

CHURCH HISTORY

— — — GUSTAF ADOLF LUTHERAN CHURCH — — —

Gustaf Adolf Lutheran of Gwinner had its beginning June 23, 1897. A meeting was called at a school in Dunbar Township to select a committee to organize a congregation. On July 10, 1897, a congregation was organized as the Independent Swedish Lutheran Church of Forsby. This was later to become Gustaf Adolf Lutheran Church.

The first trustees and directors elected were: John Ek and Nels Bjork for one year and Albert Anderson and Gust Isakson for two years and Nels Petterson for three years. Peter Backstrom was secretary. Charter members were: Nels Petterson, Alrick Johnson, John Ek, Peter Backstrom, Carl Johnson, C.O. Goranson, John Holmstrom, M.C. Vangerud, John Nickleson, Nels Bjork, C.M. Swenson, Oluf Melroe, Louis Halin, A.A. Wahlund, Adolf Saunders, John Johnson, F.A. Anderson, Anders Wahlund, C.G. Isakson, Henry O. Walsted, M. Bjork, Charlie Anderson, Carl Matson, E. Gust Johnson, Elvin Lund, J.M. Lund, R.F. Goranson, Anders Larson, Oscar Lund, Magnus Anderson, Herder Anderson, August Anderson, Matt Wahlund, Eric Wahlund, A.J. Gabrielson, A. Swanson, Edward Isakson, M.H. Toffley, O.J. Gabrielson, and Jonas Sundquist.

Pastor H. Sandell was the first pastor to serve and services were held in the Forsby School located one mile north of the future location of Gwinner.



The original G.A. Lutheran Church building.

On October 28, 1898 it was agreed to build a church building. Land for the church was acquired from the State School Board, and the site was located on the NW corner of the NW 1/4 of Sec. 36, Twp. 132, Rg. 56 for \$22.50. The building committee was Erik Backlund, R.P. Johnson, and Nels Bjork. Later Nels Bjork and Erik Backlund resigned from the building committee so John Ek and Frank Anderson took their place. A stone mason and carpenter were hired, but members worked for free.

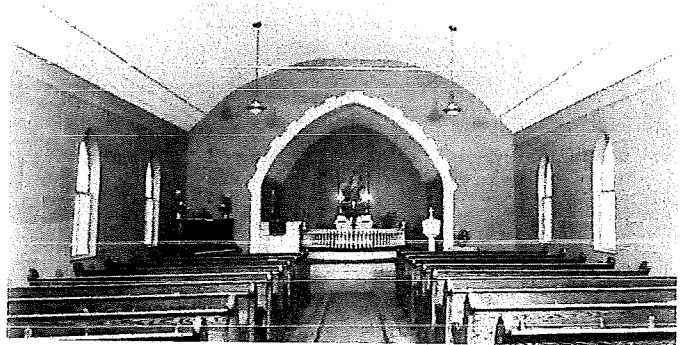
The church was completed in January 1899. The total cost was \$800.00. The membership was 96 persons over the age of 21. The inside of the church was finished in 1905 with money from the Ladies Aid and Young People.

Jan. 28, 1900-1903, C.L.A. Blomberg was called to serve as pastor every other Sunday for nine months with a salary of \$135.00 for the nine months. Miss Selma Wicklund was the first organist; one Sunday's collection was her salary.

Pastor H.M. Olson from Oakes served from June 1903 to February 1904 when Pastor John Safstrom was called to serve the next four years. In November 1908, Seminarian C. Samuelson was asked to serve over the holidays and then was called to serve the congregation after his ordination in June. He served from 1908 to 1912.

On Dec. 1, 1906 the congregation voted to move the church to Gwinner, locating on lots 17 and 18, Block 8. The church was moved in the winter of 1907-1908 using two steam engines.

In March of 1912 the congregation voted to join the Augustana Synod; the official name became Gustaf Adolf Lutheran Church of Gwinner, ND and a new constitution was adopted. New officers elected were Nels P. Lund, August Anderson, and John Holmstrom as deacons and trustees were Nels Petterson, Elvin Lund and F.A. Anderson.



