

Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

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Issue 3

Reverend Paul Ylvisaker: "Faithful Servant in the Lord's Kingdom"

"Go back with me to the year 58. We are down by the harbor of Corinth, Greece. Among the ships there look at that one. It is getting ready to sail for Italy. A small group of friends are bidding farewell to Phoebe, a church woman of Cenchria. A man in the group carefully hands her a package and earnestly instructs her as to the delivery of that precious article. And who is the man? It is the Apostle Paul. And what did he with so much care entrust to Phoebe? It is the Letter to the Romans, or what one writer has called, 'the whole future of Christian theology.' That Italy-bound ship carried cargo more valuable than gold...Of the sixty-six gems in the lovely brooch that the Betrothed, the Church, has been given by the Spirit as proof of her Bridegroom's favor until the day of the Great Marriage, the Letter to the Romans sparkles the brightest with the theology and love of Christ."

These words are typical of the creative style of writing that characterized Paul Ylvisaker. Imagery, picturesque language and unique illustrations from his vast knowledge of history, literature, geography, God's creation and human character came from his "toolbox." Though his sermons were usually short, his hearers were not short-changed on Law and Gospel or ever deprived of fresh and original illustrations.

As to substance, the *Word alone, Grace alone and Faith alone* best characterized Ylvisaker's sermons and writings. And when he spoke of God's grace in Christ he was at his best. In his many years as editor of the *Lutheran Sentinel* his pen was a ready weapon against attacks and threats to God's Word, His Grace and the precious gift of Faith. In his essay to the 1967 synod convention he said, "We could sing all day to the Holy Ghost and it would profit us nothing - our song would be but a tinkling cymbal - if we broke loose from the written Word...We equate the authority of God and the authority of Scripture."

When our synod celebrated its centennial in 1953 it was Paul Ylvisaker who was requested to be editor-in-chief of the anniversary booklet, *A Blessing in the Midst of the Land*. We quote, "There is enough spare scenery in Norway to fit out a new continent...What a lovely plant is not a Christian congregation, rooted deep in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ...As the New England builders picked the finest of the pine to make the mast of the vessel that should exhibit American skill, so our *Sentinel* should command our best effort...Go down to the harbor, that is the mail box, and greet the ship as it comes into port. Notice its sturdy lines. It's a good ship, this our *Sentinel*."

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Norwegian Wood...

When I arrived at *Our Savior's Lutheran Church* (Albert Lea, Minnesota) it was near time for the celebration of the congregation's 75th anniversary. I began thinking about some of the preparation that needed to be made for that celebration. As I hung my gowns in the sacristy closet I had to move a piece of wood from the floor to allow them to hang straight. Since I had a woodburner in my home to help supplement the heating, I thought of taking the wood home to burn. But upon giving second thought, I wondered about why this piece of wood was in the church. After reading the history of the church and finding out that *Our Savior's* congregation was the congrega-

tion that hosted the second Synod Convention of the newly re-organized "Norwegian Synod", it occurred to me that this piece of wood may have some significance. I remembered that the famous "Oak" of Wisconsin - under which the very first service of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America had been held - had fallen from old age and from a storm some years back, and that pieces of it had been given to various congregations of the synod at that time.

Upon further questioning of other pastors and synod officers, it was found that this piece of oak that I might have taken to burn in my wood burner was a piece of the *Oak of Koshkonong*, where the first worship gathering of the old synod had been held.

Now "fire wood" became "Precious Wood". It had a prominent place at the congregation's 75th anniversary service. It now needs to be cared for, carved into something presentable, and put in a prominent place on display for the congregation to cherish.

You never know what you might find in the closets of the church. The very thing you think should be tossed out could very well have great importance in history.

Rev. Wayne Halvorson

(Note: Do YOU have a chunk of Koshkonong Oak at your church? We'd like to find them all! If you know where one is, please e-mail the editor at: heywab@mnlic.net or write her at: RR3 Box 53, St. Peter, MN 56082).



Reverend Wayne Halvorson holds a piece of *Koshkonong Oak*, a chunk of wood he found in the sacristy and almost tossed in the wood stove...



