



# Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

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## A Legacy of Hope ... in Utah (1986-2005)

By Suzanne Bawden

It all began around 1986. Who knew that an idea promoted that year at Grace Lutheran (LCMS), Sandy, Utah, to start a mission congregation in the southwest area of the Salt Lake valley, would lead to this heritage of faith, struggle, hardship, and hope!

In the summer of 1986, vicars began canvassing the area. Frank Kohagen, a prominent member at Grace, spearheaded the project, holding a meeting of interested parties at his home/office in West Jordan on August 20, 1986. Due to efforts and background work accomplished prior to that point, a Lutheran Brotherhood grant of \$20,000 had been approved for the endeavor. But truly, the vision of a West Jordan, Utah,

congregation had started before that. When the Kohagens purchased their residence, it was not only with the intent that this would be their Real Estate Office and home, but also with the thought that it was large enough to be a place for a new congregation to meet, a service they were willing to offer.

Sunday, September 14, 1986, marked the first worship service of the "Southwest Lutheran Mission." Led by Rev. Leo Rubel (Emeritus, LCMS) of Ogden, Utah, and held at the Kohagen's Real Estate office/home, it was attended by about 50 people. The closing hymn used that day was "Beautiful Savior," which became a favorite of the congregation and was sung



frequently during the formative years of the congregation. The first Adult Bible Class and Sunday School Classes were held the following Sunday.



Organizers met October 12, 1986 to discuss a church name, possible ministerial candidates, a preliminary Constitution and Incorporation, and permanent officers. After four separate votes, the “Southwest Lutheran Mission” became “Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church.” The next day, the LCMS recommended calling a full-time pastor for Hope and a little over a month later, on November 17, 1986, Rev. Greg L. Sahlstrom was called as Missionary-at-Large to West Jordan, Utah.

On November 23, 1986, Interim Pastor Rubel suffered a heart attack and no longer could lead services. Until Pastor Sahlstrom officially accepted the call, Pastor Fiene of Grace LCMS filled in, driving across town between services at his own church to arrive in time to deliver a sermon. Frank Kohagen, as chairman and later President and Elder of the congregation, led the beginning and ending of the services.

Pastor Sahlstrom accepted the call December 4, 1986 and arrived December 29th with his wife Eloise and sons Peter and Albert. On January 11, 1987, the congregation established a new Worship and Bible Class schedule (9:15 AM Sunday School/Bible Class with 10:30 AM Worship Service) which, except for the additional of an 8:00 AM Worship Service, has prevailed to the present day.

At first, the congregation was small enough to meet in the Real Estate Office on

the first floor. But the Kohagens soon began remodeling the basement of their facilities to provide additional seating in a more church-like setting, finishing April 18, 1987, just in time for Easter Sunday the next day. At that time the church had a “mascot,” Duffy, the Kohagen’s poodle who, despite their best efforts to keep him elsewhere contained, sometimes managed to find his way in and attend services.

January 1, 1987 marked the Commissioning Service of Pastor Sahlstrom as Missionary-at-Large. Several “first” dates followed: January 18, 1987—first Communion Service; February 7, 1987—first Adult Information class; March 14, 1987—first Site Committee meeting; April 26, 1987—first Baptism at Hope. On May 18, 1987, approval was received for Hope to be on the Laborers for Christ Priority List for building a church in 1988. One of the first tragedies — and miracles — of the congregation occurred on May 11, 1987, when Carol Oetker, secretary for the congregation, heading home from a church meeting, was in a head-on collision with drunk driver. She was in a coma for some weeks and her survival was questionable. Carol was to have been Hope’s VBS Coordinator that year. Others filled in and Hope’s first Vacation Bible School was held June 22-26, 1987 at the Kohagen home. The first annual congregational potluck/picnic was celebrated July 11, 1987, at the West Jordan City Park. Carol Oetker had been given a weekend-only release from hospital — the first time since the May 11th accident — and surprised everyone by attending the picnic.

