



100th Anniversary

1926 – 2026

"To God Be The Glory"



Evangelical Covenant Church

1631 1st Avenue East, International Falls, Minnesota

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Author's Note:

The contents of this work are by no means exhaustive, and much of what is presented is based on the writings and memories of many who have gone before. That said, a considerable amount of care has gone into ensuring that truth and accuracy is foremost in the minds of the editorial staff.

PROLOGUE

“There is a Place called Heaven
I can’t quite tell you where,
But give your heart to Jesus
And He will lead you there.”

Over a century ago, an unknown, unseen hand carved these simple words on the wall of a little log cabin deep in the forest of Canada, just north of Baudette, Minnesota.

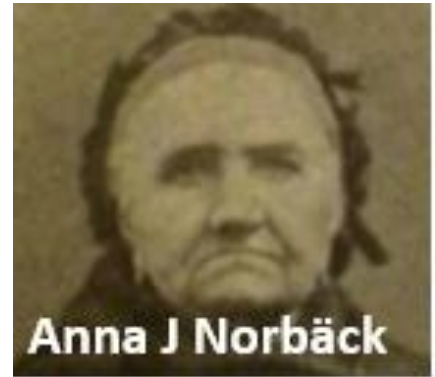
Discovered by a youth named Hilmer Francis, the words prompted him to accept Christ and later contact the Swedish Mission Covenant Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, asking them to begin a church in International Falls. In the 1920’s, they took on the establishing of this very church as their “Home Missions” project.

This is the story of that church; our church.

Chapter 1	Evangelical Covenant Church: Beginnings
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The origins of the Swedish Mission Covenant Church in the United States date to the early 1800's in Sweden.

Anna Jonsdotter Norbäck from Kroksta in Ångermanland Sweden (just North of Stockholm) had just gone through a spiritual crisis, and after listening to revivalist preachers, joined the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Sweden. She soon becomes a leader in this church and encouraged her congregants to dedicate themselves to studying the Bible and the writings of Martin Luther. Her expectation was that both needed to be interpreted literally. She was also known to have a beautiful singing voice, which she used to her advantage in her ministry.



When the revivalist movement spread through the Nordics, the religious landscape shifted dramatically. The movement challenged the Swedish state churches (Lutheran), as the "emotional religious sensibilities"

of the revivalists could not reconcile with the "rational" and some might say "cold and ritualistic" faith practices of the state church.



On the other hand, leaders of the state churches could not square the emotional appeal of the revivalists, referring to the group as an unsustainable movement, and no more than an "infectious affliction of the nerves."

Despite the resistance they faced from state churches, new revivalist congregations like the Baptist Union of Sweden and our own Swedish Mission Covenant were founded. And while in time the state church

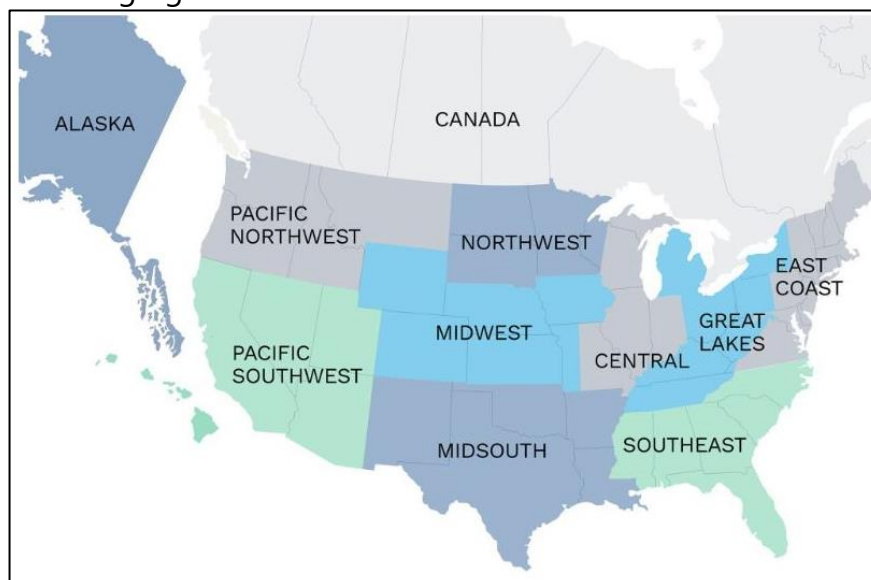
recognized the legitimacy of several other “breakaway” groups, as long as they recognized the authority of the state church, these initial revivalist movements were the first truly independent movements in the Nordics.

Their members organized congregations in accordance with democratic principles, and it has been recognized that in this way, the revivalist movement helped break down barriers to both democracy in the Scandinavian homeland and the struggle for universal, equal suffrage in this country and others.

As Swedish and other Scandinavian immigrants arrived in this country seeking vital faith and church reform, they called themselves Mission Friends, and they focused less on the doctrinal arguments of the day and more on personal faith in Christ and Scripture as the center of their life together. They gathered in small groups to read the Bible, sing songs, share a meal, and encourage one another in the faith. In time, the vision of these adventurous Swedish immigrants has become the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC), one of North America’s most diverse racial and ethnic denominations.



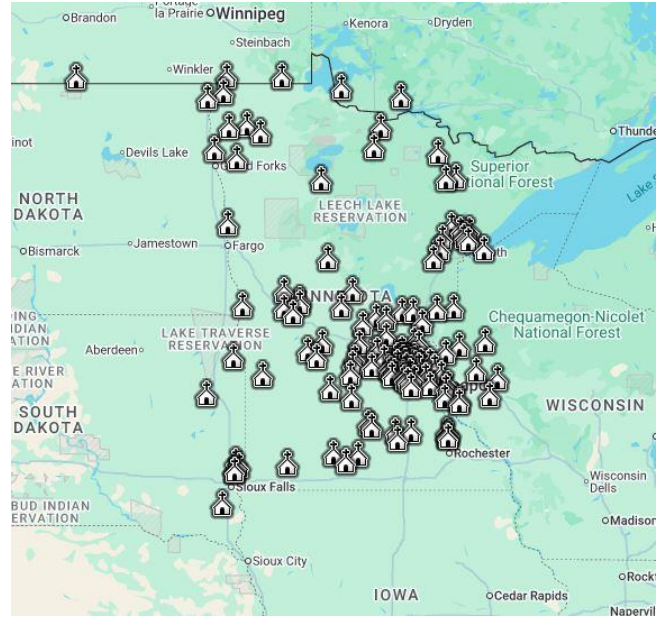
Keeping with this “small group” focus, in its early days, the ECC found its voice mostly in the congregations of the Midwestern small farm towns and in rural settings.



It is interesting to note that currently, the Evangelical Covenant Church of America is divided into 11 conferences, and we are part of the Northwest Conference.

This conference contains roughly 140 churches in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin. And because of our early midwestern roots, our conference, the Northwest Conference, (originally the Northwest Mission Association) is actually older than the Evangelical Covenant Church Denomination we are a part of.

Speaking of our Denomination, over the years a number of our pastors and lay leaders have held prominent roles in the leadership of the Denomination. Our fourth pastor, O. R. Swanson, went on to be elected Superintendent of the Denomination.



There was also Ralph Hanson, a very active lay leader in our congregation, who hailed from Birchdale, Minnesota. Ralph found increasing levels of responsibility in the Covenant, including Secretary of Foreign Missions, and the "Covenant Giving for Growth" program.

Today there are more than 850 congregations across the United States and Canada, and the Denomination also partners with the global church in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East/North Africa, and around the world.

Chapter 2	International Falls Evangelical Covenant Church: Beginnings
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"To God be the glory ... great things He hath done" is the theme which has echoed throughout the International Falls Evangelical Covenant Church for one hundred years. But how did it start?

*"There is a Place called Heaven,
I can't quite tell you where
But give your heart to Jesus
And He will lead you there."*

In the early 1900s, an unknown, unseen hand carved this simple poem on the wall of a little hunting log cabin deep in the forest of Canada, just north of Baudette, Minnesota. They were discovered by a young man named Hilmer Francis, and the words prompted him to accept Christ as his Lord and Savior. Not many years after this, Hilmer contacted the Swedish Mission Covenant Church (SMCC) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, asking them to begin a ministry and subsequent church in International Falls. In the 1920's, SMCC honored that request by establishing an International Falls ministry as their Home Missions Project.



Hilmer Francis

Pioneers of the church have recollections: "The grassroots of the church came from a firmly planted desire in the hearts and minds of Mr. and Mrs. Hilmer Francis who

requested the Northwest Mission Association send their field evangelist A.B.(Axel Botolf) Ost to conduct evangelistic meetings in view of starting a Covenant work."



A.B. Ost

Reverend Ost was perfect for this role in that not only was he a Swedish Immigrant, but also because he lived on a farm in Minnesota, and he was also a very forceful and persuasive speaker. After studying theology in Chicago, his calling as an evangelist led him to evangelism work in both this country, and later in Mexico where a number of churches were started.

Reverend Ost held a series of meetings in the winter of 1924, both in the rented City Hall on Fourth Avenue and in the Holler School. Pastor Stanley Anderson of Cook assisted with these, and typical of the response to these meetings, "an elderly Mr. Holler walked from Ranier to attend one of these meetings with the purpose of getting right with God. He became one of the original little flock."

Following this evangelism work, our first pastor, Oscar E. Johnson, received a call from the Northwest Mission Association (Now the Northwest Conference) in April of 1925 to engage in Home Mission work in the new congregation. (It should be noted that this is *not* the same Oscar Johnson who in 1904 began serving in the Lake of the Woods area, and was instrumental in the early days of the



Oscar Johnson, Olga and Son

Baudette Covenant Church.) However, this *is* the same Oscar Johnson who was the grandfather of our Associate Pastor Paul Langmade, who served the congregation in the early 2000's.

Pastor Johnson was able to return to the church in 1976 for the church's 50th anniversary, and he related that our first public meeting place was a vacant, second-floor room adjacent to a lawyer's office in town. He said that he went out and rented thirty folding chairs for the meetings. That first Sunday, attendance was only eight, but that night, 23 of the 30 chairs were filled.

On the third Sunday, a Sunday School was organized with an attendance of about ten. Soon after this, with the current space running out, the congregation moved into the Odd Fellows Hall for Sunday worship. Services were conducted here for about 13 months. It was also here that the Sunday School and church attendance experienced a marked increase.

In the summer of 1926, about six months before the new original church building was completed, a Conference District Tent was used for special meetings on the open spaces of Main Avenue between Twelfth and Thirteenth streets. A tent was also purchased and set up on the Holler addition. The tent and the Ole Antonson home were used for services while the construction of the church and parsonage was completed.



As mentioned, this original structure was finished just before Christmas in 1926. There was no basement under it, and very little if any insulation in the walls. It has been said that the fire in the church wood stove needed to be started well in advance of a service to

keep the chill off, and on many cold winter days it was just barely enough.

It is well worth noting that the Covenant Church of America, organized by Swedish immigrants, retained some Swedish traditions from the home country. One of those traditions was the early Christmas morning Yuleta Service. It was fitting that the first service held at the new Holler Mission church was the 6 a.m. Yuleta Service in 1926. We're told that even though the plaster was still wet and seats were improvised out of available nail kegs, a very good turn-out was reported. However, we're also told that at that hour, many of the children in the group had a difficult time staying awake.

Four months later, a ceremony of dedication was held in April of 1927 with the Rev. Theo Anderson, then president of Minnehaha Academy, Minneapolis, officiating.



At this dedication, charter members to the church were received, and a special recognition was made of the Sunday School, which by June of 1927 had the enrollment of 160 members.

The photo on the next page shows pastor Johnson (center left in the white shirt) and a small part of the Sunday School at that time.



And to help retire the nail keg seating, a gift of \$500 (almost \$12,000.⁰⁰ in today's value) was received and used to purchase 120 opera chairs, which arrived just prior to the dedication service. These chairs (seen here) were used in both the sanctuary and also in the choir loft. They served the congregation well, and some might remember that a number of these chairs were repurposed for classroom seating after the major Sanctuary construction was completed in 1965.



Another little-known fact is that one of the hanging lights from the original sanctuary now hangs in the stairwell leading to the present balcony.

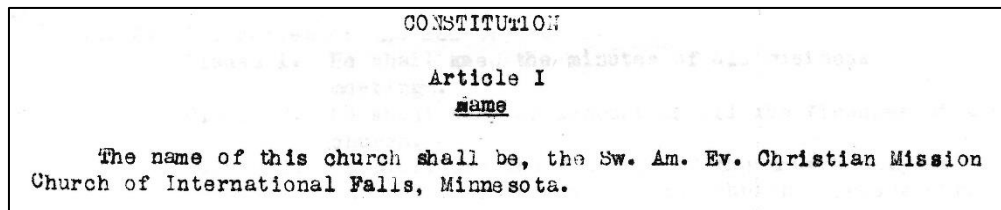
Chapter 3	What's in a name?
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According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word "name" means:

*"a word or phrase that constitutes the **distinctive designation** of a person or thing"*

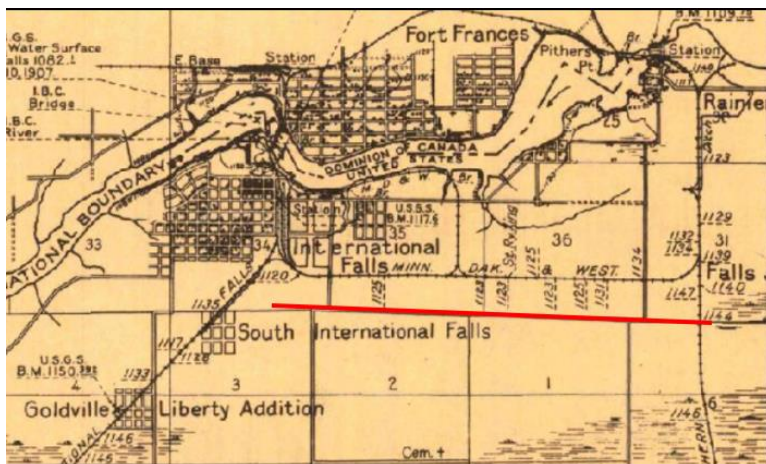
But what happens to that "distinctive designation" if a name keeps changing? Because as a church, we've had a bit of an identity problem over the years.

