

## Bethel's First 100 Years

The first Norwegian Lutherans who gathered in Hudson were served by the well-known pioneer Lutheran pastor, the Rev. Lauritz Larsen.

He was called by the Norwegian Synod to minister to the new settlement of Rush River in Pierce County in November 1857, and his large mission included counties in southeastern Minnesota, as well as several counties adjacent to Pierce in Wisconsin. In Hudson, Pastor Larsen conducted services once a month and stayed in the community an additional day or two, especially to instruct children preparing for confirmation. Early Norwegian Lutheran services in Hudson were held in a public hall in the downtown district.

Following the resignation of Pastor "Laur" Larsen in 1859, there were about three years when the Norwegian Lutherans in Hudson had no regular pastoral services. Cultivation and preservation of the faith was left heavily to the home where parents taught the elements of Christianity to their children.

During those years, other Norwegian Lutheran pastors, such as the Rev. Nils Brandt and the Rev. Berrt Munn, stopped in Hudson occasionally on their "missionary journeys."

The first Lutheran minister to preach on a more or less regular basis to Norwegians in Hudson was the Rev. O. J. K. Hagestad who served the Rush River parish from 1863-1876.

On March 15, 1873, a number of Norwegian families met at the home of John Lake in Hudson for the purpose of discussing the possibilities of organizing a congregation. Those who committed themselves to the "best of their ability" were: Jens Thomsen, Ole Gunderson, Elias Baker, Ole Lake, A. D. Olson, Ole Hammer, Olaus Johnson, Nels Johnson, Hans Holbeck, Christian Amundson, Ole Thomsen, and John Lake.

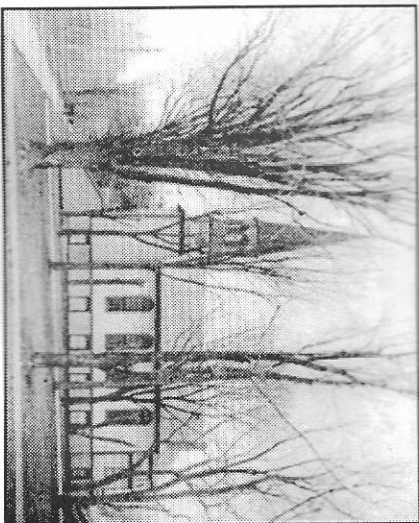
The congregation was organized under the name: *Norsk Evangelisk Luthersk Menighed av Hudson og Omegn* - the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Hudson and Vicinity. The first meeting was scheduled for March 18, 1873, at the Olson Hall (Harris Hotel) on First Street. At that time, A. D. Olson, Ole Lake, Ole Gunderson and Ole Hammer were elected as officers. The new congregation was now a reality.

On April 12, 1873, at a meeting held at the home of Ole Gunderson, a committee of three was chosen to determine the best location for a church. Two petitions asking for contributions, one in Norwegian, one in English, were posted in public places.

Meanwhile, meetings were held on the first Sunday of each month at Olson's Hall; contributions were set at 25 cents per person. Before long, a decision was made to purchase a lot north of the St. Croix County Court House at a price of \$375. Plans for the new building were left in the hands of John Amundson and Ole Hammer.

*Kvindeforening*, a Ladies' Society was organized in April 1874. This group met once a month at the home of one of its members. Meetings began at 2 p.m. with a devotional period followed by sewing items that could be sold at a bazaar. It is interesting to note that when the second payment for the newly-purchased church lot was due, the *Kvindeforening* was asked to make the payment.

Plans for the new church were finally drawn up in February 1875. It was to be 30 x 78 feet with a



Bethel Lutheran Church, circa 1890

steeple. Several church members volunteered their services, and the *Kvindeforening* promised to pay for the plastering.

In October 1876 the congregation voted to obtain a loan of \$175 for two years, at 10 percent interest. The new church, as it then stood, was insured for \$1,500.

The Rev. Hans J. Krogh preached his first sermon in the new church in October 1876. He lived in Baldwin from 1876-1880 and received a salary of \$50 a year. Services were held every tenth Sunday.

Even though the congregation had been organized in 1873, it was not until 1879 that a constitution was adopted, and the name of the church was changed to "The Norwegian Evangelical Congregation in Hudson and Community."

