

Church History

During the early years of its history, Elim Lutheran Church was an important center for the people in the community of Waterman. Most of the churches of the Columbia Conference can point back to humble beginnings, and Elim congregation is no exception. In fact, the embryo of life is to be found in the activities of lay people who had a heritage of Lutheran background that could not be easily put aside.

At the turn of the century, a group of devout men and women pledged their hearts and hands to become the Elim Evangelical Lutheran Congregation. Most of them were immigrants from Scandinavian countries. They brought to this country many admirable traits of industry, thrift and good citizenship, but of foremost importance was their deep devotion to God's Word and to His Church, and a firm resolve to bring up their children in God's way.

Soon the desire of the people to organize a congregation was strongly evident, so much so that during the year 1907 a number of Swedish immigrants were asked to sign a paper which would signify their intention of becoming members of a Lutheran church if organized. However, when the actual day of organization took place, many of the people declined membership, but there were still a goodly number very much in earnest about having an organized and functioning church in their midst. On the evening of September 30, 1908 worship services were conducted after which a meeting was held for the purpose of organizing. Thirty-four persons signified their desire to become a part of an Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Families would come from Seattle by boat, the "F.G. Reeves", and the "Atlanta", which the children liked best because it had a better horn! They docked at the Waterman dock where there was a store and one summer spent time on the beach and would journey up the hill to the Waterman School where church services were held. They also journeyed on the boat, which is now the "Virginia", a well-known pleasure boat in these present times. They also rowed where Harper is now in a rowboat and then were picked up there by church families and were transported to church.

There were many factors that contributed to making progress and growth of the congregation during the next decades slow and difficult. The fact that there was no resident pastor stationed on the field was the outstanding difficulty. Various pastors contributed their time and effort to minister faithfully to the congregation.

There was a house that was called "The Little House on the Corner" which was located at the Corner of what is now Woods Road and Hillcrest Drive. Everyone who was new in the area would have a place to stay since there were no hotels. This was a very small house -- sometimes two families lived in it. In 1925 "the church was begun -- and the field was theirs -- take care of this field". At that time the ladies had \$700 in their fund to contribute toward building of a church. The men and children

started doing the same because it was stated "Look what they could do together". The children had \$75.

"Elim was named after the place in the desert where 12 people had found rest and comfort under the trees-good water-and went away refreshed. They had named the spot "Elim". When the immigrants read about Elim in the Bible they felt their spot in Waterman with the good water and beautiful trees were as the Bible described Elim in the desert, so they named the church "Elim".

Hard financial struggles characterized these years as well. The life of the congregation was declining until in 1934 there were only 15 members. The history of the building of the first church and the acquisition of property covers a long span of years. The question concerning the buying of property was first brought up in 1909. It was not until 1931, however, that a committee of four, to act as the building committee. The building was erected in 1932. Dedication services on the old church were held on September 11, 1932. This must have been a thrill to the hard-working people who had all these years struggled to build their church, and now the dream became a reality.

The five years after 1939 showed a great upsurge of interest and activity at Elim. The Board of Home Missions took responsibility, and with the Regional Director of Home Missions supervising the students who worked in the field, there was a steady growth. There were then 60 students enrolled in the Sunday School and 30 adult communicant members.

At the annual meeting in January, 1943 it was decided to call a pastor and furnish \$720 per year toward his salary. A senior at Augustana Seminary was extended a call and arrived during the summer of this same year to serve the congregation of Elim. During the previous years, property was purchased for the parsonage. With these two events the congregation really began to grow and prosper. This was the first resident pastor, coming in August 1942, and during his term here he also conducted services at the Orchard Heights church where there was a Navy installation consisting of housing for 2,900 families of Navy employees and Navy personnel.

In 1905 the people of the community started a fund to buy a bell that was to be placed in the belfry of the first church to be built in Waterman. There being no church in the community at the time of purchasing the bell, the bell was placed on two poles in the schoolyard. Here it remained until the new schoolhouse was ready for use in 1912. The bell was then placed in the belfry of the new school when it was decided that it should remain there as long as the building was used as a schoolhouse and then, if there was a church, the church should receive the bell. When the schoolhouse was sold in 1948 and was no longer a school, (it is now known as the Waterman Clubhouse), the bell was removed and placed in the belfry of Elim. It took from 1905

to 1948 to reach the place it was originally intended for. When Elim built the new church in 1968 the much-loved bell was moved to the new site.

A great historical event took place on January 1, 1963 when four large church bodies- the Augustana Evangelical, the American Evangelical, the Finnish Evangelical, and the United Lutheran Churches merged to become the Lutheran Church in America. Before the merger in 1958, the old black "The Hymnal" was replaced with the red "Service Book and Hymnal". Elim purchased the new hymnals but they were not put to use until 1960. In later years a green hymnal was published -- "The Lutheran Book of Worship", so history repeated itself when people claimed a new pastor had caused the change. Elim has had many changes throughout its history, but naturally, as with any change, there are resistances to revisions of any kind.

It was decided that since there was a difficult financial period that Elim would drop the intern program. There was still a great need for a youth leader. In the spring of 1983 a very successful "Lay Renewal" weekend was held. This was the beginning of the activities for the 75th Anniversary of Elim Lutheran Church. We continue to pray for God's strength and guidance, and pray that we may continue to work together to further His Kingdom here and in the community and in the world.