

Extended History of Jerico Evangelical Lutheran Church



Norwegian emigration to America began in 1825. By the 1830s, Norwegian immigrants had made their way to Illinois. The 1840s found them settling in Wisconsin. The 1850s marked the beginning of Norwegian settlements in Iowa and Minnesota, and by the 1860s the Norwegians were moving into South Dakota.

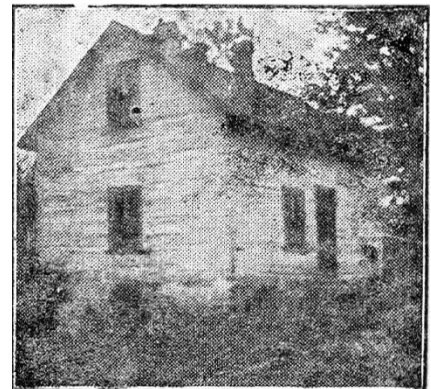
We must admire these early immigrants.

Oftentimes, after they had reached the port of embarkation, they had to wait one, or two, or even three weeks for repairs to the vessel on which they had engaged passage. Once under way, their trans-Atlantic voyage would last an average of seven weeks. With unfavorable sailing weather, this might stretch out to ten or twelve weeks. A passenger was usually required to have a supply of food for twelve weeks. Then followed the long and expensive journey inland to Chicago and Milwaukee. All in all, in the early years of migration, 'the duration of the journey from Norway to the settlement which was the immigrants' ultimate destination was rarely made in less than nine weeks; often it consumed as much as five months.'

The first Norwegian settlers arrived at the Crane Creek Settlement in Chickasaw County, Iowa in 1863. These settlers first had

... settled near Vermillion [South Dakota]. The Civil War had broken out and there was unrest and disturbance in the air all over. The bloody Indian outbreaks at Spirit Lake, New Ulm, Willmar and other places occurred. The new settlements in South Dakota were fearful of a like fate but were at that time unmolested. The day came, however, a year or two later when they too fled for their lives. The old covered wagon, sunbaked and rickety, was hurriedly loaded, the oxen hooked on and the flight, at a snail's pace, was on.

The ten families who comprised the original settlement were: Ole Anderson Mjolver, Thor Halvorson Faaberg, Soren Torbjornson Faaberg, Hans and Otto Olson Nigard, Kristian Olson Steinbakken, Mikkel Monson Ronnei, Halvor Nilsen Lysne, Jetmund Knudsen Bjerke, Helge Mathieson, and Mikkel Skare. The following year found fellow countrymen arriving at this settlement directly from the Jostedal Valley, on the Sogn Fjord, in Norway.



Jetmund E. Knutson cabin: site of many early church gatherings



Pastor U. V. Koren

The young pastor, U.V. Koren, visited these immigrants for the first time in 1864 and, no doubt, conducted the first Worship Service among them. Pastor Koren lived at Washington Prairie, near Decorah, and served numerous congregations in northeast Iowa. He would conduct from ten to twelve Services here each year.

In 1867, under the direction of Pastor Koren, a congregation was organized consisting of sixty members. It was first known as the Crowe Creek congregation. This name was used only for a few years, and the congregation was named: Crane Creek Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation.

In 1869, the congregation received its own pastor when the Little Turkey [Saude] and Crane Creek congregations Called their own pastor. A parsonage was constructed at Little Turkey. For several years, the pastor also served the Norwegian Lutheran churches at Cresco and Orleans.

A constitution was adopted in 1877 when the congregation joined the Norwegian Synod at the district convention held at Story City, Iowa. Lars Helgegaarden represented the congregation which now numbered 380 souls.

In the 1880s, when the congregation numbered nearly five hundred souls, a doctrinal controversy developed throughout the Norwegian Synod. The question was whether sinful man could, in any way, contribute toward his own salvation.

The majority of the congregation, together with the pastor and the synod, held fast to the Biblical teaching that our salvation is completely a gift of God in Jesus Christ. However, after much strife in both words and actions, a minority of the congregation withdrew their membership in January of 1889. They formed a new congregation, in October of that year, which also adopted the name Crane Creek Lutheran Church. That congregation soon became a member of the Anti-Missouri Brotherhood and then joined the United Norwegian Lutheran Church (now the ELCA).