You see, in our records, we have an early constitution which states:



"The name of this church shall be, the **Swedish American Evangelical Christian Mission Church of International Falls, Minnesota.**" We really don't know when that constitution was written, only that it was probably pre-1930. Because in July of 1930, we filed official legal documentation involving our "Articles of Certification" and a "Certificate of Incorporation". At that time, we were listed on these documents as: the "**Holler Mission Church, Holler Minnesota**". And these two documents go on to say that the church was affiliated with the "**Swedish Mission Covenant Church of America**".

It's interesting that, as we talk about being from "Holler," Minnesota. Holler was a distinct



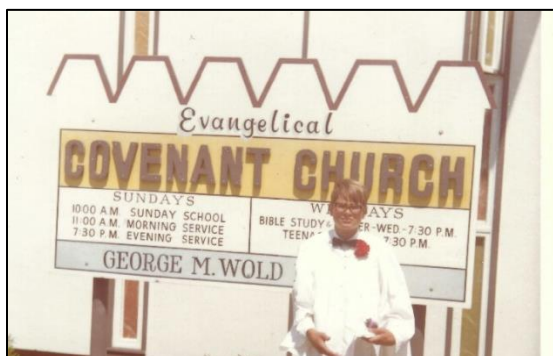
location, considered from around 15th Street South. It was an area between International Falls and South International Falls, but it was never an officially incorporated area, even though it had a "town hall."

It's in this unincorporated area where our building was located, so for many years, we were known as being in Holler.

It wasn't until the 1950s that our identity changed from Holler to South International Falls. Our documentation said we were the Mission Covenant Church of South International Falls, but to make it simple, our sign only said: "Mission Covenant Church." And for a lot of people even today, many only know us as that.



In the 1960's we added the prefix of "**Evangelical**" to our name, because we were affiliated with the Evangelical Covenant Church of America. And when the City of International Falls and the Village of South International Falls merged in 1989, we dropped the "South" from the "International Falls" location.



With all of these changes, it's surprising we're not called something like, The **Swedish American Evangelical Christian Holler Mission Covenant Church of, Holler, South International Falls, and International Falls, Minnesota**. But then that would probably never fit on a softball jersey.

Through it all, however, there have been two shortened versions of our name that seem to have a priority and recognition over all others: Either the phrase "**Mission Covenant**", or just "**Covenant**" says it all. Using either of these will



almost certainly ensure your listener knows who you're talking about, and where our church is located. And if they don't, they're probably new to town, and it's a perfect time to invite them to come and see what God is doing.

Chapter 4	Pastors:
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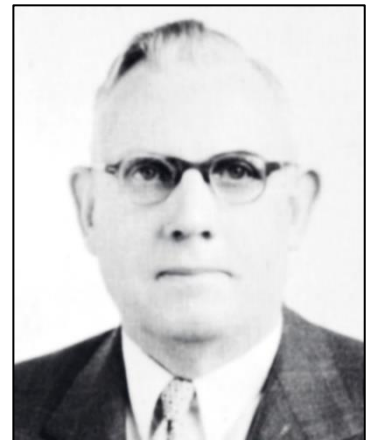
Over the last 100 years, the International Falls Evangelical Covenant Church has been blessed with Pastors, Associate Pastors, Youth Pastors, Pastor to Seniors, Visitation Pastors, and Interim Pastors who have led with God's truth and personal integrity. At other times, many lay church leaders and volunteers have stepped into the breach when a need was evident.

Each of these brought a unique and specific skill set and dedication that shaped our congregation during the time they were with us. And all of these played a vital part in the molding of our congregation as God's spirit moved among us.

For this writing, we will focus on our senior and interim pastors, adding other pastors and lay leaders into God's story where their times of service allow.

Pastor Oscar Johnson: (April 1925 – June 1927)

In April of 1925, Pastor **Oscar Johnson (Olga)** received a call from the Northwest Mission Association, now known as the Covenant Northwest Conference, to engage in Home Mission work at the northern Minnesota outpost of International Falls.



Pastor Johnson was a man committed to ministry throughout his life. He had very little formal education because the death of his father forced him to drop out of school to support his widowed mother. However, his ministry commitment really took hold with his conversion as a young adult following a promise made to his mother on her deathbed.



Because of his lack of formal education, some might think this would hold him back. However, in 1922, as a young adult, he went to Midway Training School (Also called "St. Paul Training School of the Christian Missionary Alliance", and now "Crown College") and took elementary

grammar, spelling, and reading along with difficult Bible subjects. He was self-taught, reading and studying extensively and receiving high grades.

Pastor Johnson relates that in coming to this new congregation, the first public meeting place was a vacant, second-floor room adjacent to a lawyer's office. He went out and rented thirty folding chairs. Attendance at the first Sunday morning service was eight, but

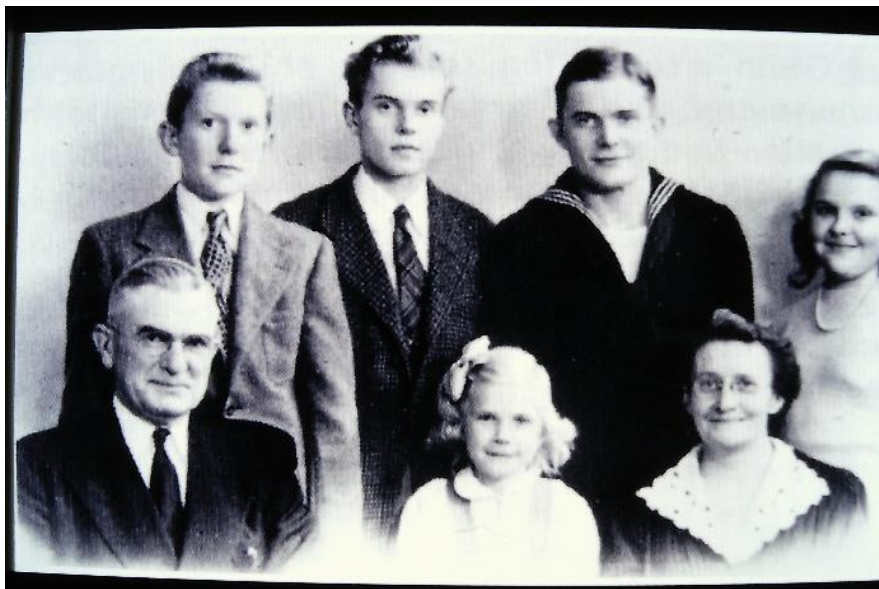


in the evening 23 of the 30 chairs were filled. By the time the Johnsons left in 1927, they moved from rented rooms to large tents and finally to a building of our own in Holler, Minnesota. This location was the corner of 1st Avenue East and 17th Street, where our current campus is still located.

After leaving International Falls in June of 1927, he pastored Covenant churches in Minnesota and Wisconsin, and even though he retired from full-time ministry in 1941, he worked as an interim pastor in many congregations throughout Minnesota. He conducted weekly nursing home services in and around Minneapolis and in many area rescue missions. Oscar Johnson and his wife Olga were married for 61 years. He went home to be with his Lord and Savior April 25th, 1984, at the age of 85 years.

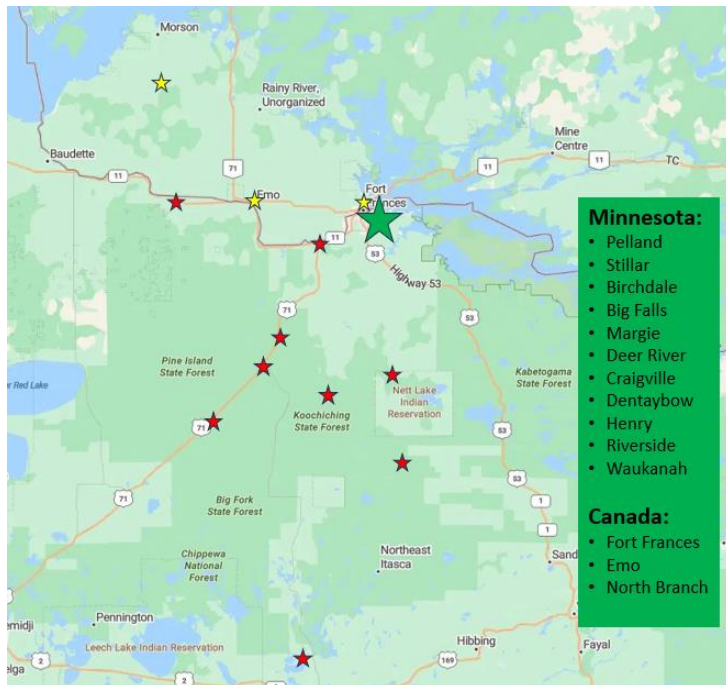
Pastor H.J.(Hjalmer) Gravem: (July 1927 – July 1934)

When Pastor Johnson and his family left in June of 1927, the vacancy was filled by **Pastor H.J. Gravem (Helen)** and his family, who were in the States on furlough from their missionary assignment to China.



Arriving with two sons, they left in 1930 with an additional son and daughter, and a second daughter was born to them in China when they returned to the missionary field.

Rev. Gravem and the N.W. Mission Association planned an effort to evangelize out-of-the-way places in the area. In the spring of 1928, Hannah Bergstrom, Ruth Eckstrand, and Agnes Sveiven (later Swanson) were called to serve as "Home Missionaries" with a base at the little church in Holler. The girls lived in the upper room of the old church and conducted Bible Schools. It should be noted that after a few years, Agnes Sveiven, shown, moved away, only to return as the wife of our fourth pastor, O.R. Swanson.



As the months went by, parish work was established in homes and logging camps at Stillar, Birchdale, Big Falls, Margie, Fort Frances, Emo, and North Branch in Ontario, as well as in Deer River, Pelland, Craigville, Dentaybow, Henry Township, Riverside, and Waukanah.

Services were conducted in both schools and town halls in these small communities, and many young men and women came to our church from the Mission

Association to assist in these outreach programs with visitation, conducting Bible schools, and boys and girls clubs.



the logging camps. He and other laity visited many camps, and with local people helping with music, their presence was always appreciated.

Pastor Gravem held a deep compassion for the woodsmen, and a genuine desire to preach in



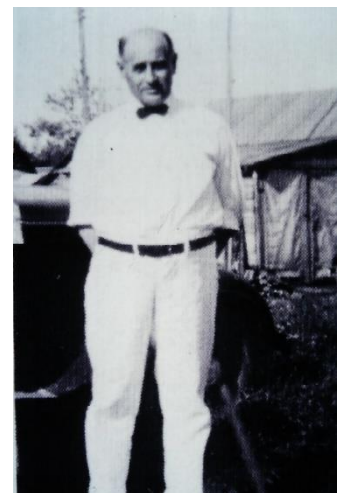
It's been recorded that during this time in the 1930s, there were over 190 logging camps in Koochiching, northern Beltrami and Itasca counties, and camps were built to house up to 150 men. Since many camps remained unreachable over the years, it's no wonder the Mission Association saw



Pastor Gravem and the Mission Covenant Church of Holler, Minnesota, as a critical hub for this vital work.

The work at that time was challenging, however. The country was soon to be plunged into the Great Depression, and people were struggling for economic survival. With their experiences in China, however, Pastor Gravem was well suited to both understand and help with relief efforts. He was gifted in helping to meet physical and spiritual needs, bringing the love of the Savior to so many people in need.

During this time, the Northwest Mission Association recognized the incredible need and opportunity in Northern Minnesota, and the Swedish singer and Evangelist **Carl Lindberg** was sent to assist with revival meetings. These meetings were increasingly blessed of the Lord to the extent that a tabernacle was built across from what was the Star Laundry and International State Bank in the present parking lot area. This was during the depression.



On one occasion, a meal was prepared for the many men without work. Many came to the meetings and were converted.

In all, the meetings continued from late summer of '31 until Christmas. It was estimated that more than 100 people were prayed with. In this photo, you can see one of the revival tents used in the early days of the evangelistic campaigns in the background.



Around this time, **Ralph Hanson**, from the Birchdale area, entered into the work supporting pastor Gravem, assisting in church work, and serving on the ministry circuit around northern Koochiching County and into Canada.

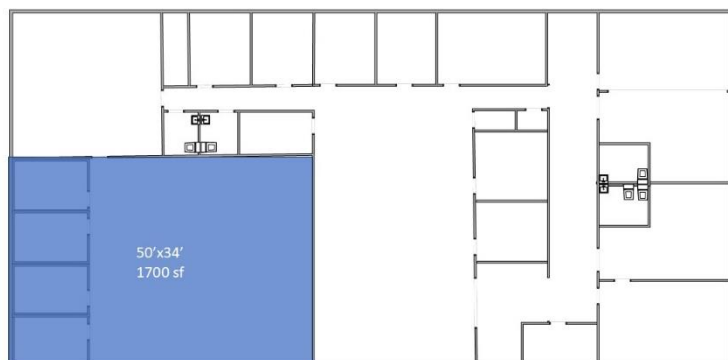
Ralph was also an inventor. As a missionary for six years in Alaska in the 1930's, Ralph saw the need for better transportation, other than a plane or dog sled. He may actually have been the first to invent the snowmobile. He called his contraption an air sled because he used an old airplane motor for power. An improved version of the air sled was built in Berkley, California, where he pastored for a time, and then sent to Alaska. Later, Ralph served as General Secretary of Covenant Foreign Missions for our entire denomination, establishing churches around the world.



Back here in the Holler Mission Covenant Church, the Sunday School enrollment had increased to 200, and when Covenant Dist. Supt. Edgar Swanson arrived in 1928 for meetings, he noted the utterly inadequate space available, and presented the cause to the Home Mission Board. As a result, the original structure was enlarged with an upper room and a basement for

Sunday School classrooms.

