

IN SEARCH OF THE EIELSEN SYNOD

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## IN SEARCH OF THE EIELSEN SYNOD

Who is the Eielsen Synod, where is it, and what is it doing? The basic reference works on American Lutheranism or on American denominations in general all contain a statement to the effect that the Eielsen Synod has all but died out in this century. That "all but" is an intriguing little phrase, and my purpose in researching this paper was to find the faithful remnant that makes those qualifying words necessary.

The LCUSA Connection The Lutheran Council in the USA publishes a directory of all Lutheran congregations in North America. Almost, that is. At the bottom of a statistical report of the various Lutheran church bodies in the United States and Canada was the telling little remark, "No recent report has been received from the Eielsen Synod." Hoping that they would be able to provide further illumination, I wrote to LCUSA and asked for whatever information they had in their files.

The only recent information that LCUSA had on the Eielsen Synod (now officially known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) was the notice which appeared in the LUTHERAN STANDARD of the death of the Rev. Thore Larson, the president and last surviving pastor of the Eielsen Synod. This dashed my hopes of meeting this man,

but the staff assistant who responded to my letter was able to direct me to the secretary of the ELCA, Janette Larson of Windom, Minnesota.

When no reply came to my letter to Secretary Larson, I tried a phone call. Directory assistance had no listing for her, but they were able to give me the numbers of the only two Larsons in Windom. It so happened that I reached Janette on the first try. It also happened that she was of absolutely no help. She had been secretary of the synod in the past, but she no longer serves in that capacity. She was not able to tell me who the present secretary was, and even though she was related to Thore Larson she could not give me the name of someone who would be able to give me more information. She did not know who was in charge of the day-to-day operations of the church. Although an erstwhile secretary, she did not think that <sup>there</sup> were any synod records in existence.

Joseph Jacobson What next? The LUTHERAN STANDARD article that LCUSA had sent mentioned the locations of the four remaining Eielsen congregations: Centerville, South Dakota; French Lake and Jackson, Minnesota; and Taylor, Wisconsin. That information was better than none, so I packed my bags and headed for Taylor.

Taylor, a small town with a population of less than 350, is located in Jackson County about eight miles southwest of Black River Falls. There is one church in town, Taylor Lutheran Church (ALC), but Pastor Omar Nelson was

nowhere to be found. A visit to the local grade school brought only puzzled looks at the mention of the Eielsen Synod, but they thought that Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Nelson, a vibrant couple in their nineties, might be able to help. They were. They remembered the "old time church," and they suggested a visit to Mr. Joseph Jacobson. "They used to meet at his place, you know. He showed us some of the record books last year."

Mr. Jacobson was glad to have company. He had celebrated his ninetieth birthday just a few days earlier, on the same day as my twenty-sixth, so we began by marvelling over our mutual milestones. He apologized for the faultiness of his memory, but the times when it failed him were outweighed by the times when it did not.

Ole Jacobson, Joseph's father, was born in Norway in 1850. He came to Wisconsin in 1870, not for a religious but for a very practical reason--the draft age in Norway was twenty-one, and he decided that he would rather switch than fight. The energetic evangelism of the Eielsen Synod soon brought him into the fold, and subsequently he was elected a trustee of the synod. Elling Eielsen lived until 1883, so Ole Jacobson worked with him for more than a decade. Joseph remembers his father describing Eielsen as "a tough old man." Ole felt that the splits which plagued the Norwegian Lutherans were caused by the fact that Eielsen could not bear to share authority; his autocratic methods precipitated the exodus of those who

wanted a greater say in the running of the church. Perhaps Ole's interpretation sheds some light on the acknowledged anti-organizationalism of Elling Eielsen.<sup>1</sup>

The Taylor congregation never had a church building of its own. In fact, they never had a pastor of their own. They used to be served by the pastor of the Eielsen congregation in Lodi, Wisconsin, but after that congregation disbanded a pastor would travel from Minnesota every four to six weeks to conduct services. These services would be held in one of the member's homes, and Jacobson recalls that the homes would have every available space filled with people.

Church services were not restricted to the weekends when a pastor was able to travel to meet with them. The stress on lay involvement which Eielsen (who started as a lay preacher) instilled continued, and the people in Taylor felt no compunctions about worshipping without benefit of clergy. They did not really have lay preachers, in the full sense of the term, but one of the men would read a sermon out of a collection of sermons. Jacobson showed me several of these sermon books. Interestingly enough, the books he had were translations into Norwegian of sermons by the great Lutheran mystic and devotional writer, Johann Arndt. I think Arndt would be amazed to

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<sup>1</sup>Nelson, E. Clifford. The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian Americans. Volume 1 written with Eugene L. Fevold. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1960; Vol 1, p. 145.

learn that sermons he wrote had been preached by a layman more than 400 years later in the parlor of a farmhouse in a rural town in the New World.

