



Eastern Synod
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Eastern Synod Newsletter

www.easternsynod.org



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Left: Henry Gilbert donated land for the church, which was ready for services by the summer of 1876.

Right: Germania Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church is one of the most unique churches in Muskoka. It's one of very few log construction churches without siding, and is the only surviving pioneer-era Lutheran church in the region. (Photos by Andrew Hind)



GERMANIA NAZARETH Evangelical Lutheran Church

By Andrew Hind
MUSKOKA LIFE magazine, April 2021
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The village of Germania is home to one of the most charming churches in Muskoka, a building of rustic beauty and historic significance. Huddled in a clearing amidst the forests of Draper Township, Germania Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church represents generations of strong devotion to God. The pioneer settlement it calls home may have failed, but the church itself endures. That's part of the majesty of Germania Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church.

My introduction to this remarkable building came about 15 years ago, courtesy of the late Velda Gilbert. A frail but still spirited 90-something at the

time, she guided me across the road from her home and up the creaking stairs of the church. Though her blue eyes were failing, she still saw the church clearly – at least as it once was, in her youth.

“The church used by be full every Sunday. It was a very important part of our lives,” she explained as we walked inside. And, with much pride, she added, “my grandfather played an important role in its creation.”

Germania was founded in the early 1870s, mostly by settlers of German ancestry. In 1875, even as the farmers were still struggling to tame the land, the first steps towards establishing a church were made. A board of trustees was established, comprising the three most prominent names in the community: George Gilbert, Herman Weissmuller, and Nikolaus Wettlaufer. It fell to them to organize the building ef-

forts, raise the necessary funds, and acquire land.

In most 19th century communities, local landholders donated small parcels of land, generally half an acre or so, upon which to build houses of worship. Germania was no different. It was William Gilbert – Velda's grandfather – who stepped forward to sign over a lot, and as a result the church became known unofficially as ‘Gilbert Lutheran Church’ in his honour.

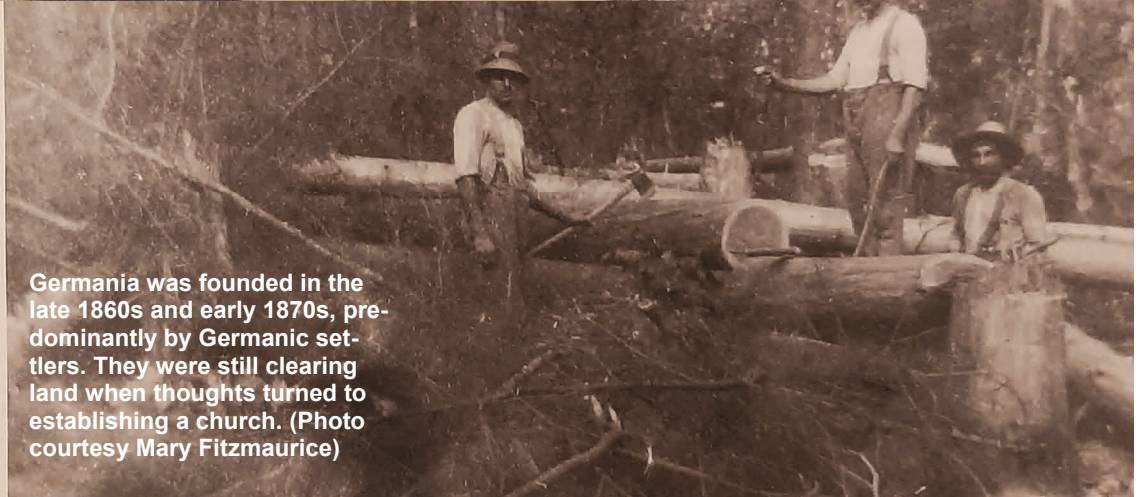
Herman Weissmuller did his part by donating the necessary lumber from his sawmill. Construction began in 1876, and by the next year the church was ready for services. Building the church was a community affair, but so too was maintaining it; all parishioners owning farmland were required to supply a quarter cord of wood per year for heating.

To provide a home for the preacher, a parsonage was constructed opposite the church on the northwest corner of the village intersection. This meant that for a time the community



After Sunday services, churchgoers would often enjoy afternoon picnics – sometimes accompanied by the minister, as in this photo. (Photo courtesy Mary Fitzmaurice)

enjoyed the presence of a resident priest, a luxury few hamlets could claim. After the building burned down sometime around 1885, Germania was forced to share its preacher with nearby Gravenhurst. Residents were required to provide him accommodations when he was tending to affairs in the village, as well as transportation to and from Gravenhurst.



