

Northland Lutheran Church History

A little over 160 years ago Ole Olson Wrolstad, a Norwegian immigrant, moved from Rock River in Jefferson County, with his family to a desolate area near the South Branch of the Flume Creek in the Town of Harrison, Waupaca County. The land was wild and full of possibilities for a man who had ambitions to create his dream to build a sawmill. The creation of the sawmill and the Norwegian heritage of the area attracted other Norwegian families who needed employment and a place to create their homesteads. With the increase of families in the area, the Northland community was founded.

As the Northland area grew, more opportunities were available to the Norwegian settlers to keep their traditions and heritage alive. Religion was kept to small gatherings or a long trip to church in Scandinavia. With the influx of Norwegian immigration to the area other Norwegian Lutheran Churches were formed; New Hope was formed in 1856, Alban was organized in 1878, and Hitterdahl in 1882. The formation of these churches still did not offer much of an opportunity to the settlers in Northland because all the churches were too far away for large families to travel to. Confirmation students found traveling to New Hope or Alban a deterrent to continue their religious studies. As a result, the people in the Northland area felt distanced from their religion.

In 1890, Anders Solom made the first attempt at creating a church in Northland by gathering donations amounting to \$700. A meeting was then called at the Loberg Schoolhouse to organize the formation of a congregation and church in Northland. Pastor Eidahl, the pastor of New Hope and Alban opposed the formation of a congregation and building of a new church, so all plans for building were dropped.

A new pastor would bring new challenges for the Northland community. In 1904, Pastor O. Farseth, came to serve Alban and New Hope. With renewed vigor the people around Northland tried a second attempt to organize a new congregation but this time they met even stronger opposition from Pastor Farseth. So yet again plans were set-aside for the new congregation. What the people of Northland came to learn later was that after the second attempt to organize a new congregation, Pastor Farseth met with the people of Norske to come up with a site to build a chapel in their area. This chapel would belong to the New Hope and Alban congregations and would be served by their minister. When word of this plan reached the people of Northland there were massive outcries of rejection for the idea. The plans for the chapel were soon dropped.

With feelings being hurt and the lines of trust fading between the people of the Northland community and Pastor Farseth another meeting was called to order on December 13th, 1906, by Lorin Wrolstad and John Barkimo. Pastor Farseth declined to attend the meeting because he did not want to be part of the project. The ambitious group of Norwegians called this meeting for the soul purpose of deciding where a church in Northland was to be built. The meeting was called to order by Lorin Wrolstad. Ole Borge was elected chairman but did not accept, so Even Erickson was elected in his place. Secretary-elect for the meeting was Ole Buslett. Most of the members present were in favor of organizing a congregation and building a church in the Northland community. Two places were mentioned as possible building sites. The first place was the home farm of Mr. Matt Hanson (across from Northland Ballroom) and the other site is where the church currently stands. The initial vote that evening lead to a tie and no definite building site was decided. Jorgen Bergen, Kittel Barkimo, and Andrew Myhre were elected to start raising money for the building of a church. Robert Anderson, Gulbrand Nelson, and Martin Wrolstad were elected to sign up new members for a congregation.

It did not take long for Pastor Farseth to hear about the progress of the congregation and a future church in Northland, and he immediately began to gather support for a chapel in the Norske/Northland area. When the people of the Northland area heard the promise of a chapel in the Norske/Northland area and that it would be supported by the minister of Alban and New Hope they were so disappointed with Pastor Farseth. John Barkimo summed up the feelings of the area the best in a letter, "I can't believe anyone would hinder the building of a church when surely every minister and teacher should rejoice in every church steeple that could be raised to the glory of God."

January 2nd, 1907, a meeting was held to go over the list of people who committed to a church in Northland. It was discussed at the meeting that people North of Northland would stay with the Alban and New Hope congregation because Pastor Farseth convinced them that a church in Northland would never last. With that information taken into consideration the location of the church building was decided to be in its current location because of its pristine location on the hill. The land was donated by the Wrolstad Estate. A committee was elected to get an estimate for a church building. The meeting was adjourned.

As spring approached, Ole Buslett called a meeting to finalized planes for a congregation and church in Northland. On March 18th, 1907 the motion was made to start a Norwegian Lutheran Congregation in Northland, the motion was passed, and Northland Lutheran Congregation was formed.

The cost of the building was discussed at the meeting and it was approximated that the building would cost \$3000. Twenty-four men donated money in increments of five dollars to one hundred dollars. A total of \$1,210.50 was collected at the meeting. The newly formed congregation voted to borrow \$1000.00 from the Farmers State Bank of Iola. The funding came up short of their goal to start the building in the spring of 1907 so construction was delayed for one year.

