

## The Story of the South Beef River Lutheran Church

Provided by Sandra Isaacson  
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The South Beef River Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation, is located six miles southeast of Osseo in the town of Garfield just east of the intersection of county Highway B and FF in Jackson county. The congregation was organized after church services on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 1870. Professor I.B. Frick preached that day on the Pentecostal gospel text. Present also were Pastor Svennungsen of French Creek. The original charter members were few, consisting of 15 families and 1 bachelor. They were: John Hansen, Knut Neilson, Nils Nilson, Ole A Hjelmistad, Amund Andersen, Gunnar Olsen, Avle Larsen, Nils Knudsen, Andreas Larsen, Pete Baardsen, Hans Martin Pedersen, John Olsen, Ole Olsen, Henrick Trulsen, Fredrik Olsen and Ole Olsen Onstad, bachelor. The following children were baptized on that day: Mathilda, daughter of the Knut Nielsen's; Elizabeth, daughter of the Ole Hansen's and Albert, son of the Hans Larson's. Four services were held in 1870 by the Reverend Erik Jensen and Reverend Svennungsen. The cemetery was dedicated December 3, 1870. The church got its name because of the river that ran about a quarter of a mile from its location.

From the beginning, the South Beef River Congregation was served from Trempealeau Valley, the mother of most of the Lutheran congregations of Norwegian Lutheran in Trempealeau and Jackson counties. Four services were held that first year by Pastor Jensen, assisted by Rev. Svennungsen. In 1871, SBR joined with the Pigeon Creek Parish which consisted of Pigeon Creek, Upper Pigeon Creek, Hale, and Whitehall. Pastor L. Sherven, the first resident pastor, served the Pigeon Creek Parish from 1871 until 1876 when he accepted a call to French Creek in 1876.

Being without a pastor, the Pigeon Creek Parish authorized the Church Council of the Synod for the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America to call a pastor from Norway. Emanuel Christopherson, who had completed his theological training at the University of Oslo, Norway, accepted the call and arrived in the summer of 1876 and settled in Pigeon Falls.

Public worship was held in homes and nearby schoolhouses for several years. The people of the congregation began to see the need for a church and the decision to build was made. A small church was built, completed in January, 1878 at the cost of \$500. It was small, but large enough for their present needs. On July 2, 1883 the church was completely destroyed by a tornado.

The congregation had grown much larger, and it was apparent that a larger church building was needed to meet the needs of a growing congregation. The congregation immediately voted

unanimously to build a new church. Such a church was immediately started and was completed in 1885 at the cost of \$4,100. This church, larger than the first one, was 32 feet by 48 feet by 18 feet high, with an entry 20 feet by 12 feet by 14 feet high. It was dedicated on June 25, 1885, by the President of the Eastern District of the Norwegian Synod, H. Halverson. Other Pastors attending were: Mollen, Heyer, Myhre, Urberg and the congregation's Pastor Emanuel Christopherson. Pastor Christopherson faithfully continued to serve the congregation until he passed away on March 23, 1909. That same year on June 1, 1909, the church was struck by lightning and destroyed by the fire. This was indeed a trying time for the congregation as Pastor Christopherson had served the congregation for almost thirty-three years. Such trials and tribulations, following one after another, caused deep sorrow in the congregation and also caused much serious thought and self-appraisal. Certain that even with these trials, the Lord had the good of the congregation in mind. With the help of God, the congregation survived these trials and through them became even stronger in unity and self-sacrifice.