The Rev. J. O. Scheie was the first resident pastor, serving from 1881-1882. He was succeeded by the Rev. J. H. T. Lee who served from 1888-1894, and again from 1903-1918.

In 1901 a lot at 1021 Second St. (just north of the present site of Croix View Apartments) was purchased from W. E. and Marilda Webster for the purpose of building a parsonage. It was obtained under a three-year contract at a price of \$400. The ladies of the *Kvindeforening* again came to the rescue in providing \$1,400 for the lot and building materials.

Under the leadership of Pastor Lee a *Mandsforening* - Lutheran brotherhood - and *Ligdomsforening* - young peoples' society - were organized. The former never became very active, but the latter became an active organization for the young confirmed members of the congregation, and in the course of time, gave way to the Luther League.

During Pastor Lee's ministry several additions were made to the church. Pastor Lee was succeeded by the Rev. Hans Fosness who remained until 1898. During his tenure a basement was added to provide room for the growing Sunday School and for a modern heating plant. Again, the women helped defray expenses, including the purchase of 100 chairs for the church parlor at a cost of \$35.50.

It was during Pastor Fosness' ministry, too, that the name of the congregation was changed to Bethel Norwegian Lutheran Congregation of Hudson. The change was signed April 27, 1897, and from that date on, the church was to be known as Bethel, an appropriate name, for its Old Testament meaning is "the place of God."

The Rev. Holm Holmsen succeeded Pastor Fosness, remaining until 1903.

At the turn of the century, the *Kvindeforening* became the Ladies Aid Society. Meetings were held in the church parlors; bazaars and church suppers were served, and ice cream socials were held on the church lawn. Proceeds from these functions helped to pay expenses in the congregation.

Pastor Lee returned to serve the congregation and remained until 1918. In his later years he returned to Hudson serving as a teacher for a Sunday School class and assisting the pastor in Holy Communion.

Pastor Lee was succeeded by the Rev. B. M. Branford whose ministry was brief; few records of his tenure are available. These were somewhat difficult times for the congregation as the transition between the Norwegian and English languages was beginning to take place. Many of the members were sentimentally attached to the old language, but the times were demanding a more thoroughly American church.

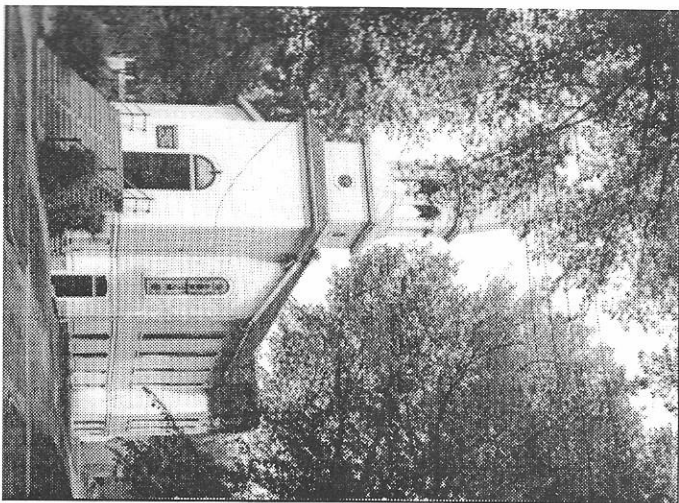
The Rev. Oscar Thompson was installed as pastor of Bethel January 28, 1923, and his ministry was to cover the next quarter of a century. At this time there were a little less than 70 families belonging to Bethel, and services were conducted in Norwegian and English. After 1923 all church records were kept in English.

Under Pastor Thompson's direction, the Sunday School was reorganized, with attendance

and stewardship records kept. The graded system was introduced, and members of the confirmation class were invited to continue in Sunday School through their high school years. For 20 of the 25 years the Thompsons served in Hudson, the pastor's wife, Matilda Stene Thompson, acted as superintendent of the Sunday School.

Early in 1925 the decision was made to enlarge the church sanctuary at an estimated cost of \$8,000. Rededication took place in 1926.

In 1943 the remaining members of the disbanded Ebenezer Lutheran Church, which stood at the corner of Fourth and Myrtle streets in Hudson, presented Bethel with its replica of Thorvaldsen's "Christ," which had graced the chancel of that congregation. It was placed above the altar at Bethel where it remained until the church gave way to the new Bethel in 1959, where the statue occupied a dominant place in the new chancel.



