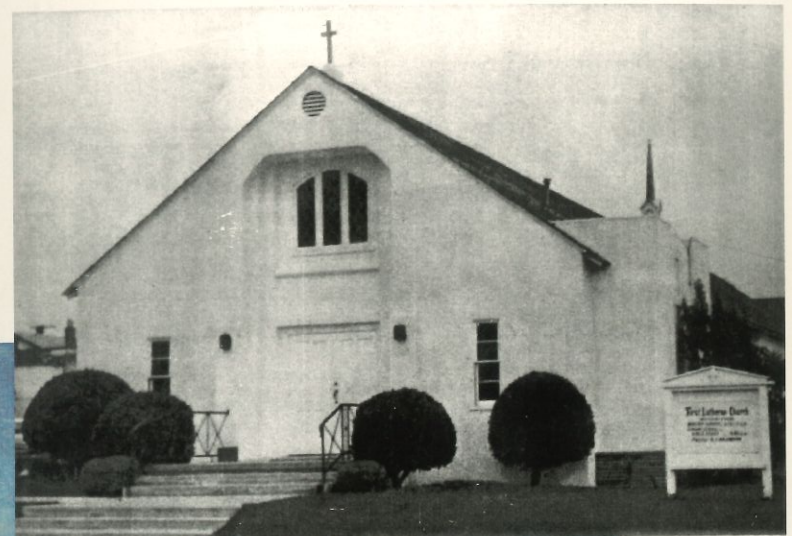


*First
Lutheran Church
of
Manhattan Beach
1948-1998*



50 Years of God's Grace

*First Lutheran Church
of
Manhattan Beach*

Written by Pastor Steven C. Carlson

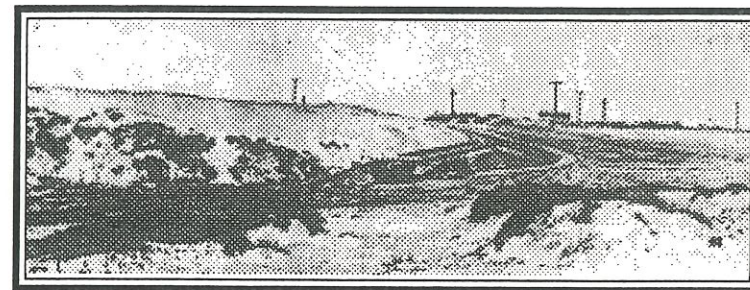
*First Lutheran Church
Near Sun, Sand and Sea
Always Longs Nearer
Our Lord Jesus Christ to Be*

*50 Years of God's Grace
First Lutheran Church of Manhattan Beach*

Background

The early history of First Lutheran Church of Manhattan Beach is one of rich blessings from God Almighty, dedicated members with confidence in their Lord, and a growing beach community set in a time of national postwar economic affluence. There is no doubt that this congregation was the will of God, and that He, and He alone, is to be praised for fifty years of grace and mercy.

In painting a history of First Lutheran we will endeavor to consider all of the elements that God employed to give birth to this new congregation that would grow and flourish with its community.



Valley Drive and Manhattan Beach Boulevard c. 1920.
City Hall is in the upper right of the picture.
As you can see, there is still plenty of sand!

During Spanish/Mexican rule, Manhattan Beach was part of Rancho Sausal Redondo, a 22,400 acre cattle ranch that covered a large part of what we today call the South Bay. The Rancho was a series of rolling sand dunes that were rich in wildlife including rabbits and quail. The water teemed with fish and the shores were rich in shell fish.

The first known home on the 2,300 acres that would later become Manhattan Beach was a mansion built in 1872 by Colonel Duncan, a Virginia plantation owner who had moved west following the Civil War. In 1901, Steward Merrill bought a portion of the future town site and

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named it Manhattan after his east coast home. The name stuck.

While Los Angeles and surrounding areas began to grow at the turn of the century, Manhattan Beach remained relatively unnoticed until after World War II. The population of the 2-mile square town at incorporation in 1912 was estimated to be between 500-600 people. By 1920, the population was only 895, and in 1930, the town had shown only a slight increase to 1,891 people.

