



125th Anniversary

1877 – 2002

Past, Present & Future

HISTORY OF ZION CHURCH – 1873 - 19

Homestead rights opened a new opportunity to settlers to the Dakotas. A Swiss settlement with rights to the lands of rolling prairie lands in Pleasant Valley. A few sod shanties and huts with only a few traveled trails and shortcuts to neighbors and villages became evident in this new land named Paris, which later became Beresford. The Rev. William Oehler, a young Evangelical missionary pastor, driving by horse and buggy from Luverne, Minnesota came to this area, and it was in 1873 that the first congregation was formed. It was a small group at first, but when the minister came, they would gather at a home to worship, or under the canopy of the blue sky, with the utmost desire to get together and worship God in Truth and Spirit, and the congregation became a part of the Evangelical Conference.

Every two or three weeks when Pastor Oehler drove from Luverne, Minnesota by Horse and Buggy, they gathered at Grandpa Mathias Schmid's house located just east of the former church site, on the farm site where Robert and Audrey Bovill now reside, as it was the largest home in the settlement.

After a few years, a schoolhouse was built at Pleasant Valley in 1880, which then served the place to worship for over eight years.

This mission included Zion, Centerville, Tea and Hooker, and was served by the following ministers – Oehlers, Lemon, Passer, Speath, Dudendorf, Barret, Yennie, Price, Bunte, Meyer, Gevman, Helmer, Fischer and Frank Schaeffer.

Circumstances did not always turn out well and sometimes the spirit would die down for a time.

Rev. Charles Zech was sent to Zion in the spring of 1898, being a little worn from serving nine churches in North Dakota, the Conference gave him a few months off, and he came back in August. After driving his horses from Clear Lake, South Dakota, he stopped at the John Messner home between Harrisburg and Tea SD, to rest and then going on to Zion, Pleasant Township area.

At first there were eight families in this group, but by visiting around, the group began to enlarge. The people were mostly of German-Swiss origin. The services were mostly in German, but other people promised to come to the services if they were in English. For a time the evening meetings were in the German language and in English for the Sunday morning services. Rev. Zech made his home with Mother Fitzgerald and at the Kundert home. Rev. Zech married while serving Zion church and they stayed with Mother Johns' in her home west of Beresford, until the parsonage located in Centerville was ready to live in.

The first sick call Rev. Zech made was to Mr. Zweifel, located northeast from the schoolhouse, and presently across the road now from the Lester Voegeli farm. The first Christmas program, held at Pleasant Valley School was filled to capacity, using nail kegs and planks to sit upon.

On the evening of August 30, 1900, a meeting was called at the Grandpa Mathias Schmid home, to consider building a church. There was a good attendance and Rev. William Suckow, the District Superintendent, was present. The group decided in favor of a new church to be called Zion. The committee elected to Supervise the building of the first church were, Jost Stuessi, Thomas Voegeli, Baltz Schmid, and Andrew Johnson. There were difficulties where to build it. Grandpa Mathias Schmid offered land and so

did Henry Kundert. Mr. Schmid had already donated land for a cemetery, which had been started on the hilltop across the road from his farm place, and so they thought best to build near the cemetery. The members had great will power with fortitude and strength from God. The church was built and dedicated free of debt on December 16, 1900. On the following Monday, the funeral services of father Peter Tschudy were held from the new church.

Lumber was hauled from Centerville by horse and wagon by Rev. Zech and Wesley Schmid. The church along with the Bell, cost around \$1400.00. The same bell rings from its bell tower yet today for special events and cemetery burials. The minister's annual salary was approximately \$450.00. Rev. Zech and his wife not only served the church's needs, but were very helpful in the homes. The Reverend often times served as engineer on a steam threshing rig, and his wife helped in the homes caring for the sick and new babies as well. Serving the church for four years, he started the first Ladies Aid organization with Mrs. Andrew Johnson as president. John Martz served as the first Church Sexton.

In 1902, while Rev. Zech was serving Zion, the church was destroyed by a tornado. Soon after it was destroyed, it was rebuilt and constructed to the design of the first church except for a bell tower with an open window design. Rev. William Krueger followed Rev. Zech, and while serving the congregation, the church was dedicated December 17, 1902. The Rev. J. J. Schaeffer followed Rev. Krueger and at this time the field was changed from the Centerville Mission to the Beresford Mission. A need arose as what to do with the surreys, buckboards, buggies and horses while church services were held. A long narrow horse barn was built on the very west edge of the church property for the use of keeping the horses sheltered. Not long after it was built, it too was recognized as not adequate to hold all the horses. A long hitching rail with 100 rein ties allowing space for fifty team of horses that brought surreys and buggies to church was erected along the cemetery fence across the road from the church. It was last used in the summer of 1982 when Harris and Ruth Johnson came to Sunday morning church services by horse and buggy. During the Schmid family reunion in July of 1988, a team of mules and buggy were hitched to the hitching rails for the Schmid Family reunion tour of homesteads and special places.

