

# Ehlert Family



he Ehlert family name was brought to Frankenmuth in 1965, when the Rev. Joel Thomas Ehlert was ordained into the ministry and installed as pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church. His grandfather, The Rev. Frank Frederic Ferdinand Ehlert, brought the family name to America in 1892. Frank Ehlert (1880-1962) was born in Stettin, Pomerania in northeast Germany, the same year that St. John's Lutheran Church in Frankenmuth was founded. His father, a blacksmith, died when Frank was only six years old. Frank, his mother, brother, and two sisters, came to America in 1892, when he was 12 years old, and settled in Markesan, Wisconsin. He attended Prep School and College in Watertown, Wisconsin. In 1906, he married Elsa Witte (1879-1964) and was also ordained into the Lutheran ministry. For thirteen years he served as a pioneer pastor to six congregations in South Dakota. He later served Lutheran congregations in Wisconsin and Minnesota, where he retired in 1956 after 50 years in the ministry.

Frank and Elsa's marriage was blessed with four children: Myrtle, Norbert, Gerhardt, and Marcella; also, 18 grandchildren and over 40 great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren. A son Norbert, born in 1911, followed his father's footsteps and prepared for the Lutheran ministry. However, an over-supply of pastors at the time turned Norbert's interests in other directions and so he worked for the A.O. Smith Corporation in Milwaukee for forty years. He married Dorothy Kaul of Thiensville, Wisconsin. The couple raised four children: Ronald, Joel, LeAnn, and Susan. They lived in the Thiensville-Mequon, Wisconsin area most of their lives. They have 12 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Joel Thomas Ehlert, born 1938 and son of Norbert and Dorothy, was born in Thiensville, Wisconsin.

His home was just a block away from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, from which he graduated in 1965. He served as a vicar in Sturgeon Bay, Milwaukee and Jefferson, Wisconsin as well as an instructor at Northwestern Lutheran Academy in South Dakota.

It was in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, that he met his future wife, Miriam Baganz, whose father and grandfather, were both Lutheran ministers. Two weeks after their marriage, which was performed by her father, Joel and Miriam brought the Ehlert name to Frankenmuth when Joel was installed at St. John's Lutheran Church. Two daughters, Pamela and Jennifer, were born to the couple.

As Pastor of St. John's, Rev. Ehlert helped the congregation build a new Parish Center in 1970, has conducted the Adult Choir since 1970, and instituted the "Frankenmuth Lutheran Hour" in 1972, now heard every Sunday on three radio stations. The congregation presently numbers 782 souls.

Rev. Ehlert is a religious editorial writer for the Frankenmuth News, conducts services at the Frankenmuth Convalescent Center, serves on the board of directors of the Frankenmuth Foundation, and is a member and past president of the Frankenmuth Rotary. He served as a contact man for the Wisconsin Synod's Committee on Relief, helped sponsor two Laotian refugee families in Frankenmuth. He helped establish the Bethesda Lutheran Group Home, served as a tour guide on trips to the Holy Land and Lutherland in East and West Germany. He served on the Bavarian Princess Selection Committee and received the "Religious Heritage of America-Michigan Religious Leader Award".

Pastor Ehlert and Miriam count at least eight Lutheran ministers in their family trees: two grandfathers, a father, a brother, a brother-in-law, and three uncles.

