

# History of Bergen Congregation

Compiled for Golden Jubilee (51st Anniversary) July 12-13, 1936  
by R. S. Sigdestad

The Bergen congregation in Day County, South Dakota, was organized in the home of Nels Williamson Sr., by Lynn Lake, in the autumn of 1885, by Rev. K. O. Storli of Wilmot, S. Dak., on one of his mission journeys. It consisted of the following 17 voting members: Iver E. Skaare, Rasmus K. Mork, Ole Simonson, Ole E. Bakken, John J. Grove, Sakarias J. Sigdestad, Kolben T. Mork, John S. Sigdestad, Jacob K. Mork, Erik Winson, Ole Aas, Ole Monson, Nels Williamson Sr., Ole Svang, Martin Davidson, Hans Anderson and Martin Anderson.

In 1886, together with Webster, Grenville and Fron churches, a call was extended to candidate in theology, .C M. Nordtvedt to become their pastor. He served until the fall of 1889 when he moved to Wisconsin.

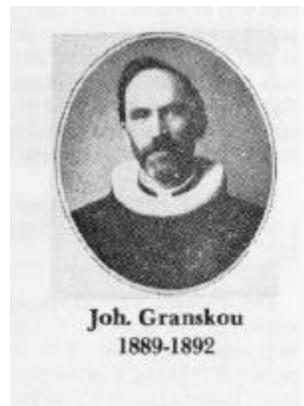
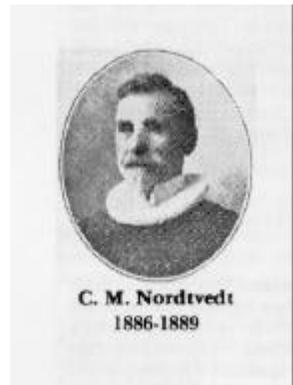
Two acres of land was donated to the congregation by Anton Norby for a cemetery in 1887. It was consecrated by Rev. Nordtvedt in 1888, and the first one to be buried there was Anfin Sand, March 13 of that year.

The first infant to be baptized of families who later became Bergen Church was Serine Skaare (Mrs. Lars Mydland) in the home of John Tofley, Dec. 5, 1884. And the first child of Bergen to be baptized was Selma Grove (Mrs. Rasmus Egge) in the Nels Williamson home in October, 1885. Both were baptized by Rev. Storli.

The first confirmation was held by Rev. Nordtvedt June 10, 1887, when the following were confirmed: Kolben K. Mork, Pierpont; Martin Williamson (deceased), Anna Williamson (Mrs. Kittelson, Montevideo, Minn.), and Kristine Winson (Mrs. Polis, deceased).

When organized, the congregation affiliated with the Anti-Missouri Brotherhood, which in 1890 became part of the United Lutheran Church, and in 1917 joined with the other bodies forming the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America.

The first representative sent to a Synodical meeting was Anton Norby, delegate to the union meeting in 1890.



Rev. Johannes Granskou was called to the pastorate of Rev. Nordtvedt in the summer of 1899 and served the Bergen Church from Dec. 1, 1899 until Jan. 1, 1892, when he resigned in order to permit a better arrangement of the parish. Bergen then called Rev. L. E. Kjelaas and he took charge Jan. 28 of that year. During the next four years a number of committee meetings and conferences were held with the Skudesnes and Falnes churches with the purpose of forming a pastorate. Finally in the fall of 1896, Fames joined Bergen in calling a pastor.

During the first years of existence Bergen held the services and meetings in farm houses and school houses—mostly in the school house on Ole Monson's farm. At a business meeting Feb. 15, 1892 it was decided to build a church, size of auditorium 44x28x16, with chancel 17x16x12, and an octagon-shaped sacristy 7x6x7. A committee of three—George Borgeson, Lauritz Alg and Jacob K. Mork were selected to solicit funds, and they raised by subscriptions \$1060.00. The building committee was Ole Bakken, Lars Arneson, Kolben T. Mork, John Tofley and Lars Aadland. Magnus Olson built the foundation and the capable church builder, A. P. Byron got the contract to erect the church. A tower, 10x12, was added to the specifications. It

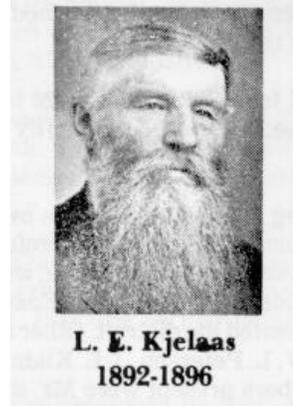
was built up same height as the roof, and later completed and church bell installed. The cost of this church was \$3,700.00. In 1913 it was decided to build a side room, 14x18, on north side of chancel where smaller meetings could be held. The gallery was also built at this time and the interior of the church finished in metal siding and ceiling.

The first large meeting of the church was held March 13, 14 and 15, 1894 when the cornerstone of the church was placed by Rev. J. Granskou, assisted by the pastors Kjelaas, Mickelson, Rislov and Hinderlie.

In 1891 the Ladies Aid Society was organized by Rev. Kjelaas. Mrs. Erik Winson was its first president. This Ladies Aid is still very much active and has been a source of great blessings both to the local church and to various missionary activities.

Rev. Kjelaas preached his farewell sermon on Pentecost Sunday, 1896. Rev. A. K. Flakoll, his successor, served the Bergen and Falnes churches from January, 1897 until his death Jan. 23, 1903. His earthly remains were laid to rest in the Bergen cemetery.

A Temperance Society was organized by Rev. Flakoll. It was active for a period of more than 20 years and did much good in church and community.



