

OUR SAVIORS LUTHERAN CHURCH OF WHITEHALL

(From 1952 article in Whitehall Times)

Our Savior's Lutheran congregation of Whitehall is the result of the union of the Whitehall Evangelical Lutheran and the Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran congregations, the former affiliated with the Norwegian Lutheran Synod and the latter with the United Lutheran church. Since 1918 these two synods have united into one now known as the Evangelical Lutheran church. The Whitehall Evangelical Lutheran congregation was organized in 1870 by the Rev. Erick Jensen, with Hans Bringsosen, Lars Skjonsby, Peter Kristianson and Kristian Pederson as charter members. During the first four years the congregation had no church building but worshipped in various homes and school houses. In 1874 the congregation purchased a church building from the Baptists-this building was located a mile northeast of the present Old Whitehall Cemetery.

In 1889 the congregation sold its place of worship to the Presbyterians and moved into Whitehall where in 1889 a new church was built on the site of Our Saviour's. This church was struck by lightning in 1918 after which the present structure was built, being dedicated in 1920. The Emmanuel Lutheran congregation was organized in 1899 by the Rev A J Oerke of Pigeon Falls who served the congregation until 1918 when it merged with the Main Street church. Charter members of this congregation were Theodore Erickson, Andrew Bensend, John Vold, J H Skjonsberg, Simon Pederson, Gullick Knutson, E B Gullard, Peter Nelson, Mrs Ingeborg Larson, E. Berg, Mrs Lars Enger, H O Hovde and Mrs Johan Olson. The church in which the congregation worshipped was located on Dewey Street and was built in 1902. With the 1917 merger of the Hauge's Synod the United and Synod Lutheran churches negotiations began for the amalgamation of the two Whitehall congregations. Union committees were composed of Tom Lindem, Claude Everson, Gilbert Pederson, P C Pederson, A H Bringsosen, Ole Erickson, Knudt Knudtson, O C Haraldsrud, Peder Ekern and L L Solsrud.

Of the pastors who have served the present congregation and its predecessors only two are still living besides the Rev O G Birkeland, resident pastor. The Rev E B Christopherson of Pigeon Falls who served the Main Street church from 1912 until the merger in 1918 is still serving four congregations, Pigeon Falls, Upper Pigeon, Hixton and South Beef River churches. The Rev O L Hofstad who was here for the dedication of the present church and remained until 1925 is in the Madagascar Mission field.

Deceased pastors are the Reverends Erick Jensen, S Svernugsen, S L O Sherven, Emmanuel Christopherson, A J Gerke, G K Ramberg, M Caspar Skjonsby and N C Haakestad. By 1890 the Main Street church had a membership of 264 and in 1914 the Dewey Street church had a membership of 190. At the time of the 70th anniversary of the united congregations in 1940, membership had grown to approximately 1,000 and today it is nearly 1,500, of whom more than 1,000 are confirmed members. Pastor Birkeland alone who was called here 1931, has confirmed 440 children and adults since his first confirmation service in 1932.

Two confirmation classes meet each Saturday morning in the new Sunday School building, the senior class taught by Pastor Birkeland and the junior group by his assistant, Richard Ulvilden. The Girl Scout troops have their meetings regularly in the new Sunday School building. Mrs Walter Reich is leader of

the senior girl Scouts of which there are nine. The Intermediate troop number is 26. Miss Mavis Smith is their leader with Mmes. Herb Johnson and Eugene Smith as assistant leaders. The thirty Brownie Scouts have as their leaders Mmes. Harold Arneson, Wilbur Briggs and Marvin Olson.