This increase was due in large part, to land sales along the beach. One could purchase a lot within 900 feet of the beach for \$200.00. You could put \$50.00 down and pay \$10.00 per month to have your piece of paradise, or so the advertisements read.

There was only moderate growth between 1930 and 1940 when the population reached 6,398. During that decade, the town suffered extensive damage from the 1933 Long Beach earthquake. In that same year, scandal rocked the town when men were allowed on the beach without bathing suit tops!

The Birth of a Congregation

During and immediately after World War II, Manhattan Beach finally came into its own--being transformed from a small town to an up-and-coming city. By 1953, the city's population had risen to 26,315. It was during this time that many young families moved into the area. Everywhere there was new construction. Small

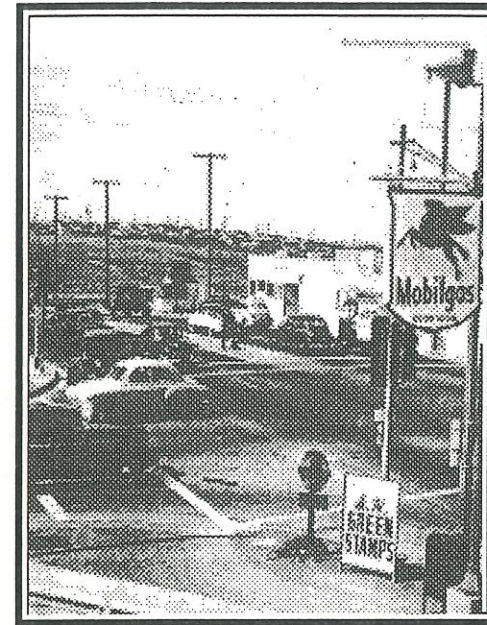
bungalow homes were being built west of Sepulveda. The average home was under 1,000 square feet. Many new schools were being built, including the construction of the city's first High School in 1948. By 1960, the popu-



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lation had risen to 33,934.

The postwar population boom, with the many young families moving into the community, demonstrated a clear need for new churches. This did not go unnoticed by the Pacific Southwest District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Encouraged and supported by area pas-



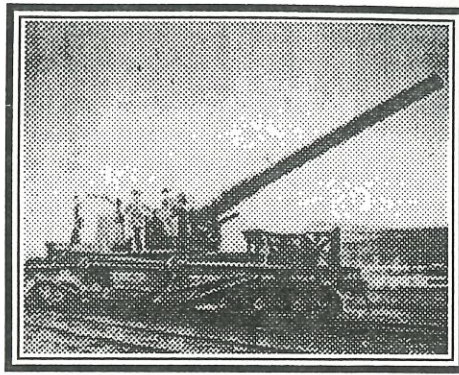
Intersection of Manhattan Beach and
Sepulveda Boulevards, looking north
1949

tors, the Reverend Immanuel Horde surveyed the Manhattan Beach/El Segundo area for mission opportunities during Memorial Day weekend, 1948. He was assisted by the Senior Walther League (youth group) of Trinity Lutheran Church, Los Angeles. The District Mission Board reviewed the results and determined that Manhattan Beach offered the greatest potential for beginning a mission congregation.

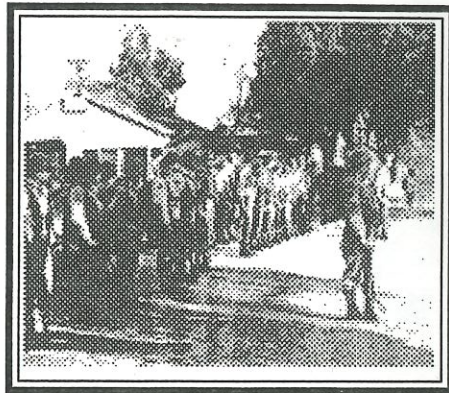
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Inglewood led by Pastor Eldred W. (Bill) Dierker, then canvassed the community by going door to door explaining to the people of Manhattan Beach that a new mission church would soon begin. Good Shepherd became the mother church which gave birth to five of our South Bay congregations.