Germania was founded in the late 1860s and early 1870s, predominantly by Germanic settlers. They were still clearing land when thoughts turned to establishing a church. (Photo courtesy Mary Fitzmaurice)

In keeping with the community's ethnic composition, services were initially held in both English and German. This continued until nearly the turn of the century, by which time a new generation of Canadian-born and fluently English-speaking residents began to take over communal affairs and the ethnic makeup was changed when a number of non-German families arrived to add diversity to the community. Henceforth, services were held in English.

The early days of the 20th century was arguably the heyday of the Germania Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church. Attendance was at a peak, new floors were laid throughout in 1900, and Charlie Speicher, a gifted local musician, donated a 'mouse-proof' organ worth \$40. The church was the beating heart of

the community, and it showed in the attention parishioners lavished upon it even while the substandard soil was providing little in the way of profitable harvests.

Sadly, this glory period did not last long. Germania dwindled as the 20th century progressed and disillusioned farmers abandoning their lands for fresh opportunities elsewhere and, as it did, the church naturally began to suffer for lack of resources and attention. Indeed, there is a very good chance it would have shared the fate of the nearby schoolhouse, which recently collapsed under the weight of snow load and the years of neglect, if not for the tireless devotion of one man.

Godfrey Clark grew up on a farm eight miles away in Housey's Rapids, and as a child in the 1950s he and his family attended the church as regularly as services allowed – at the time, ser-

vices in Germania were held once a month, with the minister coming up from Toronto. His mother, Jessie Speicher, was proud of her family's deep ties to the church and the fact her uncle had donated the organ. "My mother was a faithful woman and the church was important to her," explains Cook from his Gravenhurst home. "My mother was a mainstay of the church and looked after things for many years."

When Cook retired to Muskoka after a 30-year absence, care for the church was put into his hands. It seemed natural that the responsibility passed from mother to son. Cook handles the finances, oversees maintenance, and does many repairs himself, including recently repairing the foundation. Even though only a dozen or so attend services at the church,



The adjacent cemetery encloses headstones dating to the earliest years of Germania's settlement. Viewing the names engraved upon them, one quickly realizes how tight the community was – neighbours were often bound together by blood. (Photo by Andrew Hind)

Cook faithfully devotes his time to its preservation.

“Caring for the church is a way of honouring my mother,” he says, emotion tingeing his voice. “I’m deeply rooted in religion, and my roots are bound to this church.”

It’s easy to feel its pull. The dull grey siding that once covered the church’s exterior walls has been removed to reveal the sturdy timber of its original construction, the logs seeming to symbolize the strength and indomitable spirit of those who settled this difficult landscape. Germania Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church is one of the few examples of non-veneered churches in Muskoka, thereby offering a unique insight into pioneer construction.

The special delight of the church is in the interior. It hasn’t been altered much over the year and

breathes the atmosphere of a by-gone era. The pews, altar, baptismal font, and oil lamps are all original, and the century-old organ is still there. Heating is provided solely by an ancient wood stove. The original land-grant, issued Feb. 1, 1875, hangs encased in glass from the wall.

The cemetery adjacent to the building gives silent testimony of the many German families that once populated this part. Reading the inscriptions on the stones, one begins to comprehend how tight knit the community would have been. Neighbours weren’t just friends, they were quite literally family, either through blood or marriage. Velda led me among the fading and cracked tombstones that day, and despite failing eyesight she was able to point out by memory the graves of friends and relatives who have left her.

One of the stones, the tallest in the cemetery, is a cross-shaped

memorial to Adam and Wilhelmina Dietz. Velda shared that the Dietzes were well-respected farmers who came to Germania in the 1890s. She then raised one of her rail-thin hands, crooked a finger, and beckoned me to follow. We walked to the far rear of the cemetery, Velda leaning on my arm as the ground grew uneven and we began to push our way through foliage. Just outside the cemetery boundaries she pointed, guiding my eyes to a small grave marker partly obscured by leaves and sinking into the ground. This was a grave the parishioners had wanted to forget about.

The grave belonged to Katherine Dietz, daughter of Adam and Wilhelmina. Hers is a tragic story. Two years after her mother died in 1901, the 29-year-old became pregnant out of wedlock. Her courter abandoned her, her father was ashamed of her, and the community shunned her. Despondent and alone, she ended her misery by walking in Weissmuller Lake, allowing the weight of her sodden dress to drag her to the bottom. Guilty now of two transgressions against the morals of the day – pregnancy before marriage and suicide – Katherine was buried outside the cemetery property, on unconsecrated ground.