The services themselves were not very liturgical. They would begin by singing a hymn or two, and then "the pastor would stand up and preach for an hour from the heart. That's what p<sup>r</sup>aching is. Today they only preach for fifteen minutes because of all those ceremonies. You call that a sermon?" The service would then close with the Lord's Prayer.

The congregation in Taylor was somewhat of an informal affair. There were no organizations ("not even a Ladies Aid--the old ministers were against them"), no elected officials, no annual meetings. There was "agreement without legal affairs." Nels Peterson was the acknowledged leader, so he would see to it that the congregation had a place to meet on Sunday. Other than that, there was not much business to take care of.

Pastor Thore Larson was elected president of the Eielsen Synod in 1958, but that perhaps says less than it might suggest. "That job went more or less by age anyway. Larson didn't get it until he was the last one left." Larson was ordained in 1948, at the age of forty-three, and from then on he seems to have been almost a circuit rider. During the week he would tend to his farm, from which he made his living, and on weekends he would travel to the various preaching stations. The collection

in Taylor would be given to Pastor Larson to cover his travelling expenses, but one wonders whether it even did that as the size of the congregation dwindled.

The Eielsen Synod has required proof of "conversion" for membership from its very beginnings. The original constitution stated, "No one ought to be accepted as a member of our body, except he has passed through a genuine conversion or is on the way to conversion."<sup>2</sup> The term "conversion" seems to have been interpreted in different ways. Jacobson spoke of some in the congregation who were branded as "fanatics" by outsiders, apparently with good reason. They could speak of nothing but "religion," and they stressed the need for a conversion "experience." Thore Larson could be moved to tears while preaching when he spoke of his own conversion. Yet he never condemned anyone who had not had such an experience, and, when Jacobson was asked whether he had ever had a conversion experience, he replied, "Not exactly." Larson "believed in conversion," to be sure, but "conversion" for him was almost a synonym for "sanctification." The kind of things involved can be surmised from a tribute to Larson written by his son (see appendices): no alcohol, no movies. Most writers give this proof-of-conversion requirement as the reason that the Eielsen Synod could

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<sup>2</sup>Nelson, op. cit., p. 337.

not retain its youth, and there undoubtedly is a great deal of truth in that statement.

Joseph Jacobson, however, attributes the decline of the Eielsen Synod to another cause. "It was the language; the Norwegian language." The pastors of the Eielsen Synod refused to use anything but the mother tongue. In fact, most of them were unable to use English well enough to express themselves in it, especially over the course of an hour-long sermon. This attitude is somewhat surprising, and is even more so when we consider the trek Elling Eielsen made in 1841 from Illinois to New York to procure English catechisms.<sup>3</sup> The previously mentioned constitution specifically provided that, "The children must be educated in both languages, but in the mother tongue first."<sup>4</sup> Thore Larson, however, was the first to preach in English at Taylor, and at the end of his ministry he worked exclusively in it. But by then it was too late. "The children didn't want to belong" before Larson even began his ministry, and during his thirty-five years of service he performed no marriages at Taylor. The last Sunday School classes were taught more than twenty-five years ago. The little group of about a dozen that had been meeting with Pastor

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<sup>3</sup>Nelson, op. cit., p. 77.

<sup>4</sup>Nelson, op. cit., p. 340.



Larson slowly but surely dwindled away. To call the congregation in Taylor today a congregation is a bit of hyperbole--Joseph Jacobsen is the only member left.

The trip to Taylor did not yield many figures or dates, and the records which Jacobson had were all in Norwegian, they were incomplete, and they left off more than fifty years ago. Joseph, like his father Ole, is a trustee of the Eielsen Synod, but, as he said, "I haven't heard from them for a long time." The trip did yield some interesting recollections from a man whose father knew Elling Eielsen and who was born just ten years after Eielsen died. Joseph Jacobson and his father have served the Eielsen Synod for 110 of its 135 years of service, and the impressions gained from that close connection can reveal a great deal about the nature of the synod. The trip to Taylor yielded something else, too--further leads. Jacobson showed me some copies of THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP BANNER, the publication of Hauge Foreign Mission, Inc. Thore Larson had served on its board for 25 years, and two of his sons are on the board. This gave me some more bearings to continue my search.

Difficult Seas Sometimes good bearings are not enough, and you end up foundering on the rocks anyway. This is what happened to me.

