

A BRIEF  
HISTORY  
OF  
FIRST IMMANUEL  
LUTHERAN CHURCH  
OF CHICAGO

Pastor Donald Becker  
2004

## CHICAGO IN THE 1850'S

When First Immanuel Lutheran Church was founded in 1854, Chicago was a town with 60,652 people.

It was growing very fast. Immigrants were coming from all parts of the country and world.

In 1850 Chicago had a population of 30,000. In 1860, 10 years later, the population was 109,000, more than 3 ½ times as big.

The city limits were Lake Michigan on the east, North Avenue on the north, Western Avenue on the west, and 31<sup>st</sup> Street on the south. It was about 5 miles from north to south and 3 ½ miles from east to west.

In 1854 Franklin Pierce was president of the United States. A man named Isaac Milliken was mayor of Chicago. He was voted out of office after a one year term.

In those days Ashland was called Reuben Street, Roosevelt was 1<sup>st</sup> street, and Darnen was Robey street.

The water tower was built where it stands today. People were complaining that fish and frogs clogged the water hydrants.

In 1852 630 people, 6% of the population, died in a cholera epidemic. Most of them were children.

In 1853 an African American Methodist church was founded. Negroes were about 1% of Chicago's population.

In 1855 there was a beer riot by the German immigrants when the city fathers tried to close the beer saloons.

Also in 1855 the first city hospital, forerunner of Cook County Hospital, was built. Chicago was becoming the railway capital of the American west.

In 1856 Marshall Field and Dwight Moody came to town.

Chicago was an important stop on the underground railway, as white and black people together helped escaped slaves on their way to Canada.

Abraham Lincoln, then a state legislator, came to Chicago 3 times in the 1850s and made speeches against slavery. He was president when the civil war was begun in 1860.

## **THE PIONEERS**

### **1854 TO 1860**

The founders of First Immanuel Lutheran Church came to Chicago to escape a government in Germany that did not allow true freedom.

Among other things, the government was forcing them to join the government-sponsored church, which was not Lutheran.

When they arrived in Chicago they joined First St. Pauls, the only Lutheran church in town. It was on the north side, three miles away.

For a while they walked the 3 miles every Sunday. But it was too far for their small children to walk that distance every day to school. So they decided to build their own church on the west side.

They built a log cabin church 46 feet long and 24 feet wide, at Roosevelt and Blue Island streets. It was about one half the size of our parish hall today. They named their church Immanuel.

On the first Sunday in September, 1854 they dedicated their little church and installed their first pastor, a young man named George Schick. They paid him \$16.67 per month at the beginning.

They also used their church as their first school building. For the first year their pastor was the teacher.

The next year they called their first full-time teacher. Before long he had a classroom of 130 students in one room. The teacher was also the church musician.

When the first church building was 3 years old, it was already too small. So they built another church at the same place.

That same year, in 1857, the Roman Catholics started to build the massive Holy Family Church on the lot right next door to their church. Holy Family was dedicated in 1860.

The founders of Immanuel believed in education. Over the next 25 years they built a half dozen branch schools and helped new German immigrants start another half dozen. Most of them developed into new Lutheran churches.

## THE SECOND GENERATION 1860 TO 1880

To vote in the business meetings of Immanuel Lutheran Church in those days, a member had to attend church regularly and pledge to give a stated amount of money to the church every year.

On that basis they voted to allow women to become voting members. This was more than 60 years before women were allowed to vote in national elections.

Women rarely earned enough money to qualify to vote, but the minutes say that "Mrs. Schaeffer" became a voter in 1859.

Following the practice of most Protestant churches, members of Immanuel "rented" a pew each year for themselves and their families. Others could sit there only if the renters were absent or by their permission.

Unmarried men sat on the west side of the church and unmarried women on the east side. This was to keep the young worshipers from being distracted.

The congregation was 9 years old when President Lincoln issued the proclamation ending slavery in the South. The records say that Immanuel church took door offerings for the union soldiers and prayed for them every Sunday.

In 1867 they voted to start the first Lutheran High School in Chicago, but their timing was too early. Not enough students applied.

Also in 1867 the Lutherans and the Catholics next door had serious problems getting along. The records of Holy Family church say that it all started when some disgruntled German Catholics started attending the Lutheran Church.

It got so bad that the Lutherans finally moved their church 3 blocks away to Taylor and Sangamon Streets.

But they weren't so angry that they couldn't do business. The Lutherans sold their property to the Catholics, and soon St. Ignatius College Prep high school was built on land where Immanuel built its first church.

In 1868 Immanuel sent its pastor on a special trip to Cincinnati to purchase a set of three bells for the church. The bells he selected were still ringing in 2004, 136 years later.

## **THE BUILDERS**

### **1880 TO 1900**

Immanuel Lutheran Church had 5 pastors during its first 22 years. The next pastor, Louis Hoelter, came in 1878 and stayed until he died in 1922, 44 years later.

In the 1880s Ashland Avenue was called the "German Gold Coast," because many wealthy and professional German families lived there.

In 1886 Immanuel decided to build a magnificent new church on Ashland near Roosevelt. The pastor went door to door to collect money and pledges for the new church.

The new church was dedicated on November 4, 1888. The celebration lasted until the next Sunday. The church cost \$58,000.

In December of the same year the pastor and his family moved into a new parsonage next door. In March of the following year, a new 3 story school building was dedicated across the alley behind the church.

The church was built to seat 1400 people. The pews were closer together then. They went all the way back under the balcony below the organ console.

The church was nearly full on most Sundays. On Christmas Eve and Easter Sunday there was usually standing room only.

There was a large rose window on the east side facing Ashland Avenue . On Easter at sunrise the whole church was bathed in a beautiful light of many colors .

Two towers were built near the entrance of the church. The steeple of the larger tower reached toward heaven, 185 feet above street level.

The church bells were placed in the larger tower. They were rung several times on Sunday and for every funeral.

In 1888, the year the church was built, Immanuel had more funerals for children 6 years old and younger than for all the members who were older than 6.

