

LeRoy Covenant Church History **125th Anniversary - 2015**

The church's simple beginnings date back to the first part of 1880 with Mission preachers bringing the Gospel message. The first meetings were held in the area of the Swedish settlers at Sawyerville and Dewings in the home of Charles Peterson.

Church organization began at an important meeting held during the Christmas season in 1883 where the Word was preached so mightily that eight persons were saved. Most of these people became the "charter members" of the new church. They kept their faith bright and burning by joining together in prayer meetings in their homes. One home especially stands out as their prayer home, that of J.P. Swanson. Many glorious times were had in this home. This home was called "Bethesda" for it was truly a place of prayer. It was felt after a time that the Christians should organize. On October 31, 1890, thirteen people who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ met in Peter Peterson's home to organize the Swedish Evangelical Mission Church. Rev. K. Bloom was there to help and counsel. The charter members were Mr. & Mrs. John Nelson, Mr. & Mrs. Eric Gustafson, Mr. & Mrs. J.P. Swanson, Mr. & Mrs. Nels Anderson, Mr. & Mrs. Peter Peterson, Mr. Magnus Swanson, Mr. August Swanson and Miss Emma Swanson, who later married Mr. Watson. Officers were elected and at a later meeting a constitution was drawn up. On January 5, 1891 a lot on the corner of Warren and Cherry Streets was purchased and construction began so that Christmas services of 1891 were held in the new building.

One of the first groups within the church was the Ladies' Aid, which held its first meeting in 1888, two years before the church was officially organized. In the beginning, it was called a Syforening, (Swedish for sewing society). At the meetings, women made quilts and various articles to sell at an annual auction. The first chairman of the organization was Mrs. Lena Anderson, who served in the office for 51 years. In 1888, the first year of the organization, the total receipts were six dollars. In 1939, the total was \$410.39. Before the depression the receipts were little short of \$1,000 a year. In later years, the group became known as the Covenant Women, which is the name it is known by today. Their mission is to support the church with local and international community needs.

Also, an early focus was the education of children in the Word. A Sunday School program was organized on May 30, 1891 with Mr. August Swanson as Superintendent and his wife, Tillie, as assistant. Fifteen children were enrolled at the beginning and by Christmas time of the same year, enrollment was twenty eight children. Several others helped as teachers over the years as the Sunday School increased in attendance.

Between the years of 1892-1894 no marked change was made in the church. It was hard for the small group many times, but their faith and faithfulness kept the church going. From 1904-1919, the church called many student pastors to serve for the summer and Christmas seasons. During their service, many were converted and the church was blessed and one man became a missionary to China. When there was no pastor, ministers from Cadillac often came down to help and to preach.

In November 1919, the first full-time pastor, Rev. William T. Johnson, was called from Mears, Michigan. The Lord blessed his work among them, but saw fit to call him to his reward on July 9, 1922. His son, born in LeRoy, Reuben LeRoy Johnson, was a life-time member of the Covenant Church until his death. During Rev. Johnson's ministry the church celebrated its' 30 year jubilee in 1920.

From 1922 to 1941, the church called several full-time pastors to serve. During this time the young people became enthusiastic helpers of the church and ministry was blessed. In 1923, money was raised by subscription from the members in the congregation to build a parsonage. The present parsonage was completed in 1924 at the cost of \$1,600 and Rev. D. A. Werklund was the first pastor to reside there. By 1932 official church membership stood at 30, rising to 45 by 1934. During that same time Sunday School attendance averaged 55. Church Chairman, Pete Lofquist reported that the combined offering receipts of 1932 & 1934 as being \$2,292.26. Until the late 1930s, all church services were conducted in the Swedish language.

The church celebrated it's 50th Anniversary in 1940 with Pastor C. Cassius Sturdy and was known as The Mission Covenant Church. In 1941, the church had 35 members. Sunday School had 30 students enrolled. Several permanent pastors were called until the year 1951 when student pastors from North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago began serving, with a few exceptions.

In 1965, the church's 75th anniversary was celebrated at the Cadillac Northwood Hotel on October 30, 1965 with Pastor Lennart Arnell. There were eleven members at this time. A merger of the LeRoy and Tustin Covenant churches was given consideration in 1965. After analyzing construction costs of a new central facility suitable for serving both congregations, the idea was abandoned.