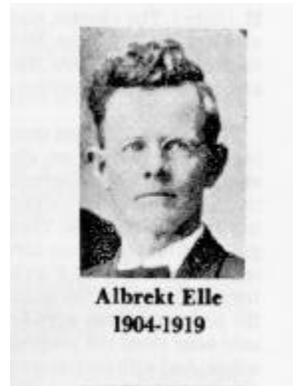
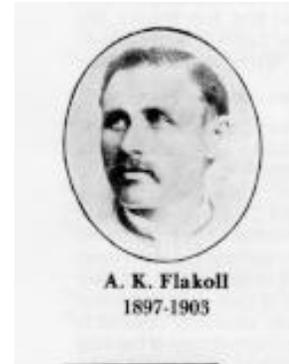
The church was dedicated by Rev. G. Hoyme, president of the United Church, May 16, 1901.

Rev. J. U. Pederson filled the vacancy during 1903-4. Rev. Albert Elle, a missionary in Madagascar who had returned home because of ill health, was now called as pastor of Bergen and Falnes churches and served the parish from

March 1904 to May 4, 1919 when he moved to Canada.

A young people society and a girls' society were organized by Rev. Elle. They are now known as the Luther League and the Charity Circle. They are still active and endeavor to serve the Kingdom of God at home and abroad.

Land was purchased and the parsonage built in 1904. It is valued at \$5,000.00.

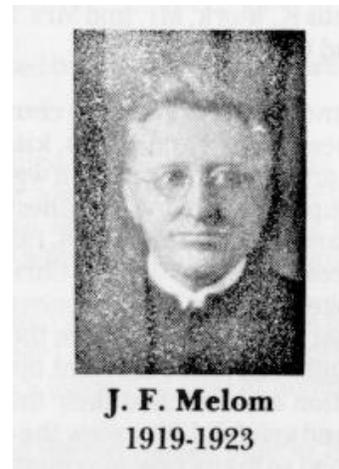


During the winter of 1918 a request was received from the Skudesnes congregation to join the Bergen-Falnes pastorate. At a business meeting in Bergen Feb. 25, 1918 the request was granted, thus realizing what many had hoped, prayed, and worked for ever since the beginning of these churches, namely that Bergen, Falnes and Skudesnes should constitute one parish.

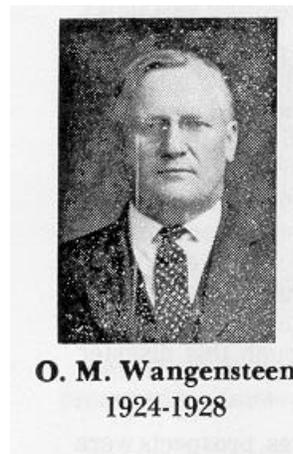
Rev. J. F. Melom was called to succeed Rev. Elle. He took charge in July, 1919, and moved to Grand Forks, N. Dak. in October, 1923. Rev. L. E. Hammer served temporarily until the fall of 1924.

Rev. O. M. Wangensteen was called May 4, 1924, took charge Oct. 12, 1924, and preached his farewell sermon Sept. 16, 1928. He also went to Canada.

For a number of years the need was felt for a basement under the church where the various societies and part of the Sunday School could meet, and meals and lunches could be served during festal gatherings of the congregation. And in 1926 it was decided to build such a basement. Excavation was made on the south side of the church, and when the basement was ready the church was moved over. At this time the sacristy of the church was remodeled, and furnace installed. The cost was \$5,640.00. The Charity Circle purchased the electric light plant and also paid for the kitchen equipment. The Ladies Aid had the church decorated inside in 1927, which cost \$488.00. July 17, 1927 the cornerstone of the remodeled church was laid by Rev. M. J. Nilsen, and Dr. A. J. Bergsaker, president of the South Dakota District, dedicated the church and basement. Some of the members had opposed this project, but when they saw the finished work all agreed that the improvement was well worth the cost.



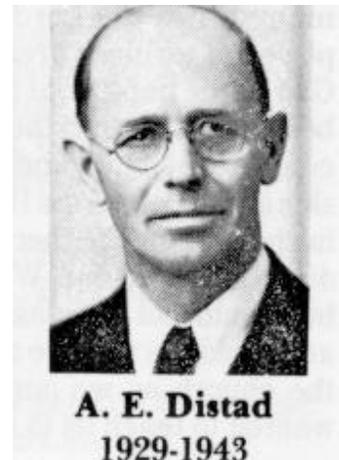
Rev. M. J. Nilsen supplied from Christmas, 1928 to June, 1929. The present pastor, A. E. Distad came June 26 and was installed by President Bergsaker July 21.



The pioneers were dropping out fast and it was evident that many of them would not live to see the Golden Jubilee. It was therefore decided to observe the 45th anniversary June 22-23, 1930. Rev. Albrekt Elle, who served this church for a period of 15 years, was the honored guest. Dr. S.C. Eastvold, vicepresident of the South Dakota District, represented the district. Other speakers were the pastors M. J. Nilsen, A. Elmer Moe, W. L. Peterson, J. L. Kildahl, and the local pastor, A. E. Distad. The charter members present were Mr. and Mrs. Iver Skaare, Mr. and Mrs. Ole Simonson, Mrs. Karl Grove, Ole E. Bakken, Jacob K. Mork, John S. Sigdestad, Mr. and Mrs. Rasmus K. Mork, Mr. and Mrs. Martin R. Davidson, Mr. and Mrs. Martin Anderson and Ole Monson.

The Ladies Aid spent much money decorating the church for this anniversary, laying new carpet on chancel floor, adding to kitchen and dining room equipment, a total of several hundred dollars. And all were so happy and thankful that at last the church was complete and one of the finest rural houses of worship in this part of the state. Then came the fateful Dec. 26, 1934. The congregation was gathered for Christmas services when the "Happy Christmas" in a few minutes was turned into grief. Fire broke out around the furnace room and in a short time, traveling between the walls, set the roof afire. From the smoke-filled main floor the pews and piano were brought out. The rest went up in flames. In that bitter cold hour stood the congregation and watched their dear sanctuary reduced to ashes. And with deep sorrow and grief did they view the charred ruins of the dear old church to which was attached so many precious memories. We remember the many times the Lord met us there with His salvation and peace; the many powerful sermons preached there; the many infants received into

convenat with God at the baptismal font, the large number who had made the good confession before that altar in the rite of confirmation; the many times the members of the congregation had knelt at the altar and heard the declaration of forgiveness of sins and received the Holy Sacrament; the many happy pairs who had been made husband and wife there, and the solemn services about the earthly remains of a departed loved one. We bowed our heads and thanked God for what we had had, but could not help asking God "Why should this happen, just as we had all arranged the way we desired?" Perhaps it was because we had not made use of the church as we ought and should, and that the Lord through this disaster wanted to teach us to make better use of God's house.



