

# 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY



## OF THE LUTHERAN/METHODIST PARISH IN WOONSOCKET, SD

August 1, 1970 – August 1, 2020

## PASTORS

### UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

George Neville	1881 – 1884
E.W. Adams	1884 – 1885
T.S. Hunt	1885 – 1886
Oliver Mury	1886 – 1888
J.G. Hall	1888 – 1889
Thomas H. Youngman	1889 – 1894
Herbert Haynes	1894 – 1895
Charles Cole	Supply
S.J. Watson	1895 – 1897
L. McLean	1897 – 1898
W.F. Minty	1898 – 1901
F.F. Case	1901 – 1904
Joel A. Smith	1904 – 1905
Paul H. McBeath	1905 – 1908
Louis L. Lane	1908 – 1909
John H. Kearton	1909 – 1911
John Gibson	1911 – 1913
Paul Gardner	1913 – 1914
T.S. Bassett	1914 – 1915
T.B. Wilbur	1915 – 1917
Ralph C. Shearer	1917 – 1921
R. W. Wilcox	1921 – 1924
A.W. Thurston	1924 – 1929
A.J. Hoyer	1929 – 1932
T. W. Cannon	1932 – 1937
Ed Folley	1937 – 1941
R. Marcus Walker	1941 – 1943
V.M. Morrison	1943 – 1949
H. Lee Speakman	1949 – 1950
Arthur T. Goold	1950 – 1952
S.A. Parvin	1952 – 1967
William Russell Cain	1968 – 1970

## BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

P.E. Bongsto	1907 – 1912
C.J. Stadem	1912 – 1915
O.E. Daehlin	1916 – 1918
Edward Erickson	1918 – 1921
J.E. Jorgenson	1922 – 1923
L.J. Odland	1923 – 1929
C.O. Johnson	1930 – 1938
O.M. Knudson	1938 – 1945
A.G. Mathieson	1945 – 1948
E.O. Munkvold	1948 – 1953
Duane H. Shay	1954 – 1965
Lowell S. Stordahl	1965 – 1970

## LUTHERAN / METHODIST PARISH

James Carpenter	1970 – 1973
Joel Flugstad	1973 – 1977
Jeff Martinson	1977 – 1982
Arve Peterson	1982 – 1993
Vaughn Nesheim	1993 – 1998
Dale Battleson	1999 – 2000
Stan Bockwoldt	2001 – 2002
William R. Miller	2002 – 2008

## SPIRIT OF FAITH

Rhonda Wellsandt-Zell	2008 – 2019
John E. Anderson	2020 –

## **OUR STORY**

The Lutheran-Methodist Parish of Woonsocket and Forestburg was formed in 1970 when the United Methodist congregation asked to share the Lutheran minister. With this ecumenical agreement, the first Lutheran-Methodist Parish in South Dakota was established.

“Together in Christ” during the first 46 years, this parish had retained its individual congregational identities before merging into a single congregation, Spirit of Faith, in 2016. The United Methodist Church of Woonsocket is the oldest congregation, founded in 1884 and associated with the Dakotas Conference of the United Methodist Church. Bethany Lutheran Church was organized in 1906. Forestburg Lutheran Church, begun in 1921, was originally a part of the parish until 2016. Both are associated with the South Dakota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Rev. James Carpenter, in his first call, was the first minister to serve the parish, from August 1, 1970 - June 1973. Music was a vital part of the ministry as shown in Pastor Jim’s guitar playing and his wife Kathy’s beautiful singing. Pastor Jim led an active youth group on a canoe trip to northern Minnesota and also to the National Youth Gathering in Dallas, TX. They adopted their son John while here, and later adopted a daughter, Elizabeth.

Also in his first call was Pastor Joel Flugstad, who served from September 12, 1973 – August 1977. Pastor Joel led us in learning the new Lutheran liturgy. We remember his dry sense of humor and his beard that made him

resemble a true disciple, as he certainly was. On the island at Lake Prior with the three congregations as his witnesses, Pastor Joel was commissioned as a missionary to Brazil. During this time the congregation sponsored two Vietnamese refugees, finding and furnishing them with a house and jobs in Woonsocket before they moved to Minneapolis.

