

A Historical Sketch of Komstad Covenant Church:
(*An article from the church's Hundredth Anniversary in 1974*)

The early settlers of Clay County, South Dakota, were most of them emigrants from the Scandinavian countries who came west on the promise of good farm land, as well as for religious reasons. Spiritual revivals had been sweeping over their countries, and many felt they no longer wished to be under the compulsory worship of the State Church. The new land promised freedom of worship. Many Swedish people settled in the northern part of the county, later called Riverside and Glenwood townships. It was an area of much prairie, long grass and treeless plains. Many had come with very little, if any money or other material possessions. There was no money for buying lumber with which to build houses. The closest lumber available was at Elk Point. Much hard labor went into digging dug-outs for a place of residence. These were later replaced with sod houses. Food was scarce, mostly wild fowl, fish and a few berries if they were near a river. The land must be broken up to get some grain planted. Prairie fires swept through the long grass frequently, Indians wandered about, drought and grasshoppers were other hardships endured.

In spite of these obstacles, most of the settlers remained. As more people moved onto the land they seemed to sense the need for spiritual and moral fellowship.

No records are found prior to October, 1874, of the beginning of the Komstad Church, but evidence indicates some families had been meeting in the respective homes. The first recorded meeting on October 23, 1874, bears the signatures of Adrian Isackson, Gustavus Norgren and Lars Peterson. This group was organized with the First Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sioux City, Iowa. The two churches called the Rev. J. E. Bodin to serve as pastor in 1875. There is no record of his mode of transportation between the two places. That their means were limited we understand when the collections the first year amounted to \$6.42. Of this \$4.00 was went to the Synod and Rev. Bodin Received \$2.42 as his salary for the year. Mr. P. Lindholm of Sioux City represented the two churches at the Mission Synods meeting at Stockholm, Wisconsin, in May, 1875. His traveling expenses came to \$20.08, and Komstad was to pay half of this sum.

At a meeting of the congregation on May 6, 1875, five acres of land were offered as a gift on which to build a church, which was done the following year. In June the same year Mr. Hans Quarnberg donated the timber for the sills. Mr. Charles Anderson and Mr. Charles Jacobson were appointed as a committee to raise funds so the rest of the required lumber could be purchased. They received \$20.00 and this was considered sufficient for the proposed building.

At the Annual meeting held November 4, 1876, thanks was given to God by the chairman for the church building and the for the revival which had gone through the community. At this time it was decided that Henry Hammer, whose mother had been active in the work, was to become their pastor if it was permitted by the Synod. He served until 1886. At the Annual meeting in 1877 it was decided to purchase a stove and to make arrangement to have a chimney built, so the building could be heated. It was another five years before benches were installed for seating. At this same meeting (1877) the Rev. Hammer was called to serve the church the coming year at a salary of \$200 for the year. That custom continued for many years, to elect the pastor at each annual meeting. He was also allowed to travel to other churches to speak as he wished. They were to take an offering once a month for the Mission Synod.

At the Annual meeting in November 1878, the need for a barn for the horses was discussed. A committee was appointed to determine the cost of one large enough to house 10 horses.

At the Annual meeting in 1881 the pastor was instructed to purchase a book to record baptisms and deaths of the communicants. The November 1882 Annual meeting decided to build a fence around the church property, and one man was delegated to circulate a subscription list for money for this project.

At a special meeting in March 1884, it was determined to set 12 2x6 cottonwood posts, 10 feet apart for hitching posts for the horses. In May of the same year, one delegate was elected to go with Rev. Hammer to the Annual Mission Synod meeting at Red Wing, Minnesota. The offering taken at the meeting came to \$10.00; they decided to take another one on the following Sunday and this with the \$10.00 was to be divided between the two to defray their expenses.

At the Annual meeting of November 1884 the first mention of a cemetery was made. The lots were to be 16' x 16' and cost \$10, or half lots to be 16' x 8'. Should someone outside of church members wish to bury a loved one they were to pay \$1.00 extra.