**Bethel Lutheran Church, circa 1950**

By 1951 worshippers filled the church at one service, and the following year a two-service schedule was begun on a regular basis, except during the summer months.

In the fall of 1955 the congregation made the decision to erect a new building, beginning in 1958. Architects were hired in 1956, a building committee was named, and Dr. Martin Anderson, former district president, was retained as financial consultant in a three-year pledge campaign.

The decision was made in 1957 to construct the new church building on the site of the parsonage, just north of the church, connecting it to the existing parish house in an L-shape. Another parsonage was obtained at 1227 Second St. in the winter of 1958.

Contracts for the new church were let in late spring of 1958 with the figure of \$183,000 given as the projected cost of the building. The congregation borrowed \$115,000, \$95,000 of it from Lutheran Brotherhood. Ground was broken for the new church June 15, 1958; the

In 1948 Bethel celebrated its 75th anniversary. That year Pastor Thompson resigned after serving the congregation for 25 years. In June, the Rev. Norman P. Scheide accepted a call as the new pastor. Also that year, the congregation purchased, at a cost of \$13,000, the Arngquist-Thomson home north of the church to use as a parsonage, and the former parsonage on Second Street was sold.

The congregation at that time numbered about 475. Only recently established as a one-church parish, Bethel had grown little over the years. As late as the early 1940s, it was part of a parish including Our Savior's in Stillwater and a church in Bayport.

In 1949 a Sunday School addition was built behind the existing church, extending north onto the newly-acquired lot. The two-story building was completed in 1952 and was known for many years as the "parish house."

cornerstone was laid April 26, 1959. Services continued in the original church building while the new building was being erected; the two Bethels stood side by side, and the original structure was razed when the new building was completed.

First services in the beautiful new house of the Lord were May 10. Prominent on the new altar was the same replica of Thorvaldsen's "Christ" that had graced the former church building.

The 1960s became a period of expansion. Membership grew more rapidly after Bethel attained its adequate physical plant. In 1963 a parish worker was called to assist the pastor and from 1967-70 three student interns each spent a year assisting Pastor Scheide.

Expansion at Bethel took on other aspects. Many of its members were vitally interested in the foreign mission program of the church; as a result, in 1963, the congregation voted to sponsor the Rev. Richard Hueter, serving in New Guinea. The initial amount of the sponsorship was \$3,000.

The following year, 1964, saw expansion along another line: communication. Bethel voted to broadcast a Sunday service weekly over neighboring station WAVN in Stillwater. Taped at first, the broadcasts soon became "live."

Bethel was blessed with a wonderful musical ministry. Pastor Thompson did much to encourage and promote good church music, himself being a soloist and choir director. A great deal of credit, too, was due to Edith Hanson Sather who served as organist for more than four decades, retiring at the end of 1972. Not only did she serve as organist, but at various times she directed the junior and children's choirs. Pastor Scheide's wife, Martha, an accomplished musician, also worked tirelessly at achieving and maintaining a high standard of quality as she directed the senior choir for 25 years.

In keeping with this love for the church's musical heritage, the congregation voted in 1965 to purchase a pipe organ. Actual purchase and installation was postponed for a time, due to a new "crisis" which presented itself. Property adjacent to the church on the north was available, and it was decided to purchase the Campbell-Jensch house for future expansion. Acquisition of the property gave Bethel possession of a quarter of a block. The house was named "Bethel House," and served as an annex for church activities for five years. In 1971 it was razed to make room for a parking lot.

The new Cassavant pipe organ was eventually purchased and was dedicated October 8, 1967. Featuring 16 stops, grouped in 19 ranks, it was installed at a cost of \$35,000 of which \$25,000 was borrowed.

Women continued to play an important role in the life of the congregation. With the advent of the American Lutheran Church in 1961, the term "Ladies Aid" gradually gave way to American Lutheran Church Women (ALCW), but the energy and purposefulness of those servants of the Lord didn't diminish.

In 1970 a full-time associate pastor was called. The Rev. Orrin Tietz accepted the call to share preaching and general pastoral work.

Many felt that Bethel ought to have more space for its expanding program in education and other activities, so in 1971 the decision was made to complete the educational unit by extending the present wing to the north. The addition was built in 1971-72 at a cost of about \$125,000.

May 28, 1972, was a happy day for Bethel, for on that day Gary Simpson, a son of the congregation, was ordained into the ministry with Pastor Scheide acting as ordinand.

