

MISSION EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

120 YEARS - 2015

The Mission Evangelical Free Church can trace its roots back to a group of Swedish immigrants who settled just east of Wilton in the late 1800's. This small group of believers began meeting together in homes in December of 1894. It was on January 31, 1895 when fourteen charter members met together at the home of Erik Ghylin in Burleigh County to form "The Swedish Evangelical Mission Church of Slaughter."

Some of the families that were part of the early ministry were: Mr. & Mrs. John Ecklund, Mrs. and Mrs. Erick Ghylin, Mr. & Mrs. Nels Erickson, Axel Hedstrom, Mr. & Mrs. Mrs. T.A. Nelson, Mr. Charles Johnson, Mr. & Mrs. John Engstrom, Mr & Mrs. August I. Asplund, Mr.& Mrs Nils Erickson, Mr. & Mrs. Oscar Ecklund, Mr. & Mrs. John Dahlgren, Mr & Mrs. Oscar Backman, Mr. & Mrs. Gabriel Thor, Andrew Thor, John Hanson, John Johnson, Mr. and Amond Thor and Mr. and Mrs. C.P. Strom. Soon others joined them as they met in homes and school houses to worship God and to study His Word together.

Some of the congregation would walk to the services while others used horses and buggy or sled and others came using oxen with hayracks. The journey was tedious and often in the bitter cold of North Dakota winters or under the heat of the summer sun, but no one seemed to mind.

The name of the church was changed to the "Swedish Covenant of Slaughter" in 1897. The group was well enough organized to build their first church in 1898 at a site five miles east of Wilton on the southwest corner of Section 34 in Grass Lake Township. It was a one acre piece of land which had been donated by John Engstrom and it was a 40 ft. x 24 ft. x 12 ft. building with 6 ft x 6 ft. doorway. They added a 24 ft. x 24 ft. barn to the property in August of 1899.

The church name was changed again in 1915 and it became known as the "Swedish Mission Church of Wilton."

The first church building had a high ceiling and was difficult to heat in the cold North Dakota winters. The congregation decided to sell the building and build a new church in 1915. An all day meeting was held and a special building fund offering was received. The old church was purchased by Oscar Thor and used as a granary. The new church cost \$2,258.10 and when the bills were paid, they had \$1.25 left in the treasury. A basement was put under the building in 1948. Electricity replaced the carbide lights in 1949 and shortly after that an oil furnace replaced the coal heater.

In 1952 the church affiliated with the Evangelical Free Church of America and is now known as the "Mission Evangelical Free Church of Wilton." The church was reorganized at that time with 35 charter members. They were: Warren & Vivian Adams, David Asplund, Doris Asplund (McDill), John & Belle Asplund, Walfred & Esther Asplund, Lorna Erickson (Ellis), Anthony & Lydia Erickson, Clarence & Alta Falkenstein, Marjorie Falkenstein (Magnuson), George Moses, Jeanette Danielson (Adamyk), Robert Asplund, Norman Asplund, Norlin & Margaret Backman, Lawrence & Anna Backman, Helmer & Verrell Dahlgren, Henry & Signe Danielson, Rose Marie Thor (Rosenau), Elaine Asplund (Steinert), Hjelmer & Blanche Thor, LeRoy Thor, Oscar & Pauline Thor and Roy & Ilene Thor.

The church was again remodeled in 1956 when the steeple was taken off and an addition was

added at an estimated cost of \$2,700.00 A gift was given by Naomi Hagstrom Frosch in 1961 and this was used to put a well in at the church and for some landscaping. Some trees and shrubs were planted. New storm windows and screen were put on the church in 1963. Washrooms were put into the church in 1966.

The congregation experienced rapid growth in the 1970's. The church received the "Church of the Year" award at the National Conference of the Evangelical Free Church of America in Green Lake, Wisconsin. Pastor Edwin Wolt, David Asplund (Chairman) and Lloyd & Goldie Maynard (delegates) attended the conference to receive the award.

