

**1872**

**2022**

**A CELEBRATION MARKING THE 150<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY OF ST. JOHN'S CHURCH**

**RURAL GALCHUTT, ND**

**JULY 31, 2022**







One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of

St. John's Lutheran Church

Rural Galchutt  
Richland County  
North Dakota

July 31, 2022



## *THE CHURCH IN THE VALLEY*

There's a little country church  
Standing in the Valley Still  
Where the people all came to gather  
When the sexton rang the bell.

And on the sacred alter  
Shines a painted picture fair,  
Here the image of the Savior  
Looked down on people there.

Here they sang the hymns, old classics,  
Here they quietly met and prayed,  
And the rafters, old and seasoned,  
Still echo words they said.

Here they listened very humbly  
To the reading of God's word  
And the sermons of the pastor  
As he preached about the Lord.

Here the organ, old and mellow,  
Sent out music wondrous sweet  
And they paused in friendly greeting  
When the service was complete.

The flickering lights of the chandelier  
Reminded all of the uncertainties of life,  
And also that God's mighty hand  
Would see them through life's strife.

Here so many of our loved ones  
Lie in peaceful rest;  
We pray that through the passing years  
We may lie there with the blest.

Yes, this historic old church in the Valley  
Still calls us with its bell  
To remember those who instilled in us  
This great heritage so well.

*Adapted from a poem by Helen Loomis Lindham*

Welcome Members and Friends of St. John's Church,

It is my pleasure to be in ministry with you as we celebrate St. John's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. God has blessed this ministry over the years with beautiful servants of God. We have been sustained through God's faithfulness and present spirit over these many years. God's loving guidance will continue to lead us into the future.

One hundred fifty years is an outstanding achievement. Back at the 125<sup>th</sup> celebration, Pastor Hedman said, "the Pastors and people of this small church had a fire in their hearts for their church and what a powerful effect it has had on all of us." Pastor Hedman was right on; this congregation has had a love for sharing God's word and love through this community for years.



When we are the church together, anything can happen when we put God at the center and work as people of God to share the good news of Jesus Christ and our community. The Holy Spirit will continue to work through you as we remain faithful servants of God. The Church is the people so, if you and your families are around, this church will continue to share the love of God with all.

I leave you with Romans 8:26-28: "Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

We are called to work for God's purpose, and I believe the people of St. John's have done this and are continuing to worship and praise God. I am blessed to be a part of something so wonderful! Thank you for being the Church today!

God's peace to my sisters and brothers  
in Christ,

Pastor Janelle Hansen



*Much of the information for this booklet was taken from previous history books and booklets created for prior anniversary celebrations or recounts from private individuals. We were unable to verify all the information but hope the history is an accurate record of the facts at those times. We apologize for any misspelled names.*

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF ST. JOHN'S CHURCH**

This year, 2022, marks the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the historic St. John's Church in Richland County, North Dakota. The congregation, organized in 1872, was originally known as the South Wild Rice Lutheran Congregation. St. John's church, together with the Synode Lutheran at Norman on the Sheyenne River, were the first two Norwegian Lutheran churches to be established in North Dakota. While St. John's was one of the earliest (though not the first) churches in North Dakota, it does, however, claim the distinction of being the oldest church in North Dakota still standing on its original foundation.

More than one hundred and fifty years ago, from 1869 to 1871, a group of pioneers had pushed their way westward as far as Fort Abercrombie in the Dakota Territory. They settled here in the Red River Valley along the Wild Rice River. These hardy men and women, mostly of Scandinavian heritage, struggled for survival as close to the military fort as possible, often working for the officers in the fort or hauling hay for the horses of the cavalymen. They soon began to feel the need for a place to worship - a place to hear God's word and to thank Him for His protection and blessings.

Reverend Niels Ylvisaker of Minneapolis conducted services throughout the Red River Valley, including one held on Sunday, October 6, 1972. The exact location is unknown. In a letter, Reverend Ylvisaker recalled this event:

*"... I went on to the Norwegian settlement on the Wild Rice River, southwest of the fort at this place. There was no hard and fast organization and the people had been visited by many pastors. I was received with a friendly spirit. All the settlers were sent for by messengers, the settlement is not very large, and the majority came to services. After the meeting was over, the audience decided to organize a congregation which, together with Norwegian Synod congregations farther north, were to have the same pastor."*

Among these early settlers were Ole Bentson, Haldor A. Erickson, Erik Hoel, Thorvald Jacobson, K. L. Johnson, Peder L. Johnson, John P. Laasstuen, K. K. Lee, Erick A. Moen, Torsten E. Moen, H. C. N. Myhra, Gilbert Olson, Johan Olson, K. K. Rykken, M. J. Siverind, Nils T. Tvedt, and John O. Wold.