Interior of Gustaf Adolf Lutheran Church after remodeling in the late 1930s.

Reverend J. Edor Larson served from 1912 to 1919. The first English sermon was preached by Rev. Larson and was so well received, it was decided to have one English sermon a month. Pastor Edwin Vickman served from 1919 to 1921. Rev. J.A. Mattson then served from early in 1922 to late 1924. S.N. Elvin was with us from 1925 to 1932. Student Pastor Clarence Johnson served for about two years. During his stay he worked hard on evangelism, increasing the church membership.

Student Pastor Melvin Dorstad served as minister for a year and Student Pastor Marshall Johnson also served one year.

In 1936 Rev. Eskil E. Bostrom was called and it was while he was here that the tall steeple was made shorter, the entire church interior was remodeled and the basement was put under the church. Most of the labor was volunteer, including the Pastor. The building committee for the church basement was Ivar Petterson, H.O. Wallace, A.G. Anderson, and Thomas Hartness.

Rev. K.L. Engstrom served Gustaf Adolf Lutheran from 1942 to 1949. In 1944, 30 young men from the church were serving in the Armed Forces.

In 1948 a Pioneer Banquet was held with former Pastor Eskil E. Bostrom as speaker. Items of historical interest, antiques, photographs and various articles were on display. The Ladies Aid "retained its reputation by serving a tasty and well planned meal."

Rev. Raymond Torgerson came in 1952 and stayed until 1956. In 1953 a motion was made, seconded and carried to publish quarterly the names of members and the amount they had paid into the church treasury. This program didn't last long.

Rev. Avis Benson served from 1956 to 1960. In April 1956 a vote was carried to build a new parsonage. A sod breaking ceremony was held on May 6, 1956. Nearly all the work was done with volunteer labor. The Bensons were the first to occupy the new parsonage. The mortgage on the parsonage was burned in 1961.

Rev. Raymond Mai came to serve the congregation in 1960. The congregation had been talking for two or three years about building a new church, and in 1961 a vote was passed to build the new church. A building committee was formed: Laurie Petterson, Elmer Anderson, Harold Jacobson, Ted Melroe, and Laurence Week. The finance committee consisted of: Sig Melroe, George Kjellin, Gerald Hegle, Irving Melroe, and Harry Wallace, chairman.

Schoenrock & Sons, builders of churches, was contracted to build the church. Since the congregation did not want a basement, Mr. Schoenrock explained how he would construct a cement slab in such a way so the frost could not get under and break up the floor. The church was built with much donated time and labor. Georgia granite was used for the back of the altar. The decking came from Canada and was stored in the Kjellin barn, where men and women from the congregation sanded, stained and waxed it. The ground breaking was in October 1963 and the foundations were poured in November 1963. The cornerstone laying service was celebrated Sept. 27, 1964.

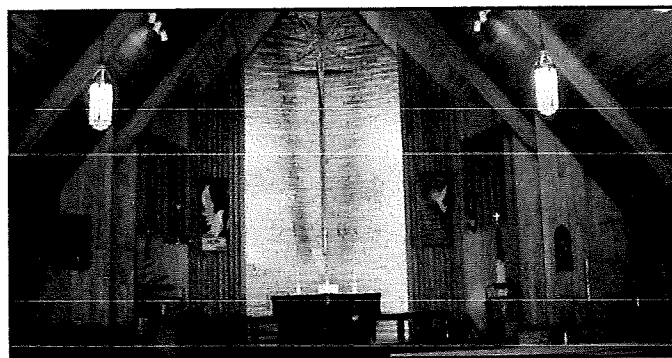
On Ash Wednesday, Mar. 3, 1965, the first service was held in the new church, celebrating Holy Communion. Dedication service for the new Gustaf Adolf Lutheran Church was held on June 27, 1965.

