



NORWEGIAN GROVE
EVANGELICAL
LUTHERAN CHURCH
100th ANNIVERSARY
1881-1981

The Centennial History of the Norwegian Grove Lutheran Church

From an early history of Norwegian settlers in Sibley County we glean the following: "Neri Nereson, Jergen Nereson, and Ole Nereson, all from Satersdalen, were the first Norwegian settlers in Sibley County. They settled in the southern part, close to the county line, in 1855. That settlement is called Norwegian Grove. It joins with, and was settled at the same time as, the New Sweden settlement in Nicollet County."

The Norwegian Grove Luthern Congregation was organized the first day of February, 1881, at the home of Mrs. Anna Nereson, following a preliminary



Mrs. Anna Nereson home, site of organizational meeting.

meeting at the home of Svenke Torgerson on January 14, 1881. Prior to the organizational meeting, members of the new congregation had been attending services at Norseland. What today is known as Judicial Ditch 1A was to be the boundary line between the Norseland and Norwegian Grove congregations.

The following were charter members of Norwegian Grove Lutheran Congregation:

Gunder Nereson	Jorgen Peterson
Ole Overson	Svenke Torgerson
Asbjorn Torgerson	Louis Overson
Gunder S. Torgerson	Ole Indahl
Nere Nereson	Anton Reilson
N. G. Johnson	Reiel Antonson
Isak Wold	Torger L. Torgerson
Halvor J. Nereson	Gullick N. Johnson
(Later) Ole O. Foss	Swen K. Swenson

The first trustees of the congregation were:

Jorgen Peterson
Reiel Antonson
Nere Nereson

Until the new church was erected in 1884, services were held in the homes of the charter members. Rev. Thomas Johnson was the first pastor of the congregation, and his salary was \$85 a year. Ole Overson, one of the charter members, donated the land for the church and cemetery. The site chosen for the new church was conveniently located, as the members all lived within a five-mile radius of it. Later on one-fourth acre was bought from Ole Overson for \$10.



Rev. & Mrs. Thomas Johnson, first pastor



The first church, built in 1884.

John Rice did the carpenter work on the first church, and also built the furniture. The church was of good construction, about 20 feet by 30 feet, and was built on a low stone foundation. The building consisted of one room, with a small sacristy built out at the west end. Two doors, one on each side of the altar, led from the church to the sacristy. Between the two doors was a small door leading to the altar. The church had three windows on the north, three on the south, and a small one on the west in the sacristy. There was only one outside door; that was on the east side. Just inside the door to the left stood the stove. It was a long, black, narrow stove with a large drum on top, through which the smoke went before it passed into the stovepipe. The stovepipe extended the full length of the church to the west end where the chimney was. There was a narrow aisle up the center of the church, and on each side of the aisle were rows of pews extending to the wall. Extra pews stood against the wall in the front for the Sunday School pupils, and also at the back of the church by the stove. For many years services were conducted every second or third Sunday, usually in the afternoon. Since the late 1930's, services have been conducted every Sunday morning.

To begin with the church had no organ. The singing was led by the Klokke, Jorgen Peterson. The second Klokke was Ole Foss. Later on the congregation purchased a reed organ, and a piano was donated. The first electronic organ was purchased for the church in 1958. In 1976 a new Conn electronic organ was purchased and dedicated. This instrument is still in use today. Anna Johnson was the first organist. Each family had their own hymnbooks, which they brought along to services and Ladies' Aid. They were the small books with the words only. The pastor and organist had the music editions. For the Norwegian services, the "Koralbog" by Rev. E. Jensen, and published by the Lutheran Publishing House of Decorah, Iowa, was used. For the English services the Lutheran Hymnary, published by the Augsburg Publishing House of Minneapolis, is used. Down through the years special music has been provided by the Sunday School pupils, the Young People, and a choir that was organized around 1935.

In the early years, religious school was held at the church every spring for two months. This was always concluded with a large picnic. Each fall a Mission-Festival was held. There were always two services — one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The afternoon service was devoted to Mission work. Dinner and lunch were served outside on the church grounds.



A Ladies' Aid meeting in the early years.