In 1872, Rev. J. A. Hellestvedt, a traveling missionary, came through the area on monthly visits. Sometimes he came on horseback, sometimes afoot on snowshoes or skis. There was great rejoicing when a missionary could arrive and conduct a worship service in one of the log cabins. If there had been births since the last visit, baptisms were performed; if there were couples who had decided to get married, weddings were performed. The people were hardy folks so there were few burials.

After one of his monthly visits to the little community then known as Richville, Pastor Hellestvedt was asked to take a petition to Pleasant Township (then the headquarters for the Lutheran Churches in the area). The petition stated that these people wanted to organize a Lutheran Congregation with their own pastor.

On November 27, 1872, a committee wrote a constitution which was formally adopted and recognized, and, on December 27, 1872, St. John's Church was organized and recognized by the headquarters office. At first the church was referred to as the South Wild Rice Congregation or "The Norsk Evangelisk Luthersk Kirke" in the Township of Richville, Dakota Territory. The first constitution showed the sincerity and willingness of these sturdy pioneers to be bound by the laws of God and the church in furthering his kingdom in these wide-open spaces.

At the first congregational meeting in December of 1872, P. L. Johnson was named chairman and H. C. N. Myhra was appointed Secretary. At the first Annual meeting held in October 1873, John Wold was elected Secretary and Kirkesanger, Kittel Rykken was elected as Treasurer, and P. L. Johnson as Trustee, for three years. In the early days it was necessary to have a Kirkesanger/Klokker. This was perhaps because some of the pastors did not sing, and because there were few organs in the newly settled communities. The pioneers considered it essential to rejoice in God's goodness with singing and so they had Kirkesangers long before they had organists and organs. The records are not complete as to dates when the congregation received its first organ, but in 1900 a smaller organ was traded for a semi-pipe organ. The first recorded organist was Mrs. John Winther in 1914. During the next several years, the following served as organists: Annie Wold 1916, Minnie Wold 1917-1922, Mrs. Ole Nelson 1923, Lillian Erstad 1924-1931, Judith Erstad 1932-1934, and Julia Johnson 1935 - 1939.

At this meeting in 1873, it was decided to reserve land from the K. K. Lee farm (Section 32, Range 48, Township 134), one acre of which was to be church property. Knud Johnson and Rueben Myhra later made additional grants of land. The present cemetery is the third location. When discussing St. John's history, Leonard, Geneva Flaa, and Palmer Tverdahl recalled the following:

*There was an interesting land deal in those early days of the church. K. K. Lee, whose land bordered the church lot, decided to donate an acre of his land to the church. Knud Johnson also wanted to donate an acre to the church but his land bordered K. K. Lee's land and not the church property. They solved the problem by moving the line fence one rod over unto the Johnson land and then took off a rod of Lee's land that bordered the church property and gave it to the church from Knud Johnson.*

In December of 1874 it was decided to build a schoolhouse that could serve also as a church until they could afford to build a separate building. The first schoolhouse was not large, only 18 feet by 22 feet by 10 feet. However, the parishioners were very content for now they had a special place dedicated to the worship of God and the education of their children. Each family was taxed 50 cents a year. This was likely the first place of worship built by Norwegian Lutherans in North Dakota. Later it was moved just north of the church on land donated by Knud Johnson.

In 1876 Pastor Hellestvedt was given a leave of absence to take a trip back to Norway for his health. In 1878 Rev. R. J. Wisnaes was called. By 1879 the congregation had grown since many of the settlers in the Military Reserve had joined. It is interesting to note that the ordination of Rev. R. J. Wisnaes, who served as pastor at St. John's from 1879 to 1883, was held in the schoolhouse located on the extreme southeast corner of the Toby Johnson home farm. Toby was the grandson of Peder L. Johnson and the farm he inherited had been Peder's farm.

Peder Johnson and John Wold were chosen to find a suitable location for establishment of a parsonage. Forty acres of land were purchased in 1880 for a parsonage, one mile west and one-fourth mile north of the cemetery. It was customary to have about 40 acres of land with the parsonage so there would be feed for their cows and horses. The house for the parsonage was placed near the Wild Rice River directly east of the former Oscar Folstad farm. In 1885, each member was assessed \$6.00 to clear up the debt on the land. The parsonage and land were later sold, and the money used to build the steeple in about 1897.

At a meeting on October 31, 1881, a decision was reached to build a church thirty (30) feet long and twenty-two (22) feet wide. Peder Johnson, Nils Tvedt, Haldor Erickson, John Wold, and H. C. N. Myhra were placed on a building committee with power to act for the congregation. On February 17, 1882, the size was reconsidered and enlarged to fifty (50) feet long and twenty-eight (28) feet wide with a fourteen (14) foot ceiling. A "bygemaester" (building overseer) was to be hired with the carpentry work to be done by the members. Logs were donated and sawed into lumber at the local sawmills.