I recall commenting to Velda that Katherine was ostracised in death as in life. The palpable sadness fell over Velda. She simply shrugged her thin shoulders. She had no words.

Were she still alive today, Velda would undoubtedly be happy to hear that services are still held in her beloved church, once per month in July and August, conduct-

A photo from a July 2019 service at the church. Pictured are Pastor Lori Pilatzke of St. David Anglican/Lutheran Church in Orillia and the Rev. Dr. Michael Pryse, Bishop of Eastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. (Photo courtesy St. David Anglican-Lutheran Church, Orillia)



Katherine Dietz's grave (below) lies just outside the cemetery proper. She was ostracized in death as in life. (Photo by Andrew Hind)



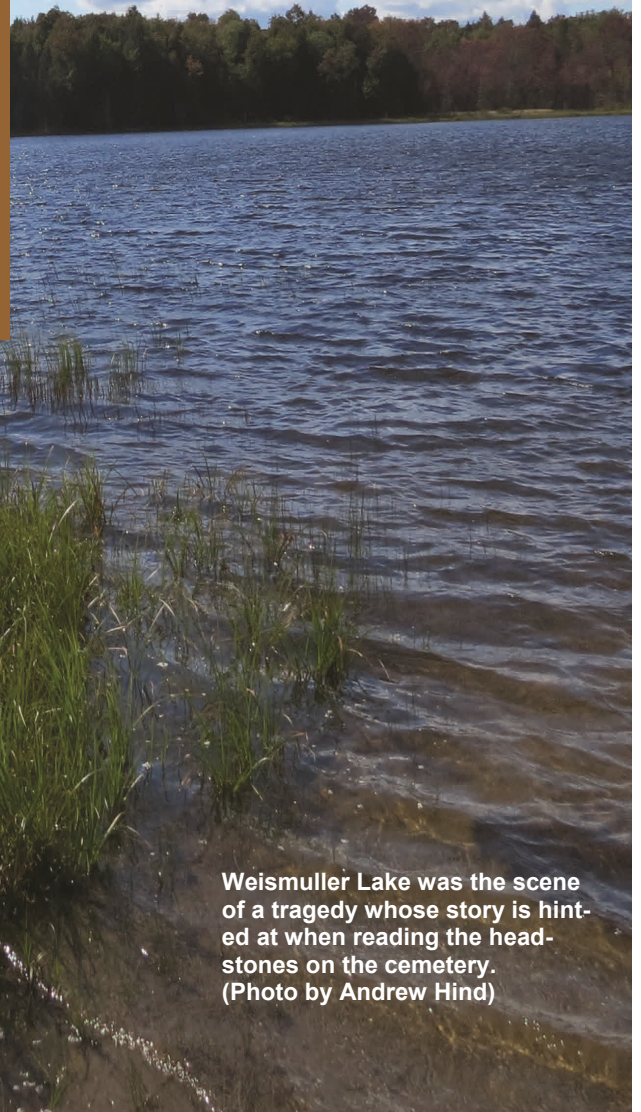
ed by the clergy of St. David Anglican-Lutheran Church in Orillia.

Germania never really lived up to the heady expectations of its eager settlers. The farms have given way to forest, the smithy and mill have long since disappeared, the settlers moved on. And yet, despite the tragedy that is Germania, the community's church continues to triumph. It is the only surviving pioneer-era Lutheran church in Muskoka.

"The church is special both spiritually and historically – it's almost 150 years old, after all," says Cook. "It's close to me, so as long as I'm alive and able, I'll keep it going."

He pauses, then adds, "but what'll happen when I'm gone?"

It's a question that hangs heavily in the air, both for Godfrey and all those souls at rest in the cemetery.



Weismuller Lake was the scene of a tragedy whose story is hinted at when reading the headstones on the cemetery. (Photo by Andrew Hind)

Jessie Speicher, was proud of her family's deep ties to the church.



Building a Better Budget

Every three years, several hundred rostered ministers, lay delegates and visitors, representing congregations across the territory of the Eastern Synod, gather over several days for inspiring worship, stimulating educational experiences, highly valued fellowship and to conduct the Synod's business. One of the important business matters that delegates to this year's online event, *Assembly 2021*, will consider in late June is the adoption of budgets for the next three year period.

Since the early 1990s our Synod has experienced a slow, but steady, decline in benevolence offerings received from congregations. Given the financial and other challenges that many congregations have been facing, this isn't surprising news.

