

# Balsam Lutheran Church History 1872-1997

## (Excerpts from the 125th Anniversary book)

Balsam Church has grown from a small group of Swedish emigrants to a diverse congregation. In 1937 the membership was 80.5% Swedish. The membership had a homogeneous, ethnic background and was strictly an agricultural community. Times for worship services and meetings took this fact into account. Today there are few farm families and the membership extends beyond the immediate vicinity.

An early tradition was the "old country" custom that the men sat on one side of the church during services and the women and children on the other side. Perhaps someone observed that it was not logical for families to be separated in the house of God and eventually the tradition was abandoned.

Initially, Balsam shared pastors with other Lutheran congregations such as Bethesda (Sand lake), Swedish Evangelical (Taylors Falls, Minn.) and First (Amery).

### **Early non-resident pastors included:**

P. A. Cederstam 1872-1874;  
A. F. Tornell 1874-1879;  
M. Spangberg 1880-1889;  
C. J. Youngberg 1889-1894;  
J. P. Lundblad nine months;  
G. A. Stenburg 1895-1896.

### **Resident Pastors of Balsam:**

Dr. Jonas Magny 1896-1907;  
Dr. G. Rast 1907-1909;  
A. J. Malmquist 1909-1916;  
Olaf Wallin 1916-1923;  
O. A. Landell 1923-1925;  
C. E. Sholander 1925-1933;  
Rudolph Jonson 1934-1936;  
Carl H. Olson 1937-1944;  
Gustav N. Ander 1944-1954;  
Clifton Trued 1955-1960;  
Gary A. Park 1961-1967;  
Ahti Karjala 1967-1970;  
John Gary Fondriak 1970-1973;  
John Junttila 1973-1976;  
Terry Stratton 1977-1985;  
Thyra Krier 1986-1991;  
Ed Rasmussen 1992-**1997 or later**  
***To be continued....***

### **The organizers and charter members of our congregation in August of 1872 are:**

- John Isakson and wife and two children. John was born in Sweden in 1817, arrived in America in 1869, and arrived here from Taylors Falls in 1872.
- Peter Johnson
- Gustaf Johnson and wife and two children
- Elias Swanson and wife and two children. Elias was born June 3, 1824 in Sweden and arrived in America in 1871.
- Carl Elmgren and wife and seven children. Carl was born Nov. 23, 1822 in Sweden, arrived in America in 1868, received here on Sept. 15, 1872.
- Carl Edman
- John Humble and wife and two children. John was born on Aug. 16, 1828 in Sweden, arrived in Aprica in 1869, received here Sept. 15, 1872.
- E. L. Lundgren and wife and four children.
- C. P. Johnson. Carl was born Jan. 28, 1844 in Sweden, arrived in America in 1869, received here Sept. 15, 1872.
- G. Tulpan and wife. G. Tulpan was born Nov. 16, 1827 in Sweden, arrived in America in 1871.
- Aron Malmquist
- Jonas Malmquist

- Swen Carlson and wife
- John Lindgren and wife and three children. John was born Aug. 10, 1830 in Sweden, arrived in 1868, received here from Chisago Lake July 15, 1872.
- Carl Malmlund and wife and one child
- Ola Olson and wife and five children. Ola was born July 3, 1830, was received here Sept. 15, 1872.
- Anders Nelson and wife and six children
- Carl Johnson and wife and two children
- Sven Swanson
- Gustav Nelson and wife and three children
- Fredrick Malmquist
- John Hakanson and wife and four children. John was born Dec. 11, 1848 in Sweden, arrived in America 1869, received here July 15, 1872.
- Solomon Anderson and wife and two children
- Peter Anderson and wife and four children
- Begt Anderson
- Peter Jacobson and wife and three children
- Carl Swanson and wife and six children.

### **First Church Building**

The first church building was started in June 1878. The building was 40' long, 28' wide, and 14' high. Stone work was done by Andrew Nelson and woodwork by J. Lindgren. It took about six years before it could be painted and finished inside.

A. L. Melin was the song leader, Andrew Nelson the janitor-sexton, and Anna Anderson and Anna Humble were the organists.

The first Sunday school was to begin in May 1879, and held by the deacons.

### **First Resident Pastor – Pastor Magny**

At the annual meeting in January 1896, a call was extended to Pastor Magny, at a salary of \$600, free house, free fuel, and free use of the forty acres of land.

Pastor Magny requested replacing the old frame church. In 1904, a decision was made to build a 50' long, 32' wide, and 16' high church with a choir log, sacristy and steeple. The outside would be brick veneer and the basement wall of stone. Much of the stone work was done by Frank Swanson who donated 30 days of labor.