Pastor Dierker described the South Bay during the war era as an area swarming with poor, Midwest families fleeing from the dust bowl which decimated the country's farm belt. The defense industry offered jobs

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Left: 8-in.
railway gun
used in coastal
defense
Below: The
outfit of
Battery E,
52nd Coastal
Artillery



with good pay, so the South Bay became a mecca for these pilgrims, offering hope and a new beginning. At that time there were Army camps, military installations, and coastal gun emplacements throughout the area. South Bay communities were on constant alert to possible submarine attacks. The

influx of new families continued when the war ended as many men discharged from the military settled in the Los Angeles area.

In the Spring of 1948, the Mission Board of the Pacific Southwest District called upon Concordia Theological Seminary in St. Louis to make a seminary student available for that summer. He would be charged with organizing a new congregation. That student was Richard Z. Meyer, known to many of us today as the Rev. R. Z. Meyer, who recently retired after many years of faithful service to our District. After graduating from seminary, Pastor Meyer went on to serve in many

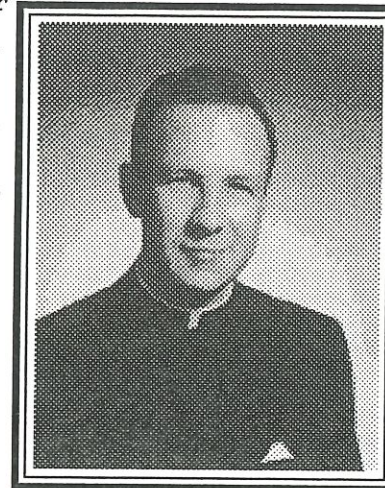
District leadership positions, including Vice President of the Pacific Southwest District. The young R. Z. Meyer, had just finished his first year of seminary training when he was sent to Manhattan Beach. The following is an excerpt from

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a letter he wrote to First Lutheran on September 25, 1998:

"In 1948, my summer field work assignment from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, sent me to Southern California to start a proposed mission congregation some place in the Los Angeles area. Being a New Yorker, I knew little about California except that it was far away and bordered the Pacific Ocean. Being financially strapped, I had to hitch across the country to get to the home of my supervising pastor in Los Angeles. He was the Rev-Horde, pastor of Lutheran in the of the city. take the bus to off at Manhattan-leveard. I would paved and un-going from seeking poten-for the new mission.

We wor-



Rev. R. Z. Meyer in 1960 when he was in San Diego--12 years after his summer mission assignment which God used to organize what was to become First Lutheran Church of Manhattan Beach.

former Manhattan Beach Mortuary on the main boulevard a few blocks from the ocean. I recall the people who gathered to begin this new church. Since we had no facility, we met in homes for Bible discussions and to begin organizing a congregation. I only worked this field for two months before I had to get back to the seminary for fall classes, but it proved enough of a beginning to warrant the calling of a full-time pastor.

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I shared with Pastor Carlson the culture shock of Southern California. For one thing, being a well-bred New Yorker, I would wear a suit with shirt and tie. Making calls on home after home, I would be greeted by the woman of the household who usually wore shorts and a halter or something like that. The casual dress was one thing I had to adapt to, but there was never any inhibition to inviting me in to talk about the church. So different today! The openness and trust was a reassuring experience for a student seminarian boldly taking the first steps in becoming a minister in the church.

One of the side benefits was discovering I had distant relatives living in California. Some of them came on Sundays to encourage not only me but the new mission. One, a young teenager by the name of Alice, played the small organ. Today she teaches at St. John Lutheran School in Orange. Another cousin, the Reverend Jack Jacobsen, was also the Pastor at First Lutheran many years ago. So you can understand why I have fond memories of this congregation.

I recall that Manhattan Beach was country. Walking the many streets, visiting the many homes, writing news articles for the Daily Breeze, having a malt and a burger at a little restaurant close to the ocean, experiencing a mortuary becoming a church on Sunday mornings, riding the city bus, enjoying the wonderful Horde family, and so much more--all of this fills my memory."

Pastor Meyer concluded his remarks by saying,

"May the Lord richly bless your celebration, for holding up the past helps to shape up the future. It is the future that will open up whole new avenues of Gospel ministry as you touch people with the life and love of the Lord Jesus. I will remember you in spirit as you celebrate, joining your thanksgiving and praise to our good and gracious God."

