



By Jan Rahn

Tribune Staff

Memorabilia, music, a meal and long-time members will all be a part of the special weekend celebration taking place at the Elsie United Methodist Church on Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 14-15 while commemorating its 125th anniversary.

Everyone is invited to take part in this time of reflection into the past and anticipation for what lies ahead.

Former pastors of the church have been extended special invitations, and at least three plan to attend thus far.

Bishop Scott Jones will deliver the sermon on Sunday, and District Superintendent Rev. Kay Alnor will speak either Saturday evening or Sunday.

A photo directory has been created which is for sale at the event or on-line for \$20. There will also be free souvenirs and memorabilia donated by church members.

Saturday Barbecue

A barbecue on Saturday evening begins at 5 p.m., with a program afterward.

The meat for the barbecue on Saturday evening will be prepared by the men of the congregation, and side dishes will be provided. Homemade ice cream and cake will be served for dessert.

A historical presentation and video will follow, with a time of sharing and conversation in addition to recognition of long-time members of the church.

Pastors will share their memories, and there will be items on display.

Sunday Morning

Sunday morning worship is set for 9 a.m. In addition to Bishop Jones' sermon, special music will be presented by children of the church and Perkins County graduate Tori Osler.

A special presentation related to the "Imagine No Malaria" project is also planned.

A meal will be provided for everyone in attendance.

Come enjoy the celebration organized by members of the congregation, renew old friendships and learn about the history of the Elsie United Methodist Church.

Elsie UMC history

Celebrating 125 years of service to the Elsie community and surrounding area is the Elsie United Methodist Church which began under the jurisdiction of the North Platte District of the West Nebraska Conference on Sept. 18, 1888.

The Methodist Church was organized by Rev. Edward Flemming, with services in Elsie being held in the school house. The Elsie circuit included several "schoolhouse churches," Tatum, Blackwood, Terry and Pleasant View. In 1889 the Miller School was set off from Blanche and added to the Elsie circuit. A small parsonage, costing about \$225, and a barn for \$20, were built. Mr. C.E. Perkins, president of the Burlington Railroad, gave \$100 toward these buildings.

In 1893-94 a new church building was erected on a hill in the northeast corner of town. This new church was a landmark that could be seen for miles over the prairie.

Mr. C.E. Perkins frequently visited the county in his private rail car and spent many evenings entertaining some of his friends at a game of poker. During a stop-over in Elsie, he noted the new church building, but the seating facilities were inadequate. Residents explained to him that because of the poor crop conditions, they had been unable to buy pews. That night Mr. Perkins won \$300 in a poker game and directed the Elsie station agent to turn the money over to the church trustees the next morning (without explaining how the money was obtained). Mr. Perkins' grand-nieces were able to visit the current church building last year at the Elsie quasicentennial (125th) celebration, enjoying the humor of the donation.

Various combinations of the charges occurred over the years, including Grant, Madrid, Grinton, Wallace, as well as Tyrell, Blanche and Pleasant Valley. During 1913-15, the pastor serving Elsie, Madrid and Blanche received \$450 per year.

The parsonage was built on Main Street in 1916. The church building built in 1894 was minus a bell, so donations were collected to purchase one for \$84.65. This bell is displayed in front of the current church building in Elsie.

In 1923 the Board of Trustees determined that the church either needed to be remodeled or a new one would be built. The latter decision was deemed more advisable. The land for the new church was donated by Mr. and Mrs. M. L. McCullough, while Mr. McCullough served as a Trustee. During the construction period, the church services were held in the building used for all community activities, the American Legion Hall. The dedication was held for the new building on May 4, 1924. Membership in the church had doubled from 45 to 90 since starting the project.

The church building was partially destroyed by fire on Dec. 10, 1944. Repair work began immediately and a re-dedication service was held on Jan. 21, 1945. A new Baldwin piano was purchased for the price of \$756. The other piano, purchased when the church was built, was damaged by the fire and was moved to the basement for Sunday School.

Over the years various women's organizations and youth groups were formed and functioned in the life of the church. The Women's Society of Christian Service supervised the remodeling of the church basement, making it ready for the 25th anniversary celebration of the church

building.

A new Hammond organ was purchased in April 1963. It was first used for Easter services on Sunday, April 14, and was formally dedicated on June 2, 1963.

On Feb. 28, 1965, a church conference was held to decide whether to build a new building or remodel the existing one. By a vote of 68-4, the new building project was approved. The laying of the cornerstone took place on a cold, windy Sunday, Feb. 20, 1966. Consecration services were held on April 17, 1966. The new brick church was built on the same land given by Mr. and Mrs. M. L. McCullough, west and north of the frame church.

In September and October 1966, the men and friends of the church tore down the white frame building, saving all saleable materials. The amount collected at auction from lumber and other items donated was \$4,200. The pews, given by Mr. C. E. Perkins, to the first church built in 1894 were sold to the Perkins County Fair Board for the new 4-H pavilion.

The huge iron bell, removed from the belfry of the first frame building by teams of horses and "well pulling blocks and tackles," was also installed in the second building the same way. When it was removed from its home in the 1924 building, it was placed in a bell stand furnished by the Methodist Youth Fellowship and friends. The bell now currently rests in a bell tower created along the sidewalk leading to the new entry of the church, constructed by Kinney Construction in 2003.

In the fall of 1968, the Elsie-Madrid circuit was divided. Madrid was united with Grant, and Elsie was combined with Wallace and Grinton.

Dedication services for the new church were held on May 21, 1972.

The Elsie church observed its 100th anniversary of service to the Elsie community on Sept. 25, 1988. The Elsie-Madrid parish was recreated in 1992.

The parsonage, purchased in 1942 and completely remodeled in 1952, was sold for \$12,000 and the home across the street north was purchased for the new parsonage in 1994.

The church and its congregation have been a constant Protestant presence in Elsie for 125 years. It continues to serve through many ways.