

Our Saviour's History

**Compiled by Pastor John F. Henning
May 31, 1983**

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, 300 Logan Street, is still called by some Merrill natives the "Norwegian Church" even though through a number of mergers, new member families and intermarriage, over half the membership is made up of descendants from German, Sweden, Poland, Italy, Estonia, Denmark, Great Britain and other countries. The history and traditions of the congregation have helped preserve the Norwegian flavor.

In August, 1885, the congregation was first chartered under the name "The Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church". Better known in those days as the Synod Church of Merrill, the thirteen charter member families had begun meeting for worship as early as 1879 led by Rev. A. Mikkelson and later by Rev. N. Berge. In 1885, Nels Forde of Amherst conducted services and led them toward organization. Pastor P. Koren, Washington, Iowa, accepted the call as their first pastor. In 1887 the first church was built on Lot 2, Block 10, Willard's Addition.

Charter members of the congregation were the families of John A. Johansen, Gabriel Stephenson, Anton Martinson, Mikkil Martinson, Nils Anderson, Peter Peterson, Leuis Knutson, Nels Evjue, Ole Gunnesgaard, Jacob Odegaard, John Kolstad, Mrs. Anna Olsen and John Lokemoen. Evjue, Peterson and Knutson were the first officers.

By 1902 the congregation had grown but trouble developed. Fifteen families separated from the Synod Church to form a new congregation that was chartered on April 12, 1903, under the name of Zions Evangelical Lutheran Church of Merrill, Wisconsin. May 2, 1903, Zions constitution was adopted and Rev. Norby from Winchester, Wisconsin, became their temporary minister until Rev. Hvistendahl was called on November 6, 1903. Having no church building, this congregation rented the Norwegian Methodist Church. In 1904, Zions purchased the corner of Logan and Second Streets for a building sight.

Charter member families of Zions were: John M. Moe, Nels Evjue, Nels M. Knudson, Jacob Odegaard, Lars Hanson, Thomas Severt, Hans H. Thompson, Gilbert Everson, Gust Olson, John Severson, Nels Anderson, Ivan Solberg, Math. T. Johnson, Ole H. Thompson, Knudt Severt, John H. Lokemoen, Thomas Larson, Torgen Erickson, Jens Johnson, Ole Kaasa and Christ Solumn. They paid their pastor \$5.00 a year from each member plus three offerings per year.

In 1904, the first worship in the English language was conducted; until this time only Norwegian was used. The language used at funeral was up to the mourners. John Moe and John Severson were hired to build the new church at a cost not to exceed \$3,000.00. Emma Evjue was appointed first organist in 1905.

On June 17, 1907, a summer school was started in the church parlors. Children attended half days; the older one in the morning and the younger children in the afternoon. The school ran for six weeks, beginning shortly after public school dismissed in early summer. Our Saviour's

continues to have summer schools, now called Vacation Church School or Vacation Bible School. They have been shortened considerably to one week of half days.

Fellowship has always been an important aspect of Our Saviour's Church life. In October, 1908, the first Lutefisk supper was held. Christ Solum, John Lokemoen and I.J. C. Solberg formed the committee that ran the supper. That traditional supper has been held annually ever since, growing in popularity each year. On July 5, 1908, the first ice cream social was also held. The ice cream socials are only held on rare occasions, recently being replaced by activities at the Our Saviour's Fair Stand and other events.

Sitende Mai (May 17, Norwegian Independence Day) was celebrated annually in the early 1900's with a Norwegian flag procession. This was discontinued by 1919.

The reuniting of the Synod and Zions congregations began January 8, 1915, with a united congregation meeting between Zions and the Synod. It was decided to unite, but to wait for the merging of a new Evangelical Lutheran Synod which came about in 1917. On July 8, unity was accomplished and John Moe, H.L. Larson and Ole Kasse were elected officers.

From 1919 to 1924, Rev. Housgstad served Immanuel, Wausau; Our Saviour's, Merrill, and Barnes Creek and Chat. On September 10, 1924, Rev. Andrew Green of Kenosha was called to be the pastor at Merrill and Barnes Creek while Wausau called another pastor. During the summer of 1925, it was decided to build a parsonage on Fourth and Logan, the site of the old Synod Church which had been torn down by the men of the congregation.

Mr. C.G. Torkelson was in charge of building the new parsonage using all the lumber that could be salvaged from the old church. It is interesting to note that C.G. Torkelson's son, Robert, was the architect for the present church on Logan and Third Streets bearing a 1966 cornerstone.

1942 brought a new influx of members when the Barnes Creek Lutheran Church was blown off its foundation by a storm. Transportation was now more available so the Barnes Creek members decided that instead of rebuilding, they would demolish their damaged church and join with the Our Saviour's congregation in town.

