

A Brief History of Messiah Lutheran Church Camrose, Alberta

Camrose Canadian, June 28, 1917

At the huge convention held in St. Paul Minn. two weeks ago when the three Lutheran Church bodies of the continent (the United Norwegian Lutheran Church, the Hauge Synod, and the Norwegian Lutheran Synod) were amalgamated, Rev. J.R. Lavik, president of the Camrose Lutheran College was elected president of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of Canada. He is also a member of the National Council of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America and Mission Superintendent for the branch of the work in Canada. Rev. Lavik is recognized as being a man of marked ability and high Christian ideals. It is hoped that it will not prove necessary for him to move from Camrose. However, with the great responsibility of his new office now resting upon him, it will be necessary to find someone to fill his place as president of the college.

Camrose Canadian, December 3, 1917

At a meeting in the Lutheran Church on Wednesday evening, the members of the two Lutheran congregations, Moland Lutheran Congregation [United Norwegian Lutheran Church] and Immanuel Norwegian Evangelical Congregation [Hauge Synod] organized themselves into one congregation. A constitution and bylaws were adopted and officers elected. A committee was named to bring in reports with regards to choice of pastor.

As early as 1899 Norwegian Lutheran pioneers in the Stony Creek Settlement were conducting worship services in homes and the New Salem Log Schoolhouse. Pastor Wick, a missionary pastor stationed in Wetaskiwin was occasionally available to lead a service. It was following his service on September 30, 1901 that a Lutheran congregation was formed and named Moland, after a Moland congregation in Telemark, Norway. In 1905 the Camrose congregation built its first church on the corner of 50th Avenue and 52A Street. The lot was donated; the building fund was \$465.00. Their pastor from 1904-1906 was Pastor Halvorson. Messiah celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2001 thereby acknowledging the ministry of Moland Lutheran Congregation which dates back to 1901. Moland Lutheran Congregation is then considered to be the predecessor of Messiah Lutheran Church.

Immanuel Norwegian Evangelical Congregation began, in 1909, as a Hauge Mission Society. However in 1911, they chose to organize themselves as a congregation, build a chapel, and call Rev. T.T. Carlson as their pastor. In 1916 their worship space was damaged by fire so it was sold, dismantled and reconstructed as a farm house. Perhaps one of the reasons they merged with Moland was that they no longer had a place to worship.

The newly formed 1917 congregation was named Moland Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation. Pastor Ellington, who had been the pastor at Immanuel, was called as the first pastor. They worshipped in the Moland church but by 1926 that church no longer met their needs so, with the exception of the bell and altar, they sold it, for \$1000, to Calvary Pentecostal. The understanding was that they could stay there until their new church was built.

Construction began on a larger church at the corner of 48 Street and 49 Avenue and in the fall of 1927 the basement was completed so services could be held there. The cornerstone was laid the following year. The mortgage for this church was burned in November of 1944 and the newly purchased parsonage situated on 48th street was dedicated. Presently, the bell from its predecessor churches rings out every Sunday at Messiah.

The Camrose Parish not only included Moland Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church but also Scandia (Armena), Bethesda (New Norway), St Joseph (Hay lakes), and in 1925, the Parkland Congregation. This meant that the church in Camrose shared a pastor with the other congregations so he was not always available to conduct services at Moland or minister to its parishioners. Consequently, in 1936, the congregation left the Parish and after Pastor Carlson's term ended, called its own pastor, the Rev A.H. Solheim. In 1943 the congregation officially changed its name to Camrose Lutheran Congregation.

During the forties and fifties Camrose Lutheran Congregation experienced much growth so in 1953 plans were made to construct the current church and in 1954 three lots on the corner of 50th Street and 48th Avenue were purchased. The previous church on the corner of 48 Street and 49 Avenue was sold to First Baptist Church and was still a place of worship until the late 80's at which time it became a Performing Arts Centre. In 1991 the building was purchased by Augustana University College and moved onto campus to be used by the drama department as their theatre.

With the commitment of volunteers and a budget of \$75,000, construction on the current church began in April of 1955 and the cornerstone was laid in September of that year. Under the leadership of Pastor Veldey, the first worship service was celebrated in April of 1956. Pastor Veldey left that June so the congregation was without a regular pastor until Rev. Oscar Laaveg accepted the call in February of 1957. Perhaps that is why the church was not officially dedicated until May 4, 1958. In 1961 the name was changed to Messiah Lutheran Church. In 1973 Messiah became debt free so on September 23, during a service of thanksgiving, its mortgage was burned.