Blessings!

R. Z. Meyer

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The new congregation grew quickly, even during that first summer. Sunday School first met on August 8, 1948. Early worship services were held at the "Chapel of the Good Shepherd", a funeral home located at 400 Manhattan Beach Boulevard. Charter member Jim Adcock was appointed as one of the congregation's first officers. The first three years of the congregation's history were years of great excitement. The name "First Lutheran Church of Manhattan Beach" was chosen in 1949 when the congregation became an official part of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

In the same year, 1949, the Martha Society of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) signed their Charter and the Voters' Assembly was organized. The Lutheran Women's Missionary League is a Synod-wide church auxiliary dedicated to the development and maintenance of greater mission consciousness among the women of the LCMS. They were and are dedicated to mission education and support. They adopt and support a variety of local and foreign mission projects.



First Martha Society, First Lutheran Church of Manhattan Beach

A Legacy of Growth

The first pastor called to First Lutheran of Manhattan Beach was the Reverend William J. Schepman who was installed on March 5, 1950. Pastor Schepman is a relative of Pastor Timothy W. Schepman who is currently serving St. John's Lutheran Church in El Segundo, California.

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The congregation purchased six lots on Manhattan Beach Boulevard and Poinsettia Ave. and on October 15, 1950 broke ground for the current sanctuary. Volunteer workers from the congregation helped reduce the building costs, and on Sunday, June 3, 1951, the sanctuary was dedicated. 350 people attended that first worship service. Three months later a Reed

Organ was purchased. In that same year, the Walther League was organized.

In March, 1952, Pastor Schepman was granted a peaceful release. He was replaced by interim Pastor William Schmook. Pastor Schmook's grandson, Norman W. Schmook, is presently serving Zion Lutheran Church in Victorville, California. On Sunday, November 30, 1952, an installation service was held for Pastor John C. Jacobsen, the cousin of Rev. R. Z. Meyer. On April 12, 1953 the parsonage was completed at 825 11th St. in Manhattan Beach and Pastor Jacobsen and his family moved in to their new home.

Education has always played an im-

portant role in the life of Lutheran congregations, so on February 21, 1954 a two-classroom Christian Day School was approved by the District Mission Board. Their approval was necessary because the congregation was still receiving financial support from the District. Ground breaking on the classrooms was held on May 9, 1954. The school was



Pastor Wm. J. Schepman



Pastor & Mrs. Jacobsen & Sons

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dedicated and the first teachers were installed on September 12, 1954. On April 11, 1954, a new Baldwin organ purchased by the LWML was dedicated.

In 1955, the congregation became self-supporting. A sign advertising the congregation's presence was purchased by the Men's Club and placed on the corner of Manhattan Beach Boulevard and Poinsettia Avenue.

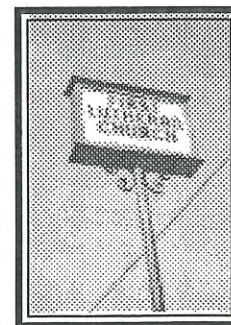
In April 1956, Pastor Jacobsen was granted a peaceful release and Pastor William Schmook again served as the interim pastor until the installation of Pastor Kurt Klein on August 25, 1957. In preparation for the installation of Pastor Klein, the church parking lot was paved and the church property was fenced.

In 1959, the first Altar Guild was established at the church. Their immediate order of business was to remodel and redecorate the sanctuary. New

carpeting and a large wooden cross were donated by the LWML. In September, the congregation's Day School was closed because of a variety of unfortunate circumstances.

In 1959, a First Lutheran Braille Work Center was established by Dottie and Walt Dashnaw. This publishing effort has been in continuous operation for 39 years! Volunteers come from not only First Lutheran but other local congregations to produce books for the blind. Today, through the efforts of our braille workers headed by Mrs.

Detta Hagen, hundreds of volumes of braille materials are



Pastor & Mrs. Klein & Warren

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dispersing the light of God's Word to visually-impaired people not just in the United States, but throughout the world.