Truman Larson, Thore's youngest son, has taken over the family farm in Jackson. I thought that that would be the best place to look for information, so I placed a

phone call. As luck would have it, the person who answered the phone was Mrs. Leona Larson, Thore's widow. She had seen the letter I had sent to Janette Larson, but she was not able to give me much more information than Janette was. She did say that there were no synod records, but she mentioned that there was a somewhat outdated history of the Eielsen congregation in Jackson. My pulse speeded up when she said that she would send it to me. I asked if she and her son would answer some questions that I would send to her, and she agreed. After hanging up, I sat down and carefully typed out a series of questions which I felt would give a good overview of the Eielsen Synod's last 25 years and of its plans for the immediate future. I enclosed a stamped, self-addressed envelope, visited the Post Office, and sat down to wait.

I'm still waiting. Telephone calls and letters have prompted no response. Lack of funds prevent a trip to Jackson, which is southwest of New Ulm, so my search has ground to a halt.

The Conclusion of the Matter Elling Eielsen is reported to have said, "Jesus and his disciples never took minutes." Those who claim his name today seem to have adhered quite closely to that example. The lack of records and statistics and the unanswered correspondence are frustrating for a researcher, but there is historical precedent; the faithful remnant is merely remaining true to its heritage. The questions with which I began

my search are going to have to remain largely unanswered, at least for now. It seems that the story of this tiny church body might never be told. Its death toll began long ago and has grown progressively softer. When the first of the Norwegian Synods breathes its last, the sigh might be too soft to hear.

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#### A CONCLUDING UNSCIENTIFIC POSTSCRIPT

After having resigned myself to never learning anything further about the Eielsen Synod, I typed up my paper and handed it in. Maybe I should have done that earlier, because that very day I received a letter from Mr. Truman Larson, Thore Larson's son.

The information which the LUTHERAN STANDARD printed in its notice of Thore Larson's death was not quite correct. The congregation in Centerville, South Dakota, which had gone by the name of Nazareth Lutheran Church, was dissolved in 1980. This leaves the Taylor congregation with its lone member, Immanuel Lutheran Church in French Lake, Minnesota, and Stall Lutheran Church ("Stall" referring to a former family in the congregation) in Jackson, Minnesota. Mr. Truman listed eight members for the Jackson church and none for the one in French Lake. How a church

can have no members is a bit puzzling. I was unable to locate French Lake on the Minnesota map; perhaps it is near Jackson, which is about 55 miles southwest of New Ulm, and the Jackson people worship there on occasion. At any rate, French Lake and Jackson have their own church buildings, and Centerville had its own until it folded.

When Thore Larson was ordained in 1948, there were five pastors in the synod. One of these, Rev. J. O. Blannes, had served at the Stall Church beginning in 1912. He remained as an assistant to Thore Larson, so at least one of those pastors was not serving a separate congregation.

Pastor Larson had no formal training for the ministry. He worked his farm both before and after his ordination, much as Paul plied his trade of tent-making. Larson received his call from the synod because of his acknowledged ability as a lay leader. It is interesting to note that the call came from the synod, not from the congregation. Perhaps there was the realization already at this time that Larson would soon be serving more than just the Stall Church. His opportunities to serve were limited by the size of his flock, of course. Outside of celebrating the Lord's Supper, the only pastoral acts which Mr. Larson listed for the last 25 years of his father's ministry were funerals.

Lay involvement seems to have varied with circumstances over the years. When Thore Larson would travel to

preach at the other congregations, no one would preach in his absence in Jackson. Today, however, Pastor Merle Knutson (who I assume is a member of another small Norwegian group) and Truman Larson are handling the preaching in Jackson and French Lake.

The Jackson congregation, unlike the one in Taylor, did have at least one organization--a Ladies Aid. There is no Sunday School, and I assume it has been a number of years since one was in operation.

The Eielsen Synod adopted its constitution in its final form in 1850 in Koshkonong, Wisconsin. It really was in its final form, because that same constitution is still in effect today. Mr. Larson quoted it to me when he responded to my question of what conversion is and whether it is still required for synodical membership:

It is not really required to prove conversion for who can prove that? But (the constitution) reads, "No one can be adopted as a member of our church without being truly converted or being on the way to conversion and that a marked grief over sin is felt and with a hunger and thirst after righteousness." To be converted means to endeavor to change ones attitude toward sin and endeavor to live a life in accordance with God's Word. I would hope you have experienced this.

Worship services in Jackson are quite similar to what Mr. Jacobson reported in Taylor. There are a total of four hymns sung, there is no recitation of a creed, no confession of sins and absolution, and no congregational participation in a liturgy. The high point of this simple, straight-forward service is the sermon,

which averages twenty minutes to half an hour in length. In keeping with the tradition of most of the Lutheran churches of the last century, the Lord's Supper is celebrated only two or three times a year.

