

The History of St. Luke's Congregation Albury



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This chronicle covers some of the highlights in the life of St. Luke's Congregation from its beginning in 1926 to the time of the amalgamation of the two Lutheran Churches in the mid 1960s.

Our early pioneers who were of the Lutheran faith were people very much of the land. When they arrived in the Southern Riverina, the country they preferred to settle on was of a gentle undulating nature, never hilly or the flat plains. Many a time their farms surrounded the small village of the area; here they would carry out the majority of their business and personal dealings. This lifestyle continued for a number of decades before gradually these people of a rural background, and in small numbers at first, moved to the large towns such as Wagga Wagga and Albury to make their homes.

Prior to World War 1 very few of the citizens of Albury were of the Lutheran faith. After peace was restored in 1918 people from the surrounding farming areas began to drift in to settle in the town. It was then that Walla Walla's Pastor Simpfendorfer was made aware of the spiritual needs of these Lutheran people. Pastor Simpfendorfer, with his great organising skills and being a tireless worker, then decided that he would conduct Sunday morning services at Jindera and then on occasions would hold an afternoon service for the Albury Lutherans at the Presbyterian Church. This format continued after the arrival of Pastor Stolz who was inducted as Assistant Pastor of the Walla Walla Parish in 1925.

In 1926, Albury had a population of 10,000 people and scattered throughout the town a considerable number of present and past adherents of the Lutheran faith who had moved and settled in the town. Pastor Stolz in the company of Mr G Arnold visited numerous homes throughout the town. Almost immediately the necessity of beginning regular services was realised. So a meeting was convened for 12th November at the home of Mr J Lieschke with Mr H A Paech presiding. The gathering at this meeting moved unanimously that the holding the regular church services should commence. The first service was set down for 19th December 1926 at 3.00pm. For this historic occasion, Malcolm's spacious Reception Hall in Kiewa Street was hired. (Malcolm's was a firm which catered for balls, public and private functions in their large hall or at private venues). Only one half of the hall was available for the service, as being so close to Christmas, in the remainder of the hall hundreds of Christmas cakes were arranged, with the most artistic designs and aromas. Screens and curtains formed a division thus presenting the hired half of the hall with a church-like aspect for the service. About 70 chairs had been placed in rows for those who were expected to attend. A piano was available and also a table which served as the altar, lectern and pulpit. Mr R S Scholz of Jindera accompanied the singing. For the service almost every chair in the hall was occupied, which was a sign of the future potential for a congregation.

After the success of the first church service held just prior to Christmas in 1926, the Albury Lutherans decided to establish a congregation. The founding meeting was held on 22nd February 1927, in the home of Mr F Schnelle at which Pastor Stolz presided. Mr G Arnold was elected Secretary/Treasurer, Messrs W Krause, H Obst and C Koetz filled the position of Stewards. Mr F Schnelle was elected pianist for the church services. At this meeting it was also decided services would be conducted in both languages, English on the first Sunday of the month and in German on the third Sunday.

At the time of this meeting, the Albury Congregation comprised following people:

Mr & Mrs O Schnelle	Mr H Obst	Mrs Greschke
Mr & Mrs & Miss Arnold	Mr & Mrs W Krause	Mr & Mrs Lieschke
Mr & Mrs Stanton	Mr & Mrs Wiesner	Mr & Mrs Gollasch
Mr & Mrs Schnelle	Mr C Koetz	Mr & Mrs Schubert
Mrs Bockmann	Mr & Mrs Paech	

With the death of Pastor Simpfendorfer in July, 1933, the large Walla Walla parish was left with only Pastor Stolz to serve its seven congregations. Pastor Stolz continued in this role until July 1936, when Pastor Linke who graduated from Immanuel Seminary in the previous year, was appointed and took charge of what was to be known as the Southern Field of the Walla Walla Parish. This field consisted of five congregations: Jindera, Bethel, Albury, Brocklesby and Baranduda; with an occasional service conducted at both Wangaratta and Yackandandah.