In 1893, 5 years after the church was built, Immanuel had 3,100 baptized members. The school had 565 pupils in 6 classrooms, an average of 94 children per classroom.

The first use of electric lights at Immanuel was on December 24, 1898, just in time for Christmas Eve.

## THE ENGLISH SPEAKING GERMAN AMERICANS 1900 TO 1930

Beginning in 1892 the home games of the Chicago Cubs, then called the Chicago White Stockings, were played in the block bounded by Taylor, Wood, Polk, and Wolcott Streets. An elevated train stop was built to drop fans off at the entrance gates. Members of Immanuel could climb up into the tower of their church and watch the game from 3 blocks away.

In 1915 the Cubs moved to Wrigley Field. They sold their ballpark to the University of Illinois who built a medical school and the Research and Educational Hospital on that site.

During the 1800s everything at Immanuel Lutheran Church was in the German language. In 1901 the congregation voted to add an English service on the 3<sup>d</sup> Sunday of the month in the evening.

In the same year they decided to use English as the language of instruction for the upper classes of their grade school. The lower grades were still taught in German.

When the United States went to war against Germany in 1917, German-speaking citizens were suspected of being on Germany's side in the war. In some places churches that worshiped in German were burned to the ground.

To prove their loyalty to America the use of English increased rapidly in German-speaking churches.

The result was that for the first time people who didn't know any German could participate more fully in the life of Immanuel church.

In 1909 Chicago's first Lutheran High School was begun in Immanuel's school building. In 1922 the high school moved into its own building at 120 N. Wood Street.

Between 1910 and 1920 the church experienced a sharp decline in membership as people began moving farther west in Chicago.

In 1922 Pastor Louis Hoelter died after 44 years as Immanuel's pastor. His son Edward Hoelter became pastor.

In 1924 the church's tall steeple had to be taken down because the timbers were rotting and it was in danger of falling into Ashland Boulevard. There were no funds to rebuild the steeple.

In 1929 Immanuel Lutheran Church celebrated its 75<sup>h</sup> anniversary with a banquet at the Graemere Hotel. The entree was a ½ fried chicken. Tickets were \$2.25 per person.

## THE DEPRESSION YEARS

### 1930 TO 1940

In the 1930s the overriding national issue was the Great Depression. Money was scarce and jobs were hard to find. The community around Immanuel Lutheran Church had also become much poorer. People of many ethnic backgrounds lived nearby.

In 1933 Pastor Edward Hoelter died and Herman Bauer became pastor. Immanuel resolved to continue to serve its diverse community in its many spiritual and other needs. It called on other Chicagoland Lutherans to help. Some examples:

- ++ In 1934 Immanuel formed a relief committee for those with critical needs.
- ++ Lutherans in Chicagoland formed a "City Mission Society" to serve neglected parts of the city. They assigned a deaconess to work with poor patients in Cook County Hospital. Adults and children from this ministry were baptized at Immanuel.
- ++ The Northern Illinois District of the Lutheran Church called a pastor to provide spiritual service to students and nurses at Cook County Hospital.
- ++ Pastor Fernandez, a Mexican, began to conduct Lutheran worship services in Spanish at Immanuel.
- ++ In 1934 Immanuel's school had only 29 pupils. Tuition was only \$2.00 per month for members and \$3.00 for others. But that was too expensive for many. So Immanuel started its first Sunday School for children of the church and community.

Meanwhile the regular life of the parish continued:

In 1935 the youth of the congregation got permission to put a tennis court on the land where the parish hall was later built.

In October of 1936 the voters gave the pastor a rising vote of thanks for "better than average" sermons the previous month.

In 1937 the church purchased a used pipe organ from a theater. It was still serving the congregation in 2004.

Also in 1937 Immanuel hired its first "lady teacher." All previous teachers had been men. The same year the school had to be closed for a while because of a polio epidemic.

In 1938 the church celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church building by painting and redecorating the church.

In that year women and men began taking communion together. Before this all the men received the sacrament first, then the women.

In 1939 the school enrollment included 21 children who were "wards of the state."

## **THE WAR YEARS 1941 TO 1947**

The first half of the 1940s was defined by the second world war. The entire nation was mobilized for the war effort.

After 10 years of depression, jobs were now plentiful. Women were hired for jobs previously held only by men. People migrated from the south to find work.

Young men and women volunteered for the army and navy. Many others were drafted. Immanuel's Pastor Bauer resigned as pastor to become an army chaplain and serve the "boys" in the army.

Erwin Meinzen became Immanuel's next pastor because the war prevented him from returning to India where he was a missionary.

The war also prevented Alvaro Carino, a recent seminary graduate, from returning to his home in the Philippines. The Lutheran Church called him to be pastor to students and nurses in the hospitals near Immanuel. He also served as assistant to Pastor Meinzen.

Because it was not far from bus and train stations, Immanuel opened its doors to servicemen and women passing through Chicago on their way to the war.

The congregation began a ministry to Mexican immigrants near the church. Mexican children enrolled in Immanuel's school. A seminary student came from St. Louis to Chicago on weekends to conduct Spanish services and visit in their homes.

In 1944 the Ladies Aid purchased an altar rail so that the congregation could kneel as they received holy communion.

Because there were several Immanuel Lutheran churches in Chicago, Immanuel was reincorporated as "First Immanuel Lutheran Church of Chicago."

After the war ended in 1945, many servicemen and women moved to new housing in the suburbs. Many African Americans from the south chose to stay in Chicago.

In 1946 Pastor Carino was commissioned at First Immanuel to become the first Lutheran missionary to the Philippines.

In 1947 Pastor Meinzen accepted a call to return to India where he had been a missionary before the war.

First Immanuel's membership fell to a new low. The minutes say that the balcony was closed on Sunday mornings and the members were encouraged to sit closer to the front of the church.

## **STAY OR RELOCATE? 1947 TO 1948**

Because of the sharp decline in membership in 1947, First Immanuel Lutheran Church was asking itself whether it could survive in its old neighborhood. A relocation committee was appointed to make preliminary plans for a move to the western suburbs, where most of the members were now living.