With the hard times brought on by two successive crop failures, prospects were not bright looking toward rebuilding. But the members had not lost courage, and already, Jan. 10, 1935, two weeks after the fire, they voted to build a new church on the site of the old one. At a meeting on Feb. 9, they elected a building committee of five members, namely: Jacob Fosheim, chairman; Clarence Sigdestad, Elmer Skaare, Lars Sandvik and George Engebretson. In unity and with undaunted courage, the congregation proceeded to erect a larger and finer building. The members excavated the basement and donated all cement work. The dimensions are—auditorium 38x44, and chancel, 38x18, making the size of main church 38x52 with 12-foot posts. The sacristy is 10x22, and entrance and side rooms 12x26. Thus the length of the church is 84 feet, with full basement under the whole structure. The church was sufficiently ready so that confirmation service could be held Nov. 3, the first service in the new church. The work has progressed steadily so that now, at the time of dedication and the 51st Anniversary, July 12-13, 1936, the church stands here complete. And when we today look back upon the past we must exclaim with the Psalmist "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad."—Psalm 126:3.

The church with furniture and equipment as it stands is valued at more than \$15,000. The Charity Circle has installed electric light plant and fixtures at a cost of \$775.00, and are now striving to raise money to pay for it. The Ladies Aid has furnished kitchen and dining room and are laboring to pay for that.

There is no record to be found of church work and ministerial acts the first seven years. The following statistics date from February, 1892:

Baptized 444. Confirmed 374. Married 61 couples. Buried 159. 2827 communicants. About 1275 Sunday services. The membership is now about 300 souls, but a number of families worship with us and look to Bergen as their church home without actually being members.

The members of Bergen Church have in all these years worked together faithfully and in unity, and have been spared from divisions and strife. Its pastors have served faithfully, and proclaimed to us the whole counsel of God, the Law, and the Gospel, that sinners might be awakened and saved, and that the Christians may be edified and grow in Grace.

When we are now assembled, July 12 and 13, 1936, to observe a triple festivity, namely Laying of Cornerstone, and Dedication of new church, and a 51st Golden Jubilee of the founding of the congregation, we look back upon the years past and say: "Bless Jehovah, O My Soul; and all that is within me, bless His Holy Name. Bless Jehovah, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."—Psalm 103:1, 2.

May then Bergen congregation, in ages to come, stand as "a city set on a hill that cannot be hid," and be a beacon of light to guide generations to come, onward and homeward, to the great feast up yonder. It is our wish, hope, and prayer, that many, many of Bergen members may be numbered with the Triumphant Church in Heaven, blending their voices with the vast, unnumbered host of the Redeemed, eternally singing the song of God and the Lamb.

Of the charter members of Bergen only the following are still alive: Mr. and Mrs. Iver Skaare, Mr. and Mrs. Ole Simonson, Ole E. Bakken, John S. Sigdestad, Mrs. Rasmus K. Mork, Mrs. Martin Davidson, Mr. and Mrs. Martin Anderson and Ole Monson.

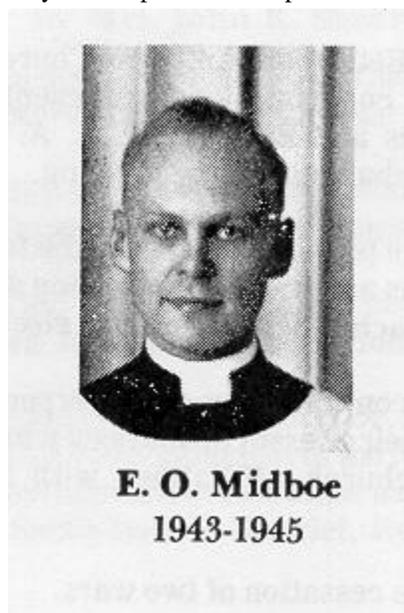
## 1936-1955

Compiled for the 70th Anniversary July 9 and 10, 1955,

by Mrs. John R. Skaare

Only July 12 and 13, 1936 the Bergen Lutheran Church in Lynn Township, Day County, South Dakota, observed its 51st anniversary.

Rev. Albrekt Elle of Sylvan Lake, Alberta, Canada, was the only former pastor, and Mrs. O. M. Wangensteen the only former pastor's wife present.



**E. O. Midboe**  
1943-1945

This was a triple festivity, namely laying the cornerstone, dedication of the new church and the Golden Jubilee (51st) of the founding of the congregation.

The Sunday morning sermon was preached by Dr. A. J. Bergsaker, D.D.L.L.D. Secretary and General Field Superintendent of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America and also the laying of the cornerstone assisted by Rt. Rev. Henry E. Solem, President of the South Dakota District, Rev. A. Elle and Rev. A. E. Distad, local pastor.

On Sunday afternoon Rt. Rev. Henry B. Solem preached the sermon and dedicated the church, assisted by the pastors of the Aberdeen Circuit. There was also an evening service with Dr. Bergsaker and Rt. Rev. Solem speaking.

Rev. A. Elle preached the anniversary sermon on Monday forenoon. One of the features at the afternoon service was the singing of the choir for the first time. Charter members were seated in the front of the church. There were 11 charter members living at this anniversary and at this 70th anniversary only one remains, namely Mrs. Martin Anderson of Webster, S. Dak. A confirmant reunion was held in the evening.

The Ladies Aid served dinners and suppers. Music was furnished by the Bergen choir, male quartet and chorus, Falnes and Skudesnes choirs and Mrs. M. J. Nilsen.