This downward trend is worrisome, nonetheless, since the ministries that are supported by the synodical budget are funded primarily by benevolence offerings. The past year has introduced an additional, potential concern – what longer term impact might the pandemic have on congregational (and hence synodical) finances? With these concerns about to confront us head on, one of the initiatives in the Synod's strategic plan included a review of the budget setting process, followed by a rigorous review of the dollar amounts that are allocated to fund each of the synodical ministries.

Many aspects need to be considered when developing budgets for the Synod. How do we strike the most appropriate balance between providing suffi-

cient funding for the many traditional forms of synodical ministry that we have valued so highly for many decades now, while ensuring that exciting new forms of ministry that are emerging also receive their share of diminishing resources? It takes many hands and a variety of perspectives to build budgets that identify, evaluate and weigh all of the possibilities!



The process to build a better budget started last fall when Synod Council members held a working session to develop high level budgetary principles, to suggest ministries that should be considered for new or additional funding and to identify lower impact areas where it might be possible to consider funding reductions. The Deans, representing each of the seventeen different geographic areas across the Synod, were also invited to provide their input.

In March, the four synodical officers along with synod office staff, met on several occasions to assess all of the ideas that were generated, to review historical spending patterns and to finalize budgetary principles and assumptions that could be used as a foundation for budgets over the next triennium. Next, Kim Marcy

(Director of Finance and Administration) and Keith Myra (Treasurer) forged the output from these sessions into draft versions of budgets for 2022 – 2024. These drafts were subsequently reviewed by Synod Council's Finance Committee (Rev. Davis Kaneps, Anne Drouillard, David Wilk, Kim Marcy and Keith Myra) prior to being finalized and approved by the entire Synod Council.

The next step of the budgetary process is the upcoming opportunity for *Assembly 2021* delegates to discuss, possibly amend and then adopt Synod Council's recommendations. The proposed budgets that are being recommended include modest increases to bursary/internship support for seminary students, increased funding for several social justice initiatives, as well as reduced funding

in several areas. It goes without saying that any reductions, especially when they directly affect people, are difficult and not made without considerable thought and discussion.

It's virtually impossible to develop 100% realistic budgets several years in advance. As such, even though the Synod's budgets have been developed for the upcoming three year period, it is expected that the budget for each specific year will be reviewed and fine tuned, as necessary, by Synod Council at the start of each year.

Thank you, in anticipation of your continuing partnership and your generous offerings that support all of our vital and vibrant synodical ministries!

Keith Myra
Eastern Synod Treasurer



June 25-26, 2021

(Virtual Meeting Format)

Visit the Assembly Page

Delegate registration will remain open till May 31st.

[Click here for delegate registration.](#)

If you would like to view the proceedings via Livestream you can register as a visitor– you will be able to watch and listen but you not be able to interact with the proceedings.

[Click here for visitor registration.](#)

Ministry Opportunities

Redeemer, North Bay, ON
Trinity, Walkerton, ON
St. Paul's, Magnetawan, ON
Christ the King, Whitby, ON
Christ, Peterborough, ON
St. Peter's, Cambridge
Faith, Brantford

St. Matthew, Welland ON &
First, Port Colborne, ON

For more information contact Rev Douglas Reble, Assistant to the Bishop dreble@elcic.ca

“OK..... Now What: Discerning A Path Forward”

Co-hosted by the Eastern Synod and
Martin Luther University College

June 1, 2021 : 6:30 - 8:30 pm EST

Discerning... and dreaming.... About a post- pandemic church!

[Click here to register.](#)

2021 YTD- So Far So Good Financial Update (as of April 30th, 2021)

The challenges that Covid-19 has created continue! This time last year was the beginning of the pandemic in our part of the world. Most of us were not anticipating that we would still be in the midst of this pandemic a year later. With that being said, the Synod has been fortunate to receive benevolence dollars that congregations graciously continue to send. The YTD benevolence offerings are down 1.1%, the drop would actually be about 8% had it not been for timing differences related to the 2021 remittances that several congregation made, versus those that they made in 2020.

Offerings designated for Canadian Lutheran World Relief, that were received by the Synod office, saw a 17% decrease in April 2021 over April 2020, resulting in an overall decline of 14% on a year to date basis.

We continue to be grateful for the many members and congregations who are continuing to faithfully remit their offerings on a regular basis. The ministries that you support through your offerings have always been important, and as the pandemic continues, they are even more critical.

For details, refer to [Financial Update](#) on the synod website.

