

# A BRIEF HISTORY

By MALCOLM ROSHOLT

In the beginning there was one Lutheran church congregation in Alban township, later there were two, now there is one, for with the organization of Faith Lutheran Church an old concept has been reestablished and a new one affirmed. Action to consolidate the Alban and Rosholt Lutheran congregations, in addition to a third at Galloway, Wisconsin, was taken at individual meetings held by the three congregations in January, 1961 and the legalization of the new incorporation became effective on April 1, 1961.

Behind this development lies a long history of church harmony and also of church discord in which tolerance for the opinions of the other man has been respected in the tradition of the Protestant dispensation where every man is his own priest and in the American tradition of democracy where every man is responsible to his own actions.

Behind this development also lies a history of cultural change and adaptation to new forces in the lives of a people who once took the bold step of leaving their homes in Norway and Denmark and, despite often bitter and merciless circumstances, were able to establish themselves in new homes on the Wisconsin wilderness frontier where they found greater economic freedom and even greater religious opportunity.

Throughout this period our people have exhibited a certain stubbornness to change, some more so than others, some less so but all fighting to preserve what is considered good from the past while approaching with caution what appears to be new in the future, and this is as it should be. The process still goes on.

The difference between the Ideal and the practical accomplishment of this Ideal faced our forefathers even as it faces us today. Apart from doctrinal matters, some of our problems in the past arose over simple mundane questions, some over cultural affairs, and some no doubt because of man's inherent pride in family and race. We have not pretended to be consistent except in one direction, namely, in our everlasting quest for peace with God.

And it was this groping for an answer to the eternal mysteries that prompted our people, before they were numerous enough or rich enough to build a church, to meet in each other's homes and listen to a neighbor read from Martin Luther's *postil*, a book of sermons written for informal worship. When the weather permitted and a pastor was available, the people gathered at Alban school house, a log cabin, which stood about half a mile south of Alban corners. But the first recorded evidence of a pastor in this area appears in a diary written by Knut Halverson, a pioneer of the Tomorrow River settlement in the town of Sharon. The visiting pastor was Nils Bryngelsen Berge who conducted services in the home of John Furuvoild on Tuesday, March 6, 1877. Pastor Berge, a native of Vos, Norway, after his ordination at St. Louis, Missouri, in 1870, served briefly as an assistant to Pastor Amund Mikkelsen in Scandinavia, Wisconsin, and in 1871 was called as resident pastor to New Hope where he served this and other congregations, including Alban after the latter was organized on April 30, 1878.

As the east Alban community at this time was made up of a mixed population of Norwegian and Danish emigrants, plus a few second generation Norwegians who had moved here from Waupaca county, the new congregation took the name of The Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, a member of what was then known as the *Norske Synode* affiliated with Concordia Seminary, a German-sponsored school of theology of the Missouri Synod at St. Louis, Missouri.

While the records of this church begin with the baptism on September 21, 1871 of Martin Kristian, son of Hans Jorgen and Anna Drothea Fredericksen, we can not be sure where the baptismal ceremony was held. It is even possible that this and later entries in the early 1870s of baptisms, marriages and deaths were post-dated on the basis of records in the pastor's office at New Hope after the congregation was organized at Alban in 1878. But children of the pioneers of Alban recall that services were occasionally conducted in Alban school by Pastor Berge in the 1870s before a congregation was organized. For the most part, however, these earliest pioneers drove to north New Hope church and children attending confirmation classes usually walked to New Hope to "read for the minister" (*lese for presten*)

A decision to build a church for the new Alban congregation was taken in the latter part of 1878 and apparently the building was sufficiently well along to lay the cornerstone that same year. But it was not until several years later that a steeple was built and even later before a bell was hung. This was not a matter of time, but of available funds, and the pioneers built as they found the means to build with. Practically all the labor was donated by the members of the congregation, many of whom, in lieu of cash, contributed lumber and building materials. For it was a matter

of personal pride to have one's own church in the community. It not only identified people but gave them a focal point of interest where they could share in each other's religious experience as well as cultural and economic advancement. As the congregation was unable to employ a full-time pastor, services were conducted at irregular intervals, often a month apart, supplemented by special services at Christmas and Easter. Thus it was important to be in church when the occasion offered and, following the service, to stand outside and visit, trade horses or sell a cow.

