

ST. PETER'S GERMAN AND SAXON LUTHERAN CHURCH

Detroit, Michigan

On January 26, 1930, the "Deutsche Saechsische Evangelische Lutherische St. Petrus-Kirche" was founded by Pastor John Teutsch.¹ Forty-six years later it is the only Lutheran congregation which is predominantly German in Michigan.² The interdenominational German language school for children, which began with the founding of the church, is still serving the city. Approximately 100 students study the language in five levels, ending with tests from the Modern Language Association. The average German service attendance is currently four times the average at the English service.³ The pastor, Dr. Wolf Goegginger, preaches in German on Detroit and Tampa, Florida, radio stations. The yearbook is published in German and English. St. Peter's is without doubt a thoroughly German institution, a home for the immigrant Lutherans of German descent in America, especially the elderly Volksdeutsch people.⁴

St. Peter's is one of many German Lutheran congregations founded primarily for the Transylvania Saxons. The following is a chronological list of these churches:⁵

<i>Name</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Date Founded</i>	<i>First Pastor</i>
St. Paul's	Ellwood City, Pa.	1902	M. Orend
Honterus ⁶	Youngstown, Oh.	1910	George Schuster
St. John's	Cleveland, Oh.	1922	John Foisel
St. John's	Farrell, Pa.	1923	Johannes Deutschlander
Honterus	Gary, In.	1924	John Teutsch
Teutsch ⁷	Cleveland, Oh.	1926	Johannes Deutschlander
Martin Luther	Columbus, Oh.	1926	George Schuster
Christ	Canton, Oh.	1927	Emil Bockelmann
St. Peter's	Detroit, Mi.	1930	John Teutsch
St. Paul's	Waterton, N.Y.	1932	Albert F. Gillmann

Other German Lutheran congregations, founded during earlier migrations by other German groups, were later controlled by Transylvania Saxons.⁸ Many German Lutheran churches have faltered and disappeared. Some of them are the above-named Saxon churches in Gary, Farrell, and Watertown.⁹

St. Peter's has remained on the scene, guided by only three pastors in her forty-six years.¹⁰ The continued German identity of the congregation has doubtless been due to the 800-year isolation of the Germans in Transylvania, which led to the merging of German language and culture with religion and folk customs. Pastor John Teutsch founded and directed the congregation for thirty-two years, until his death on June 25, 1962.¹¹ He began St. Peter's in Detroit after founding and building up Honterus Lutheran Church in Gary. A Saxon himself, he started St. Peter's with 141 members and saw the congregation through many building projects and renovations. One month before he died, Thiel College honored him with a Doctor of Divinity degree.

The second pastor, Gerhard Wuerscher, served from December of 1962 until July of 1968, when he received a call to hospital chaplaincy in Connecticut. Originally from Breslau and Waldenburg in Silesia (Germany), he had earlier served in Philadelphia. During his tenure at St. Peter's, the church library was begun, made possible by the Martin Behaim Society in Germany. When the congregation was without a pastor, several ministers filled in at St. Peter's. One, Frau von Pirch, was perhaps the first female pastor to serve in the Lutheran Church in America.¹² She had earlier served as the German pastor in Glasgow, Scotland.

Dr. Wolf H. Goegginger came from Toronto to St. Peter's as the fourth called pastor of the congregation.¹³ The third, Hans Hohnsbein, died tragically only two days after he preached his first sermon in Detroit. Pastor Hohnsbein, from Hamburg, Germany, had previously served in Edmonton, Alberta. Dr. Goegginger was then called to St. Peter's on April 1, 1970, and continues to serve there. Born on the east shore of the Baltic Sea, he is German by descent, from Riga,

Latvia. His remarkable career includes degrees from Jena (B.D., 1938), Dresden (M.Div., 1939), Heidelberg (Ph.D., 1941), and Toronto (M.A., 1968). He has served as a pastor in Germany, an assistant for linguistics at the University of Heidelberg, an interpreter in World War II, a personal secretary to a bishop, a common laborer, a magazine editor, a traveling chaplain, and as a founder of German religious and cultural institutions in Toronto. He has also served as vice-president of the German Interest Conference of the Lutheran Church in America. As German pastor, German school principal, and German radio preacher, Dr. Goegginger is well suited for his demanding roles. Although many German churches have failed, St. Peter's continues to be of service to the German people of Detroit.¹⁴

In the last two years the neighborhood around the church has started to change. Many church members now commute from the distant north suburbs. A church like St. Peter's depends on new migrations from Europe, as members age and the youth assimilate the American culture. Nevertheless, a continued interest in the German language is evidenced by the request for a German confirmation class for six students in 1975. At St. Peter's, the German identity remains.¹⁵

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NOTES

¹John Foisel, *Saxons Through Seventeen Centuries* (Cleveland: Central Alliance of Transylvania Saxons of the United States, 1965), pp. 317-322. Bibliography, p. 343. Wolf Goegginger, *Jubilaeumsausgabe 1930-1970; 40 Jahre Deutsch St. Petrus-Gemeinde* (Detroit), pp. 12-13.