In 1980, the 90th anniversary was celebrated at Sweitzer's Restaurant in Cadillac, MI with Pastor Tom Beckstrom, who served both the LeRoy and Tustin congregations. The original church pulpit was painted white. Pastor Tom took the pulpit and striped the white paint off from it, returning it to its' original wood finish and it is still used in the sanctuary today; however, the cross which had once hung from the front, is no longer present. The church pianist for over 50 years, Alice Shelander retired from the position during this time. However, she was forever an advocate for respecting the Pastor and his wife. Alice used to meet Pastor Tom's wife, Barb, at the kitchen door and always insisted on taking her

dish and informed her that the kitchen was not for her work, but those who served under them.

Recognizing that children are a foundation for the future, in 1982, an after-school program, 7-Up Club, was started with a handful of children. Over the years, it has been known by many names, the most well known and currently used being J.O.Y. Club (Jesus Others and You). This club has taken on many forms, programming and leaders, but its mission has always been to teach children about Jesus Christ and the importance of putting their faith in Him. It is a program that the church has supported and enthusiastically prayed over for years. In 2015, the program is blessed with 147 children each Wednesday after school. They fill the church with enthusiasm, love, questions, faith and songs that the angels applaud. Twice a year, the church hosts a J.O.Y. Club program in which the children lead their families in a worship service teaching them what they have been learning all year. On these Sundays, church attendance swells two or three times the program's size to accommodate everyone who comes. Over the years, our church has been blessed by the thousands of children that have graced this program and their families.

Throughout the years the size of the congregation has varied from the original thirteen charter members to a packed house of ninety in 1989. By June of 1990, a new 40' x 70' addition was constructed adjacent to and connecting with the original church and was used as a sanctuary and fellowship hall. The new building offered a seating capacity for 150, a full kitchen, two more lavatories, storage space and plenty of room for growth, or so it seemed. The church's centennial banquet celebration was held in the new multi-purpose fellowship hall/sanctuary on October 27, 1990, with Pastor Bud Faulk.

Under Pastor Bud's ministry, the new addition reached maximum capacity. The decision was made to extend the new structure another thirty-six feet, which brought the building to the edge of the sidewalk; adjacent with the original church building of 1891. The addition, completed in November 1991, included a new church steeple, service platform to accommodate piano, organ, choir and pulpit area, sound booth, pastor's study and choir room. The sanctuary could now seat 275 people. The upstairs area of the original church was partitioned off for use as classrooms and a library and the downstairs updated into a nursery and pre-school classroom. Three lots across from the church on Cherry Street were purchased and developed for parking. The additions and improvements totaled \$175,000. However, shortly after construction was completed, two "Miracle Sundays" brought in enough money to pay off all but \$20,000 of the mortgages on the buildings. Pastor Bud and his musically talented wife, Lydia, infused many new elements into worship, including drama, wide varieties of music styles and a focus on children involved in worship. This tradition lives on strongly in worship services today.

In 1996 under Pastor Dave Coryell, more space was again needed to accommodate ministry needs. Construction was started on a new 40' x 70' Fellowship Hall and included a full basement for Sunday School classrooms. In 1997, the church celebrated five members of fifty years plus membership, Reuben LeRoy Johnson having the highest seniority. Considering future growth, in 1998 the church purchased the house and lot east of the current parsonage. The house was then demolished to allow for a large open space. In 1999, church membership was 111, with many more attending regular weekly services and programs. The church supported children's programming of Breakaway, J.O.Y. Club, Brigades, Pioneer Girls, Joyful Noise Choir and Sunday School. Adult programming included: Choir, Praise Team, Promise Keepers, Bible Study, Sunday School and Covenant Women Ministries. The church celebrated its 110th Anniversary Banquet on October 28, 2000 in the Fellowship Hall with Pastor Dave Coryell.

