

FIELD NOTES

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Zum Kripplein Christi
Iron Ridge, WI

Zum Kripplein Christi Wisconsin Synod Lutheran Church lies on Rock Road north and east of Iron Ridge, Wisconsin. The date 1865 is engraved on the building's facade, but the church structure, of grey stone, is probably not the original building. Alongside stands a much more recent building--perhaps twenty or thirty years old (or at least recently refurbished and sided)--that houses a grade school. Bruce Braun is the principal and sole teacher. W.A. Marquardt is the Pastor; he doubles up serving another congregation (Trinity) and resides in Hartford [357 Highway S, Hartford, WI, 53027, 673-2082]. From a previous visit to the site I had learned that German services took place on the second Sunday of every odd month at 10:30 AM and so I had written to the pastor announcing my intention of coming and inquiring as to whether he knew of any German speaking old timers who were good singers. He hadn't responded and, as Phil Bohlman suggested, he didn't know anything anyway. In fact he was just racing out, hauling vestment case behind me, to make it to his next service when I arrived. Reminiscent of catching a professor between classes.

Instead I was befriended by a curious teenager. In such a locale where everyone knows one another, strangers aren't hard to spot. Apparently some were speculating that I was a visitor from Germany come to see how things were in the New World. The youngster introduced me to an older man, Armond Boeder, whose family had been involved with the church since its inception. Boeder was in a slight hurry since it was his turn to serve as usher, but he did say that his family had various songbooks and that plenty of singing was certainly part of his experience. Moments later my young friend, whose name I never caught, introduced me to the German speaking minister, Professor Gawrisch of the seminary in Mequon, who was to conduct the service. He was a short friendly

man, but also in a hurry and, I gathered, not especially familiar with the congregation. He merely told me that in this church everyone sings. [Perhaps this was meant for my Irish Catholic ears since several Prods have informed me that, having been raised a Catholic, I am no doubt ignorant of congregational singing--an inference that conflicts entirely with my experience.] Loitering about, I also met the aforementioned principal, Bruce Braun, a friendly young man of perhaps thirty whom I had overheard earlier discussing the merits of certain pianos. As it turns out, his father had been a German teacher and he teaches German songs to his charges; he also doubles as organist for church services (the German services excpeted).

As the time for services approached, I went into the vestibule where Mr. Boeder handed me a hymnbook. I looked it over as I slid into a pew Evangelical-Lutherisches Gesangbuch fur Kirche, Schule und Haus(Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, n.d.). It contained only words but no tunes. A small notice board toward the front of the church listed the selections for that day: #'s 437, 448, 546, 311, & 314. I wondered, as the organ sounded from an overhead loft, whether the organist (Mrs. Arnold Dais) had the tunes in her head or whether she followed some notations in another book. As the Professor foretold, the parishoners joined in. Their were perhaps twenty-five in attendance. With the exception of one retarded young man [Downs syndrome?], all were at least sixty and ranged, I'm guessing, up into the eighties. Most were women. Indeed the pews in front of me were filled exclusively with women. Each of them had had their hair down recently, it seemed to me, and only one wore a head covering.

The service itself matched the few other Lutheran ones I've attended and, naturally, contained the same basic structure as the Catholic mass--the few exceptions included the greater emphasis on hymnsinging and the administration

wine with wafers. Professor Gawrisch's sermon concerned "Die Siegende Kraft des Glaubens" (The Triumphant Power of Faith) and, although I could only catch bits, I recall several references to the nefarious doings of "der Teufel."

With the service's close, I filed out with the rest and shook hands with the Professor while exchanging what seemed to be the customary phrase "Good morning." Mr. Boeder was bustling around prior to closing up the church in connection with his duties as usher, so I reiterated my purpose in coming to his wife. She was very personable and immediately mentioned several other people who might be good subjects. I suggested setting up a session sometime in the afternoon during the week of March 18 through 22, and we agreed that I would call in a few days to confirm a meeting. Its worth noting that she said she and her friends knew secular songs as well as church songs and that, although some of these songs were learned in school, they were also sung acapella at home.