The Bergen Brotherhood was organized on Feb. 24, 1939 and has been an active organization to the present time.

On Aug. 4, 1942 Rev. A. E. Distad resigned and a farewell service for the Distads was held in June, 1943.

On April 22, 1943 the Board of Trustees was authorized to make the best arrangements with Falnes and Skudesnes congregations to buy a parsonage in Pierpont. Mrs. Kemp's house was purchased for \$2300.00. The country parsonage was sold at a later date.

Rev. E. A. Midboe and wife, newlyweds, and also recently ordained, arrived in July, 1943. He was installed on July 4 at Skudesnes by Dr. L. A. Pierson, South Dakota District President.

In February, 1945, Rev. Midboe left to be inducted as an army chaplain. We regretted their leaving but then, too, we realized the need for chaplains in our Armed Forces.

Rev. E. Borg-Breen of Bristol served temporarily. A meeting was held at the Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Pierpont on Feb. 7, 1945, in the evening. The congregations represented were Bethlehem, Langford, Falnes, Skudesnes and Bergen. Dr. L. A. Pierson, South Dakota District President, acted as chairman of the meeting.

Purpose of the meeting was to discuss plans for the future if a reorganization



**L. S. Gjerde**  
1946-1950

would strengthen the parishes and shorten the driving distances for the pastors. A committee of three from each congregation was elected.

On March 13, 1945 the five committees met at Pierpont. At this meeting it was voted that Falnes dissolve their present affiliations with Bergen and Skudesnes and that Bethlehem join church affiliations with Skudesnes and Bergen Lutheran.

Nineteen forty-five saw the cessation of two wars. April 7 marked VE Day (Victory in Europe) and Aug. 14, VJ Day (Victory in Japan). A starving Europe and a tottering China opened doors to an immense program of spiritual and material rehabilitation. Wartime restrictions on scarce commodities such as gasoline, tires, shoes and some food stuffs were lifted late in 1945. Sugar remained scarce and most of us can remember how we used syrup, honey and pudding powders to satisfy the "sweet tooth." Rationing of sugar ended in June, 1947.

Dr. L. A. Pierson installed Rev. L. S. Gjerde on May 5, 1946 at the Bergen Church. Bergen Aid, with the assistance of Bethlehem and Skudesnes, served dinner at noon and some of the Circuit pastors and their wives were present. Rev. Gjerde had served as a Navy Chaplain in the Second World War.

In July, 1940, Mrs. Eric Johnson's house was purchased for \$5800 and the former parsonage sold for \$4000 by the Pierpont parish, Bergen paying its share of \$600. The chancel and aisle of our church were carpeted in 1947 at a cost of \$1071.34.

On Nov. 3, 1948, the Randeberg Male Chorus of Norway gave a sacred concert and showed colored moving films. This was the first time we used our new REA lighting system.

Rev. L. S. Gjerde resigned Oct. 2, 1949 and his farewell service was held on April 30, 1950 with a fellowship dinner and program in his honor.

Rev. A. E. Distad took over the pastoral duties on June 8, 1950 and served until Rev. and Mrs. A. R. Sellevold arrived in August the same year.

Installation service was held at Bethlehem on Sept. 10, 1950 for Rev. A. R. Sellevold by Dr. L. A. Pierson, President of the South Dakota District, for the parish.

An oil burning furnace was installed late in 1950 at a cost of \$2165.00. To keep our church clean and beautiful it was redecorated in 1951.

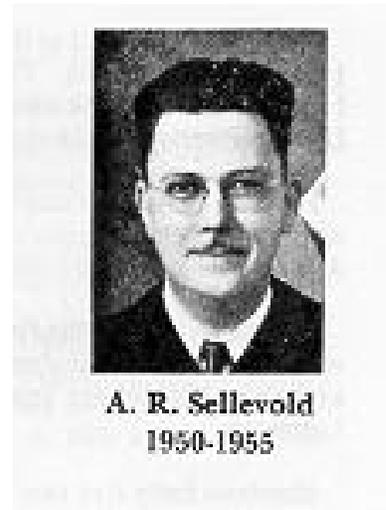
A concrete floor was laid in the kitchen, double sinks with hot and cold running water, hot water heater, two rest rooms and a sewage system were added in 1953 at a cost of \$1959.16.

Rev. A. R. Sellevold resigned the last Sunday in October, 1954 and his farewell service was held January, 1955, followed by a fellowship dinner and program in their honor.

Rev. A. Elmer Moe of Aberdeen then took over the pastoral duties the middle of February and continued until the arrival of Rev. George Udem who accepted the call of this parish and arrived the first of June.

Records of ministerial acts and services are incomplete but records show the following since July, 1936: Baptized 139; Confirmed 89; Married 40 couples; Funerals 80; 2109 Communicants; About 618 Sunday services. The present membership is 262 souls (1953 report).

As we assemble for our 70th anniversary of the founding of Bergen congregation let us give thanks to God for the memories of this congregation and the priceless heritage, for the Faith of our fathers in generations past. In Hebrews 13:7,8 we read, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God: consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."



*God bless all those whose membership is here;  
Thy people, Lord, who love Thy house and Thee,  
And may we find in Thy great Book at last,  
Each name recorded for eternity.*