*It is interesting to note the financial report of the church in 1881:*

<u>Regular Fund</u>		<u>Land Fund</u>	
Receipts	\$14.00	Receipts	\$149.75
Paid Out	<u>\$ 7.50</u>	Paid Out	<u>\$134.29</u>
Balance	\$ 6.50	Balance	\$ 15.46

Meanwhile, services were held as often as possible by Pastor Hellestvedt, usually in the Martin Johnson home since his was the largest cabin in the community. Pastor Hellestvedt served two other churches at this same time, North Pleasant and South Wild Rice. He usually traveled among his widely scattered parishioners on a horse owned jointly by the three congregations.

In 1882 the name of the church was changed, and the name "St. John's Church" was adopted, with the Dwight Church taking the name "Wild Rice Lutheran." Erik Hoel was sent to Pleasant Township to confirm these name changes at the headquarters office. The annual meeting in June 1883 was held in the church, although the building had not been completed. The baptism of Anna Jacobson is recorded as the first to take place in the church on Christmas Day 1883.

Furnishings for the church were slow in coming. The bell bears a date of 1885. In 1886, John Moen was hired to make twenty-four pews. Moen was paid \$150 for building the pews and some other work. The Ladies Aid had been organized in 1883 and, in 1887, the Ladies Aid purchased the chandelier at a cost of \$71.65.



The year 1896 was one of intense activity since the twenty-fifth anniversary would be marked in 1897. The Ladies Aid provided the pulpit and altar. A contract was authorized for the building of the steeple. The members removed the siding, resided, and repainted the outside. The barn was also enlarged.

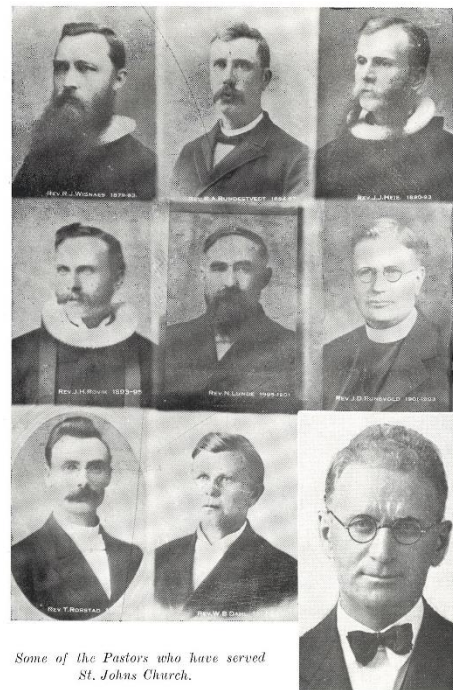
The pump organ was acquired in 1900 and a stage built for it. Karn Johnson was the first organist. At the early services there was no accompaniment for the singing. For this reason, the Kirkesanger who led the singing was important. The first Kirkesanger was John Wold. Later several congregations engaged the same individual to fill this position as they shared the same pastor.

By 1900 the building and furnishings were completed. Little has been changed since then. The most significant improvement was the addition of electricity in 1940. From time to time the building has been re-shingled and painted and necessary maintenance performed. Until 1937 all meetings and records of the congregation were in Norwegian. Services, however, were conducted in both languages.

Thirteen pastors have served the congregation since its inception. These pastors were shared with other congregations as convenience and economic conditions dictated, among them Pleasant, St. Paul Wild Rice, Emmanuel, Bethany, and Galchutt. The creation and subsequent re-combination of Lutheran congregations and communities can lead to confusing histories of individual churches. Events claimed as the first in a congregation may be claimed by more than one church because both churches claim a single community of believers as their founding community and often shared pastors.

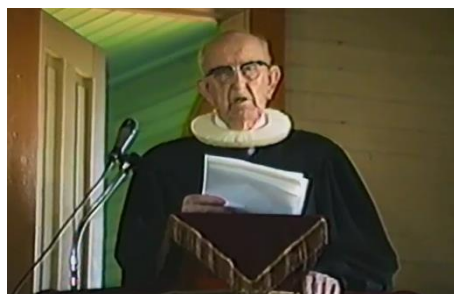
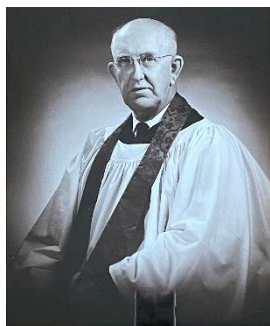
### Pastors who served St. John's Church

- 1872 – 1876 Pastor J. A. Hellestvedt
- 1876 – 1878 Pastor N. Forde
- 1878 – 1879 Pastor J. E. Bale
- 1879 – 1883 Pastor H. J. Wisnaes
- 1883 – 1887 Pastor A. P. Rondestvedt
- 1888 – 1893 Pastor J. J. Heie
- 1893 – 1894 Pastor J. W. O. Rovik
- 1895 – 1901 Pastor N. Lunde
- 1902 – 1903 Pastor J. D. Runsvold
- 1903 – 1912 Pastor Thomas Rorstad
- 1912 – 1916 Pastor W. B. Dahl
- 1917 – 1936 Pastor V. L. Peterson
- 1936 – 1941 Pastor Hans Upstad



Some of the Pastors who have served St. Johns Church.

