

History

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church

- 1825 The New York Daily Advertiser has this announcement:
"A Novel Sight"
A vessel called a sloop has arrived in the port with immigrants from Norway. It is very small measuring forty-five tons and brought forty-six passengers, male and female and one baby born on the ship."
This sloop the "Restoration" sailed from Stavanger, Norway on July 4, 1825 and arrived in New York on October 9, 1825.
- 1848 In this year alone, 107 ships were chartered in Norway to bring immigrants to America. There were three massive waves of immigrations...1866-1877, 1879-1890, and 1900-1910. The principal area of Scandinavian settlement extended from Illinois to Wisconsin and to eastern Montana.
- 1870 The immigrants came in considerable numbers to the Merrill area because of work to be found in the sawmills and lumber camps.
- 1876 The Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod was formed in Wisconsin.
- 1878 Scandinavians who settled in Merrill were served by typical Pioneer circuit riders. They traveled the distance from Amherst, Wisconsin to Merrill providing the Lord's Sacraments on an irregular schedule.
- 1880 Some of the known traveling preachers were Rev. A Mikkelson, Rev. N. Berge, Rev. Nels Forde and Rev. N. Sovde who helped organize a congregation.
- 1885 August 21, men gathered on a Friday evening to organize an Evangelical congregation and to draw up the principal points of a constitution. The following trustees were elected: Nels Evjue (president), Lewis Knudsen (secretary), Peter Peterson (treasurer). The church's official name became the "Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church of Merrill".
- 1885 October 26, Pastor N. Sovde called the first congregational meeting to order. It was decided they would call a pastor together with a congregation in Wausau and Pine River.
- 1886 Rev. Paul Koren began his work as pastor. He served until 1889. Members were visited by the trustees and asked to contribute \$5.00 a year to be collected in quarterly amounts by the men for the pastor's salary.
- 1887 The first church building was built on lots 3 and 4, block 10 of Willards addition to Merrill. This was several lots east of the present parsonage on Logan and Fourth Streets. The building committee was Nels Evjue, Anton Martinson, A. Seim, A. Moen and Peter Peterson.
- 1889 The first meeting of the Ladies Aid was at the home of Mrs. Andrew Moen when I.G.

Monson was the pastor. Its name was listed as "Den Norske Evangeliske Luterske Kirke's Kvindeforening."

- 1890 Activities like Lutefisk suppers, auction, Ice-cream Socials, 4th of July picnics and other festivals were held to help pay the church debts. These events continued to be held many years.
- 1895 Lots 5 and 6 of Block 9 on Logan Street and the house there on was purchased for \$750. This was to be used as a parsonage. A succession of young pastors stayed a year or two and then left because of the low income on which they could not exist and pay rent besides.
- 1895 The pastor's income was increased to \$225.00 yearly with the addition of three festival offerings and a free house.
- 1895 Seventy dollars was raised to pay the church debt to Nels Evjue.
- 1896 It was voted to have a Sunday School at 12:30 every Sunday. Evert Norsby was elected as school superintendent.
- 1896 The congregation voted to join the Norwegian Synod and sent its first delegate – Charles Price.
- 1897 A Norwegian Summer School was started, when 56 children were signed up to attend. From then on a seminary student was sought to teach sessions of several weeks each summer.
- 1897 Charles Price organized a choir which made its first appearance at a Christmas service.
- 1899 The church building was moved from 4th Street to the lot on Logan Street which held the parsonage. The house was moved to the southern part of the lot. An addition with a basement was added to the church. The Young People's Society helped financially and they were given the right to have meetings there.
- 1900 The church became known commonly as "The Synod Church."
- 1901 Rev. L. O. Oien, who had taught summer school as a student, was called and served until 1908.
- 1902 Trouble developed in the Norwegian Evangelical Church (Synod) and fifteen families left and organized Zion Lutheran Church.
- 1903 Lands being opened for homesteading in the west drew 23 families who left the Synod Church and Merrill to settle near the area of Mott, South Dakota. They started a church and named their settlement Merrill. A Christmas tree was sent to them from Merrill.
- 1903 Ten families were taken into the congregation at a quarterly meeting. They were from a new wave of migration from Norway.
- 1910 February 16, the Synod Church decided to collect \$300.00 in order to become debt-free on the day it celebrated its Twenty-fifth Anniversary, August 21, 1910.
- 1915 A group of farm families left the Synod Church to form the Barnes Creek Church. An old school building was purchased and remodeled by C.G. Torkelson. It became a

church on Highway 17, east of Merrill.