(Note: The editor has been encouraged for some time to include in *Oak Leaves* this personal remembrance, written in 1993.)

"Sandbakkels"

It is just over a week now until Christmas, and that means it is soon time to call Great Aunt Esther and see if she feels like baking sandbakkels this year. For those new to the word, "sandbakkels," (meaning sand pastries and also called sand tarts) are a Norwegian pastry. They are a mixture of brown sugar, butter, flour, egg, and vanilla, stirred into a stiff dough, pressed into greased aluminum tins that look like little cups with scalloped sides, and baked in the oven. Once done, many people fill the centers with berries and whipped cream, but my family, a bunch of diehard Norsky purists, has always preferred them just the way they are - crisp and golden and melting in your mouth.

Great Aunt Esther has been making the Christmas sandbakkels since before I was born, before my mother was born, and even before her sister - my eighty-five year old grandmother - was born. Esther is blessed with length of days, as the saying goes. As of today, the exact count is thirty-five thousand, four-hundred and eight of them. That's just over ninety-seven years. And that's a long time to be making sandbakkels.

Like most of our other family traditions - lefse and lutefisk among them - the making of sandbakkels began in the Old Country. It was continued here in America when my great-great grandparents sailed over and sunk roots on a little farm just east of Waterville, Iowa, the town I grew up in and where I still live.

It was Esther's mom, my great grandmother, Mathilda, who showed Esther how to make sandbakkels when she was just a young girl, back in the early years of this century. And, it is Esther who has carried the tradition through the decades. Each year for as long as anyone can remember, there have been packages under the Christmas tree, five pound coffee cans filled with sandbakkels, for each of our families to enjoy until well after New Years. The packages were always signed: "From Aunt Esther and Uncle Carl," until 1987, when Great Uncle Carl passed away.

I had watched Esther make sandbakkels once, the year her oven wasn't working. She brought the supplies to my house, and I helped a little, but she did most of the work. It wasn't until 1988 that I became the *Official Apprentice Sandbakkel Maker*. I arrived home from college in mid-December, after an exhausting day of final tests and a three-and-a-half hour drive. It was nearly nine o'clock at night, just about the right time for starting the sandbakkels. Though Esther was getting up there in years, she always did prefer to do her baking late at night. And so, after having a bite to eat, I drove up the hill to her house - one she has lived in now for over fifty years - and we began the night's work. As I slowly and clumsily greased the tins and tried to press the dough evenly - not too thin or they would bake too crisp and burn, and not too thick, or they would puff up in the middle and be soggy - into one of the tins, I glanced out of the corner of my eye at Esther who had filled four tins in the same amount of time, or so it seemed. She didn't hurry though, and wasn't messy either. Esther never hurried or made a mess in her life. She is one of those people who works with painstaking neatness, focused and steady on the task

at hand, not stopping for anything until the job is done. And who somehow still manages to make jokes and have a good time. I think she has simply always enjoyed work, especially the kind that involved giving of her time to someone else and the satisfaction of seeing them pleased when it was done. In this case, I think she basked in the thought that once again, her beloved family would have delicious sandbakkels to enjoy through the holidays.

We baked and talked, and I watched as she experimented with the stiffness of the dough, testing it by cutting into it with a tablespoon, sprinkling on a little more sifted flour, testing it again. I figured we would just go by recipe directions, but have since learned that the amounts on the sandbakkel recipe are just there for looks. At the time, I wasn't sure if the amounts were dependent on Esther's mood or because it was a full moon or what, and it wasn't until two years ago that I began to understand.

In December of 1991, Esther was feeling sort of old, I guess, and gave up on the idea of making sandbakkels. To the family, this was the equivalent of the sun announcing that it didn't feel like shining anymore, and that we would just have to get along without it somehow. We had counted on this tradition forever, and it wasn't going to seem like Christmas unless we had sandbakkels.