The next minister called was also newly ordained, single and in his first call: Rev. Jeff Martinson served our parish from October 1977 – April 1982. Pastor Jeff's children sermons and puppets taught both young and old. Writing poetry was also a special gift he shared with the parish. While serving here, Pastor Jeff met his future wife, Faith, who had come to teach at the Forestburg School. The Forestburg Choir sang at their wedding.

Rev. Arve Peterson served from September 19, 1982 until 1993. Pastor Arve and his wife Joyce have five children. Lifelong learning and a love of history were important to him, as he taught at the college level and earned his doctorate while here. Pastor Arve's radio program, "God's Interlude," was on WNAX on Sunday evenings. Under his guidance the first Parish Council was organized in 1983 and the annual Thanksgiving community church service was begun.

In 1993, Rev. Vaughn Nesheim and his wife, Marian, came to our parish. Pastor Vaughn had retired after 22 years as a United States Army chaplain, with the rank of Lt. Colonel. Challenging sermons and vision to reach out to the community were important. Signs were erected in both Forestburg and Woonsocket, announcing the

presence of the churches. Parish Rally Day was held the first Sunday after Labor Day to raise enthusiasm for the start of Sunday School and fall activities. Pastor Vaughn introduced the Prayer Rock that was passed around to members. The Nesheims have four children, and left the parish in 1998 to live in Colorado Springs, CO.

Rev. Dale Battleson and wife Kay moved back to South Dakota from New Jersey. He had previously served churches in South Dakota. Pastor Dale was installed by ELCA South Dakota Synod Bishop Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl on February 14, 1999 at the service at the Woonsocket Community Center. Pastor Dale started an adult Bible Study class. They left in November of 2000 to serve St. Paul Lutheran Church in Stickney, South Dakota. They have two children.

From December 2000 – June 2001 Rev. Jeff Gramza of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Wessington Springs served as our interim pastor. One worship service was rotated between the three churches followed by coffee fellowship. A single Sunday School was also organized.

Throughout the parish's history, active groups were the vocal choirs, bell choirs, youth group, United Methodist Women, circle Bible study groups, and the WELCA organizations at Bethany and Forestburg.

Due to the shortage of pastors in both the Lutheran and United Methodist denominations, the parish needed to broaden the possibilities. In January 2001, all congregations voted to accept either a Lutheran or Methodist clergy depending on availability. From 1970 –

2001, all clergy had been Lutheran according to the first agreement.

After working with the Rev. Sheila Richards, the United Methodist Conference Superintendent, the first United Methodist pastor was appointed to the parish. Rev. Stan Bockwoldt served from July 1, 2001 – July 1, 2002. Pastor Stan led a class in faith sharing and took the confirmation class on a camping retreat at Lake Poinsett. In January 2002, the Parish Scholarship Program was started for high school seniors of the parish.

The second Methodist clergy, Rev. William Miller, was appointed effective August 18, 2002 and served until March 31, 2008. Pastor Bill was born and raised in West Virginia and came to South Dakota to attend Dakota Wesleyan University in Mitchell. He had previously served churches in the state. His life took him many places in the business world, but his heart brought him back to ministry in South Dakota. Pastor Bill has three children. It was Pastor Bill's idea for an auction fundraiser for youth ministries. He donated tools and other items to get it going. Pastor Bill had a special way of fitting past experiences into the lesson for the day.

Rev. Rhonda Wellsandt-Zell began her ministry with this parish as the long-term supply pastor in March 2008. In September 2008, Pastor Rhonda accepted the call to be our permanent minister. Pastor Rhonda is a Nebraska native who came to South Dakota to serve her internship year at St. John's Lutheran in Bancroft and American Lutheran in DeSmet. She never left South Dakota, as she met her future husband, Terry Zell, while on internship.

They have one son, Alex. Parish Caring classes were held in 2009 to include parish and community members. The Coffee Cup Coins mission project has proven to be a successful outreach opportunity. Pastor Rhonda's inspirational teaching skills guided the congregation.

