

Memories on the Occasion of the Dedication of the New Church Building in Harmony, Minnesota

21 July, 1913

A Piece of the Congregation's History

It was in the year of 1854 that Norwegian men and women started to settle in the part of Fillmore County, which was called Greenfield. And those who arrived in this part of Minnesota have certainly not had any regrets for clearing the fields and building homes; for the land is among the best. At that time, it was cheap. Now it is expensive. At that time the poor people settled here. Now the whole area is prosperous.

The first settlers came from older Norwegian settlements in Wisconsin, especially from the well known Muskego. But also people directly from Norway found their way here. And the amount of Norwegian settlers grew annually. Now there is a big settlement here.

The first most important thing was, of course, to get a roof over one's head and food to sustain life. Much heavy work and much poverty accompanied the labor of the settlers here as well. But strong men and patient women did great things here as well as other places.

During the first years of the new settlers there was a lack of ministerial services. This was, of course, greatly missed. Although the spiritual condition for many could be less than ideal, there was a longing among the Norwegian settlers to have a church, sermons, distribution of the sacraments and a servant of the Lord among them.

It shall be said about the early group of pioneers that they had learned the meaning of the words from this hymn in their old country:

It is good to live in the house of the Lord
It has been built upon a cliff.
There your soul can safely rest,
In the shade of spiritual peace.
There we are fed the bread of life,
The sweet ointment of joy floats by,
There we see the heavens open.

It was always very helpful and joyous when one of another of the first Norwegian ministers in this country visited the settlement. It turned into a party among the settlers. Lots of tears were shed when ministers like P. A. Rasmussen and U. V. Koren were amongst them, preaching the old gospel, baptizing the children, giving communion and throwing earth on the deceased.

During the early times of settlements there were no churches where people could congregate to receive the grace of the Lord. But they huddled together in the small, poor cottages or in a small and modest school house. The words of the singer were fitting of the times and circumstances:

We congregate for our Lord
Even in the lowest dwelling
Finding with St. Peter what is good
Would not exchange it for anything in the world.

Besides visits from the ministers mentioned above, it must be mentioned that people in this area together with other settlements were serviced by Pastor Jensen for some years. He could well be called a mission pastor because he serviced Norwegian people in a bigger part of Fillmore County.

Several more years passed before a congregation was formed. Many meetings were held for this purpose. But quite some time passed before a result was obtained. Greenfield congregation was not incorporated until 1866. Candidate Tobias Larsen was, however, called to be minister and started his work in 1865. He was ordained by Prof. F. A. Schmidt and Pastor P. A. Rasmussen on July 30, 1865.

Pastor Tobias Larsen thus became the first permanently employed minister for the congregation. His parish consisted of the following congregations: Greenfield, Union Prairie, Sætersdal and Bloomfield. This parish was very big with a considerable distance between the congregations. Therefore, after some years, the parish was split.

Pastor Tobias Larsen got his theological education partly at the Norwegian University and partly at the Konkordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri.

The protocol shows that the following men took part in the founding and incorporation of the Greenfield congregation:

Ole S. Eriksen Solseth	John Johnson Kasen
Herbjørn Nilsen Ingulfslund	Johannes Olsen Thoe
Dreng Evenson Kirkelie	Ole Østensen Bømaagen
John Thompson Krosso	Arne Evensen Kirkelie
Johannes Elefson Sauarlie	Even B. Haugrum
Arne A. Aaberg	Gullek A. Maland
John Hacobson Einong	Hermam Knudsen Hemmestvedt
Ole Olsen Skrabek	Harvey Gregersen Bøen
Halvor Svennungsen Bostrak	Kittil Alfson Veseth
Tallak Brokken	Ole Olsen Traim
Erik Eriksen Solseth Jr.	Even Wilsen Neshaug
Svend E Solseth	Ole Olsen Traim
Erik Eriksen Solseth Sr.	Ole J. Morem
Thorgrin Drengson Rege	Ole Olsen Flatastøl
Kittil A. Harstad	Thomas Wilson Traim
Gjermund Johnson Kasen	Ole Kittelsen
Gregar Herbjørnsen Bøen	Tallak Larsen
Torger Halvorsen Rollag	Peder Mathisen Rakkestad