The basement layout shows this initial work (in blue) overlaying our existing basement footprint. It included four classrooms and a larger meeting room. The dedication credited the Mpls. contractor Aaron Carlson and the friends of the church for donating the building supplies.



Soon after completion, in the August 25, 1929 "Holler Mission Church Messenger (Vol 1, No.1), " Pastor Gravem speaks about the new classrooms.

We wish to render our praise to Him for the additional Sunday School rooms, for we know that "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it", (ps. 127:1). And we thank our many friends who, with their gifts, have come to our aid. The fund is growing, and we are confident that when we equip these rooms with seats, and whatever else is needful, that "God shall supply all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus". (Phil. 4:19). We invite you to come and inspect our new rooms. Come next Sunday, September 1, RALLY DAY, and bring your children. And then come every Sunday after that. There are classes for the grown-ups, too, and we will be delighted to have you with us.



Bible Camps were first attended by the church youth in 1930 at lake homes on Rainy Lake, and the camping program moved to the Big Falls Bible Camp area in 1934. (The present camp facility is located at Bluewater near Grand Rapids.)

The Gravem's saw the Holler Mission Church prove true to its mission focus during their seven years of service. They returned to the Chinese foreign mission field in 1934. Before they left, however, pastor Gravem constructed a "Chinese Gate" between the church and parsonage, which stood for many years.



Pastor Alrick Olson: (August 1934 – April 1935)



Pastor **Alrick Olson (Phoebe)** was our third pastor, serving as interim pastor for nine months between the Gravem's departure and the arrival of Pastor O.R. Swanson.

He was a dedicated Covenant minister whose ministry ranged all across northern Minnesota and into southwestern Ontario, Canada.

There was great concern for Native Americans in the early 30's, and the Mission Association sent Alrick to the border to help reach them.

He invested himself heavily in this effort, learned the Ojibwe language and it is said that he bonded with the Ojibwe so well that he once remarked, "me and another Indian."

Alrick, along with others, also worked among rough and hardened lumberjacks in the logging camps, and anywhere else the Gospel needed to be preached. He was instrumental in starting a Gospel Mission on Second Avenue adjacent to the Riverside Hotel, and wrote a gospel tract titled "Timberwolves and the Day Star," based on a real event in his life.

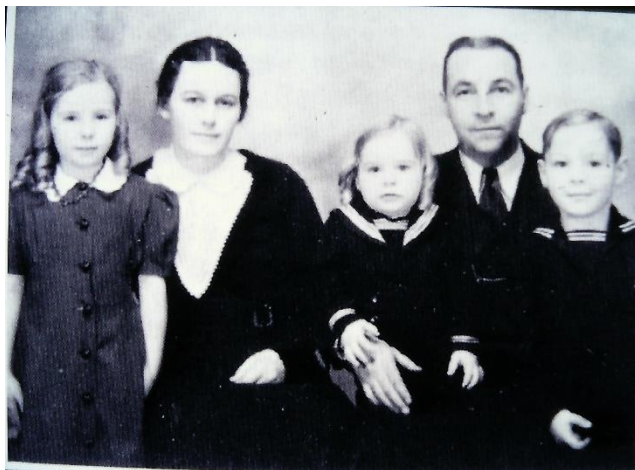
He was also instrumental in the decision by G. Christian Weiss, of future Back to the Bible renown, to respond to the Spirit's call and give his life to Jesus.



Because of his gift for jumping into an opportunity as soon as it became apparent, and his ability to reach people in out-of-the-way places, he was well known in both Northern Minnesota and Southwest Ontario. Through his efforts, churches were begun, and many souls were won for the Lord.

Pastor O. R. Swanson: (May, 1935 to May 1939)

Pastor **O. R. Swanson (Anges)** was our fourth pastor. When they arrived here in 1935, their family included a daughter, Grace, and a son, Paul. Another son, Donald was born here during their ministry.



When Pastor Swanson began his ministry in the Falls, you might say it was almost like coming home to a place he had never been before. This was because to his wife Agnes, this *had* been home not that many years earlier.

Until she left in 1930, Agnes Sveiven (now Swanson) had already ministered in our little mission church for several years, and on their return, she jumped right in and helped pave the way for her husband's successful ministry. And because she already knew so many of the people here, and they knew her, they were able to skip the "he's the new guy" phase and immediately begin seeing God's blessings.

Key to this was her ability to build on some of the ministry she had been involved with in her previous time. Some of the weekly **scheduled** activities included:

Agnes related of this time: "We had a large Young People's Society, Junior Group, Ladies Aid, and Youth Choir.

- **Sunday:**
 - 10:00am Sunday School
 - 11:00am Morning Service
 - 3:00pm Children's Hour
 - 6:45pm Junior League
 - 8:00pm Evening Service
- **Tuesday**
 - 7:30pm Wolf Cubs
- **Wednesday:**
 - 2:00pm Wide Awakes (Girls 13 and under)
- **Friday:**
 - 8:00pm Prayer Meeting
- **Saturday:**
 - 6:45pm Boy Scouts

There were also activities just to keep the church going. At one point, the church purchased forty acres of "Stumpage" from the state, and Pastor Swanson and boys from the church cut enough wood to supply fuel for the church and parsonage for two years. This proved to be a great time for spiritual fellowship with the boys, and friendships were created that lasted years after the wood supply had run out. It also gives you an idea of what it takes to heat an uninsulated building. And if you've ever wondered how big 40 acres is, it's the same as 102 Ice Hockey rinks, or 400 Basketball Courts.

There were days of fasting and prayer in the "upper room", special meetings with Carl Lindberg and with Rev. C.D. Anderson, and during this time, the church became self-supporting. The Swansons left the local church in May of 1939.

In 1942, three years after leaving the Falls, Pastor Swanson received a call to become superintendent of the Evangelical Covenant Church. Later in life, and after a time in Arizona with missionary work, Pastor Swanson retired and passed away in 1984. Agnes passed away at Covenant Manor in Minneapolis three years later.

Pastor Rodney Rosengren: (June, 1939 - December, 1940)



Pastor Rodney Rosengren was our fifth pastor. He arrived from **North Park Junior College** in Chicago (see photo) to serve as interim pastor for the summer months after the Swanson's left. However, since no pastor was secured by the end of summer, he stayed on until the end of 1940.



(NOTE: In early 1940, Pastor Lloyd Johnson arrived with his family and Rodney continued on through the end of 1940 as an assistant to Pastor Johnson.)

In addition to his pastoral duties, Mr. Rosengren was active in Sunday School work and youth work. On several occasions, he and the church youth assisted Alrick Olson in conducting services at various places in Canada and also in street meetings in downtown International Falls.

Mid-week services were held regularly, meeting in the "upper room" of the church, and during his time with the church, three series of special meetings were held.

Rev. Lloyd Johnson: (June 1939 – April 1945)

Reverend Lloyd Johnson (Esther) had served on the foreign mission field in the Congo, Africa, before coming to the small church in Holler, Minnesota. They arrived with their family in 1939, and the work was well established when they began their service to the church and northern Minnesota.



It was recorded as they left the 110-degree heat of California for Minnesota, pastor Johnson said: "I wouldn't trade Minnesota weather for the whole West Coast – I'm never coming back." And he never did.

When the Johnson family pulled into the church parking lot after their cross-country journey, the first folks to meet them were two of the Hall girls, Betty (Blankman) and Helen (Nordlund).

They then ran back home to tell their mother Anna, who immediately came with the keys to the parsonage, and then started notifying the men of the church who were available that the new pastor was here and needed help unloading their belongings into the parsonage.



It wasn't long after that that men seemed to come out of the woodwork to help unload furniture, household items, and anything else the Johnsons had carried with them into the parsonage, and daughter Adele remembers, "food seemed to appear like magic. It was a great welcome."

Sunday afternoons would often find pastor Johnson and youth conducting services in Birchdale and around the area. They were accompanied by a small folding organ with Virginia Fairchild playing, and different folks singing. Back at the Church, a string band, composed of members of the congregation, added greatly to the Sunday evening services. And in a lay ministry role, former interim pastor Alrick Olson worked alongside pastor Johnson in so much of this northland field work.



During the Johnsons' ministry, two important changes were happening to both our church and ministry in general.

Members of the last outlying chapels served by the church were beginning to join the local congregation as a matter of convenience and practicality. More people had



transportation at that time, and roads had been improving greatly throughout the county.

But there were still many children who were unable to get to Sunday School services and events, so it was during this time that the bus program was started.

Long time church member Ethel Lindstrom recalls: *"Concerning the bus ministry, I am reminded of a trip to Big Falls for a baptismal service during Lloyd Johnson's pastorate. On the way, the bus broke down. Pastor Johnson thumbed a ride to town, secured another bus from the local bus company, picked everyone up and continued on to Big Falls. Several were baptized, including at least one teenager, and one very elderly lady. Returning in time for the evening service, Pastor Johnson remarked, 'We sure don't make any money, but we do have a lot of fun.' How true!*

During Pastor Johnson's time, the church held several week-long evangelistic outreach meetings. One in particular involved the evangelist Chief White Feather, also known as Teyet (TIE-it) Ramar, who was a grandson of well-known Lakota Chief Sitting Bull. He was here for meetings numerous times.



Before giving his life to Christ, Chief Whitefeather was a well-known opera singer and sang at the White House for the king and queen of England at the invitation of the President. As a youth, Phil Johnson remembers how Chief White Feather would stay in the parsonage with the Johnson family during the crusade. Through the day, the chief would spend time with the local native tribes, and in the evenings lead an evangelistic service at the church.

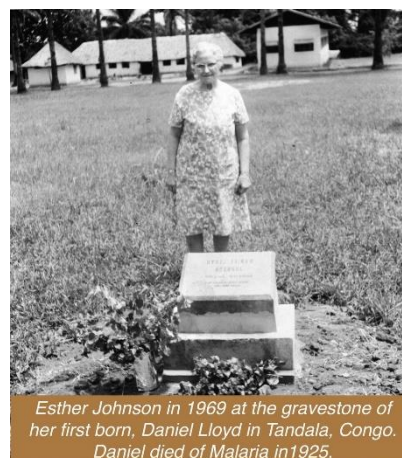
Phil, now in his 80s, remembers two specific highlights of these meetings. One was that on Thursday night, Chief White Feather would wear his full headdress during the service. Because he was a chief, it was "legal" for him to do that.

The other was that by the last service on Friday evening, every child in the group could sing "Jesus Loves Me" in the native Sioux language.

Pastor Johnson left the church in April of 1945, but stayed in the area as a circuit pastor for a number of Northern Minnesota churches and locations, including churches at Northome, Deer River, and Pomroy. He also conducted crusades during this time throughout northern Minnesota. In those days, a crusade might go on for as long as two or three weeks. It's said that toward the end of a series of meetings, Pastor Johnson would mail home his dirty dress shirts to be cleaned and pressed. As one of the children commented, "He liked the way mother did them".

During this time, Esther and the children maintained a “home base” here in International Falls, and Esther was actively involved in the church as church secretary, and later as Sunday School Superintendent. Pastor George Wold made a tribute to her faithful service on one occasion by jovially introducing her as the Queen Mother of the Covenant Church of South Falls.

Pastor Lloyd Johnson passed away in 1965, and Esther in 1985. Before her passing, however, in 1968, the congregation was able to support Esther as a short-term missionary back to the Congo after being away for 36 years. She was able to visit the grave of their first-born son, Daniel Lloyd, in Tandala, Congo, which was a very moving experience for her. (Daniel had died of Malaria in 1925.)



Her time back in Africa was a time of real blessing for both her and the many who still remembered the work of the Johnsons so many years earlier. Esther’s final years were spent at an Evangelical Covenant Retirement home in California, where she wrote a book about their time in Africa.

Pastor George Wold: (May 1945 – May 1974)

Pastor **George Wold (Ruth)** served the church for 29 years, and during this time the church experienced many growing pains and subsequent advancements for God’s kingdom. But we need to back up just a bit.

The Wolds came to us from the Community United Presbyterian Church of Effie, Minnesota. He served there from 1942-1945, and prior to that, he served as supply pastor at the Spruce Park Lutheran Brethren Church.



It was in Effie where George and Ruth married. She was referred to as a “Lovely pastor’s daughter from Iowa.”



It was also noted that she was an accomplished pianist and singer, and together she and George often provided Special Music for a service. For many, it was a special treat when George would play his **autoharp**. Although he never played it for a Sunday Morning Service. You would have to come to

an evening or midweek service to hear his handiwork.

And if you were to come to a Sunday Evening Service and you could smell a residual from the hand-operated mimeograph machine George kept behind the cross, you knew you were going to be singing choruses. And there was a good chance the autoharp was going to play a part.

It would be fair to say that George Wold was a building pastor. He built up people, he built up congregations, he helped build up the community, and he built up buildings. One of his strengths was his unassuming personality and his ability to form relationships very easily with people.



When the Wold's arrived in 1945, the furnaces in the church and parsonage had been updated from wood to coal, but it still took a lot of coal to heat the uninsulated church and parsonage. Along with this, there was no sewer or running water available.

Water could be purchased from a **"water shack"** on the street corner for a few cents a bucket, or \$.50 cents a barrel, and at that time, the parsonage and church shared two appropriately designated **"out buildings"**.