Rev. Hunsberger followed, serving from 1907 to 1909. The Rev. William Gaines served from 1909 to 1913. The field was then supplied by R. T. Horn, William Klienschmidt and C. H. Leggett.

Rev. R. D. Dexheimer came in 1916 and served for four years. Rev. Dexheimer organized the Women's Missionary Society at this time. One of their first commitments was to send \$35.00 to their homeland of Canton of Glarus, Nidfurn, Switzerland to be used for the families in need. After leaving the Zion church he became Superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League in Naperville, Illinois.

Rev. C. W. Ferk served the following three years and was followed by Rev. Roy Long. Rev. J. J. Stroh followed, serving for two years. In 1928 Rev. George Hoefs served the field for seven years. Those were lean years from 1928 - 1935 during the depression. He and Mrs. Hoefs, being so patient and doing with so little also, were very dedicated in serving the church. The Hoefs left many friendships in the church.

Since that time most of the pastors were students from Western Union College, later named Westmar College of Lemars, Iowa. Ralph Dunn of Sioux Falls, South Dakota was

Up until this time the church had always been an Evangelical Church, but in 1948 the Evangelical Church joined forces with the United Brethren Church and emerged as one to become the Zion Evangelical United Brethren Church. Pastor Jay Sackman served from 1948 – 1951, and during this time the church held special services to celebrate its 75th Anniversary on September 19, 1948. Rev. Sachman left and moved on to received his doctorate and become professor of Religion at North Central College in Naperville, Illinois. During the time he served, a Junior Choir was formed and directed by Sally (Blumer) Enck and Delores (Voegeli) Welch.

Darwin Miller of Fargo, North Dakota, served one year. In 1952 – 1954 Rev. Rueben Job came to serve the Zion Congregation which became his first step into a dedicated ministry. It was there during a Hard Time party, that Pastor Job and Beverly saw the need to form a “Young Married” group. The purpose was while serving God their was a need for fun, and fellowship. The guideline to belong in the group was the combined age of husband and wife could not exceed 80 years. A strong bond united the group together within the church. Rev. Job then entered Seminary located in Naperville, Ill. He served several South Dakota churches before becoming a District Superintendent, and was nominated a Bishop of the Iowa Conference. He is an author of several books, and became editor of “Tidings”, and the “Upper Room”, also served as committee chairman on the New Hymnal of the United Methodist Church.

Victor Gross served from 1954-1957. During this time, new church pews were installed in 1956. After leaving, Rev. Gross went into Mission Work and is presently residing in Bowdle, South Dakota. Marion Knoell served from 1957-1958, and James Price from 1958-1959. Dean Mock from 1959 – 1960. Rev. Jerry Wickre came with his wife Linda to serve from 1960 – 1963 while attending Westmar College. He ministered and impacted the lives of children and youth and during this time he encouraged Dorthy Nothdurft to reorganize and direct the Junior Choir of which she directed for 18 years with 32 children singing in the junior choir. Several groups were formed as trios, quartets, mixed octets and a Men’s chorus during this time. Rev. Wickre then ministered to several churches in the conference, and passed away while serving the Fargo, North Dakota Church.

Rev. Thomas Stone came in 1963 when he was Registrar at Westmar College. He had a valuable gift if meeting someone once, he could remember their name and face. Rev. Stone recognized the need to start a Men’s Brotherhood, and it was formed with a special need to provide care for Zion cemetery. He served two years, and is presently located in Bella Vista, Arkansas.

In 1965, a retired minister, the Rev. John Dirks and his wife Ethel, had moved to Beresford. After serving Methodist Churches for over 50 years, he was called to serve Zion church. Rev. John and wife Ethel were patient, kind and loved us as we loved them. The WSWS carpeted the Sanctuary in 1966. The lecturn and guest book cabinet ensemble were both made by Rev. John Dirks, with funds provided by the Young Married Group. The pulpit was a gift in the memory of Joe Zweifel and the baptismal font a memorial to Mrs. John Stuessi.