On August 3, 1987, Hope received authorization for a land purchase loan. Sunday, August 16, 1987, became Charter Sunday. Pastor Sahlstrom was installed as Pastor May 22, 1988, having been called as missionary-at-large to that point. Frank Kohagen became Hope’s Building Chairman, heading up the local volunteers while also coordinating with the Laborers for Christ team who arrived March 1, 1989, to begin their portion of the

build. Groundbreaking ceremonies occurred March 6, 1989 and June 11, 1989 marked the cornerstone and [roof] cross dedication. Laborers for Christ departed July 5, 1989, leaving the rest of the work to be done by the congregation. A bittersweet farewell service was observed in the Kohagen's basement church Sunday, September 17, 1989. During the following week, one of the final touches for the building, a surprise for all, was the cross that Frank Kohagen lovingly built and hung over the altar; this still today adorns the front of the sanctuary. Festivities followed Sunday, September 24, 1989, as the building dedication and first services were celebrated in new building. An anonymous 1991 donation provided funds for a permanent divider wall to create a Preschool/Sunday School room. During the next year, Frank Kohagen built both the wall as well as elegant wooden bookshelves for the Pastor's office. Some years later, he headed the committee to expand Hope's parking lot, providing almost double the space.



Hope's Preschool opened shortly after completion of the room. While its initial years proved to be a rocky road, the school today is flourishing and has well served many children.

1992 became the "year of the organ," as fundraisers were held to replace the old instrument, half of whose keys no longer functioned, with a marvelous Rodgers Organ which remains a highlight of the church to the present.

Unfortunately, the congregation's 10th anniversary in 1997 wasn't celebrated or even noted. That year marked the culmination of one of the darkest and most difficult struggles in the congregation's history. Hope's survival was very much at stake. Sufficient changes in the LCMS had caused grave concern to many of the congregation's members and, after many years of increasingly earnest discussion and debate, in November 1997 the congregation voted to leave the LCMS and sought alignment with the ELS. While the stress of such an action often results in a church's demise, Hope endured and June 1998 marked a high and bright spot for the congregation as reception into the ELS was formalized. In September 1999 the congregation finally healed enough to hold a big celebration, on Sunday morning celebrating the 10th anniversary of Hope's building and that afternoon, in a separate festivity, honoring Pastor Sahlstrom for his 15-year anniversary of service in the ministry.

After many years as Hope's dedicated and faithful shepherd, Pastor Sahlstrom received a call to serve in Ukraine and left at the end of May 2001. Rev. Walter Anderson, Em., served as interim Pastor through November that year. Hope was fortunate to have a relatively short vacancy and rejoiced as Pastor Aaron Hamilton was installed on December 9, 2001. Accompanied then by his wife, Heather, and children Susannah and Gabriel, they were later blessed in 2004 with a Utah-born son, Shane.

Dates and projects mark the historic timeline, but the true legacy of a congregation comes from her people. There are so many members and friends of the congregation who have donated, dedicated and sacrificed for the congregation that it would be impossible, even in a long, detailed history, to name and credit them all. However, there are three names that deserve recognition as their contributions greatly factor into Hope's heritage:

**Frank Kohagen.** In so many ways, Frank could be called the father of the congregation. A few of his contributions have been noted above; there are many more. While many local people, both Hope members and friends, participated in the construction project, there were many, many hours and days when Frank was the only person on the job site. Dedicated to seeing the job completed, Frank devoted so many hours to the building project that it eventually cost him his business and even his home. Nevertheless, he and Louise remained faithful to their Lord, over the years serving in almost every position in the congregation. It seemed fitting that Frank's death in 2004 came on November 1st, All Saints Day.