The Eielsen Synod will be making definite plans for its future sometime in June of this year. Mr. Larson did not respond to my question as to whether there were any candidates in the synod to replace Thore Larson; the fact that he is now serving as a preacher, however, would seem to make him a logical prospect to follow in his father's footsteps. He certainly has a concern for the state of the Lutheran church today, as he showed in his concluding remarks:

We do not usually answer questionnaires like this because most of the reports made by people like yourself have never been favorable to our Synod or God's Kingdom in general but rather emphasize the negative aspects of the Synod--such as declining membership, etc. We hope to continue as a loosely knit organization patterned after the Hauges Venner and other groups in Norway. There is a desperate need in the USA today for the old-time preaching of law and gospel, sin and grace. Most of the organized churches of USA, especially Lutheran, have devised "cunningly devised fables": "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine but, after their own lusts they shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables". II Tim. 4:3-4 I think you should be more concerned with where the Lutheran Churches are headed than with the past. We cannot answer for the mistakes and/or acts of others of the past but we are responsible for what we are doing today.

Sincerely,  
Truman Larson

That brings my search for the Eielsen Synod to a close. It was an interesting search that revealed some interesting people. They are a small band clinging tenaciously to the vision of the man who was instrumental in the formation of Norwegian Lutheranism in America. We have our theological differences, of course, but much of American Lutheranism today could do worse than to take a lesson from these faithful few.

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citizens are now drinking liquor! What will the harvest be? Investigations show that out of the near 40,000 auto accidents in twelve months, 60% of the drivers had been drinking one hour before."

—A. S. London

Remember this was written 35 years ago. What are today's figures?

From the above quotations, we can come to only one conclusion: DON'T DRINK. For "At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder" (Prov. 23:32).

There is a cure for alcoholism; to partake freely of the Water of Life, Jesus Christ, who said, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst..." (John 4:14). Dr. Allan Starr, a noted neurologist, says, "In all my experience, I have never known a case that could not be permanently cured through the influence of religion." Christ is the cure—seek Him.



### REV. THORE LARSON, Home in Glory

Rev. Thore Larson went home to be with the Lord on November 19th at the age of 78. He was pastor of Stall Norwegian Lutheran Church of rural Jackson. His church was the oldest congregation in Jackson County, its history going back to 1881 when the first Norwegian settlers built cabins northwest of what is now Jackson, Mn. Pastor Larson served the church from June 6, 1948, and was only its fourth pastor. The Stall Church was part of the Eielsen Synod. With only four con-

gregations, it is the smallest synod in the Norwegian Lutheran Church. Pastor Larson served all four congregations and he was also the last pastor of this Synod. He was ordained to the ministry in June 6th, 1948, in Clear Lake, Ia., and was elected president of the Synod in June, 1958, which position he held until his death. All Norwegian Lutheran Synods have their roots in the Eielsen Synod.

Hauge Foreign Mission Board had the honor and privilege of having Pastor Larson on its Board for 25 years. He was a man of humble spirit and a great concern and burden for mission work. This burden and concern never diminished over the years. Two-day mission meetings were held regularly each year and any missionary from H.F.M. coming through at any time had a wide-open door to speak and present his work. He and his faithful wife, Leona, always were given to generous hospitality and a warm spirit of fellowship.

Pastor Thore Larson will be greatly missed by all. He was a dear friend and brother in the Lord of whom we can say, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." Blessed be his memory.

### "I Am Alpha and Omega" (Rev. 22:13).

by Madsen from "The Word"

Jesus is the first, and Jesus is the last. He is both the beginning and the end.

In the beginning was the Word - and this Word was Jesus.

He was prior to every created thing. He existed before the morning star sang the praises of God in the sky, for He Himself was its Creator.

But He is not only Alpha-the first — He is also Omega-the last.

When the world with its lusts passes away, then He remains. When everything else dies the second death, then He lives together with all those who have life in Him forever.

Alpha and Omega - may He be the first and the last also in your life!

A wrong beginning will never be made when He is Alpha. Neither will we finish with broken hopes when He is Omega.

Every day in which He is the first and the last, is a day of the Lord. Every year, in which He is the beginning and the end, is a year of grace, full of blessings from God.

"Lord, be Thou my Alpha and Omega through every day of my life - also on the last."



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**— Editorial —****Our Needs All Met**

*"But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 4:19).

We cannot begin, in any way, to comprehend all the needs which God supplies for mankind by Christ Jesus. We are in no way even mindful of many of our needs that God through Jesus Christ has and still is supplying day by day. Our greatest need, by far, was our need of salvation, which God, in His infinite love, made possible for all mankind when He sent His only begotten Son to die in our stead. Yes, our need of reconciliation to God was made possible through His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

As children of God, we also have the need of being kept from the power of satan in our journey through this life, and I Peter 1:3-5 assures us that we are kept by the power of God to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.