The Ladies' Aid Society first met at the homes of members on Sunday afternoons, and the whole family was invited. Dues collected in these early days was ten cents from each. The first organized meeting that is recorded was on June 7, 1925. Officers elected were Mrs. F. W. Briard, president, Mrs. A. T. Skaro, treasurer, and Mrs. H. E. Tollefson, secretary. Many lufefist dinners were held in homes of members to help pay for the new church. For many years the Ladies' Aid October meeting was held at the Kasota Lutheran Home for the Aged. Now the Aid serves yearly at the Lakeview Rest Home in Gaylord and at the Grandview Retirement Home in St. Peter. Since 1975 the ladies have had a bazaar and bake sale every other year to make money for various church projects. In 1978 the Ladies' Aid paid for the new carpeting in the front of the church and down the center aisle. They also put up the cross and new lighting and decorating in the front of the church.

The first baptisms after the congregation had been organized were administered on Sunday, May 15, 1881. Baptized that day were:

Anna Maria Kristenson, daughter of Karl & Bertha Kristenson, born March 20th
Annie Mathilda Svendson, daughter of Sven K. & Margit Svendson, born January 21st

The first class of confirmands in the new church was in 1885:

Nils Nereson, son of Jorgen Nereson
Karl Reilson, son of Anton Reilson
Thone Torgerson, son of Asbjorn Torgerson
Anne Torgerson, daughter of Asbjorn Torgerson

The first wedding was that of Ole Foss and Anne Nereson, and was held on December 20, 1881. Mr. and Mrs. Louis Peterson (Mary Peterson) were the first to be married in the new church building.



Annie Swenson,
one of the first baptisms.

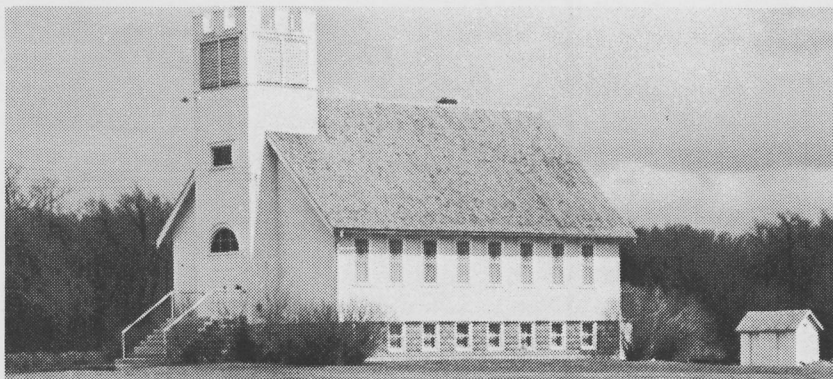


Ole & Anna Foss,
first marriage in the congregation.



Mr. & Mrs. Louis Peterson, first to be married in new church.

During the middle '20's the congregation realized the need for a larger and improved church building. At first it was thought that the old church could be remodeled, but after a more careful study of the situation, it was decided to erect a new building. Several sites were considered, but finally the gift of the present site by Jeanette Foss was accepted. This site was located about 7½ miles south of Gaylord on trunk highway #22, about a half mile east of the old site. To meet the expenses of the new church building, pledges were made, and suppers, bazaars and ice-cream socials were held at the homes of members.



Church built in 1929.

Those who served on the building committee were Selmer Wold, Helmer Tollefson, Wm. F. Briard, and William Skaro. A contract was let early in the spring of 1929. Ole Olson of Winthrop did the carpenter work, and E. J. Gladitsch of Gaylord did the mason work. Members of the congregation donated freely of their time and labor to build the new house of worship. The frame building had a full cement basement, was 30 feet by 46 feet, and the estimated cost was \$6,000. Work on the new building was begun in May of 1929, and was completed in October of that same year.

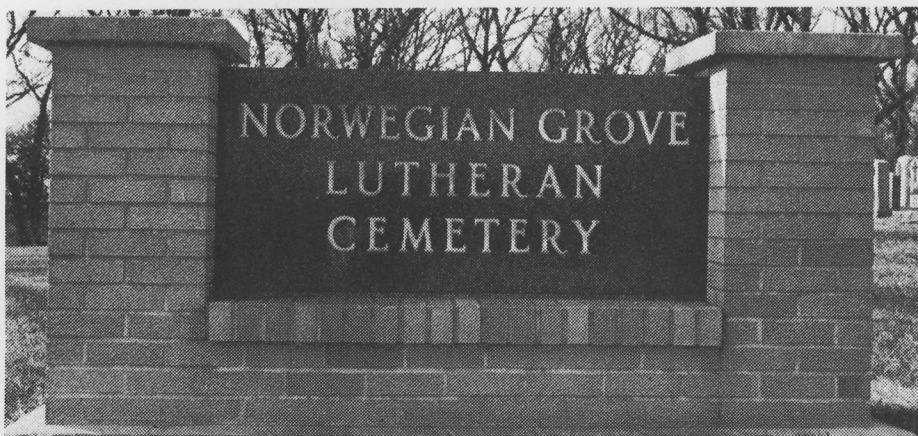
Rev. O. M. Gullerud, pastor of the congregation, presided at the dedication of the new building on October 20, 1929. The cornerstone-laying service was held in the morning at 10:30, with Rev. J. J. Strand of Chicago, a former pastor of the congregation, preaching the sermon. The dedication service was held at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, with Rev. Christian Anderson delivering the sermon. Other pastors who assisted at the dedication were Rev. E. H. Gade of Gaylord and Rev. C. W. A. Kuehner of Winthrop. Dinner was served by the ladies in their newly finished kitchen and dining hall.