The church designer, David H. Schoenrock, wrote the following description of the new church:

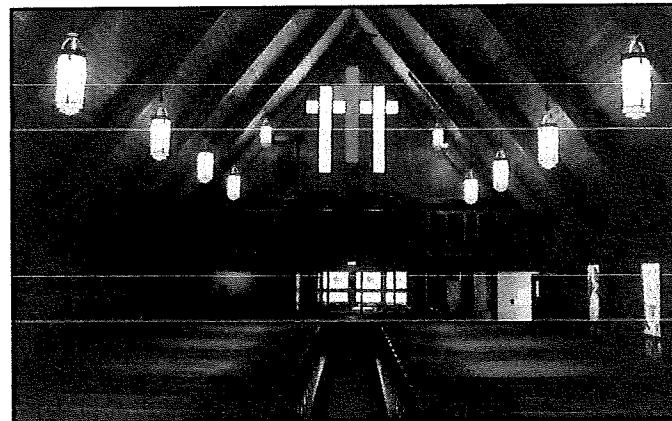
"What is a church? A church needs neither roof nor walls, but since roof and walls are needed for congregational devotion and education, a church must be built with a devotional atmosphere. The form of the church has changed through the ages with the architectural expression of the functions determined by necessity and the available materials. Therefore, we have had such extremes as the tent to the soaring cathedrals of the Gothic era. In those days the greatest minds and artists combined to create the living monuments that still stand as an expression of their faith.

"These functional and traditional architectural experiences have been combined with modern expression for a realization of what we have before us today. The natural state of the materials used expresses a relationship to the Creator, although they cannot compare to the beauty from whence they were derived. The clay for the bricks, the stone and slate, have their origin from the beginning. The trees from which the decking has been produced, may not be ancient, but are as the ones composed by the Creator. These are the materials which give us a devotional atmosphere, used in a way to distinguish this structure as a place of worship.

"As we enter the church from the east, we come upon a large narthex-lobby which serves both the church and the educational unit. The pastor's study and church office are immediately off the narthex for the convenience



Interior of the church facing the altar.



Interior of the church facing the balcony.

of administration and consultation. As we turn to the left, we enter the assembly hall and the classroom area. There is room for ten individual classrooms. Also directly off the narthex is the kitchen, wash rooms, and a large lounge and meeting room.

"Also immediately to the right of the narthex is the nave of the church. As we enter the nave our eyes are immediately drawn to the focal point, the empty cross. Here we can see that Christ is risen. The white marble background is used as the traditional reredos. The altar, pulpit, baptismal font, and communion rail are a combination of marble and teak wood.

"The building has an area of 9,400 square feet. The church proper will seat 300 people with overflow under the balcony and choir facilities in the balcony. The exterior of the building and interior of the nave is faced with Hebron brick, with flagstone used for the window panels and the front of the church. The entire roof structure is made up of laminated beams and arches. These are covered with three inch cedar decking over which is applied one and one-half inches of fiberglass insulation and 300 pound combination shingles, or built-up roof.

"Red is used as the predominant color in the nave carpet and lanterns. Hand wrought copper symbolism is employed throughout the chancel.

"Our task is a privilege, for the structure stands as a living monument of the affirmation of the faith and vision of the members of Gustaf Adolf Lutheran Church of Gwinner, North Dakota."

David H. Schoenrock, Designer

In August 1965 Pastor Mai left for Clay Center, KS and in June 1966 Rev. Darrel Nelson came to serve Gustaf Adolf. The church library was opened in 1971. Pastor Nelson left in October 1972 for Shenandoah, IA.

In 1969 the church council recommended to the nominating committee the placing of some ladies' names on the election ballot for council members. Betty Melroe and Vi Kjelland were the first women elected to the church council. Later, Pauline Lee was the first woman president of the church council.

Rev. Donald C. Kern came to Gustaf Adolf in 1962 and stayed until 1977. In 1975, despite a poor economy at the time, the men of the congregation put on a hard, successful drive to pay off the church mortgage.

From 1978 to 1986 Rev. Doug Olson served our congregation. He helped organize the Altar Guild, a wedding guide book was compiled and marriage preparation classes were begun.

A workshop on rural stress was held in 1985 and then a support group was organized for rural people. Support groups were also formed for smokers and weight control. AA met in the church on Sunday evenings.