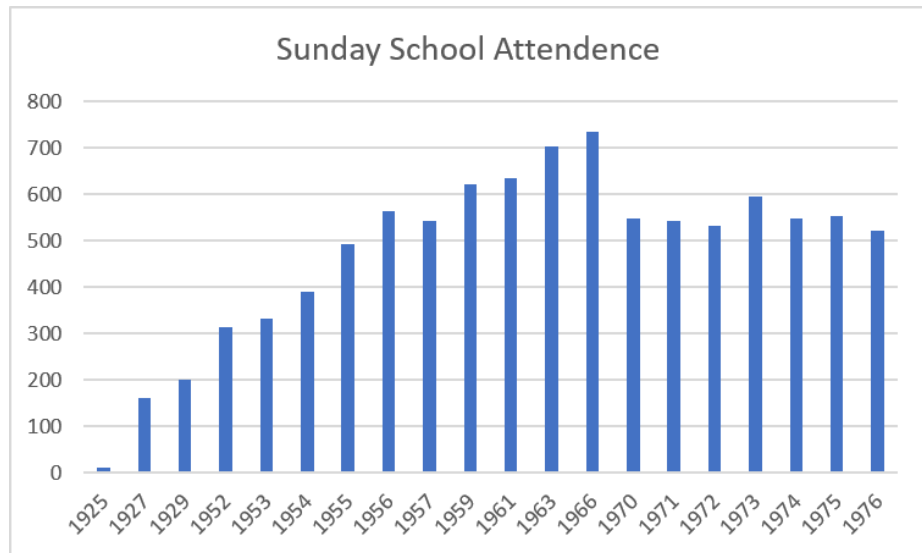


Fortunately, this changed when the new Holler school was built just a few blocks South of the church.

Since the water and sewer lines to the school ran right past the church, we petitioned the City to allow us to tap into these lines, and the city gave its permission. And yes, the “out buildings” were quickly removed.

As mentioned, during this period of 29 years, the church experienced considerable growth; both in people, activities, and in structures.

It started with a national Sunday School Contest which was entered under the direction of Pastor Wold and Mrs. Esther Johnson. The results were a growth from 200 to over 730 enrollments in the Sunday School by 1966. And this did not



include the Cradle Roll, which had numbers up to 135. Can you imagine that many children in our building, which did not include the current Family Life Center? But we’re getting ahead of ourselves a little.

The church structure was raised to construct a basement in 1951. In 1954, further excavation was made, providing additional space for classrooms and enlargement of the auditorium. Even a garage was constructed to house the Sunday School bus and to double for Sunday School classrooms. But even after all of this, the congregation was bulging at every seam.



In less than ten years, the original church was razed (1963), ex-cavation was made for additional basement area, and the new church was constructed.

The architect was Robert Sandberg, Hibbing, and the general contractors were Max Gray Lumber Co., Hibbing.

During the building, the congregation assisted with their means, material, and labor, and



the new church was dedicated on March 21, 1965, with the Rev. Paul Anderson, Supt. of the N.W. Covenant Conference, taking part in the ceremony. Parking space was a problem until the church purchased several small homes north and east of the church, had them removed, and improved the lots.

The Wolds resided in three parsonages during their 29 years. The original parsonage adjacent to the church, the next dwelling located at Home Lane, by the high school, and finally a parsonage constructed on First Avenue West, near what was at the time the Holler Elementary School.



Along with other changes over time, as modernization saw the lumber camp begin to decline, this ministry was phased out, and a radio ministry over local station KGHS was begun in 1965.

The church, once well-known as the Holler Mission Church and later as the Mission Covenant Church, officially changed its name to the Evangelical Covenant Church (but to so many who started attending during Sunday School, it always was and will be the "Mission Covenant").

Four young men, qualified seminary or Bible Institute graduates, served short terms as assistants to Pastor Wold during part of his ministry. Those who were selected and assigned to a wide range of church duties were:

- **Loren Anderson**, (1950's) and
- **Brance Modin (Kathy)**, **Rick Moore (Diane)**, and **Jerry Rose** (late 1960s to 1970s).

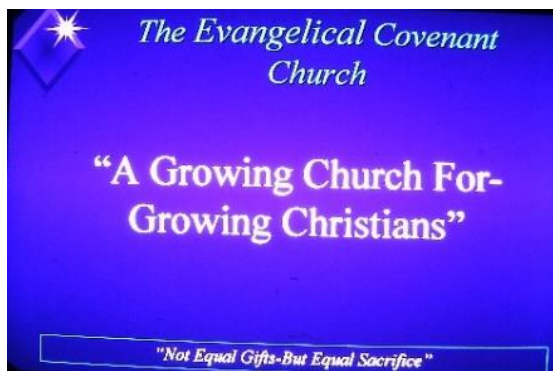
NOTE: So well-known and respected was Pastor Wold in the ministry at that time, Rick Moore, a graduate of Oak Hill Bible College, specifically asked George if he could come and be mentored by him for a year. Rick then went on to successfully pastor a number of congregations before his retirement from the ministry.

During the Wold's ministry to the community and church, Pastor Wold performed **275 weddings**, officiated at **346 funerals**, in addition to **infant dedications, adult baptisms**, and **teen Confirmation**. Ruth Wold served faithfully as the church organist and pianist.



Also, over 375 church families had been involved in the program of the church which included: Worship services, Sunday School, Women's Mission Circle, Men's Fellowship, Senior and Junior Teen groups, Grade-school age girls' and boys' clubs, Bible studies, and the Bible Camp ministry.

We mentioned earlier that Pastor Wold was a building pastor. When he and Ruth left in 1974, he mentioned the one thing he felt he had left undone was the addition of a multipurpose facility for the congregation.



Twenty years later, however, when the congregation began a second Stewardship Campaign for that very purpose, George gladly volunteered his voice and "influence" to the key multimedia presentation for the drive.

HONORS:

- An honor of community-wide interest was given Rev. George Wold in April, 1974, shortly before his departure to Coon Rapids, Minn., where he served as pastor. The International Falls Junior Chamber of Commerce named Pastor Wold Boss of the Year".
- The congregation honored the Wold family with a farewell reception at which friends from church and community expressed their love to the pastor and his family who so diligently had given forth the Good News for 29 years.
- Also, after another 20 years in Coon Rapids, George was given the honorary title of "Pastor Emeritus."



Pastor David Smith: (June 1974 – December 1980)

Pastor **David Smith**, his wife **Barbara**, and their three daughters arrived in the summer of 1974 from Bemidji. Before this, Pastor Smith had been serving as our interim pastor and was formerly installed as pastor at an Installation Service on November 10, 1974.

Preceding his call, Pastor. Smith had served in positions as:

- camp director for 5 years,
- director of mission ministries for 2 years,
- dean of education for 3 years, and
- as a teacher of Bible subjects, Christian doctrine, pastoral theology, and Christian education

for a total of ten years at Oak Hills Bible Institute of Bemidji, Minn.



Pastor Smith was an idea person, and never one to do something the way we always did it if there was a new or innovative way to better achieve it. Many of the ideas introduced by the pastor and congregation involved the area of training and education. He recognized the importance of learning at all ages, from cradle to grave, and worked hard to ensure all education was moving us towards heeding the charge of 1 Peter 3:15 “. . . *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. . .*”

Some of the key accomplishments in this regard included:

- Major change in our churches’ education process involved moving away from an elected Sunday School Superintendent to an elected “Christian Education” board responsible for teaching and training across all areas of the church.
- An organized the Homebuilders Sunday School Class for younger married couples. This group quickly outgrew its location in the church and began meeting regularly in the South International Fire Hall. Members of the Homebuilders also met for social gatherings.
- A successful new program was Children's Church, which met in the basement auditorium during the morning worship service in the sanctuary.
- The pastor's sermons-on-tape were made available to the congregation.
- Home Bible Study Groups were also growing in size and interest, with organized studies for women, men, married couples and youth.
- Additionally, the Library was begun, and parking lots were paved.

In the spring of 1976 Doug Wachob was elected by the congregation to the position of Youth Director. He, with the support of his wife Becky, worked closely with the pastor in building on what was, enlarging the scope of ministry in almost every department of the church.



From Pastor Dave's perspective, he saw God working in six areas of the church during his time here which allowed all of this growth to happen:

1. So many people were willing to stand up and take responsibility for ministry.
2. The readiness with which the church adopted new ideas and moved forward to serve the Lord.
3. A very strong and growing interest in missions
4. A well-developed Christian education ministry
5. A desire to serve the whole Body of Christ, and
6. A strong youth program.

When Pastor Smith left the church, there was an eight-month gap before Pastor Larry Fullerton was able to take the reigns as Sr. Pastor. During this time, the church was able to enlist the services of two interim pastors, George Schultz and Brent Birdsall.

George Schultz: (January 1981 – May 1981)

George Schultz (Kathy) were well known to the congregation at this time, being one of the missionary couples we were supporting who just happened to be home for a few months and were available to assist.



Brent Birdsall: (June 1981 – August 1981)



Brent Birdsall (Sandra) was also well known to the congregation, as Sandra (nee: Stenberg) was one of our own, growing up in the church. Her parents were Elmer and Marlys Stenberg, who were active members of the congregation. Brent and Sandy met while they were both attending the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, married in the church, and were getting ready to leave for Siera Leon on the African mission field. The last Sunday evening service before they left, Brent and Sandy sang of duet of the old hymn, "So Send I You." As they sang the verses, they became more and more "off-key". In Brent's message that night, he talked about how we often see mission work as a drudgery, and maybe a sentence, but it should be seen as a blessed calling.

Pastor Larry Fullerton: (September 1981 – May 1988)

Pastor Larry Fullerton (Helen) came to us from our Canadian Conference. Like pastor George Wold and his wife Ruth, Larry and his wife Helen ministered as a team. Larry was known for his strong grasp of the truth of God's word and solid sermons that challenged people to grow deeper in their faith. While a strong speaker, Larry's personality was a bit more introverted. This is where Helen complemented his ministry. She had a vibrant, outgoing personality and enthusiastically ensured there were no gaps in their ministry.



During the Fullertons' time with us, Sunday Morning services averaged 300 in attendance, and Sunday School for all ages averaged 270 per Sunday.



Two highlights of Fullerton's ministry were the burning of the church's mortgage in April of 1984, and the construction of the new North handicap-accessible entrance with a wheelchair lift.

Pastor Larry Connors: (June 1988 – June 2006)

Pastor Larry Connors (Kathy) came home to our congregation after serving churches in the Southeast for a number of years. We say "came home" because Larry was from International Falls, and this was his church growing up. As Larry says, *"As I look back over the years of this church, it is only by the grace of God that I am a part of this ministry. It all began in the early 1950s when I was a little boy who rode the church bus to Sunday School. Little did I know that, years later, I would serve as a pastor of this church."*



It was through the ministry of this church that Larry first heard the good news of Jesus Christ. He was taught about Jesus at release time classes, in Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and from the pulpit by Pastor George Wold. Larry said, *"Pastor Wold had an incredible impact upon my life...more than he will ever know. The time that I spent in his home, with his family, had such a positive influence on my young life... in coming to know Christ as my personal Savior, and ultimately influencing my very calling into ministry. All of this happened as a result of this local church."*

There were many highlights of the Connors' ministry in the eighteen years they served the congregation. Some key remembrances include:

- When the Connors arrived in 1988, the "Parsonage" was beginning to lose its significance as a way to attract a pastor when an available salary was limited. And since the Connors were interested in owning their own home, and the current parsonage wasn't it, the church voted to sell the parsonage and officially get out of the "landlord" business.



Jesus was lifted up.

- The Awana program was started, making Wednesday night the most "energetic" day of the week. Coupled with the existing Junior and Senior teens, the church was a beehive of excitement, learning, and God's grace. Many lives were changed during these times, and the name of Jesus was lifted up.
- The men in the church were introduced to a movement called "Promise Keepers" in the early 1990s. This was a real turning point for many of our men, challenging them to take their faith seriously, in their homes, in their occupations, and in their church. As men took the spiritual leadership role as God had designed for them, the church saw a marked change for the good in so many areas.
- One of those areas was the need for more space. This was an issue that had been on the minds of so many as far back as Pastor George Wold in the late 1960s. A Stewardship Campaign was begun to raise over \$600,000 as a miracle goal. This was reached, with much more, and in January 2020 a new Family Life Center was dedicated.
- Community service took on a new priority with a move to honor our public school teachers, Community plays, and fall leaf pickup to name just a few.





Pastor Eric Marx (August 2007 – May 2011)

Pastor Eric Marx (Phoebe) and their family came to us highly recommended from a small congregation in Iowa. From the very beginning of their ministry, the Marxes displayed high value in family and relationships. They worked to build strong interpersonal connections with both the congregation and the

community.

In a letter received in June of 2026, pastor Marx stated: *"The Marx family are grateful for your many acts of kindness shown to us during the years that we labored together. The International Falls Covenant Church is fully alive, and God is using it to impact the lives of so many others. It was a rich experience, and it was a privilege to call the northland home."*

In 2018, Pastor Eric suffered a heart attack, which required him to slow down and step away from a church bi-vocational ministry he was involved in at that time. Currently, Eric is retired, Phoebe is thinking about it, the family is doing well, and the Marxes reside in Kimball, Minnesota.

Pastor Ryan Sarenpa (July 2011 – July 2012)



Pastor Ryan Sarenpa (Clarissa): Before the calling of Pastor Olson, Pastor Ryan Sarenpa and his wife Clarissa served the congregation as an Interim pastor.

As a people person, Pastor Ryan and Clarissa developed many close friendships during their time with us, and Clarissa was an active member of the Sunday Morning Worship Team. Also during their time, the first "Sportsman's Expo" was held in the Family Life Center, which turned out to be a great community success.

Pastor Darren Olson (August 2012 – August – 2018)

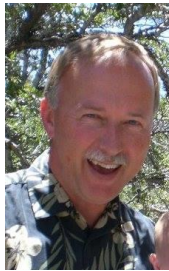


Pastor Darren Olson (Brenda) were excited to return to Minnesota from a church in the Southwest. Prior to leaving Minnesota, the Olsons had served in Princeton, Minnesota, at Karmel Covenant Church. Youth were a priority with Pastor Olson, and his work with Awana and teenagers set the stage for many who went on to follow Christ.

Supporting Pastor Darren were Ed Natysin, lay Pastor to Seniors, and our future pastor, Seth Bjornrud. Pastor Olson left the church in August of 2018

Pastor Dan Johnson (September 2018 – June 2020)

Interim pastor **Dan Johnson** served our congregation during what many have called the "Covid Pastorate." As an already retired Covenant Pastor, Pastor Johnson would split his week between home early in the week and then International Falls during the last part of the week.