Nils Knutsen Gaasedelen
Tosten Ellefson Kvammen
Helge Halvorsen Rollag
Herbjørn Olsen Vaae
O. H. Oppegaard
Anders J. Boxrud
Aslag Nubson
Hans S. Johnson
Østen Maland
Thomas Thompson Krosso
Hellik Morem
Nels Johnsen Boxrud
Nils Nilsen Morem
Gunuf J. Brufloft
John Nilsen Boxrud
E. G. Johnson
Nils Bøen
Gunuf Johnson Qvile
Lars Larsen Hegland
Arne Arnesen
Ole Pedersen
John Sevalse

Andreas P. Helgeland
Nels H. Gausta
Ole Christiansen
Nils N. Ingulfsland
Svend E. Kirkelie
Kittil Fjøstuf
Gunder Thoe
Torger T. Felland
Asle Olsen Flatastøl
Østen N. Ingulfsland
Tollef A. Harstad
Thomas H Vindeleik
Erik Matsen Staur
Johannes Jensen Auren
Knut Arnesen
Thor E. Kirkelie
Aanon Torgerson Omlie
Jørgen Kittelsen Bjørgo
Kristian Olsen
Svennung O. Haugerud
Julius Markestad

Just after the congregation was incorporated in 1866, it started building a church; but it took a long time to completely finish it. It was, however, put to use as soon as possible. It was inaugurated on the 7th of October 1874 by Pastor Koren. The ministers Tobias Larsen, St. S. Reque and Nils Brandt took part in the solemn celebration.

Now the congregation had a lovely church. This old church was, for the time, a very impressive and worthy church. It was built from bricks that were fired close to the place where the church was built.

The old church has now withstood the elements for about 46 years, and has been a dear place of refuge for all members, old and young. Only once during these years has the church been exposed to great danger, when lightning struck the tower and splintered it. It was a miracle that the whole church did not succumb to the flames.

The congregation did not escape the fights within the teachings which embroiled the Norwegian church people. The fight over slavery, the Sunday, the absolution etc. were also introduced. When the fight regarding Predestination started, the connection with the Norwegian Synod was cancelled, which had lasted several years. Since then, it has not been organically linked to any church body, but has been serviced by ministers from the Norwegian United Church, and has supported the many doings of this society.

In 1887, Pastor Larsen bade farewell after having served the congregation for 22 years. From here, he moved to Wittenberg, Wisconsin, where he was called to manage a school for native Indians. He died some years ago.

The congregation was now in need of a new minister. The parish, which now included Greenfield, Setersdal and Henrytown congregations, gave Bishop H. J. Laache in Norway the authority to name a new minister. He recommended Peder Dreyer who had just finished his education from Pastor Storjohann's School for Ministers in Norway. The name of the school was Hauge's Minde.

Peder Dreyer accepted the calling and was ordained here in this country by Pastor P. A. Rasmussen, Lisbon, Illinois. He was blessed by Pastor J. Krohn the 4th of September, 1887. He served the congregation for approx. 16 years. In 1903 he resigned and accepted a position from Clermont, Iowa. He is now working for the Indremisjonen in Norway and lives in Bergen.

During the years of Pastor Dreyer, the parish changed. The Setersdal congregation cancelled their connection with the Greenfield parish and connected with the Cresco parish. Just before this, a new congregation had been formed in the part of Greenfield which is now situated in Iowa. This congregation was called Fremont. The parish now consisted of three congregations where there before was only one, - Greenfield, Henrytown and Fremont.

These congregations offered a position to Pastor Gerhard Rasmussen, who at the time was the minister for the Bethlehem's congregation in Minneapolis. He accepted the offer and started his work in January of 1904. He was blessed by Pastor Peder Dreyer. Pastor Rasmussen is still the minister of the congregation. He received his education from Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, Capital University, Columbus, Ohio and the University of Kristiania [Oslo].

As we can see from this, the Greenfield parish has for the last half century been served by only three ministers.