In 1948 August Oltroge became the new pastor. He received permission from the congregation to live in Forest Park instead of at the parsonage at 1134 S. Ashland. The sexton-caretaker moved into the parsonage.

First Immanuel received two offers to purchase its property. One was from an African American church. The other was from the Illinois Medical District, which was planning to expand the area into one of the largest medical centers in the world.

In the fall of 1948, First Immanuel's school was not opened. A fire in the church's furnace room was put out before it did serious damage. The final service in the German language was held.

In May of that year, First Immanuel called a crucial meeting of local and national leaders of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to ask their advice about moving.

Andrew Schulze, pastor of an African American Lutheran Church on the south side of Chicago, made an impassioned plea for First Immanuel to stay and minister to the African American population moving into the housing projects near the church.

His appeal was seconded by Dr. O.H. Theiss, executive secretary of the Walther League, the national youth organization of the Missouri Synod.

Dr. Reuben Hahn, executive secretary of the Lutheran Student Service Commission, which coordinated Lutheran work among university students around the country, asked First Immanuel to stay and serve students nearby. Pastor William Miessler, Lutheran Chaplain at the University of Illinois Hospital, agreed.

The most convincing argument came from the president of the Illinois Medical District, the same group that once offered to buy First Immanuel's property. "This area will need churches in the future," he said. "Because of your location you are the envy of other churches. Thousands of people will live here in the future."

Pastor Semman, secretary of missions for the Northern Illinois District of the Missouri Synod, said that the district would be interested in providing some financial support for this plan.

## **PREPARING FOR A NEW FUTURE 1949 TO 1953**

First Immanuel Lutheran Church took another year to study all the aspects of this new ministry to their changing community.

In March of 1950 the relocation committee became a rehabilitation committee. First Immanuel had decided to stay.

Now plans began to move swiftly. The school was sold to the medical district. The church received an easement for an alley around the church property to provide access to the buildings.

A parish hall would be built on First Immanuel's property north of the church. The interior of the church building would be redecorated.

Building the parish hall would cost \$60,000. Redecorating the church would cost \$5,000.

Funds for this came from the sale of the school building and a loan from the Lutheran Church extension board at 1% per year. The Lutheran Women's Missionary League gave \$5,000 for furniture and other needs in the parish hall.

In 1952 Pastor Oltroge accepted a call to another congregation. The mission board agreed to pay one half of the salary of the next pastor, with the understanding that he would spend time working with the ministry to students as well as First Immanuel church.

This call was sent to Pastor Ralph Moelling. Before accepting, he asked the congregation several questions, including "Will the congregation accept members of another race?"

In response the congregation passed this resolution: "We will certainly not refuse anyone of any race of color who would apply for membership." Pastor Moelling arrived in April of 1953.

Later the members of First Immanuel took pride in the fact that 1953 was one year before the Supreme Court decision declaring that racial segregation in public school is unconstitutional. And it was two years before the Montgomery bus boycott catapulted Martin Luther King, Jr. into national prominence in 1955.

## **BEGINNING THE NEW MINISTRY 1953 TO 1954**

In 1953 First Immanuel became the first all-white Lutheran congregation in Chicago to make an aggressive effort to integrate Negroes (the preferred term then) into its church membership. This effort was based on three articles of faith.

The first is that a congregation should serve its immediate neighborhood with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The second is that a congregation should celebrate racial inclusiveness as the most complete expression of the church of Jesus Christ.

The third is that the larger church body should assist such a ministry with resources of people and money. When First Immanuel began this new ministry it had 120 active communicant members.

In May of 1954 the instruction classes leading to membership included African Americans for the first time.

That summer First Immanuel celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary with special services on three successive Sundays. Former members saw signs of the church's new direction.

In Pastor Moellering's eighth month in office, the congregation asked the Northern Illinois District mission board for funds to call an assistant pastor and a deaconess.

The board replied that it had no funds for such a rapid expansion of staff.

A pattern was established that continued for several years. The congregation would ask for a large increase in subsidy. The mission board would give a small increase. Then First Immanuel would look for ways to find help elsewhere.

The congregation was creative in getting the help needed. In October of 1954 a Sunday School rally was held. The rally was attended by interested students from Concordia College in River Forest. The next month the students helped First Immanuel canvass the neighborhood looking for children to attend Sunday School.

When the Sunday School grew, Concordia students were among the new teachers needed. This relationship with the students continued for more than 15 years.

The room in the parish hall originally intended to be a cloak room became an office for the secretary, the Sunday School, and for necessary office equipment and supplies.

Family names added to membership of the church in 1954 included: Bey and Ricks.

## ADDING WORKING STAFF 1955 TO 1956

In 1955 a vicar was added to First Immanuel's staff. He was Samuel Hoard, an African American student from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis studying to become a Lutheran pastor. Vicar Hoard assisted Pastor Moellering in preaching, serving at the altar, and visiting families in the community.

Two suburban congregations helped to pay his salary. During the next several years four other seminary students spent their summer vacations as vicars at First Immanuel.

In August of 1955 Rita Sadosky, a deaconess from Valparaiso University in Indiana, began two years of ministry at First Immanuel. Her assignment was to develop programs for reaching the children of the community.

Mostly as a result of her work 89 persons, almost all of them children, were baptized in 1955. 98 were baptized in 1956.

The Sunday School soon registered 250 children. 150 of them were active in attendance. Many teachers were from Concordia College.

Over the next ten years more than two dozen young people came to First Immanuel from many parts of the country to work full time with the children and youth of the church and community for at least one year.

They were attracted by the excitement of this interracial ministry and worked for a subsistence salary.

A three week vacation Bible School in that summer registered 80 pupils. Partly as a result of this statistical success, the Northern Illinois District of the Missouri Synod purchased the house across the street from the church at 1129 S. Ashland. It was used as a residence for the pastor and other workers.

The family of George Manning moved into the parsonage next to the church. They became the cleaners and care-takers of the church property.

An Apache family from Arizona joined the congregation.