It was then I knew it was my turn to go it alone. Esther encouraged me,

handed me two small plastic bags which contained the antique tins, and I set my mind to the job. I went home to my trailer, dug through my recipe box and found the card with Esther's light and delicate handwriting, the one that said "Sand Tarts" at the top. I prepared the kitchen, the ingredients, and myself, and began. Things went pretty well, once I abandoned the amounts listed on the recipe and began feeling and sensing when the dough was just right.

For some reason, my kitchen didn't look quite as neat as Esther's usually does after baking. There was flour here and there, and things were a bit greasy, but despite the fact that I didn't inherit neatness, there on the table, in short stacks, were three dozen golden Norwegian pastries.

The job was not yet done. The big test remained. I carefully stacked a few tarts into a plastic container, put on my coat, jumped into my Monte Carlo, and drove the quarter mile up the steep hill to Esther's house.



The look on her face told me that Esther knew why I had come. She picked a tart out of the container and tasted it. She took another bite, and kept eating. She didn't fall over or anything, and in fact seemed to be enjoying it, though I wondered if maybe she was trying not to hurt my feelings. And then, she said that she liked them! She said they were crisp and rich and just how they were supposed to be! And then she declared: "You can do this as good as me!" My heart leaped, my ego soared, and the words from my mouth were, "Well, not yet, but maybe someday." Said with all the humbleness I could muster. And, Esther replied, "You're going to be a crackerjack at this!"

Upon hearing these words, the "Hallelujah Chorus" went off in my head, and I stood there in Great Aunt Esther's kitchen feeling as if I had just won the Nobel Prize for Literature. After two years of being Chief Apprentice, careful observer, practicing and getting a feel for the techniques, learning to appreciate the tradition, my ancestors who began the tradition, and Great Aunt Esther herself, I had now been handed the torch and given the okay to carry it on into the next century, as Esther herself had done in this one.

Perhaps this sounds like a small matter, but to me it was of great significance. Family is important. Traditions and customs provide a thread of continuity down through the generations. Though I never knew my great-grandparents, through traditions like sandbakkels and lutefisk and reading the Christmas Gospel before opening gifts on Christmas Eve, I feel a connection with the past. Though Christmas is probably different in many ways than it was for my ancestors - far too many presents and electric lights - I think that in all of the important ways, it has remained the same. We still value tradition and our heritage, we still remember and respect our loved ones who have passed away, and above all, we still thank and praise God for all that He has given us, most especially His dear son, our Savior.

I think Esther feels up to doing sandbakkels this year, but I think this time it will be by the light of the sun rather than a full moon. After ninety-seven years, it is just possible she may be slowing down a bit. When we have finished our baking and the tarts have cooled, I will carefully stack them into the coffee cans, wrap them up with paper and bows, and sign the tags: "From Great Aunt Esther and Robin," just as I have written now for the last five years, and that I will continue doing until I am too feeble to bake or to write.

As for my sandbakkel recipe, I have added three words to the title. It now reads "Great Aunt Esther's Sand Tarts." And when my children and grandchildren ask about the name, I will tell them all about her and Great Grandma Mathilda and all the rest, as I pass on to them the art of making sandbakkels, the most delicious of the family legacies.

Postscript: *In 1994, Great Aunt Esther fell and broke her hip - for the second time - and had to go to a nursing home. My husband and I bought Esther's house, and our family lived there until 1998, when we moved to Minnesota. We still own Esther's house, and I still make sandbakkels in her kitchen. Esther has gotten the "first-fruits" of my efforts each year until 1998, when she passed away, at the age of 101. That year, I took my best sandbakkel and left it on her tombstone on Christmas Eve. It was gone the next morning. Pastor Ferkenstad says it must have been a Nisse...*



Editor

Bethany To Make History

In May of 2001, Bethany Lutheran College will graduate its first class of seniors. What an extraordinary historical event for the college, and for our synod. The school certainly has come a long way since the synod took it over in 1927.

The following poem was written by the Reverend I.M. Blaekan (1862-1945), the "poet-laureate" of the Norwegian Synod in his day. The poem appeared in the 1928 *Synod Report*.

