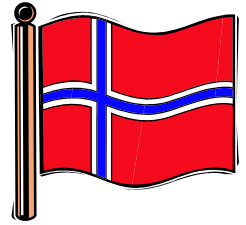


Our Saviour's Lutheran Church

Serving Our Savior Jesus Christ since 1890



## Norwegian Heritage

Prior to the merger, the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church and Our Saviour's Lutheran Church were fiercely competitive as the means of salvation for the faithful Norwegians in Fairhaven. Ethnic origins were indeed the strong calculus of one's religion, but how this was delivered became the means of competition between the several Norwegian Lutheran churches on Bellingham Bay. The Fairhaven churches conducted their business meetings and their services in Norwegian. The records indicated that the United Lutheran church as early as 1910 held an evening service in English about every six weeks. Our Saviour's Lutheran Church clung to Norwegian services and the records indicated that when Pastor H. L. Foss delivered his farewell sermon in 1927, that the morning service was in Norwegian and the evening service was in English.

The merger was the result of discussion, debate, and agreement on the national level. As the second generation of Norwegians came to be a force in the church, this group began to insist upon more "modern" church practices. When this was not accomplished, many sought other churches. Thus, there were fewer parishioners to fill two separate parishes serving the same clientele.

With the merger accomplished in 1917, the Church now turned to be of spiritual and social service to the congregation. This was now composed of not only first-generation Norwegians, but also second-generation Norwegian-Americans. Norwegian was still the language of the Church, but gradually it was being phased out and English, although grudgingly, was used. By the end of the 1920's and definitely by the middle of the 1930's, English became the dominant language of the Church in Bellingham. A chronicler of the activities of the women's groups at Our Saviour's noted that the Ladies Aid conducted their meetings in the 1920's and maintained their minutes in both English and Norwegian. Then the chronicler commented: *"Think of the struggle between the old and the new. Progress was being made, but there was pathos for the old, because it was inevitable that it had to lose out eventually."*

Beginning in 1931 and lasting until 1955, the women of Our Saviour's Lutheran served a lutefisk dinner. For those, however, who could not handle lutefisk there was always an alternate choice. The lutefisk dinner was usually in the first week of December. It was a tradition that meant *"...an overflow of eager, happy diners eating lutefisk."*

*Either you liked it or could not tolerate it.” In 1939, in two evenings in early December, the women of the Church served 895 meals. Everything was accomplished by the women of Our Saviour’s working in the small and crowded kitchen of the old church.*

Mrs. Inez Johansen in the Reminiscences prepared for the 75th anniversary wrote about the lutefisk dinners and commented: *“Every possible corner of the social room and the parsonage, too, was utilized for some related purpose, as for instance the furnace room was used for cleaning of the silverware, which after each using, became darkly stained. (We sometimes wondered what happened to our stomachs after the consumption of the lutefisk...)”*

The Church Bulletin for the 75th anniversary sagely noted: *“We are thankful for our heritage and our roots; for the endless sweat and tears of those who’ve gone before us. All the love and devotion--in time and talents--of those faithful people in the past and present has been and is an attempt to further the Kingdom of God by telling the world about the saving grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”*

(Excerpted from “Centennial of Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church, Bellingham 1890-1990” by Gordon Tweit and August Radke.)

One final note regarding the Norwegian heritage of Our Saviour’s--here is an excerpt from a wedding policy document published in June 1993:

*“Everyone is concerned about fees. We are not interested in renting our space to anyone. Instead, we are willing to enter into a relationship with you. Many people over many years are responsible for building our church and providing ministry here. Our question to all who want to be married here is, “How will your marriage help to build up the body of Christ in this place?” If Our Saviour’s is willing to support you in your wanting to get married in our church, what might you do to support us in our ministry here? One way to give support is through a financial donation. In addition, people have offered their gifts of music, **fish**, and volunteer hours. We are flexible because we are interested in a relationship, not rental.”*

**Fish?** Enough said.