In the same way that the congregation started to build a church just after it was formed, it also started right away to build a parsonage. The old parsonage was situated half a mile from the town of Harmony. With it came 40 acres of land. The ministers would reside here until 1897. At that time, the old parsonage was sold, and Pastor Dreyer built his own house in Harmony. Thus the congregation was without a parsonage, and that was not a good thing. In 1905, the congregations built a large and lovely parsonage in the town of Harmony.

The old church is marked by age, but it stands there as a testimony to the labor and sacrifices of the forefathers. For several years, the congregation had in mind to build a new church which was better suited to the times and conditions. But not until 1912 was the decision finally made to do it. Even though there had been divided opinions about the placement of the new church, the congregation was somewhat in agreement that it should be built in Harmony. A lot was donated by a corporation consisting of members of the congregation and other Norwegians in the town. On this lot there stood for many years a Chapel which was used for Sunday school,

Parishioners school, meetings and festive gatherings. The work on the new church was started in June of 1912. The corner stone was laid on the 29th of September the same year by Pastor Rasmussen. Pastor H. O. Fjeldstad from Goodhue County gave the Norwegian sermon, and the local minister gave an English sermon.

The new church is built from pressed brick, with a basement and trimmings of Bedford stone. The style is gothic all the way. The lines are simple and beautiful. Superfluous decorations have been avoided. It is high and airy with seats for about 400 people. The following men have, as a building committee, done the work: Tollef Sanderson, Ole Fosse, Tosten Aplen, Ole Skrabeck and Hans E. Hansen. John A. Lund was for a short time member of the committee and has at times worked as overseer of the work. Renherd Risseland, Anund Roheim and Adolph Steen plus Nils Oftedal have performed the construction work and the painting. The trustees of the congregation have also been involved in the work. The Board consists of the following: Henry Gregerson, Ole Aplen, Terjus Wilson, Martinus Bergan and Theodore Olsen. Halvor G. Brufloft was a trustee for the yearly meeting of the congregation in January, 1913, and Henry Gregerson was elected in his place.

Besides the general subscription which has come from the members of the congregation, associations and single persons have donated extra gifts to the church. Harmony women's club has donated one of the large windows. It depicts the Ascension. Mrs. Anne Einong has also donated one of the large windows. This depicts Easter morning. Wilton Center girls' club has placed the window in the front. It depicts Jesus in Gethsemane. Harmony girls' club has provided for a pipe organ in the church. Ole Fosse, Ole Skrabeck, Nils Ingulfsland and Tosten Aplen have each donated one of the double windows. Torkel Traim donated the corner stone. Harmony Sunday school children have supplied the baptismal font. T. A. Sorenson has paid for scrolls on the pews. Pastor Rasmussen and his wife have donated the altar vessels. Malene Larsen has donated two candle sticks. Stina Sanderson has given an altar cloth in Hardanger pattern. Hon. and Mrs. O. N. Thundale have given the congregation an altarpiece, painted by the well known artist Herbjørn Gausta. The picture depicts Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Martin Brufloft has given a lectern. The women's club has in addition seen to the necessary carpets, chairs and table for the minister's room and decorations of altar and pulpit. In addition, many members of the congregation have willingly donated their time and labor to even the grounds and construction of sidewalks. The gilded cross, which lights from the spire, is a gift from three unnamed men of the congregation.

Sunday, the 21st of September, 1913, the new church was consecrated. Pastor N. A. Giere announced the gathering and encouraged the congregation to take part in the event. The chairman of the United Church, Dr. T. H. Dahl, gave the sermon and performed the consecration. The ministers of the parish participated. Prof. Carl Weswig, English teacher at the Norwegian-Lutheran Seminary in St. Anthony Park, made a speech.

As the congregation looks back on the past 50 years, it can and will not praise itself. It has tried to protect the word of God and the confession, and God has been merciful and good. When

now starting a new chapter of its existence and work, it asks God to still bless the congregation in the years to come. May the name of the Lord always be remembered in this place - from generation to generation,

God's word is our inheritance
It shall be our heritage
Give us, God, the praise in our graves
We honored you with all our might
It is our help in need
Our comfort in life and death
O God, wherever we are
Let this, as long as the world stands
Be inherited by coming generations.

(Translated from Norwegian by Hans I. Svanoe.)