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50th Anniversary

First English Lutheran Church

Ortonville, Minnesota

# History of First English Lutheran Church of Ortonville, Minnesota 1927-1977

Rev. John Walseth was serving Big Stone and associated congregations at Clinton, Minnesota when the tornado of 1908 destroyed a large portion of the town. Due to the resulting lack of accommodations, and the fact that the Clinton parsonage had been sold, Rev. Walseth established residence in Ortonville in 1910. Some local Lutheran families came to him for spiritual guidance and a group gradually developed, especially through the arrival of new families in the community.

The Home Mission Superintendent, Prof. Olaf Glasoe, was called in to look the field over. He advised the group to start a Ladies' Aid Society and to ask Rev. Walseth to give as much time as he could spare from his other congregations for this work. In 1912, co-operating in parish arrangements subsequent to the Union of 1917, Rev. Walseth resigned from his Clinton parish and accepted calls from St. John's congregation at Milbank, South Dakota and St. Paul's congregation at Bellingham, Minnesota. District President Rev. C. J. Eastvold was called to Ortonville to arrange this new parish, and Ortonville was added to the two aforementioned congregations. Several years of activity and growth ensued, with no further formal development.

The Ortonville group finally decided to start an English Lutheran Church, to call a young man who could use the English language perfectly and have services every Sunday morning.

On December 2, 1926 the Ladies' Aid Society was organized at the home of Mrs. O. M. Osen. Charter members were the Mesdames: S J. Anderson, John Dobak, Carl Eastvold, L. P. Everson, John Hagevik, Julia Martinson, O. M. Osen, Wm. Randall, A. C. Saeger, Nellie Scholberg, H. J. Shelver, A. H. Sorenson, and John Spanyers. The society was a continuation of the Norwegian Aid organized in 1912 by Rev. John Walseth.

On January 1, 1927 a business meeting of all prospective members was held, at which the body of the constitution was adopted, officers elected, and the Trustees authorized to arrange for the incorporation proceedings, and the purchase of the Orton-

ville State Bank building as a church. On February 2, 1927 "First English Lutheran Church of Ortonville, Minnesota" was the name formally adopted by the congregation, and they sent an application for affiliation with the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America to the secretary of the Southern Minnesota District.

This group had been meeting for services and Sunday School in the basement of the library. On May 1, 1927 services were held in the newly purchased bank building on Main Street.

Rev. Arling E. Thompson was installed on June 5, 1927 and served as first pastor of First English Lutheran church until June 1937. He built a solid foundation of pastoral work that has continued through the years. Lutheran Daughters of the Reformation (LDR) and Young People's Luther League were organized. Mrs. J. C. Sanborn started the Golden Rule Society.

On July 17, 1939 Rev. Otto E. Schmidt was installed, and in his five years here, saw the church built, and the congregation grow. April 2, 1939 the Building Committee bought the three corner lots at the intersection of Jackson Avenue and Third Street Northwest. Architect Thorwald Thorson was chosen and instructed to draw up plans. The fact that no general contractor could be interested in building such massive granite walls at a price we could pay, was but one of the many difficult problems which demanded



**Pastor Arling Thompson**  
1927 - 1937



**Pastor Otto Schmidt**  
1938 - 1944

the constant and conscientious concern of the committee whom the congregation had delegated these responsibilities. O. M. Osen was general chairman of the building project; E. J. Martinson, chairman of the congregation; Mrs. J. C. Sanborn, treasurer; J. M. Dahl, secretary; and A. H. Anderson, John Dobak, Carl Eastvold, Ferd Grosenick, J. A. Jacobson, William Klemp, and Casper Weigand comprised the combined council and building committee.

They bought a used truck and hired day laborers to haul the chunks of granite to the church site. Thorson spent much time here to see that his first church was built to his plans and specifications. The corner stone was laid on June 13, 1939 and the first service was held in the new church sanctuary on December 24, 1939. The dedication service was May 5, 1940, when Mrs. O. E. Schmidt joyfully sang "How Lovely Are Thy Dwellings."

Rev. Lavern R. Hanson was installed June 25, 1944 and remained for six years. On February 18, 1945 Memorials Windows were dedicated for Lt. John Dobak, S. Sgt. Harold Schmidt, Pvt. Maynard Nelson and Pvt. Richard Nelson. In 1947 the first parsonage was purchased; the twentieth anniversary of the church was celebrated; and the first organ was dedicated in time for Christmas. On November 26, 1950, a mortgage burning ceremony was held in the church to burn the church mortgage notes, ten years sooner than had been anticipated. The church had continued to grow and expand in all ways.