One church service was held each Sunday, rotated between the three churches, each of which maintained their own church buildings. The three congregations shared a Sunday School, youth group, choir, and parish council, while having separate church boards and women's organizations.

Around 2014, members came to realize that changes were needed if the parish was to have a bright future. A Vision Team was formed at the request of the Parish Council in the Spring of 2014. This team had the task of coming up with a plan for the future of our parish. Their main focus was on how we could best use our resources to continue as a thriving faith community.

The team concluded it was not financially wise to maintain three aging and worn buildings that were not handicap accessible nor energy efficient. The recommendation from the team was to use one church as a meeting site and to develop plans for building a church to meet our needs.

In the Fall of 2015, the United Methodist Church became the meeting place for worship and all activities. The parish took a huge leap of faith on Reformation Sunday, October 30, 2016, when members voted overwhelmingly to form one congregation, Spirit of Faith Lutheran-Methodist Church, and to build a new church.



The two Woonsocket churches were demolished (Bethany Lutheran on August 29, 2016 and the United Methodist Church on April 27, 2018) to make room for the new church building for Spirit of Faith on the same block. Worship services were held outdoors around Woonsocket and at Prairie View Care Center while the new church building was being constructed. Groundbreaking for the new building was on May 20, 2018. An extremely successful capital campaign for the building fund began on December 1, 2017 and will conclude on November 30, 2020. The campaign kickoff was held at the worship service on October 15, 2017. On Kickoff Sunday we exceeded our goal of \$200,000 as on that one day we received pledges of \$215,000. As of July 2020 we are at just over 95% collected of all the capital campaign pledges. The first worship service in our new church was on December 23, 2018. The church building was dedicated on January 27, 2019 with a meal and open house following worship.

Pastor Rhonda Wellsandt-Zell was instrumental in our decision to live boldly and effectively guided us on our journey to become Spirit of Faith. After being our minister for 11 years, Pastor Rhonda concluded her call to serve us on June 30, 2019.

Dr. John Anderson came to us as a seasoned supply pastor, first leading worship on June 23, 2019. He offered to lead worship twice a month as well as teach confirmation while we looked for our next pastor. After two months in this capacity, he shared a sermon about his background and call story, telling about his great grandmother, who first taught him the importance of

faith at a very young age. Several members gathered after worship and asked whether it was possible Dr. John could become our pastor. After sharing this news with him, he said he had been thinking the same thing. Coming from a Lutheran background and being licensed as a United Methodist local pastor, Dr. John is able to speak both languages of faith for those at Spirit of Faith. Dr. John was assigned by Southeast District Superintendent Roger Spahr to lead Spirit of Faith effective January 1, 2020, and was officially appointed by the bishop as our permanent pastor effective July 1, 2020.

Pastor John is a Mitchell, South Dakota native, where he lives with his wife Taryn and three children: twins Emmett and Selah and their older brother Evan. Pastor John comes to us from the world of higher education; he has earned a Master's in Theological Studies from Duke Divinity School in Durham, NC and a Ph.D. in biblical studies from Baylor University in Waco, TX. He has taught at several colleges, universities, and seminaries, and brings that experience and expertise into the pulpit. His sermons are challenging and insightful, with a subtle touch of humor. He is passionate about connecting both the academic with the life of faith, as well as the biblical text with current events and challenges in the world. After the first three months of Pastor John's assignment to serve us, 30 new members decided to join Spirit of Faith.

At this same time, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, reaching South Dakota in mid-March 2020. With it unsafe to physically gather together in the sanctuary, he led

worship from his home for a week and then livestreamed from the sanctuary for two weeks. To meet in a safe way, Pastor John proposed beginning drive-in worship services using an FM radio transmitter, allowing members to worship in the church parking lot from the safety of their vehicles. Members would honk for “amen,” and the chorus of honking horns on a Sunday morning became a regular occurrence. The first drive-in service was successfully held on Palm Sunday, April 5, 2020, followed by an in-vehicle palm parade all around Woonsocket. During drive-in worship we celebrated confirmation and presented our graduating seniors with quilts. We also celebrate communion using pre-packaged elements.