In the 1880s a series of questions left unresolved since the Civil War faced the *Norske Synode*. While the crux of the matter eventually centered on doctrinal interpretation, this in turn had been influenced by other matters which the new emigrants and their pastors were confronted with when they left their homes in the Old Country and sailed for the "land of their choice." The question of slavery was involved; but even before the Civil War, the question of parochial schools was involved. The pastors who came over from Norway and Denmark to minister to the new churches wished to establish a form of ecclesiastical hierarchy not unlike the Old Country and they also wished to maintain their influence over the education of the youth in opposition to the American common school which was considered to secular and amoral. There was also a question of racial feeling. Throughout this early period the German-sponsored seminary at St. Louis had dominated the thinking of the Norwegian pastors and through them their Norwegian-Danish parishioners. All these confrontations with American democracy were an incentive to change and the majority of Norwegians adhering to the *Norske Synode* were anxious to shed every vestment of subservience — which they could do in a democracy but could not do in the Old Country — and, to show their independence, began agitating for a new church organization which would cast off the old and put on the new. They dared not admit to themselves, apparently, that this is what they were doing and, to put the stamp of authority from the past on their actions, took up the matter of doctrine to prove the correctness of their new position. The question at issue then was whether man could be saved by grace alone without any merit on the part of the individual, or whether man also had a part in his own salvation. It came to be called *naadevalgstriden* after the Dano-Norwegian words, *naade* for grace, *valgs* for choice, and *strid* for strife or struggle.

At a meeting of the Alban congregation held in 1887, the members voted 17 to three in favor of a split with the *Norske Synode*. There were patently others who were against leaving but did not choose to attend the meeting. While much of the agitation for a split was led by Pastor K. (for Kittil) O. (for Olson) Eidahl, called to New Hope in 1884 after the death of Pastor Berge in 1883, and who also served the Alban congregation, it would appear that the majority in the congregation were not in need of much convincing. They had been reading the papers too. And for the next three years the Alban congregation, like many others, including the one at north New Hope, was without a synod or final authority. This was resolved in 1890 when these two congregations, with many others, joined what came to be called the United Church, a new synodical conference. With the formation of the United Church, affairs at Alban returned to normal and Pastor Eidahl went about his mission more or less as he had done before the trouble started. But on a Sunday morning when the weather was clear, he could probably hear the peal of another church bell about two miles to the northeast, for here the three families who voted to remain in the *Norske Synode*, now augmented by several other families, had built a new although smaller church.

When the vote was taken in 1887 to split with the *Norske Synode*, the majority who voted in favor of the split were the dissenters from the established church and it would have seemed that the three who voted to remain in the synod should have been the heirs to the original building. Instead, the dissenters kept possession. It was an interesting question of ownership, and if the question was ever brought up at a meeting at all, it is not recorded, and the three families in the minority had to find a new church building. Again, this was the democratic way. The majority ruled. Had this happened in Norway or Denmark, the dissenters would probably have lost their church building and been sent to jail as well even as the government had once jailed Hans Nielsen Hauge.

Thus while there was friction and some personal animosity between neighbors, there were no overt measures taken by either group to discipline the other, for this would have violated not only the Sermon on the Mount, but the democratic principle on which this nation is founded. They got along and made the best of it, and in the end this was the reasonable thing to do, for one day they would join hands and forget the whole affair. How much better this way than to force the hand of either?

One of the collateral effects of the split was to focus attention on Bible reading in the home. A man had to know what the Bible said if he was to be able to defend his position on purely doctrinal grounds. It was a time of deep soul searching and, no doubt, wonderment. And even after the split came, one group tried to "convert" the family of another to the other synod and it known that these discussions among the laymen often lasted far into the night. We can look back on this period with a certain envy because the quest for God was so sharply defined and openly discussed.

A feature of the 1890s and early 1900s at Alban were the several *hoitidsdag*, or festival days. Special Sundays every year were reserved for a children's festival when the young were given a new status in the church community. There were mission festivals (*missionsfest*) when services, held morning, afternoon and evening, featured a missionary speaker, usually from Zululand or China. The *kresmode* or district meeting attracted big gatherings. This was held in different parts of the circuit but when it was held here or in nearby villages, every effort was made by the members of the congregation to attend at least one of the two-day affairs. There were also revival meetings (*opvaekkelsermode*) often lasting two days, and on February 14, 1905 a special service was led by Pastor A. L. Dahl to fight for prohibition and against the saloons.

Ordinary church services in the 1890s and early 1900s were seldom finished in less than an hour and a half. As services were not held every Sunday, many were accompanied by at least one baptismal ceremony. As there were no bulletins issued to members of the congregation, the pastor also spent several minutes describing upcoming events, announcing the dates of the next Bible reading class, or Ladies Aid Society meeting, or a funeral or business meeting. Pastor Eidahl, who spoke German as well as Norwegian and English, often preached two sermons at a single service, one in Norwegian and one in German. Both ethnic groups listened in silence while he was preaching in the opposite language. But after Eidahl left in 1904 this was given up.