In December 1885, they decided to secure lamps for the church, the board was to solicit money for this purpose.

One thing to come before the group in November 1887 was a Communion service. After some discussion it was decided to have a special service for this observance, rather than at the close of a Sunday worship service. The minister was also to send for sample copies of three song books: "Cymbalen," "Evangelii Basun" and "Lammets Lof."

A 40 acre tract of land had been given to the church by Mrs. Hammerquist, the proceeds to go to Missions. In March of 1888, it was decided to rent this land for a period of three years for \$50, with the stipulation that 20 acres be broken for fields the first year. The Rev. Hammer resigned that spring. The Rev. L. Anderson made a visit to the parish, and he was called to the pastorate. It was also decided to have prayer services each Wednesday evening.

The Annual meeting of 1888 listed the first treasurer's report: Receipts (\$103.44), disbursements (\$89.50), balance (\$13.94), with a commitment of \$8. The pastors' salaries were not included in these reports. It was decided to take an offering for the Iowa Mission District the first Sunday of each month. They were also to rent a house for Rev. Anderson from one of the members at 75¢ per week.

At the meeting in November 1889 two men of the church were assigned the task of planting trees on the church grounds. During this time the Rev. Anderson had left the parish, and a Rev. Nelson was hired at \$325 for the year with one month vacation to travel. He stipulated he would take care of his room and board, and any money left over from vacation travel above actual expenses would be turned in to the church treasury. Rev. Nelson was succeeded by the Rev. Sundquist. The last three were here all in one year.

About this time a difference of opinion arose among the membership and 11 members withdrew and held services at the Riverside Mill. In spite of the small number, they decided to put up their own place of worship. The new church was erected on the John Holmquist farm, one mile west and one mile south from the present church, where the Harold Engstroms now reside. They had the use of the Holmquist barn loft while the church was under construction. This was called the Riverside Church. This group called the Rev. Abraham Wilson in 1886, but he served only one year when he became ill and died.

The Rev. A. P. Youngberg took over the work in 1890 in Riverside and continued through 1894. There are no records of a minister at the Komstad Church at this time. Rev. Youngberg was followed by the Rev. Carl Hanson from 1896 to 1898. During the first year of his ministry he succeeded in uniting the two groups, and the Riverside church was moved to Komstad and attached to that building in 1897. The parsonage was erected in 1896. Rev. Hanson wrote the first church constitution, as far as our records show, which was in effect until 1954. So that every one would be free to worship in this place the church was non-denominational until 1954. It was also decided to insure the church for \$300 and the parsonage for \$400. Rev. Hanson later became president of North Park College.

At the Annual meeting in 1901 the Board was instructed to draw a map of the cemetery, with lots to sell for not less than \$10 or more than \$25.

The Rev. Nels Wickstrom assumed the work in 1898 and served until 1905. The first lady to become a member of the church was Mrs. Wickstrom, the pastor's wife, in 1903, at her request. At the next Annual meeting 29 ladies joined the church, and in April 1904, another 8 were made members. The present church structure was erected in 1905, most of the planning being done by Rev. Wickstrom, much as the Evangelical Free Church of Boone, Iowa, was built.

From an article appearing in the "Dakota Republican" of Vermillion, dated June 14, 1906, and preserved by Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Johnson, parents of Rodney Johnson, the following information has been obtained: "January 31, 1905, the Congregation met in extra session to discuss the building of a new church. Rev. Wickstrom reported that Gust Norgren and himself had been about the community and had been promised in church building subscriptions \$4,757.50." This report instilled new life and courage, and it was then and there decided to build. Rev. Wickstrom had architectural plans which were adopted. A building committee was chosen consisting of John N. Johnson, chairman; Gust Norgren, secretary; and Karl J. Kron, treasurer. The old building, which had done thirty years of service, was moved out near the section line and used for services until the new one could be completed. The 28th of July it was sold to Gust Norgren for the sum of \$300. One hundred twenty five persons subscribed and paid \$6,291.65.