While both ministers of the parish to the greater part worked independently of each other, all congregations were still a part of the Walla Walla Parish, with each minister living in his respective field. Upon his arrival in Albury, Pastor Linke resided at 421 Hume Street. His stay at this address was only for a short period, before he moved to the home of Mr Wiesner at 485 George Street. This abode had a number of advantages over the previous address, namely a garage for the car and a telephone. For many years the Albury Congregation held their church services in a hall near Hoyts Theatre, but when this building was sold in July 1935, the members were obliged to look for another place to worship. They succeeded in procuring the use of the Church of England Sunday School Hall in Olive Street next to the Police Station and the Presbyterian Church which was used on special occasions. These two places continued to be used for worship until the present church was erected.

In 1933, Albury was the largest congregation of the Southern Field, but on average attendance it ranked only third. It was thought one reason for this was that worship times had to slot in when the buildings were available and on occasions it was not appropriate to hold a service.

The first serious attempt to build a church in Albury was in July 1928, when a special meeting was called. After a number of difficulties and then the Great Depression of the 1930s, the project came to an end and hope faded. Then in mid 1935 a fund was opened, called "The St. Luke's Lutheran Congregation Building Fund" and a collection was to be taken up annually. The wheels of motion began from there. At the beginning of the following year, a building committee was elected, consisting of Messrs C Scholz, P Ebert, J Lieschke, H Terlich and C Kolz. During the first weeks of 1938 Pastor Linke took what was termed a "Tour of Collection" in a number of parishes and congregations throughout New South Wales, canvassing support for the Albury Church. Generally he was well received and several hundred pounds were realised. Upon Pastor Linke's return to Albury from his "tour", the Church Building Committee reported on its latest decision, recommending that a church with the dimensions of 42 feet by 22 feet with 14 foot walls be built. The church was to be located on a block of land previously purchased by the congregation for the sum of £370. This recommendation was approved by the members. Mr Barrie of Henty was then to be approached to draw up the final plans accordingly.

In August 1938, when St. Luke's Building Fund stood at £1200 the final decision was made to build. On 22nd August, the contract was awarded to Mr F W Lemke, a Sydney builder who had previously relocated his business to the border, for the erection of the church for the quoted sum of £1408. Building was to commence almost immediately, and with normal progress, the house of worship was expected to be completed by early December.

On a day of Spring sunshine, the Foundation Stone of St. Luke's Church was laid on Wednesday 28 September, 1933 at 3.00pm. The Vice-President of the District, Pastor J D Stolz delivered the festival address based on Ephesians 2:20, with Pastor J Linke having the honour of laying the stone with the inscription on the stone 1 Corinthians 3:11. At the close of the service a special thanks was extended to Mr Bennett, monumental mason of Albury, who gifted the foundation stone to the church. Prior to the opening of the new church many donations of furnishings and monetary gifts were received, which caused much joy and appreciation amongst the members.

St. Luke's day of great blessing and answered prayers took place with dedication of the new church at 10.30am on the 18 December 1938, the 4th Sunday in Advent, exactly twelve years from the time of the first organised service, held in Albury by Pastor Stolz. The expectation of a large gathering was not disappointed despite the pressing heat of the day in the summer of 1938/39. Five ministers were in attendance. Pastor E A Jericho presented the Dedication Address, Pastor H Fuhlbohm performed the Act of Dedication, Pastors A Lohe and J Stolz the Mission Festival and Pastor Linke the Liturgy.

With the appropriate remarks Mr C W Scholz, the secretary of the Building Committee handed the key to President Fuklbohm to open the church in the name of the Triune God. The ministers led the way into the new church, followed by the committee bearing the Holy Bible and the Altar Vessels. The solemn strains of Handel's Largo played on the organ spread the atmosphere of reverence. The Sacred Vessels and the Holy Bible were handed to the President and placed on the altar and an impressive ceremony was delivered. After the singing of a hymn the church was dedicated to the Triune God for the proclamation of His Word and the administration of the Sacraments. The Walla Walla and Jindera choirs beautified the service with their singing. On the completion of the service many of the visitors returned to the Albury Botanical Gardens to enjoy a picnic lunch and some relief from the heat of the day. After the dedication a debit collection was taken annually and in March, 1944, the final payment was made and the church was debt free.