## 1955-1970

### Compiled by Mrs. Sherrill Sigdestad

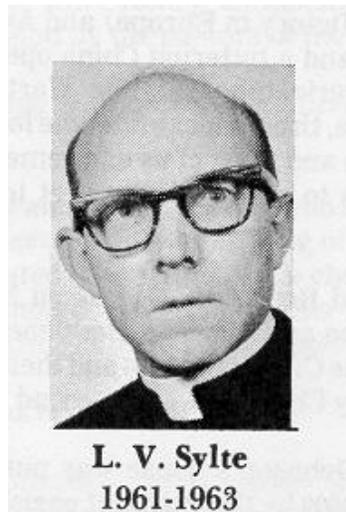
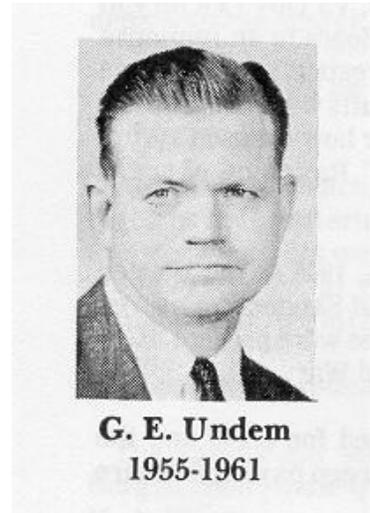
The 70th anniversary of Bergen was observed July 9-10, 1955 with one charter member, Mrs. Martin Anderson, in attendance. She has since passed on. Dr. A. N. Rogness, President of Luther Theological Seminary, gave the sermon and anniversary address. Former pastors in attendance were A. E. Distad, L. S. Gjerde, A. E. Midboe, M. J. Nilsen, and A. R. Sellevold. Rev. G. E. Udem and family had been with us only a few weeks at the time of the anniversary. The Udem's moved to Viborg, S. Dak. in 1961 and are now at Sherman, S. Dak.

It was our pleasure in 1956 to hear Miss Torbjorg Loken, a missionary from Zululand. She is from Oslo, Norway and a niece of the late Mikel Loken. We have also heard missionaries from most of our foreign fields.

The cemetery association erected a block building in 1957 for the storage of lawn mowers and equipment. 1959 will be remembered as the driest year on record. It was drier than the 'Dirty Thirties.' Only 12.11 inches of rainfall, compared to 12.65 in 1933.

In 1960 the Evangelical Lutheran (Norwegian), American Lutheran (German), and the United Evangelical Lutheran (Danish) united under the name of The American Lutheran Church. Two years later they were joined by the Lutheran Free Church. Pastor L. V. Sylte accepted his first pastoral call from the seminary, coming to our parish in July, 1961. Pastor Sylte served until Dec. 31, 1963. He has since received his doctorate degree and with his family resides in Nashville, Tenn.

Pastor E. M. Mueller was interim pastor about 17 months in 1964-65. The 40th anniversary of Mueller's ordination and wedding were observed Aug. 7, 1964. His farewell sermon was June 13, 1965. Pastor Mueller now serves a parish at Waubay, S. Dak.



August 1, 1965, Pastor H. S. Skilbred was installed by Dr. Gilbertson at a joint service in the Pierpont gymnasium. August 15 our congregation held a reception for the Skilbred family. They came to us from Arnegard, N. Dak.

Pastor A. E. Distad, a pastor at Bergen from 1929-1943, passed away Aug. 24, 1966 at the age of 87 years. He had made his home in Webster following his retirement.

We have taken part in two Preaching-Teaching-Reaching Missions. One in 1956 with Pastor R. W. Ellison of Pierre the speaker, the other in 1967 with Pastor Sikkink of West Concord, Wisc. as speaker.

Bethesda Nursing Home in Webster was constructed in 1956, under the auspices of the E.L.C. In 1968, Sun Dial Manor Nursing Home was opened in Bristol. Members of our parish have and do reside in the three nursing homes of the community. The ALCW makes an annual visit to one of the Homes with a program.

In September, 1968, Pastor Skilbred suffered a coronary heart attack and was hospitalized in Fargo for several weeks. Doctors ordered complete rest for him so Pastor Ernest Johnson of Bristol, and Layman John Westby of Groton assumed our pastoral duties. A suggestion was then made for Bergen to form a parish with Bristol. As a result, an unanimous vote was cast to dissolve parish affiliation with Bethlehem and Skudesnes and join with Bethesda of Bristol for a two-point parish, effective Jan. 1, 1969. Pastor Johnson resigned his pastorate at Bethesda to serve a parish in Alaska, so the councils of the newly formed parish served as a call committee and a call was extended to Rev. E. J. Olson of Maxbass, N. Dak. He accepted and was installed at Bergen May 11, 1969 by Dr. Gilbertson. A social evening honoring Pastor Skilbred and Pastor Olson was held. Pastor Skilbred still serves the Bethlehem-Skudesnes parish.

The Golden Wedding Anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Chris Kambestad was observed in June of 1969, with the ALCW assisting the family in preparations.

The winter of 1969 saw a record 91 inches of snowfall. Frequent snowstorms and blocked roads kept us from having services and Sunday School from midJanuary until Palm Sunday in March. Farmers suffered livestock losses and

adverse weather kept the surviving livestock from gaining properly. According to official records livestock gains were down 30 percent for the winter and labor costs up 30 percent for the same period.

The WMF became the American Lutheran Church Women (ALCW) in 1960. The ALCW continues active in the Lord's work at home as well as in mission fields. Stewardship projects of sewing clothes, making blankets and soap and assembling layettes are among activities. The three Bible study circles, namely Esther, Ruth and Mary-Martha, were organized with the ALCW merger. Pastors give Bible study lessons each month for the circle leaders. Highlights of the years have been the lutefisk and turkey suppers and fall festivals. World Day of Prayer has been observed since 1965 with neighboring churches and a pictorial directory of the Bethlehem-Skudesnes-Bergen parish was compiled in 1968.

The church building has seen several improvements, the main ones being painting the exterior and interior, new shingles on the roof, a tiled cement floor in the dining room. The altar, baptismal fount, chancel chairs and woodwork were refinished in 1969 and Tim Vogl retouched the altar picture at a cost of \$50.00.

Bergen Brotherhood was organized in 1939 with Palmer Loken as the first president. The group meets in the church and in homes, with programs ranging from timely topics to Bible study. A highlight for several years was the Ladies Night banquet they served during the Christmas holidays. The Brotherhood sponsored Bergen Boys 4-H Club with Selmer Sigdestad as leader. This club disbanded in the late 1950's. The boys club, along with the girls club, Handy Helpers, bought a set of white paramounts for the altar and pulpit. In 1967 a mixed group organized the Bergen 4-H club. There are 19 members at present. The Brotherhood purchased and erected two church road signs and each year furnishes a Christmas tree for the church.