As we look to the future, a new future, for our college, and for its students and instructors, it seems fitting that we again print (and ponder) Blaekan's words:

Bethany

*The fear of God is the beginning
Of all the wisdom worth the name.
True fear of God is always winning
Our victories in Him who came
And won for all in Heav'n a place,
Now offered to each one through grace.*

*Such fear of God is not a feeling
Of terror in the heart of man,
But filial, yearning and appealing
To God in His good grace to stand.
Thus God gives courage, strength,
and cheer
In life and death naught else to fear.*

*The love to God, all love excelling-
Save His great love to sinners lost,
Which is a fountain ever welling
In deserts drear, of priceless cost.
Each languished soul who
drank thereof
Has found the true, eternal love.*

*The world with all its gold and glory
Has naught but husks to feed our soul.
And sad but true is the old story
Of dearest friends that oft grow cold.
But through all change of loss or gain,
A constant friend will God remain.*

*In Him then trustingly abiding,
We place our hope, our life, our all.
We leave each step unto His guiding
And gladly hear our Master's call.
Be it through cross in valleys deep,
Or sunny heights, he will us keep.*

*Thus fear and love and trust
combining,
To honor God in study here,
Shall in a world of darkness shining
Proclaim to people far and near
The value of each costly gem,
Worn as our students' diadem.*

*Within these portals generations,
If so it please our gracious Lord,
Shall come to train for
different stations
In church and state, by deed and word.
May ev'ry one who comes here find
What most they need for heart
and mind!*

To you, our honored tutors, greeting
In His great name whose cause
you serve.
Whatever problems you are meeting
From this true course you
will not swerve:
To teach, to guide our students here
In heav'nly wisdom God to fear.

To you, as teachers, we have given
Our greatest treasures in your care,
Immortal spirits who in heaven
Salvations's bliss with us shall share.
To mold them for such destiny,
Your honored calling here will be.



Nor are we in our aim forgetting
The knowledge needful for this life.
Nay, rather better we are fitting
Them for their mundane toil and strife.
The highest type of man we see,
Where knowledge vies with piety.

With joy today our salutation
We to our students will extend.
Whatever work, or cause, or station
To which you later may attend,
You know, that here, your faithfulness
Will largely shape your life's success.

In you, dear students, we are placing
Our fondest hopes for future days.
The problems that you will be facing
Your fathers met and solved by grace.
If you'll be true as they have been,
Ev'n through defeat you then shall win.

No privilege, we know, is greater,
Than to attend a Christian school.
No training for you can be better
Than under God's own guiding rule.
His glories of a life to come
Illumine ev'n our earthly home.

To ev'ry synod congregation
And fellow Christians here today:
Receive our kind solicitation
For Bethany to work and pray,
That she may live and thrive and grow
And countless blessings from her flow.

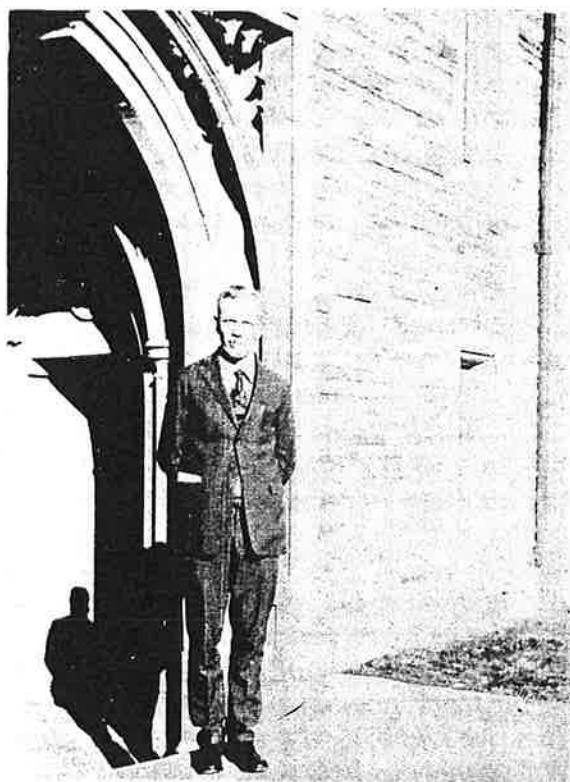
A ring of men and women praying,
O let us form 'round Bethany!
Nor hesitating or delaying
Her from incumbrances to free.
It is, we know, God's gracious will
With generous hearts such schools
to build.