**Rev. Greg Sahlstrom.** A congregation's first pastor, especially one that is there for many years, has a special place in the hearts of her members. Known for working long, seemingly-tireless hours, Pastor Sahlstrom was so instrumental in and so much a part of the establishment of Hope's traditions that it is impossible to begin to list the contributions. However, there are two lasting legacies that he gave to Hope: Education and Evangelism. A convert to Christianity himself, Pastor Sahlstrom put a great emphasis on accurate and thorough Christian Education for all — young to old — and developed a great thirst and appreciation for ongoing, more in-depth instruction in many of the members. Also known for his outstanding research and ongoing outreach to Mormons (Hope is in Utah!), evangelism in general was a continual emphasis of his ministry and, due to the training he provided and enthusiasm he generated, a number of mem-

bers were enabled and motivated as effective members of the Evangelism Committee and the congregation participated in several efforts to develop expanded ministries in areas where no conservative Christian church existed.

**Rev. Aaron Hamilton.** Also concerned with Christian Education, Pastor Hamilton has helped lead the congregation towards investigation of developing Hope Academy. Looking at the possibility of starting a kindergarten within the next year or two, Pastor Hamilton has encouraged the congregation to pursue a dream of some members to see a full grade school in place in the future.

August 2007 will be Hope's 20-year anniversary. While no brief summary is adequate to describe the life of a congregation, overall, Hope's legacy is reflected in her name. May this congregation forever remain a place where the only true hope for life is faithfully taught and preached!

*Suzanne Bawden is a member of Hope Lutheran Church in West Jordan, Utah.*

## Anniversaries: Churches and Schools of the ELS

*(Please inform the editors of errors and omissions.)*

**1851: 155 years ago**

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Portage, WI, organized.

Newport Lutheran Church, Wisconsin Dells, WI, organized.

**1856: 150 years ago**

Trinity Lutheran Church, West Bend, WI, organized.

**1881: 125 years ago**

Norwegian Grove Lutheran Church, Gaylord, MN, organized.

**1886: 120 years ago**

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Audubon, MN, organized.

**1891: 115 years ago**

Forest Lutheran Church, Forest City, IA, organized.

**1896: 110 years ago**

Hope Lutheran Church, Portage, IN, organized.

**1906: 100 years ago**

Oak Park Lutheran Church, Oklee, MN, organized.

Nazareth Lutheran Church, Trail, MN, organized.

**1921: 85 years ago**

Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Princeton, MN, joined the ELS.

**1926: 80 years ago**

Calvary Lutheran Church, Ulen, MN, organized and joined the ELS.

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Madison, WI, organized.

**1931: 75 years ago**

First Trinity Lutheran Church, Marinette, WI, organized.

**1941: 65 years ago**

Redeemer Lutheran Church, New Hampton, IA, organized.

**1946: 60 years ago**

Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Hawley, MN, organized.

Lakewood Lutheran Church, Tacoma, WA, organized.

**1956: 50 years ago**

Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Bagley, MN, joined the ELS.

Grace Lutheran Church, Weston, OH, organized.

**1966: 40 years ago**

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Portage, WI, joined the ELS.

Newport Lutheran Church, Wisconsin Dells, WI, joined the ELS.

**1971: 35 years ago**

Faith Lutheran Church, Parkersburg, IA, organized.

Faith Lutheran Church, Alpena, MI, organized.

Heritage Lutheran Church, Apple Valley, MN, organized and joined the ELS.

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Bloomer, WI, joined the ELS.

**1976: 30 years ago**

Christ The King Lutheran Church, Bell Gardens, AZ, joined the ELS.

Grace Lutheran Church, Vero Beach, FL, joined the ELS.

Faith Lutheran Church, Parkersburg, IA, joined the ELS.

St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Myrtle Creek, OR, joined the ELS.

Christ Lutheran Church, Sutherlin, OR, joined the ELS.

Faith Lutheran Church, San Antonio, TX, organized and joined the ELS.

Bethany Lutheran Church, Port Orchard, WA, established a Christian Day School.

Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Elderon, WI, organized and joined the ELS.

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Okauchee, WI, joined the ELS.

St. Martin Lutheran Church, Shawano, WI, joined the ELS.

**1986: 20 years ago**

Christ Lutheran Church, Port St. Lucie, FL, organized.

Peace Lutheran Church, Jefferson City, MO, organized.

Our Savior Lutheran Church, Grants Pass, OR, joined the ELS.

Christ Lutheran Church, Klamath Falls, OR, organized.