Rev. V. L. Peterson  
1917-1936



Pastor Hans Upstad

## The St. John's Ladies Aid

As far as can be ascertained, St. John's Ladies Aid was organized in 1883, although no written records were kept until 1886 and then only of the annual meetings. Surprisingly, the earliest officers of the Aid were chosen from the men of the congregation. Revisors were also appointed to audit the treasurer's books. Later, the women were chosen as officers, and Mrs. Hans Myhra served as the first woman president. As soon as the girls were confirmed they were considered members of the Aid, and in this way the Aid grew rapidly. The charter members were:

Mrs. H. C. N. Myhra, Mrs. P. L. Johnson, Mrs. K. K. Lee, Mrs. Erick Hoel, Mrs. Thorvald Jacobson, Mrs. K. L. Johnson, Mrs. Anna Johnson, Mrs. Ole Benson, Mrs. John Olson, Mrs. Pete Linde, Mrs. Nels Thompson, Mrs. Charley Johnson, Mrs. John Myhra, Mrs. John Engum, Mrs. Sjur Botne, Mrs. Sven Moen, Mrs. Sjur Johnson, Mrs. Ole Lodahl.

Time at the monthly meetings was spent in quilting or cutting and sewing garments to be sold at the annual auction. Often the material used in these garments was calico purchased at five cents a yard. Sometimes the material was donated but usually the Aid Sewing Committee purchased it. The women spent much of their time making these garments, but there was always a time for devotions, sometimes conducted by the Pastor, sometimes by the President of the Aid.

In addition to working for the church mission and donating to orphan homes, the Aid helped support parochial schools in the community, lent money to the farmers and to the congregation. Many things in church were paid for by the Aid, such as the "Lyse Kroner" (lights/chandelier) costing \$71.65 bought in 1887; an altar set in 1890 for \$23.12, and the Altar and Pulpit costing \$117.20 in 1896. In 1896 when the church was repaired, the Aid paid for material for the altar and for the painting. It is interesting to note that all the early members were Norwegian, and as a result all the meetings were conducted in the Norwegian language.

Money was raised through dues and by having an Annual Auction Sale. This was usually held in June, the first one being held on June 24, 1883, in the Hans Myhra grove. Other groves were used at various times, including those of K. K. Lee, K. L. Johnson, and Ole Benson. The people gathered in the morning to attend these auctions, bringing baskets full of food. Tables were set for the noon meal and in early times all food was served free of charge. The sale was then held in the afternoon. Erick Lien, a farmer residing near Dwight, served as auctioneer. Later he was replaced by Torger Wateland. These men were usually paid three dollars for their services. Among the articles sold were the garments that the women had made at their Aid meetings such as men's shirts, aprons, children's garments, and quilts. An embroidered and framed motto, "Welcome Home" was made and donated by Mrs. Fosmark and sold at the auction in 1887, purchased by P. L. Johnson for \$4.25. Mrs. O. E. Olson later came into possession of it and later sold it to J. M. Johnson, the last known owner. Another such sample was "Teach Me Thy Will," made and donated by Mrs. Peter Linde, a charter member. Dolls were also sold.

## **St. John's Young Ladies Aid**

On July 22, 1925, a meeting was held at the Trond Flaa farm for the purpose of organizing a society for the younger ladies of the congregation so that they, too, could have an active part in the work of the church. At this meeting, a committee was selected to nominate officers. The group was formally organized at the next meeting on August 8, at the Theodore Botnen home with the following listed as charter members:

Frances Alexander, Myrtle Botnen, Hazel Botnen, Thea Botnen, Emma Brandon, Grace Erstad, Ida Erstad, Lillian Erstad, Inga Flaa, Alphie Flaa, Pauline Hoel, Myrtle Jacobson, Miranda Jacobson, and Viola Waterland.

Officers elected at this meeting were President Emma Branden, Vice-President Frances Alexander, Secretary Lillian Erstad, and Treasurer Hazel Botnen. At first meetings were held every two weeks with the girls entertaining in alphabetical order. They decided to work for the Orphanage in Fargo, so a Purchasing Committee was appointed to buy material that the girls made into garments for the orphans. At Christmas, each girl's family was asked to donate a dressed chicken for the orphanage. These girls also took care of the Christmas tree program and festivities at St. John's. For these various charitable and home enterprises, the girls obtained their funds from dues of 25 cents per meeting, ice cream socials held in groves on various farms during the summer, suppers served in Galchutt's school house, and bazaars held shortly before Christmas. There were always devotions and interesting programs at the meetings, in addition to the work on the charitable projects to help needy people and to encourage work in the local church.