The cost of the church was as follows: Lumber, brick and plastering (\$3,329.60). Stone (\$18). Painting materials (\$242.62). Moving old building (\$80). Hardware (\$345.16). Mason work (\$610.90). Carpenter work (\$1,742.24). Painting (\$202.20). Gust Norgren's work (\$150). Gas plant (\$345.30). Heating apparatus (\$340.90). Benches (\$626.07). Bell (\$152). Carpets (\$74.91). Board (\$16). Zinc (\$2.75). Miscellaneous (\$19.90). Inside fixtures (\$147.61). Total (\$8,456.16).

Besides the above cost, it gives us pleasure to mention the princely gift made by Anderson and Holmquist of Centerville, in the form of a beautiful and costly piano; Karl J. Kron, a beautiful and highgrade organ; and, last but not least, a beautiful pulpit Bible, by David L. Anderson.

On Sunday afternoon, May 27, 1906, the dedicatory service for the new church was held. The Rev. E. Thorell was pastor at this time. Dinner and supper were served in the church to which all were invited. Services were continued also on Monday. "In spite of the cold, disagreeable day, the church was packed from center to

circumference." The above article was written by Charles S. Moore. He also stated in the preceding spring about sixty young people had been converted and joined the church.

The Rev. Thorell served from 1905 to 1907. The Rev. Andrew Modig came in 1907 and remained until 1916. During this time the Young People's Society resumed after some years of inactivity.

The Rev. John E. Melin served from 1916 to 1922. During this time the basement was enlarged, which made a social room and also added Sunday School class rooms.

The Rev. F. O. Dahlberg followed Rev. Melin from 1922 to 1927. Until this time all services had been in the Swedish language. To meet the changing trend, it was decided to change to the English language for all but one Swedish service a month. Shortly after this all services were in English. A lay minister, namely Mr. Joseph Carlson, served from 1927 to 1929.

The Rev. A. Vernoy Peterson started his service in January 1929 and continued through 1932. The young peoples work and choir were both resumed and continue functioning.

The Rev. Raymond A. Johnson assumed the work in July 1933, continuing through August 1938. The first Daily Vacation Bible Camp was organized and met at Lake Poinsett the same summer.

The Rev. G. F. Jansson took up the work in March 1939 and served until 1950. In January 1941 a Memorial Fund was started and many beautiful as well as useful memorials have been purchased for the church. Rev. Jansson was instrumental in organizing a Mens Brotherhood and reorganizing the Ladies Aid.

The Rev. Harold Fredrickson began his work here in June 1950 and continued through May 1954. During this time the oil burning furnace was installed in the basement. The interior of our sanctuary was greatly improved with the placing of Nuwood on the walls, and the ceiling was insulated to make for easier heating in the winter.

The Rev. Vernon Anderson served as interim pastor from June 1954 to July 1955. This year the floors in the sanctuary were sanded and carpeting laid in the aisles in preparation for the observance of the 80th anniversary. Having been an independent church for almost 80 years, there was a growing need sensed for fellowship with a larger group. This was climaxed by joining with the Northwest Conference at their annual meeting in May of 1954 and was followed by affiliation with the Evangelical

Covenant Church in June of the same year. The parsonage was modernized by installing running water and a bathroom in 1955.

The Rev. Dwight Johnson assumed the work in July 1955, serving through the spring of 1959. A revised church constitution including new by-laws was adopted at the 1957 Annual meeting. This same year a loudspeaker system and a communion table with accessories were purchased with memorial funds. Pastor Johnson's detailed land survey covering a 76 square mile area revealed that less than half of the land was held by Komstad people. This led to his warning emphasis: "Remember your church when you sell or rent!"

During the summer of 1959 we were assisted by community pastors and local laymen. In September the Rev. Raymond Nelson, a former Covenant pastor, an instructor at Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa, served as interim pastor until the spring of 1960.