In 1945 the first definite steps towards the erection of a much needed hall were taken at the annual meeting of the congregation. The decision was unanimous, the necessity of such a building was required as practically every aspect of the congregational life would benefit. With the granting of the government permit for the building, St. Luke's Church Hall, and the passing of the plans and specifications (main hall 36 feet by 26 feet, kitchen 17 feet by 16 feet) by the Albury City Council in mid 1947, the paperwork was complete. But before any building work could commence the air raid trenches at the rear of the church had to be filled in and the site levelled. The trenches were dug during World War 2 when Australia's shores came under attack from the Japanese forces. With the site in readiness, Mr A B Chick, the chosen builder, was approached to construct the hall on a 10% cost plus basis.

At the beginning of February 1948, the long awaited building of the hall was commenced. On Sunday 30th May in a brief ceremony, the Foundation Stone was laid. With the shortage of materials due to the building boom after World War 2, the building proceeded at a slow rate. It was then with great rejoicing that the members of St. Luke's assembled on Sunday morning 6th November 1949, to witness the dedication of their Church Hall. A brief dedicatory service was held at the hall entrance by Pastor B Muetzelfeldt and then Pastor Scheer formally opened the Church Hall.

The cost of the hall, which at that time was an "L" shape, came to £1,600. The mortgage on the building was liquidated in November 1952, three years after its opening. By 1962 it was considered the size of the hall did not meet the requirements of the congregation. In December a meeting was called and a plan for the hall extensions was displayed and discussed. These additions consisted of enlarging the kitchen and adding two rooms and toilets. It was estimated that £5000 should cover the cost of the extensions. Some walls had to be demolished, after which the building operation began on 11th September 1963, and was completed on 15th December of

the same year. Much of the work was carried out by voluntary labour, overseen by Bro. N Jacob.

From the time Pastor Linke took charge of the Southern Field of the Walla Walla Parish, the pastors lived in tenanted housing in various parts of Albury. This arrangement was at times most inconvenient to both the pastor and parish members alike. In July 1949 the Albury Parish Committee decided that the time had come for a definite move to be made in securing a manse. After a number of false moves to acquire a suitable home or land for a manse, the block next to St. Luke's Church was finally secured at a cost of £1200 which was generously donated. The decision was then made to proceed with the erection of a brick/tile roof constructed manse. On 31st July 1954, the tender of £5,300 by Mr W Vickers was accepted with the building to commence almost immediately. Owing to the acute shortage of roofing tiles at the time, the progress on the building was greatly retarded, thus it was April 1955, before the manse was completed.

Throughout the years, the rift of 1846 which had occurred within the Lutheran Church in Australia caused a great deal of heartache, not to mention wastage of man power and money in the Lord's work. There had been many in both branches of the churches who had worked and prayed for an amicable union. Discussions were continued in faith, even though at times through the years the outlook for amalgamation was anything but bright. With meetings continuing on a regular basis between the two churches, it was cause for special thanks when in December 1964 and January 1965 that a major breakthrough came. This resulted in a Document of Union which was endorsed by the leaders of both the Lutheran Churches in Australia at that time. In March 1965 the ELCA conducted their General Synod at Toowoomba which unanimously adopted the Document of Union.

In October of the same year the UELCA held their Synod at Horsham, and after a spirited and serious debate the Synod also adopted the Document of Union. This decision paved the way for Altar and Pulpit fellowship between the ELCA and the UELCA and ultimately the establishment of one Lutheran Church in Australia after a separation of approximately 120 years.

A combined service which involved both Synods of the Lutheran Church in the Albury district was conducted in the Regent Theatre on the Sunday afternoon of 28th November 1965. It was an experience to remember. A gathering of approximately 1500 people attended this thanksgiving service where all could embrace in love and harmony. Undoubtedly the highlight of the union celebrations were the combined communion services held throughout Australia during the month of December. For some in particular, this was a moving experience as they were able to commune for the first time with their own relatives.