One of the organizations that supported First Lutheran Church during those formative years (and continues as a source of support today) was Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL). The AAL is a fraternal benefits company that provides

insurance only to Lutherans and uses its profits to further the work of the church. AAL traditionally sponsors a variety of events and projects for congregations. Recently, in May of 1998, AAL helped support the internationally renowned African Children's Choir which performed in concert here at First Lutheran.



African Children's Choir in Rehearsal

As the population of Manhattan Beach topped 34,000 people in 1960, a three-year expansion program was initiated. On May 7, 1961, Pastor Klein was granted a peaceful release to serve as a hospital chaplain in Vancouver, British Columbia. The Reverend Harold Kupke served as the interim pastor for four months until the installation of Pastor Richard Guehna.

Pastor
 Richard
 Guehna
 and
 Family

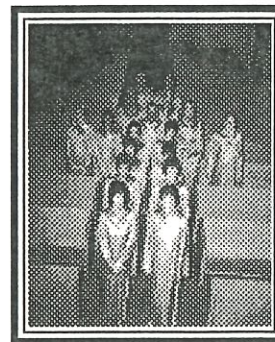


Because music has always played a critical role in the worship life of God's people, the congregation established an Adult Choir, which was followed a little later by the organization of a Junior Choir.

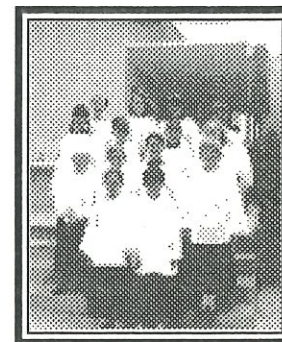
Sunday school, like the

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community, was overflowing with children in those years. First Lutheran rose to the occasion and made the education of their youth a priority in the congregation's ministry. Vacation Bible School attracted children from the area who came to enjoy the various fun activities as they learned more about their Lord.



Adult Choir
 c. 1965



Junior Choir
 May 1966



Sunday
 School
 Children
 1960

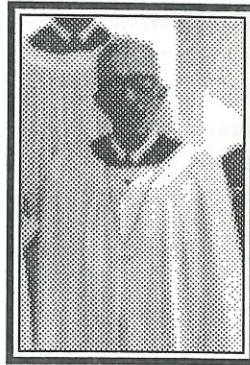


Vacation
 Bible
 School

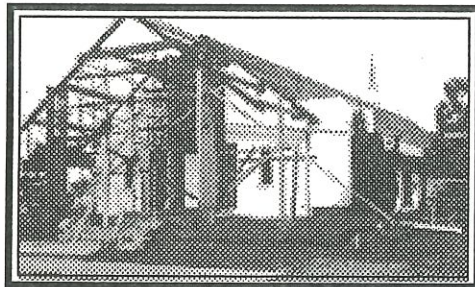
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In 1962, additional property was purchased on Eleventh Street as part of an expansion plan. Pastor Guehna was granted a peaceful release on December 9 of that same year. The Reverend George Kupke became the interim pastor until April 7, 1963 when Pastor Gottfried H. Naumann was installed.

The congregation celebrated its Fifteenth Anniversary shortly after Pastor Naumann was installed. Additional property was purchased fronting Manhattan Beach Boulevard and plans were begun to expand the educational wing and add a fellowship hall. While those plans were underway, the Fifteenth Anniversary Stewardship Dinner served to kickoff a plan to remodel the church sanctuary. In May, 1965 a special worship service was held to rededicate the newly remodeled worship facility.



Pastor
George Kupke



The 1964 sanctuary
remodeling project
under way.

The remodeled
altar area with the
beautiful new cross
donated by the
LWML.



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Pastor Naumann expressed the following in a letter written in 1965: *"The congregation has taken me to their hearts and has many talented and faithful men and women to stand ready to ease my work."*

Katherine Naumann, Pastor Naumann's wife, shared some very interesting Naumann family history with us to add to the family history of First Lutheran. *"Missionary Naumann, Pastor Naumann's father, returned with his family from India to Europe in 1912. Gottfried was five years old at the time. (On the journey home to America, the Naumann family booked passage on a ship leaving from South Hampton, England.) The "Titanic" was at port in South Hampton, but they took another ship that sailed a short time later. After being at sea for several days, there was a heavy fog and ice bergs surrounding them. When the fog lifted, bodies and wreckage were visible (as the ship the Naumann family was on sailed into the immediate aftermath of the sinking of the "Titanic"). By the grace of God, Gottfried Naumann was spared."*