The Rev. K. B. Eklund assumed the work in March 1960, continuing through May 1964. During this time new doors were installed in the front entrance of the church, a gift from the estate of Mrs. Anna Struble. The "Covenant Hymnal" replaced "Hymns of Praise." An oil burning furnace was also installed at the parsonage.

From June until September the following helped us carry on the work: June and August--William Neuman from the North American Baptist Seminary; July--the Rev. Paul Nelson then serving the Grandveiw Covenant Church near Larchwood, Iowa.

In October 1964 at the 90th anniversary observance of our church, the Rev. Everett Hansen was installed as our minister. He had served in our pulpit during the month of September, before accepting our call. Although blind, he could, with the assistance of his faithful wife, Ruth, carry out the responsibilities until he passed away at the Pioneer Memorial Hospital at Viborg, South Dakota, following a heart attack suffered during the Sunday morning worship service. He was laid to rest in the Komstad Cemetery. While the Hansens were with us, the electric organ was installed. The parsonage was remodeled. Considerable improvement were made in the park which had been started while Rev. Dwight Johnson was with us. At this time more trees and shrubs were planted and the arch put up. The barn was leveled at the parsonage and a garage was purchased and moved onto the grounds. The cave on the church grounds was filled in and a new cemetery fence was installed.

From September 1966 to June 1967 we were assisted by the Rev. L. J. Lovseth of the Beresford Bethesda Home, the Rev. Eric Johnson of the Sioux Falls Mission, and Morris Anderson, student pastor from Sioux Falls College, and a musical team.

In July 1967 the Rev. Carl Isaacson was installed as regular pastor by Rev. Carl Janson, North West Conference Superintendent. Rev. Isaacson remained with us until November 1973. The wall and doors in the basement were removed, making one large room. Serving tables and more folding chairs were added. This last year carpeting was laid on the basement floor. A new well was dug at the parsonage for use there and at the church. Running water and wash rooms have been added at the church. Individual mail boxes were made and installed in the foyer for each family of the church.

From November 1973 to May 1974 we were served by Randall Tschetter, a senior student at the North American Seminary.

During the years, two people have gone from the group into foreign mission work: Elizabeth Peterson to China and Lionel Seger to the Sudan Interior Mission.

The sanctuary was made more worshipful by the installation of the two memorial windows by the families of the late Mr. and Mrs. Gustavus Norgren and Mr. and Mrs. Lars Peterson, before the observance of 50 years activity. The picture "Christ Knocking at the Door" was painted by one of our Sunday School boys, Virgil Johnson, while a student at the University of South Dakota. The families of the late Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Anderson were responsible for this meaningful addition. Mr. Robert Peterson had the panel placed under the picture.

The late Gustavus Norgren left a \$2,000 endowment with the revenue to go to foreign missions. His son, the late Carl Norgren, gave a perpetual annual bequest of \$2,000 to be used for improvements of the church.

The Sunday School work was started January 12, 1878, during the ministry of Rev. Hammer. Under the guidance of Rev. Melin graded Sunday School lessons were adopted. The first Daily Vacation Bible School was held in the summer of 1934, while the Rev. Raymond Johnson was serving as our pastor. Our Sunday School became affiliated with the South Dakota Covenant Sunday School Association during this time. The South Dakota Covenant Bible Camp work was also instituted. This group has now joined with the Northwest Conference and meets at Lake Beauty in Minnesota.

Activities for the young people have continued through the years, for religious instruction and social activities. In earlier years it was one large group of various ages, meeting before the regular Sunday evening services. Now they have been divided into two age groups--Trailblazers and Senior Hi League, meeting on a week night.

The Trailblazers are a group ages 9 through 13 years, meeting once a month. Their time is spent singing, hearing Bible stories, doing hand craft and playing games. A short business meeting is held and the offering taken. Each year they have had a swimming party and picnic combined, they have also played softball. The members and their mothers have taken turns providing refreshments. Currently there are eleven members, present leaders are Diane Bjordal and Bonnie Nelson.