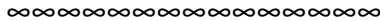
In addition to the success of drive-in services, we have now begun broadcasting services on Facebook Live. This has greatly expanded our outreach. We have also found creative ways to continue serving the community, including bird feeders outside residents’ windows at the local nursing home, a drive-in movie, virtual prayers, and at home Vacation Bible School. While the pandemic presents obvious challenges for worship, it has also taught us what it means to be the church in and for the world, when the church has left the building.

Spirit of Faith continues to be a unique congregation and is proving that two faiths can come together. Our mission statement “saved by grace, gathered in faith, called to serve” highlights how we strive to worship and live our faith.

Our members are involved in a wide variety of activities. We are a Spiritual Growth Congregation that has an active Redevelopment Team. We are also part of the Neighbors in Solidarity program with our partner, Church on the Street in Sioux Falls.

Activities include: Women of Faith, small group Bible studies, weekly worship services at Prairie View Health Care, Junior and Senior High youth groups, Wednesday Night Live youth programs, Confirmation and first communion classes, Vacation Bible School, choir, bell choir, Hope Circle, Mission Action (includes quilters), serving the Love Feast, assisting with school Snack Pack program, Fall roast beef supper, and the Christmas Cantata.

We praise and thank God for the pastoral leadership provided to us and for our members who have been privileged to participate in doing God's work in the world the last 50 years!



*“How very good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity” –Psalm 133:1*

*“So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” –Romans 12:5*



Rev. William R. Miller



Rev. Duane H. Shay



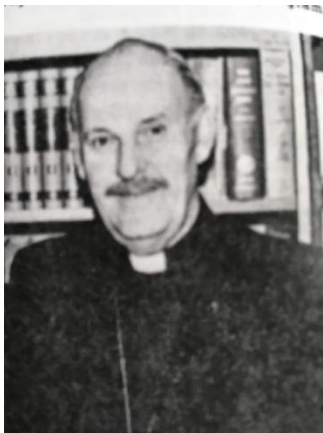
Rev. Jeff Martinson



Rev. and Mrs. Joel Flugstad



(Back) Rev. Lowell Stordahl, Rev. Stan Bockwoldt, Rev. James Carpenter  
(Front) Rev. Dale Battleson, Rev. Vaughn Nesheim



Rev. Arve Peterson

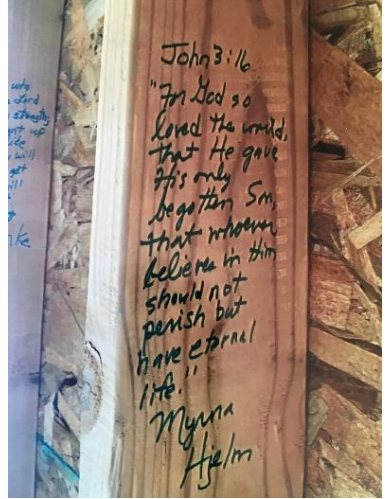


Rev. Rhonda Wellsandt-Zell



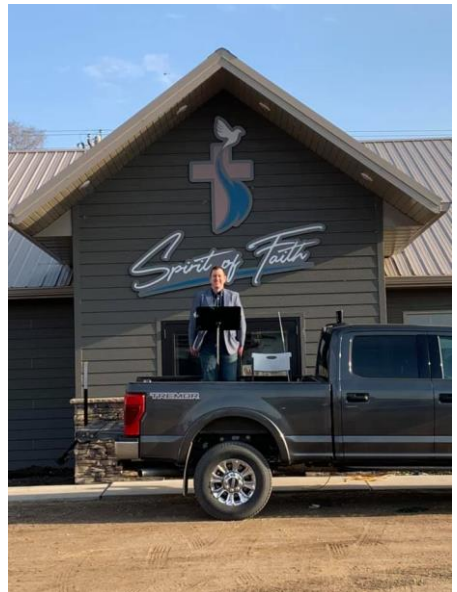
Dr. John E. Anderson

# SAVED BY GATHERED IN CALLED TO





# GRACE FAITH SERVE





*Spirit of Faith*