- 1916 During the Rev. J. H. Myrvang's stay at Merrill members of the Synod Church and the Zion Church started a drive to combine the two churches into one congregation.
- 1916 Rev. Hjalmer Madland served as pastor of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church (Synod Church), the Zion Church which had called him in 1913, the Barnes Creek Church and the Chat Church.
- 1917 The Evangelical Synod was formed by a merger of the Norwegian Synod, Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod, United Norwegian Lutheran Church Synod. It was known as the ELC.
- 1917 In July, the Norwegian Lutheran Evangelical Church (Synod Church) and the Zion Church merged. All property of both churches was to belong to the new congregation. Services were to be held in the Zion Church and all other meetings to be held in the Synod Church building.

The Forming of the Zion Church

- 1903 On April 12th a meeting was held to organize another Norwegian Evangelical congregation in Merrill. It's official name became the Zion Lutheran Church.
- 1903 May 2nd, a committee composed of Nels Evjue, John Lokemoen, Jacob Odegard, John Moe and Tom Severt presented a constitution that was the same as that of the Synod Church.
- 1903 The first officers of the new church were John Larson (president), John Johnson (secretary) and Chris Solum (treasurer). Trustees were Ole Kaasa, Nels Knudsen and Nels Anderson. Ole Kaasa was elected Sunday School Superintendent. The Rev. A. V. Evistendahl accepted the call to be the first pastor. He had also served the Synod Church earlier in 1900-1901.
- 1904 It was resolved to build a church and to buy the property on the corner of Second Street and Logan Street for \$1150.00.
- 1905 The basement of the new building was in use for services in January. In furnishing the building as it progressed, the Ladies gave several hundred dollars. The Young People's Society presented the altar set and the lectern. The Young Girl's Society, "Spring Flowers", gave the baptismal font.
- 1906 The first Lutefisk supper was served in this church and that custom has carried on to the present day.

- 1907 First English services. Before that every service was in Norwegian. Eventually two services were held on a Sunday with one in English and the other in Norwegian.
- 1911 On August 18, it was voted that "Certain women, good and faithful workers of the church" were given the power to vote at congregational meetings.
- 1912 A house at 407 Pier Street was purchased for a parsonage.
- 1913 Rev. Hjalmar Madland accepted a call and became the pastor and in 1916 became pastor for the Synod Church, too.
- 1915 January 8, at a meeting between the Zion Church and the Synod Church, a decision was made to unite the two congregations. However, it was decided best to wait until the new ELC Synod would be formed since both belonged to different synods now in the process of merging.
- 1917 July 8th, the two congregations united. The official name of the church became Our Saviour's Lutheran Church. Pastor Madland continued to serve for two more years. The officers of the new church were John Moe (Vice-president), Nels Evjue, Ted Hanson, Sam Gilbertson were trustees. Ole Kaasa, Olaf Odegard, Gust Olson were deacons. C.G. Torkelson became secretary, Ben Larson, treasurer, and John Lokemoen, Sunday School Superintendent.
- 1919 From 1919 to 1924 Rev. C. Hougstad served Our Saviour's in Merrill, Barnes Creek and Chat Churches, and Immanuel in Wausau.
- 1923 The upper part of the altar and the statue of the Synod Church was carried by a group of men to Our Saviour's Church. It was placed upon the altar of the Zion Church. This altar base had been made by John Moe. He had also made the pews and altar chairs.
- 1924 Rev. A. Green was called to serve at Merrill while Wausau called its own pastor.
- 1925 January 2 was a red letter day. All women of the church who were 18 years of age and over were given the power to vote and hold offices in the church.
- 1925 The old Synod Church was torn down and its lumber was used to build a new parsonage. Mr. C.G. Torkelson contracted to do the building. This is the same building recently remodeled.
- 1927 An amendment to the constitution changed the procedure of the congregational meetings. "A president shall be elected by the congregation and from the congregation to preside at all meetings. In case of his absence the vice-president shall preside. The pastor shall act as an advisor. (Formerly the pastors acted as president.)
- 1927 Rev. C.G. Eidnes became pastor of Our Saviour's and Barnes Creek. The salary at this time was \$1,600. Besides three special offerings. He would also have free housing with the exception of fuel, water and lights.
- 1931 Rev. J.M. Hestenes was installed when E.L.C. churches in Merrill, Tomahawk, Spirit Falls and Barnes Creek united in a joint call. On April 14, 1933, Rev. Hestenes while at Tomahawk suddenly passed away. Joseph Hestenes, his eldest son was called to serve as a temporary pastor during the summer while he was on vacation from his

seminary studies.