He was still able to maintain a vital ministry to the congregation by recording videos of his Sunday Morning messages and then playing them online.

And for those times he wasn't on site, Associate Intern Seth Bjornrud would have a physical presence and keep Pastor Dan informed and updated on church goings-on.

Pastor Seth Bjornrud (August 2020 – Present)



While Pastor Dan was covering as our interim pastor, a pastoral Search Committee had been formed by the congregation, and an intense search had begun. Numerous potential candidate names had come and gone until the committee decided to look to our own and recommended to the congregation the name of Seth Bjornrud, our current Associate, Youth and Worship pastor. The congregation enthusiastically embraced Seth and his calling began in August, 2020.

Originally from Embarrass Minnesota, Seth grew up as the son of a pastor, being his father was the pastor of the Embarrass Free Church. He studied at Oak Hills Christian College, and had connections with the Bemidji Evangelical Covenant Church.

In the summer of 2024, through a mutual friend, Seth met Kaitlyn Radi, and in January of 2025, they were married. Later that year, their daughter Bergan was born.



While the church is still working through a number of the issues Covid left us, two of the bright spots of Seth's ministry are to Teens and Young Adults. With Associate Pastor Marco Griffith, God has been doing an amazing work in this area, and the congregation is seeing a real growth in young families.

Chapter 5	Associate, Youth, Visitation and Worship Pastors
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Over the years, there have been a good number of individuals who have come alongside the pastor's in supporting the work at the International Falls Evangelical Covenant Church. While we do not claim to have records of them all, here is a good listing of what we can verify, and we apologize if we have left anybody out.

1. Oscar Johnson

2. Hjalmer Gravem

- a. Hannah Bergstrom,
- b. Ruth Eckstrand, and
- c. Agnes Sveiven
- d. Alrick Olson

3. Alrick Olson

4. O.R. Swanson

5. Rodney Rosengren

6. Lloyd Johnson

- a. Rodney Rosengren - Intern

7. George Wold

- a. Miss Helen Monrean – Parish Worker
- b. Loren Anderson - Youth
- c. Brance Modin - Youth
- d. Rick Moore – Intern and Youth
- e. Jerry Rose - Youth

8. David Smith

9. Larry Fullerson

- a. Roger Anderson

10. Larry Connors

- a. Barry Durkee - Youth
- b. Bob Lancacster – Visitation
- c. Paul Langmade – Youth and Family
- d. Alan Johnson – Associate
- e. Elaine Johnson - Worship
- f. Kyle Gunderson - Youth

11. Eric Marx

12. Ryan Sarenpa

- a. J.C. Barber – Intern
- b. Ed Natysin - Visitation

13. Daren Olson

- a. Nathan Nelson – Youth
- b. Seth Bjornrud – Youth and Worship
- c. Ed Natysin - Visitation

14. Dan Johnson

- a. Seth Bjornrud

15. Seth Bjornrud

- a. Marco Griffith

Additionally ministry included Jerry Skifstad, Dennis Clark and Brian Trexel.

Chapter 6	Sunday School and Cradle Roll
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Sunday School:

The Sunday School work has always been uppermost in the hearts and minds of the leaders of the church. Mrs. Belva Hughes Kiesling, a former member of the congregation, gives this account of the origin of the Sunday School: "The Bovey's, (Mrs. Kiesling's parents) moved to South Int'l Falls in 1918. Two teenage Manley girls were conducting a Sunday School of five in the Town Hall, then located across from the Holler School, (not Shannons Incorporated). It was under the auspices of the Sunday School Union. A Rev. Gregg would visit the Sunday School occasionally and he wanted an older person to "head it up". When Mrs. Bovey volunteered, their family of five plus the original five became the nucleus of the Holler Sunday School."



The organizational meeting of the Holler Sunday School was held the first Sunday of May, 1925, in the downtown Odd Fellows Hall. By June 1927, after the church was built, the enrollment reached 160 members.

The N.W. Covenant Board sent a number of parish workers to the Holler Mission church to make home visitations, to conduct Daily Vacation Bible Schools and to assist with Sunday School work in the outlying rural districts and the local church.

God was working in such a mighty way that by 1929 the enrollment had increased to 200 which made enlargement of the church a necessity. The upper room and more Sunday School rooms were added in 1929, and none to soon as attendance continued to grow.

The little Holler Church was becoming a bigger Holler Church.





Around this time the Sunday School youth were encouraged to go the summer Bible Camps which were held at the Bennett home on Rainy Lake. In 1934 the youth began attending Bible Camp at **Big Falls**, Minnesota; later to a Bible Camp near Blackduck Minnesota, and at the present time to the Covenant Bible Camp at Bluewater Lake near Grand Rapids.

A giant step in Sunday School progress was launched with the joining of both the "Covenant" and "Christian Life" magazine contests in 1952. Pastor George Wold and Sunday School Superintendent Esther Johnson each credited the other and the 55 dedicated Sunday School staff members for the success of the contest and they all acknowledged that it was God who supplied the increase.

The contest was a monumental endeavor involving a day of fasting and prayer, hiring Miss Helen Monrean as parish worker, inviting teachers and parents to a "Kick Off" banquet, using radio, newspaper and poster advertising, and staging a well planned parade. There was added public interest in the dropping of paper plate "flying saucer" invitations from an airplane, sending newsletters to parents on the contest progress, displaying graphs showing progress and offering prizes to those bringing new members.



Coinciding with the contest, a 10 lesson, five evening Sunday School Teachers' Institute was taught by **Rev. Nathaniel Franklin** of Dawson, MN. Who had authored the course. The entire contest ran for six Sundays in the fall of 1952 and resulted with 250 persons visiting the Sunday School, added 100 new members on the rolls, and doubling the size of the infants in the Cradle Roll.

With the enrollment of 115 children under five years of age a new beginners department was organized apart from the primary Department. Later a nursery class for toddlers was organized.

Over \$50 worth of lumber (almost \$700.00 in 2026 dollars) was used by the pastor and a few helpers to make benches for emergency seating. The church had anticipated needing more room; therefore, renovation began in 1951.

A basement was constructed to provide much needed classroom space, but at the close of the contest the space was still inadequate.



The church garage doubled for Sunday School classrooms, and the bus used to transport Sunday School students was replaced with a newer one. It seems that the current bus the church owned spent more time in the shop than on the road.

In the late 1960's the church actually had two busses, one for a "City" route, and one for a "Country" route. Both ran each Sunday, and both were full.



Not only did the Sunday School attendance surge, but the church attendance did as well. The pastor's efforts were greatly appreciated and he was given a well-earned raise in salary.

Ultimately the church also engages the services of it's first intern, a North Park Seminary student, Loren Anderson, to assist the work in 1957.



The Sunday School has always been served by a staff who have made personal commitments to Christ. When a vacancy arises, prayer is sent forth and a replacement is found. The annual Christmas Programs and the Sunday School picnic are events which highlight the year.

Some members of the Sunday School staff, in addition to volunteers from within the church, assist with the mid-week "Release time" classes at which students from grades 3 – 6 were given school permission to attend religious instruction for one hour during the school week. The church, as all churches in town, no longer offer Release Time however.



In the 1960's through 90's Sunday School was still held in high regard with the Congregation. There were classes for all ages, and each fall, students who were moving from one department up to another participated in all of the Pomp and Circumstance of "Promotion Sunday."



Attendance in Sunday School was also important. For many of the children's classes, everyone would meet together with their teacher to sing songs, take an offering, celebrate birthdays, etc. Birthdays were special. You would bring pennies and put your age number into a birthday bank while the rest of



the room counted the pennies for each one dropped into the bank.

After a short time together, each teacher would take his or her class to their specific meeting place and go over the lesson for the day. And here's where attendance would be taken. This was all recorded in an attendance book, which

a lady from the Sunday School Office then picked up.

And if you were able to achieve perfect attendance over the course of a year, you were rewarded by being called to the front of your department and given a "perfect attendance" pin.

In the first year, you received the pin. The second year there was a wreath that went around the pin. Starting in the third year and in the future, you received a bar that would attach to the bottom of the wreath, and that's where the more bars you had, the more "credibility" you had with your Sunday School peers. But getting perfect attendance was not easy. You were allowed to miss two Sundays because of illness; otherwise, you had better be there.



And the ladies in the office knew the score, because they kept track. This record is from 1965, and you can see all of the different categories that had a specific Sunday School focus. What's interesting is there was a category for visitors. There were always new visitors coming to Sunday school. (Maybe their home church was also having a perfect attendance focus, and they couldn't afford to miss a Sunday.)

May 16

	Today	Last Sun.	Year Ago
Officers	5	7	4
Nursery	35	30	32
Beginner	43	43	37
Primary	71	71	82
Junior	86	84	78
Intermediate	45	53	47
Senior	22	18	17
Young People	33	40	36
Adult	63	61	52
Visitors	29	20	18
Total Attendance	441	427	403
Total Offering	61.93	58.97	52.18

Daily Vacation Bible School has also been a program of the Sunday School. In days past, DVBS would be scheduled for two weeks of morning and afternoon sessions with a program on the closing evening. In later years, it has been shortened to a week of morning

sessions with no evening program.

Cradle Roll:

The function of the Cradle Roll Department of the Sunday School was more than a chart on the wall. Parents of new arrivals in the church family were sent an invitation to enroll their baby in the Cradle Roll. Following enrollment, a woman was assigned to visit the baby's family periodically until the toddler was invited to enroll in the Sunday School nursery class at the age of two. In past years, the Cradle Roll enrollment (of a child until they reach five, or until they enter the Sunday School) had been as high as 135. At this point in the church's history, the Cradle Roll as an official function has been disbanded.



A second home Ministry of the **Sunday School Office** was that of mailing Sunday School papers to absentees and to those who were "Shut-Ins". Also, Sunday School teachers were encouraged to visit the homes of their students, as well as sending cards. This too no longer happens as an official function of the Sunday School.

As mentioned, Sunday School was one of the areas hit hard coming up out of Covid. That, coupled with a current shortage of volunteers, has created new concerns about regrouping and fully meeting the expectations of "Sunday School for all ages."

Chapter 7

Boys and Girls Clubs, Awana and Covenant Kids

Boys and Girls Clubs: (1970s)



The Boys' and Girls' clubs were for those in fourth through sixth grade; not old enough for Jr. or Sr. Teens. These clubs met on Wednesday nights and were very active.

The Boys' Club would meet for two hours, broken into three segments: Bible study, games and fun, and crafts and activities. This included many "off-campus" outings.

The **Girl's Club**, which was originally associated with the "Pioneer Girls' Club International," involved girls from grades two through six, and met during the school year calendar. Their time was divided into record taking and devotions, activities, songfest, and Bible exploration. At their peak, there were between sixty and seventy girls involved.

Awana:

Soon after Pastor Larry Connors and his wife Kathy arrived in 1988, the Awana (**A**pproved **W**orkmen **A**re **N**ot **A**shamed) program was started. They had been active in Awana at a previous church and saw the benefits it



provided. This was a very organized program that took children from preschool to sixth grade through Bible training, Bible verse memorization, and activities around what was called the "Awana Circle."

This program was one of the more effective methods of getting children involved in the church, both from church families and so many more from outside of the church.

The Awana calendar followed the school calendar, and a real highlight of the program was the awards service in the Spring of the year. As a student would complete a book with its assignments and memory requirements, they would move to the next book in the series and receive recognition such as a badge or patch for their uniform. Several former Awana leaders have said that they have run into an individual on the street who commented, "Hey, you were my Awana Teacher." God's word does not return void.



In time, no matter how good the program, it was felt that Awana had served its course, and the leadership moved to a Denomination Developed Program called "Covenant Kids." This program is currently being used, and as a support to families, a meal is provided for children and their parents before the evening begins, should they want. This has proven to be very well received.



Chapter 8	Teens and Young Adults
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Teens:

There seems to have always been an active youth group in our church. From the beginnings back in the late 1920s, the importance of a youth organization was recognized and supported. Early members recall youth going with the pastor to lumber camps or to



other churches to perform with the choir or in other ways during services.

For many years, we had two youth groups, following the school designation of Jr. High (7-9th Grade) and Sr. High (10-12th Grade). Usually lay leaders would shepherd each

group, but if there was a Youth Pastor on board, they would usually take over the Sr. Teens. When Paul Langmade was hired as an Associate Pastor to Youth and Family, he brought both Jr. and Sr. High Teens together in one group. This has worked well, and has been our format since then.



There are two focus parts to teens. The first is the group that meets on Wednesday nights. This is the full group, with many visitors and young people outside of the church. It's a time for fun, activities, worship, and a chance to hear the gospel. The second focus is a smaller group of more serious Teens who meet on Sunday Nights and dig deeper into God's word to grow stronger in their Faith.

Young Adults:

The young adult group was started to fill a need of those who were too old for teens, but still wanted to get together for fellowship, bible study, and personal growth. This group continues to grow, and they have become more and more active in the church, which has proven to be a real blessing.

Chapter 9	Bible Camp
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Early on at the Holler Mission Church, our Bible Camp program started in 1930 on the shores of Rainy Lake. One of our early members, Bowman Nyberg, would smile when this original camping was brought up. He remembered it well, and he said it really made a difference in his life.

It was a small group back then, where people brought their own tents and camping supplies. Even in these early days, however, the meetings were geared for all ages of our congregation. Around 1934-35, however, we realized the strength provided in numbers, and joined with other "Covenant" churches in the area to form the "Koochiching District". This allowed for one centralized camping area in **Big Falls, Minnesota**.

This camp was located just East of the bridge along the Big Fork River.

Koochiching District

- International Falls
- Bemidji
- Big Falls
- Baudette
- Fort Frances



At first, campers slept in tents. After spreading blankets on the ground to provide a minimal barrier between campers and the elements, a tent was erected over the blankets. Unlike today's use of an air mattress, or other soft bed to sleep on, campers were then given a "tick." This was a large sack (about the size of a twin-size mattress) that the camper would fill with straw (and who knows what other small creatures).