Bethel celebrated its centennial anniversary in 1973 with a membership of slightly more than 1,300.

- Taken from Bethel's centennial booklet

## Into the Second Century

The history of Bethel from 1973-1998 mirrors that of its first 100 years: it's the story of a congregation growing in membership, striving to meet the needs of the community it serves, reaching beyond the bounds of that community in its mission.

During the past 25 years, Bethel has grown from 1,375 members to nearly 2,000 members; the church facility has been enlarged and remodeled, and programs have been initiated to serve and support members as well as non-members in the Hudson area and in far-reaching areas of the world.

Staffing structure and focus, too, have changed during this time period to meet the challenges of the congregation which has become diverse in background, diverse in needs. The church now seeks to address not only the needs of the nuclear family, but also those of young and old, married, divorced, and single.

Technical advances have infiltrated the church, creating new avenues to further its mission: Services are now regularly broadcast over the radio and on the local cable television channel, and records are kept on computers.

In the late 1980s church history was recorded as the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church merged to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

Changes in the past 25 years have been numerous, and at times difficult, but through God's grace, challenges have been met. Bethel continues to be "the place of God."

### The past 25 years

Bethel congregation celebrated its centennial year in 1973 in many ways, including a congregational dinner September 20 in St. Patrick's Gymnasium. That same year, Pastor Norman Scheide concluded 25 years of ministry at Bethel, and the Rev. L. Donald Docken accepted a call to be senior pastor. Pastor Docken arrived in February of 1974, and the Rev. Orrin Tietz continued to serve as associate pastor for several months.

That year the parsonage at 1227 Second St. was sold, and the congregation began offering the pastor a housing allowance. Also in 1974, stained-glass windows were installed in the church.

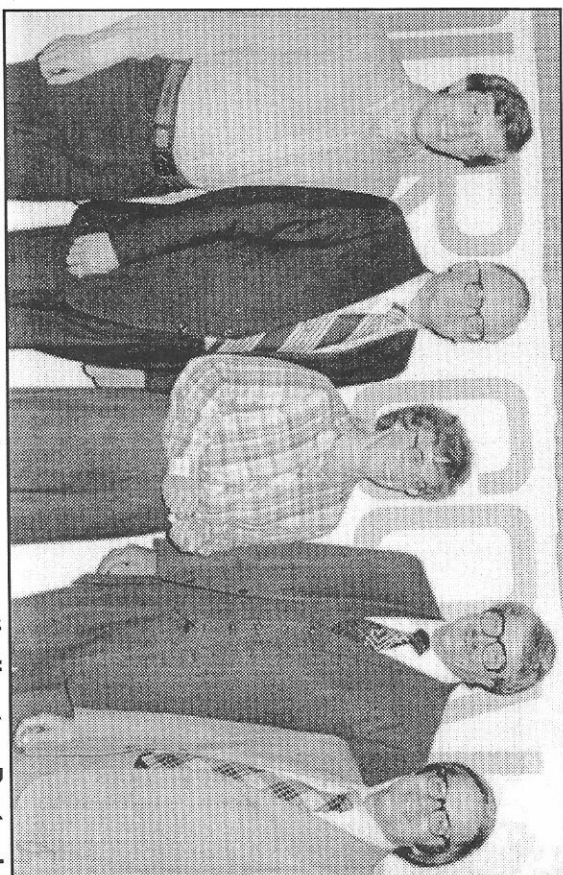
Pastor Docken's 15½-year ministry at Bethel was a period of rapid growth in membership that presented many challenges for the congregation. For several years he was assisted by seminary students, but in 1976, the council and the parish education committee recommended that staff be added.

In 1977 Albert Schilling began serving as assisting pastor and Rhonda Shiell as youth director.

Late in 1979 the Rev. James Gronewold replaced Schilling and began serving as Bethel's associate pastor. His ministry focused on youth and adult education, evangelism, visitation of shut-ins, and planning congregational gatherings. He was instrumental in forming "growth" groups. Three groups, with 12 in each group, met weekly, even through the summer months, for two years. The small, close-knit groups shared their faith and concerns as well as a Bible study.

During the late 1970s, Bethel reached beyond it walls to support a three-year pledge of \$12,000 to the United Mission Appeal and to sponsor a refugee family in the Hudson community.