Family names added to the membership in 1955 included: G. Manning, S. Robinson, Pryor, R. Brown, J. Anderson, A. Evans, Chase, Holmes, Reels, E. Morris, Brooks, H. Bruce, B. Carter, Weakliss, Gamer, and Houston.

## **EXPANDING THE VISION 1956 TO 1958**

In October of 1956 William Puder arrived at First Immanuel. His job was to visit the homes of the Spanish-speaking people in the community and begin worship services for them in the Spanish language.

In the first year his income came from a part-time job teaching religion at Luther High School North. A year later he became full-time. First Immanuel became the first Lutheran church in Chicago to include weekly worship in Spanish into its Sunday schedule.

In 1957 Joyce Bremer, graduate of a parish worker program at St. John's Lutheran College in Winfield, Kansas, succeeded Rita Sadosky as the leader of work with children at First Immanuel.

The Sunday School began to mature into a solid and stable program. Teachers and pupils developed good relationships. That summer there were two vacation Bible schools, each two weeks long. Attendance was high.

Pastor Moellering's father, a retired pastor, spent several months making hospital and shut-in calls for the congregation. His only salary was free room and board at his son's home.

Pastor Puder managed to get some free tickets to the Ice Capades. On November evenings for the next several years, First Immanuel's children and their teachers walked the mile to the Chicago Stadium and back to attend this event.

Early in 1958 Pastor Moellering announced that he had been awarded a Danforth Christian Campus Worker Grant for graduate study, which required him to resign as pastor of First Immanuel. He would leave with regret in August.

The congregation began making plans to call another pastor. Pastor Donald Becker was called and installed on November 16.

Family names added to membership in 1956 included: Kilpatrick, Kilgore, Norris, Blackman, Downing, Barksdale, Olsen, Knackstedt, Martin, R. Manning, Espinoza and Puder. The first members who worshiped in the Spanish language also joined in 1956.

Family names added to the membership in 1957 included: Banks, V. Wallace, Allen, Miller, H. Moore, Medina, and Torres, Whitehead, G. Davis.

Family names added to the membership in 1958 included: McBeth, Henry, Goulsby, Dennis, Durham, Preston, Culberson, De Leon, E. Hunter, H. Robinson, M. Stewart, Buford, Mollison, E. Collins, Becker.

## **THE SUNDAY SCHOOL FAMILIES 1958 TO 1959**

In 1854 when First Immanuel Lutheran Church was founded, the fathers of the families decided where the whole family would go to church.

By 1954 when the church was 100 years old, families were organized in an entirely different way. The women and children of the family made their own decisions about a lot of things, including if and where to go to church.

In spite of these changes in society, First Immanuel decided to be a church of families and not only a church of individuals.

The strategy for bringing new families into the church worked like this. First, a Sunday School and Vacation Bible School of high quality were established to attract children to the church.

Before long parents, especially mothers, began to investigate why their children liked the Sunday School that they were attending. Often one or both of the parents took adult instruction classes and joined the church.

After they joined the church, many of them were immediately enrolled to become teachers in the Sunday School.

Every week the new teachers would walk to the church on Tuesday evenings for a Sunday School teachers meeting. At these meetings the deaconess would lead them in a study of the lesson for the next Sunday and discussion of ways to improve their teaching skills.

The quality of the teaching remained excellent, and more children and their families joined the Sunday School and church.

The deaconess and pastor would visit the families in their homes during the week. The teachers would also visit as they were able. On one Sunday in February of 1960 the teachers made a canvass of the community and visited a total of 564 homes in an effort to find new children for the Sunday School.

When the teachers from the college went home for their vacations, members of the church would teach double classes. By 1959 they were confident enough that they decided not to close Sunday School for that summer, but to handle Sunday School classes and a Vacation Bible School without the college students.

Family names added to membership in the church in 1959 included: S. Young, M. Davis, W. Harris, Hayes, Hampton, Shelley, Stresow, Oscar, Ditnarsen, Palmer, Brandt, and Yniguez.

## **EXPANDING WORK WITH CHILDREN 1959 TO 1960**

In February of 1959 state law allowed parents to ask that their children be released from public school for one hour a week to receive religious instruction at the church of their choice. Under this release time program First Immanuel enrolled 52 children from Jefferson school.

In the spring of 1959, the mission board informed First Immanuel Lutheran Church that the board could not afford to support both a pastor to the Spanish-speaking and a deaconess at First Immanuel. They would discontinue the support of the deaconess.

The congregation responded that both ministries were essential to its mission in the community, and that to lose the deaconess was unacceptable.

The Sunday School teachers from Concordia College in River Forest agreed. They came up with an idea. They would ask the student body at Concordia to support Immanuel's deaconess through personal offerings.

They cleared the idea with their college president and the student body responded. First Immanuel would keep its deaconess.

That summer Joyce Bremer resigned as parish worker to continue her studies. Carolyn Gresens (later Becker), a student deaconess from Valparaiso University worked at First Immanuel for two months that summer. She was the first worker to receive support from the college students. A Vacation Bible School that summer enrolled 200 students.

In the fall of 1959 Carolyn was succeeded by Rosalie Ditmarsen, a graduate of Concordia College, St. Paul, Minnesota. That fall 300 children were enrolled in Sunday School. They were taught by 31 teachers in classes spread all over the church and parish hall. 11 of the teachers were members of First Immanuel, 21 were from the college. Carolyn returned as deaconess and secretary in 1960.

The congregation wanted to bring the children of the Sunday School into full membership of the church. So a program of instruction was set up to prepare children for confirmation.

The classes were held for two hours on Saturday mornings. There were four classes, one for each grade five through eight.

Family names added to membership in the church in 1960 included: E. Hunter, Pinkett, Sanfilipo, Rittman, C. Johnson, Lebron, and Miranda.

## **A CHURCH OF FAMILIES 1960 TO 1961**

In keeping with the goal of becoming a church of families, a concerted effort was made to bring married couples into the church.

From 1955 through 1958, there were no instances when both parents of a family joined First Immanuel at the same time. During the next six years, from 1959 through 1965, 12 married couples joined the church. Nine spouses of members also joined their wives or husbands in the church.