To the best of our knowledge, a tick was never seen as all that comfortable, but it was better than the cold, hard ground. And

how much did campers actually sleep at camp anyway?



It wasn't long, however, before thirteen buildings gave the Big Falls camp a more permanent feel. These included a tabernacle, dining hall, dormitories, and cabins.

According to one camper, waking up in the morning meant "dipping your washcloth into the cold river right in front of the dining hall and washing

the night away before breakfast."



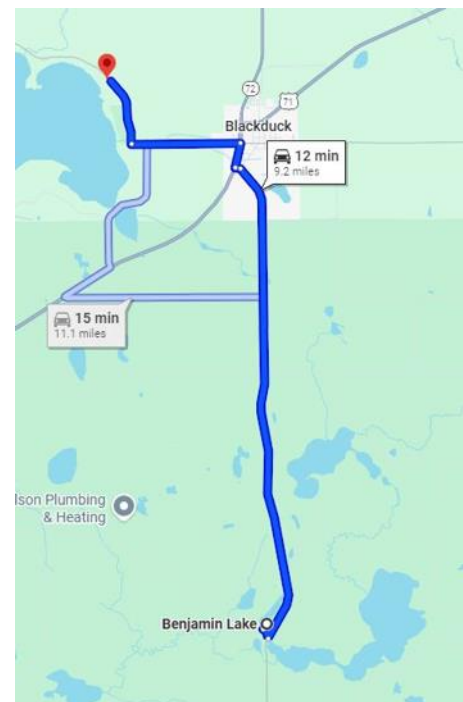
Lives were changed, and many more relationships were started during these times; relationships that continue to this day. And the cost? It cost a dollar a week for camp, which in today's figures would be around \$23.50.

In time, the Koochiching District camp moved again, this time to **Blackduck, Minnesota**.

The camp was located on Blackduck Lake and served the District well for a

number of years. The word of God was taught, friendships created or renewed, lives were changed, and Godly memories were created.

In the mid-1960s, swimming became an issue at Blackduck Lake, so campers were bused a short distance to Lake Benjamin. All of this only added to a memorable (and occasionally itchy) camping experience. There was also an idea by some that we should be looking at having our own camp again, like we did at Big Falls.



In 1936, Mac and Marnie McAlister started Camp Marmac on Bluewater Lake in Wabana Township, Minnesota. The name Marmac came from the first three letters of each of their



first names, **mar** and **mac**. (And Marmac sounds a whole lot better than Macmar.)

Marmac was originally a summer-long camp for boys from well-to-do Twin Cities families,

but later the McAlisters built facilities for girls as well. The McAlisters operated the camp for 30 years until their desire to slow down in 1967 led them to list the camp for sale.

At the same time, the idea of having our own camp was gaining steam and a prevailing sentiment in the Koochiching District that we should seek a better location. Camp Marmac seemed like the ideal fit. It wouldn't take much to transform it from a camp where students came for the entire summer to a Bible camp with week-long stays for all ages.

Considering that our congregation was the largest and most invested in the "Koochiching District," we initially looked at purchasing Camp Marmac outright. Coming off of a significant new **sanctuary** building program just a few years earlier, however, we didn't want to take on that much additional debt.



Little known to us, the Covenant churches in the Red River Valley were also seeking a new camp location, and they soon finalized the purchase of the camp. At this, Bluewater Covenant Bible Camp was born.



However, since there was no chapel, and a Bible Camp needed a chapel, a large **tent** was brought in to meet the need until an official chapel could be constructed from an existing building.



Something else that many will remember is that at first, there were actually **two camps** in the original purchase. The main camp(A) was where all of the activities took place, and where the girls stayed. Halfway across the lake, however, was a second full camp. This was where the “boys” cabins were located. This “boys side” also had a lodge with a dining hall, shower buildings, a beautiful beach, and an open area for sporting activities. At one time it had been another complete camp.

Other than the cabins and shower house, however, none of these other amenities were used. Rather, a church bus ran between the two camps, on a narrow winding road, bringing boys to the main camp in the morning, and back to their respective sleeping cabins at curfew.

It was always a challenge to “miss the bus” going back at night, requiring a camper to walk the mile road, usually with some fellow boys who also “missed the bus.” It was also a challenge to do all of this while hiding from the roving pastors who just happened to be looking for boys who “missed the bus.” And for some, it meant just a little more time with their new camp sweetheart.

Unlike the “main camp,” however, this “boys’ camp” sat on leased state land, and when the lease was up and it was noticed that this camp needed a lot of work, it was decided to tear down the cabins, let the lease go back to the state, and move everyone and all activities to the main camp. All that’s left standing at the old boys camp is a stone fireplace that at one time graced a wall of the well-equipped dining hall.

Initially, the Koochiching District, including our church, began renting the last two weeks of the camping season for our Junior High and Senior High camps from the Red River Valley District. About fifteen years later, however, in the early 1980s, both the Koochiching and Red River Districts recognized a need for better cooperation between the two, and several churches in the Koochiching District joined with those in the Red River District to form a new camping partnership.





Our "up front" contribution to this new partnership was to build an additional, well-needed cabin, which we gladly did. This photo shows just some of the men who drove to the camp and constructed the building.

And now, rather than the Koochiching District renting two weeks every year for Junior and Senior high students, we joined the existing Red River camp scheduling program as part owners. This opened up the Bible Camp to children at a much earlier age.

Since that time, our Bluewater experience has included children and youth camps, men's



and women's weekends, an annual "all church retreat," winter youth events, **church leadership weekends**, church baptisms, and so much more.

From the very beginning, Bible Camp is not just something we do, or send out children to. Rather, it's something we are. And for us, it will always be a big part of our story in these first 100 years.

Chapter 10

Building Campaigns

It's not very often a fledgling congregation starts with its own building, and we were no different. As local mission work began, a series of meetings were held in the winter of 1924 both in the rented City Hall on Fourth Avenue, and in the Holler School, just a few blocks South of our current campus.

A. 1926 First Building:

Our first building was a small structure, standing on the corner of 17th Street and 1st Avenue East, where our existing sanctuary is today. It was approximately 50'x34'; it did not have a basement, and the sanctuary was positioned so the congregation, when seated, faced East, the reverse of what it is today.



It was believed by some in those days that facing east was the preferred position if a church could manage it because it added a greater sense of "Awe" to whatever a minister was preaching. It seemed that when the rising sun would shine through a church's stained-glass windows, usually located just behind the altar, there was more of a divine authority to whatever the minister was saying. That really wasn't a factor for us, however, because we didn't have any stained glass in those days, nor do we even today.

Our first service involved improvising seating out of nail kegs, and plaster walls that were still a little bit damp. We were focusing on the basics. And as far as running



East and West, well, the lot ran east to west. For us, facing East was just what fit best on a long, narrow East/West lot.

This initial building had no insulation in the walls, and an old wood burner in the back for what little heat it could give off. It was said that it took a lot of wood, and later coal, on a cold winter day to make the building even somewhat comfortable for activities to be held. It was recorded that in 1935 pastor Swanson purchased forty acres of "Stumpage" from the state, and he and boys from the church cut enough wood to supply fuel for the church and parsonage for two years.

The building did not have a kitchen either, because, as some said, people "did not come to church to eat; they came to Worship". But as time went by, those Scandinavian men and women wanted their coffee. To remedy this, a tiny little room next to the furnace room in the back of the church, probably intended for wood, was converted into a makeshift "Coffee kitchen." And that little kitchen was well used, especially on those cold days in the winter.

Another modern convenience not afforded the original congregation was water and sewer. But there were two appropriately identified "outhouses" to the North of the church for both the church and the parsonage. And as for water, according to pastor George Wold, *"When we first came to the Falls, (May of 1945) there was no running water in the church or parsonage. There was a water shack on the corner where water was purchased for a few cents a pail and about 50 cents a barrel."*

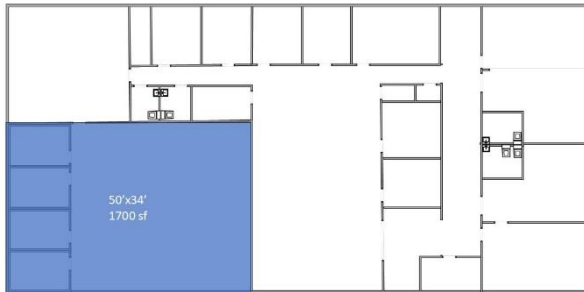
Within a couple of years of the 1926 construction, a small area was added to the east of the building, consisting of Sunday school rooms and a second-floor area referred to as the "upper room." This was important because even though this was early in the congregation's existence, Sunday School had an enrollment of 200 and an outlook of continued growth. Concerning this addition, Pastor Gravem commented:

"We wish to render our praise to Him for the additional Sunday School rooms, .and we are confident that when we equip these rooms with seats, and whatever else is needful, that "God shall supply all our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus"

"Holler Mission Church Messenger, Vol I, No. I (August 25th, 1929)

B. 1951 Basement added.

Evangelical Covenant Church, Basement Layout.



As the church was growing, Sunday School seemed to be one of its biggest ministries. This meant the need for more space moved up on the priority list, and considering limited land availability, a basement under the existing building was seen as the best path forward. The blue shaded overlay area on our current

basement shows the size of this original building and basement. The photo at right shows the building looking from the Southeast, as it sits on its new block foundation (circa early 1929).



While this helped for a short time with four additional Sunday School rooms and a larger room for holding small groups, within three years it was again seen as "just not enough." An interesting feature of this basement is that if you tear the paneling off the north wall of the current Teen room, you'll find glass block windows which at one time opened to the outside. Now they're just a puzzlement to any future basement remodel.

C. 1954 Whole Church Addition

In 1954, a large "L" shaped addition was added to the basement on the existing basement's North and East sides, and the sanctuary over top was enlarged to cover this additional space. (See green overlay in the diagram.) This almost tripled our space, and provided for a larger sanctuary above, as well as a kitchen in the basement and other areas including a nursery and more classrooms.

Evangelical Covenant Church, Basement Layout.





Another important milestone for the church at this time was the addition of inside bathrooms. The local school district was in the process of constructing the new "Holler Elementary School" three blocks to the South of the church, and the water and sewer lines connecting the school ran down 1st Avenue East, right in front of our building.

Since the church served many from the entire community, it was decided to ask the city for permission to tap into the water and sewer lines. This was granted, and the two outhouses became nothing but a fond memory; OK, . . . just a memory.



Because of this work, the parsonage that sat just to the North of the church eventually needed to be moved. Part of the reason was the need for more off-street parking. Another reason was it was just getting too old and the congregation wanted to ensure our pastor was well taken care of.



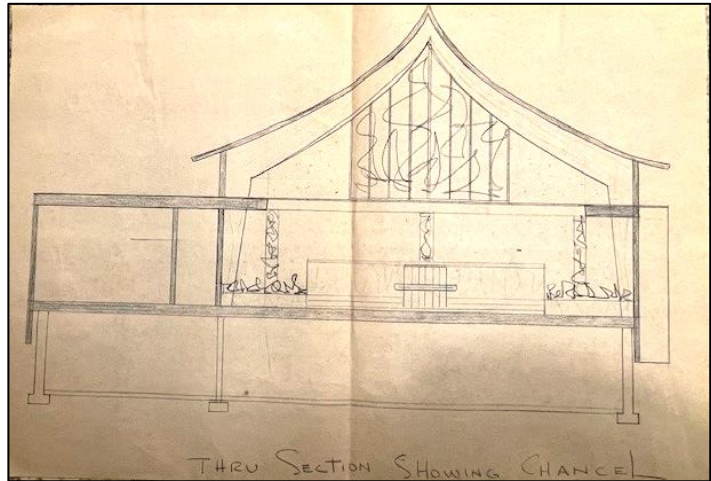
A new parsonage was secured on Home Lane on the West end of International Falls which served the pastor and his family well for a number of years.



D. 1963-64 A Major Rebuild:

As God continued to bless, and the work grew, a decision was made by the congregation to expand once again, but this time it would be a major undertaking involving a new sanctuary and more Sunday School and meeting space.

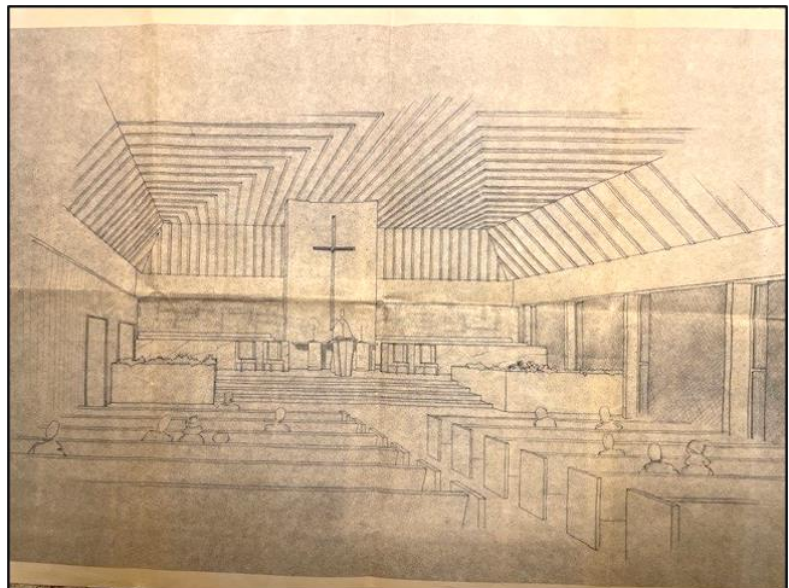
Hibbing architect Robert Y. Sandberg was contracted to begin the design work and ideas started flowing. Because the recently constructed International Falls First Lutheran church used a high roof pitch and stain glass as a strong design theme, some initial idea from Sandberg



followed those elements. His design shown at right shows what that may have looked like with stain glass alongside and above the pulpit/choir loft area.