In 1979 a committee, headed by Al Weitkamp, was formed to make arrangements to sponsor a widow with seven children, ages 8-17. The husband had been killed fighting for the United States in the Vietnam War and the family had been forced out of its home in Laos. They arrived in Hudson in the midst of a cold January, bringing with them only a wooden cutting board, a large knife, and some dishes and spoons.



1980-- Pictured, left to right, Lee Swenson, youth director; Pastor L. Donald Docken, senior pastor; Charlotte Lee; Robert Nasvik, and Pastor James Gronewold, associate pastor

The committee had readied an apartment for them, furnished with donated items. The younger children attended public school, and the older ones were tutored by volunteers. Medical and dental problems were treated by local doctors and dentists. After a year and a half, the family moved to Eau Claire to be near relatives; today, most of the family members live in the St. Paul area.

A memorable event during Pastor Docken's tenure was a Peace and Memorial Service in September of 1982. A moving service brought together veterans of the U.S. Army's 70th Division and the German Sixth Nord Division, men who had once faced each other in mortal combat. Pastor Docken had been a member of the 70th Division, serving in France in World War II. After the war, some of the men in the group made contact with the German group and eventually invited them to a reunion where the idea for the service was born. Few will forget the sight of these former enemies embracing one another.

By 1983, with a membership of nearly 1,800, Bethel had a Sunday School enrollment of nearly 400 students. Organizing Sunday School classes for 350-400 students was no small job, and credit was due to many people, but it would be impossible not to mention Cynthia Huntley, who in 1988, stepped down after serving as Sunday School superintendent for 20 years. Some of the key people who aided her were Karen Pavlis, who was co-supervisor for many years, Barb Holt, Terri Wilcox and Karen Brathal.

Through the years there have been many changes in the structure of Bethel's Sunday School program. Today each grade has three to four classes with teachers sharing in team teaching, aided by high school or confirmation-age students. Sunday School supplies and resources have been increased; additional equipment such as VCRs, tape players and videos have been purchased, and a new supply/reception area has been constructed. The traditional Christmas program has evolved into three programs, one each for three-year-olds-

kindergarten, grades 1-3, and grades 4-6. Most importantly, hundreds have responded to the call to teach, contributing their time and talents to Bethel's Sunday School program.

Adult education, too, has been ongoing for the past 25 years. As previously mentioned, Pastor Gronewold led growth groups in the late 1970s. He was replaced in 1983 by the Rev. Samuel Koebel who led the Search Bible Studies which featured a large group meeting on Sunday mornings and small study-group meetings in homes during the week. Pastor Koebel also conducted some Crossways Studies, introduced the Divine Drama, the Discippling Program and Witness for Christ.

In 1988 the Befriender program began at Bethel with 12 people taking part in the training sessions conducted by the Wilder Foundation. The program was designed to teach lay people to be an extension of the pastors' visitation ministries. Another training session was held early in the 1990s.

In recent years, the Rev. Karen Johnson and current associate pastor, the Rev. Van Bredeson, have led numerous "good food for the soul" groups and Bible studies. Following a long tradition, the women of the church continue to meet in "circles" for monthly Bible study, and the Men's Fellowship Breakfast, begun by Pastor Docken, continues to meet two Wednesday mornings a month.

Via de Cristo, a spiritual-filled weekend retreat, offers the opportunity to apply practical Christian living to daily lives. Participants meet in renewal groups after the weekend experience to offer support to one another.

Early in the 1980s it became apparent that the congregation was outgrowing the church facility, and plans for expansion were begun. In 1986 the congregation approved building plans, and a capital fund-raising drive asking for three-year pledges to finance the project got underway.

At the same time, the congregation also took on a three-year commitment of time, talent and money to support the inner-city ministry of Pastor Al and Ina Erickson in the Phillips Neighborhood in South Minneapolis.

The Ericksons, who resided in the neighborhood, sought the help of several churches to attempt to minister to needs of the community which was largely comprised of Native Americans, Afro-Americans, Asians, and Hispanics. In the ensuing years, the congregation raised funds of up to \$5,000 a year to support the program, and numerous individuals prepared and served meals at the neighborhood's center in Our Savior's Lutheran Church, helped to clean and repair buildings, and made "hands-on" contact to mentor others.

The women of Bethel hosted a milestone event in 1987 when Bethel was the site of the St. Croix Valley American Lutheran Church Women Convention, celebrating 25 years of ALCW history and the beginning of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America Women.



