

1980

Lutherans mark 100th anniversary

By PAULINE TORRECILLAS

The Lutheran Community, First Evangelical Lutheran Church, is celebrating its 100th anniversary this weekend. Tonight, members of the congregation and friends will attend a banquet at the Elks Lodge, where the featured speaker will be the Rev. Enok Mortensen, historian of the Danish Lutheran Church. The former pastor will talk about the life and ministry of the Rev. Adam Dan, Lutheran Community's first pastor, with whom he was acquainted. Sunday, the membership will gather for a worship celebration with co-Pastors Nancy Schmit and Endel Kallas conducting the service at 11 a.m.

Lutheran Community has come a long way since 1880 when Conrad Jessen, proprietor of the Scandinavian Hotel, Lorenz Hansen, Peter Lauritsen and Jes Schmidt formally declared the formation of the Danish Evangelical Lutheran "Menighed" (church) of the Pajaro Valley.

One hundred years ago a band of Danish residents of the Pajaro Valley gathered behind a saloon and hotel (Scandinavian Hotel) and reached a decision that would make a lasting impression in the area. They decided to form a Lutheran church in Watsonville — to minister to their needs in their native language.

Up until 1880 the Danish communities in Watsonville and Salinas relied on the infrequent visits of itinerant Lutheran preachers who made the trip to Watsonville from San Francisco. That wasn't enough for the local Danish residents. Along with their desire to form a church they voiced a concern for a more organized expression of their Christian faith.

Among the primary concerns of the group was that of securing a pastor. Fortunately, the wife of Mads Freese had attended "fold school" in Denmark with the wife of one Rev. Adam Dan, who happened to be pastoring a Lutheran church in Racine, Wisconsin, at the time. Peter Jorgensen, who led the organization of the Danish congregation in the Salinas area, was searching for a preacher at the same time, too. The end result was that the Rev. Mr. Dan and his family agreed to come to California.

The preacher commuted regularly to Watsonville from Salinas, but the trip turned out to be a real hardship. Even though he had traveled widely before his tenure in Watsonville, spending nearly a decade in the Holy Land in missionary service in the 1860s, he found the trip to Watsonville an exercise in frustration.

He complained, for example, that the train fare cost him \$3 round trip (no small amount on a yearly salary of \$300), the stage coaches were very dusty and no provision was made for a "half price ticket" for poor preachers. The Rev. Mr. Dan persevered, however, and the Danish church formally rooted itself in the community of Watsonville.

After the departure of the Rev. Dan in 1884, the Danish church continued its efforts in Watsonville. By December



The Revs. Endel Kallas and Nancy Schmit in front of the current structure.

1888, construction was under way on a new church building, still located on Ford St. Dedication services were held on Feb. 21, 1889.

By 1895 the church was advertising its worship services in the local newspaper. The regular service took place at 7:45 p.m. Sunday evenings — because it was difficult for the preacher to make train connections from Salinas. The following year, the church began to offer services not only in Danish but also in the English language.

The church has undergone many changes in the past 100 years. Nineteen pastors have followed the Rev. Dan in the pastoral leadership of the church. By 1954 the congregation was being served by a full time pastor, Pastor Owen Grams. In 1966 he was succeeded by the Rev. Wendell Clutz. He in turn was succeeded by Pastors Nancy Schmit and Endel Kallas, who began their ministry as "co-pastors" of the parish in 1979.

The church has also gone through a succession of names since its first designation as the Danish "Menighed." The word "First" was initially substituted in the place of the "Danish," and in recent years, the church has also become widely known in Watsonville as

the "Lutheran Community."

In 1960, after years of discussion, the church closed its operation at the Ford St. site and relocated at 95 Alta Vista, which was formally dedicated on May 29 of that year.

The first discussion of a pre-school for the church came before the church council in 1968. In 1969, the "Community Interplay Pre-School" was formally adopted as an integral ministry of the parish.

Other changes during the last century were the decision to use the collection plate instead of the traditional Danish "Klingpung" to conform to the English service practice (1933); the congregation accepted the use of the 'new' red hymnal, the Service Book and Hymnal (1959); and the congregation began the regular use of the new green hymnal, the Lutheran Book of Worship (1979).

Presently, the church enjoys a unique blend of past and present. Its Danish heritage is clearly in evidence with the names Andersen, Jensen, Skov and Rasmussen on the parish roster. But the church likewise rejoices in its diversity of people, many of whom have come to the Lutheran church from other denominational traditions.

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WATSONVILLE
REGISTER-PAJARONIAN
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The original Lutheran church, built on Ford Street in the 1880s.