After the death of Pastor Emanuel Christopherson, the congregation was served temporarily by Pastor O.K. Ramberg from 1909 to 1910. In 1910 the Pigeon Creek Parish, which then consisted of South Beef River, Pigeon Creek and Upper Pigeon Creek, comprised a call committee. Pastor Einar B. Christopherson, son of Pastor Emanuel, was called as Pastor and he accepted. The congregation promptly made plans to build a new larger and more modern church than the one destroyed by lightning. This is the church that stands today. A plan worked out by Runnestrand of Ettrick was accepted. A building committee was chosen consisting of the following: M.C. Johnson, C.M. Larson, Johan Olson, T.R. Kittelson, and Martin B. Olson. It was decided to move the new building across the road from where the previous churches had stood. In the spring of 1910, the work on the church began. Johan Olsen erected the basement, using stones hauled in by many members from the congregation. The basement is 8 feet high under the whole building. Martin B. Olson had the contract to build the church. The building of brick veneer is a short cross structure 32 feet by 48 feet by 20 feet high. The chancel is 20 feet by 22 feet with two small rooms, one on either side. The base of the steeple is 12 feet by 12 feet and the height of the steeple and spire is 100 feet. High up on the bell tower the pinnacles atop the four corner piers were surmounted by finials. The tower holds the large bell, that when rung can be heard though the valley. There is also a clock on the bell tower. The pulpit and alter were built by Rennestrand of Ettrick, and the baptismal font and numeral tablets were built by Charlie Amundson. The altar painting by Herr Gount, depicts Jesus and Peter walking on the water and is one of the few items that was saved when the second church burned. The pews are a comfortable old fashioned oak, carved in a classic design. The pulpit is raised high above the congregation with steps leading to it. The pulpit, alter rail, baptismal font as well as all the other wood surfaces were highly polished. The vaulted ceiling has curved oak beams. A gallery runs around three sides of the church, supported by Corinthian columns. Many beautiful choirs have sung from the gallery, as well as special music for various events. This church was

built at an estimated cost of \$10,500. The level farm land all around speaks of quiet rural living by people who have persevered in their faith. Little did the founders and builders know that the steeple and church would be seen by millions of people from all over the nation while traveling by on the Interstate, which was built just to the west of the building.

On June 11, 1911, Rev. Kvasse, then President of the Eastern District of the Norwegian Synod, laid the cornerstone of the present church in the name of the Triune God. The following pastors were present assisting in the dedication: O.K. Ramberg, S.S. Urberg, S. Folkestad and the congregation's Pastor E.B. Christopherson.

The need for a new parsonage was recognized by the Pigeon Creek parish. In 1912 the old parsonage, that was built in 1876, was sold and moved across the road. A new one was built on the old site at a cost of \$4,309.32. They received \$615.25 for the old parsonage and other items, leaving a balance of \$3,694.07, of which South Beef River's share was approximately \$1231.00. This parsonage was sold, when the parish alignment dissolved in 1964, and is still in use as a private home, as is the original parsonage, on the northwest bank of the Pigeon Creek pond.

Mrs. Iver Hoff organized the Sunday School in 1919. Other teachers were Rena Pederson, Amanda Holt, Mrs. Julian Larson and Mrs. Martin Jermstad. The exact date of the First Ladies Aid is not known, but the first written records date back to 1908. However it is recorded that back in 1888 or 1889 there were three Aids: The first aid organized was Golden Valley with Mrs. Ingebor Halverson as president. Later that year, Church View was organized with Mrs. Julius Larson as president. In 1909 Beaver Creek reorganized with Mrs. C.M. Larson as president. The meetings were conducted in the Norwegian language, they met in homes and it was an all-day session with dinner and lunch free. Later they started having their meetings in the afternoon with a ten-cent charge for lunch. Each group worked separately, but for the same purpose- Parochial schools and missions. They sewed aprons, men's and boy's shirts, pillowcases, knitted mittens and stockings. When they had a large supply on hand they would have a sale. This was their main income. On January 6, 1916, the three aids served dinner at the annual meeting of the congregation, which became a tradition. On June 8, 1928 the three aids met at the church basement and voted to unite. Mrs. Martin Jermstad was elected president. On January 1, 1961 after the merger, which led to the formation of the American Lutheran Church the Ladies Aid became known as A.L.C.W. Mrs. Lloyd Nelson was the first president. Circles were not organized until November.