Eventually, when many of the girls went away to school or nurses' training or moved to different communities, the Young Ladies' Aid disbanded and those who remained became members of the Ladies Aid.

## **The Sunday School and Parochial School**

According to the records of the St. John's Congregation, the first Sunday School was organized November 20, 1876. This was probably the first Sunday School organized in Richland County. The first teachers were Martin Johnson and Ole Bentson, each elected to serve for two years. This certainly showed the steady faith which our ancestors had in wanting to have their children brought up in the Christian faith despite all the other difficulties surrounding the pioneer community. They took it upon themselves to see that their children were given Biblical instruction since there were only traveling missionary pastors who visited the community.

By 1879, a short ten years after these people had first arrived in the Red River Valley, they also saw fit to form a Parochial School. The school opened in September of 1879 and classes were held for two months. Ole Johnson and John Wold were the first committee selected to collect funds and organize the school together with the Skjeien Congregation. By 1882 the school was holding classes for four months each year. One of the first Parochial School teachers was Johannes Grandskau who later became a Lutheran pastor in South Dakota. In

1884 he increased the school term to five months beginning in April. Four years later in 1888, St. John's together with Dwight hired E. J. Unde as a teacher. He was paid \$30.00 a month for eight months, four at Dwight and four at St. John's. He was also hired as Klokker (sexton) at St. John's Church and paid \$1.00 additional each year by each family in the congregation.

The first confirmation mentioned in the records was held in 1884, the students "reading" once a week with the pastor. (Even as late as the 1970s, when confirmation students held classes with the pastor, it was referred to as "reading" with the pastor.) The following year, in November of 1885, there was a class of six. One member of this class was Nellie, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. P. L. Johnson. Nellie was the first white child born in Richland County (June 14, 1871), and this was first known confirmand to have been born in Dakota Territory. Most of the other members of these first two classes were born in the older Norwegian settlements of Minnesota, Iowa, or Wisconsin. Four of them had been born in Norway and one in Sweden. The members of this second class were Maria Swenson, Randine Engum (Mrs. P. K. Gunness), Nellie Johnson (Mrs. O. E. Olson), Kari Halverson, Nellie Christine Tvedt, and Peder Pederson. The members of the confirmation class had a public questioning of the catechism on the day of confirmation. At one of these, the pastor asked in Norwegian, "Vem er din neste?" (Who is your neighbor?) The confirmand answered, "Torvald Jacobson." Another question to the confirmand asked, "Va er de meneshe onske over alt?" (What does man desire above all?) The confirmand answered, "His wife!"

In later years, classes for religious instruction were held in the Galchutt School, jointly with Bethany Church. There was also a girls' Bible class and a boys' Bible class. The Sunday School only met from May until November, but there was always a Christmas Tree program. In 1939 Bethany organized their own Sunday School and held classes at their church while St. John's continued to have classes at the Galchutt School.

## **The Luther League**

For many years, the Bethany and St. John's young people were organized as the Bethany Young People's Society and meetings were held in the Bethany Church. However, in 1933 the St. John's members organized their own Luther League. Many outdoor meetings were held during the summer months at the homes of members. The records of the first meetings have been lost but it is known that the first officers were President Elmer Hoel, Vice-President Lillian Erstad, Secretary Judith Erstad, and Treasurer Joseph Flaa. Many of these young people also formed a choir and projects of the Luther League included raising money for an American flag, music for the choir and choir gowns, and donations to the Red Cross.

## Members of St. John's Since Organization

- 1872 Charter Members: Erick P. Hoel, H. C. N. Myhra, Peder L. Johnson, K. L. Johnson, Kittel Kittelson Lee, Thorvald Jacobson, John Olson Wold, Johan Olson, Gilbert Olson, Ole Bentson, John Pederson Laasstuen, Erick Anfinson Moen, Kittel K. Rykken, Nils T. Tveidt, Torsten Erickson Moen, Haldor A. Erickson, Martin Johnson Siverind.
- 1873: Ole Johnson Siverson, Peder Magnussen, Mathias Magnussen.
- 1874: Nils Jorgenson.
- 1877: John Amundson.
- 1878: Gulbrand Olson Weller.
- 1879: Sjur O. Botnen.
- 1880: Joseph Erickson, Johannes P. Engum, Peder Bergum, Lars L. Moe, Christian Paulson, Ole Larson, Knud Reine, S. J. Bjorgaas, Paul Paulson, Peder A. Linde, Alfred Anderson.
- 1882: Thom E. Moen and parents.
- 1883: Kittel T. Rykken and family, Paul Pederson and family, Ole A. Lodahl and family, Johannes Erickson and family.
- 1884: Johannes Grandskau, John Fosmark and family, Knut A. Tweto and family.
- 1885: Johannes Qveum and family, Anders Strand, Ole A. Lodahl, Sven Moe and family, Thor Sagstuen and family, Paul Sagstuen.
- 1889: E. J. Unde and family, Halgrim Brotten.
- 1893: Lars B. Sandven and wife.
- 1894: Ovid Vrynd and family, J. O. Strand and family.
- 1897: Andrew Fisher, Andrew Hovland and family, Geo. Obergram and family.
- 1898: Charles Brandon and family, Torger Wateland, Henry Lillegard and family, Isak Berg, Andrew Olson, J. Oscarson, R. O. Tverdahl, Henry Anderson.
- 1903: J. Oscarson and family.
- 1906: Ole J. Johnson and family.
- 1942: (See below)