During the last few years, it became evident that the church sanctuary classrooms and other areas were too small, - but should we build more?

Because we believed God loves the country church, and it can be the center of community life and hope, it was voted to enlarge the basement and overflow to the

followed by his brother Robert. During thrashing season on Tuesday morning, early morning around approximately 8 A M on August 2, 1938 during thrashing time, a bad thunderstorm with a bolt of lightning struck the church steeple, started it on fire. As the Beresford Fire Department worked and had the fire almost under control, the water supply gave out. Leaving the scene to refill the booster tank, the fire gained headway. A thrashing crew at the Bovill farm just down the hill from the church filled water tanks and containers with water taken from the supply tank and livestock watering tanks, placed them on bundle racks to bring to the church. Because of the thunderstorm, the task of getting up the hill on the dirt road became very difficult. The firemen and the thrashing crew efforts became hopeless and only the east, west, and north walls and the flooring were left standing. The pews, benches, bell, worship elements and records were saved by the thrashing crew. Worship services were held in the Pleasant Township Hall until a new church could be rebuilt.

Rev. Donald Walkes, who resides today in Watertown, South Dakota came as a student from Western Union College to serve Zion Church. During his time, a third church was built with a larger entrance and a steeple not quite so tall to hold the bell in its tower. The church was dedicated December 8, 1938.

Ed Ehresman, also a student from Western Union College served from 1939 to 1940. Then in 1940, Rev. Charles Zech, who had retired and living in Watertown, South Dakota decided he would again like to serve Zion Church. He drove 150 miles every Sunday morning to minister faithfully to the church needs. Rev. Ehresman came back to serve for another year, and later, he became very involved in Dakota Conference work.

Rev. J. C. Sippel with his family served Zion church for three years living in the parsonage on N. 3rd St. in Beresford from 1942 - 1945. On November 5, 1943, a beloved son and the only ordained minister from the Zion Congregation, Rev. Leslie Milliken, passed away. During the Sippels' ministry at Zion, the church was again destroyed by wind. When the church had been destroyed for the third time, the question arose - - "Does it pay to rebuild the Church?" Some comments were - Surely the Lord must be displeased about something to allow a church to be destroyed three times! -- Maybe it was best to wait awhile.- - Others thought it was foolish to build a rural church any more. What was God's purpose in permitting this to happen in this community? Some said - He was testing the faith. One commented as he looked at the ruins - "The Lord often smites those whom he loves the most." The final decision was - - There must be a church up on Zion's hill. The faith was strong and alive!! It was World War II years, and carpenters were scarce. Materials were hard to get and very costly. The building transpired with a full basement, larger narthex and an entry and a much shorter bell tower. On June 17, 1945, the church was dedicated, debt free.

Harry Stephens was the first pastor to serve in this new church. He married while serving, and he and his wife being very musical, reorganized the choir and directed it. Mrs. Millie (Voegeli) Speich directed the choir after the Stephens left until the 70's. Kenneth Koth became pastor, serving for one year, after which Otto Lehner served the following year, driving up from Westmar College with his wife and 2 children. The membership of the church began to grow during his ministry. Pastors Stephens, Koth and Lehner were under the supervision of Rev. Robert Fiend of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. His wife Alice resides in Sioux Falls today, and has been a spiritual leader in the United Methodist Church and for The United Methodist Women.

Sanctuary with extra classrooms. A building committee of George Voegeli and Erwin Voegeli, Co Chairmen; Mrs. Fred Blumer, Mrs. Clifford Schmid, Clarence Lawtensen, Donald Stuessi and Freeman Swanstrom received the 'go ahead', and the work began on a 22X32 foot addition to the existing building. A full basement, large narthex, class rooms and overflow, as well as new furnace, kitchen and restrooms located in the basement were planned. Exactly six months after the ground breaking of November 19, 1967, the new addition was dedicated May 19, 1968. Again it was debt free. A beautiful organ was presented that same day, a gift from Mrs. Millie Speich in memory of her late husband Matt Speich. Rev. Dirks retired in 1968, and Rev. David Workman, who was serving the Beresford Church assumed the responsibilities of Zion also. The Church union of the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church had taken place in Dallas Texas on April 23, 1968. The name was changed to the Zion United Methodist Church. At the present Rev. Workman resides in Vancouver, Washington.