²Other German Lutheran congregations in Michigan:

Missouri Synod

St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth

Trinity, St. Joseph

St. Stephen, East Detroit

Zion, East Detroit

St. Peter's, East Detroit

Wisconsin Synod

St. John's, Saginaw
 Paul the Apostle, Detroit
 Immanuel, Lansing
 St. Paul's Stevensville
 St. Matthew's, Benton Harbor
 St. John's, Dowagiac

Statistics from Elizabeth M. Mayer, "Deutschsprachige und die deutsche Sprache in Michigan" (Kalamazoo: mimeographed, 1973), pp. 5-6. Quoted by Wolf Goegginger, *1975 Jahrbuch* (Detroit: 1975), p. 2.

³Goegginger, *op. cit.*, 1970, p. 7, for the 1969 statistics. Attempts to increase the congregation's work in English have not been successful. Pastor Wuerscher worked especially on this.

⁴The majority are Transylvania Saxons. Other groups represented are Danube Schwabians, Polish Germans, Yugoslavian Germans, East European Germans, and so forth, and some born in Germany. Volksdeutsch is a term invented in Hitler's time to include as German those who were born in other countries.

⁵J. Foisel, *op. cit.* Many were founded by the old Pittsburgh Synod. On the Pittsburgh Synod's missionary aims: E. Clifford Nelson, ed., *The Lutheran in North America* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), pp. 195.

⁶Gregory Jackson, "Honterus Lutheran Church," *Ohio Lutheran* (LCA) May, 1975. Honterus (1498-1549) was the Saxon Reformer; Foisel, *op. cit.* pp. 150-156.

⁷Gregory L. Jackson, "St. Thomas Lutheran Church," *Ohio Lutheran*, March, 1975. (Teutsch was renamed St. Thomas around 1965.) Georg Daniel Teutsch (1817-1893) was the beloved bishop of the Saxons; Foisel, *op. cit.* pp. 260-262. The author served St. Thomas for two years.

⁸ St. Peter's	Monaco, Pa.
St. Mark's	Homestead, Pa.
Martin Luther	Salem, Oh.
St. Paul's	Chicago, Il.

⁹Gregory L. Jackson, "Bilingual German Churches in the Lutheran Church in America," *German American Studies*, IX (1975), Spring, pp. 11-15.

¹⁰John Teutsch, January 26, 1930-June 25, 1962.

Gerhard Wuerscher, April, 1963-July 6, 1968.

Hans Hohnsbein, September 1, 1969-September 2, 1969.

Wolf Goegginger, April 1, 1970-Present.

¹¹He founded St. Paul's, Windsor, Ontario, on the same day St. Peter's was begun.

¹²At that time her husband was the German Consul in Detroit.

¹³A detailed biography may be found in Goegginger, *op. cit.*, 1975, p. 16. (To Dr. Goegginger I am indebted for the information provided in this article.) Cf Wilhelm Neander, *Lexikon deutschbaltischer Theologen* (Hannover: 1967), p. 47.

¹⁴Presidents of the congregation:

1930-32	Andreas Guip
1933-35	Johann Thalgott
1936-38	Johann Schindler
1939-41	Johann Thalgott
1942-44	Johann Schindler
1945-47	Louis G. Sauerbrey
1948-56	Johann Schindler
1957-59	Gerdinand Noske
1960-65	Thomas Seiler
1966-71	Alfred Alesi, Sr.
1972	Adolph Hohentanner
1973	Heinrich Gerstheimer
1974-Present	Andreas Lindert, Sr.

¹⁵Statistics from *Minutes of the Michigan Synod of the Lutheran Church in America, June 5-8, 1975* (Askov, Minn.: American Publishing, 1975), p. F-2.

Baptized Members	Confirmed Members	Current Expenses	Other Expenses	Total Benevolence
382	313	\$25,997	\$374	\$2,854

LEBENSZEICHEN

Zeichen
 Gegeben in der Nacht
 Das Trommeln
 Neben meinem Bett
 Mutterhand
 Auf dem Rücken
 Des neugeborenen Kindes
 Leises Rülpsen
 Zeichen
 Der Erneuerung des Lebens.

LOWELL A. BANGERTER
 Laramie, Wyoming