The country church soon became too small for the growing congregation and after much prayerful consideration, the members voted to build a new church in Wilton. Howard & Lee Stewart donated land for the church building on the north side of Wilton and construction began on the present new church in 1978. The new building cost \$234,386.00. This large L-shaped church building has a 50 ft. x 70 ft. unit which includes the sanctuary, pastor's study, church office, Sunday school rooms and the church library. The 116 ft. x 40 ft. wing includes the foyer, fellowship hall, kitchen, friendship room, bathrooms, Sunday school room and storage room. The full basement is under this wing and has more classrooms, a large meeting room, the furnace room and a large storage area. Much of the work was done by Froeschle & Sons, Inc. who served as the general contractors. Members and friends of the congregation dug the basement, the water and sewer lines, did sheet rocking and assisted in the work wherever they could. Erna Engelbretson was hired to stain and finish all the doors and windows and was assisted by ladies of the congregation. The first service was held in the new church on Oct. 15, 1978. The Dedication Service was held for the new church on April 22, 1979. The final payment on the church mortgage was made in January of 1992 and the mortgage burning was held on April 26, 1992. TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

In 1983 the old church building was donated to the Circle C Ranch and it was moved south of Baldwin, ND. It has been restored close to its original condition and is used for a youth Bible Camp and for special meetings. Two of the original oak pews and two ceiling lights are in it.

In 1996, the Friendship room in our church was refurbished in memory of William Steinert. Bert Johnson wired in the new P.A. System into the Sound System Cabinet.

In September of 1996 the contractor who put the pavement on the parking lot in August, was back and put two more inches on part of it. The parking lot had a chip seal put on it in 1999.

In 2012 the stage was renovated and prepared for upgrades to the sound system. New carpeting was put in to the sanctuary, fellowship hall, entry, hallway, nursery and some classrooms in 2013. Old windows also were replaced at a cost of about \$22,000.

Several of our families today can trace their roots back to the early members of our congregation. August Asplund joined the church in 1885. His grandson, David Asplund, is still a member. Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Backman became members in 1899. Their grandson, Arvid Backman, is a member today. Mr. and Mrs. Nels Erickson were members and their grandson, John Erickson, is a member. Mr. & Mrs. John Engstrom were charter members in 1895 and Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Danielson became members in 1905. They are the maternal and paternal grandparents of Jeanette (Danielson) Adamyk, who is also a member.

MISSION PARSONAGES

Pastors came from near and far to help fill the pulpit during those early years and served along with Rev. Berg who was one of the faithful servants in the early 1900's. Times were hard and it was difficult to make ends meet for his wife and family. He homesteaded on 80 acres northeast of the Axel Asplund (now Kenneth Roehrich) farm and lived in a tar papered shack, which served as the first parsonage.

The church rented homes that served as the parsonage for a number of years. In 1953 the first parsonage was purchased in Wilton. A plan was adopted that spring whereby the church rented 110 acres of land and the men, working two days, seeded it to flax. The payoff came that fall when the men gathered and through good cooperation, harvested the flax in one day. The proceeds were enough to take care of one half of the cost of the parsonage. They proceeded to purchase a parsonage at 308 N. Railroad St.

That fall Pastor Lawrence and Ruth Palmquist and little Stevie came to take up the work in the church and moved in to the parsonage. This building was sold in the early 1960's when Pastor Milton Kaale purchased his own home in Bismarck and commuted from there. In 1969 Pastor Paul Needham came to fill the pulpit and once again a house was rented for them to live in.

In the spring of 1974 the members voted to build a new parsonage at 36 Bismarck Ave. The ground breaking ceremony was held in May 1974 and the work began on the basement. A carpenter and others were hired to do all the work except for digging the basement, sheet-rocking and painting, which was done by the members and friends of the church. This beautiful new home was built for the total cost of \$33,000.00. Pastor and Mrs. Ed Wolt and their family moved into the nearly completed building in August of 1974. A dedication service was held that fall for the parsonage on October 26, 1974.

In March of 2013, the congregation voted to buy a lovely new parsonage and move it on a lot owned by the church southwest of the church. It was a prebuilt home that was purchased from Dakota Custom Homes in Washburn and moved to Wilton that fall. The excavating and plumbing (but not the materials) were donated by volunteers. The basement was finished and the porch and deck were also built by volunteers. Volunteers also built the double garage for the parsonage in the fall of 2013-2014 and did the landscaping of the yard. There is a presently a balance of \$73,000 on it. The old parsonage was sold in September of 2013.

CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Several of our young couples moved to Bismarck around 1950 and Rev. Gordon Langmade went to Bismarck and held Bible studies there. As a result, the First Evangelical Free Church was started. Our pastors & church chairman also helped to start other EFC churches in Rugby, Beulah and Minot.

There have been several who have been baptized in the church baptistry and many baby dedications. There have been many weddings also. On March 15, 2003, our Pastor David Johnson, married Judy Bremer in Storm Lake, Iowa, and they served here two more years.

MINISTRY TO YOUTH

Sunday School was first started by Mrs. Erick Ghylin in her home and she was the first teacher. It was discontinued for several years while the Union Sunday school was held at Still. The Still Union Sunday School was formally organized in 1919. For more than 15 years this Sunday school offered non-denominational religious instruction to anyone in the community who cared to attend, and at the same time answered an important social need. Edna and Frieda Ecklund, daughters and the only children of John Ecklunds (charter members of the Mission Church) were the organizers of the Still Sunday school and also its first teachers.

Sunday school was again started in the Mission Church in 1934, during the ministry of Rev. H. E. Berglund. It was organized with Mrs. Anthony (Lydia) Erickson, Mrs. Ned (Mabel) Asplund and Mrs. Benton (Annie) Backman heading the effort.

We have had a Vacation Bible School every year, for many years. Most of the time our people have planned and been in charge of it. A few times some came to help including Child Evangelism, Dan & Marilee Otteson and others. They have been well attended.

Many years we have partially paid the expense of our children going to Camp in the summer. They have attended at Cooperstown Bible Camp, Good News Camp, Trails End Camp and Asbury Camp.

For three years, we have had an Easter Egg hunt at the church, the Saturday before Easter. Many children from the community come to hunt for the eggs, stay for a visual story about Christ and the crucifixion, then have lunch. They really enjoy it.

The Free Church Youth Fellowship was active for many years. They have had Bible studies and special activities have taken them on ski trips, boating, swimming, bowling, climbing Mr. Whitney, Sonshine Music Festival in MN, Hills Alive in SD and to hear other musical groups.

In 2000 the large storage room in the basement was cemented and the north half of it was made into a youth room. The Boone family donated \$3,000.00 to the youth group as a memorial. The youth also worked raising money for it and paid for half of the cement, along with other expenses. They did much of the work in finishing it and held their meetings and many activities there.

The AWANA Club program was started in the fall of 1992. This program has grown to over 40 children from age 3 through 6th grade for club each Wednesday night. We have about 20 to 25 staff members that work with this program.

For the last several years, we have participated with Samaritan's Purse packing shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child. They are distributed all over the world.

MINISTRY TO WOMEN

The Women's Missionary Society was organized in 1947 and later changed to "Free Church Women's Ministries" (FCWM) by action of the National FCWM Conference in 1984. Later it was changed to "Women's Ministries" and to "Resound" in 2013.

The ladies have had Bible Studies, prayer, worked in the library, served for special church occasions, funerals and weddings.

In 2000, they purchased laminated flooring for the parsonage kitchen and utility room. In 2001 they purchased new carpets, window shades and valances in the parsonage bedrooms.

A few days used to be set aside in the winter for "White Cross" projects when the ladies rolled bandages and made other needed items for the Mission Hospital in Tandala, Zaire, Africa. However, bandages are no longer needed so they gather with the ladies at the First EFC church in Bismarck once a month, to sew layettes for the hospital in Africa, and do other crafts for missions.

A few summers we gathered to make cookies for Cooperstown, Child Evangelism and Fa-Ho-Cha Bible Camps.

We have had Women's Mini-Retreats and Women's Tea's. Several ladies have attended the Cooperstown Women's Retreats every September and some have gone to the Medora Retreat held each spring.

CEMETERY

Our cemetery is located six miles east of Wilton on 318th Avenue. The church had purchased four acres of land from the Northern Pacific Railroad for \$10.00 to use for cemetery purposes on April 5, 1898. Granite markers have now replaced the wooden crosses or flat boards that were first used as grave markers. The records show that many of those early settlers, along with veterans and a number of infants are buried in our cemetery. The early settlers had the task of preparing bodies of family members for burial in their own homes. Coffins were sometimes purchased but more often they were made by a relative or neighbor. Traveling ministers or clergy from Wilton would come out to conduct the funeral services.