The Charity Circle and Luther League have become one group—Family League. The League strives to be a family gathering for worship and fellowship. Several young people have attended International L.L. conventions and the high school students are members of a Hi-League with Bethesda.

The choir has been a part of the worship since the early days. Some members can attribute 50 years and more in the choir. Conrad Flakoll was one of the earlier directors. The choir gowns were acquired and used for the first time at our 70th anniversary observance. Two members, John R. Skaare and Selmer Sigdestad, have been presented the picture "Grace" from the group in appreciation of their years as members. Mrs. Maynard Sigdestad and Mrs. Ole Fosheim are the present directors.

Bergen records show 626 have been baptized and 486 confirmed. Present baptized membership is 189 with confirmed membership 149. Although the years see a decline in the number of farms in our locality, we are thankful to God for the remaining faithful members who enable us to keep our country church doors open.

"Now to Him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever."—Amen

#### THANK YOU

LEST WE FORGET—At this 85th anniversary let us pause to express our gratitude and humble thanks to the faithful pastors and the pioneer men and women of Bergen congregation whose untiring efforts and steadfast devotion has made this a reality and pray that God will bless us and direct us in His service.



**H. S. Skilbred**  
1965-1968

**1970-1985**  
**Compiled for the Centennial June 29 and 30, 1985**  
**by Mrs. Jeanette Sigdestad**

An important milestone for Bergen congregation is being observed June 29 and 30, 1985. We are celebrating our Centennial. Among our many blessings, we have been able to celebrate our Golden Jubilee, 70th and 85th anniversaries. Now we have reached our 100th birthday.

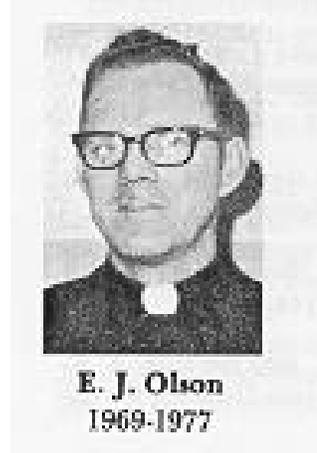
It is with thanksgiving to God and praise in our hearts that we observe this event with former members, pastors, and friends of Bergen congregation.

With the passing of time history is being made.

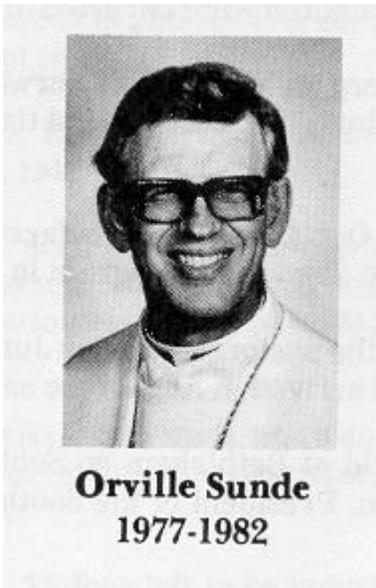
The Word and Sacraments continue to be the core of our life together. The program of the American Lutheran Church is focused on service. We have been inspired and guided by dedicated pastors to lead others to God and be of service to fellowmen.

Pastors have arranged Spiritual Emphasis meetings conducted by guest speakers and Evangelical Outreach programs in our parish. We have had guest speakers, and through these means we have the awareness of helping others spiritually, emotionally, and financially.

Besides our Outreach to others we have given generously to World Hunger annually. The Seminary Appeal of 1980 was also supported, and we have given to the United Mission appeal. Nebraska South Dakota Bible Camp has been a special project. The Brotherhood has also given funds. In 1977 they served a pancake supper using all proceeds for the camp.



Records show that over 850 quilts have been made and given to Lutheran World Relief as well as layettes, soap, kiddie kits, children's clothing, etc. Many boxes of clothing have been donated to the Marie Sandvik Mission in Minneapolis. Lutheran Social Services are sponsoring a Refugee Program to which we donated bedding, towels, bathroom and kitchen supplies in 1984. Our Sunday School also had a part in this project. We hope and pray that through these gifts the recipients will know that Christians care and will have courage for today and hope for tomorrow.



Our homes are in need of constant repair and maintenance, and so it is with God's house, our church. Since our last anniversary in 1970, fluorescent lights have been installed downstairs, new tables and chairs were purchased. The entrance, stairways to the church and to the downstairs have been carpeted, which enhanced the beauty as well as providing a safety measure. Memorial funds were used for these improvements. Stainless steel silverware, coffee servers and a buffer were bought with LCW funds.

A substantial monetary gift was given by one of our members to paint the exterior of the church in 1977. It was repainted the summer of 1984. The dining room, kitchen, and cloak rooms have been painted a number of times.

The cemetery committee had arranged groups to mow and maintain the cemetery, and families cared for their lots. In 1974 the congregation voted to begin Perpetual Care. Members of the congregation clean and mow the cemetery before Memorial Day, and then it is maintained by a paid custodian during the summer.

Memorial Night has always been a special time for our congregation. The cemetery committee plans a program and lunch with fellowship. Representative Frank Denholm was the guest speaker in 1973. He presented the American flag to the congregation. Several years later memorial money was used to buy a flag pole, and an area north of the church is used for the veterans' salute on Memorial Day.

Since 1972 we have had a memorial treasurer who lightens the duties of the congregational treasurer.

Our congregation has enjoyed many special events through the years. Every October we have a Harvest Festival. Usually a musical group or individual furnishes the program. A planned lunch or meal is served to members and visitors. A number of years we had a silent auction. Proceeds and offerings are used for benevolent causes.

The men of the congregation are very willing to help with the work whether it be cleaning, painting, or helping with special events. In 1972 they served a Mother-Daughter Banquet to 80 people.