Hope Lutheran Church, West Jordan, UT, organized.

**1991: 15 years ago**

Family Of God Lutheran Church, Fort Mohave, AZ, organized.

Faith Lutheran Church, Litchfield, IL, organized.

**1996: 10 years ago**

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Cold Spring, MN, joined the ELS.

Abiding Word Lutheran Church, Bowling Green, OH, organized and joined the ELS.

Messiah Lutheran Church, Omro, WI, joined the ELS.

## From the Archives:

What is the history of coffee and church gatherings? Do you have a story to share?



From the last issue:



Commemorative plates have a long history not only for churches, but other organizations and events as well. They are a wonderful source for church history and research. Do the archives have one from your congregation? 🌿

## Tell us your history, your stories!

Please send us your ideas, articles, and suggestions for *Oak Leaves* – (gargy@blc.edu). We welcome information and articles on church anniversaries, and articles of Synodical and local significance.

*Annual Meeting — June 17, 2006 at Norseland Lutheran Church, rural St. Peter, MN.*

*Topic: The Legacy of Pastor Milton E. Tweit*

Remember to visit the website:

[www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/history](http://www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/history)

# ELS Historical Society — Tenth Annual Meeting

## Saturday, June 17, 2006

Theme: *A Legacy of Christian Ministry: Pastor M. E. Tweit*

Place: **Norseland Lutheran Church**  
10 miles northwest of St. Peter on Hwy 22  
St. Peter, Minnesota

*The church is handicapped-accessible.* ♿



9:30 am - Registration & Coffee

10:00 am - Opening Service

10:20 am - Welcome

10:30 am - **Panel A: Legacy in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod**

1. Founding of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
2. The Synodical Conference and Its Dissolution
3. The Circuit Visitor

*(Format for panels: 10-minute presentations and 30-minute panel discussion periods)*

11:30 am - **Panel B: Legacy in Christian Education**

4. Christian Day Schools
5. Bethany Lutheran College and High School
6. Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary

12:30 pm - Luncheon *(Reservations and advance payment required. See below)*

1:30 pm - Business Meeting

1:45 pm - **Panel C: Legacy in Parish Work**

7. Catechesis
8. Preaching
9. Pastoral Care

2:45 pm - Life and Legacy of Pastor M. E. Tweit

3:00 pm - Coffee

**Voting Membership:**  
\$10/year: individual  
\$15/year: husband & wife  
**Associate Membership:**  
\$15/year: individual  
\$25/year: institutional  
\$5/year: student  
**Lifetime Membership:**  
\$200

*For further information, contact Robin Ouren, [heyra@hickorytech.net](mailto:heyra@hickorytech.net) or 507-246-5309  
or [Elsa.Ferkenstad@blc.edu](mailto:Elsa.Ferkenstad@blc.edu) or 507-344-7354.*

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership dues (see chart) = \$** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please**     \_\_ # **Historical Society members attending luncheon x \$9 = \$** \_\_\_\_\_

**send**                     \_\_ # **non-members attending luncheon x \$10 = \$** \_\_\_\_\_

**Total = \$** \_\_\_\_\_

**payment  
by June 1.**

**Please send payment for luncheon and membership by June 1 to:  
ELS Historical Society - 6 Browns Court - Mankato, MN 56001**

## **Oak Leaves**

ELS Historical Society  
6 Browns Court  
Mankato, MN 56001

### **Renew your membership!**

ELS Historical Society

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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Send completed form and check (see box below right  
for type of membership and correct amount) to:

**ELS Historical Society**  
**6 Browns Court — Mankato, MN 56001**

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**Oak Leaves** welcomes articles of both Synodical and local significance  
for publication. Articles maybe edited for style, clarity, or length to al-  
low for publication. Submitted manuscripts will be deposited in the  
archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

#### **MEMBERSHIP**

All membership  
renewals are due **June 1**

**Voting Membership:**

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

**Associate Membership:**

\$15/year: individual  
\$25/year: institutional  
\$5/year: student

**Lifetime Membership:**

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