The cemetery is cared for by members of the congregation and by the relatives of those who are buried there. About 360 (Evergreen, Green Ash, & Lilac) trees were planted on the East, North & West sides of the North half of the cemetery in the spring of 1991.

MINISTERS AT MISSION:

Through the efforts of Mr. John E. Ecklund, the Swedish Alliance Mission of St. Paul sent two young ladies, Miss Thelma Simonson and Miss Hanna Resengren, to do missionary work in December of 1894. They returned to St. Paul in the spring of 1895. Miss Mary Wieberg and Miss Sadie Nylander came here that spring from the Alliance Mission and served here for several months. They were assisted by lay pastors O. Engdahl and Erick Ghylin. Several came to know Christ as Savior and these joined with other believers to form the Mission Church. One of the early ministers was a man known in the community as "Preacher Larson." There were a number of years when the Church was without a regular pastor. However, the church was never vacant as the church was served by lay preachers, visiting pastors and evangelists. These would often stay in the home of the congregation while they ministered in the area. In 1947, Rev. J.W. Fjellstedt was called as pastor and the pulpit has been filled ever since.

Evangelists who have held special meetings at our church through the years were: Rev. J.A. Thorwall, Edsel & Naomi Lindquist, Royal & Marvell Lindquist, Armin Geswein, Rev. & Mrs. Paul Bergren, Rev. & Mrs. Roy Dalzell, Rev. & Mrs. Floyd Dalzell, Rev. Joy Cummings, Rev. & Mrs. Syd Frank.

Many missionaries and others have come to speak. There have also been many groups that have come to minister such as Teen Challenge, First Evangelical Free Church choir, Northwestern College Choir, Trinity Western College Singers, Continental Singers, Millar College Choir, Cory Harkins, Vern Baardson, Schmidt family, Masters Plan Quartet, Waddington Family, Heavens Harmony, Greg Hager and others.

Pastors at the Mission Evangelical Free Church throughout the years have been: Preacher Larson, C.J. Johnson, C.W. Johnson, Andrew Berg, H.M. Olson, S.F. Palmquist, R.P. Nelson, S.C. Salstrom, C. Edward Johnson, R.G. Fasteen, Thure Johnson, S.C. Theodore Ramsey, R.N. Nelson, C.C. Carlberg, Joel C. Nordlund, H.E. Berglund, Kasper Benson, J.W. Fjellstedt, Warren Wedan, Gordon Langmade, Lawrence Palmquist, Ed Kimball (interim), Clifford Green, Milton Kaale, J.A. Witmer, Delmar Becker, Paul Needham, Edwin Wolt, Wesley Macy, Edwin Wolt (interim), David Johnson, Barry Durkee, Joseph Kost (interim), and the present minister, Russell G. Whitaker, Jr.

Members and friends of the church who have entered into part-time or full time ministries are Kenneth Asplund, Leonard & Elaine Asplund Steinert, Norman Asplund, Karen Krein Wood, Nancy Wolt, Desiree Deckert Schmidt, Rodney and Gabriela Adamyk, Janis Adams Baken, Nathan Johnson, and Nathan Middaugh.

Some have gone on short term foreign mission trips in the winter. Elwood Erickson & Rodney Adamyk went to France in 1985 and Rod went back there in 1986. Rod went to El Salvador in 1988, Costa Rica in 1989 & Guatemala in 1990. Mark Redington also went. In January 1993, John Erickson and Rod went to Slovakia.

Present members of our church are Ted & Jeanette Adamyk, Rodney & Gabriela Adamyk, David Asplund, Annette Backman, Arvid and Helen Backman, Merwin & Myrna Backman, Brent & Julie Basaraba, Verdeen Bender, John & Lila Erickson, John & Sandra Hartman, Kathy Hirschert, Lance Holden, Linda Holden, Laren & Joan Holznagel, Keith & Joan Kruckenberg, Eugene & Mary Kurle, Jim & Nancy Kurle, Ralph & Judy Lipelt, Wayne & Pauline Maynard, Jerry & Jean Monroe, Margaret Nieuwsma, Melanie Oberg, Adam & Christina Rondeau, Reuben & Nyleen Steinert, Howard Stewart, Pastor Russell & Sue Whitaker.

MINISTERING - TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

*Prepared for 120th anniversary of Mission Ev. Free Church
by Jeanette Adamyk*

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