

## HISTORY

### BETHANIA FREE LUTHERAN CONGREGATION MARSH GROVE TOWNSHIP, NEWFOLDEN, MINNESOTA

It was on March 27, 1884 that Bethania Congregation was organized after worship service at the Gullick Wedme home in the N.E. ¼ Section 32, West Valley Township, Marshall County, Minnesota. However, records indicate that there had been religious services in the community prior to the organization of the congregation; fourteen people were communion guests at a service in the area in the month of December, 1883. At the organizational meeting Pastor Christian Saugstad presided as chairman and Olaf Brekkestran was appointed secretary. The following were charter members:

Gullick Wedme	P. K. Green	Olaf Brekkestran
E. O. Hjelle	Elias Haarstad	Iver Ophus
Petter P. Vinje	Jens Green	Ole E. Bjornrud
A. Anderson	Ole Erickson	
Ostgaard	H. P. Elseth	Jens Webjornson

Elected as trustees were Gullick Wedme, Elias Haarstad and Iver Ophus; deacons: Jens Webjornson and Petter Vinje; treasurer: H. P. Elseth; secretary: Olaf Brekkestran. E. O. Hjelle; song leader as there were no organs or other musical instruments.

The name of the congregation was to be Bethania Norsk Evangelisk Luthersk Menighed (Bethania Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation). Pastor Saugstad temporarily served as pastor until 1885 on a free will offering which amounted to \$43.00. The constitution and order of service of the Conference was accepted. A committee of three namely E. Haarstad, H. Pederson and Ole Erickson were appointed to locate a cemetery for the congregation. According to church records the following infants were baptized in 1884: Peder Pederson, Olaf Olson, Halbert Ingvald Pederson (Elseth) and Petra Louise Green. The first couple married was Martha Schie and Mathias Hanson. The congregation affiliated with the Norwegian Danish Conference.

1885. It was decided to pay the pastor's salary of \$60.00 per year to be paid between November 15 and December 1. The report of the cemetery committee for a graveyard location in the N.W. ½ Section 5 Marsh Grove Township was accepted. Pastor Knute B. Birkeland served as pastor in 1885 and part of 1886. Caroline Bangen moved and it was seconded and unanimously approved to call theological student Elias Aas as pastor.

1886. Theological candidate, Elias Aas began serving as pastor in 1886 at \$50.00 a year and free house. More families joined the congregation from time to time. At the annual meeting at the home of E.O. Hjelle it was decided to build a log church 20 by 24 feet with shingle roof. H. P. Elseth, Ole E. Bjornrud and E.O. Hjelle were elected as members of the building

committee. Each member was to furnish 92 feet of good sound logs. At this meeting Jens Webjornson and E.O. Hjelle were appointed as Sunday School teachers which possibly was the beginning of the first Sunday School in the congregation.

1887. The log church was built at the site of the present church; it faced west and the cemetery was to the south. There was a cellar under it in which they placed a box stove. The floor boards were laid about one inch apart under the seats so the heat could come up from below and make it nice and warm. The trapdoor to the cellar was right in the middle of the aisle. The first seats were made of sawed off logs with planks nailed on top. The pulpit was octagon shaped; a few steps led up and there was a shelf for the pastor's books. It was painted black with blue trim. Ole E. Bjornrud built the pulpit. Later Ole Thompson of West Valley built an altar with railing around it and painted it white. Common chairs soon took the place of plank seats. Each member was to pay \$2.00 for extra lumber.

1888. In May of this year Martha Hjelle, Mina Sagness and Eddie Heft were the first class to be confirmed in the log church. Reverend Elias Aas resigned as pastor of the congregation in December; A. Anderson Ostgaard was to have four mission services during the year. At the end of the year the Ladies Aid was asked to pay the church debt in the amount of \$10.00; it was also decided to quite spitting tobacco on the floor. The janitor was to order three men to clean the church when needed; the janitor to receive \$5.00.

1889. In March of this year theological student, Hans Ostgulen was called as pastor and he accepted. They lived in Warren, Minnesota and he used horses and buggy or sled to serve his congregations; he was to have two holiday offerings besides wages of \$60.00. Each voting member was to pay 25 cents to parochial school.

1890. It was decided that each voting member give 25 cents towards building a barn. The congregation became a part of the United Norwegian Church.

1891. Single men were to pay \$1.00 less than families and single ladies to pay as they please to pastor's salary; it was also decided to have two months of parochial school next year.

1892. A barn was built and completed in February; a committee was appointed to speak with churches Westaker, Middle River and Folden to consider parsonage. There was a unanimous decision to support Augsburg College.