Beginning in 1959, an annual stewardship meeting was held each fall to encourage the members to support the church and its work financially.

About that time the "house across the street" at 1129 S. Ashland took on a new purpose. It became additional church office space and was used for programs such as Saturday School and youth events.

In 1960 Pastor Gene Seefeldt was added to First Immanuel's team . He was the third pastor now working out of the church. His specific responsibility was to reach students studying at the medical center near the church.

Pastor Seefeldt reported that there were nine professional schools within walking distance of Immanuel at that time. They were training doctors, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, and others in the healing professions. They were at the University of Illinois, Cook County Hospital, Veterans Hospital, institutes for the blind and the physically and mentally disabled, and others.

Attendance at Spanish worship service in 1961 averaged 48 worshipers. About half of them were members of First Immanuel congregation.

In the fall of 1961 Pastor Puder left First Immanuel to become pastor of a church in Brooklyn, New York. He was replaced by Pastor Gale Schmidt, a new graduate from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. Pastor Schmidt continued the ministry to Spanish-speaking people.

Attendance at the English services in April (the month including Easter) averaged 200. Children of the Sunday School began attending church in larger numbers.

The minutes note that some adults were asked to patrol the parish hall and tell the children that they could not stay in the parish hall during the times of the services.

Family names added to the church in 1961 included: N. Williams, Swan, Montgomery, R. Stewart, W. Brown, Croom, Marquez .

## **TEENAGE MEMBERS 1962 TO 1964**

By 1962 there was a growing number of young people of high school age attending Sunday School and church at First Immanuel.

The congregation advertised for a college student willing to spend one year working full time with the church's youth. He would live in the house across the street, and be given money for expenses, but no salary.

Lee Grugel, a new graduate from Ohio State University, accepted the offer. He began by becoming the organizer and teacher of Sunday School and Bible Classes for high school students.

Almost all of First Immanuel's children and youth lived in the public housing near the church. They could easily walk to church.

First Immanuel had families on all 15 floors of two buildings, 1510 W. 13<sup>th</sup> St. and 1520 W. Hastings St. The pastor and other church workers could visit 20 families in one afternoon or evening without leaving the building.

There was a youth meeting every Friday night. They had serious studies and discussions, dances and other parties, and a lot of time to enjoy one another's company.

Cars would take the youth to city-wide events, sports events, picnics, and other kinds of activities. Many children and youth bonded into friendships that lasted for many years.

In 1963 First Immanuel experienced its most dramatic growth. Saturday School confirmation classes enrolled 90 students for grades 5 to 8.

In that year 66 persons were confirmed into communicant membership, 39 teens and 27 adults. Of the total membership of 344 communicants, 88 were teenagers.

When Lee Grugel's year was over, he was replaced by two students from Valparaiso University. They expanded the program to include tutoring for those who requested it.

Nine young men worked with the youth and children of First Immanuel under this kind of an arrangement for more than 10 years.

Family names added to membership included: In 1962, A. Morris, Grugel, Schmidt, L. Morris, Denton, Ellis, J. Mitchell, Moore, Nevels, Marks.

In 1963: Eilert, G. Anderson, Prince, Segovia, Maxwell, Gaddy, Mobeley, Barnett, Barker.

In 1964: Woten, Ray, Hoskins, Bums, Mann, Stovall, L. Bruce, I. Jones.

## **RACIAL JUSTICE ISSUES 1963 TO 1966**

From the time that the first African Americans joined First Immanuel Lutheran Church, the congregation worked for racial inclusiveness and integration in other churches.

Beginning in the 1950s a delegation of members from First Immanuel attended the annual gathering of the Lutheran Human Relations Association held at Valparaiso University. It was dedicated to integration and racial justice in the church and nation.

Adult members of First Immanuel and several white suburban congregations held Bible studies and fellowship meetings in each other's homes. The youth of First Immanuel hosted a busload of white California youth in their homes in the housing projects.

The Sunday School teachers of First Immanuel organized a Sunday morning "worship-in" at a Cicero Lutheran congregation, modeled after the sit-ins in the South. The Cicero congregation had canceled a Sunday School rally at their church which would have included African Americans because they were afraid of their neighbors. The Cicero church was nervous but friendly.

Beginning about 1963, members of First Immanuel became more active in the movement toward racial justice and equality.

In 1963 some members attended the March on Washington, best remembered for Dr. King's "I have a dream" speech. Others were involved in Chicago marches for educational equality, job opportunities, and open housing.

Together with other black and white clergy, the pastors of First Immanuel walked the streets encouraging moderation during the uprisings of 1965 and 1968. First Immanuel's youth worker, George Smith, regularly attended meetings of the West Side Organization, a community group about one block from the church.

When television Channel 2 broadcast an editorial opposing Martin Luther King's coming to Chicago, Pastor Becker wrote them a letter supporting Dr. King. The television station gave him a chance to tell that side of the story on the television news cast.

For most members the high point of this activity was a community rally in First Immanuel's church at which Dr. King gave an impassioned appeal that the people of Chicago's west side join him in his efforts.

First Immanuel was chosen for the rally because it was the largest church in the community, and because it was known to support Dr. King. The rally included west side people of all ages, colors, creeds, ethnic and economic groups.

## **BLACK LEADERSHIP 1960 TO 1970**

Black and white members of the church council worked together easily. There was only one time when they voted along racial lines. It was in response to a chance to host the community rally at which Martin Luther King was the primary speaker. White council members worried about the possibility of violence. Black council members saw the rally as a precious opportunity.

Both were surprised that the vote had lined up according to race. The black votes won five to four. After a day or two of divisiveness, harmony was restored.

By the middle 1960s, under the slogan "Black is Beautiful" the preferred word for identifying African Americans began to shift from Negro to Black. It was accompanied by an emphasis on Black leadership in Black communities.

In some respects First Immanuel was ahead of the movement toward Black leadership. Beginning in 1960, three Black men served as president of the congregation in that decade: Herbert Bruce, Odis Flynn, and Walter Brown.