As a Christian, there is another need that is met and that is the need of a redeemed soul to praise and glorify God. No one has been truly converted or saved except there is also a burning desire in the heart and soul to worship and praise the Almighty God, whom we have come to know as our Father through faith in Jesus Christ. This desire and need is met through the new heart we received. I

Chronicles 16:10, 25 reads, "Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord." "For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised . . ."

Jesus knew of our needs and met them when He said in John 14:16, "I will pray the Father and He will give you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever. Verse 17 states, "Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive," and in verse 26 we are told that this Comforter which is the Holy Spirit shall teach us all things. God surely supplies all our needs.

Have you found it to be true even as a child of the King that we will many times carry a burden and try to solve it ourselves before we look to God in prayer and guidance? We need to be reminded often of Phil. 4:19, "My God shall supply all your need."

There is also the need of physical and spiritual rest that is met by our Lord. We can rest in the river of grace and we receive grace upon grace. To think that God has invited us to come boldly to the throne of grace. Heb. 4:16 reads, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Sometimes our needs are not met because we do not ask of God or we ask amiss for that which is not good for us. Let us come and ask boldly and freely as children of the King. That we are by Christ Jesus, but let us always remember to add, "Not my will but Thy will be done." Remember, God has met and will continue to meet our needs but not necessarily our wants.

A.L.

**In Memory of  
Reverend Thore Larson**

by Arne and Elsa Gronning

A telegram was delivered here at our Mission on Saturday, November 20th, reading: "Dad passed November 19 Funeral Monday Truman Larson."

We knew that he was not strong but still the message came rather unexpectedly to us—and so many blessed memories came to our hearts and minds. We remembered so well the first time we met Leona and Thore on a cold winter day. From the very first day, we somehow felt that we were of the same spirit. Elsa, the children, and myself will never forget all the spiritual uplift, help and hospitality we experienced through the Larson Family and the Eielsen Synod throughout thirty years. We think of all the miles Pastor Thore Larson traveled for Hauge Foreign Mission and for the many Mission Sundays in his church: the last one on the 11th and 12th of September of last

year - only 2 months before he went to be with the Lord! We had a feeling when we said hello this time that next time would be in glory!

When thinking of the faithful service of Pastor Thore Larson, there comes a Scripture verse to my mind. It was the Word from Jesus regarding one of His disciples: "*Behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile*" (John 1:47). There was an Haugean in his life and in his service for the Lord. His message was rooted in the Word of God and brought forth with humility and by the power of the Holy Spirit, in simplicity. Besides, he was a good farmer, and had (like the old Haugeans) an open home for all. No-one but God knows how many guests have received love, hospitality and spiritual uplift by staying at the wonderful home of Leona and Thore, and Truman. So many missionaries with families have stayed there for days at a time!

May God bless the family who has lost a good husband, father, grandfather and brother, and we all realize that we have lost a beloved leader and friend. May we admonish each other to follow in the steps of our faithful leaders, Heb. 13:7. May God bless you all in the service for the Lord.

## A Tribute To Dad

by Truman Larson

I am reminded of the 1st Psalm: "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*" As long as I can remember, my Dad would lead his family in prayer. I suppose you could say his prayers were not classical in that sense of the word, but you felt like here was a son talking intimately to his father. No fancy words-no fancy long petitions — just a child-like faith and trust in a living God who saves to the uttermost. Dad never wanted for himself, or any of his children, that even the appearance of evil should fall on them. He always admonished us to shun all forms of evil and in this he set a good example. He never wanted to eat a meal in a restaurant that served alcohol. He never wanted to go to a movie theater even if the performance might be of a religious nature. Certainly, he endeavored to not walk in the counsel of the ungodly. (AND HE SHALL BE LIKE A TREE PLANTED BY THE RIVERS OF WATER.) Have you noticed while driving through the rangelands of the Midwest, how often you will see one tree standing alone near a stream, all green and full of life, while all around it the trees seem stunted or dwarflike?

This tree was near the source of life. It drew its water from the stream and was flourishing while the others were lacking moisture. This was my Dad! In times of trouble, other people might be wringing their hands and wondering what to do; he would be calm and able to trust in his God. This is the way I remember Dad and this is the way I want to always remember him. This is the spirit I would like to have just a little of.

O Holy Ghost, to Thee our light, We cry by day, by night,  
Come grant us of the light and power, Our fathers had of yore,  
When thy dear church did stand, A tree deep-rooted grand;  
Full crowned with blossoms, white as snow  
With purple fruits aglow!

## The Value of Humility

by H. J. Ness

Humility is the direct opposite of pride and independence of God. Pride shuts out the mind to God's truths regarding repentance, salvation and the glorious future in store for the faithful, humble child of God. Pride also locks the heart and weakens the hands and mind. Pride builds a wrong and too-high regard for one's self. It is an abomination to the Lord. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble" (Jas. 4:6). "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).