Then she shall stand a beacon,
shedding
More lights upon the paths of man.
Then she shall grow, diffusing,
spreading
More knowledge over sea and land,
Till distant peoples yearningly
Shall look for light from Bethany.

O Jesus, Thou, who often wended
Thy way of yore to Bethany
And there Thy mission-work attended
For dead and living lovingly,
Come help us make our Bethany
A humble place, O Lord, for Thee!



Rev. I.M. Blaekan



Left: Paul Ylvisaker at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, circa 1926.

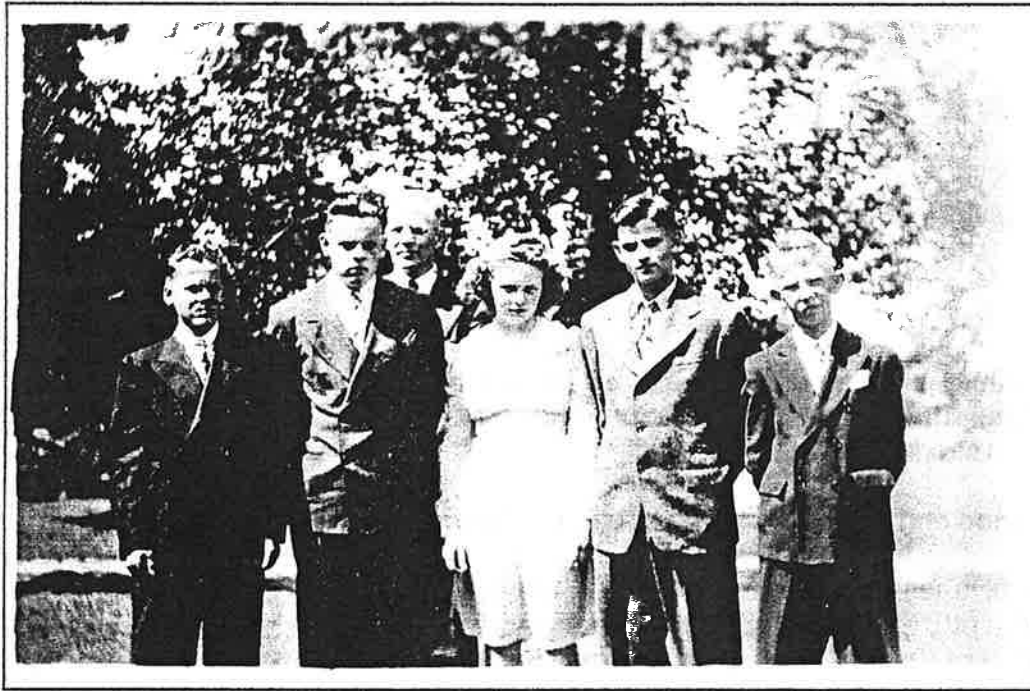
Right: Rev Ylvisaker, circa 1965

(continued from page 1)

In the *Lutheran Sentinel* which Pastor Ylvisaker edited for a number of years, he wrote in the August 23, 1962 issue very pointedly of "spiritual tramps" who "have grown careless of the righteousness with which they should be clothed; they are poor in hope; they are on the move but have grown indifferent concerning the final destination. These spiritual tramps may be the princes of this world, having much, the sail of their hope may be filled with the air of success, yet they wander in the wilderness where there is no way. For without the blessing of God and His clear Word all men are tramps. Having His clear Word we are rich...."

Rev. Ylvisaker was not only my pastor for a number of years, confirming me in 1944, but also a good friend. He tutored me in Norse back in the days when Norse was still required for entrance to the seminary. Sometimes I'd hitchhike home from Bethany on weekends. I'd stop at Hartland [Minnesota] at the parsonage to call my parents. But Pastor Ylvisaker wouldn't hear of it - he'd back out his '36 Ford and take me home, muddy roads or not.

