

FEATURED

St. John's Lutheran, rural Galchutt, honored for 150 years

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St. John's Lutheran's sesquicentennial will be honored with an 11 a.m. joint worship service Sunday, July 31 at the church, located on Highway 81 near Galchutt, N.D.

Courtesy Galchutt Lutheran Church

All are welcome Sunday, July 31 to join the members of the Galchutt-Emmanuel Ministry in celebrating the 150th birthday of St. John's Lutheran Church, rural Galchutt, North Dakota.

St. John's Lutheran's sesquicentennial will be honored with an 11 a.m. joint worship service at the church, located on Highway 81. Because parking is limited, guests are encouraged to take the shuttle available from Galchutt Lutheran Church, 105 Galchutt Ave. in Galchutt.

"Galchutt Lutheran has embraced the role of watching over St. John's Church and is very proud of the history it entails," said Kendra Dockter, treasurer of Galchutt Lutheran Church. "St. John's plays a very important role in Galchutt Lutheran's history and is something Galchutt members cherish."

A lunch provided by The Black Pelican, Wyndmere, North Dakota, will be served following the ceremony and commemorative mugs will be given to attendees.

The ceremony will include Galchutt Lutheran pastors through the years attending and sharing their experiences with St. John's Lutheran over the years. The story of St. John's and Galchutt Lutheran, like many in the southern Red River Valley, is one of inspiration, innovation, compassion and tradition.

Located on the corner of Old 81 and County Road 8, just south of Abercrombie in Richland County, North Dakota, St. John's Lutheran Church catches the eye of many travelers. Originally organized in 1872, it was one of the earliest churches. Although not the earliest church in North Dakota, St. John's does claim the distinction of being the oldest church in North Dakota still standing on its original foundation.

St. John's Lutheran was established by 17 men who organized, wrote a constitution, petitioned to their leadership near Christine, North Dakota, and held their first service on Dec. 27, 1872.

"In the early days, services were held in both English and Norwegian," Daily News reported in 1997.

The pioneering 17 church members, as reported in 1972 in observance of St. John's Lutheran's centennial, were: Thorvald Jacobson, Erick Hoel, John Olson Wold, Johan Olson, Gilbert Olson, Ole Benson, Peder L. Johnson, John Pederson Laasstuen, Kittle Kittelson Lee, H.C.N. Myhra, Erick Anfinson Moen, Kittle K. Rykken, Nils T. Tweit, Thorsten Erickson Moen, Haldor A. Erickson and Martin Johnson Siverud.

St. John's Lutheran's 150 years have included such milestones as:

- 1875 – land granted by church members to secure a graveyard; in the early days of the church, services were held in members' homes
- 1882 – adoption of the name St. John's Lutheran; prior to this, the church was known as the South Wild Rice Congregation; following the adoption of the St. John's Lutheran name, the church in Dwight, North Dakota, became known as Wild Rice Lutheran
- 1884-1900 – construction and improvements to the St. John's Lutheran building, including the placement of a bell (1885), church pews (1886), an altar and pulpit (1896) and a pump organ and stage (1900); it was not until 1940 that the building received electricity
- 1941 – establishment of Galchutt Lutheran Church, which resulted in many St. John's Lutheran members dispersing to various churches and the discontinuation of regular services at St. John's; as of 2022, the historic building has neither running water nor electricity

Galchutt Lutheran Church maintains ownership of the old church and the cemetery and has been responsible for the upkeep of both.

Over the years, there has been a renewed interest in preserving and celebrating the heritage of the St. John's Lutheran building, which has been used for baptisms and weddings.

"While there is no working electricity in the building, each September, Galchutt Lutheran Church holds a heritage service at St. John's Lutheran Church in an attempt to preserve its history," Dockter wrote.

Dockter is a lifelong member of Galchutt Lutheran, one who looks forward to Sunday's rally and heritage celebration.

"It is fun to see the Sunday School kids singing up front during this service in such a unique and awesome building, one that is full of history," she said.

A short video sharing the history of St. John's Lutheran is available at <https://youtu.be/xNOuugM36cU>.

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