Weddings, receptions, wedding anniversaries, fellowship meals, Memorial and Christmas programs are among the treasured memories.

One of the most unique events was the Christmas program of 1980. Our Sunday School has a small enrollment but that did not prevent the teachers from having an excellent program. The afternoon of November 16 the members of the congregation were invited to the Kenneth Anderson home where Paul Johnson took pictures in their pasture with sheep and shepherds as well as the manger scene in the barn. The Bergen men, women, and children dressed as Biblical characters, acted out their parts as the Christmas program was filmed. This film was shown December 22 to a full church.

October 31, 1983 marked the 500th birthday of Martin Luther when the Sunday school staff arranged an appropriate observance at the Sunday morning worship with Sunday School children and adults participating. Following the service, everyone was invited downstairs for birthday cake and coffee. Among the top 10 religious stories of the nation, the second-place story was the observance of Martin Luther's 500th birthday.

Bergen continues to have a Brotherhood organization. The Scope is used for the studies. They and the LCW pay our young people's campers fees. They also contribute Christmas treats and the tree for the church and have contributed to church-related projects. There was an average of 15 to 18 men who were active, but this number has decreased due to deaths, and several have moved out of the area.

There are not many children in Bergen, consequently the Sunday School enrollment is down, but we have an active adult class of about 10./The fall of 1984 our parish began the Search program. The group meets weekly with lay people as leaders.

Bergen and Bethesda became a parish one year prior to our 85th anniversary. Pastor E. Olson was our first pastor for the newly-formed parish. The parsonage is owned by Bethesda with Bergen paying rent to the congregation.

Due to the increasing cost of fuel beginning in 1975 we had services downstairs during the winter months to conserve fuel. In 1977 Bethesda invited us to join them during the winter, thus we worship with them January, February and March. The Sunday School joins Bethesda classes during this time.

Since 1970 Bergen LCW has met often in homes. The Circles and Brotherhood always meet at homes. Bergen joins Bethesda for Lenten services. Confirmation classes are combined and also Luther League.

Parish Luther League is very active. They meet twice a month, one of the meetings being devotional or study time. In 1984 they attended the Passion Play in Spearfish and toured the Black Hills. They had a three-day retreat at Roy Lake. Their aim now is to be able to attend the National Luther League convention at Denver in August. Ice cream social, car washes, spaghetti supper, leaf raking, and slave auction are some of the money-making projects for the trip.

The American Lutheran Church and South Dakota District have experienced many changes since our last anniversary. A new hymnal, called Lutheran Book of Worship, was published in 1978. A year later Bergen bought 65 books with memorial gifts designated for this purpose. The procedure for calling a pastor has changed considerably. Children at age 10 may partake of communion after three instruction periods by the pastor. Prior to 1973 the "South Dakota Lutheran" was a publication for each family in the District. It has since been incorporated into the "Lutheran Standard." During this era we have seen many women enter the ministry. One hundred twenty women pastors are wives of pastors. An increasing number of single women are being ordained and many women pastors are married to men of a different career.

On January 1, 1988 a new Lutheran church will begin its ministry. This will be a union of three Lutheran bodies. We will see some changes in the structure of the church.

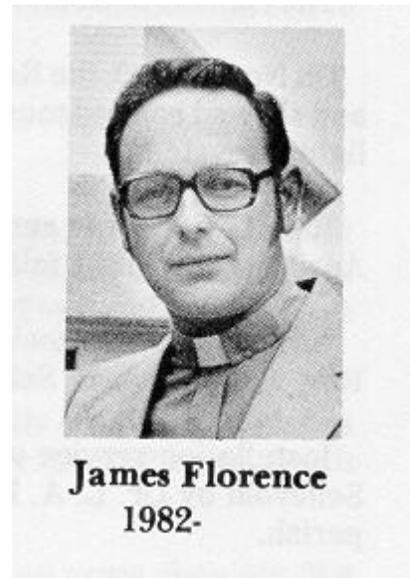
Four pastors have served us since our last anniversary, one of these as an interim. We are thankful for dedicated men who have been shepherds of the Bergen flock.

Edward Olson (May 1969-June 1977)

Orville Sunde (September 1977-January 1982)

Ronald Brugger (February 1982-November 1982) Interim

James Florence (December 1982-



Bergen mourned the passing of Pastor H. Skilbred, age 62, on May 9, 1978. He was our pastor from August 1965 to May 1968, and was a consecrated man of God.

Mrs. A. E. Distad, who was known throughout the conference for her willingness to serve in every capacity, passed away March 7, 1971. Blessed be the memories of these mentioned and the many men and women of our congregation who have left a heritage to Bergen members and friends.

Our congregation has always been fortunate to have good singers, music directors, pianists, and choir. Mrs. Maynard Sigdestad gave much of her time as choir director and pianist. On her retirement in 1977 she was given special recognition for her years of service. Other choir directors have been Mrs. Kenneth Anderson, Mrs. Robert Anderson, and Mrs. Ole Fosheim. Pianists have been Mrs. Robert Anderson, Mrs. Kenneth Anderson, Joan Skaare, Julie Skaare, Joy Skaare, and Valerie Anderson. Joy Skaare and Valerie Anderson are present pianists and have had this position since age 12.

The Bergen trio, namely Mrs. Orville Brandlee, Mrs. Ole Fosheim and Mrs. Marvin Holden, have sung for many occasions and worship services. They sang for our 70th anniversary, the 85th and we will hear from them at our Centennial.

The Bergen 4-H is still active. It is a girl's and boy's club includes area young people.

A news bulletin, "Bits of Bergen," is printed quarterly and is edited by Mrs. Orville Brandlee. Shut-ins especially enjoy this paper.

Our congregation has had the Centennial observance in mind since January 16, 1983, when a committee was elected at the annual meeting. In June 1983 and 1984 the LCW sponsored a craft and bake sale, dinner at noon, morning and afternoon lunch at the Bristol Cafe. A substantial sum was realized at both events for the Centennial. A 208 page cookbook was compiled by the ladies, called the Bergen Centennial Cookbook. Many were purchased for 1984 Christmas gifts. The LCW also made a cookbook in 1973. A beautiful pieced quilt has been made to commemorate our 100th birthday.