He was a pretty good-sized man with a deep bass voice, yet he was kind and gentle, sensitive to others' feelings. One time he and another neighboring pastor came out to the farm to talk Bethany. I was cultivating corn. My dad had a heart condition that sometimes limited this activity. The other pastor said something like, "I hear your father isn't well." Before I could respond Pastor Ylvisaker spoke up and said, "Well, he's probably not as strong as he'd like to be." That sounded so much better and endeared him to me all the



The 1944 Hartland/Manchester Confirmation class, left to right: Truman Bartness, Donald Jordahl, Rev. Ylvisaker, Dorothy Munson Robran, Richard Newgard, Luther Ylvisaker.

more.

I'm grateful that Pastor Ylvisaker was instrumental in getting me to Bethany. Much good has come from that! I still treasure one of his gifts, Volume III of Pieper's *Dogmatics* with his signature and date: May 17, 1953. He knew I needed it for the seminary.

After his retirement in 1970 he and his wife Bergitte moved to Albert Lea, Minnesota, and I was privileged to be his pastor at *Our Savior's* until his death on July 29, 1973.

In his 1974 report to the synod, President George Orvick stated:

"Pastor Ylvisaker was born on April 6, 1900 at Zumbrota, Minnesota, the son of Andreas Christian and Maria Erstad Ylvisaker. He graduated from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri in 1928 and was married in that year to Bergitte Broin of Kenyon, Minnesota. He was ordained into the ministry at West Prairie Lutheran Church near Thompson, Iowa. He served the Thompson and West Prairie congregations for eight years and later at Story City, Iowa. Her served 28 years as pastor of the Hartland and Manchester Lutheran Churches until his retirement in 1970.

" He was treasurer of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod for many years, and editor of the Lutheran Sentinel for ten years. He also served on the Catechism Committee which produced a new synodical catechism in 1966. He was co-author and editor of the historical booklet, A Blessing in the Midst of the Land. He also is the author of a booklet on the Lord's Prayer, and another, To the Praise of the Glory of His Grace, a compilation of his writings that appeared in the Lutheran Sentinel.

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Secretary's Minutes
ELS Historical Society Meeting
June 10, 2000
Bethany Lutheran College
Mankato, Minnesota

The fourth annual meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Historical Society was held Saturday, June 10, 2000, in the conference room of Trinity Chapel of Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota.

Registration and coffee began at 9:30 in the Dining Center of the Great Room.

A 10 a.m. opening service was held in the chapel. "Come Holy Ghost, Creator Blest", ELH 10, and "O Light of God's Most Wondrous Love", ELH 399, were sung. Reverend Erling Teigen used Joel 2:28-32 as his text for a Pentecost Eve homily, showing how Joel's prophecy points to Pentecost and how our ELS history is the record of the Holy Spirit working among us through Word and sacrament.

President Orvick welcomed the society observing that the Lord uses small voices and small places to carry the Gospel. He announced that the house next to the seminary will be remodeled, incorporating the garage to be a museum.

Rev. Walter Anderson, pastor of Reformation Lutheran Church, Hillsboro, Oregon, told of preserving history in his new congregation, formed in 1996 after two conservative groups left the Missouri Synod, joining the ELS in June of 1997. The history of one group, Grace Lutheran Church, was lost when movers "cleaned out" records to make room for new materials. The new congregation appointed a historian who started a scrap book. They also record all services, having audio tapes ready at the end of each service. They also videotape services for members.

Rev. Wayne Halverson, pastor of Our Savior's, Albert Lea, Minnesota, organized in 1918 after the 1917 merger, spoke about the history of an older congregation. *Our Savior's* was one of the first missions of the newly reorganized Norwegian Synod. The 1919 Synod Convention was hosted by Our Savior's.

At 11 a.m., Laurann Gilbertson, Textile Curator at Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, Decorah, Iowa, presented the topic, "Dating Historical Photographs Using Women's Clothing, 1860's -1920's". Using slides of vintage photos, she showed the distinct changes in clothing styles through the decades that help determine when the photos were taken.