From 2004 – 2013, two ministers, Daniel Turos and Ron Pinc, faithfully served the congregation and community. The church supported a variety of children's programming including Kid's Clubs, J.O.Y. Club, Community Vacation Bible School, Youth Group, Joyful Noise Choir and Sunday School. Adults enjoyed Bible Study, Adult Fellowship, Covenant Women, Choir and Sunday School. Church membership in 2011 was 41.

Since 2011, the church has been committed to building programming which engages and ministers to the entire family. Creating family-based ministry has been an important focus for ensuring a foundation for the future of the church. Children's ministry continues to grow through the after-school program, J.O.Y. Club, which in 2015 had 147 children participating. Adult ministries of Bible Study, Covenant Women and Exercise Faith develop disciples and mentor. Family Fellowships for each season, such as Winter Sledding and Ice Skating, Summer Family Camping Weekend, Fall Trunk or Treat and Spring Princess Tea and Knight's Dinner have engaged families in the importance of making faith an integral part of their lives. Sunday School ministers to the entire family with adult classes to encourage and challenge each other and classes focused on the ages and ability of children. Summer brings family-style Sunday School classes where families learn and participate together. Making children a part of Worship Services has proved to engage families and has led to children leading us in song, scripture and a passion for Christ. Church membership in 2015 is 52, with attendance being 75-80 each Sunday Service. However, the best part of Sunday Worship Services is that consistently 1/3 of the people in attendance are children. We are delighted that tomorrow's church worships each Sunday with us.

As we celebrate our 125th anniversary in 2015 with Pastor Jesse Slimak, we acknowledge our thankfulness and appreciation for the faithful foundations laid by the many Christians in this church over the years. We joyfully recognize our oldest members, Ray and Carolyn Fewless, who joined the church in 1954. Their

faithfulness of 61 years inspires us all to serve Christ everyday. We will take the foundations laid and look to the future of our church. A future built on a firm foundation of Christ, leading us to strengthen our faith and a belief that God has chosen the church to minister to this community. God has chosen us to be a light in LeRoy and beyond and we must embrace this call.

Psalms 100:5 – For the Lord is good and His love endureth forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations.

Sources:

- ❖ 50th Anniversary Program, 1940 by Lena Anderson, Emma Lofquist, Alice Shelander
- ❖ 75th Anniversary Program, 1965 by Alice Shelander
- ❖ LeRoy Chamber of Commerce History, 1999 by Bob Williams
- ❖ Ray & Carolyn Fewless, Jeannie Booher, Amber Kelso

LeRoy Evangelical Covenant Church Pastoral Service Record

Pastor	Years Served	Wife's Name	Notes
William T. Johnson	1919 – 1922	Hilda	
Paul LeRoy Olson	1925 – 1927		
B.A. Werklund	1927 – 1929		
John Anderson	1930 – 1937		
C. Cassius Sturdy	1937 – 1941		
David Bjorlan	1941 – 1944		
A.W. Nordeen	1945 – 1948		
Clarence Peterson	1948 – 1951		
Albert Damrose	1951 – 1952		Intern
Willard Peterson	1952 – 1953		Intern
Harold Nelson	1953 – 1954		Intern
Earl D. Swanson	1954 – 1956		
Ralph Youngman	1956 – 1961	Earldine	
Richard Nelson	1962 – 1963		Intern
Jerold Rice	1963 – 1965	Claire	Intern
Lennart Arnell	1965 – 1966		Intern
Wesley Howland	1966 – 1972	Alma	
Floyd Coon	1972 – 1973		
Reuben Rosnau	1973 (4 mon.)		With Tustin
Jerry Au	1973 – 1976	Ginny	With Tustin
Thomas Beckstrom	June 1977 – 1982	Barb	With Tustin
Mark Alberici	1982 – 1986		With Tustin
Robert Ward	Sept. 1986 – April 1987		Interim Pastor With Tustin
Thomas J. Walker	1987 – 1989		With Tustin
Bud Faulk	1989 – 1995	Lydia	
Quincy Underwood	Feb. 1995 – Jan. 1996	Nancy	Interim Pastor
David Coryell	1996 – 2004	Jan	
Daniel Turos	2004 – May 2011	Laura	
Ron Pinc	2011 – June 2013	Ruth	Interim Pastor
Jesse Slimak	July 2013 -	Emily	