**Pastor Samuel Koebel**

Three hundred and fifty attended the May 7 celebration which featured music, pageantry, drama, a Bible study, a global meal, and a worship and communion service. The theme, "Weaving New Patterns in Christ," was carried out in the use of baskets and basket-weaving demonstrations.

A groundbreaking ceremony for the church addition took place in May 1988, and construction continued into early 1989. On March 5, 1989, the new church addition was dedicated. Bethel had an enlarged narthex, an elevator, added rest rooms, an enlarged Fellowship Hall, additional Sunday School rooms, conference and scout rooms, new staff offices, and a new workroom. Cost of the project was \$637,095.

While in the midst of construction and remodeling, the congregation had to meet several other challenges: Pastor Docken had previously announced that he would be retiring that year, and Pastor Koebel subsequently offered his resignation and accepted a call to Ladysmith, Wis. It became necessary to form two separate call committees, one to call an interim pastor to fill Pastor Koebel's position, and one to call a senior pastor. The Rev. James Hartsoe became interim pastor, and the Rev. Dennis Nelson accepted the call to be senior pastor, beginning in September 1989.

The love of great choral music has been evident at Bethel for much longer than the past 25 years, a tradition due to many accomplished musicians who set standards in the early life of the congregation. Bethel is known for its musical groups and dedicated singers and directors. Many members of the Senior Choir have sung to the glory of God for more than 30 years.

Directors of the Children's Choir (Intermediate Choir, Praise Kids) have been Molly Lein, Jan Hinchman, Roberta Pominville, Rob Weisel, Maggie Speich, Ron Ruettmann, and Lonna Posschl. Current director is Susan Langlois.

Directors of the Junior Choir (Repertory Company, W/J/D) have been Molly Lein, Katie Adelman, Marsha Gronewold, Dana Sawyer, Julie Henriksen, Alyce Tracey, and Lonna Posschl. Current director is Lisa Ruettmann.

Directors of New Beginnings (high school) have been Katie Adelman, David Wickert, Maggie Speich, Rob Weisel, and Craig Gustafson.

Gail Nolan currently directs a choir of kindergarten, first and second graders. The Senior Choir has had only three directors in the past 25 years. They are Gloria Gaynor, David Wickert, and Roberta Pominville. The choir continues to sing every Sunday from September to May, and there are several occasions during the year when all the choirs combine to offer a special anthem. Several cantatas also have been presented by the Senior Choir, including the recent "Passion Cantata" by Bethel organist Layton James that featured musicians from the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.

Senior Choir has been blessed with the accompanying skills of Delores Willi and Char Lee, current accompanist.

Principal organist at Bethel for the past 25 years was Delores Willi, who in 1997, retired after 40 years of involvement in the church's musical ministry. In 1957 she started in the music program at Bethel as director of the Children's Choir. Gradually she began substituting for Edith Sather who was then organist. She became full-time organist in 1974.

During her years of dedicated service, Delores Willi recruited and encouraged many young musicians in the congregation. Easter and Christmas services traditionally featured the talents of young musicians who enhanced the worship services with special instrumental music.

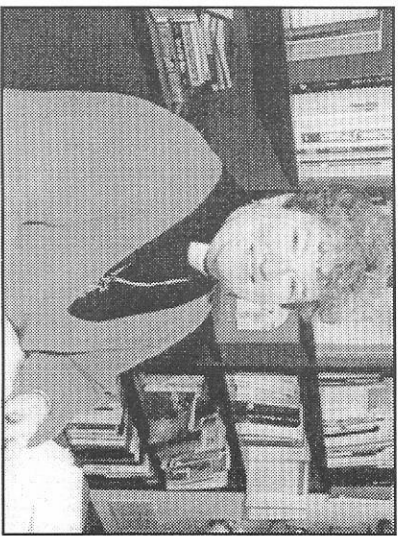
Assisting organists in the past 25 years include Jim Moen, Molly Lein (who currently plays for the Thursday evening worship service), Katie Adelman, and Julie Doidge. Today,

Layton James serves as principal organist; other organists are Monica Weekes (who also is piano accompanist at the New Song Service), Sonja McGill and Rebekah Jorstad. In recent years a bell choir and chime choir have been added to Bethel's music program.