Pastor Ness writes about these days:

The question now became, who should have the right to the old church. Finally the matter, after a long and lasting number of meetings and deliberation, was solved this way; the ones that withdrew their membership bought the old church for \$600. At a congregation meeting on June 16, 1890 the congregation decided to build a new church and the cornerstone was laid [in Jerico] on October 19, 1890.

The Crane Creek Ladies Aid (C.C.Kvf.) held their first meeting on October 18, 1905 at the home of Mrs. Nils Anderson. Those in attendance at the first meeting were: Mrs. Andrew Ellingson, Miss Ida Ellingson, Mrs. Nils Ellingson, Mrs. Louie Grove, Miss Carrie Slindee, Mrs. Erik Slindee, Mrs. J.G. Rugland, and Mrs. E. Attleson (a visitor).

The Ladies Aid met twice monthly from 1905 to 1954. Until 1924 the devotions and business were conducted in the Norwegian language.

In 1917 the Norwegian Synod entered into a merger with church bodies with whom there was no doctrinal agreement. The Crane Creek and Little Turkey congregations did not join this new Synod. The following year, a remnant of congregations and pastors re-organized the Norwegian Synod, which today is known as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). The Crane Creek and Little Turkey congregations joined the ELS in 1923 at the convention at Princeton, Minnesota. Representing the congregation was Andrew Braham Since that time the congregation has been known as the Jerico Lutheran Synod Church or the Jerico Evangelical Lutheran Church.

In 1924, the Seventh Annual Convention of the ELS was hosted at Jerico. The Recessed Convention of the ELS again met here in 1960.

Services were conducted in the Norwegian language until January of 1929 when the following announcement was made:

Notice, Jerico! According to the resolutions of the congregation at its last annual meeting, all services on the first Sunday of the month will be conducted in the Norwegian language and all services on the third Sunday of the month in the English language.

Services were conducted twice monthly until 1941 when every-Sunday Services began in both the Jerico and Saude congregations. The regular use of Norwegian in the Services continued until 1945.

The congregation was marked with continued growth. Eventually the congregation reached a membership of 443 souls in 1942. At this time the Jerico-Saude parish was the largest parish in the Synod. Three pastors of the congregation also served as the president of the ELS. They were: Rev. H.M. Tjemagel, Rev. M.H. Otto, and Rev. M.E. Tweit.

In 1941 the congregation assisted in establishing a sister-congregation in New Hampton. In time, a number of members were transferred to Redeemer Lutheran Church.

A Christian Day School was started in 1947. It was in that same year that a joint Jerico-Saude Lutheran Youth Society was formed. A Men's Club was formed in 1968.

The congregation celebrated the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Cornerstone Laying of the present church building and the 106th Anniversary of the congregation on November 18, 1973.

Today the congregation stands, just as it did of old, upon the Foundation of Jesus Christ. In the early years, the pioneer founders established a congregation where they could worship the Savior and teach their children of His Grace. They defended His teachings of the Bible through strife and difficulty. Their descendants stood firm upon the teachings of Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen. Today, the sixth generation of their descendants worships the Savior who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

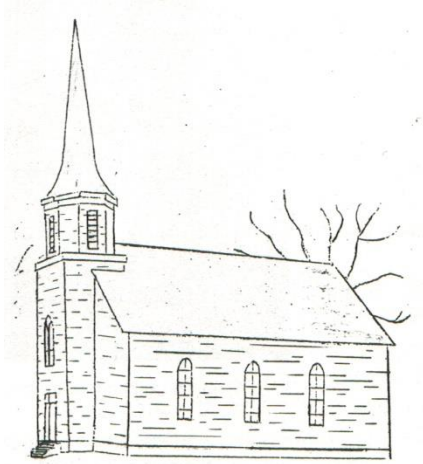


Jerico Lutheran Church (built 1913)

Church Buildings

The congregation has worshiped in four church buildings.

Local schoolhouses, together with the log cabin of the Jetmund E. Knutson family were the scene of many early religious gatherings.



