

## **Reflections on the History of Komstad Covenant Church:**

*( An article from the church's celebration of One Hundred Twenty Five Years of Heritage in 1999 )*

With religious freedom and the Homestead Act of 1862 beckoning them to America, Swedish immigrants settled this area of Dakota Territory. Many of these early pioneers began meeting in various homes, some of which were dugouts, where together they prayed and thanked God for their new-found land.

The earliest recorded meeting of the Komstad Mission Church was on October 23, 1874. John E. Bodin was the first pastor, arriving around June 1, 1875. He served this church and a Mission Church in Sioux City, Iowa. His means of transportation between the two churches is unknown, but it must have been a very difficult trip in those days. The collection that first year amounted to \$6.42. Of this amount, \$4.00 was sent to the Synod, and the pastor received \$2.42 as his salary.

The Ladies Aid Sewing Society was started in August, 1875. The meetings, which began in the morning and lasted into the afternoon, included a Bible study, singing and prayer, followed by sewing and knitting. An auction of the finished articles was held each year, with the proceeds used for foreign missions, visiting pastors and the local church.

Five acres of land were offered as a gift for the building of a church. With a sum of \$20 collected, the lumber was purchased and a plain but sturdy structure was built in 1876. It was not until more than a year later that a heating stove was purchased, and another five years before benches were installed for seating.

The Sunday School was organized in January, 1878.

During the next few years, a small horse barn, hitching posts, a cemetery, fence, trees, lamps, song books, and a record book were added. A 40-acre tract of land was given to the church with proceeds designated to go to missions.

A difference of opinion caused the church to split in 1889, and eleven members withdrew and held their services at the Riverside Mill. In spite of their small number, they put up their own place of worship, called the Riverside Church.

In 1896 the two groups were united, and the Riverside Church building was moved to Komstad and attached in 1897. The parsonage was built, and the first constitution was written. So that everyone would feel free to worship in this place, the church was non-

denominational and remained so until 1954. The first ladies joined the church in 1903.

Early in 1905, a new church building was proposed. One hundred and twenty-five persons contributed for the building at a total cost of \$8,456.16 in materials and labor. A piano, organ and pulpit Bible were given as gifts.

Ten years later the basement was enlarged for Sunday School classrooms and a social room. Until this time, all services were in Swedish. But to meet the changing trend, English soon became the primary language of the church. Daily Vacation Bible School was held for the first time in 1934, and the South Dakota Bible Camp was organized at Lake Poinsett.

The sanctuary was enhanced and made more worshipful by the installation of stained glass windows depicting two Bible verses. A picture, "Christ Knocking at the Door," was painted by Virgil Johnson, a former Sunday School boy.

In May of 1954, Komstad became affiliated with the Evangelical Covenant Church and the Northwest Conference.

Two members of this church have gone into foreign mission work: Elizabeth Peterson to China and Lionel Seger to the Sudan Interior Mission.



During a violent hail and wind storm in late August, 1980, much damage was done to the interior and exterior of the church. A large portion of the north stained glass window was broken out, hymnals and Bibles were saturated with rain, pews were damaged by flying glass and water, and tombstones in the cemetery were shifted. Community spirit and monetary gifts were received from many people, some from far away, and together the reconstruction was accomplished. To help raise money for repairs, a soup luncheon was sponsored by the ladies and has since become an annual soup and pie supper.

In recent years the kitchen was updated, the roof shingled, new front doors hung, and new furnaces and air conditioning installed. Beautiful banners have been made by individuals and groups to enhance the sanctuary.

When we stop to look back over the past 125 years, it is evident that faith and trust in God have brought this church to this day. It was not the material possessions that were important to the early pioneers but the coming together in the Lord's name to experience His grace and love in this new land. Komstad Church is not merely a building. Komstad Church is the faithful people who have prayed and praised, taught and preached, and in so many ways given unselfishly of themselves over the past 125 years.