Walter Nelson came in June 1969. He and his wife and three children remained here three years and presently reside in Mitchell, South Dakota. During his time serving in Beresford and Zion, Dennis and Nancy Stuessi, after college and whom both have their roots and early religious training from Zion, designated their lives to serve in the Missionary Field. On June 10, 1970 and were commissioned to work with the Mission Aviation Fellowship. In one year, they were to raise funds to support the opportunity and field of mission work they had chosen. Dennis and Nancy hosted many mission/fund-raising opportunities. On March of 1971, they were officially commissioned and were located in Indonesia. They continue to work with MAF and just recently visited our church in June of 2002 from their home station in Switzerland. They have raised 3 children in the Mission Field and have devoted countless hours bringing Gods' Word and love and the sharing of themselves throughout the world.

Rev. Orland Sloat came in June of 1972 – 1976. During this time he was the host pastor for the Zion Church 100 Year Celebration. Today he resides in Fargo, North Dakota. The Bell Tower was rebuilt and dedicated in memory of Wesley Schmid during the celebration. It stands today above the trees, marking the site of the former Zion Church.

Rev. William Meile came in 1976 – 1979 and now resides in Minnesota. Rev. Glennys Ulshak served coming in 1979 and with her husband Fran and two young children. She was the first woman to serve our parish for Three years until 1982. She now lives in Connecticut.

Coming in June of 1982, The Rev. Bert VanEssen served our church until 1988. During that time the church celebrated their 110th Anniversary. With the economic conditions of a farming community, it was again asked, "Can We Continue? Because Churches are not built of wood and stone, but of dedicated men and women who have a concern for their fellow men. With faith and love in their hearts, and a strong heritage instilled in them, the church presented a preamble to the Beresford United Methodist Church of an intent to merge as one body. Provisions were made that the church and its contents be attached to Zion Cemetery. Summer services were held and in 1985 continued action on the preamble was formed. In December of 1986, the Charge Conference of the United Methodist Church accepted the merger. The new denomination would be called the Beresford Zion United Methodist Church.

In December of 1988, members affiliated with Zion Church met at the Melvin and Dorthy Nothdurft home to form a Cemetery Association to establish perpetual care to maintain future cemetery care. The Bell Tower would stand intact. A replica of the church will symbolize a memory of Zion's past to be placed with an engraved granite stone placed into the former Zion brick sign.

During Pastor Penny Ritter time of serving the Church from 1988 –1994, the remaining church contents, the church structure and small building behind the church fell to the cry of the auctioneer on April 1, 1989. Lines of memories graced the rows of small and large wooden chairs, a large wooden bell wheel, books, and platforms once used to set a stage for special programs and Christmas, the old cistern pump, and much more. The church building was sold to Alan and Erma Fossum of rural Canton, South Dakota who attached it onto their home, providing them a larger living space, and providing a garage with a shop area. Church pews and the Baptismal Font were donated to the East Pierre Mission Church. The dishes and kitchen utensils were donated to the new McCook Lake United Methodist Church. Folding tables, folding chairs and SS tables, pictures, brass vases and candleholders, communion service, upholstered arm chairs, the Lectern, Guest Book cabinet, file cabinets with Zion's past records, and storage cabinet were brought into the Beresford Zion United Methodist Church and are in continual use today. The large Bible presented to the congregation in 1900 by Rev. Zech, has been placed in the Heritage Cabinet in the narthex of the new church. The former signs from our past church affiliations will be displayed during the 125th Anniversary Celebration, along with the Zion military roll.

With the love of the Sippel Family, a Trust Fund, in memory of Rev. J. C. Sippel, was set up to provide scholarships to further the education of our graduating seniors of Zion church. It continues today as an on-going scholarship fund for the graduating seniors of the Bersford Zion United Methodist church. It has been a special gift of love from a dedicated pastor and family who have a special place in the hearts of Zion..

Perhaps there is a more realistic sentiment about the Zion Church. Its members remain to be sons' of the soil. Many remain to be direct descendants of the early settlers who are still lifelong residents of the community. It is the combined efforts of many through the years, and of the culmination of efforts and working together that has impacted the strength and fulfillment of God's commission "Go Ye Into All the World." We recognize the commitment, the strength and the faith in God that brought them to this territory almost One Hundred and Thirty Years ago.

Compiled and written by Dorthy Nothdurft 6-26-

2002

Thank You –

To the past Zion members who have shared their knowledge and who have contributed their memories.

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And with gratitude to Mae Blumer who compiling the history presented at the 75th Anniversary Celebration of Zion Evangelical United Brethren Church..