### **Pastor A. J. Malmquist**

Pastor Malmquist came from Cumberland at a salary of \$550 in 1908, and stayed until 1916. His wife was blessed with musical ability. She not only played the organ but directed the senior choir and a youth choir. Her salary was \$100 a year.

Each Sunday for eight to nine months, Sunday School was held with the pastor, deacons, and others to teach the 75 or so children.

### **Pastor Olof Wallin**

Pastor Olof Wallin began his time of service at Balsam in October 1916. His starting salary was \$700 which was later increased to \$800. Mrs. Wallin was elected to serve as organist at a salary of \$100 a year plus two offerings. Son, Eugene, was elected to be the janitor with a salary of \$80, later increased to \$100, plus two offerings.

### **Pastor C. E. Sholander**

Pastor Sholander arrived in the parish in 1925. The first salary proposal was to pay \$850 plus the parsonage and 35 acres of land and a yearly Christmas offering. Similarly, the Range congregation would pay \$400 and an offering. At a later meeting it was decided to raise the amount to \$1,000 and Range's representatives agreed on \$500. Pastor Sholander would have the use of 12-14 acres of land and four weeks of vacation.

The 60th Anniversary celebration occurred on August 27-28 1932. Pastor Sholander wrote a booklet of Balsam's history to that date:

Children baptized from 1895 to date: 850

Confirmed from 1883 to date: 500

Funerals conducted from 1895 to date: 250.

Membership consisted of 205 communicants and 60 children, for a total of 265 members.

At the annual meeting in 1928, the vote was to keep all records from there on in English rather than Swedish. Services at that time alternated weekly between English and Swedish. In 1935, they only had Swedish services once a month.

### **Pastor Rudolph Jonson**

Pastor Jonson came to Balsam in July 1934. His salary was set at \$850 (later raised to \$900), a month's vacation, parsonage, and the use of seven acres of the adjoining land.

### **Pastor Carl H. Olson**

Pastor Carl H. Olson of Duluth was called to serve Balsam and Range. He arrived in May 1937.

There was much discussion of how to deal with the parsonage to accommodate Pastor Olson's family. The decision was made to rebuild with a plumbing and heating system. A motion passed that the total costs of the house not exceed \$4,500. Work on the project continued rapidly with much donated labor which kept down the cost. The dedication of the parsonage took place October 3, 1927.

The Balsam Church burned to the ground on January 22, 1939 just as services were being concluded. Willing hands quickly entered the edifice and began carrying out fixtures and furniture. Saved were the organ and piano, all pews, table and chairs in the basement and other goods. The Balsam congregations unanimously decided to rebuild on the site of the former church. In the meantime, the members met at the Range (Elim) church for which a \$5 a month would be paid to the Range janitor and ½ the cost of wood and light. The little wooden church at Volga was offered for use and the congregation began to worship there on Easter Sunday. The A. J. Carlson family generously donated 50 hymnals.

The congregation decided that the new church plans would include: leaving the steeple off, having a balcony and back rooms if not too costly, possible space for a pipe organ, the outside be brick veneer, and there be six art glass windows on each side. The confirmands were to purchase the alter window. The contractor, O. J. Bronstad, estimated the approximate cost at \$12,500. Of this sum, \$8,100 was covered by insurance. A dedication ceremony for the new church was held on July 21, 1940. By 1943, the debt was wiped out.

### **Pastor Gustav N. Ander**

Pastor Gustav N. Ander began his duties on November 1, 1944. He was offered a \$1,350 salary, two weeks of vacation and no farm land. In seven years, his salary rose to \$2,400.

On November 27, 1952, the 80th anniversary celebration was held.

### **Pastor Clifton Trued**

Pastor Trued accepted a call in 1955. His starting salary was \$2,160, plus parsonage, one month vacation, and ½ of his moving expenses.

In 1955, Pastor Trued reported that Balsam congregation consisted of 114 men, 108 women, and 68 children. The average Sunday attendance was 128 per service. A two year period of confirmation instruction was instituted, hoping to decrease the 'mortality rate.' "Statistics show that almost 75% of your youth are lost to the church after confirmation!"

On March 5, 1958, members voted on a proposal: "To erect an annex 14' x 24' on the south side, near the west end of the present basement to provide kitchen facilities, and to convert the present kitchen to restroom facilities." It passed 31 yes votes and 4 no votes. The annex cost was \$5,500 (building \$3,000, furnace \$1,000, plumbing \$1,000, and folding doors and tracks \$500.)