- 1935 The Fiftieth Anniversary of the church was celebrated on August 23, 24, 25. Pastor H. Peterson was pastor. The new Art Glass windows were installed. These were donated by individual members in memory of relatives. Now these same windows are a focal part of the new sanctuary.
- 1937 Rev. M.H. Quail served Our Saviour's congregation from January 24, 1937 until he retired on July 26, 1970. During the 33 year period the congregation increased from 240 to 800 baptized members.
- 1941 Barnes Creek Church was damaged in a wind storm. The members joined Our Saviour's Church. Among the Barnes Creek people were many of the families who had belonged to the old Synod Church.
- 1960 The American Lutheran Church Synod was formed. And Our Saviour's became a member of the new Synod. The church observed its 75th Anniversary.
- 1963 Another group of members joined and introduced the first significant number of non-Norwegians. The St. James Church in Pine River disbanded and a great number of German names were added to the rolls of Our Saviour's.
- 1965 On January 5, the plans for a new building were accepted at a congregation meeting. The site of the St. Francis School was purchased from St. Francis Catholic Church. Harold Engel took on the task of removing the building and also served on the building committee with Stanley Chilson, Dufur Peters, David Finanger, William Peters, Richard Hagedorn, Lyle Anderson, Olaf Lokemoen, George Engel, Oscar Osness, and Mrs. Allen Osness (Carol).
- 1966 Dedication of the new church, January 23rd. Robert Torkelson, a son and former member of the congregation was the architect. All the Sister of St. Francis School and the priests of the Catholic Congregation of Merrill took part in the dedication.
- 1970 Pastor Quail retires. He came to Merrill in 1937 and served thirty-three (33) years. During that time he baptized 538, confirmed 341, performed 188 marriages, and 354 burials.
- 1970 Rev. Lindley H. Jacobson conducted his first services in September. He initiated the teacher training session for the Bethel Bible Series.
- 1972 Rev. Gerhard Bretheim was installed and continues the teacher training of the Bethel Series. Over 108 people enrolled in the series of lessons which culminated with over 60 members completing and attending a joint banquet with St. John's Lutheran Church members who also completed the course in their church. Harley Swiggum, founder of the Bible studies was in attendance.
- 1975 A large number of Swedish names were added to Our Saviour's rolls when 41 members from the Bethlehem Church joined in anticipation of the two churches making a merger. The uniting didn't take place at this time.
- 1976 Rev. Dan Olson accepted a position as associate pastor to Rev. Bretheim.
- 1977 Rev. John F. Henning was called to serve this parish in a team ministry with Rev. Olson.

- 1985 The 100th Centennial Year of Our Saviour's Lutheran Congregation. A highlight of this year of celebration was a joint ecumenical service with St. Francis Catholic Church also celebrating its centennial. The was held at the Merrill High School auditorium.
- 1984 Burned mortgage of church.
- 1987 Dedication of Building Addition.
- 1989 Rev. Keith Anderson accepted position as Associate Pastor.
- 2000 Rev. Jeffrey Martinson accepted position as Associate Pastor
- 2003 Rev. Theodore Gulhaugen accepted position as Senior Administrative Pastor
- 2008 Jamie Diestelhorst joined Our Saviour's as Youth and Family Director
- 2010 Current staff includes Interim Pastor – Beth Macha, Associate Pastor – Jeffrey Martinson, Youth and Family Director – Jamie Diestelhorst, Administrative Secretary – Jean Monti, Administrative Assistant – Rebecca Burgener, Financial Secretary – Shirley Henkelman, Treasurer – Marlene Graap, and Custodian – Tim Ruprecht

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church 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. Descendants of other nations have been willingly received and made a part of the family.

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