

THE HISTORY OF  
ZION EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH  
OF FORT MORGAN, COLORADO

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"Built on the sure foundation - Jesus Christ." Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church came into existence as a result of a split that occurred in the old Deutsche Evangelische Lutherische Zions Gemeinde.

The original German congregation was founded in 1913 by a group of German and German-Russian immigrants that settled in the area around Fort Morgan. Shortly after the organization of the congregation, property was purchased on the corner of 6th Avenue and Ensign Street. Later that year a church edifice was erected. Three years after the church was built, a parsonage was added. The cost of the land, church, and parsonage was in excess of \$10,000.00. To cover the costs, loans were sought from the members and from the Iowa Synod of which the congregation was a member.

During the early years the congregation grew and there was an apparent outward unity. But, true doctrinal unity was lacking. This became evident during the celebration of the Lord's Supper. One group would follow the Lutheran teaching and practice, while another group in the congregation would follow the Reformed teaching and practice.

The disunity intensified as the congregation was served by different pastors. If the pastor was Reformed in his teachings and practice, then the congregation would follow him. If the pastor was Lutheran, the congregation would make the appropriate adjustments and follow him.

In 1927, during the pastorate of Reverend E. Schroeder, the dilemma reached a crisis stage, and a split became imminent. During a Church Council meeting Reverend Schroeder issued a mass excommunication to all members who followed the Reformed methodology. Later, in the same meeting, the same people were also barred from entering the church. With this one action a flourishing congregation of over 400 communicants was reduced to 9 voting members and their families.

Because the congregation was so small and unable to support itself, President Moehl of the Iowa Synod informed the remaining members the Synod could not support the congregation. So he advised them to seek another congregation with the same faith and practice and join it. At the suggestion of President Moehl, the current pastor and the few remaining members attended worship services at Trinity Lutheran Church on Sherman Street.

Because of doctrinal problems that arose in Trinity, the remaining members of the old Deutsche Evangelische Lutherische Zions Gemeinde could not find a permanent home. Consequently, the nine members and their families from Zion, and 16 other families from Trinity, left Trinity and returned to Zion.

With their return to Zion the members immediately began procedures to reorganize the church. A committee of 5 men was appointed to begin the reorganization of the old German congregation. The men were: Henry Thieman, Ernest Harms, Sr., August Seehaase, Harry

Luebke, and George Stolte. As part of their duties they traveled to Norfolk, Nebraska, to confer with Pastor Witt, who was the President of the Nebraska District of the Wisconsin Synod. President Witt gave them a hearing but no definite advice. On their return trip they stopped in Sterling, Colorado, to consult with Pastor O. H. Hensel, who was the Missouri Synod District President. After their return to Fort Morgan, they convened at the house of Edwin Schmidt to report on their progress.

In the Spring of 1933 the group purchased the 6th Avenue and Ensign Street property for \$2,500.00. On June 18, 1933, the group assembled at the house of Henry Thieman for the actual reorganization of the old Zion congregation. The constitution was accordingly revised and signed, and application was made to join the Wisconsin Synod and obtain a pastor.

The men who met that evening and who eventually signed the constitution were:

Henry Braun	Harry Luebke
William Brockman	Harry Meljo
John Godemann	William Moehlenbrink
Ernest Harms, Sr.	Edwin Schmidt
Ernest J, Harms	Ewald Schmidt
Emil Harms	August Seehase
Fred Koencke	Carl Steffens
John M. Krening	George Stolte
John H. Krening	William Stolte
William Krening	Henry Thieman
John K. Krening	Alex Winter
Henry Krening	Fred Wunsch
	John H. Zwetzig

The joy of finding a new church-home was short lived. Soon after the congregation was reorganized and the proper steps taken to file

the corporation with the Morgan County Clerk, the members of the old Deutsche Evangelische Lutheranische Zions Gemeinde filed suit against the sale of the property. In October of 1933 the suit was dismissed through the testimonies of Rev. E. Schroeder, Rev. H. Schulz, and the Iowa Synod. Once again peace and joy resumed.

During the 50 years of its existence the Lord has blessed Zion in many ways. Among these blessings was the privilege to be the first Wisconsin Synod congregation in Colorado. Pastor Venus H. Winter testifies to this fact in a letter to one of Zion's former pastors - Rev. G. Meyer. Fondly he recalls the first worship service he led.