What about humility, then? Humility begets receptivity. Humility is the result of a right understanding and estimate of self. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, using God's truths, often in conjunction with trying circumstances. We see this illustrated in the life of Jonah, Daniel, Joseph, and especially with Moses in his forty years of herding sheep in the desert.

Humility prepares the heart for God's work in and through us. God uses humble people who will give the glory to Him. The one whom God has been able to make truly humble is the one He can trust with power and responsibility. This is clearly demonstrated in the Disciples following the crucifixion and the resurrection of the Lord. They had come to a right estimate of themselves and of Christ, and were deeply humbled. God cleansed them from their pride and strong self-will. He united them into one humble and unselfish body by His Spirit, and He gave them the power necessary to fulfill their calling with joy.

Humility makes a person unselfish, while at the same time strong and bold for God and His kingdom. True faith in God grows in a

# Faith & Fellowship

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### The Cover

The 76th Annual Lutheran Brethren Schools World Mission Conference was held January 26-30 in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. In addition to the LBS students, many others came to be challenged by the conference theme *God's Global Plan - And You*. The conference goal of \$7000 was exceeded by \$2400.

The 77th Annual World Mission Conference is being planned for January 25-29, 1984.

## Comment

### An Era Ends

An era has ended in American Lutheranism, and only one Lutheran magazine, to my knowledge, has acknowledged it. The last pastor, Rev. Thore Larson, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, better known as the Eielsen Synod, went home to be with the Lord late last year.

Most of you probably have never heard of this synod. It had no college, no seminary, and few remaining churches — four to be exact and these were all served by Pastor Larson.

The founder of this Lutheran denomination was Elling Eielsen, a Norwegian-American Lutheran lay preacher, missionary, pastor, and organizer. Born near Bergen, Norway, he was converted as a young man and became an active preacher in the Haugean revival movement. Eielsen came to the United States in 1839 and is credited with conducting the first Norwegian Lutheran service, building the first Norwegian Lutheran Church and organizing the first Norwegian Lutheran congregation in America.

In the early years this synod insisted on "positive and courageous evangelism and the development of vigorous lay leadership. It sought to perpetuate the ideals of the great evangelist, reformer and revivalist Hans Nielsen Hauge. The Eielsen Synod insisted on conversion as a condition for membership.

What happened to cause this synod to decrease to the point where now there are no pastors? What happened to its evangelistic influence which was once a positive force in American Lutheranism?

My knowledge of this synod is limited so I don't have the answers, although I know former members of

this denomination and as a boy remember occasionally attending an Eielsen Synod church in Clear Lake, Iowa.

I can only guess that the younger generation didn't keep alive the vision of a vital, lay-oriented, evangelistic church.

Is there a need for this type of Lutheran denomination in Canada and the United States? A denomination that will preach and teach the necessity of conversion? A synod that will foster revival and lay activity through the use of spiritual gifts by all believers in the congregational fellowship?

May God grant that the Lutheran Brethren keep this vision of Elling Eielsen alive. May it never die among us. □

*David Rinden*



### Notice

The 1983 Annual Convention of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren will be held May 30-June 1, 1983, on the campus of Lutheran Brethren Schools, Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

*Everald Strom, president*  
*George Aase, secretary*

## NEWS Quick look

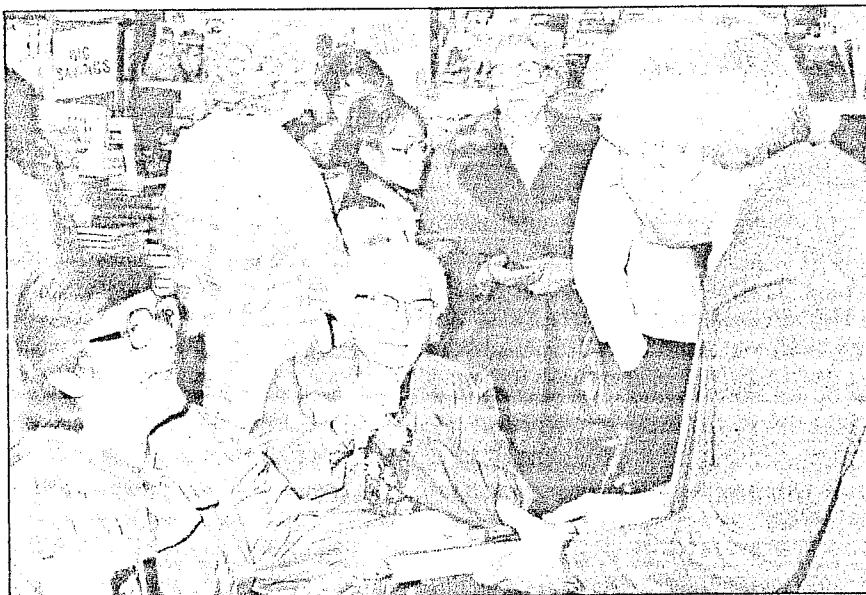
**The American** Roman Catholic bishops, over the objections of the White House, intend to proceed with plans for a major pastoral letter that questions many of the fundamental policies of the nation's nuclear defense posture. Meeting in Washington, D.C., the bishops gave the go-ahead to their ad hoc committee on war and peace to begin work on a third and final draft of what is now a 110-page text. They agreed to meet in Chicago next May 2 to consider the new version.