Some interesting facts were recorded in the annual reports of the congregation. In 1914, it was voted to repair the horse barn and supply hay for the pastor's horses. The use of tobacco in the church was denied in 1916. It is of interest to note that a budget of \$2,000.00 was adopted in 1952. In 1964, by standing vote, it was decided that women of the congregation be given the

right to vote. A new organ was purchased for the church at a cost of \$200.00 in 1914 and then in 1951 a Consonata organ was bought. In 1965, a Baldwin electric organ was bought, which was used until 2004 when a new organ was purchased.

The transition from the Norwegian to the English language was becoming evident in confirmation instruction and church services. In 1932 it was decided to have Norwegian and English services every other time. However, it was not until 1950 that the Constitution was reprinted from Norwegian to English. Until sometime in the 1950s, the men and boys sat on the right side of the church, so they were closer to the pulpit and pastor, and the women and small children and young girls sat on the left side.

From time to time improvements were made and the church building was made more comfortable and pleasant for public worship. Electricity supplied by the REA was installed in 1941 thus making it possible to install an oil furnace the same year. In 1944 Art glass windows were installed at the cost of \$1,829. The lancet windows run from the tops of the downstairs pews and continue up beyond the gallery coming to a point near the ceiling. The old windows were sold for \$60. The interior of the church was also redecorated that year.

In 1947 the Rev. and Mrs. E.B. Christopherson were given a three month vacation to go to Norway. During his absence the Rev. N. E. Halvorson served the congregation.

The 76<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the congregation was celebrated in 1956 with appropriate festivities. Another anniversary was observed in 1960 when the SBR congregation joined the other three congregations in a golden jubilee celebration at the Pigeon Creek Church in honor of the Rev. E.B. Christopherson's ordination and installation as pastor of the Pigeon Creek Parish.

The congregation was saddened three years later by the death of their Pastor on November 19, 1963 at the age of 78 years. (Pastor Christopherson's funeral and President John F. Kennedy's funeral were held on the same day.) He had served his congregation faithfully for 53 years. He and his father, the late Emanuel Christopherson had serviced the Pigeon Creek Parish for 87 years.

Pastor Christopherson confirmed several generations of many families and is remembered with fondness. Prior to Confirmation the students answered questions in front of the congregation, in early days it was the day of Confirmation and later it was held on a Sunday evening about two weeks prior to Confirmation. Questions from the teachings of the Catechism were asked and each student was to learn a verse from a hymn and say that verse when questioned. This could be very nerve racking as each student wanted to make their family proud and impress the Pastor.

Prior to Pastor Christopherson's death, plans had been laid for a new parish alignment with the result that the Pigeon Creek Parish was dissolved. In 1964, the South Beef River Congregation voted in favor of forming a new parish with the King's Valley Lutheran congregation. The following year it was voted to include the Price congregation if they so desired, and Price later became the third congregation in the new alignment, thus forming what has come to be called Trinity Lutheran Parish.

It was now necessary for the newly formed Trinity Parish to purchase a house for the pastor, so the former Bert Freng residence, in Osseo, was bought at a cost of \$6,000. Extensive remodeling was necessary to make it more convenient and comfortable.

In 1964, Ray Nichols, a recent graduate of Luther Theological Seminary, St. Paul accepted a call to be pastor, and after three years of service for the Lord accepted a call to be pastor of a newly formed congregation at Pierce, Idaho. Pastor Nichols' resignation became effect March 20, 1967.

Pastor O.G. Birkeland of Whitehall conducted Holy Week services and Easter services March 26, 1967, and then beginning April 1, Pastor Robert H. Arneson of Eau Claire began an interim ministry serving the three congregations.

In May of 1967, Pastor Clarence Solberg, assistant to the District President of the Northern Wisconsin District, conducted a self-study in the parish to determine the future of the congregations involved. All three churches of the parish voted to continue as they were, that is, to continue as a three congregation parish.

