dr. Charles P. Cressman
1953-1958

Dr. Charles P. Cressman arrived in September 1953. A graduate of Muhlenberg College and the Philadelphia Seminary, Dr. Cressman received his doctorate in sociology and served as a sociology professor at Wittenberg College. Prior to his call to St. John's, he served parishes in Kentucky and Pennsylvania.

1933

In 1933, a nursery to occupy small children during the church service was begun.

1937

In 1937 St. John's first "ministerial son," the Rev. Dr. Howard F. Reisz, graduated from Gettysburg Seminary and was ordained by what was then the Maryland Synod.

Also in 1937, St. John's celebrated its 50th anniversary on November 7, with special worship services, dinners and other festivities. There were 370 communing members on the rolls at that time.

1943

In 1943, Sister Elizabeth Cress was called as St. John's first full-time deaconess. She was so admired that the Elizabeth Cress Missionary Society was established in 1946 and named in her honor. This group was the forerunner of the women's group known today as Women of the ELCA.

1951

The second building program of Pastor Wiebking's tenure involved the erection of a new sanctuary in 1951.

1952

The first issue of the church newsletter, *St. John's Herald*, was published in 1952. It was professionally printed and labeled August-September, Volume 1, Number 1. Mr. Philip A. Lindenmeyer was editor. One article said that *The Herald's* purpose was to "keep you well informed of the happenings in our church, that you may enjoy with us the fellowship and assist us in carrying on the work of God's Kingdom."

1953

By 1953, St. John's ministry had grown so large that the congregation decided that another pastor was needed. The congregation called the Rev. Dr. Charles P. Cressman as associate pastor - the 13th pastor in St. John's history.

1954

Dr. Cressman's arrival to serve as associate pastor brought new vigor to the life of St. John's. It also brought about a need for housing for the Cressman family, which included his wife Anna and their three children. It was decided to build a parsonage on the property behind the church parking lot. The new parsonage at 2933 Neifeld Avenue was dedicated in March 1954.

St. John's YoMaCs Club

In 1954, Dr. Cressman established a young married couples club. They chose the name YoMaCs and provided social and recreational fellowship for young married couples in the community.

The combined age of the couple could not exceed 90, and all of the offices of the organization were to be filled by couples. Dues were \$2.00 per couple per year, with an additional 50 cents per couple per month collected to pay for refreshments. Each month a different group of three couples planned the program. In February 1956, the YoMaCs decided to sponsor a Mother-Daughter Banquet, with the first banquet held in May that year. The women cooked the meal, and the men served it.

The YoMaCs continued to be active for 46 years until the group was disbanded in November 2000.

St. John's Altar Guild

In April 1955, the Altar Guild was founded, at the urging of Dr. Cressman and with the assistance of the YoMaCs. There were 15 members at the first meeting. Ever since, this group has provided a valuable service to the congregation by caring for the altar, preparing for communion, laundering the altar linens and acolyte vestments, arranging flowers, and ordering the poinsettias and spring blossoms that decorate the sanctuary for Christmas and Easter. They also make sure that everything is in order for baptisms, weddings and funerals.

1954

1955

Church membership began to grow by leaps and bounds in the mid 1950s. This was especially true for the Sunday School. To help with the workload, Miss Irene Falk was called as Director of Christian Education in March 1955.

The average attendance in 1955 was 764 pupils per Sunday, and due to this large attendance, it was decided to hold a second session of Sunday School beginning at 11 a.m.

Approximately 60 people attended the Leadership Training classes taught by Dr. Cressman so that they were able to be Sunday School teachers. In order to be a teacher, one had to be confirmed, be at least 16 years old and have taken at least one teacher training course or have a "satisfactory capability or background."

It also had become apparent that additional space was needed for the growing Sunday School. After much urging from the Sunday School Association, the Church Council finally agreed to recommend to the congregation that an addition to the Social Hall be built. On July 27, 1955, the congregation voted to lengthen the hall by two bays and add two more floors, making the building three complete floors. Also planned were a chapel and a pastor's study, but these items were never built due to the cost of the project. The Parish Education Building was dedicated in October 1957 in conjunction with the 70th Anniversary of the congregation.

Hilma Kiel - 2.944 x 2.717"

St. John's First Church Secretary

The early 1950s had seen such an increase in activity of all sorts that the need arose for help in the church office to answer the telephone, take care of church records and do all of the other tasks that are usually handled by a church secretary. Mrs. Hilma Kiel was asked by Pastor Carl Wiebking to volunteer in the church office one day a week to record communions and other items for the church records.

When Dr. Cressman became senior pastor, he requested that she increase her service to several mornings a week, and finally, in the fall of 1955, she was hired as St. John's first full-time secretary.

After 20 years of faithful service to her church, Mrs. Kiel and her husband retired to Florida in 1976.

After an unprecedented 32-year tenure, Pastor Carl Wiebking retired in May 1955. A grateful congregation elected him Pastor Emeritus. In addition to his pension from the United Lutheran Church in America, the church granted him a monthly stipend of \$125 for life and gave him \$6,000 toward the purchase of his new home in nearby Carney. In retirement, he continued to serve as a supply pastor in the Baltimore area until his death in 1961 at age 71. His wife Frieda predeceased him in 1956. He and his wife are buried in St. John's Cemetery.

1955

The Rev. Dr. Charles Cressman was called as senior pastor upon Pastor Wiebking's retirement in 1955. St. John's continued its rapid growth in church membership, and Dr. Cressman continued to oversee creation of new programs to expand St. John's ministry, even to the establishment of a blood bank for members who needed blood following medical procedures.

1956

At a special congregational meeting in June 1956, the congregation unanimously voted to call as assistant pastor the Rev. Norman P. Forde, who would become the 14th pastor in St. John's history.

The special congregational meeting in June 1956 did more than just call Pastor Forde. Discussion centered on the need for a larger worship area and still more Sunday School space.

At a congregational meeting in September 1956, it was announced that the congregation was completely debt free. However, with the planned expansion of the Social Hall for more Sunday School space and the need for a parsonage for the Forde family, St. John's would be acquiring the largest debt in its history.

To accommodate the growing congregation, a third Sunday morning service, at 9:30 a.m., was added in the fall of 1956.

Ground was broken on November 4, 1956, for expansion of the educational building.

On November 25, some 121 new members were received.

The dedication of the new parsonage at 2935 Neifeld Avenue took place on December 16.

For the first time, three Christmas Eve Services, plus one service on Christmas Day, were planned to accommodate the anticipated large number of worshippers.

By the end of 1956, the membership of St. John's had grown to almost 1,300 members.



The Rev. Norman P. Forde
1956-1959

Born to a farming family in Wisconsin, Pastor Forde had been 17 when World War II broke out, and he subsequently served three years in the Army in the European Theater. After graduating from Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, he enrolled in the Lutheran Seminary in Chicago. He was then called to Fort Worth, Texas, to develop a mission congregation and remained there for three years until he, his wife Shirley, and young children, Linda and James, were called to St. John's.