At noon, a meal was served in the Great Room.

At 1 p.m., Dr. Peter Harstad, Executive Director of the Indiana Historical Society present-

ed the topic, "Y0, Y1K, Y2K, and the ELS", focusing on Norway at three distinct periods in history: the beginning of Christianity, the end of the first millenium, and present day. He showed how Christianity first came to Norway, how it traveled from there to America and through our Synod, and how today, Norway has become a mission site for the ELS.

The business meeting was called to order by Chairman Erling Teigen. Amanda Madson read the secretary's report. Albin Levorson read the treasurer's report. The checking account total is \$1,390.95. A CD plus interest totals \$3,116.07.

Archivist Norman Holte reminded people to label and date photographs, suggested that congregations micro-film church records to save archival space, and send the archives bulletins with installation news and the like.

It was suggested that ideas discussed the the Board of Directors be printed in *Oak Leaves*.

A trip was made to "Koren Country" June 9, 2000. Bethany's people mover transported 26 people on a 350-mile round trip to Washington Prairie Lutheran Church, rural Decorah, Iowa, the Pioneer Memorial at Luther College and Vesterheim Museum, both in Decorah, and to Trinity Lutheran Church, Calmar, Iowa.

Robin Ouren, *Oak Leaves* editor, gave her report. A larger font size is being used for the newsletter. An *Oak Leaves Sampler* will be distributed to all of the pastors at convention, for them to take back to their congregations and use as a bulletin insert. The sampler contains snipets of *Oak Leaves* articles, information on submitting articles, photos, and ideas, as well as how to join the historical society. It was suggested that members send *Oak Leaves* subscriptions as Christmas gifts.

The assembly thanked Rev. Craig Ferkenstad for beginning and editing *Oak Leaves*.

Elections were held. Albin Levorson was re-elected to the Board of Directors. Erik Olsen of Mapleton was elected to the board.

Suggestions for future historical society tours included Albert Lea, Minnesota, and Lime Creek, Scarville, and Lake Mills, Iowa. Norskedalen near Coon Valley and LaCrosse, Wisconsin, was also suggested.

The meeting adjourned at 3:45 p.m. and coffee was served in the Great Room.

Amanda Madson
Secretary



There's still time to get a great gift for that historian on your Christmas list!
Give them a subscription to *Oak Leaves*!

Just send us the person's name and address, along with
a check for \$10, and we'll get the next issue sent to them.



Mail to: **ELS Historical Society; 6 Browns Court; Mankato, MN 56001**



Evangelical Lutheran Synod
 Historical Society
 6 Browns Court
 Mankato, MN 56001

(Ylvisaker, continued from page 9)

"Christian burial services were held for Pastor Ylvisaker on August 2, 1973, at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Albert Lea, Minnesota. The Reverend Theo. Aaberg preached the funeral sermon and the Reverend Richard Newgard officiated. Your synodical president spoke on behalf of the Synod. Interment was at the Hartland cemetery. Thanks be to God for this faithful servant in the Lord's Kingdom."

Bergitte Ylvisaker passed away on December 1, 1981. The three Ylvisaker children, Luther, Paul B., and Marguerite, all reside in Albert Lea.



*Rev. Richard Newgard
 Glenville, Minnesota*

Oak Leaves is published periodically by the ELS Historical Society: 6 Browns Court; Mankato, MN 56001

Editor: Robin Ouren.

Board of Directors: Erling Teigen (Chair), Joseph Abrahamson, Craig Ferkenstad, Norman Holte, Erik Olsen, Albin Levorson, Amanda Madson, George Orvick, Marguerite Ylvisaker.

Oak Leaves welcomes articles of both synodical and local significance for publication. Articles may be edited for style, clarity, or length to allow for publication. Submitted manuscripts will be deposited in the archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Membership

All membership renewals due **June 1**

Voting Membership:

\$10/year: individual
 \$15/year: husband & wife

Associate Membership:

\$15/year: individual
 \$25/year: institution.
 \$5/year: student