Since there have been few young people in the confirmation class each year, they have usually been combined with the Norseland class, and oftentimes confirmed in the Norseland Church. In the early years of the congregation, young people would occasionally get together for fun and fellowship. Such meetings were usually held at the homes of members, and were not held on any regular basis. In 1927 the young people from our congregation were invited to join the youth society at the Norseland Church. This invitation was accepted, and from that time to the present the two congregations have operated a parish youth society. The monthly meetings of the society alternate between the two churches. Separate treasuries are maintained. In addition to the monthly meetings, there are usually two or three outings of various kinds during the year. Parents of the young people have taken their turns assisting in the work of the organization as adult leaders. In this Anniversary year the adult leaders are Lanny and Marilyn Briard. The present officers of the parish youth society are: Mike Karlsrud, president; Corey Olson, vice-president; Heidi Thoele, secretary; Blaine Schmidt, treasurer. At the present time eight young people take part in the Lutheran Youth Society. There are also thirteen children enrolled in our Sunday School.

Theodore Tollefson donated one-half acre of land adjoining the church grounds to the south, to be used as a cemetery.

In 1956 the congregation observed its 75th Anniversary. Rev. C. M. Gullerud, a former son of the parish, preached the anniversary sermon. In preparation for this Anniversary a new altar and pulpit and baptismal font and hymnboard had been purchased for the church sanctuary. Mr. Thomas of Arlington did the carpentry work. These improvements were made possible by monies from the Nora Foss legacy.

In 1964 a well was drilled on the church property, making running water available in the church basement for the first time. In 1966 the congregation built and dedicated a new kitchen in the basement, a new entry way to the church, and indoor restrooms. Members of the Building Committee at this time were: Arnold Schmidt, Arthur Tollefson, Kenneth Skaro, Donald Berg, and Charles Goodman (later replaced by Clayton Overson). Former pastor, Rev. M. E. Tweit, was guest speaker at the dedication service. In the afternoon a beautiful new monument, bearing the cemetery's name, was dedicated out at the cemetery.



New Cemetery
Monument, 1966.

At its annual congregational meeting in January of 1977, Norwegian Grove Lutheran Church voted to join the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and was accepted as a member of the Synod at its convention in June of that year.

The following pastors have served the congregation during the past 100 years:

Rev. Thomas Johnson	- 1881-1906
Prof. J. B. Frick	- 1906-1907
Rev. B. M. Rafteseth	- 1907-1909
Rev. J. J. Strand	- 1909-1925
Rev. O. M. Gullerud	- 1925-1937
Rev. M. E. Tweit	- 1937-1958
Rev. J. Petersen	- 1958-1969
Rev. T. A. Aaberg	- 1969-1976
Rev. T. Skaaland	- 1976-1980
Rev. N. A. Madson	- 1980-

It is with gratitude that the congregation acknowledges the many special gifts which have been received over the years for the building and improvement of the church property. And as the congregation looks back on a century of God's blessings it says as with one voice: *"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake."* Psalm 115:1



Prof. J. B. Frick, 1906-1907.



Rev. & Mrs. B. M. Raftesaeth, 1907-1909.



Rev. & Mrs. J. J. Strand, 1909-1925.
Their Silver Wedding Anniversary



Rev. & Mrs. O. M. Gullerud, 1925-1937.



Rev. & Mrs. M. E. Tweit, 1937-1958.



Rev. & Mrs. J. Petersen, 1958-1968



Rev. & Mrs. T. A. Aaberg, 1969-1976



Rev. & Mrs. T. Skaaland, 1976-1980



Rev. & Mrs. N. A. Madson & family, 1980-