But the pastor and the assisting pastors were white, in part because there weren't many Black Lutheran pastors available.

There was one notable exception. Dr. Robert King, a Lutheran pastor and professor at Concordia College, was a regular preacher once a month at First Immanuel during most of 1967. He also assisted in teaching Bible Classes and was an advisor to the church's youth program. Most of Chicago's other Black Lutheran pastors served as guest preachers at First Immanuel during that time.

Black Sunday School teachers were selected as early as the 1950s. Robert Woten became Sunday School superintendent in 1967.

When the congregation decided to use a deacon of the church to assist the pastor in distributing holy communion, William Harris was selected. He and Warren Blackman served as head ushers.

After he graduated from college in 1970, George Manning became the church's organist, choir director, and leader in many areas involving art and decoration.

Family names added to the congregation included:

In 1965: E. Brown, McGowan, Hutchins, Jeffrie, Watson, C. Smith, Karnatz.

In 1966: Underwood, Bailey, Wilkie, Simmons, Willis, Y. Carter, Gore, Addams.

In 1967: R. Thomas, Foy, G. Smith, Middleton.

In 1968: Bowman, Hunter, Harrison, Cruthers, Braeunig, Schutt.

## **EDUCATING THE CHILDREN 1965 TO 1969**

Following a tradition that began in 1854, the year that Immanuel Lutheran Church was founded, the congregation continued to emphasize education for its children and youth.

The church's elementary school had been closed in 1948 for lack of funds. It was reopened in 1965 as a pre-school and kindergarten modeled after the headstart programs of that time.

When Michelle Schutt and Candy Smith, who had been Sunday School teachers at First Immanuel, graduated from Concordia College, they initiated the idea of the pre-school, volunteered to start it, serve as the first teachers, and to live at a subsistence salary.

During the first ten years of its existence, 10 different graduates or seniors from Concordia College, all of them well qualified, were teachers at the school for one or more years. Two members of First Immanuel, Annie Morris and Tony Gaddy, were also teachers.

When the board for missions informed the church that it could no longer support the school in spite of the low cost of operating, three women of the community whose children had attended the school volunteered to teach on the same basis. Two of these teachers, Connie McCartney and Dorothy Sikora, taught the school for 22 years until it had to be closed in 1995.

Also in 1965 the congregation began an aggressive program of enrolling its children in Lutheran Schools in various parts of the city. By 1969 there were 50 First Immanuel children in Lutheran elementary and high schools in Chicago.

When the Chicago Board of Education permitted high school students to transfer to public schools outside their own district, First Immanuel assisted some of them in selecting the schools and applying for the transfers.

In 1967 David Masengarb, a youth worker at First Immanuel and graduate of Concordia College, expanded the tutoring program dramatically. One innovation was to use vans to transport interested high school students to Concordia College where they were exposed to life on a college campus.

Students at the college introduced them to college level instruction in English, math, Science, and foreign languages. The evening often ended with a swim in the college pool or a stop at McDonalds on the way home. An average of 12 per week participated.

Students of college age were encouraged and sometimes assisted in enrolling in colleges and universities away from home, where they could participate in campus life as they took classes.

## SPANISH-SPEAKING MEMBERS 1956 TO 1966

Located at the intersection of Ashland Boulevard and Roosevelt Road, First Immanuel Lutheran Church lived in a community that was constantly changing. In the mid 1950s, when the new ministry began, it looked like this.

- ++ To the northwest was an expanding medical district.
- ++ To the southwest was a community of homeowners scheduled to be removed to provide additional space for the medical district.
- ++ To the southeast was newly constructed public housing. It included seven tall buildings, each providing homes for 150 families.
- ++ To the northeast was an old Italian community into which Mexican and Puerto Rican families were moving.

First Immanuel saw its ministry as integrating into one church family all segments of its neighborhood, so the church began a new ministry to Spanish-speaking people.

An attempt to reach Mexican families was made as early as the 1930s when a Mexican pastor conducted Spanish services at First Immanuel for a while.

In the 1940s Mexican children began to enroll in First Immanuel's school. A pastor came from St. Louis over the weekends to visit Mexican families in their homes and conduct services in Spanish. Later a pastor came from Valparaiso University for this purpose.

In 1956 the congregation called a full time pastor to live in the community and begin an intensive effort to reach Spanish-speaking families for the church.

Pastor William Puder began the ministry. When he left in 1962 to do the same kind of work in Brooklyn, New York, he was succeeded by Pastor Gale Schmidt.

As was expected, this part of First Immanuel's outreach grew more slowly. Yet over ten years more than 50 adults and another 50 children became members of the church. Many more who did not join the church were served by the congregation. A Spanish-speaking member was elected deacon and another trustee of the congregation.

In the 1960s Chicago's Department of Urban Renewal began to tear down the homes in which Puerto Rican and Mexican families were living, and they were forced to move.

First Immanuel made the decision to transfer all its Spanish-speaking members to two Lutheran Churches into which they were moving. On January 1, 1967, First Immanuel transferred 100 members to these congregations.

Family names added to the church's membership in those days included: Medina, Lebron, Miranda, Yniguez, Olivera, Perez, and Santana.

## MEMBERS ON THE MOVE 1965 TO 1970

Over the 150 years of First Immanuel Lutheran Church's existence, one thing was constant. People were always moving in and out of the neighborhood.

In the second half of the 1960s the moving accelerated for several reasons:

- ++ The urban renewal program of the city continued to tear down older homes to make room for new housing .
- ++ The medical district, especially the University of Illinois, continued to buy land for institutional growth.
- ++ The department of public housing raised the rent for middle income residents to make room for lower income families.
- ++ The uprising in the streets made the area less secure and less desirable for many.

The move of members had a serious impact on First Immanuel.

- ++The ministry to the Spanish-speaking people moved to other churches.
- ++The pastor and youth workers had to move out of the building across the street. It was no longer available for children and youth programs .
- ++ The idea of building a replacement across the street was considered, but was found to be impossible .
- ++ Because of new concerns for safety, some parents of students at Concordia College discouraged their children from coming to the city.
- ++ By 1970 the majority of members could no longer walk to church, affecting especially First Immanuel's children and youth.

