

125TH  
ANNIVERSARY  
OF  
ST. PETRI  
LUTHERAN  
CHURCH

1875-2000



## THE HISTORY OF THE ST. PETRI LUTHERAN CHURCH

The first settlers began to arrive in this area in 1871. The early immigrants who settled in the Red River Valley were to a large extent, Scandinavians. Most of them had some acquaintance or affiliation with the Norwegian Lutheran Church denomination, The Norwegian Synod or the Norwegian Danish Evangelical Conference. These churches, through their Home Missions sought to reach out to all the new settlements with the Word of God. Wherever men settled came also the men of God to minister to their spiritual needs.

The first of these to enter this settlement was Rev. Bernt Hagego. This pioneer missionary pastor came to this settlement from Audubon, Becker County, Minnesota. Rev. Hagebo organized many churches in the Red River Valley. Besides St. Petri, he organized the Sand Hill Congregation in 1872 and Bygland in 1874. The St. Petri in either late 1874 or 1875. According to the church publication "Norske Lutherske Menigheter I Amerika", the St. Petri Congregation is listed as being organized on October 11, 1874. Another source listed the date of organization as May 11, 1875. During the early years, St. Petri was a member of a parish which included Bygland, St. Petri and Zion on the Minnesota side and the Walle Congregation in (what was at that time) Dakota Territory. The pastor at that time resided at Bygland and the early church records were kept there. They had a fire and our early records were lost. So it is difficult to establish the exact date.

### ORGANIZATION OF THE ST. PETRI CONGREGATION

A meeting to organize the St. Petri Congregation was held at the home of Hans L. Gorden. Who had a homestead three miles southeast of Shelly along the Marsh River. Others at that first meeting were Andrew L. Gorden, Hans H. Gorden, and Charles L. Gorden. A second meeting was held on January 7, 1875, at the Anders Tronnes home - Anders O. Tronnes and Ole A. Tronnes were added to the list of members. The first memorandum of a business meeting is from February 21, 1875, held at the Hans L. Gorden home. Four more names were added to the list of charter members -

Jorgen Johnson, Johannes Jorgenson, Theodore Tronnes, and Edward Tronnes. So by the beginning of May 1875, there were 10 Charter Members. Lars H. Gorden - Secretary; Johannes Jorgenson - Trustee; Anders O. Tronnes - Trustee; Hans L. Gorden - Trustee and Andrew L. Gorden - cantor or "klokker".

### NAMING OF THE CONGREGATION

At one of the early meetings, it was decided to name the new congregation "The Trefaldighets Menighet of Marsh River". The English translation would be Trinity Congregation of Marsh River. The name was changed to St. Petri Norsk Evangelisk Luthersk Menighet (translation, St. Petri Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation). This name remained in place until 1944, when the Synod adopted the name ( The Evangelical Lutheran Church). Then we became known as "The St. Petri Congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The final change came in 1988, when the Synods of the ALC, LCA, and AELC merged and we became the St. Petri Congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or E.L.C.A.

The Rev. Bjug Aanondson Harstad was the first pastor called to serve St. Petri in 1874. At one of the early congregational meetings, Rev. Harstad and Lars L. Gorden were elected to a committee to draft a constitution. They drew up a short constitution (one page). The Constitution was adopted October 11, 1975 and on that date the St. Petri Congregation officially became an active organization.

### BUILDING THE OLD CHURCH IN NIELSVILLE

During the years before 1887, the services were held in various homes and the old school house. The final decision to build a church building was made on November 6, 1886. The building was completed in 1887, on a site in Old Nielsville located 1 1/2 miles northwest of the present site of Nielsville. In 1896 the railroad laid its tracks through what is now the present site of Nielsville. In 1898 the building was moved to its present site, and put on a brick foundation. A parsonage was also built in 1898 and the following year a barn was built by the parsonage. Various remodeling and additions have been made through the years. In 1907 a basement was built under the church.