Meanwhile Pastor Farseth heard the results of the March 18th meetings and immediately went door-to-door and talked with families about what a bad idea it would be for them to leave New Hope and Alban to start Northland. He was unable to change the path of progress and as a result he announced that he would sever all ties with the new Northland congregation and their church.

On June 10th, 1907 the newly elected officers called a special meeting to elect Ole Borge, Lorin Wrolstad, and Ole Buslett to the Northland Church building committee. One recommendation for the building was that the church must face East.

At a special meeting the Northland congregation debated who they should send call letters to. Despite all the trouble that Pastor Farseth caused he would be contacted first, after all he was the pastor for most of the people in the new congregation. A group met with Pastor Farseth at the New Hope parsonage with to hopefully mend the hurt feelings that have occurred with him and Northland. Unfortunately, Pastor Farseth still wanted nothing to do with the Northland Congregation or their church. A few days after the meeting with Pastor Farseth, John Barkimo met with Pastor Mathieson of Iola. Mathieson did agree to serve as Northlands minister if none of the call letters were answered.

Now that they had a minister lined up, the building began, and every member had to work one day to help clear the timber off the land. In July, 1907, the building was started. Foundation work was done by Theodore Torstenson (part of his wages to include free room and board, he stayed at the home of Lorin and Sophia Wrolstad). Torstenson and apprentice Hans Halverson cut all the stone used on the basement by using a drill and a wedge. Ole Langdock, a carpenter by trade, and Eddie Myhre also worked on the foundation.

In August 1907, after the foundation was completed, framing of the building began by John Barkimo, John Olson Reiersen and Otto Halvorson. In January 1908, the church was plastered by Ole Grove. A gas light was to be installed and centered in the main beam and rather than having the carpenters climb to drill the hole in the thick beam, Lorin Wrolstad brought his 30-30 rifle, laid down on his back aimed for the beam and shot a hole for the light to hang from.

There were still members of the congregation that wanted to mend relations with Pastor Farseth. A letter was sent to him asking if he would be willing to preach every third Sunday of the month in the afternoon and meet with the confirmation classes at a salary of \$200 a year. He accepted the call but he said he would not meet with the confirmation classes. He also demanded that a writer for the local newspaper, who belonged to Northland, rescind the negative article that was printed about him because he mixed English with his sermon.

The first services of the Northland Lutheran Church were held on January 5th, 1908, at the Loberg schoolhouse and at the Thompson Schoolhouse on January 19th. Then on February 16th, 1908, the first service was conducted in the partially finished church. The seats were only wooden planks on wooden blocks and only part of the floor was finished, the rest only being sub-floor. During this service the baptism of Ruben Brubakken took place. He was baptized in the tool chest of John Barkimo because there was no baptismal font.

In the spring of 1908, the pews were put in and the steeple was built. John Johnson and John Barkimo built the steeple. Shortly after the church was built it was struck by lightening and the top rod was damaged. John Peterson, a local blacksmith, offered to repair the damage for \$10. He put together three long ladders tied them together with ropes and placed them against the steeple; he climbed the hazardous scaffolding and bent back the rod.

As time passed relations with Pastor Farseth did not improve. During the summer of 1908, Pastor Farseth became ill and resigned as pastor of Northland. Pastor Hvid agreed to come from Minneapolis and aid the church in their time of need. Pastor Hvid helped and encouraged the congregation every chance he had during the three months he served. This was such a change for the Northland congregation. The church was completed and the corner stone was laid on October 25th 1908.

Pastor Hvid and Pastor Nelson from Scandinavia were present for the special service. A wood furnace was installed in the basement and all members were to report for one day of wood chopping. This routine existed for several years. Mrs. Even Erickson donated the first organ and the first organist was Lora Thompson.

After working over a year on the church building John Barkimo's wages came to \$756.50. John also became the first janitor at a salary of \$10 a year. Besides building the church, John Barkimo an artist in woodcarving and cabinet making, built the beautiful altar which has merited much praise. As Malcolm Rosholt wrote, the altar was Barkimo's ("mester fog") masterpiece. Barkimo also built the pulpit and the baptismal font. The late Mr. Barkimo was recognized as a master of his craft by the Norwegian Historical Society of Decor, Iowa. His many carvings are in great demand today.