*"Dear Brother,"*

*"The picture on the cover of the Northwestern Lutheran last week brought back memories to me. Once upon a time I preached in that church. It was September 3, 1933, 29 years ago, and it was the first Wisconsin Synod service ever held in Colorado."*

Reverend Winter continues talking about the many churches he was instrumental in starting. He then states concerning Zion:

*And then there is our beginning in Colorado, in your church (Zion)... Our nucleus, as your history there will show, was a group of Missourians and a group of American Lutheran families who banded together to form a new congregation. President Witt of Norfolk, Nebraska, asked me to go to Fort Morgan for services and a meeting. In our first service that Sunday morning 125 persons were present. The service was conducted in German. That afternoon we had a meeting of the congregation and called the first resident pastor. That Sunday evening we met in church again for an English service. We had quite a time rigging up a liturgy that most people would*

*know, but, lead by stalwarts like Mr. Luebke and others who sang as they meant every word, we all survived the service..."*

*With fraternal greetings,*

*V. H. Winter*

Another privilege the Lord granted Zion was the ability to be instrumental in the founding of the Colorado Conference. In February of 1934, the Conference was organized at Fort Morgan with four pastors present. They were Reverend Baumann, Reverend Hillman, Reverend Siffering, and Reverend H. Schulz of Zion.

Probably the greatest blessing that has been given to Zion is the privilege to have had 50 years of nonstop Gospel preaching.

#### ZION'S PASTORS - PAST AND PRESENT

Reverend Herold Schulz	1933 - 1941
Reverend Milton Weishahn	1941 - 1946
Reverend Ralph Unke	1946 - 1947
Reverend R. H. Roth	1948 - 1957
Reverend Roy G. Hoenecke	1958 - 1961
Reverend Phillip Kuckhahn	1961
Reverend Henry G. Meyer	1962 - 1972
Reverend James Phillips	1972 - 1977
Reverend Norbert Mielke	1977 - 1982
Reverend James N. Proeber	1982 -

#### VACANCY PASTORS WHO SERVED ZION

Reverend Orval Kreie:	1941	Trinity
Reverend John F. Brenner:	1946	Trinity
Reverend Gus Frank:	1948	Trinity
Reverend Norbert Gieshen:	1957 -8	Trinity
Reverend Victor Bittorf:	1961 -2	from Pilgrim, Denver
Reverend Larry Ellenberger	1972	from Christ Our Redeemer, Denver
Reverend Larry Lemke	1977	from Shepherd of the Hills, Greeley
Reverend Timothy Bauer	1982	from Christ Our Redeemer, Denver

Unfortunately, much of the history of Zion has been lost or

destroyed. Still, one thing stands clear, the desire to stand firm on the foundation that was laid when Zion was organized. Yes, by God's grace and mercy that has not changed! Members may come and go. There may be times of trouble, turbulence, and temptation for the congregation. But, in spite of all this, the foundation laid in 1933 remains uncracked and undamaged. That foundation is Jesus Christ. It is for this reason that Zion can rejoice, and that they can thank God for 50 years of rich and countless blessings.

#### - ORGANIZATIONS -

Since the congregation was founded in 1933, the members have always been active. Throughout the years there have been many societies or groups that served the members' needs for Christian fellowship. Of all of them, none have endured time as the Ladies Aid. Even though it has gone under different names, it too celebrated its 50th anniversary.

Although it is not an organization "per se", Zion has always been interested in Christian education. Again, since it was organized, Zion has maintained an active Sunday School, and has held Confirmation classes regularly for young people who desire to become members.

In addition, Zion, at various times has had a choir, a Young People's Society, and a Young Married Couples Club. Again, all had

the same purpose in mind - fellowship centered around the Word of God.

#### PASTORAL ACTS AND MEMBERSHIP

During the 50 years of its existence, the church has experienced a constant turnover in membership. Members have come, joined, and then gone. Still, others come to take their place. For this reason, Zion's outward growth has not been overwhelming. The group of Christians worshipping, however, has always been a very faithful one. Today, Zion has a baptized membership of over 45 souls and 41 communicants.

The following pastoral acts have been administered at Zion during its 50-year history.

Baptisms.....	189
Marriages.....	59
Burials.....	47
Confirmations.....	161

With a few exceptions Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church has remained relatively the same. It is hard to say whether this is good or bad. The final judgment is up to God. But, in a world that is rapidly changing, it is always good to know that one thing stands true. That is the Word of God, the sure foundation of Zion Lutheran Church.