The past quarter of a century has brought many changes in the staffing needs at Bethel. Pastor Docken began his ministry at Bethel in 1974, aided by numerous seminary students. In 1977 an assisting pastor, Albert Schilling, and a youth/education director, Rhonda Shieff Hermanson, were added. Late in 1978, the assisting pastor was replaced by Pastor James Gronewold who became associate pastor. He served until 1983, and was replaced by Pastor Samuel Koebel who ministered at Bethel until 1989. Youth directors who served Bethel included Hermanson, Lee Swenson, Julie Henriksen and Kirsten Fisher.

Staffing responsibilities were re-evaluated in 1989, and the next year, Pastor Karen Johnson accepted a call as associate pastor in the ministry of life and growth, focusing on programming, congregational life, worship, education, and ministry, which included communion and visitation of shut-ins and visitation of newcomers.

In 1991 a second associate pastor, Pastor Van Bredeson, began serving in the ministry of education, youth and family. His focus has been not only on youth, but on those who are in daily



**Pastor Karen Johnson**

contact with youth. He teaches parenting classes, couple's communication classes, and peer counseling. His ministry also encourages adults to be interested in and care about the youth in the Hudson community.

Opportunities for youth fellowship and service have grown tremendously at Bethel in the past 25 years. Youth groups now cater to several different age categories, and Bethel's young people participate in adventure outings such as hiking, skiing, camping, and canoeing. These activities challenge their abilities, require them to face fear, work as team, and rely on strength from God when they feel weak. In addition, there are opportunities for service that teach that they can make a difference in the world. In recent years, Bethel's youth have painted homes of elderly in Leadville, Colo., built homes in Harlan, Ken., and raised money and solicited funding to purchase a 15-passenger van for the church.

Pastor Johnson left Bethel in 1997 to accept a call to Augustana Lutheran Church in Cumberland, Wis. She was replaced by the Rev. Joanne Sorenson who was installed as associate pastor in July 1998.

Shortly after Pastor Nelson began his ministry in 1989, the congregation engaged in a strategic planning process. John Clymer headed a committee that made use of resource materials to identify the congregation's strengths and devise practical ways to build on those strengths for the future. Bethel's strengths were identified as worship, leadership resources, and visibility in the community. One result of the process was the implementation of several worship options: the traditional service, the New Song service, and the Thursday informal service.



**1998 Pastoral Staff--Pictured, left to right, are Pastor Van Bredeson and Pastor Joanne Sorenson, associate pastors, and Pastor Dennis Nelson, senior pastor.**

In recent years, Lenten worship, a somber tradition in many congregations, has become a lively and renewing experience at Bethel. Pre-worship meals, "sermons" that are dramatic characterizations of Biblical people or people of faith, involvement of children, and an informal style have sustained the involvement of many people.

An ongoing effort has been mounted to strengthen the congregation's ministry of hospitality. First-time worship guests are welcomed while they are at worship, and that welcome is amplified by a visit from a "bread caller," a member who delivers a fresh loaf of bread, extending a personal welcome to the worship guest.

Pastor Bredeson has reached into the community by participation in community resource development efforts such as "asset building" for healthy kids which involved the Hudson Daybreak Rotary.

No-cost space is provided at the church to a counselor for Lutheran Social Services who offers support to families and individuals.

A Mission and Justice Committee was created in 1991 to give focus to the congregation's social ministry efforts. Its ministries have included adopt-a-family Christmas projects, school supply projects locally and globally; support of El Shaddai Ministries, a Phillips Neighborhood ministry among inner-city minorities; work trips to flood-ravaged areas, and more.

In 1990 the council set a pattern for benevolence or giving for mission beyond the confines of the congregation: namely, that benevolence giving would grow in proportion of the congregation's budgeted resources for mission efforts. The result is that budget mission dollars have grown from 11 percent in 1990 to 16.4 percent in 1998. In actual dollars this amount is much more remarkable: \$43,000 in 1990 to nearly \$76,000 in 1997.

The Bethel Endowment Fund was created in 1996 to extend Bethel's ministry beyond the confines of its budget. To date, more than \$53,000 has come into the endowment. Interest earned on the fund will provide grants each year to support Christian religion, Christian charity, and education for Christian life and service.

A highlight of the 125th anniversary year was the introduction of a musical setting of the liturgy, composed by Bethel organist Layton James and dedicated to the glory of God in honor of the anniversary and the 40-year musical ministry of Delores Willi.