But stain glass and curved laminated wood ceiling beams were expensive, and our focus was to be good stewards of the monies God had given us. In layman terms, it meant we wanted as much space as possible for a little money as possible, and by-the-way, make it look nice. And with all that, keep in mind this had to incorporate an existing basement that was half out of the ground.

Once the "Big Box, Small Cost" theme had taken root, Sandberg still tried to add a design feature over the pulpit area that curved the ceiling in a way that would draw the congregation's focus towards a central cross.

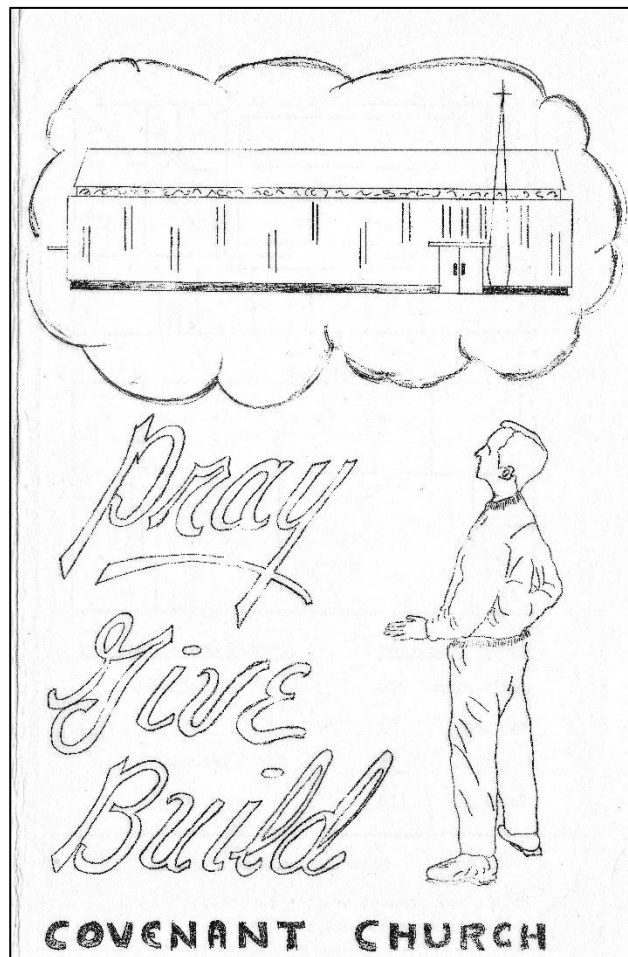


While pleasing to the eye, this too added to the cost of the project and deemed to be just a bit "unnecessary." We kept the cross, dropped the ceiling feature, finalized the drawings. And once "Foster, Jacobs and Johnson Engineers" from Duluth verified the engineering, we were able to get a better idea of the total expected cost.

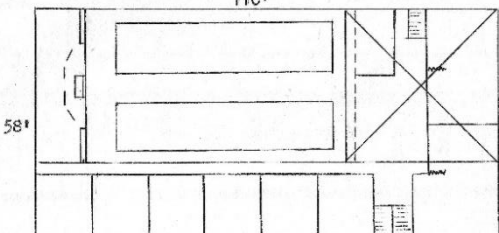
Stewardship Campaigns are not new to our congregation. In this case the plan was to borrow for the entire expenditure. Along with that however, there was a desire to see how much people would give above and beyond their normal giving to support this project. Yes, the congregation had agreed to do it, but now the rubber was getting ready to hit the road.

Early in 1962, the campaign started, with a "Loyalty Sunday" scheduled for April 15th, 1962. And no, there is no known correlation between Loyalty Sunday and April 15th, "tax day."

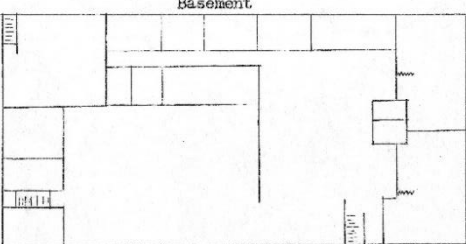
A central element of the Stewardship Campaign was an informational bulletin based on the theme "Pray, Give, Build". This bulletin went into great detail with both drawings, financial information, some scripture around giving/tithing, and a sample pledge card to be turned in on that Sunday. Keep in mind that this was all happening at a time when, for the most part, people had more time than money, and the money people had was budgeted for the basics of life. This was going to be a big commitment for many people.



Main Floor
with Balcony over "X"
110'



Basement



Seating Capacity		Sunday School Capacity	
Auditorium	300	Enrollment	
Balcony	75		850
Overflow	75	Attendance	
Total	450		700

This plan will

Double our present seating capacity.
Increase Sunday School enrollment by 250 pupils.

OUR WEEKLY FINANCIAL NEEDS --

Building Fund..... \$270.00

General Operating Expenses,
Benevolences and Missions..... 270.00

Weekly Total \$540.00

HOW WE CAN MEET OUR FINANCIAL NEEDS --

In our fellowship we have approximately 108 giving units. We can meet our needs if each unit gave weekly the following:

To Building Fund..... \$2.50

To General Operating Expenses,
Benevolences and Missions..... \$2.50
(Or 5% of Gross Income)

Let's aim even higher!

TITHING -- 10% of income. Let us strive for this! How easily our needs would then be met!

"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."

Luke 6:38

"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully."

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."

II Corinthians 9:6 & 7

"Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase."

Proverbs 3:9

There are no known records on how much was pledged for this effort, but the fact that the congregation moved forward with the project indicates there was a groundswell of support, and construction began in earnest.

A major piece of evidence of this groundswell was the use of volunteer help in the construction. The church hired parishioner Clint Carlson as the general contractor for the work, paying him between \$1.50 and \$2.00 per hour.

According to Clint's son John, everything that Clint made went back into the building. That was his way of supporting the project.

LOYALTY SUNDAY
APRIL 15, 1962
2:30 P.M.

Special Speaker: Dr. Louis Permon
Architect will be in attendance.

Special Music: Ladies' Quartette
Men's Quartette
Men's Duet
Skiffled Trio
Jim Haifsted and Hawaiian Guitar

We urge everyone to try to be present at this Loyalty Rally! It will inspire you!

On Loyalty Sunday, Faith Goal Cards will be distributed for the purpose of obtaining a picture of our capabilities to repay our building loan. A sample of which is below.

Mission Covenant Church
20 International Falls, Minn.

With God's help, I hope to fulfill this Faith Goal for years 1962, 1963, and 1964 as follows:

For Building Fund \$ _____ per week

For General Operating Expenses,
Benevolences and Missions \$ _____ per week

Signature _____ Date _____

Address _____

It is understood that this Faith Goal may be revised if circumstances should make it necessary.

Faith Goal Cards received on Loyalty Sunday.

One of Clint's responsibilities was to supervise the building and organize the volunteers from day to day to keep the project on schedule, under budget, and moving forward.

Before the new construction could begin, however, site prep required removal of the existing building, and Ivan Keeney and his new P&H crane were perfect for the job. Ivan had recently purchased the crane, and it's the same one used to set all of the major iron work and beams on the new Bronco Arena completed just a few years later. You might say our project was a trial run.



E. In the middle 1980's a handicap entrance was added to the North side of the building, including a wheelchair lift that has been a real asset in supporting both access to the church, and supporting anyone and anyone who might have a physical need.

This opened up much improved access to and from the parking lot, and provided a safer pick-up and drop-off zone.

F. 2000 A new "Family Life" center was added, just east of the existing building in the "North" parking lot. It had already been decided that we needed more space, and we believed that God wanted us to begin moving in that direction. Interestingly, this was an issue that had been on the minds of so many as far back as Pastor George Wold in the late 1960s.

In the middle 1990's, Dale Boyum, who at that time was the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, asked and was permitted by the church leadership board to look into a couple of Stewardship Campaign groups to see if that might be a path to pursue. He had been in contact with a Covenant Church in the Minneapolis area that had just completed a successful campaign using the John Maxwell group "Injoy."

The board invited two groups to come and give a presentation of what they envisioned a campaign to look like, and what it would entail. After this, the Board agreed that Injoy would be a good fit for us, and brought this to the congregation for approval, which it was.

The campaign was launched with three financial goals:

- Victory Goal: \$300,000
- Challenge Goal: \$450,000
- Miracle Goal: \$600,000

With any major project like this, there were some late adopters to the effort, and a few who were opposed. But for the most part, the congregation was ready to see how God was going to work, and there was an excitement throughout the church.

Once plans were designed based on what the congregation determined was our greatest need and what would support ministry, building began.

One of the highlights was the ground breaking and prayer. First of all, the leadership broke ground, then the congregation circled the building site and, led by our chairman, prayed over the building site, the construction, and for the ministry that God was going to use this gift of his for.



While the new Family Life Center was under construction, the congregation also did not neglect the current facilities. There was always updating and maintenance that needed attention. Whether replacing a 60-year-old furnace, patching cracks in the roof,



or just painting and general upkeep, it has always been a priority to ensure we are taking care of the blessings God has given us over the years.



Chapter 11	Missions Conference
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We cannot even begin to talk about our annual Missions' Conferences without recognizing that our whole existence as a church is predicated on the mission work of others. It was **Hilmar Francis'** contact with the Swedish Mission Covenant Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota that saw them establish our church as a "Home Missions Project." Along with this, the Covenant headquarters in Minneapolis sent and supported many men and women to assist us in both the work of our church and mission work throughout the area.



There were three "Bible Women" as they were called (Hannah Bergstrom, Ruth Eckstrand, and Agnes Sveiven) who lived in a little room on the second floor of the church called the "Upper Room." Other ladies, such as Myrtle Johnson and Myrtle Dahlgren, lived in the old church kitchen and ministered here for many years. They were all a tremendous help to the youth and children's Bible Clubs, and in addition, spent many hours in home visitation. There were also a number of men involved, (with guitars and other musical instruments), working with the boys.

Along with this, much local work involved the small towns and lumber camps in the immediate area. Alrick Olson, an interim pastor, had a ministry in logging camps, among the native Indians. And during this time, a gospel mission was started on second avenue, adjacent to the Riverside Hotel. Alrick Olson is credited with leading G Christian Weiss of "Back to the Bible" to the Lord.



The Minneapolis headquarters often sent used clothing to us to sell at rummage sales. Since our congregation had a concern about "buying and selling" on church property, however, the sales were held in the Holler Town Hall, two blocks north of the church.

Concerning missions, in the early 1960s, the Congregation began thinking more globally in its desire to influence the world for Christ.

This idea may have been initially impacted by the fact that two of our former pastor families, the Gravems and Johnsons, had come to us after serving on the foreign mission field. Or, it may have been because our own Ralph Hanson from Birchdale had served in Alaska, and later as the Evangelical Covenant Church's director of Foreign Missions.

And these were no doubt somewhat influential, but if you look deeper, many will point to a more personal reason for this global desire.

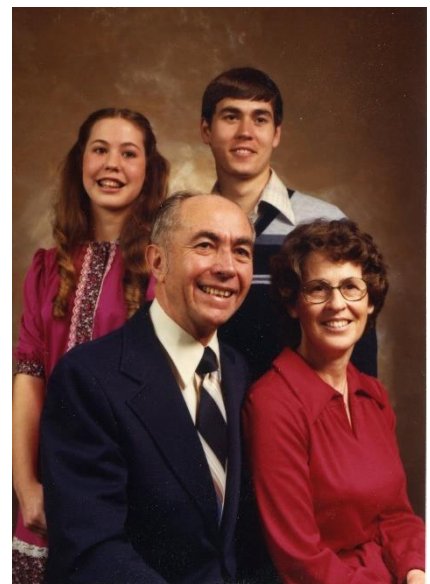
Over the years, a number of our own fellowship had answered God's call to the foreign mission field. And because of this, more and more we were getting to know missionaries not just as a name on the end of a map pin, but rather as friends and family. Many of these who stepped up and answered God's call were people we knew; people we had relationships with, and that made missions, no matter where it happened, much more personal to us.

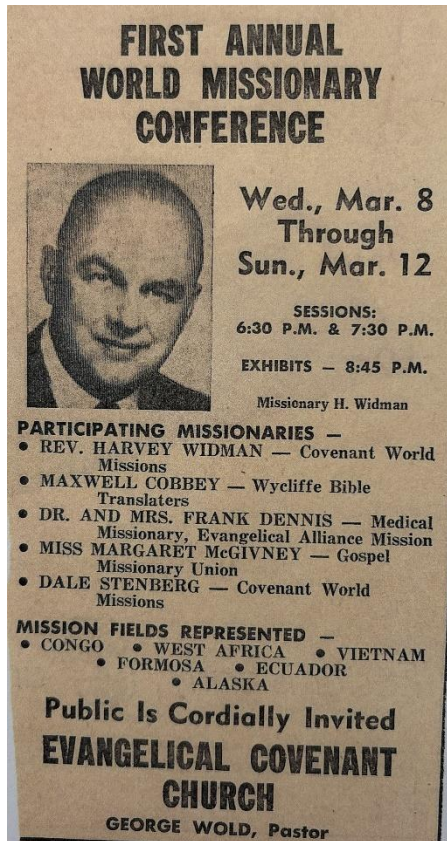


Early examples of this included our own **Margaret McGivney**, who began serving in Ecuador in 1942. Some might remember when Margaret would be home on Furlow in the 1960s, and she would go into the elementary schools and show a slide presentation of her work with the natives in the Quito (KEY-toe) area of Ecuador. Even back then, she wasn't able to talk about the Ministry part of her work, but with all she shared about the indigenous people and their culture, none of the students ever dozed off.

Then there were the **Wardlaws**. Keith and Myrtle were from our Lindford Township area and served with the Viaca (WHY-ka) Indians in the Amazon River Valley in Brazil. Additionally, sisters to our own Jim and Arlene Degerman included Lucile Dobbs (Indus) and Bessy Degerman (Bemidji), serving in the Congo and Japan, respectively. And there were so many others.

With such a family foundation from our own congregation and surrounding area, it just made sense to become more active in missions, no matter where the calling.