In 1956 a parish education building was added to the south side of the church. In 1968 a new front entrance was built and in 1974 a new entrance and storage area was built on the east end of the church.

### **PASTORS WHO HAVE SERVED AT ST. PETRI**

In addition to the two previously mentioned pastor, Rev. Bernt Hagebo, who organized St. Petri and and Rev. Bjug Aanondson Harstad who was the first pastor called to the St. Petri Congregation and served from 1874 to 1880. There also was Rev. Hans Pederson Salstad 1877 to 1882. Rev. Peer Peder Stromme 1880 to 1882. It seems that the pastorates of these first three pastors overlap. In earlier publications, it was suggested that the discrepancies may be due to the fact that these early pioneer ministers served large areas and they may have helped each other. Another possibility could be that since Pastor Salstad resigned in 1882, because of declining health. It is possible that Rev. Harstad stayed on for a few years and Pastor Stromme came over from Ada to help out the last two years of Rev. Salstads pastorate. This if pure speculation by this writer but without the early church records it is as good an explanation as any. Rev. Anders C. Anderson 1882 to 1890, Rev. Halvard Roadlkvam 1890 to 1892, Rev. Hans Olsen Skyberg 1892 to 1893, Rev. Johannessen Villesvik 1883 to 1886, Rev. Johan Theodor Bursett 1896 to 1898, all of these early pastors lived at other places and commuted to Nielsville. The first resident pastor to live in Nielsville was Rev. Ole H. Brodland who served from 1898 to 1911 and again from 1925 to 1939; Rev. Otto Johnson Lutnes 1911 to 1916; Rev. Jacob Nelson Dordal 1916 to 1921; Rev. Karl Stromme 1922 to 1924; Hans M. Finstad 1940 to 1946; Rev. Orlando A. Lee 1947 to 1954; Rev. Edward W. Johnshoy 1955 to 1966; Rev. A.B. Solberg 1966 to 1971; Rev. Dean R. Bakken 1971 to 1975; Rev. Robert Nedrud 1975 to 1983; Rev. Thomas Kolden 1983 to 1987; Rev. Harald G. Bringsjord 1987 to 1991; Rev. Jim Holthus served as interim pastor for part of 1991 and Rev. John Olson from Shelly took over the confirmation class, and Mr. Mike Sletto of Crookston conducted the Lenten Services; Rev. Raymond Blank served as the last resident pastor from 1992 to 1994.

In November 1994 the church council voted to hire Rev. Karen Jorgenson as interim pastor for Sunday services and Rev. Orlin Ness to teach the confirmation class. Pastor Jorgenson was attending U.N.D. in Grand Forks working towards her masters degree. Due to the difficulty of negotiating the snow covered and icy roads and a change in her class schedule, she was unable to continue. Rev. Orlin Ness and Mr. Mike Sletto took over pastoral duties until we hired Rev. Donald Rice in May of 1995. Pastor Rice had recently retired after 14 years as director of church relations at Concordia College. He agreed to conduct 40 Sunday services a year and to teach the confirmation class. He also was to visit the shut-ins in their homes and make regular visits to the nursing homes. The congregation was to hire replacement pastors for the other 12 Sundays in the year. In April 1996 it was decided to hire a second retired pastor to share the duties. Pastor Rice suggest Rev. Howard Wagner, who had recently retired as senior pastor at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Moorhead. Pastor Wagner began his duties in September 1996 and continued to serve as on of our pastors until his untimely death in November 1999.

Pastor Richard Radde retired as a VA Chaplain in 1995. Before that, he served parishes in MN, WI, and MO. He has also been a campus pastor and an active duty Army chaplain. At this time, he serves Salem and St. Petri Congregations.

We would like to say a special thanks to the writers of the St. Petri 75th and 100th history books and to the late Charles N. Gordon who was historian for the diamond jubilee anniversary held in 1950. Most of the information contained in this history was obtained from those sources.

The year 2000 is here and now we are looking forward to our 150th anniversary in 2025.