In June of 1967, a meeting was called at SBR Church to call a pastor. Pastor Robert Arneson was issued a call and in July accepted the call to serve. He served until 1984.

A special congregational meeting was held in 1968 for the purpose of discussing the extensive work necessary to repair the church exterior. It was voted to tuck-point where necessary and to paint the exterior trim of the building at a cost of over \$5,600. The following year the interior of the church was refurbished. The walls and ceiling were covered with sheet-rock and then textoned. All the woodwork and pews were re-varnished and the side pews were shortened and turned to face the altar. The entire upstairs was carpeted. Over \$10,000 was spent on the interior work on the building and the resurfacing of the parking lots. The driveway south of the church was closed off and reseeded for grass, and a security light was installed on the east parking lot. \$995 was spent in 1970 to have the art glass windows releaded.

South Beef River celebrated their Centennial on June 12, 13, 14, 1970, including a service in the Norwegian language on Saturday, June 13, by Pastor Urberg from Blair. A booklet of

congregation pictures and history was printed. A list of all confirmation classes from 1870 through 1970 was compiled.

Pastor Ernst Staehling served as interim pastor from September 2, 1984 until April 28, 1985, when Pastor Loren Barker was installed. Pastor Barker served from April 1985 until June 1990. Pastor Irwin Flaten served as interim pastor from June until September 1990 when Pastor Jonathan Stansfield was installed. He remained pastor until 1995. Pastor Etler (Duke) Johnson was interim from 1995 to 1996. Pastor Dwight Hanson served from July 1996 to June 2001. Pastor Dan Alexander was interim from July 2001 to May 2002. (Several major changes took place during this time, which will be discussed later.) Pastor Gregory Ofsdahl was installed in July of 2002 and remained until September 30, 2007. October 2007 to April 2008 Pastor Kathy Fullarton was the interim, Jeanne Warner was interim from April to June 30. Pastor Linda Marlett was installed on July 1, 2008 and served until August 8, 2017. Pastor Sandra Hutchins served as interim pastor from August 2017 until August 2018. Pastor Janelle Harrison started as bridge pastor in August 2018.

The SBR congregation held a 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration on June 11, 1995 with a morning service followed by a dinner and an afternoon program. The program had special music, roll call of confirmation classes and recognition of the oldest Confirmands, welcome and introduction of former Pastors, and Re-Dedication of the church. The theme was '125 in '95'.

Ground breaking took place in 2001 for a new addition, which included a fellowship hall, kitchen, lounge, handicap bathrooms and handicap access to the church sanctuary. Many large trees were removed and massive amounts of fill were hauled in to make the new addition line up with the existing building. The parking lots were also changed to provide better access to entries. The \$411,000.00 addition, complete with sidewalks and the road project was completed in the summer of 2002. Ribbon cutting for the addition was held in October of 2002. The old basement has been remodeled to create several separate rooms for the Sunday School classes.

In September of 2001, Price Church merged with the South Beef River congregation. The Price Lutheran Church building was closed and donated to the Osseo Historical Society and is still available for special occasions. Every year in September, a reunion worship service is held there.

The Price Lutheran Church is located 8 miles east of Osseo, just off Hwy 10. A history of the congregation goes back to 1886 when the first service was held at the Tindahl Schoolhouse and led by Rev.H.A. Heyer. Later that year, eighteen charter members met at the Andrew Johnson Opheim home to organize a new congregation. In 1887, a resolution was passed to retain Rev. Heyer as pastor. In 1888, the first constitution was adopted and that same year noted the first

