



Rev. Ken Unruh stands in front of the Minnetrista Baptist Church, once known as the German Baptist Church.

Nearby Swedes help Germans form church

Minnetrista Baptist Church, sitting quietly on the eastern edge of St. Bonifacius, opens its doors each summer to as many as 100 St. Bonifacius youngsters wanting to attend Vacation Bible School.

The ecumenical Bible school has been offered to area youngsters for years and so, in spite of a smaller Sunday attendance, hundreds of area young people have been affected by Minnetrista Baptist. Pastor Ken Unruh, who is also Waconia Ridgeview Hospital Chaplain, is always meeting someone at the hospital that once attended Vacation Bible School at Minnetrista Baptist.

And, as far out as the church's influence spreads, its history goes back even further. It will celebrate its 130th anniversary next year.

Minnetrista Baptist was founded in November 1858 by Rev. John Wendt, Marie Wendt, Carl Bruhn, Friedericke Bruhn, Ludwig Zarendt, Marie Zarendt, Sophia Ganz and Marie Strobach. The eight had been meeting in homes since September 1857, the year after their German families moved to the area from Dayton, Ohio.

The Scandia Baptist Church (now Waconia Baptist) had already been

formed at Scandia (east of Waconia) and that Swedish congregation encouraged the Germans to form their own church in Minnetrista where they could worship in their own German language. Rev. Wendt led the German Baptist Church for its first 18 years.

During that time, the church built its first building. The wooden structure, across the street east of the present church, was built in 1868. Rev. F. Berndt ministered to the church from 1876-1878 and following an interim with no pastor, Rev. Wendt returned to the German Baptist Church. During this second term, plans were laid for a new church building.

The project was completed during the tenure of Rev. C.C. Langlitz which followed. The new building was the first at the present site. Under Rev. Langlitz' leadership the church body also grew and the church opened preaching stations in Mound, Chaska, Watertown and Hutchinson. The first three lasted only a short time, but the Hutchinson station became a permanent mission and is known as Bethany Baptist Church today.

Rev. H. Bens was the next pastor to serve the church. Then in

1901 Rev. F. H. Heinemann arrived in Minnetrista where he stayed for 37 years. It was during his tenure that the present church building was begun in 1912.

Pastors since Rev. Heinemann have included Rev. August Lutz (1938-47), Rev. Ralph Lutter (1948-52), Rev. D.S. Wipf (1953-57), Rev. R. Thomas Harfst (1958-62), Rev. Fred Klein (1965-72) and Rev. Delvin Bertsch (1972-78). Rev. Unruh arrived in June 1980 after the church had been without a pastor for two years.

Unruh sees good things ahead for the church. It is located in an area that he sees growing within the next 10 years as development moves west from the Twin Cities. There are plans to eventually add on to the church to make room for more people and more activities. It will also be made more handicapped accessible in the future.

Minnetrista Baptist has a lot to offer those looking for a church with a friendly atmosphere where people know and care about each other. It has been on St. Boni's border since the community began as a tiny village and it will continue to serve the area as the city grows and develops.