Bakken, John & Marie	John M. Johnson	Overby, Melvin & family
Bakken, Joseph & family	Olaf Johnson & family	Paulson brothers
Berglund, Ernest & family	Orville Klubberud & family	Paulson, Mr. & Mrs. Emil
John Bjerkgager & family	I. C. Kurtz & family	Paulson, Mr. & Mrs. Leo
Brotten, Melvin & family	Lillegard, I. E.	Paulson, Rudolph
Carlson, Mrs. & Mrs. Alvin	Lodahl, Henry & family	Peterson, Arnold & family
Carlson, Erick & family	Lodahl, Oscar & family	Peterson, Floyd & family
Farup, Mrs. Eskild & family	Loff, Walter & family	Qveum brothers
Fixen, Louis & family	Lunde, Ole & family	Rasmussen, Martin & family
Flaa, Leonard & family	Mathiason, Mr. & Mrs. Martin	Rezac, Joey & family
Flaa, Palmer & Adeline	Mindemann, Mrs. George & family	Rude, K. S. & family
Flaa, Trond	Moen, Edward & family	Rurup, B. J. & family
Gorder, B. P. & family	Myers, Merlyn & family	Sether, R. W. & family
Hoel, I. E. & family	Myhra, George & family	Syvbertsen, Hans E. & family
Isaackson, Henning & family	Myhra, Rueben & family	Tuel, A. E. & family
Jacobson, Theodore & family	Ness, Hans & family	Tverdahl, Mrs. Rasmus family
Johnson, Cecil & family	Oscarson, Mrs. James	Vogeler, John & family
Johnson, Mrs. C. M.	Oscarson, John	Wateland, Melvin & family
Johnson, George	Overby, Arthur & family	Wateland, Torger
Johnson, Mr. & Mrs. Herman	Overby, Mrs. & Mrs. I. H.	Wold, George & family

## **A Few of the Firsts for The St. John's Congregation**

First Constitutional meeting

- November 27, 1872, held at Pleasant Township where organization and constitution were formed.

First Congregational meeting

- December 27, 1872, at Wild Rice, Township of Richville, Dakota Territory.

First Formand (chairman) at the above meeting

- P. L. Johnson.

First Secretary at the above meeting

- H. C. N. Myhra.

First Pastor

- J. A. Hellestvedt.

First Kirkensanger

- John O. Wold.

First Sunday School Teachers

- Martin Johnson and Ole Bentson.

First Parochial School Teacher

- Johannes Grandskau.

First Regular Sunday School Superintendent

- E. J. Unde.

First Yearly meeting

- October 1873.

First Trustees chosen at first annual meeting

- Erik Hoel (3 years); Nils T. Tvedt (2 years); P. L. Johnson (one year).

First Secretary

- H. C. N. Myhra.

First Ladies Aid President

- Mrs. H. C. N. Myhra.

First Treasurer

- Kittel Kittelson Lee.

First Baptism in community

- Nellie Johnson, born June 14, 1871. (No record of this except in visiting missionary diary)

First Baptism by Rev. J. A. Hellestvedt as Missionary

- E. Hoel, August 18, 1872.

First Baptism recorded in Ministerial Book

- Anna Gurine Jacobson, born November 6, 1883, and baptized December 25, 1883, in the church.

First Marriage in this community

- J. O. Wold and Ragnild Sater, August 18, 1872, at the home of Erik Hoel by Rev. Hellestvedt.

First Marriage in Ministerial Book

- Paul J. Engum and Kari Thoreson, December 14, 1885, at Pastor Rondestvedt residence.

*A Few of the Firsts for The St. John's Congregation continued.....*

First Marriage recorded in the church

- Asmund K. Tweto and Nellie Erickson, November 18, 1886.

First Burial recorded in Ministerial book

- April 17, 1889, Edwin Fosmark, two-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. John Fosmark.