Two descendants of former Bergen members are ordained pastors. Greg Brandvold, son of Selma Holden-Brandvold, is a pastor at North Hollywood, CA. Paul Rohde, son of Betty Lou Bakken-Rohde, is a pastor at Lake Preston, SD.

Many members and former members remember the fire that destroyed the church on December 26, 1934. Two weeks after the fire the congregation voted to build a new church. A building committee of five men was elected. Only one member, namely Elmer Skaare, is living to celebrate this occasion.

Bergen's membership is 111 baptized members with 87 confirmed. Though we are a small number, we have been and are strong in the Lord's work. During the 100 years we have always met our financial obligations.

Statistics do not give the complete picture. The dedication and willingness of members to work in various capacities cannot be measured. We think of men and women who have given much of their time and talent as council members, officers of auxiliaries, Sunday School teachers, singers, pianists, custodians, cemetery committee, and ladies who have given many days of their time sewing World Relief quilts and other items. To each of you we owe a debt of gratitude. We are grateful to God for your spirit of devotion and service in His Church.

An anniversary of any kind is a time of memories. The following paragraphs contain some information of Bergen's early days. The historical facts are written in the first history of this book, but some activities of our pioneers are worthy of mention.

Early records inform us that some members walked one to five miles, often carrying a child, to worship services. Others came in wagons, buggies, and sleds. The services were held in homes and school houses before the church was built in 1892. Two years later a barn was built across the road from the church. Now horses could be inside during the service.

In 1891 the women of the congregation formed a Ladies Aid which met at noon in the homes. During the winter months the men also came and aid meetings lasted all afternoon. There were no planned programs but God's Word was read and studied and hymns sung. Portions from a book called Barne Ogdragelse were read from at every meeting. This book dealt with the proper training of youth. Programs and conversation were in the Norwegian language. The first year there was no charge for the noon meal. Then the ladies decided to charge 10 cents for the meal, including afternoon coffee. With the proceeds, material was bought for quilts which were stitched or tied at the Aid meetings. These quilts were sold at the June auction which was held annually at Lynn Lake. Many women used some of their egg and butter money to buy calico, lace, gingham, etc., which were sewn into blouses, shirts, and children's clothing and also sold at the June auction. Records show that calico was 8~ a yard, gingham 5~, satin 15~, lace two yards for 5~. The auction was one of the big events of the year for Bergen members and community. Shirts sold for 65~, aprons 25~, corset covers 65~, waists 70~, and pillow cases 50~. Pieced quilts sold for \$3.75 and less. The first auction was held June 1892 and was considered a great success. The men had a part in this sale. They set up an ice cream and food stand. A profit of \$11.75 was realized from the ice cream sales. Items at the food stand included bananas, cracker jacks, peanuts and candy. Profits from this stand was \$6.55. The sale of lemonade and cigars netted \$2.85. Cigars were in a package of ten and often used for gifts.

The Aid helped to furnish the new church. The first altar was a large wooden grocery box covered with red flannel. The first factory-made altar and pulpit were bought for \$55. The baptismal font cost \$6.50.

In 1927 Bergen launched a big change by using the English language. For the sake of older members, Norwegian services were held every six weeks. After two years this was discontinued.

The first lutefisk supper was November 1933. Prices were 25 cents for adults, 15 cents for children. The following year it was raised to 35 cents and 25 cents.

Beginning in 1933 and to the present time the national publication of our church has been in the homes of all Bergen families.

To be able to rebuild the church which was destroyed by fire in 1934 demanded sacrifice and hard work by the members. Besides individual contribution and much volunteer labor, there were fund raisers. The men had rabbit drives and the women served lunch to the hungry hunters for 10 cents. Lunch consisted of a sandwich, cake, and coffee. The ladies served lunch at farm auctions to raise money. They sold vanilla at a profit of 12 cents a bottle. A unique quilt was made by the Aid with members and friends' names embroidered on it. They charged 25 cents per name. When the quilt was finished, it was sold at the June sale.

We live in an era of many changes. The constant high cost of living is affecting everyone. Perhaps the best example is the cost of the postage stamp. Some remember when a letter could be mailed for 2 cents. In 1963 a first class letter cost a nickel. Since that time postage has increased to 22 cents. The postage stamp doesn't have a monopoly on inflation. We are aware of this when we go shopping. When we observed our 85th anniversary, hamburger was 25 cents a lb.; in 1977 coffee was \$3.25 a lb.; 1980 sugar \$4.50 for 10 lbs.; 1981 unleaded gas \$1.45 and fuel oil \$1.15. Prices on the mentioned items have moderated some. Problems more serious than inflation are violence, alcohol and drug abuse, immorality, political unrest and threat of nuclear war.

We could easily become pessimistic, but we have been given God's Word. The message of the church to any age is a message of hope and peace. Our Christian faith was given to us by our forefathers. Faith brightens our outlook and teaches us to look to our heavenly Father, the giver of all good and perfect gifts. Faith keeps our eyes focused on Him who is the answer to every problem.

Times were difficult for our pioneers. Circumstances brought struggles and hardships but God gave them faith and courage to begin our congregation and a vision to spread the gospel to other parts of the world. Let us be thankful for this wonderful heritage. May we realize and appreciate the sacrifice and prayers of our pioneer men and women.

For our Centennial Bergen chose "God's Word Our Heritage" as its theme to commemorate the efforts of our forefathers. Our congregation was built on God's Word. May His word guide our way to spread its light from age to age.

***How blessed is this place, O Lord  
Where thou art worshipped and adored.  
We gather round to sing thy praise  
With thankful hearts our voices raise.***

***With humble hearts we hear thy Word  
And may our prayers, dear Lord be heard.  
Here let the weary one find rest  
And troubled, grieving hearts be blest.***