Pastor Eidahl was followed by Olaus M. C. Farseth who resigned April 17, 1910 to be followed by Ludvig Larson Masted until January, 1917; Thormod Severin Kolste served from January to May, 1917, and Nils Folkesson Kile from May, 1917 to October, 1919. Thereafter the congregation was served a second time by Pastor Kolste on a temporary basis until the first resident pastor, Gerhard Augustine Peterson of Minneapolis came in August, 1920. Meanwhile, the United Church and the *Norske Synode* came together in 1917 both as members of the new Norwegian Evangelical Church of America, and Peterson became the first pastor to serve both the Alban and Rosholt congregations as well as a new church body in Galloway called Christ Lutheran.

Pastor Peterson resigned in November, 1923 and the two congregations were served temporarily by Severin Lewis Thompson of Nelsonville and early in 1924 Wilfred A. Johnson of Capron, Illinois, accepted the call to serve the three congregations as well as fourth at Elderon, Wisconsin.

He resigned in 1946 to be followed by William L. Anderson of Prairie Farm, Wisconsin, who resigned in August, 1956 to be followed by Olaf Olsen who served until January 1, 1959, and in June, 1959 by Vern A. Holtan, of Stoughton, Wisconsin, who presently serves the new congregation, Faith Lutheran Church, and two congregations in New Hope.

Most of these pastors made a lasting impression on their parishioners. There is no living memory of the first pastor, Berge, but an entry in Norwegian appears in the daily register of Alban congregation dated September 5, 1879 which reads (in translation):

A divine visitation service and catechisation and a short congregation meeting (was held). The congregation expressed much satisfaction with Pastor Berge.

T. B. Frick

Pastor Frick was at this time president or *formand* of the eastern district and was apparently on an official inspection tour or visitation. This entry is noteworthy because it is the first and only one made for 1879. If Berge kept a register it is not available because the next entry begins on May 20, 1883, two weeks after he died and was buried at north New Hope cemetery. Thus we know only that Berge must have been deeply respected and had become so much a part of the community that he wished to be buried among the people he had once served.

Pastor Eidahl is well remembered by older people of the congregation. One said that he prepared his sermons and "pounded the pulpit (and) believed what he preached." He was above all a practical man and as the congregations were unable to provide him with a sufficient salary, he went into the logging business as a sideline, cutting railroad ties. He was also a sharp trader when it came to trading horses, as one parishioner in east Alban—who thought he had the best of the bargain—was to learn.

It was not until 1927 that the Alban trustees voted to permit English sermons on a limited basis, actually three times a year, but this was a decision not adhered to very long because more and more English services were conducted.

The Norwegian language was hard dying in Alban and even as late as the annual meeting held January 14, 1942, five weeks after Pearl Harbor, the secretary was still keeping his minutes in Norwegian. It was the last time. A year later the same secretary, Gust D. Halverson, was recording the minutes in English. There was no motion to approve this change. The secretary apparently took it upon himself to do

so, even as the pastor had long since ceased to preach only the allotted three sermons in English per year. Finally, at the annual meeting held in 1946 Harold P. Anderson moved that "from now on all services will be conducted in the English language unless some other request be made by members in the congregation and that an amendment to this motion be made that we have two Norwegian services with Communion, one in the spring and the other in the fall." This last provision was also of limited duration. Either in 1957 or 1958 Pastor Olaf Olson, himself a native of Norway, gave what will probably be the last sermon heard in the Norwegian language in Portage county.

Meanwhile the movement to consolidation among various Lutheran groups, many of them originally founded less on doctrinal than on ethnic lines, was moving ahead. In 1917 the *Norske Synode*, United Church and Hauge Synod came together to form a single body known as the Norwegian Evangelical Church of America. This was the first step. Others eventually followed and finally in 1960 the American Lutheran Church was formed comprising several synods from among former Scandinavian and German Lutheran bodies.

While it was generally realized that a closer bond between Alban, Rosholt, Galloway and the New Hope congregations was desirable, it was not until Pastor Holtan accepted the call to serve these congregations that a move got under way to merge the Rosholt, Alban and Galloway congregations. At a vote taken at the annual meeting of Alban congregation on January 10, 1960 a ballot was cast "favoring a plan for one congregation." The count was 40 to 13 in favor. A year later on January 8, 1961 formal action was taken for the merger when the vote was 38 to 18 in favor. In a vote cast for naming the new congregation, there were 24 votes cast for the name "Faith" Lutheran Church, 22 for "Emmanuel" and two for "United." Until a central church building is created, the congregation will continue to alternate services between the Alban and Rosholt churches.

## CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CHURCH

When the split, or *splittelse* as it was known in Norwegian, came in 1887 the *Norske Synode* people who left their original church body were without a formal organization and a church. The same happened in New Hope and Scandinavia and in each case the *Synode* people eventually built another church. This explains why there is a "north" New Hope and a "south" New Hope congregation. The south New Hope church represented the old *Norske Synode*.

The organizational meeting of the new church body in Alban township was held in the home of Andrew Brekke on June 29, 1889 "for those who would hold fast to the old Lutheran teachings and unite with the "*Norske Synode*" and the new congregation was to be known as Concordia Evangelical Lutheran Church. The first annual meeting was held December 20, 1889 when Pastor O. (for Ove) K. (for Kristian) Ramberg was present. He had agreed to serve this congregation as well as south New Hope and Scandinavia. A native of Norway, he later became editor of *Our Friend*, a children's magazine sponsored by the synod.

Construction of a church building, which stood on Andrew Linland's forty, was apparently pushed to near-completion the same year of 1889 because we know that services were held here on New Year's day in 1890, although the dedication and corner stone ceremony was put off until September 1, 1890 which might suggest that the building was not yet completed until the summer of 1890. The congregation made special efforts to attract a record turnout by inviting four other pastors in addition to Ramberg. These were Amund Mikkelsen who once served in Scandinavia, Claus Frimann ("Finn") Magelssen of Manitowoc-Sheboygan, Nils A. Forde of Stevens Point and Amherst, and Anders J. Anderson of Marshfield and Wood county congregations.

Owing to the distance involved, services were held less than once a month in the early years and between times the parishioners usually traveled to south New Hope's church. And at the annual meeting held in 1899 the Concordia congregation voted to increase its share of the pastor's salary from \$60 to \$100 per year.

In the autumn of 1903 the railroad came into the fast-building village of Rosholt, and at the annual meeting of Concordia church in the country, J. R. Rosholt, who platted the original village, offered land in addition to \$25 towards a new church to be built in the village. No action was taken until March, 1905 when Adolph Torger-son made a motion that the old church, which was in need of repairs, be demolished and a new church built in the village. At a second meeting held the same month it was decided to build a new church with the understanding that J. G. Rosholt was to make a contribution of \$750.

The movement for the removal of the church was urged not only by Rosholt but also by the new pastor who had accepted a call in June, 1904, namely, Carl Severin Berthinius Hoel, a native of Aundal, Norway, who also served south New Hope, Iola and Scandinavia congregations of the *Norske Synode*. The new church in Rosholt

was modeled after another one recently built in Stevens Point for Trinity Lutheran on Strongs Avenue. In fact, the altar which was installed at Concordia, was an exact duplicate of the one in Stevens Point, both created by A. P. Lewis. We know that the church was ready for occupancy sometime in 1905 as the annual meeting was held "in the congregation's new church at Rosholt, Wisconsin on November 25, 1905."

At a special meeting held November 15, 1916 when the question of forming a new synodical conference was being discussed, a vote was taken with 31 in favor and 10 against the new synod—the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church of America which became a reality in 1917. During this period a new Norwegian term was coined in reference to this movement called *unionisme* (unionism). In the vote referred to above, 10 members voted against union with the other two synods and it was no doubt six of these who in 1922 withdrew from Concordia congregation and later helped to found the new church at Benson Corners. The reason for the withdrawal was made on the grounds that "*unionisme er synd*" (unionism is a sin). The six families, in a communication to the Concordia trustees, said they could no longer "answer for their conscience (*samvittighed*) and remain as members of the congregation." And they left in peace, but later one of them was laid to rest in Concordia's cemetery at Rosholt.

The last mention of the use of the Norwegian language in church services was heard at the annual meeting in December, 1920 when it was proposed that the Concordia congregation continue to hold morning services as heretofore, "namely, two Norwegian to one English service." This proposal was not adhered to for long and it soon became the other way around—two English for one Norwegian service. The first English entry in the church minutes was made at a meeting of the trustees held June, 1929 when W. L. Selmer served as secretary pro-tem, but at the annual meeting in November the same year, Ole Leklem, permanent secretary, shifted back to Norwegian. A year later, Leklem started out in Norwegian on the first page and on the second shifted into English and completed the business of the meeting in the English language. At the next annual meeting Leklem's notes were all in English as were the meetings that followed. The break with the past was nearly completed in January, 1935 when Martin Wolding moved "to have all services during the year in the English language and any extra Norwegian services to be conducted during the year left to the discretion of the pastor." Interestingly, Mr. and Mrs. Martin Wolding are the only members of the church still living after the church was removed to Rosholt.