The statue of Christ was purchased and installed on the altar. Elmer Pendergrast of Stevens Point painted the statue. On February 22nd, 1909, Northland received an offer from the Hitterdahl congregation that started the bond between the two churches. Hitterdahl asked Northland if they would join them in calling a pastor. Call letters were sent out and Pastor T. E. Rogne accepted the call. Before Pastor Rogne came to the churches he rented a house in Iowa because the parsonage in Hitterdahl was not completed. On his way to Iowa Pastor Rogne met with Pastor Farseth. After the meeting Pastor Rogne sent back his call letter stating a change of mind and his apologies for any inconveniences. Another call letter was sent to a seminary student, Rev. M. J. Berge, who accepted. He served the parish from 1909 until 1912.

The first funeral was held in June, 1909, for Kristene Erickson (Mrs. Even Erickson). Black and white material was purchased at the store to drape the altar pulpit, and the front of the balcony. Later a purple material was substituted for the black. The idea of draping the church was abandoned with the funeral of Lorin Wrolstad in 1937.

On the second day of Christmas in 1909 the church had the first Christmas tree festival at the church. A large Christmas tree was set up inside the altar and the Sunday School children performed a program. Ole Grove, Ole Kittelson, and Andrew Anderson collected money to purchase treats for the children. Each child at the service received a special wrapped bag of candy. Dishpans of apples were passed among the congregation as Christmas gifts.

On March 11th and 12th, 1910 a circuit congregational meeting was held at Northland. The church was filled to capacity both days. There were seven pastors to assist at the meeting. On March 13th, the church was dedicated to Christ. The seven pastors, who were present at the meeting, were present to celebrate with the Northland congregation.

In the summer of 1910, Norwegian and Parochial schools were held in the basement of the church with Pastor Berge as the teacher.

The first wedding performed was that of Hans Halvorson and Alvilda Hanson on March 29th, 1910. The next two weddings were those of Nels Hanson to Emma Erickson and Peder Halvorson to Ida Kolden, both in 1911.

On October 9th, 1910, the first confirmation service was held. The twelve confirmands: John Kruger, Carrie Larson, Gina Melum, Agnes Olson, Clara Erickson, Alma Huglin, Mabel Louison, Kathryn Berger, Selman Anderson, Agnus Lund, Myrtle Lund, and Alma Helgeson.

In the summer 1911, Ole Grove painted the inside of the church. November 1911, Northland's annual meeting was held Monday morning so the farmers could bring their cream to the Northland Creamery that same day. This year it was decided that a fence be built around the cemetery. It was strongly recommended that the families of the children who attended confirmation and school classes become members. Many families sent their young to confirmation classes here because it was much closer than Alban and New Hope.

In March 1912, Pastor Berge resigned. A call was then sent to Pastor Jens Mathieson who accepted but resigned on October 27th, 1913. A letter of call was sent to Dr. T. S. Kolste who accepted the call on December 31st, 1913.

In the spring of 1914, our church bell was installed. This was the first major item the women purchased for the church. The ladies held suppers, bazaars, and other sales to help pay for it. It has been commented about the beautiful tone of the bell heard on Sunday mornings.

The longest standing tradition of Northland started in the autumn of 1915, when the annual chicken dinners of the past switched to the Norwegian delicacies of Lutefisk. Since the first Lutefisk dinner began only two years were missed, one year because of World War I and the scarcity of potatoes and one year because of the flu epidemic.

In 1916, came the end of the wood chopping. Anyone who was willing to give firewood would be given credit toward their church dues.

Dark times came to the world in 1918, because World War I and a raging flu epidemic. A great number of church services and the annual Christmas Program were cancelled. A ray of sunshine broke through in 1919, as our service men were returning, and a very special Christmas Program was held at the church on Christmas Eve. For the families of the returning soldiers, it was both a joyous and sorrowful occasion.

The year 1926, brought more change to the Northland congregation. During the first nineteen years of existence all worship services were conducted in Norwegian, but more and more people were not fluent in Norwegian and could not understand the services. So it was decided that once a month there would be an English service. By 1956, it changed to only one Norwegian Service a month. Later it got to be six Norwegian services a year. Now a Norwegian service is a thing of the past except when our church son, John Wogsland comes home and gives the elderly and other Norwegians a complete service. The secretary's reports were written in Norwegian until 1940, when Kenneth Bergen became secretary.

In 1927, the basement was enlarged and remodeled. The same year an electric dynamo was installed by the pond by Lorin Wrolstad to generate electric power. The church was wired for light and a line was built from the mill to the church. The mill generated only direct current so it could be used for lighting. The cemetery was leveled and the cement boxes around the graves were removed so grass could grow and be cut.

By 1939, the R.E.A. Co-op constructed power lines to the town of Harrison and the church hooked up to the electric power. This was alternating current, which was needed to operate motors and high voltage appliances. One of the first motors the church purchased was to be used to pump the pipe organ. This job had previously been manually done.