First church building (1875-1890)

In 1875, construction began on the first church building. It was located one mile east and two miles south of Jerico where the land had been given by an "American" by the name of Sommerville. The building was never formally dedicated, as the final work was not completed on the building. This building was sold, fifteen years later, to a minority of the congregation.

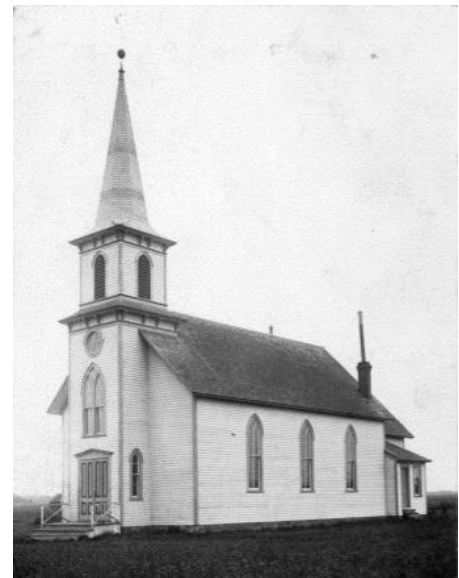
In August of 1890 the congregation purchased land near the village of Jerico for \$100. Among temporary meeting places was the second floor of a newly constructed store in Jerico. On Thursday, July 9, 1891 the congregation marched in procession from the store to the new church where the Dedication Service then took place. Following the noon meal, a second Service was conducted in the afternoon, with

the sermon being preached in English. The building was erected at a cost of \$1,700. Rev. Ness described the building when he wrote:

The church isn't very large, but beautifully furnished. The Ladies Aid had, with great sacrifice, provided the Altar Ware of gold, Coverings for the Altar, and the necessary decorations for the Altar and Pulpit.

Eleven months later, the church steeple was struck by lightning and the church burned to the ground. A new church was rebuilt, within five months, to the east of the former building. The cost was \$1800. The third church building was dedicated on November 20, 1892. Upon this occasion it was reported:

Again they proved what good will and unity can accomplish. The congregation stood in considerable debt on their first church, and therefore it is the more praiseworthy that they did not give up hope, but instead with renewed zeal quickly grasped the matter in God's name. God let it happen above all expectation. The church stands again completed and dedicated. The congregation is owing on all of it, only a couple hundred dollars.



Third church building (1892-1913)

The congregation outgrew this building. Rev. M.K. Bleken writes:

On festival occasions all the men would have to go out in order to give the women and children a place to sit. In the spring of 1913 a building committee consisting of M.K. Bleken, H.J. Knutson, A.W. Oleson, A. Braham and Lars Aasen was elected. Subscriptions in the amount of \$10,000 had been gathered. The building committee received authority to go ahead with the work. The contract was let to G.O. Melby of Mabel, Minnesota. His contract was let for \$9,057 and the old church.

This fourth church building was constructed upon the same site as the old. Construction began in early June and was completed sufficiently so that the first Service was held in the basement on November 9, 1913. The total cost of construction was \$12,000.

The Cornerstone was laid on November 27, 1913 and the building was Dedicated on May 24, 1914. In the Cornerstone is laid: 1) a Bible, 2) Luther's Small Catechism, 3) a Synod Constitution, 4) the Augsburg Confession, 5) a report of the former cornerstone laying, and 6) a short history of the congregation.

In 1951 a four-rank pipe organ was installed. The basement was remodeled and rest rooms added in 1960. The church was resided, in 1975, at a cost of \$12,400.

The words of Rev. Ness yet hold true today:

May the Lord hold His hand over this new House of God! Let His word sound forth pure and unadulterated to the saving of dearly bought souls; and may He hold them in His grace and keep strife and division away from them, that the love for each other can be built up and may they rest upon the Chief Cornerstone, Christ; and then sometime, with Him, go into the House that is not built with hands, Heaven! God grant it for Jesus' sake!



Jerico church interior

The information in this document is from the 125th Anniversary booklet of Jerico Lutheran Church, published in 1992. The Jerico church sketch on page 1 was produced by Elouise Roberson for the same booklet.