Katherine's Letter continues: *"Years later, in 1963, Pastor Naumann arrived in Manhattan Beach with Kathy and Vicky. The change to First Lutheran proved fortunate. During his pastorate at First Lutheran the beautification of the church was completed with the dedication in June, 1965. In 1964, twenty members were received into membership by adult confirmation, transfer, and profession of faith."*

In 1971, Pastor Naumann retired and received a set of golf

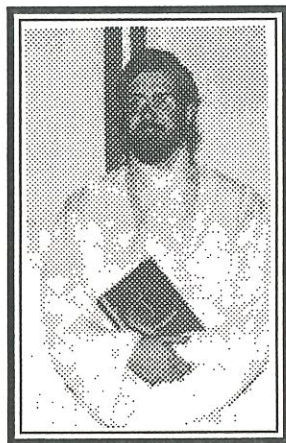


Pastor Gottfried H. Naumann
and his prized golf clubs.

clubs from the congregation.

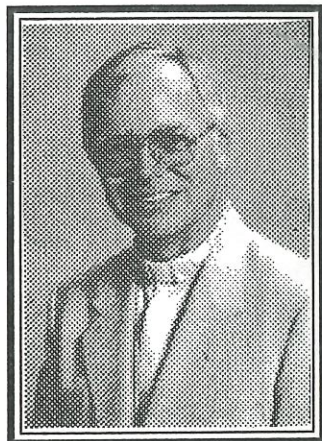
Changing Times

Also in 1971, the year Pastor Naumann retired, a young man named Norman F. David graduated from Seminary and was installed as the congregation's new Pastor. Pastor David served until 1976. He was succeeded by Pastor David Burk who was installed in 1977 and continued as Pastor until November, 1983.



Pastor
Norman F. David

These were difficult years for First Lutheran in which division and strife stole the joy from our midst and drove some from the congregation. What was needed was someone to heal the division and give the congregation an opportunity to refocus its ministry. God would soon answer that need. Pastor Robert Foelber served as the interim pastor until June 30, 1984 when Pastor Leslie C. Beale was installed in July, 1984.



Pastor
Leslie C. Beale

In the fall of 1986, the need for preschool services in Manhattan Beach became acute. First Lutheran seized the opportunity and opened a preschool for children between the ages of 2 1/2 to 5 years old. The prospects of starting a preschool was a challenging thought to many, but God blessed this effort and the school was an instant

success both spiritually and financially. In 1993, the school expanded with the addition of two new class-

rooms and a Kindergarten class was begun. In addition to helping oversee the start of the preschool, Pastor Beale got out his hammer and nails to construct the first playground for the kids. Today, Circle of Love Preschool, First Grade and Child Care Center continues to grow as it meets the early educational and spiritual needs of children in the community.

During these years the congregation began to gray and the children that had been so plentiful grew up--most of them eventually moving away. People at First Lutheran remained active with a variety of projects including the annual Oktoberfest complete with square dancing. Traveling musical groups entertained the congregation from time to time, and members took bus trips to a number of local events, but the average age of the membership was growing older.

First Lutheran was not the only congregation with an aging membership. Many older and established congregations throughout the Southland were experiencing the same thing. Old Trinity Lutheran, which helped give birth to First Lutheran, finally had to close its doors for good. Good Shepherd, Inglewood, the mother congregation for five other churches in the area, has seen a dramatic decline in its membership as the demographics of the community changed. Indeed, the winds of change were blowing throughout the South Bay--winds that are still blowing today.