First Confirmation in Congregation

- The five members of the class were Mary Enockson, Ingeborg Nelson, a boy and girl from the Sannes family, and one other unidentified person. This was sometimes between 1876 and 1878 during Rev. Forde's ministry and according to accounts from Mary Enockson, it was held in the Martin Johnson farmhouse.

First Confirmation in the Church (no written record)

- October 21, 1883. The eight members were: Anna Myhre, Karine Weimodet, Johan Moe, Mary Mathiason, Amanda Osmundson, Minnie Osmundson, and Ingvald Reine.

First Confirmation in the Church

- Recorded as held October 19, 1884, with the following members: Johannes Lee, Johan Ingebrigt Livesind, Hans Thompson, Endre Johnson, Lars Moe, Isak Reine, Anders Erickson, Karine Borgen, Jenny Myhra, Maria Transrud, Karine Stokkestad, Helga Sophie Moe, Signe Reine, Else Tweto.



## **The End of Regular Worship at St. John's Church**

In 1941 a group of members felt the need to establish a church in Galchutt, then a thriving small town. As a result, many of the members of St. John's moved to the new "town" church, some transferred to Bethany, others to Emmanuel or Dwight, and services were discontinued at St. John's. Regular service at St. John's Church ended in 1941. On May 31, 1942, the congregation celebrated the 70th anniversary of St. John's Church and the laying of the cornerstone and dedication of the Galchutt Lutheran Church. Galchutt Church maintained ownership of the old church and the cemetery and has been responsible for the upkeep of both.

## Preserving the History

Even though regular worship services were discontinued in 1941, there were a few individuals who strongly felt that certain traditions should be continued. Among those dedicated people were Palmer Tverdahl and Karl Schneider, who faithfully rang the bell every Christmas Eve for years. On clear, cold December nights, the sound of the bell was heard for many miles. Palmer served as the Sexton for several years, keeping records of the cemetery and duties connected to burials. The 1997 anniversary booklet noted Palmer had been the Sexton for 42 years at that time. In the 1980s, due to a concern for the safety of these cemetery records, duplicate records were made and kept with Joe Flaa and Bryan Flaa. Dallas Loff and Scott Fixen now maintain those records.

For many years, the only activities at St. John's were the burials in the cemetery after funeral services had been held in Galchutt or one of the other neighboring churches. In more recent years, however, a renewed interest in preserving the heritage of the old church has prompted several people to make use of it. Since 1970 an attempt has been made to have a "heritage service" once a year, as well as some special services. Although the beautiful chandelier is not kept at the church anymore, Joe Flaa hung it for several years during any special events. Each year the ladies and some of the men would gather to clean the church prior to their annual heritage services.







The 100th Anniversary of the St. John's Church was celebrated in May 1972 with Pastor Hans Upstad presiding. Special music was provided by Mrs. Elmer Hoel, Archie Isaacson, and Syvert Wateland, accompanied by Mrs. Lloyd (Arlis) Fixen. A choir consisting of the young girls in the congregation also sang. Greetings were given by Mrs. Roger (Yvonne) Domyahn, daughter of Leonard and Geneva Flaa, who had previously been a missionary.

A special St. John's Heritage Service commemorating North Dakota's State Centennial was held on June 18, 1989. Pastor Jeff McCracken presided over this service jointly with Pastor Hans Upstad. Special music was provided by both Ruth (Upstad) Hagander and Pastor Al Sandness. As was often the case, Arlis Fixen accompanied the congregation for all the music.



A celebration marking the 125th Anniversary of the St. John's Church was held in September 1997. Pastor Doug Hedman, pastor at Galchutt-Emmanuel, presided over the service. Special music was provided by Archie Isaacson and Donata Nellerhoe, along with a choir led by Roberta Whitehead and accompanied by Arlis Fixen and Kendra (Krump) Dockter. The bell was rung in remembrance of the founding fathers and mothers. After the worship service a noon meal was served, followed by a Reminiscing Worship service and fellowship time with goodies.



In 1971 (pictured to the right) and 1996, descendants of Peder and Mari Johnson, held their Johnson Family Reunions at the church. On June 25, 1977, the wedding of Laurel Johnson, daughter of Vernon and Mildred Johnson, was held at the church.



In October 1982, St. John's Lutheran Church was officially entered in the National Register of Historic Places, in recognition of its contribution to the cultural heritage of North Dakota. In 1983 a Cemetery Committee was formed, and donations were used for landscaping and the wrought iron sign. Although the committee can no longer function as a separate group, donations and memorials are still used for cemetery upkeep.

Several funeral services have been held in the church since its formal closure including Thea Paulson, Herman Johnson, Jacob Fagervik (husband of Grace Tverdahl), and Palmer Tverdahl, to name a few.

Baptisms that have been held include Kyle Krump in 1983, son of Pete and Karen (Syvertsen) Krump; Aspen Satter in 2011, daughter of Jason and Courtney (Syvertsen) Satter; Micah Moxness in 2014, son of Matthew and Marissa Moxness (pictured below left); and Rayden Julson in September 2018, son of Daniel and Sena Julson (pictured below right).