burial in the Hillcrest Cemetery, for which the land was donated by John S. Johnson. The congregation, named Jackson Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church, began plans to build its own church building in 1910, after 20 years of meeting in homes, Tindahl and Carlson Schools and Lebanon Church of Levis. On a lot donated by C.A. Christianson, Nels Instefjord assisted by church members, began as carpenter of the building project. The cornerstone of the new church was laid in 1912. In 1927 the name was changed to Price Evangelical Lutheran Church. Before the congregation's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 1986 a number of improvements were made to the building. The Price congregation has been served by the following pastors prior to joining Trinity Lutheran Parish in 1964. H.A.Heyer (1886-1899) P.A.Toft (1899-1098) S.Folkstad (1909-1920), J.H.Preus (1920-1930), N.E.Halverson (1930-1948), Jack Olson (1950-1953), Paul Felheim (1953-1955), P.Parkhurst (1956-1960 and E.G.Burtness (1960-1964). Price has been part of these alignments: Bruce Valley and Strum, Bruce Valley and Elk Creek, Calvary, Neillsville and King's Valley and South Beef River-the present Trinity Lutheran Parish.

Sunday, July 25, 2010 the congregation met to celebrate the church's 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary and reminisce about the pastors that have served from the pulpit and the history of the congregation. Many changes, both in the country surrounding the church and within the church have taken place during those 140 years. The hitching posts, horses, sleighs and buggies have been replaced by the hum of gasoline engines. The surrounding farm lands which were mostly dairy farms, producing milk to be hauled to the local creamery in large cans weighing about a 100 pounds each, are now mainly crop farms. The few dairy farms remaining, have their milk picked up by large trucks and hauled miles away to be made into the dairy products that line our local grocery coolers.

The one room schools, that taught all eight grades have long been closed and the children, who used to walk several miles to school, are now picked up by a bus and taken to the district schools.

The annual lutefisk suppers, which served 700-800 people in the church basement are only a distant memory. Those lutefisk suppers were quite the undertaking. Tents were set up outside by the back door to cook the lutefisk and rutabagas, hot water was hauled from the Golden Valley Cheese factory in the large milk cans to wash dishes. Several hundred pounds of potatoes were cooked and mashed, pies, lefsa and possibly another vegetable or salad were brought to the tables. People bought their meal tickets and waited upstairs for their ticket numbers to be called so they could wind their way down the steep, narrow stairways, ducking their heads near the bottom so they didn't get a concussion, to eat all they wanted for as little as 50 cents. We now have the modern kitchen and everything on one level to serve the Harvest dinner on the first Sunday in November.

During most of the time that Christopherson was the Pastor, Sunday services were held only every other week, as he had four churches to serve after Hixton joined the parish. SBR services were at 11:00. On Christmas and Easter, the pastor would do services in each church so SBR services were usually at 2 pm. The Sunday School Christmas program was usually on the Sunday evening prior to Christmas. The Sunday School students waited in the basement until it was time for the program to begin, then went up both stairways singing, meeting at the back of the church and walked in pairs down the middle aisle to their reserved seats. Costume changes took place either in the little room on the left of the church or in the basement. After the program was completed, the exchange gifts were handed out. A bag of candy and peanuts and were given to the children. A beautiful red delicious apple was given to everyone attending. Some of those traditions still continue today. It was always so exciting to come to the church at night and see the lights shining through those big beautiful stained glass windows with snow glistening on the roof and lawn.

Legacy Sundays were held in recent times to remember the history of the church and the cemetery. Pastor Gary Olson, the only son of the congregation in the ministry, graciously came to bring the message. Pastor Gary Olson was ordained June 11, 1967. The cemetery had placards placed by the graves, giving a little history of the deceased. A meal was served, and some years special programs were held in the afternoon to continue the remembrances. Special music and readings were also part of the festivities.

The church has upgraded to geo-thermal heat (\$80,000) and had major repair to the hundred foot, hundred-year-old steeple. The steeple repair cost \$175,000. The whole church cost less than \$11,000 when it was built so one can see how much things have changed.

Information taken from Centennial booklet, newspaper articles and from congregational members.