Among the Barnes Creek people were the families of John Lindquist, Hjalmar Stevenson, Hans Osness, Matt Peterson, Adolph Severt, Mrs. (Tom) Caroline Chilsen, Albert Gunderson, John Gustafson, Sigvard Stevenson, Andrew Stevenson, Steve Stevenson, Louis Kipke and Clarence Peterson.

Another group of members joined following September, 1962, introducing the first significant numbers of Non-Norwegians. A number of people from the St. James congregation in the Town of Pine River came to Our Saviour's when their church closed its doors. Other members joined Calvary Lutheran in Pine River. Most of these people had German ancestors.

Among these members were the families of Art Hagedorn, Martin Weege, Mrs. (August) Margaret Schleif, Albert Pehlke, Mrs. (Paul) Tillie Henkelman, Herman Lemke, Emma Jaeger, Mrs. (Irvin) Anna Gruetzmacher, Clarence and Alvin.

In 1975, a significant number of people from Bethlehem Lutheran Church joined Our Saviour's. In the absence of the pastor at Bethlehem, a number of Bethlehem members decided it would be in the best interest of the church if Bethlehem and Our Saviour's would merge. At a special meeting of the Bethlehem congregation a motion to bring about such a union was defeated. A short time after that meeting many of those people who still favored union, left Bethlehem and joined Our Saviour's. Most of these people were of Swedish descent.

The people who transferred from Bethlehem in 1975 were the families of Thomas Wardall, Ronald Nutter, Richard Swanson, Ken Mattson, Arnold Lange, Mrs. (John) Ann Kolka, Esther Henson, Ellen Heldt, Ervin Hanson, Olga Johnson, Geno Bondioli, Ronald Kolka, Clarence Wardall, Gerald Edmund, Clara Johnson, Lennard Johnson, Olga Waage, Raymond Schwartz and Lee Stebbins. There were several others who transferred somewhat earlier including Melvin Peterson, Harry Nelson, Philip Thompson, Clare Gretebeck and Roger Baumgart. A few families came later as well.

In 1985, Our Saviour's celebrated its 100th Anniversary in a joint service with St. Francis Catholic Church which was also celebrating 100 years.

In 1987, Our Saviour's dedicated its most recent building addition, which allowed for more classrooms and office space.

Currently Our Saviour's has a staff of 8 (3 pastoral staff, 4 administrative staff, and 1 custodian). Our youth program is growing by leaps and bounds, with Confirmation Camp and a mission trip to St. Louis planned for the Summer of 2010.

This August, Our Saviour's will be celebrating its 125th Anniversary. We are planning to have a small celebration and are hoping to welcome back as many pastors of and children of our church as possible.

Our Saviour's rose out of Norwegian roots. Determined to be faithful in worship and strong in fellowship and service they have maintained meaningful customs of years gone by while willingly receiving and absorbing the descendants of many nations and making them part of the "family".

Pastors serving the Norwegian Evangelical, Zions Evangelical and Our Saviour's Lutheran Churches:

<u>Pastor's Name</u>	<u>Years of Service</u>	<u>Pastor's Name</u>	<u>Years of Service</u>
Nels Forde	1885	M.H. Quail	1934 - 1970
Paul Loren	1885 - 1888	Lindley H. Jacobsen	1970 - 1972
Ingvard Monson	1889 - 1891	Gerhard Bretheim	1972 - 1977
Th. Norseth	1892 - 1894	Dan G. Olson (Associate)	1976 - 1988
A.C. Dolven	1894 - 1896	John F. Henning	1977 - 2002
J.J. Grefstad	1896 - 1897	Keith Anderson	1989 - 2000

Olaf Skattebol	1897 - 1899	Jeffrey L. Martinson	2000 – 2010
A.W. Hvistendahl	1900 - 1901	Theodore Gulhaugen	2003 - 2010
L.D. Oien	1901 - 1908	Beth Macha (Interim)	2010 – 2011
O.T. Boe	1905 - 1913	Maurice Schaus	2011-2014
Barron	1907 - 1909	Dr Dennis Creswell	2014-2017
Lunde	1912	Sarah Miller-Nehring	2018
J.O. Dreng	1909 - 1911	(Part-time Interim)	
Ivan Ramseth	1910 - 1913	Patricia Schutz	2018-2022
J.H. Myrwang	1913 - 1916	Kathy Tullmann	2022-2023
H. Madland	1913 - 1918	Justin H. Smoot	2023-present
C. Hougstad	1918 - 1924		
A. Green	1924 - 1927		
C.H. Eidness	1927 - 1931		
J.M. Hesteness	1931 - 1933		
H.A. Peterson	1934 - 1937		