Our first official “Mission Conference” was held March 8-12 in 1967 and was so successful that its format set the stage for many years to come. It consisted of five days of mission focus, starting on a Wednesday Night and concluding the following Sunday Evening. There were services Wednesday through Saturday nights, with both a morning and evening service on Sunday and missionary coffee hours during the days, Thursday and Friday. Special events for youth, and times of prayer and sharing around **breakfasts** helped include everyone in the fellowship.

Add to this that most of the time missionaries would stay in people’s homes during the conference, and you can see how this would lead



to so many connections which were begun and maintained throughout the years.

To help bring the field to the church, each missionary would have a display table set up with photos and items specific to their ministry. In this “Daily Journal” photo from our 1969 conference, Keith and Myrtle Wardlaw created a fully furnished Brazilian native temporary house, just like what you would find in the Brazilian jungle.

Even though the initial missionary focus leaned heavily toward foreign fields, we always tried to focus where God was working, and we currently support missionaries both on the foreign field and here at home.

Another important part of our Mission Conference format is keeping a separate “Missions Budget”. It has become very common today for a church to just add a line or two in their overall church budget for Missions, send the money off to their denomination, and then forget about missions again until next year’s budget. We saw that was just too impersonal, so we didn’t do it that way.

Rather, we wanted a separate fund just for missions where people would give above and beyond their normal giving. This would give people the ability to see just where their giving was going, helping to create personal ownership. And with regular **missionary updates** in our weekly bulletins, they helped increase our awareness of missionary praise and prayer concerns.

In doing it this way, we have been able to support hundreds of missionaries not just financially, but also very intentionally with our prayers.

Missionary Update
Mark & Tina Mast - One Hope Canada



On April 1, as Mark was completing a last day of ministry in Guatemala with a team he had taken to serve and proclaim the Gospel, he developed a very severe inflammation and infection in his left eye. By God's grace he was able to return to Rainy River and was referred to see a specialist in Winnipeg. Now after seeing 4 specialists in Winnipeg, Mark was told that a cornea transplant will be necessary. Pray for a miracle of healing; with God all things are possible.

Mark always has a full schedule and will be returning to Pikangikum throughout the fall and winter months to teach at schools and preach at churches and Freedom from Addiction meetings. Missionaries are needed to serve and bring sound biblical teachings.

We continue to host two Zoom worship services each Sunday from the two churches that Mark pastors, along with a weekly Zoom "Prayer & Praise" gathering every Wednesday evening. We continually marvel at the far-reaching places this affords us to proclaim the Gospel.

Mark, also, will be going back to Guatemala in October with a team. For our ministry in India which continues to flourish and the Lord is moving in mighty ways to build His church. Mark is hoping to return in November.

Thank you for your prayers, encouragement and financial support in each of these ministry endeavors.

Prayer Requests:
 1. For continual prayer for healing of his left eye without surgery.
 2. That the Gospel will transform lives for eternity.

This "Chart" was created for our 20th Conference. It shows that in our first twenty years,



we were able to support almost 150 missionaries. In the 40 years since then, there have been hundreds more who we have been blessed to support.

And while yes, that number may be a little skewed, as some missionaries have been at multiple conferences. But each time they came, they brought a fresh perspective to the work and what God was doing.

As time went by, we've also been able to follow missionary families as they've grown up before our eyes. And, we've been able to support members of our own church family in missionary work, whether full time, short term, as a summer intern, or in other ways that help spread the gospel and point people to Jesus.

Our Missions program has been in place for over 60 years, and while our focus has been from the church outward, our congregation has been blessed over and over in return. For a congregation that started as the "Holler Mission Church," you may be able to take "Mission" out of our name, but it can never be taken out of our Hearts.

Chapter 12	Men's and Women's Ministries
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Men's Ministries:

The work of the Men's Fellowship was established during Pastor Wold's ministry. Over the years it has been called a number of things, but its focus has always been to bring men together for fellowship, prayer, and to create a place for belonging.

Early activities involved church suppers, fish fries, snowmobile parties, and banquets. Many older men still have fond memories of the Father-Son (and later Father-Son/Daughter) banquets. More recent activities include Promise Keepers, Wild Game Feeds, men's small-group Bible studies, and other activities.

Women's Ministries:

The women of the church began fellowshiping together right from the start. It is believed

President: Mrs. Mina Reuter
Vice President: Mrs. Albert Francis
Secretary: Mrs. Oscar Johnson
Treasurer: Mrs. R.C. Goins

that the "Mission Ladies Aid" was organized in 1926. And it's interesting to note that the secretary's reports were recorded in Swedish. In 1941, it was voted to change the name to Covenant Missionary Circle, but everyone knew it as the "Mission Circle."

In the beginning, meetings were held in the afternoons, but as more and more women were entering the workforce, it was decided to move the meetings to an evening schedule, allowing for more involvement.

It was noted that after their afternoon session, the ladies had a rather large lunch.

"Late in the afternoon, the men, teachers and other day workers would come and have lunch with us. They would put money into an offering plate on the serving table as they went along the serving line. When work got around that we were "selling suppers," this practice was discouraged, lunches were downsized, and the men quit coming."





Once again, a name change was in the works, and currently the ladies are meeting under the denominational mantle of "Covenant Women's Ministries". Activities include monthly meetings, special events like mother/daughter banquets, Christmas parties, and serving the church in many ways, including providing food for funerals,

etc. Since covid however, there have not been meetings, but the circles are faithful for supporting the funeral ministry.



Chapter 13	Community Focus
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As a congregation, outreach to our community and surrounding area has always been a priority for us. In the early days, it was seen in our ministry in the lumber camps and native Americans. Most recently, it has involved both financial and physical support. Just a few of these include:

1) Annual Leaf Pickup:

The congregation would work in conjunction with the City of International Falls and the local Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), providing fallen leaf removal in the fall. This would happen on a Saturday, and the Koochiching Transfer Station would keep longer hours and staff to assist with landfilling the leaves. This was a much-appreciated event.

2) Community Theater

For many years, the congregation would present a Christmas play for the community. These were very well received and given high praise from everyone in attendance.

3) Backpacks

- a) Each fall, the school district provides students with a list of items they need to have at the beginning of the year. When this list was published, the congregation would work with the local Rotary club, providing backpacks and supplies to children whose family circumstances might prevent them from entering school fully prepared. It was important for all children to be given the tools to succeed.



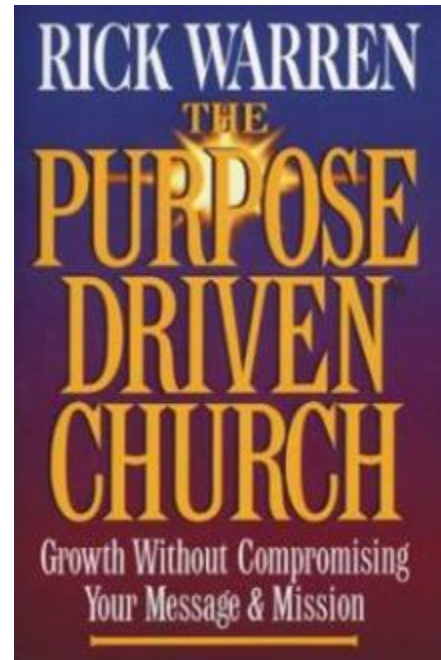
4) Trunk or Treat



a) As a safe place for children on Halloween, the congregation began its version of "Trunk or Treat." Members of the congregation would line up their vehicles around the church parking lot, decorate their open trunks, and distribute candy and information about the church to children. The church also provided free chips, hot dogs and hot chocolate to all who wanted.

5) Purpose Driven Church

a) After the congregation completed going through "The Purpose Driven Church," there was an outpouring of appreciation to our community school and law enforcement organizations. Cards of gratitude were written, as well as verbal thanksgiving. This was a special time for both the congregation and those on the receiving end. Many said they had never been thanked like this before.



These and so many other areas of community involvement help build relationships, keep a feel on the pulse of the community, and show God's love,

Chapter 14	Scatterings:
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A. Radio Broadcasting

In the early 1960s, radio station CFOB (Canadian Friends Over the Border) in Fort Frances, Ontario, made us an offer to broadcast the Sunday Morning Service for one hour for the cost of \$12.50. We had not originally thought of this as a ministry outreach, but we jumped at the idea, and broadcasting our services has been an important ministry to so many, especially for shut-ins and the elderly.

In time, we moved the broadcast to the studios of KGHS/KSDM, and later to KXBR: FM. Over the years, this greatly increased the outreach of the church and helped make it somewhat of a community church. It's surprising how many people say the Covenant Church is their home church, just because they are regular radio listeners.

B. Video Production / TV Broadcasting

In the 1970's we had an almost unheard-of opportunity to broadcast our Sunday morning services live on local cable origination television. While the local Channel Five origination point was at our local community college, the cable company had just finished updating some major transition lines, and there was now an abandoned line in front of the church that ran all the way to the college. Arnie Michalicek received permission from the cable company for us to use that line to connect with the college line and broadcast our morning service live, with a single camera.

It really wasn't the best camera because, unlike today, cameras needed a lot of light to get a decent picture. We added additional lighting to the front of the church and played with some graphics during this time, which was the beginning of over 50 years of work in this area.

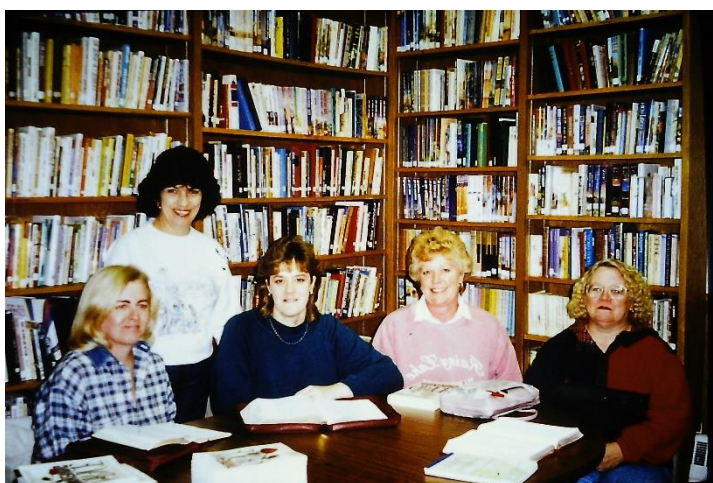
Some other churches would videotape their services, and the college would play them back at a later time, but we believe being able to have our service broadcast in real time was a blessing to so many who were unable to attend in person.

Currently, we broadcast online with three cameras and special video switching gear. This has been a blessing, allowing us to provide for those unable to attend a service.

C. The Library

Reading has always been an important activity in our congregation. To help foster this, in the early 1970's, the first "Sunday School" room next to the Sunday School Office was converted into a library. Dale Boyum took the initiative by building and installing the shelving; Gary Degerman, with additions from Clint Carlson, built the card catalog as a high school shop project; and then Mrs. Wm. Morris marked and filed all of the books using the Dewey Decimal System. While the church purchased some books to help get things going, much of the inventory was donated from private collections.

Soon the library became not just a haven for avid readers, but also a sought-after room for small groups and Bible studies because of the quiet warmth found in its surroundings.



Over the years, the library has grown, doubling its size and forcing the Sunday School Office to move one classroom down to accommodate it. Carol Clement took over the reins during this time, with her daughter Melanie Clarity helping in so many ways. New shelves were purchased, inventory expanded, and material now includes a large Audio Video section. In a world of computers, tablets, and cellphones, it really is refreshing to see how much the library continues to be used by so many.

D. Softball

In the 1970s, a slow pitch softball league was started in International Falls, and we had a team in it. Previously, town softball was based on the "Fast Pitch" model, which lent itself to the young and agile, and teams played other teams from the surrounding towns and area.



On the other hand, slow pitch was just like it sounds, just a bit more relaxed, but the competition was still fierce. The teams were mostly from "in town," and as a matter of fact, during the start of this league, there were so many churches fielding slow pitch teams that it was often referred to as the "church league." Pitching was also a whole lot different in slow pitch. Rather than rocket the ball across the plate, rules required a pitching requirement that when pitched, the ball must have an arc to it. It needed to be at least six feet off the ground, but no higher than twelve feet. Being the "Covenant" church, we liked to claim that our pitcher had the "Arc of the Covenant", . . most of the time that is.

In the 1970's, there was a popular gospel singer named Dallas Holm. Over the years, he has won five Dove Awards and has been inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame, amongst other honors. He was also a fairly good softball player. He happened to be in International Falls visiting some relatives, and while here, he was enlisted to fill a spot on the Covenant team's roster for a game. He enjoyed it, played well, and it was fun to see his name listed with the other players when the Daily Journal printed the game summary.

Over the years, we were able to field some fairly good teams. We would even, on occasion, participate in an annual tournament in the Twin Cities hosted for covenant churches by our Northwest Conference. Some larger churches would field well-oiled teams in full dress with all the bells and buzzers. On the other hand, we would cobble together a team, grouping many guys who had never played together, and every so often come home with some hardware. Our strategy was simple. We would lose the first two games, which would drop us into the consolation bracket, and away from the really good teams. Then we seemed always to play our best ball and come home with some kind of trophy.

It didn't always work, but in most cases this strategy would take us further than if we tried to win everything from the start. The hard part would be if you were playing a team in the first or second round that was using the same strategy.



Unfortunately for us, somebody *had* to win, and we would often draw the short straw.

Conclusion:

Thank you for spending time with us. While we have covered a lot of material, there is so much more we didn't have the room or time to share. And to that point, we have just barely begun to explore what God can do with a church and a congregation that answered God's calling time and time again with "Yes, Lord."

But as has been the theme for these last 100 years, the focus of this congregation has always been, and prays that it will always be: in all things:

"To God Be the Glory."

Anniversary Committee

"To God Be the Glory"

1926 – 2026

Dave Austin

Dale and Mary Boyum

Howie and Carol Hauge

Dalton Johnson

Ed and Connie Magnuson

Penny Zoupas