1893. Sponsors at baptisms to go forward and remain standing during ceremony and afterwards all except ladies walk around altar or whatever is

being used and give offering. From 1893 to 1897 Bethania was an independent congregation.

1894. To have Laymen's meetings July 3rd, 4th and 5th.

1895. It was decided that no church member enter a saloon or get drunk; if anyone so does one has to go through a church reprimand (kirketugt). A fence was also built around the church yard.

1897. Bethania adopted the fundamental principles and affiliated with the newly organized Lutheran Free Church where it remained until 1962.

1898. The pastor's robe not to be used anymore; no chanting before the altar. Baptism according to Swedish Augustana Synod. Intruductory words and the Lord's Prayer to be read instead of sung at communion. The church gave permission to Free church, United church and Hauge's Synod to preach God's Word in church.

1903. The congregation was incorporated; a decision was made to build a new church at the same place by the cemetery.

1904. In the spring of the year there was a meeting to decide on repairing the church but instead decided to build a new one. Land of ½ acre each was donated by Olaf Brekkestran and Stener Green in the east end of the quarter line in Section 6 Marshal Grove township. The size of the church was 40' by 28' by 16' and a bell tower or entry 12' by 12'. The old church was torn down and stringers were used in the new building. Material and labor for the new church building cost about \$1050.00 The main carpenters were Anton Sundberg and Erik Olson. The annual meeting was held in the new church.

1905. Sunday school was held together with Bethesda Congregation.

1906. Pastor Ostgulen's resignation was accepted; a committee was named to work with the other parish churches to call a pastor. Sunday School held together with Bethesda congregation.

1907. Pastor M. Bjornson was called in the spring of the year and he accepted. Reverend and Mrs. Martin Bjornson lived in Newfolden. Bible School was held together with Bethesda congregation for five weeks. It was also decided to build a barn and outhouse and finish church building.

1908. Decided to side the church, make platform wider and add railing; also to build altar ring, paper and side the walls in the entry.

1909. There was a discussion on building a parsonage; Ole Sund to gather money for Augsburg Seminary.

1910. Ole Tvedt's house in Newfolden was purchased for \$850.00 with a payment in cash of \$700.00 and a note at \$150.00 at 8% for 1½ years; it was decided that a new barn and shed be built with the other congregation's consent.

1911. Decision to paint outside of church and fix windows; a girls' sewing club was organized.

1912. Pastor Martin Bjornson resigned as minister, student Albert Gilseth was to be called. Built a barn for the pastor by the church. There were also English services held alternating with Norwegian.

1913. There were two services in the Green Valley community.

1914. Two young peoples' meetings were held; eighteen pews were purchased. It was decided to have every fourth service in English in 1915. Three day special meetings were held with Pastor P. Nilson. The first organist, Betsy Amundson was appointed to have offering as pay.

1915. There was a first record of Norwegian and English confirmation. Special meetings of 2½ days were held with O. A. Fosse in charge. Ole Sund hired to fire in stove and was to receive 25 cents for each firing.

1916. There were special meetings with Pastor E. Aas having 2 services and C. N. Anderson having 3 days of services.

1917. Agnes Green appointed organist. Fostervold had 7 days of special services and Senator Loback also had one special service. The pastor's salary was increased from \$125.00 to \$150.00 per year.

1918. Pastor A. Gilseth resigns; Pastor John Hjelmeland was called to serve. Cemetery to be resurveyed and made into lots; Olaf Brekkestran was appointed sexton. Betsy Amundson again named as organist.

1919. The girls' sewing circle had a sale. An addition was built with extra repair on parsonage.

1920. Julia Westlin was appointed to be assistant organist.

1921. It was decided to build a road north from the cemetery.

1922. Pastor's salary to be \$200.00 for the year. Road was built north from the cemetery. The last meeting of the Girls' society was held and there was a last and final report. Clara Engelsrud was appointed to help as organist.

1923. Pastor's salary to be paid semi-annually in June and December. The Christmas tree program was held together with Bethesda congregation.

1925. There was a special meeting to decide if to build basement under the church where it stands or move the church back to the cemetery; there was no decision as it would cost \$1200.00 so there was not sufficient funds. At a later date a committee was appointed to contact non-members for donations to move the church.

1926. A district meeting was held.

1927. Reverend Ronholm was called to be pastor with a salary of \$210.00 plus 2 offerings; Reverend Ronholm began his duties in June with installation in July. Clara Engelsrud is at present the organist.