The Senior Hi League presently has 14 members. In addition to their devotional programs they have had summer picnics and swimming. Last summer they had a joint picnic with the Trailblazers at which the families were included. A few years ago they had a pancake supper to finance a few projects. They also held a farewell banquet for Rev. and Mrs. Isaacson, at which time they welcomed eight new members. Their latest project is making banners and posters for our Centennial. Present leaders are Betty Bystrom, Deloris Hult and Mary Larson.

The Ladies Aid Sewing Society held their first meeting at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Adrian Isackson, located one mile west and one mile south of the church, in August 1875, with neighbors Mrs. Hammerquist and Mr. and Mrs. Tuve Hanson in attendance. The 12 year old daughter of the Hansons was given the task of informing other neighbors of this organization and to extend an invitation to join them with the work. Her means of transportation was walking, which was not easy as there were no roads as such, and the prairie grass grew taller than her head. Each family was to contribute 25¢ toward the purchase of sewing material. The neighbors contacted were: Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Norgren, Mr. and Mrs. John Lundberg, Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Anderson, Mr. and Mrs. John Lundberg, Mr. and Mrs. Nels Berglund and Mr. and Mrs. Berglund Sr. Men as well as ladies attended the earliest meeting. The meetings had Bible Study, singing and prayer, followed by sewing and knitting stockings for men, women and children from wool that was donated. Once each year an auction was held of the finished articles. The money realized from these sales was used for foreign missions, visiting ministers, and the local church. Until the English language was used this organization was called "Sy-forening," which means sewing society.

In the earlier years the gatherings were held in the mornings with a noon meal, and the sewing extended into the afternoons.

In approximately 1941 the Aid was divided into four circle groups: Riverside, Bersford, Centerville and Circle No. 4. The later was discontinued shortly after it was organized, the members joining one of the other three. The Riveside Circle was discontinued in 1969. A new ladies Aid Constitution was adopted during Rev. Dwight Johnson's ministry.

The Ladies Aid and Circles have contributed much to the work of the church: Missions, all projects of repairs and improvements in both the church and parsonage. From available information the following persons have served as chairwomen: 1875 - Mrs. Tuve Hanson; 1898-1899 - Miss Ida Bring; 1916 - Mrs. Ida Kron; 1929 - Mrs. Fred (Agnes) Seger; 1930 - Miss Almeda Kron; 1931 - Mrs. Ernest (Dagmar) Larson; 1932-1949 - Mrs. Lydia Nelson; 1950-1951 - Mrs. Harold Nelson; 1952-1953 - Mrs. David Dahlin; 1954-1955 - Mrs. Lyle White; 1956-1957 - Mrs. Louis Hult; 1957-1958 - Mrs. Chester Hult, Sr.; 1959-1960 - Mrs. Delmer Payson; 1961-1962 - Mrs. Jerome Isackson; 1963-1964 - Mrs. Harold Engstrom; 1965-1966 - Mrs. Raymond Lounsbury; 1967-1968 - Mrs. Lester Gors; 1969-1970 - Mrs. Chester Hult, Jr.; 1971-1972 - Mrs. Lyle White; 1973-1974 - Mrs. Inez Hult.

The Mens Brotherhood was reorganized in the late fall of 1973. The meetings have been held once a month in the homes of the members. Rodney Johnson is acting president. The Brotherhood was responsible for the finishing of the south Sunday School room in the balcony, and is currently planning on working on the garage at the parsonage.

The above history may seem detailed, but we wished to show the extremely adverse conditions with which the founders and early workers had to contend. At first there was no transportation available, but to walk. Distance didn't seem to be an obstacle for assembling together. After some time we were able to secure a yoke of oxen to help break prairie and for other back-breaking labor. It took a great deal of fortitude and faith in a living God and Savior to begin this work and keep it going through drought, flood, blizzards, grasshoppers and depressions--truly a work of faith. It is now up to us of the 3rd, 4th and 5th generations to show our stamina and faith in a God who is able to lead and guide in the second generation.