The steeple was struck by lightning in 1940 causing minor damage. Two ski jumpers Milton Aasen and Jonas Bestul, who were familiar with climbing ski scaffolding, climbed the steeple scaffold and made the repairs to the steeple.

Up to this year it was custom for the men and boys to sit in the pews on the right side as they entered the church and women and girls sit on the left. This ended when women in the church were given voting rights, bringing great changes in the operation of the church. Through the influence of the women, the seating arrangements soon changed too.

In 1947, Jim Mead of Iola dug the first well at the church. A few years passed before the water was piped into the basement. This was greatly appreciated by the women of the church.

In 1953, Northland voted to eliminate the board of trustee structure and went with the present system of electing four officers and a group of council members. As a result Ralph Hanson was elected the first president of the church, because at that time he was the oldest trustee. An addition was added to the rear of the church for storage space and rooms for the Sunday School to meet. An improvement fund was started with the money from the Erling Barge Estate. Memorial money to the church was to be added to this fund and the money used for improvements in the church. A green carpet was purchased for the aisle in the sanctuary.

June 11th, 1956, Rev. H.P. Walker resigned as pastor to take a call in South Beaver and Hardies Creek Lutheran Church. A call letter was sent and Rev. Karl Lunde a graduate from the Lutheran Theological Seminary took the call as our Pastor.

On the 50th anniversary of our church, July 28th, 1957, over 800 persons were in attendance. Our pastor at that time was Karl Lunde. Former pastors I.M. Gjellstad and H.P. Walker were present.

In 1958 the red hymnals and service books were first used. At a regular service on December 27, 1964, a special ceremony was held at the church to add to the cornerstone and bring it up to date in keeping with the addition of the front entrance. Oliver Wrolstad did the building. Ella and Freeman Myhre purchased an acre of land from Clara Kropedoski, as a gift to the church to be used as a parking lot. The Cemetery Association also purchased an acre.

It was decided that the entryway at church needed to be enclosed and new flooring be put in the fish room and the upper organ room. This list of projects was completed in 1966.

On April 20, 1975, there was a special dedication ceremony during the church service for the new 200 Digital Computer Electric Organ.

Another step toward the modern age was taken in 1977 when a phone was installed in the basement of the church.

In 1979, was a busy year for Northland, as through much turmoil, the Green Hymnals and Service Book were adopted. More changes also took place as the church interior was painted along with the woodwork, which was painted white. While the inside of the church was being refreshed it was decided by the congregation that the outside of the church be repainted with a fresh coat of white paint. A new roof was also put on the church and the church was insulated.

The following year the installation of stained-glass windows, made at Rosholt Stained Glass Co., Rosholt, Wisconsin, was completed. A special dedication service was held after the installation.

In 1981, the outside of the church was painted again. This would be the last time the church would be painted because the siding was put on the church in 1987.

In 1983, the larger book holders for the back of the pews were purchased to accommodate the new Bibles that were bought for the pews. The pews themselves were given a facelift in 1988 when the burgundy padding was added to the seats.

In 1992 a new Narthex was built. The soul purpose of the addition was to provide handicap accessibility. There were other options considered but the congregation decided that the addition would be best for the church and the congregation in the future. As long as there was construction going on in the church the congregation decided that there should be other projects completed at this time. The organ room was opened up and a sound system was put in the church. The sanctuary was painted and new carpet was put in around the altar and the new addition.

The most recent improvements at Northland have been the remodeling of the church basement and the installation of carpet. In 2005, a green steel roof was put on the church.

In January of 2010 the members of Northland Church a second special Congregational meeting to resolve to leave the ELCA synod. This meeting was held with the Bishop Justman from the ELCA in attendance. By an overwhelming margin the Northland congregation voted to leave the ELCA and become a member of LCMC (Lutheran Congregation in Mission for Christ). During this special Congregational meeting the members of Northland also voted to split from Hitterdahl and become a sole congregation with Pastor Daniel Somers as our Pastor. Following this meeting Northland established its own church office, the previous office was held for Hitterdahl and Northland at Hitterdahl, in the former Pastor office, with Laura Krogwold as the first Church Secretary for Northland.

Following the Lutefisk Supper of 2012, the kitchen remodel started. The kitchen was gutted, and part of the old foundation was replaced because the stones were letting stream of water in the kitchen. The work continued for the following year with most of the work was donated by members of the congregation. The kitchen was ready for the 2013 Lutefisk supper.

There have been many uphill struggles to get the church started and others that have brought Northland, the little white church on the hill, to the place where it is today. Northland continues to grow and evolve and as long as God is present in our growth, we will continue to grow for many, many generations to come. Thanks be to God for his steady guiding hand and bless all who have helped make Northland what it is today. God bless.