

Valby celebrates 100th anniversary

"Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim,"--the nearly 300 members and friends of Valby Lutheran Church sang these familiar words to the opening hymn at last Sunday's 100th anniversary service. They continued to lift high the cross mirroring the service of the Valby (Shepherd's Dell in Swedish) congregation for the past 100 years.

The Rev. Milton Nesvig, vice president emeritus of Tacoma, Washington's Pacific Lutheran University and archivist for the North Pacific District described Valby in the morning's sermon as a beacon among the wheat fields where many had made contact with each other and with God over the past century. The church, he said, has had a profound effect on many.

Nesvig and the current pastor of the church, the Rev. Rick Evenson were assisted with the worship service by four former pastors at the congregation: Rev. Rudolph Mensch, Rev. Mark Johnson, Rev. John Maas, and Rev. Ken Robinson. Valby congregation was formed April 19, 1886 and served by itinerant pastors until 1955 when Hope Lutheran Church formed in Heppner and the two congregations called a fulltime pastor, the Rev. Merlin Zier to serve the church. Members of Valby met in homes until five acres was donated and the building went up.

Mission pastors came by train to Alkalai (Arlington) and by buckboard to Little Sweden (north of Ione), the grandson of one early minister explained how pastors came to Valby. Paul Tews, descended from the Troedson family at Little Sweden, said that pastors would be met at the train and brought to the Morgan area where they would conduct a worship service Saturday evening for the Troedsons, Lundells, Swansons, and others of the area, and then early the next morning someone would hitch up the buckboard and take him on to Valby, stopping at Petersons for breakfast before the service.

The congregation met for a while at the Rocky Bluff School in Jenkins Cemetery, over the hill from the current location of the church. The Rocky Bluff school was later moved to the church grounds and modified to become the current social hall.

The celebration could not have been complete without awards. A \$400 donation from Aid Association for Lutherans was presented to Valby by Hermiston AAL representative Tom Nichols Otilia Hunt, 89 years-young and a former member of Hope congregation, was the oldest person present. The youngest in attendance was Kevin Drake, infant son of Doug and Carley Drake of Heppner.

Receiving the award for the person having come the farthest, the Rev. Mensch said that although he retired when he moved from the Heppner-Valby church he has never forgot the church because it was so uplifting in his own life. Many others who moved away must have remembered the Church also because Bergstroms and Petersons and others who had left the area were seen, introducing themselves to members of their extended families who remained in the area.

The Rev. Ken Robinson announced that the Valby congregation had always been "the apple of my eye," and agreed with an earlier description by the Rev. John Maas that the congregation could be compared to a nurturing mother who gave birth to fledgling pastors by encouraging seminarians to discover the style of their own ministry expecting that he "baptize the babies, bury the dead, preach on Sunday, and do whatever else he wanted."

The Rev. Mark Johnson confessed that he was a "city boy" until he came to Morrow County. His first day at Valby, he said, every dirt road "looked the same," and he wondered at the sanity of parishoners who invited him to go waterskiing after the service. Rapidly the congregation became part of the Johnsons extended Christian family and he and his family are currently serving another rural parish.

The Rev. John Maas shared a story of the history about the altar in the Church. On the 100th anniversary, it was a good replica of Swedish liturgical architecture. When the church was first built, he said, the altar had five steps up to the pulpit. The summer weather in eastern Oregon being warmer than that in Sweden, "sooner or later they figured they'd lose a pastor," he said, so three parishoners cut the altar down to its present two steps. Discovering the change, another parishoner allowed that it might be all right, "but how's the little woman going to see the preacher?" he asked. After that the couple

seldom attended services. anniversary celebrations, the Maas commented, we hear of the good things that the Church has done and disregard the controversy that contributed to the church's growth.

In addition to the many pastors who have served the church, Jane Rawlins remembered the Women's Missionary Society that provided much to many early members of the church through fellowship, and actions in their own lives.

Gus Peterson recalled that before the social hall was added to the church, meals were served in the church building. Planks protecting the church's glass windows from vandalism, he said were brought inside and laid across the pews to form tables for serving the food.

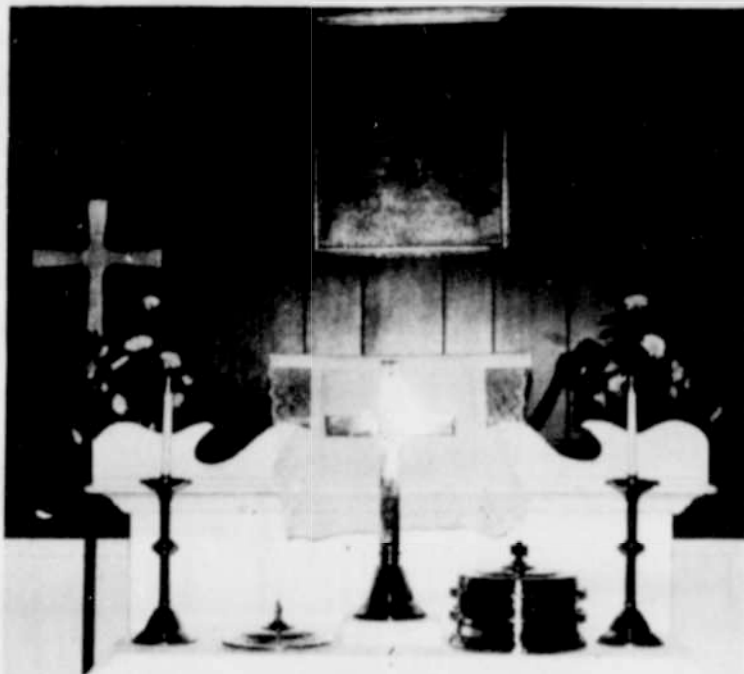
The grand party that the church with about 80 confirmed members spent many months planning succeeded in proclaiming the love of Christ just as the Church has done for the last 100 years. The Rev. Nesvig challenged the Church to renew its dedication "to teach new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you, and be sure of this--that I am with you always, even to the end of the World." (Matthew 28:20)

The day's offering, \$1,275.22 was donated to Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Boardman, the area's newest Lutheran congregation.

Photos from top: Right--the front entrance to the Valby Church building. Left--the altar in the sanctuary.

The Rev. Ken Robinson (left) and the Rev. Rudolph Mensch, Irv Rauch (left) visits with the Rev. John Maas. Right--the Rev. Mark Johnson and Steve Brownfield join in singing a hymn.

Members and friends of valby. Women of Valby serve anniversary cake.



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