## BRIEF HISTORY

November 2, 1913	Congregation organizes
November 17, 1913	Becomes member of Iowa Synod
May 20, 1914	Purchased 6th Avenue & Ensign properties
June 14, 1914	Church is completed
July 18, 1916	Parsonage is erected next to Church
January 19, 1927	Rev. E. Schroeder forbids reception of Lord's Supper under Lutheran and Reformed methods
March 1927	400 souls were excommunicated from Zion
July 1927	E. Schroeder accepts call to another congregation
? 1929	Iowa Synod becomes part of ALC
1928-1931	Rev. Seybold serves minority group of split; pays off back debt
1930	ALC brings litigation against Seybold and minority group for preventing majority from purchasing property
January 1932	Rev. Seybold leaves; ALC refuses to send another pastor
July 1932	Negotiations begin to sell property to Trinity of Missouri Synod; Pastor refuses to buy existing church
August 1932	Members go to Sterling to seek assistance from Missouri Synod to start church in Fort Morgan --request denied
October 1932	Group contacts WELS District President Witt in Norfolk; no immediate action is taken
June 18, 1933	Group organizes as Zion Lutheran Church with no particular affiliation
September 3, 1933	First WELS service in Colorado
September 18, 1933	Congregation is accepted as member of WELS
October 5, 1933	Pastor Herold Schulz becomes first WELS pastor
December 1933	Trial is held to determine rightful owner- ship of property; old corporation vs. new one
January 1934	Case settled on basis of Chicago Thesis
July 12, 1934	Retrial rejected
November 30, 1934	Final decision (cf. p.431)
February 1934	Colorado Conference was organized in Fort Morgan; Pastors present: Bauman, Hellman, Siffering and Schulz
July 29, 1934	Pastor Schultz begins services in Hillrose, Colorado
October 1, 1935	Zion's daughter congregation organizes, receives pastor and becomes member of synod June 29, 1936
1941	Pastor Schultz to mission in Omaha, NE
1943-1946	Pastor Weishahn and congregation attempts worship services and mission work in Wiggins, Colorado

1946	Pastor Weishahn leaves for Brewster, NE; Pastor R. Unke is accepts
1947	Pastor Unke asked to leave Fort Morgan
1948	Pastor R.H. Roth accepts call to serve Zion
1957	Pastor Roth leaves after rennovation of sacristy of the church
1957-1958	Congregation is vacant
1958-1961	Pastor Roy Hoenecke serves Fort Morgan
1961	Because of lengthy vacancy and shortage of pastors, Zion, Fort Morgan and Trinity, Hillrose become dual parish; Pastor Phillip Kuckhahn serves Fort Morgan/ Hillrose dual parish
1957-1961	No records of the congregation were kept to record the trajedy it endured. For many reasons -- dissension between members, un- happy feelings with pastors, the length of vacancies and the eventual split of WELS and LCMS. Over half the members left Zion. Of the 250 souls that were there only 100 remained. However the effects were felt longer.
1962	Henry Meyer accepts call to serve congre- gation; picture appears on cover of Northwestern Lutheran (August 26: Vol. 49, #17)
1964	Congregation is declared a state historic building
1966	The building is resided and no longer con- sidered a landmark
1967	Congregation receives operating subsidy from WELS
1972	Pastor Henry Meyer retires and moves to Milwaukee; Pastor James Phillips accepts the call to serve Zion dual parish
1973	Exploratory services are conducted in New Raymer, Colorado
1974	Rennovation is begun on Church basement for Fellowship Hall and Sunday School rooms
1976	Zion goes off subsidy
1977	Pastor Phillips receives call to Resurrec- tion in Milwaukee, WI; Pastor Norbert Mielke is called to serve Zion
1981	Congregation hosts Circuit Rally of LWMS; Pastor Mielke retires from ministry and Zion
June 1982	Pastor James Proeber is received from the Seminary
September 18, 1983	Zion celebrates 50th anniversary as member of WELS
June - Sept., 1984	Rennovation of Church basement for kitchen bathrooms and Sunday School area

February 1986	50th Pastor Delegate Conference is held at Zion, Fort Morgan
June 29, 1986	Zion joins daughter congregation Trinity, Hillrose, to celebrate 50th anniversary and 25th anniversary of being a dual parish
February 1987	Pastor Proeber is elected as Colorado Conference Secretary
September 1986	Zion discovers the new organization never aquired title on the property from old German congregation
November 1986	New Constitution is rewritten and submitted to state of Colorado
December 1986	Constitution is accepted
February 1987	Zion goes to court to quiet title on property for new corporation
March 1987	Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church of Fort Morgan, CO, a member of the Wisconsin Synod, officially becomes a registered corporation and title holder of 6th Avenue and Ensign Street property.
April 5, 1987	Zion begins exploratory services in Sterling, Colorado
August 30, 1987	Pastor David Bostedt is installed as Assistant Pastor, to help with Sterling outreach.
January 17, 1988	Pastor Bostedt accepts call to serve Trinity, McCook, NE, as its first pastor
March 27, 1988	Zion holds special meeting to call a full-time vicar to help with duties of Zion and Saved By Grace (Sterling)
April 3, 1988	Zion celebrates first anniversary of new daughter congregation, Saved By Grace, Sterling, Colorado.
May 17, 1988	Larry R. Schwanke is called as Zion's first vicar

-CONGREGATIONAL STATISTICS-

Baptisms	199
Marriages	62
Burials	48
Confirmations	170