**A third** of the families in the United States have drinking problems, says a new Gallup Poll. A key question asked by Gallup in a telephone survey of 1,566 adults was: "Has drinking ever been a cause of trouble in your family?" The query got an affirmative response from 33% of the interviewees, up from 22% the previous year when the word "liquor" was used instead of "drinking."

**Two pastors** of the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church who were among 26 persons detained in November in northern Namibia have been released. But two other of the detainees, Jona Hamukwaya and Kadumu Katanga, died while in custody. Police reportedly are investigating the circumstances of their deaths. The released pastors were identified as Asser Lihongo and Herson Nghulundilua.

**Drastic problems** such as serious food shortages, unemployment, epidemics, and crop failures currently are plaguing parts of Ethiopia, according to the government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. The commission said the administrative regions of Wollo, Tigray, and Eritrea are especially affected by last year's late rainfall.

**The congregation** of Christ Lutheran Church, San Antonio, Tex., culminated a three-week celebration of the church's 50th anniversary Nov. 14, with presentation of an \$8000 check against a five-year pledge of \$30,000 for the support of new missions in the San Antonio area. Ed Fossum, president of the congregation, presented the check to Clemente Saenz, service-mission director for the American Lutheran Church in the Southern District. The Rev. Arthur Rode is senior pastor of Christ Lutheran.



**Kathryn Koob**, one of the 52 Americans held hostage in Iran for 444 days, autographed her recently published book, *Guest of the Revolution* (Thomas Nelson), at a Cedar Falls, Iowa, bookstore for Dr. Robert L. Vogel, president of Wartburg College. Koob, a 1962 Wartburg graduate, said she has not ruled out the possibility of a political future. Visiting with the author was her aunt, Esther Koob (center) of Waverly, Iowa.

## ALC medical-dental program in good health

Finances of the American Lutheran Church's (ALC) Major Medical-Dental Program are in a healthy condition, the ALC Board of Pensions was told at its recent meeting.

This news was in contrast to reports at several previous meetings when the financial condition of the program was described as critical.

The Rev. Henry F. Treptow, executive secretary of the board, credited three factors for the good health of the Major Medical-Dental Fund.

The main reason for its long term improvement is the action of the ALC convention in September, which increased payments to the Major Medical-Dental Fund by 1% of the salaries of the participants. It also increased the deductible amount in some categories, thus shifting some of the costs to participants.

Although the immediate program had never been in jeopardy, financial problems were projected for the future because major medical benefits were continued for retirees after they no longer made contributions to the fund. This problem will be offset by ALC convention action.

A second reason for the program's improved health is the punctuality with which congregations and other salary-paying organizations are contributing to the fund.

A third positive factor is the favorable bond and stock market, which paid healthy returns on investments.

## Eielsen pastor dies

The Rev. Thore Larson of rural Jackson, Minn., president of the Eielsen Synod (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) since 1958 and its last surviving pastor, died Nov. 16. He was 78.

Until his death, Pastor Larson served Stahl Lutheran Church in rural Jackson and congregations in Centerville, S.D.; French Lake, Minn.; and Taylor, Wis. They are the only congregations now in existence of the Eielsen Synod in which Norwegian Lutheran churches in the United States had their roots.

BELMONT STALL LUTHERAN

1861 is the year-date being used as the time that Norwegian Lutheran church work was begun in Belmont Twp. The first settlers of Norwegian origin came to Jackson County from Wisconsin, through Iowa, and arrived here in the summer of 1860. They came in covered wagons, drawn by ox teams, taking homestead claims in Belmont and Des Moines townships. There were a number of lay preachers among the new settlers and they regularly conducted devotional meetings in the different homes. Perhaps 1860 should be given as the year in which Norwegian Lutheran church work was started in the county.

In August of 1862, Halsten Olson, a layman, was conducting a Sunday morning church service on the Taral Ramlo farm, SW $\frac{1}{2}$  of section 34. Ole Olson Fohre, wounded by the Indians and bloody, broke in upon that service to startle and stun the worshippers with the terrible announcement that the Indians were murdering settlers on the east side of the Des Moines River; he had escaped with his life. Further accounts of this may be read in the History of Jackson County and other printed histories.