### **Pastor Gary A. Park**

Pastor Gary A. Park accepted a call and was installed on August 6, 1961 at Range. A new Constitution was approved and presented to the congregation in January 1963 and as submitted by the new Lutheran Church in America (LCA). The standing committees were Christian Education, Church Property, Evangelism, Finance, Social Ministry, and Stewardship and the duties were listed. An interesting item: There could only be male users who had been confirmed!

### **Pastor Ahti Karjala**

Pastor Ahti Karjala of Michigan (a leader of the Finnish Suomi synod) accepted a call in 1967. During 1968-1967 Pastor Karjala began his clinical pastoral education program with nine months of intraining and work at Hazelden. He served the parish on weekends for half salary. The course gave the pastor much spiritual stimulation and he was very thankful to the parish for its understanding. Pastor Karjala left Balsam in 1970 to pursue his doctorate in the field of pastoral psychotherapy.

### **Pastor John Gary Fondriak**

Between the ministries of Pastor Karjala and Pastor John Gary Fondriak, the long partnership with Elim Church, Range, ended. The year was 1970. The shared pastor began back in 1904 when the Range area members wished to build a chapel and not travel such long distances. For the first time in 98 years, Balsam Church would have its own pastor.

It was at the annual meeting in 1971 that Anna Isaacson was elected to the Church Council. There is no mention of women ever running for that office in previous years.

The 100th Anniversary was held August 11-13, 1972. The church building was never more crowded. Several formal pastors returned, as did several sons of the congregation in the ministry.

### **Pastor John Junttila**

Pastor John M. Junttila arrived from Michigan in January 1973. He was thankful for the privilege of serving Balsam and the Lord, saying that it was the most blessed year that he and his wife had experienced in all their twenty years of ministry.

In Pastor Junttila's report for 1974, statistics showed that the average attendance per Sunday was 115. Communion was offered on the first Sunday of the month.

Pastor Junttila resigned in June 1976 because of illness. The area pastors held a memorial service in August following his death.

### **Pastor Terrance Stratton**

Pastor Terrance Stratton accepted a call and arrived in February 1977. A renovation of the parsonage was completed before the Strattons arrived. Following that work, a new garage was erected at a cost of approximately \$2,600.

Many changes were made. An Altar Guild was set up and continues to function; Charles Nelson constructed the wooden cross that is used at Easter and Christmas; the "Green" hymnals arrived (1979); new banners, chalice, paraments and other items to enhance the sacristy; a new confirmation program; basement curtains; Verle's flow garden on the south side of the church; children's sermons; tree planting in the parsonage yard and a windbreak west of the church; monthly family get-togethers at the Amery Middle School; Christmas barn services, and even a new riding lawn mower!

After many years as organist, Alice Carlson resigned in 1979, Julaine Berglund succeeded her and continues as our organist. During these years, the choir of 22 to 26 members was holding concerts at several area churches. Any proceeds were donated to the Organ Fund which continued to grow, largely through the efforts of Director Carlene Swanson.

In 1982 a decision to begin building an addition was not reached lightly or without considerable discussion and prayer. The dedication of the new addition was held June 12, 1983.

### **Pastor Thyra Krier**

In April of 1986, our congregation called a woman pastor, Thyra Keier.

The dream of a new organ was finally realized with the purchase of the Allen organ and the dedication which was held on June 14, 1987. The cost was \$8,000 besides trading in the old organ. The left-over funds went to purchase the blue hymnals, "Hymns for the Family of God" – a wonderful addition!

The ELCA was created and thirteen area churches participated in a huge Festival Service of Thanksgiving on January 10, 1988.

The "Year of the Bell" was 1991 when Balsam bid on the bell in the Poskin Methodist Church which was scheduled to be razed. Our congregation's offer was \$3,225.25 and it was accepted. It was not an easy

task, really dangerous to remove it from the dilapidated building. But how fitting it was to discover the Swedish inscription on the bell! What a pleasure for the older members to hear a bell once more!

**Pastor Ed Rasmussen**

Pastor Ed Rasmussen, from North Dakota, accepted a call and arrived near the end of 1992. At the first annual meeting in 1993 after Pastor Ed Rasmussen's arrival, he spoke of evangelism and outreach in to the community. He pointed out that, "we have been commanded by Christ to do this very thing. He has made us a church for this primary purpose. If we lose sight of the purpose to which we have been called, we run the risk of failing to be the church. When that happens, we lose the common cause that unites us and motivates us. Without an evangelical orientation, we become just another institution." Then it was that a seven week program began in February to increase our awareness of evangelism.

Pastor Rasmussen's membership statistics as of January 1, 1997 are 304 confirmed members and 74 baptized children.

***To be continued....***