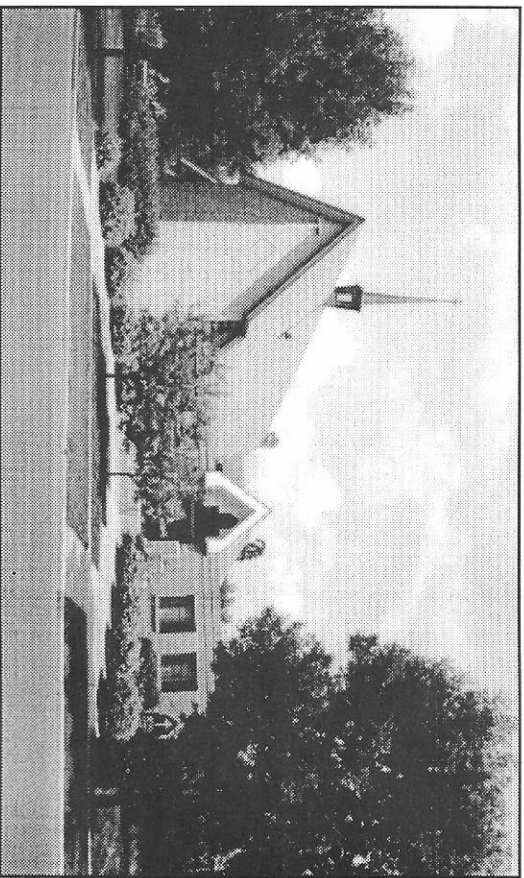
Today the Women of Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (WELCA) continue to serve Bethel as the women of the *Kvindeforening* did in the church's early days, but in the past 25 years, there have been many changes: Women have added careers to homemaking, and the church is no longer the center of many lives as it once was. It is increasingly difficult to find time to emulate the works of their mothers and grandmothers, and it is often easier to give money than to give time. An example of giving money is the Thank Offering which is sent each year to the national WELCA office and shared with Lutheran World Relief.

Service is reflected in the many colorful quilts that are seen on the pews before Thanksgiving. The quilts, along with clothing, are packed and sent to Lutheran World Relief. Clothing, food and sundries also are collected for local distribution, and many families provide Christmas gifts for an 'adopted' family.

Still there is a core of women who serve the lunches at funerals, who piece quilts for disaster victims, who share Bible study within circles.

In recent years, the national WELCA has reorganized structure and focus, and the women now address Mission Growth (education), Mission Action (stewardship), and Mission Community (outreach) through various projects. Lutheran Women Today, WELCA's national magazine, provides the monthly Bible study and gives a view of what others are doing to further the group's missions.

In 1990 the women at Bethel began the Scandinavian Food Fest, which features foods and crafts that reflect Bethel's Scandinavian heritage. The two-day event raises funds which have been used to refurbish Fellowship Hall and the kitchen and to support Luther Point



Bethel Lutheran Church, 1998

Bible Camp and other projects.

The first national Triennial Convention of ELCAW in 1993 had the theme "Women and Children in Poverty" which stimulated Bethel women to begin the project "Building Blocks of Hope" to help needy young mothers with layettes and quilts. The women of Bethel also began to contribute money and supplies to a local center for abused women.

Bethel's WELCA sponsored a parish-written Advent devotional booklet, compiled a cookbook for the 125th anniversary celebration, and continues to host a Christmas Smorgasbord.

Probably the heart of Bethel's WELCA is the circle. Four circles meet monthly for Bible study and to offer their services for WELCA projects, sharing their lives and strengthening each other in the Lord's work.

Reflecting on 125 years, the congregation at Bethel can take pride that it is "alive in its heritage and hope." The faith and service of thousands of individuals made possible, and will continue to make possible, the growth and mission of Bethel Lutheran Church.

The congregation also can take pride in the knowledge that in the past quarter of a century, five of its children have been ordained into the ministry. They are Dennis Paulson, James Alquist, Mark Docken, Valerie Johnson Peterson, Steven McGinley and David Hahn.

The mission statement summary adopted by Bethel's council in 1996, "Welcome, Equip, Send," serves as a reminder that the congregation aims to welcome every person to a living faith in Jesus Christ; to equip people with a mature faith that works in real life, and to send people in service of others in the name of Jesus Christ.