Thanksgiving Eve services were held jointly with St. Vincent Catholic Church and they continue to the present time. Offerings from these services go to World Hunger.

Pastor Doug Olson and Dawn Olson held once-a-month birthday and anniversary parties at the parsonage. On Sunday afternoon once a month, Senior Citizens were invited to the parsonage for pot luck suppers

and song fests.

The "scribes" updated the church records. George Kjellin translated from Swedish all the records of the church from 1897 to 1932.

In 1980 the parsonage basement was finished off for bedrooms, bath and a large recreation room.

The Gustaf Adolf Lutheran Foundation was established in 1985 for receiving and managing special gifts to the church.

In 1984 Gustaf Adolf sponsored and resettled two Polish refugee families and one Ethiopian family.

All standing committees and Sunday School teachers met monthly with the Pastor to help carry out their ministry.

In 1982 the youth ministry was expanded under Pastor Doug Olson's leadership. YOGA (Youth of Gustaf Adolf) talk sessions were held regularly, canoe trips and backpacking retreats were organized. In 1983 over 60 young people went to church camps in the winter and summer.

In 1979 the new Lutheran Book of Worship was introduced and the congregation learned the new liturgy and held hymn practices.

In September 1987 Pastor John Allickson came and served until November 1989.

Layman Harry Meyers came in 1989 as interim pastor and served until Pastor Lloyd Heroff came in 1990. In 1993 the kitchen and bathroom in the parsonage were remodeled and updated with Brian Bjork and Bob Bjornson doing most of the work.

In 1993 Pastor Michelle Rowell arrived and is our pastor at the present time. In 1997 the church kitchen is being updated in preparation for the centennial celebration at Gustaf Adolf to be held July 12 and 13, 1997.

On July 10, 1996, the 99th birthday of the congregation, a celebration was held with worship and birthday cake. Each month since, we have celebrated a different aspect of life in the congregation, focusing on Memories, Generations, Harvest, Saints, Youth, Baptism, Men, Music, Life, Women and God's Faithfulness.

Our present membership is 539 baptized and 433 confirmed.

Do You Remember When . . .

The hymnals had only words of the hymns and not the notes. The old Swedish hymnals were divided in the middle of each page with notes on the top part. You could use the words on the bottom half to several different melodies.

The center of the church, on the south side, had a huge wood and coal burning black stove; sometimes during services the janitor had to add fuel to keep everyone warm.

WHO WAS THIS GUSTAF ADOLF THAT OUR CHURCH WAS NAMED AFTER?

Gustaf Adolf, better known as Gustavus Adolphus (which is the Latinizing of his name) ruled Sweden from 1611 to 1632. He came to the throne when Sweden was at war with Denmark, Poland and Russia. After winning these wars, he was known as “the Lion of the North” and led an army into Germany in 1630 to save the Protestants from Roman Catholic domination. In 1631 he defeated the Catholics at the Battle of Breitenfeld. The following year, his troops overwhelmed those of Albrecht von Wallenstein at Lutzen. Gustavus Adolphus did not see the victory for he was mortally wounded in a cavalry charge and died on the battlefield. His victory saved Protestantism in Germany. His horse was mounted and is in the National Museum at Stockholm. Historians credit Gustavus Adolphus as being one of the greatest military leaders of all time. During his reign Sweden became the only Scandinavian country to ever become a world power. After the Battle of Lutzen the Thirty Years’ War changed from a religious war to a political war. The French Cardinal Richelieu, who was the real ruler of France saw an opportunity to make France the dominant political and military power in Europe, joined Sweden in the war against Emperor Ferdinand, and continued on for another 17 years. The Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648)



was the last of the great religious wars of Europe. The underlying cause of the war was the deep-seated hostility between the German Protestants and the German Catholics. The two groups disagreed in the interpretation of the Treaty of Augsburg (1555), which had been intended as a settlement of the religious question in Germany. The Peace of Westphalia was signed in 1648 after four years of negotiations. This treaty placed Calvinism on an equal footing with Catholicism and Lutheranism.

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 1:17