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MAY 2021

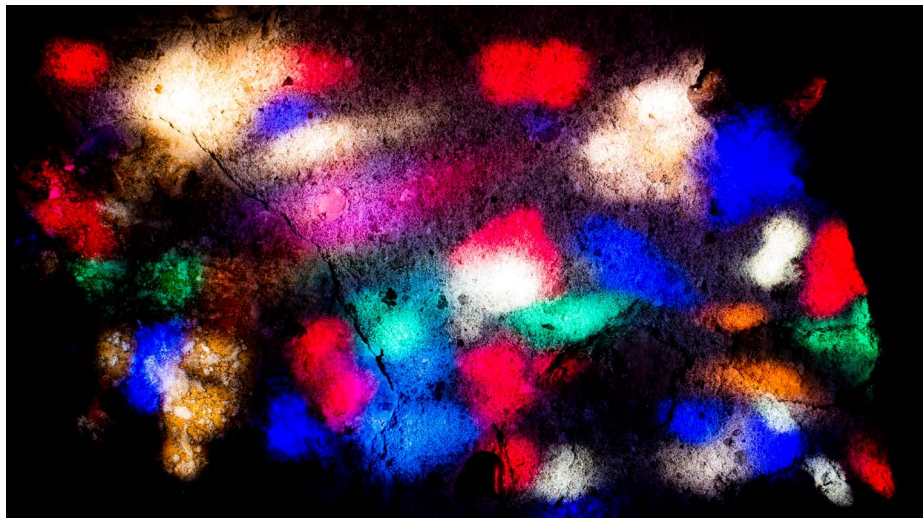


Photo courtesy of [Su Westerman](#)

Centre for Spirituality and Media

Luther and the Eastern Synod have collaborated to launch the [Centre for Spirituality and Media](#). The centre is founded and directed by Sherry Coman, associate professional faculty and the synod's deacon for spirituality and internet outreach. The centre's first public event, from 2-3 p.m. on May 25, will feature guests [Matthew Anderson](#) and [Tim Hutchings](#). Visit Luther's [calendar](#) for details. The centre is also co-hosting [OK...What's Next?](#) for rostered and lay leaders on June 1.

Video resource: The Power of Words

If you were not able to participate in this year's Dubrick Summer Institute for Ministry, you can still access four videos recorded during the event. The Power of Words: The Impact of Worship Language on the Marginalized featured challenging presentations by speakers El Jones,

of Halifax, and Rev. Dr. Kayko Driedger Hesslein, of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon. The series includes a stirring sermon by Cláudio Carvalhaes of Union Theological Seminary in New York. View the series on our YouTube playlist by clicking on bit.ly/Dubrick2021videos

About @LutherWaterloo

Welcome to this regular feature for those who would like to explore a bit more about our school. Our most popular program is our [MA in Theology, field of Spiritual Care and Psychotherapy](#). Of the 182 students registered for the fall term, 96 are enrolled in MA (SC&P), and an additional 10 are in the dual-degree [MA\(SC&P\)-MDiv](#).

Stay connected

In addition to following us on social media (@LutherWaterloo) there are many ways to stay connected with us! You can subscribe to this monthly newsletter; to our occasional Donor Update, or our quarterly alumni newsletter. Learn how to subscribe to any of our publications by visiting the [Stay Connected](#) web page.

New research web page

You have long been able to find out about research conducted at Luther from faculty members' profile pages. Now you can simply go to [ResearchAtLuther.ca](#) for a compilation of the latest research conducted by faculty and students. Work — whether completed or in progress, theoretical or applied — is gathered in various categories: Academic, community and performance. You will also find links to information on upcoming research-focused public events.

Publications

Congratulations to Laura MacGregor on two recently published articles. "[Mingled bodies and voices: Maternal reflections on caregiver expertise and intellectual disability](#)" in the Journal of Intellectual Disabilities; and [Embodied Spirituality: Maternal Reflections on the Intellectualization of Worship and the Embodied Leadership of People with Intellectual Disabilities](#) in the Canadian Journal of Theology, Mental Health and Disability.

Glebe Centre

[The Delton Glebe Counselling Centre](#), a community service provided by Luther, continues to provide therapy in person, online and over the phone.

Apple Podcasts

The Moment podcast, produced by The Centre for Public Ethics, is now available through [Apple Podcasts](#). Two episodes available, so far. Please stay tuned for more.

Vol. 4 Issue 5 *Luther* is a collection of news from Martin Luther University College in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.
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Stories: Mirko Petricevic mpetricevic@luther.wlu.ca



Disruption & Grace

LEARNING EDGES IN LIMINAL TIMES



attend online

JULY 6-7, 2021

conference registration \$120



A joint ministry
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
and the Anglican Church of Canada

nationalworshipconference.org

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