The first move towards making one parish which would include the north and south New Hope churches in the Alban-Rosholt-Galloway parish was taken in September, 1946 when it became necessary to call a new pastor following the resignation of Pastor Johnson earlier in the year. Pastor Johnson, long remembered for his scholarly language, was forced to resign owing to ill health. At this time, Our Savior's Lutheran Church at Elderon withdrew from this parish to join with one at Wittenberg, Wisconsin. Action on a joint parish with New Hope's two churches was not finalized, however, until 1956. Pastor Olaf Olsen did much to bring the congregations closer together. The blacktop road and modern automobile did the rest.

In 1948 the constitution and bylaws of the congregation were amended and translated into English, the most significant provision, probably, as quoted in the minutes: "The right to speak and vote be extended to all members of the congregation that complies to the regulations that are further specified in article seven." Thus woman suffrage came to Concordia and the Pauline admonition that women were to keep silent in church was no longer to be observed. They had a right to vote and express themselves at the annual meetings, even as they had long enjoyed the right to vote for a president of the United States.

In accepting the call to Alban-Rosholt-Galloway-New Hope parish in the summer of 1959 Pastor Holtan described the administrative difficulty of working with five congregations and hoped that a consolidation might be realized in the near future. At the annual meeting of the Concordia congregation in January, 1960 a resolution was adopted 40 to 13 "that we favor a plan of forming a one congregation council with one common budget." A year later a new resolution was introduced for outright merger of the Alban-Rosholt-Galloway congregations and the vote was 41 in favor, 14 against.

## CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

The first mention of any Lutheran religious service being held in the unincorporated village of Galloway appears in the daily register of Alban congregation for 1906 when this notation was made, presumably by Pastor Farseth: "*Mandagskvaeld, 7 Mai Praekken paa Galloway,*" in other words, services were held Monday evening May 7th, probably in a private home or in the town hall. This was chiefly a logging center at the time dominated by Moore & Galloway Lumber Company which had a big camp on the east side of modern Highway 49 overlooking the Little Wolf River.

No further religious services in Galloway are recorded until 1916 when, at the annual meeting of the Concordia church in Rosholt, it was recommended that Pastor Hoel hold services in Galloway "whenever he finds it opportune to do so." In fact

Hoel was chiefly instrumental in organizing a congregation here and the organizational meeting was held in the Franzen town hall on January 5, 1919 when it was decided to draw up a constitution and bylaws and also to build a church. This congregation was almost entirely made up of Norwegians, and services the first years were mostly in the Norwegian language until 1929 when it was decided to adopt a ratio of two English services for one in Norwegian.

This congregation, organized under the name of Galloway Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran church in 1919, in 1921 was being referred to in the minutes as Christ Lutheran Church. Owing to the small community, the congregation experienced many difficulties. Services were held infrequently and usually on Sunday afternoons or evenings. On a number of occasions we find that annual meetings were postponed for lack of a quorum. While plans for a church building were discussed shortly after the congregation was organized, it was not until 1928 that a building was completed. The dedication service on June 10, 1928, we are told, was "well attended due to the wonderful weather conditions."

## NORWEGIAN PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS

No history of the churches of Alban-Rosholt would be complete without mention of Norwegian parochial schools which were held in the community during summer months, usually for two weeks or more. The most noted of the Norwegian teachers was Thor Helgeson of Iola, author of the two volume pioneer history, *Fra Indianernes Lande*, who, almost from the day he reached Waupaca county in the mid-1860s, served for more than 50 years as an itinerant school teacher to the Norwegians and Danes of Waupaca and Portage counties. He taught several summers at Saumer (Brekke) school.

The purpose of the parochial school was not only to increase *Kristendomskunskab* (Christian knowledge) but to continue the study and practice of the Norwegian language, the latter a losing battle against the overwhelming forces of American education and culture. No further attempt was made to perpetuate the Norwegian parochial school in Rosholt after around 1915 although confirmation classes were being carried on in Norwegian until a short time later. The writer recalls around 1917 when half way through the study of Luther's *Forklaring*, or book of explanations, the question of having everything translated from Norwegian into English by his mother became such a burden she changed her mind about having her son confirmed in Norwegian and permitted him to enter the English class at Sunday school to study the same book of explanations. And what a relief for both mother and son! It was a break with the past which could no longer be denied and confirmed what had long been suspected, namely, that we were no longer Norwegians first and Americans second but Americans first and Norwegians only by ancestry.

—MALCOLM ROSHOLT