During the 1980's membership at Messiah Lutheran Church continued to grow. There were Youth and Music Ministries and by 1985 there was a Pastoral Leadership Team of three. However space was at a premium. Cubicles to accommodate the growing Sunday School were created in the basement auditorium and classes for the older students were held at the Bible School. Enrollment of students age 3 - grade 12 in 1984 was 254; in 1985 it was 270. Consequently, when the AGT building became available and Messiah's offer to purchase it for \$175,000 was accepted, the congregation voted, on March 6th, 1986, to acquire this adjacent facility.

After the AGT building was acquired a long range planning committee to develop a site plan for the existing facility and the AGT building was struck. Its members included Pat Prest (chair), Vera Lyseng, Don Myrehaug, Elaine Olson, Bernice Knudtson, Erhard Pinno, Breck McHan, Stephen Kristenson, Jim Brager, Carol Green, Karen Hanson, Florence Olson, Sharon Peterson, Ben Coltvvet, and Cameron Harder. Although preliminary construction began in June, a building committee was assigned, in December, to oversee the project from that time onward. Members of that committee were Pat Prest (chair), Mary

Broen, Ron Grue, Orlando Olson, Stephen Kristenson, Jim Brager, Robert Paulgaard, Grant Skippen, and Arie Vanderjagt.

At the same March 16th 1986 congregational meeting when members voted to purchase the AGT building, a fundraising committee was organized. It included Orlando Olson (chair), David Dahle, Henry Haugen, Cliff Brager, Stephen Kristenson, Marie Myrehaug, Erhard Pinno, Jacob Stolee, and Adeline Watson. A mortgage was obtained from the Royal Bank but by June 1st 1986, the possession date, \$53,000 had already been raised and an additional \$61,000 was pledged to be paid by June of 1988. Although the committee did not meet the goal set by Council, the total raised by June 11th was \$135,000. Furthermore, a \$90,000 loan was made available with the interest rate at Prime minus 1% and a \$20,000 five-year interest-free loan was offered.

On February 4th 1987 Church Council recommended to the congregation that the bid from A. Hanson and Sons Construction be accepted and that the electrical be done by D-2 Electric, on a cost basis, supervised by the construction company. The bid of \$325,000 included construction of the link, renovations to the sanctuary, church basement, and the AGT building plus fire dampers, fire escape and unforeseen expenses. In addition to the above named cash donations, pledges and loans, Church Council, on March 25, 1987, gave approval in principal to Investment Certificates being offered to members and friends of the congregation. On June 16, 1987 the finance Committee reported that 18 such certificates totaling \$101,000 had been received. These were renewable 5-year certificates, with the principal sum purchased in multiples of \$100. The first 18 certificates ranged in value from \$1200.00 to \$10,000. The interest rate was 7.50% which the donor chose to either receive on the anniversary date or donate to the church. About half of the investors chose to donate the interest back to the church. By December 31, 1987, Investment Certificates totaling \$287,000 had been received; others totaling \$60,000 were received in 1988.

Over the years the value of these certificates was either paid out by the congregation or donated to the church by the donor or the estate of the donor. The last certificate was paid out in February of 2017 thus ending the debt incurred by the purchase of the AGT building and the accompanying renovation costs.

Many changes of the physical plant resulted from the acquisition of the AGT building. The offices were moved to the AGT building and an Upper Room, choir space, kitchen, Fellowship Centre, playroom, and washrooms were constructed on the upper and main floor areas. A lounge, chapel, Sunday School rooms, storage rooms, and the Wednesday Workers' workshop were created on the lower level.

A service of thanksgiving for both the organ and the newly created space occurred on October 11, 1987. It was called *Celebrating God's Gifts*. The dedication committee included David Dahle (chair/secretary), Mavis Jensen, David Samm, Harry Prest, Stephen Kristenson, Alver Person, Glenda Beaver, Clive Goodrich, Betty Ostenrud and Breck McHan. The following members created a thanksgiving banner: Glenda Beaver (designer), Elvera Millang, Ann Heggan, Lorraine Mackwood, Annie Bergum, and Olga Erickson.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY
FOR ALL THAT HAS BEEN AND WILL BE

This abbreviated history of Messiah Lutheran Church was prepared by Darlene Dahle for the May 4th and 5th, 2019 celebration which acknowledged the end of the debt that was acquired by the purchase of the AGT building and the accompanying renovation costs.

References:

Camrose Canadian

Camrose Lutheran Through Fifty years 1901-1951

Messiah Lutheran through Seventy Years 1901-1971

80 YEARS OF GRACE A Brief History of Messiah Lutheran Church 1901-1981

The 90th Anniversary of Messiah Lutheran Church October 13, 1991

A History of Messiah Lutheran Church 1981-2001 (Includes acquiring the AGT building)

Messiah Lutheran Church Historical Background 1901-2005

Messiah's Archive: 1986, 1987 Church Council Minutes; 1986, 1987, 1988 Annual Reports

Interview with Lloyd Johnson who is very knowledgeable about Messiah's early history

www.messiahcamrose.ca