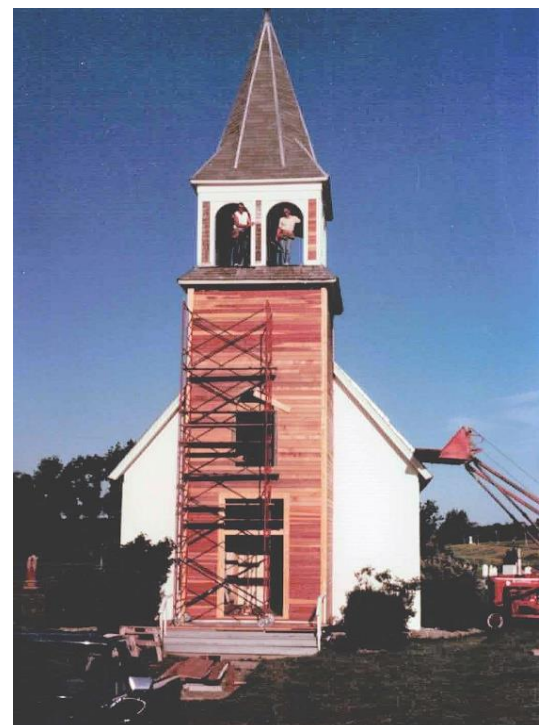
The preserved essence of the church has provided a beautiful sanctuary for weddings. While a complete list is not available at this time, recent weddings include Bryce & Tracy (Mauch) Woodbury in September 2015 and Jeremy & Kenzy (Overby) Kaehler in October 2021 (pictured to the right).



During the summers of 2015 and 2016, Pastor Michael Buller held a service of Music and Light at St. John's with wonderful gospel music and a service of communion, celebrating the "longest" day. Hymn sings were held at St. John's Church regularly during the summers of 2016 and 2017.



At least three times in the past several years the steeple has been struck by lightning. Fortunately, the bell has not suffered in any of these strikes, but lighting rods were installed with the hope of avoiding future damage. There has been considerable work done on the steeple/bell area over the past several years, along with the church being shingled several times and funds being raised to replace the cedar siding.



The annual “heritage service” is often held in conjunction with Galchutt Sunday School’s “Rally Sunday” each September. A more recent tradition includes the kids of Galchutt Church sharing special music with the congregation. Galchutt Lutheran Church has embraced the role of watching over St. John’s Church and is very proud of the history it entails. St. John’s plays a very important role in Galchutt Lutheran’s history and is something Galchutt members cherish. The history of St. John’s will be carried on and will continue to grow for many years.



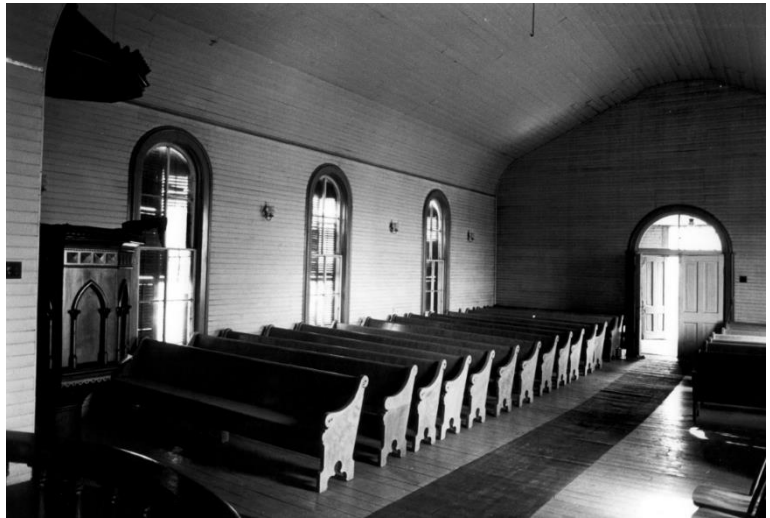
## **LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

We are fortunate to have such rich memories of God's grace and loving kindness to those Red River pioneers and to those who followed. A century and a half have passed since a small bank of Lutheran Christian settlers, in the fear of God and in obedience to His command, organized the St. John's Church.

This heritage from the past presents a challenge to those of the present generation, a challenge to "carry on" in the faith of our ancestors. The memories from the past, a past full of service and sacrifice, impels us to a reconsecration and a rededication and a determination to praise God in words, joyful songs, and loving neighborly actions. It is our prayer that every child of our church may be made aware of the heritage given to us from these dedicated Christian pioneers, and that they will continue to preserve it far into the next century.



*“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”*  
-Matthew 18:20



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<https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/44c85529-9bc2-463c-a4eb-bf2a2d51c208>