The Belmont Indian Massacre drove the white settlers out of Jackson County. Some of these people came back, but not permanently until 1864, when many others came in also.

Church work was of course resumed, and in 1867 a congregation was organized in the Log House which now stands on the Jackson County Fair Grounds. It had been completed in 1866, and one purpose for building it was to have a good place for church worship. Since this is the first church society to be incorporated in the county, we here quote the articles adopted, to wit:

"This certifies that in pursuance to lawful notice a meeting was held at the house of Halsten Olson in the Town of Belmont in the County of Jackson, and in the State of Minnesota, according to law on the fifth day of January A.D. 1867 at nine o'clock A.M. for the purpose of incorporating an evangelical Lutheran congregation in said County of Jackson, as combined with the constitution first adopted in Jefferson, Wisconsin A.D. 1846 and again confirmed in Kos Konoung, Wisconsin in the month of October, A.D. 1850

- "1. It was passed by the electors of this meeting that the name of the Congregation shall hereafter be known as the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Jackson, Minnesota.
- "2. The following trustees were elected:  
First class - Anders Olson, for one year.  
Second class - Peder Aase, for two years.  
Third class - Engebrigt Olson, for three years.
- "3. The following elders were elected: Halsten Olson, Nils Larson  
Nicolaus Olson.

"Given under our hands the 5th of January, A.D. 1867.  
Nils Larson, Chairman. Peder Havreberg, Secretary.

"This the seventh day of January, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-seven personally came before me Nils Larson, Chairman, and Peter P. Havreberg, Secretary.

/s/ Simon Olson, Justice of the Peace.

"Filed and recorded 23rd of January, 1867 - 6:00 P.M." (P. 499, Co. Record.)

## Belmont Stall Lutheran

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Eight men took part in organizing this church; their names are given in the list of officers appearing in the foregoing legal paper quoted. Sometime after incorporation the eight men divided four and four. Peter Havreberg, Simon Olson, Nils Larson and Engebrikt Olson continued together to support what we now call the Stall Church.

No doubt Rev. Elling Eielson was the first visiting pastor to serve the Lutherans in the Belmont community, perhaps starting his visits in 1865. Eielson ordained lay preacher H. E. Sether in 1868, then of Blue Earth. Rev. Sether served Jackson County Lutherans as a visiting pastor before becoming resident in Belmont Twp. in 1879.

Peter Havreberg, the first secretary in 1867, was a lay preacher. He was ordained in 1883 and then served as pastor until his death in 1894. While he was pastor, the present church was built, 1887. Some years ago the church was raised and a full basement put under it. It is well kept and in good repair, standing on the southeast corner of the NW $\frac{1}{4}$  of section 35, Belmont Twp.

Rev. D. O. Blanness began service the Stall Church in 1912 and still serves as Assistant Pastor. The regular pastor is Rev. Thore Larson, who resides on his farm, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ , Sec. 4, Belmont. The membership of the congregation is small, and apparently scattered. Some come out from the city of Jackson to worship in this church. Rev. Blanness, the assistant pastor, lives at South Haven, Minnesota.

The trustees of the Stall Church are John G. Peterson, Lloyd Larson and LeRoy Larson. Miss Marthine Larson is the Secretary-Treasurer.

In Section 22 of Belmont there is a cemetery in which quite a number of pioneers lie buried. It is referred to as the Stall Cemetery. The name "Stall" comes from a family by that name. Rev. O. J. Wagnild, writing about the Stall Lutheran Church, says, "There have been many pious, fine Christians of whom one should be mentioned. That is the old man, Hans Stahl."

The Stall Church is one of a small number of Lutheran congregations in America which continue as the Eielson Synod, getting their name from Rev. Elling Eielson. Eielson is a notable man among Norwegian Lutheran pioneer preachers in America. Before coming to America in 1839, he traveled all over Norway and went also to Sweden and Denmark. He was a very gifted and forceful speaker; he was one of the greatest disciples of Hauge, the "Father of the Laymen's Movement" in Norway. Eielson was not ordained until after he came to America, in Illinois by a Reverend Hoffman. Hoffman was an unusual man who was once also Vice Governor of Illinois, and he is the author of articles on agriculture.

Eielson is called the first Norwegian Lutheran pastor in America. He traveled extensively from his place in Wisconsin where he had his own congregation. He headed the first Norwegian Lutheran synod in America, organized in 1846. Rev. Wagnild writes of him: "He continued his journeys westward and wherever he came he gathered the new settlers together and preached the Gospel. He had to suffer a great deal, traveling mostly by foot, and as it was far between settlers, often was without shelter overnight." The last time he was in Jackson County was in 1876.

(This account subject to revision before printing. JCHS Secretary, Oct. 11, 1954.)