This is illustrated by the following statistical high points.

- ++ In 1956, 98 people were baptized into the church.
- ++ In 1962, 90 children were enrolled in confirmation classes.
- ++ In 1963, 71 persons were confirmed into the church.
- ++ In 1964, church attendance averaged 200 in English, 50 in Spanish.
- ++ In 1965, 420 were enrolled in Sunday School.
- ++ In 1967, there were 741 baptized members, including 383 communicants.
- ++ In the decade of the 1960s, 180 teachers taught in the Sunday School. More than half of these teachers were students from Concordia College.

After 1967 statistics in all these areas began to decline.

Family names added to membership in 1969 included: Oliver, Wofford, Egerer, Engelbrecht, Range, Russell,  
In 1970: Raymond, Rogers, Roberts, Halbert, T. Jackson.

## **NEW PROGRAMS 1970 TO 1990**

In the 1970s and 1980s First Immanuel Lutheran Church developed new programs to strengthen the spiritual growth of members.

In 1978 First Immanuel joined three other inner city congregations to create an organization called Lutheran Congregations for Career Development. Its purpose was to prepare young people of high school age for a successful career in the world of work.

The program taught the students how to apply for a job, exposed them to a variety of occupations, gave them some work experience, and taught them the habits necessary for succeeding at the work place. A junior bakery was created in First Immanuel's kitchen, where the young people learned baking, the marketing of baked goods, and the disciplines that accompany regular work.

Pastor Becker and Jewel Morris participated in the creation of LCCD. Janis Blackman was the first counselor for the program at First Immanuel.

In 1983 First Immanuel held its first Cotillion Presentation Ball. The young men and women were of high school age. The main purpose was to develop in them a sense of good societal behavior and an appreciation for elegance in music, dancing, and the arts. Four cotillions were presented. The third and fourth cotillions were at the Chicago Hilton Hotel.

In 1984 First Immanuel trained a dozen of its members to become Stephen Ministers. Stephen Ministers are trained to be listeners and confidants for people who need to talk to someone about personal issues. They make referrals for professional help as needed.

The youth of the congregation were assisted in attending national Lutheran Youth Gatherings. The gatherings draw highly motivated Christian young people from around the country. Using mass meetings and smaller discussion and activity groups, the goal is to develop a sense of the strength available to Christians when they work together in Christian faith and service.

In 1997 the church asked one of its members, Fred Brown, to serve as its parish nurse. The parish nurse is available for preliminary consultation, provides basic health information, and leads the congregation into a more healthy way of life.

In 1970 Thomas Jackson became a full time youth worker at First Immanuel. In addition to the usual programs, he developed a basketball team recruited from the young men of the neighborhood. For three consecutive years they won the national championship of the Athletic Association of Lutheran churches.

## WORSHIP AND MUSIC 1854 TO 2004

In response to changing circumstances, average attendance at worship services varied widely over the life of First Immanuel Lutheran Church.

In 1890 the average weekly attendance was more than 1,000 people. By 1948 average attendance had fallen below 100. Attendance peaked again in 1964 with an average of 250, 50 of them worshipping in Spanish. By 2004 weekly attendance at worship averaged 100 again.

The frequency of receiving holy communion grew steadily over time. In 1883 the congregation voted to offer holy communion once every three months on a Sunday evening. The emphasis was on preaching, not holy communion. Sermons were typically about 45 minutes long. In 1930 communion was offered one a month. In 1990 it was weekly.

For the first 70 years of its existence the congregation sang German Lutheran hymns almost exclusively. During the next 30 years they added popular English hymns from Methodist and Episcopalian sources.

In the mid 1950s Spanish hymns were sung by worshipers in Spanish. In the 1960s the congregation began to sing freedom songs that emphasized trust in God and solidarity in pursuit of justice.

In 1970 George Manning became the church's organist and choir director. By 1980 the choir had developed a repertoire of hymns from the African American gospel tradition. In the 1980s the choir was in demand to perform in concert for other congregations and special occasions.

Instruments were added to the pipe organ, such as trumpet, trombone, flute, piano, electronic keyboard, guitar, drums and others.

In 1970 the children of the Sunday School performed a modest Christmas pageant. In a few years the pageant developed into an extravagant celebration in music and drama telling the story of the birth of Jesus and the meaning of His life.

Adults were added as performers. The entire church building became the stage. The pageant was performed annually to a full house for more than 30 years.

In the 1990s women began to participate in distributing holy communion, serving as acolytes and ushers, and reading the lessons for the day.

## THE HOSPITAL CONNECTION 1941 TO 2004

In 1941 the State of Illinois created the Illinois Medical District, which meant that all the land west of Ashland between Harrison and 15<sup>h</sup> streets would be used only for hospitals and other institutions related to the healing professions.

One half of the homes served by Immanuel Lutheran Church would be demolished to make room for the new institutions. Immanuel itself was on this land, but would not be demolished because churches were exempt from eminent domain.

The first result of this change was a good one. First Immanuel reversed its decision to move to the suburbs, because the Lutheran Mission Board agreed to help pay for a pastor if the church would minister to the students who were moving into the area.

Buildings continued to be built in the medical district. In 1960 a Psychiatric Institute and a building serving children with developmental disabilities were placed in the block where First Immanuel Church had been since 1888.

Full-time Lutheran chaplains began to appear in Cook County Hospital, the University of Illinois Hospital, and the Veterans Hospital. The pastors of First Immanuel served these and other institutions on an emergency basis.

From 1984 to 1988, Chaplain Gary Boye was called to serve at the University hospital. He became an assistant to First Immanuel's pastor and First Immanuel's pastor became his assistant.

Members of First Immanuel volunteered to assist in the ministry to patients. Two members spent every Sunday afternoon helping the Protestant chaplains to bring patients from their hospital rooms to worship services in the chapel.

Many of the members who worked at the institutions of healing found special ways to serve the needs of their patients. Employees of the Illinois Hospital School regularly brought a dozen or more of their students, many of them in wheel chairs, to First Immanuel's annual Christmas pageant.

