



The History of Emanuel Lutheran Church

Since its inception, preaching, teaching, and outreach have been the primary focus of Emanuel.

Emanuel was founded by Swedish immigrants in the 1870's who had settled in Manchester to work at the Cheney textile mills. The first church building was completed by the Christmas of 1886 at a cost of \$3,300. The parsonage that abuts the church was purchased in 1891 for \$2,000.

As the congregation grew, it was decided to build a larger church structure. Dr. P.J. Cornell, Pastor of the church drew up the plans and on May 10, 1914, a groundbreaking service was held. Each Saturday, the men of the congregation cleared the land and began excavation of the basement. It took them two years to complete the foundation and it was used for worship services and Sunday school. The final service was held in the old church on December 9, 1917. World War I slowed the progress of the upper structure. Finally on March 18, 1923 the completed church was dedicated.

Music has always played an important role in the life of Emanuel – indeed Emanuel was known locally as the “singing church”. During the 1930's and 1940's a dynamic music program was instituted under the musical leadership of two brothers, G. Albert Person and Helge Person with a 70 member choir. During these depression years, music became a major focus of both worship and fellowship. In 1969 a bell choir was formed and various children's choirs have existed at Emanuel.



Originally, Emanuel's services were held entirely in Swedish. During the 1920's and 1930's, services gradually switched to English. In the 1980's a group of lay people led by Pastor Dale Gustafson explored contemporary worship styles with lay preachers. And, in the 1990's. Pr. Johansson, Intern Eric Carlson and Cynthia Niiler began the contemporary worship that we still have today at the 10:30 service. By 1998, the 'Contemporary' service had become the largest Sunday morning service at Emanuel.



Ministry has played an important role in the life of the congregation. Since 1881, there have been twenty-two pastors serving Emanuel. In the years prior to 1889 Emanuel was served by student pastors and lay preachers. In 1951 the congregation began to repay its debt by participating in the seminary internship program. Through the years, over thirty interns have served at Emanuel. At least eight members of the

congregation have entered the ministry, and in 1974, Emanuel member Ruth Johnson was one of the first women ordained in the LCA.

Beginning with the first Sunday school in 1885, Emanuel has sustained its commitment to education. Although the curriculum has changed to meet the needs of youth and adults there has always been a strong commitment of Sunday school teachers, guides and Education Directors to lead Emanuel in learning about discipleship.

Sunday School picture

Social ministry has been a strong foundation of Emanuel. Emanuel was a charter member of the Manchester Area Conference of Churches ([MACC](#)) which provides a wide variety of social services throughout Manchester. In 1971, the Emanuel Housing Board was created in order to provide low cost housing to the elderly and disabled. At the end of the Vietnam conflict several Emanuel members assisted Vietnamese families relocate. During the mid 1970's a prison ministry was started. In the late 80's, Emanuel responded to the AIDS epidemic by providing space for those who were infected with or affected by HIV. Emanuel was also a charter member of the Manchester Area Network on AIDS ([MANA](#)) and continues to provide them with free office space.



Twenty-five years ago, Emanuel saw the need to provide an early childhood program. The Chestnut Hill Nursery school was founded and continues today serving approximately 51 children. They are an accredited program with the National Association of Early Childhood Educators and one of the most highly regarded programs in the greater Manchester area.



Social ministry has extended beyond the United States. Two groups have traveled to the ELCA Center in

Mexico City, Mexico. In turn, Emanuel hosted a Mexican staff person for a six week intensive course in English at the University of Connecticut. Members are currently involved with the [Jubilee Campaign](#) by educating members about crushing third-world world debt and by supporting legislation to provide debt relief. Emanuel supports people around the world by providing the opportunity to purchase Fair Trade items.

Over the years groups were formed to meet the social and spiritual needs of parishioners. A youth ministry was organized in 1899 as the Idun Society. Three church choirs were formed in 1880's. In 1890 the Ladies Aid Society was established. In 1912 it became the Dorcas Society; in 1925 it became the Women's Missionary Society and in 1959 it became the Lutheran Church Women. In 1949, young married couples began to meet. They held marriage retreats, educational programs as well as many social events. This group also started a family camping event held each Labor Day week-end at Camp Calumet in New Hampshire.

A vital part of Emanuel's ministry has been to provide space for other groups in the community. Before the formation of MACC, homeless persons stayed in Luther Hall one night per week. Today, over 40 community organizations ranging from Alcoholics Anonymous, Music Together for Children, and Mental Illness support groups.



Today Emanuel continues its discipleship. Spiritual support includes the Prayer Shawl team, hospital visitors, healing services, Eucharistic ministers who provide communion for shut-ins, a Card Caring team, and a parish nurse program. In 2009 Emanuel adopted a welcome statement and became a "Reconciling in Christ" congregation. This was just one more step in embracing our neighbors and extending our hand in faith and love to all.

Emanuel has had a 125 years of preaching the word of God, providing educational programs, and reaching out to those in need. We pray that God will continue to guide, protect and pour out God's love on Emanuel so that we in turn with God's help will continue to be the "The Church that Love Builds, for all those who enter our doors will feel the love and presence of God."