Rev. Amon O. Johnson was installed June 10, 1951 and worked with the congregation for four and one-half years. The church was becoming too crowded to hold everyone, and two services on Sunday were initiated. There had been talk of building a parish education unit since the church mortgage was paid. As a first step, the parsonage was sold and the lots north of the church were purchased. The house there was then used for a parsonage, and a building fund started for an educational unit.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the church was celebrated on October 26, 1952. The Women's Missionary Federation enlarged the Circle concept of working units for missions and local projects, and for Bible study. The Altar Guild was another area of service for women. Rev. Johnson and son Jeffrey were stricken with polio during the polio epidemic.

Rev. C. O. B. Ness was interim pastor from January 1, 1956 until September 16th when Rev. Harold O. Ward was installed. The Parish Education unit was built that year with Thorson, Thor-



**Pastor Lavern Hanson**  
1944 - 1951



**Pastor Amon Johnson, Jr.**  
1951 - 1955

son & Madson of Mason City, Iowa the Architects, and Hasslen Construction Company the General Contractors. The ground breaking ceremony was in April 1956; the building was ready for use in September of that year, and it was dedicated on April 29, 1957.

The Sunday School rooms, a library, church offices, and Pastor's study were all in the new building.

As the church was again without a parsonage, the lots on Highland Highway were purchased in 1959 and a new 2-story parsonage was built. By this time the church building was over twenty years old and required up-dating to accommodate the ever increasing congregation. The bells and peal were added in 1963. The pulpit was moved out so that the minister always faced the congregation. A new heating and air-conditioning system were installed. The ceiling was paneled, improving the acoustics. The choir was moved to the balcony and the new organ installed there. The library was remodeled and new doors installed between the education building and the church nave. The narthex was remodeled and carpeted along with the church. A new piano was also purchased. All this was completed by 1971.



**Pastor Harold Ward**  
1956 - 1972



**Pastor Robert Sorenson**  
1973 -

As a reminder of Vietnam, in 1967 the Gerald Fredrickson Memorial Cross was placed on the church grounds. To encourage youth in christian service, Acolytes and Christeens were started.

Rev. Robert Sorenson was installed February 25, 1973, and has continued to emphasize service to fellow man through Christian service. These include the Bethel Series, Bible Study Groups, hospital visitation group, confirmation individualized, and young people communing after instruction as sixth graders.

In 1976 a new Rose Memorial Window was placed above the staff. An assistant, Pastor Leonard Smestad was added to the staff. Growth of the congregation has continued, and there are now 944 baptized members and 769 confirmed members.

People who have gone forth from this congregation to dedicated Christian service are:

Carl Ulrich, commissioned into Foreign Missionary Service on June 16, 1957. The church currently provides \$5,000.00 a year toward his support.

James Howard Goldsmith, ordained July 19, 1970, presently pastor at Badger, Minnesota.

Lyle Dean Hoxtell, ordained June 2, 1973, now pastor at New Lisbon, North Dakota.

June Eastvold Nilssen, ordained into the ministry of LCA, Fourth Lutheran Church of Springfield, Ohio, in June 1974.

Jenine Peterson Jordahl, pastor's wife at Westby, Wisconsin.

Fern Olson Cole, now at Rock Point Lutheran Mission of Chinle, Arizona.

Yvonne Anderson Belin, pastor's wife at Vasa, Minnesota.

Greetings,

"For God has placed Jesus Christ as the one and only foundation, and no other foundation can be laid." I Cor. 3:11. Upon that foundation, there was begun, in 1927, the building of a congregation called First English Lutheran. Through the years faithful and capable people within the congregation guided by dedicated men who have served as pastors have sought to build on the foundation of Christ.

There were people in 1927 who had a vision and determination as they organized our congregation. For fifty years the Lord of the Church has poured out His blessings upon us through Word and Sacrament. The earlier pages of this book tell about these fifty years. This is now history. We cannot change it, nor dare we bask in its glory; but we are called upon by the Risen Christ to build on the past. The past can be a foundation for our present and future work.

What are future goals to strive for at First English Lutheran? I believe there is much to look forward to:

- a deeper personal commitment to Christ and a fuller knowledge of the Word of God;
- an honest and generous giving to Christ of our time, abilities and money;
- more sons and daughters of FELC for the ministry and special areas of Kingdom work;
- a constant reaching out to bring others to Christ;
- a greater contribution in support, and leadership and service to our community, to our American Lutheran Church, The Southwestern Minnesota District, and our Montevideo Conference;
- a desire to understand and be understood, to share joys and heartaches, to feel with and for one another, and to love and allow ourselves to be loved by one another within the congregation;
- and a keener awareness of our Christian responsibilities to apply the Gospel to current social and political issues.

We have been blessed to be a blessing. May God be allowed to work in us and through us in the years that are ahead.

Sincerely in Him,

*Pastor Robert Sorenson*

Pastor Robert Sorenson





**Pastors pictured at 25th Anniversary  
Johnson - Hanson - Schmidt - Thompson**

(All pictures of the pastors are recent ones)