After the amalgamation of the two synods of the Lutheran Church, a great deal of reorganisation took place, not only throughout Australia, but also in the southern Riverina. Congregations were transferred from one parish to a neighbouring parish. Congregations which were adjacent to each other, where practical, one church would close and the members join neighbouring congregations. In Albury the members of the Trinity Church (Swift Street) met to discuss the future of the congregation. It was decided to disband and the members be encouraged to join other Lutheran Churches in the area. For a time St. Luke's and St. Peter's Lavington congregations remained as the one Albury Parish, but served by two pastors.

At the time of the amalgamation of the two Lutheran Churches in Albury it soon became apparent there was not sufficient seating accommodation at St. Luke's Church building for the Sunday services. Consequently it was decided that from Sunday 22 May, 1966, two morning services be conducted each Sunday. This solved the problem at that time. Then there were those members who felt that having two morning services was dividing the congregation and people were being deprived of getting acquainted with each other. Then again the problem still existed when special services were conducted such as Easter, Christmas and Confirmation. To provide more seating accommodation within the church, it was decided to extend the church building in a southerly direction towards Guinea Street. By October 1966 work had begun on the extensions and in December the walls were on the way up. While the building work was in progress, the church services were held at the Trinity Church in Swift Street. The Christmas services were conducted in the Red Cross Hall which was situated at the railway end of Dean Street.

After a number of delays in the building operations, the official dedication of the extensions of St. Luke's was held on Sunday 12th March 1967 at 10.30am. The annual Thanksgiving Service was combined with the dedication of the church. Guest preacher for the occasion was Pastor Sander and soloist for the day was Mrs Margaret Kennedy. Also present at the service was the architect Mr Walduck. The attendance on the day was 300 worshippers. This was the estimated number the extended church could comfortably accommodate with normal seating.

The total cost of the extensions to St. Luke's Church building was \$14,874.11 which included 18 new pews. Donations received were \$5257.00 which left a debit of \$9617.11. The following Sunday after the dedication of the extensions to St. Luke's Church building, the first Confirmation class of the combined Lutheran Churches of Albury was confirmed. The class consisted of 25 candidates with 500 people in attendance, of whom 400 were able to find a place within the church building.

Over the past 75 years the members of St. Luke's have been privileged to have had twelve Pastors serve the spiritual needs of the congregation. Each has left his individual mark on the life of the congregation for which they are each dearly

remembered. Those members who had known any of these Pastors personally will remember each of them by some special deed they performed within the Congregation or for them individually. As well we remember the relieving Pastors who have served the needs of St. Luke's over many years, some for a short time, others long term. We must remember the vicars who were in our presences at different times. To you all, we thank you for the spiritual care and encouragement you gave us.

Pastors who have served St. Luke's over the past 75 years:

Pastor J Stolz	1926 – 1936	Pastor D Tscharke	1969 – 1977
Pastor J Linke	1936 – 1939	Pastor N Jaensch	1977 – 1984
Pastor B Muetzelfeldt	1939 – 1948	Pastor P Lockwood	1984 – 1988
Pastor C Scheer	1948 – 1954	Pastor D Zweck	1988 – 1996
Pastor B Bartholomaeus	1955 – 1964	Pastor L Bartel	1997 – 2005
Pastor E Sabel	1965 – 1969	Pastor G Kuchel	2006 – 2012

Also we must remember the many members of St. Luke's over the past 75 years who have worked tirelessly for the wellbeing of the congregation, some in the forefront, others quietly in the background. We extend to you all our special "Thank You and God Bless".

There are many names found in St. Luke's minute books that are no longer to be found in the congregation but God has been gracious to our congregation. In the past, He has given great opportunities and has blessed many people through His Word and Sacraments. Today He still blesses us with that same gracious Word of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the same sin-forgiving, life-giving Sacraments. And tomorrow, who knows what God has planned. Whatever it is, may He help us to grasp the opportunities and serve those people around us with the Good News of our wonderful Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ

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