One of the transitions taking place in the church during this era was a rebellion against "The Establishment" which included the established church. This gave new and contemporary churches a boost. Contemporary services and music became a trend. First Lutheran was not immune to these changes, so in the fall of 1989, longtime congregational or-



The Playground at Circle of Love

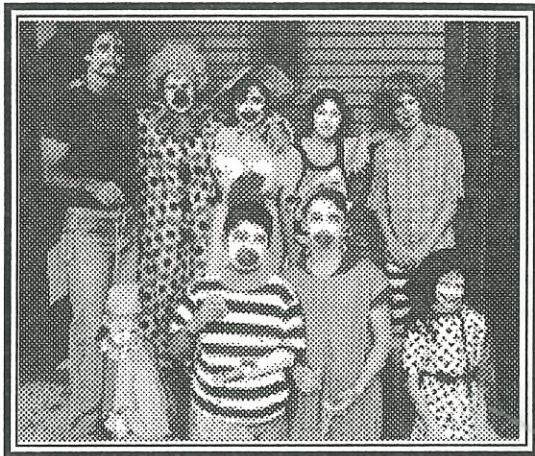
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ganist Helen Smoot was replaced by Gene Peterson and the congregation took a short foray into the arena of contemporary music. Gene was also instrumental in forming a clown ministry for First Lutheran. He left in the winter of 1993 and was eventually replaced by Jay Rogers who is our current organist and choir director. With Jay, the congregation returned to a more traditional worship format.

Pastor Les Beale served First Lutheran longer than any previous pastor. When contacted concerning his thoughts and memories on this the 50th Anniversary, he wrote the following:

"The Holy Spirit saw fit to place me in your midst as Pastor for thirteen years. The first of those years were a time of healing and renewal and even today we can give thanks to our merciful God who led us through and gave us special measures of his grace to forgive and bring unity among us and to prepare us for the time of strengthening. Build us up, Oh Lord, and enable us to do the work of ministry.

"As I look at my "Farewell Album" of letters and pictures, I remember especially our times together in Bible Class, Bible Study and Bible Fellowship of all kinds and sorts from Sunday morning to every day and evening of the week; with the children, "Young Adults" (every Sunday night for years and years!) and our special fellowship on Wednesday morn-



The clown ministry participants--
ready for action!

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ings. I shall always remember one of the pillars of the congregation saying, 'I've been to Bible Class every Sunday for 25 years and I never heard (learned) that before!' We give thanks and rejoice with great joy for every instance when God's Holy Spirit let the light shine a little brighter in the heart, mind and spirit of any one of you, and in me, too. As my hair grew more gray, I hope I grew in wisdom from God.

We entered a new phase of growth and outreach when the Lord led us and enabled us to begin the Circle of Love Preschool and Kindergarten (and First Grade and who knows what to come!) Everyone involved with Circle of Love from the beginning will acknowledge that it was a work of God and a miracle of God. Despite the cares and worries of many, Circle of Love was a success from its very first day, financially solvent, and within a year or two, able to add classrooms and office space to our campus. Mainly we were--and are--blessed with a supply of God's servants to lead the school as director(s) and wonderful teachers--and such wonderful students. Oh, how I love you all!!!

Janet and I are overwhelmingly thankful to God for our years among you, for our ministry at First Lutheran, for your ministry to us. I hope, pray, and know that we grew together in God's love and grace. And, I hope, pray and know you can look forward to an ever-changing and growing ministry as our wonderful God continues to open doors of ministry and leads still more people to enter through those doors to His Kingdom.

Rely on the Holy Spirit's power to enable you to meet the challenges of the next 50 years and the New Millennium, in everything, giving all glory to Jesus."

Soli Deo Gloria,

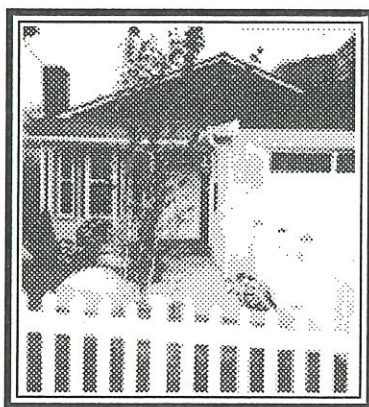
Pastor and Janet Beale

Pastor Beale retired in 1996 and was replaced by the Rev. Dr. William Scar who served as interim pastor until the installation of Pastor Steven C. Carlson in August, 1997.



