

The History of the Aardahl Lutheran Church 1896-1966 (as prepared for the 70th anniversary) From the Parish Records Book

As the records of Aardahl are being scrutinized, one must look beyond the pages of statistics. They are nothing but names and dates and ages. It is important to understand that these yellowing and charred leaves reveal more than disclosed in mere words. This year, we are recalling the history of a simple country church. It is the history brave men and women who strove to attain that for which they longed. Our retrospective thoughts are concerned not only with bare facts, but with the needs and hopes and inner most wants of those who proceeded us. They were honest, god-fearing men and women. Centuries before, their ancestors roamed the seas and raided the coasts of Europe as savage pirates. They were the Norsemen, worshippers of Thor and Odin, brave, strong and fearless. Seventy years ago, the descendants of the wild Vikings, as settlers in a new land, turned their own bravery and strength toward founding a church in which they worship with complete freedom of self-expression.

Today, as we gaze upon this church with pride, knowing that with the help of God, it can continue serving its people as faithfully as it has for the last seven decades. This is a church of many memories. As a tribute to those who founded it, it is our duty to preserve and uphold the things which are right in the sight of God. In our walks throughout life, we may chance to view many beautiful and magnificent cathedrals and temples. Let us never forget the small, white church called Aardahl, where friendship is bountiful and the good things of life prevail.

The early settlers of Aardahl community, through persistence and sincerity, organized this congregation. Aardahl, according to the reports of many is very fascinating in that the early settlers donated much of the time and money in making this pioneer church a dauntless pillar of active religious faith. In accordance with the economic situation of seventy years ago, the donation of thirty dollars was indeed a great sacrifice to be made. Yet, these people, in the presence of numerous hardships, saw fit to make such great sacrifices in the name of a worthy cause.

In the Spring of 1896, a meeting was called to organize a church congregation. With Pastor Jensen as the chairman, a group met with the committee consisting of O.T. Hegland, J.B. Hanson, and Iver Ungstad to prepare the constitution. Pastor Jensen was, at that time, conducting services in the Bemidji area. At that meeting, a congregation was founded which was to be called Aardahl, meaning "an old valley." Aardahl is the name of a valley in Settersdahl, Norway. Student L.O.

Opsata at Augsburg college of Minneapolis was requested to accept the pastorate at the end of the school year in 1897.

The following families were accepted as the original charter members: Gunder H. Aakhus, Gilber G. Weien, Elvin J. Langerak, J.B. Hanson, Gunder G. Moi, Gunstein G. Froirak, Paul O. Froirak, Knut Aakhus, Iver O. Ungstad, Paul Jorgenson (Kvale), John P. Olson, Ole A Vasen (Anderson), Ole T. Hegland, Brigde Aakhus, O.S. Huset, Louis N. Nilsen, John E. Finset, George A. Anderson, Olaf Larsen, Odin Carlson, G.G. Moi, T.H. Reise, John E. Norbe, Ole Torgrimson, Evind G. Moe, Erik Helgesen.

The first services were held in homes and school houses. Construction of the building commenced in 1899, being completed for use in 1900. It was built under the direction of Mr. Finset, the head carpenter, with most of the labor being done by members of the congregation. Money was raised for the purpose of financing the building by means of basket socials and other donations. Land for the cemetery and the church site was donated by John P. Dahl and Iver Ungstad.

At one time during the Church's history, a few neighboring Indians were invited to a Christmas program. They did not seem to appreciate the program, but they did enjoy they treats as they sat around in a circle on the floor, smoking their pipe.

Mrs. Oscar Hanson, nee Betsy Langerak, is at present time, an active member of the congregation. Mrs. Hanson holds the honor of being the first white child born in Frohn Township. The first recorded baptism of this congregation is Valbor Froirak, in the year 1897. Thirteen were recorded as being baptized in 1897, the first year of the congregation.

The first confirmation was held July 17, 1898, with a class of three: Hilder Maurice Olson, Carl Adolph L. Opsata and Gilbert E. Moe.

The first recorded burial in Aardahl Cemetery was Knut Moe. The first wedding of the congregation was that of Julius Holden and Hilda Olsen. Five Golden Weddings have been celebrated: Mr. & Mrs. Paul Kvale, Mr. & Mrs. L. P. Christianson, Mr. & Mrs. Even Mor, Mr. & Mrs. Fred Paulson, and Mr. & Mrs. Even Langerak. Several Silver Weddings have been celebrated, along with the marriages of many members and non-members.

Until 1927 the church was independent. That is, the pastors served several churches, but they did not constitute a parish. From 1927-1958, Aardahl and Nymore operated as a parish. In 1959, Aardahl & Malvik joined to form the

Laporte parish.

The cemetery has separated from the church and is an independent association called the Aardahl Lutheran Cemetery Association and has its own board of directors who operate it separately from the government of the church. This took place in 1963.

The merger with the American Lutheran Church had its beginning in 1962. Aardahl was formerly a Free Lutheran Congregation. The last Norwegian service was held in this church by Pastor Bueide in 1941. All records were written in Norwegian until 1934, until English came into usage for these records.

The following are auxiliary organizations, past and present, of the congregation:

1. Choir – The first twenty years an active and excellent choir was held in connection with church activities. Carl Opsata was the organist.
2. Ladies Aid – this organization has been the financial “backbone” of the church through many years of devoted interested of the faith.
3. Sunday School – Records have not indicated the word of the Sunday School, but it is evident that instruction of the young people has been of utmost importance through the years.
4. Luther League – This is the youngest of the auxiliaries. It began in 1928 and is financially self-supporting. It provides interesting, challenging, and fun-filled activities for young adults.

We, the historical committee, extend our appreciation to those who have supplied information aiding us to compile this summary of Aardahl’s past and present. Their help has been valuable, due to the fact that early records have been destroyed by fire. They have given a personal touch to our compilation, and for this reason we say “Thank-you!!”

Also, we thank Pastor Stoskopf for his assistance and interest in this project. We cannot fully express our gratitude, because his concern in our historic endeavors has been overwhelming. Without the help of our friends and Pastor, our efforts would have been in vain. In that we have been appointed to this duty, it has been a pleasure and a rewarding experience for us to fulfill our obligation to the congregation.

Historical Committee: Mrs. Tim Bjella, Mr. Peder Christianson, and Mr. Art Hoff

The following Pastors have served the Aardahl Church:

Rev. L. O. Opsata	1896-1907
Rev. Carl Amundsen	1907-1912
Rev. George Larson	1913-1916
Rev. O.P. Grambo	1916-1922
Rev. J. Mortenson	1922
Rev. H.E. Bode	1922-1923
Rev. Oscar C. Olson	1923-1927
Rev. Andrew Hegre	1927-1930
Rev. Carl Amundson	1930-1934
Rev. H.M. Bueide	1934-1940
Rev. Conrad Jergenson	1940-1943
Rev. Chris Iverson	1943-1954
Rev. Johan Rodvik	1954
Rev. T.A. Berkland	1954-1960
Rev. Trygeve Dahl	1960
Rev. J. Armstrong	1961-1964
Rev. R. H. Stoskopf	1964-1967
Rev. George W. Schwantes	1968-1971
Rev. Kurt M. Wied	1971-1976
Rev. Darrell Morton	1977-1980
Rev. Daniel Babine	1980-1985
Rev. Donald Carlson	1985-1990
Rev. Mike Fisk	1993-2000
Rev. Arlen Stensland	2001-2008 (Interim)
Rev. Linda Tenneson	2008-2010 (Interim)
Rev. Mary Marotte	2010-2014
Rev. Peter Warren	2015-