Family names added to the membership included:

1971: McGee, McGary, Shears, Glen, Love, Gunn, Hernandez, Hatchett.

1974-75: Camp, Dorn, Vaughn, S. Jackson, Griffin, J. Moore, M. Harris

1976-77-78: Nitz, Lard, Sikora, McDonald, M. Wilson, Kemp, K. Williams

1979: Knowles, Hamilton, Odunukwe

1980-81: Page, Burman, A. Collins, Ukachukwu, C. Evans, Agwuncha

1982-83: M. Clark, Jordan, M. Brown, Thomas

1984-87: Dyson, Lewis, Boye, Nshimo, Ngassapa, Kuzilwa 1988-

89-90: Gallimore, Rosenthal, Blevins, Crenshaw, Machina

## **COLLEGE STUDENT MEMBERS 1932 TO 2004**

In 1932 Carl Rusch, a seminary student and member of Immanuel Lutheran Church, was called to conduct worship services at Immanuel especially for students in the colleges and training institutions nearby. A decade later Pastor Alvaro Carino continued the work with students, with special emphasis on Cook County School of Nursing.

Students coming to Immanuel increased as the nearby hospitals and colleges associated with healing professions grew. In 1950 the Lutheran synod helped First Immanuel build a new parish hall to welcome these visiting students.

In 1960 Pastor Gene Seefeldt was called to be full-time pastor to these students. First Immanuel was his base for this ministry.

Pastor Ronald Nitz continued this work with students in 1974, earning his income by holding another job.

On Sundays between 5 to 20 students attended First Immanuel worship services as guests or members of the church.

Students from foreign countries, especially from Africa and Asia, came to First Immanuel looking for a place to worship while at the medical district.

In the late 1970s, a sizeable group came from Nigeria. In the 1980s more than a dozen students from Tanzania became members of the congregation. They formed an octet and sang African hymns in Swahili on Sunday mornings .

African students from a half dozen countries hosted "A Taste of Africa" featuring African food and art.

In 1996 the parsonage next to the church was renovated and became the center for the newly formed International Student Ministry of the Chicago area. The largest group of students who responded to this program were from Asia, especially China. They came to classes to improve their English, to learn American cooking, and sometimes to attend worship. Pastor Paul Hoemann initiated this ministry. Seven adult Chinese students were baptized.

Family names added to the membership included:

1991: Gardner, Campbell, Buseh, Ukoli, Gasana, Mbwambo.

1992-93: Russell, M. Jackson, McGhee, Reed.

1994-96: Bell, A. Jones, Texas, R. Mitchell, Pickett, Carrier

1997-98: Allen, Bryant, Strickland, Little, Hoemann

## **FELLOWSHIP, FRIENDSHIP, AND FUN 1955 TO 2004**

In the first half of the century groups for friendship and fun at Immanuel Lutheran Church followed the usual Lutheran pattern. There were the Ladies Aid and the Lutheran Women's Missionary League for women, the Walther League for young people, men's groups for men, and choirs and picnics.

In the years following, some new groups were formed to meet Immanuel's special needs. Several friendship groups were formed to promote various kinds of integration at First Immanuel. There were black and white groups, English-speaking and Spanish-speaking groups or events, and a mix of First Immanuel members and students, such as the choir, that brought together residents of the community with the more temporary college students.

There were different youth groups for senior and junior high school members as well as a youth choir.

In 1978 the congregation formed birthday clubs. All the members belonged to one of twelve birthday clubs that included the church members who were born in the same month.

These groups were asked to do some special things during the month of their birth. They read the lessons for the day, served refreshments after the service and became a friendship group.

In 1988, on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church building, the congregation began its Sunday morning worship on the steps of St. Ignatius prep high school. St. Ignatius was on the lot where Immanuel's first log cabin church was built.

From there the congregation followed the cross in procession for six blocks through Chicago's Near West Side back to First Immanuel church, distributing balloons and singing along the way.

In 1992 a Senior Club was formed. One of the club's projects was that seniors became honorary grandparents to the children of the congregation on a one to one basis. The children responded with enthusiasm and the relationship between the generations was bridged in a special way.

The W.O.R.K.E.R.S. was a study and service group for women. The L.A.M.B.S. was a group for younger children. They were introduced to the idea of service projects at the nearby hospitals and elsewhere. And there were more.

Family names added to the membership included:  
1999-2000: J. Davis, Tucker. Zhao, T. Johnson

## PAST AND FUTURE 1854 TO 2004

As the church celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2004, the records showed that during its existence the church has seen:

- ++ 21,355 baptisms
- ++ 6,829 confirmations
- ++ 9,108 marriages
- ++ 6,641 funerals

First Immanuel has had 13 pastors and at least as many assistant pastors. The laymen and women who held positions of leadership in the congregation were beyond numbering. George Manning was organist and choir director for the past 34 years and Gerald Downing was president of the congregation for the past 24 years.

In 1996 John Carrier became pastor of First Immanuel Lutheran Church. Pastor Becker retired and became pastor emeritus.

That year children sermons became a regular part of the Sunday morning service. The children responded favorably to the practice of having a place in the service especially for them.

In 2003, First Immanuel called a pastor, Carl Kaye, to begin a new ministry for Chinese families that have been moving into an area not far from the church.

The new millenium brought new challenges to the congregation . As had happened many times before, most of the current members had moved out of the neighborhood . Many of them drove back to the church faithfully, passing many other churches along the way.

But as members moved farther and farther away, the commute to the church became more difficult. New housing was rapidly replacing the older housing in the area east of the church.

The housing units sold from between \$300,000 and \$500,000. The residents moving in were new to the community. Their level of income was much higher than those who were moving out, and their interests and style of life was also different.

The challenge facing the church was how to reach the new residents for First Immanuel Church. The old church building is still strong and beautiful, the gospel is still needed, and God is still in His heaven.

Family names added to the membership in 2001-2003 included:  
Feng, Miles, Wilkerson, Powell, Taylor, Green