Pastor Steven C. and Mary Carlson

As First Lutheran prepares to celebrate its Golden Anniversary and looks forward to the 21st century, a variety of projects have been completed. The pastor's office was partially remodeled just prior to Pastor Carlson's arrival. A new church pipe organ was purchased in 1998. The parsonage at 825 11th St. was completely remodeled. Pastor Carlson and his wife Mary lived in a rental in Torrance for a few months until the parsonage was completed. Meanwhile, the School Board began plans to expand Circle of Love by one grade each year, beginning with the 1998-99 school year. This will require long range planning as we continue to outgrow our present facility.



The New and Improved
825 11th Street

Leaving the Past Behind and Stepping into a New Century

What will the future of First Lutheran be! Where will God lead us, and will we find the courage to follow? What kind of change will our congregation experience as we face the challenges of a new Millennium? Will we try to ignore the changes that swirl around us, or will we be up to the challenge and step out boldly in faith, becoming, "All things to all people?" Will we close ourselves off to the shifting needs of the community and live in the past, or will we have the wisdom and discernment to go where we have never gone before? Our answers to these questions will determine the future history of First Lutheran Church of Manhattan Beach.

When First Lutheran was founded, families were strong and children were plentiful. The people moving to Manhattan Beach came, in large part, out of an area of our nation that is still known as part of the Bible Belt--so church was a priority with them. Biblical morality was the foundation of our society and our lives. People felt a strong denominational loyalty to the church in which they were raised. The majority of South Bay residents were of white European extraction and were of moderate income. Mission fields were something across the sea in foreign lands. There was a general feeling of optimism as the society grew and personal wealth increased.

None of these rules hold today. We live in a society that is fearful and pessimistic. Families are weak and struggling. The mission field is no longer "over there" in some foreign land, but right here in our own backyard. Demographics are rapidly changing as a variety of new ethnic groups move into our community--challenging the church to change with them. Personal wealth has also increased greatly in Manhattan Beach as new, wealthy residents purchase the little bungalows of the past and replace them with large multimillion dollar homes. Denominational loyalty is a thing of the past as people "church shop" for the answers they are seeking for their lives. Biblical morality has been lost and today's morality is ever changing. While Manhattan Beach is experiencing an increase in the number of young families moving into the community,

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those families do not feel the need to join an organized church, but they do feel a profound need for the blessings of God.

The one thing that remains constant is that these people need what God has to offer. Rich or poor, male or female, black, white, yellow, brown or red; they are looking for hope, joy and peace of mind. They are looking for a reason to have faith and to look forward to a better tomorrow. They are not looking for new programs and gimmicks, but for the answers to the most basic questions of life. They are not looking for a message of hope that comes from the mouth of a pastor, but for a congregation that shows their faith in the Gospel message of Jesus Christ by the way they live and participate. And they are looking for love in a world that seems cold and loveless. In short, they are looking for "the real thing."

The rules of the game have changed. Those approaches that worked so well in the past, no longer produce the results they once did. Many churches have tried to continue to hold on to the past and have died. Others struggle to survive with declining and aging memberships.

Is this a negative picture of the future? By no means! This is a time of rare opportunity for the church. The world is changing around us and that change will not stop. The church has always adapted its approach and techniques to fit the world in which it lives. We change not for the sake of change, but to find new avenues to bring the lifesaving message of the Gospel to a dying people.

With change comes blessings. We live in a community of people who are hungry for the Good News and assurance that comes through Jesus Christ. They have trusted in money and found it wanting. Money has not brought them the happiness it promised. They have trusted in themselves, only to be disappointed again and again. They have trusted in churches and preachers and been let down. They are searchers. . . searching for the truth. . . the truth we confess every week in worship.

The opportunities for sharing God with our neighbors and friends have never been greater than they are today. This can and must be First Lutheran's finest hour

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as we trust in the promises of our God, heed his call to live and share our faith, and step out boldly into a new century and a new world.

Are we up to the challenge? With God's help, we are! It is He who made us, who breathed into our nostrils the breath of life, who called us to life and faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, who filled us with the gifts of His Holy Spirit, who has led us to this place and time and promises to be with us always until the end of the age. We do not step into our future alone. It is a bold new world. . . and we must become a bold new people!

In His Love,
Pastor Carlson



do everything
through him
who gives me
strength

Philippians 4:13