

DETAILED HISTORY OF ST OLAF LUTHERAN CHURCH

Saint Olaf Lutheran Church Congregation has been in existence since 1886, when a small number of settlers from Norway built the Rock Church. Reverend J.K. Rystad, pastor of the Norse church, preached at both churches for the first fifteen years at the Rock Church.

G.G. Odegaard was called, as the first pastor in 1901 and served until 1912 when he died at the age of 37 of tuberculosis. The first parsonage was built during his tenure.

Rev Herman Estrem was called as pastor in 1912 and served until 1920. The congregation continued to grow in a westerly direction; and when the township of Cranfills Gap became a thriving town, many members wanted a new and larger church there. A full city block in Cranfills Gap was purchased in 1914 and plans for the largest Lutheran church in rural Texas began. The laying of the corner stone for the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church was celebrated in March of 1917. The congregation continued to grow and by 1919 the total number of members was recorded as 693. It was 1927 before members voted to have all morning services in the English language in the Brick Church and afternoon services in Norwegian at the Rock Church.

Rev. J. A. Urnes was called in 1920 and served until his retirement in 1935. During his tenure the depression caused great hardship on the church and its members; he was asked to take a cut in salary which he readily accepted. The church continued to serve the spiritual needs, as well as the social life of the community.

Rev. W. T. Maakestad and family of four boys and one girl moved into the parsonage in 1935. With this lively family, many young people's programs were established. Church activities were the center of life in Cranfills Gap combining fun and games with Christian education, teaching social and leadership skills. Pastor Maakestad became ill in 1939 and passed away in 1940 and was buried in the Rock Church Cemetery.

Rev. Benjamin R. Maakestad, brother of Walter Maakestad, was installed in 1941. Both he and his wife, Sadie, were musically talented and organized a youth choir and

many other organizations to further the ministry of St. Olaf. A memorial fund to build a Sunday school building was established. Pastor Maakestad received a call from another state and resigned in 1952.

Rev. Einar Jorgenson became the pastor in 1954 with the membership now totaling 550 confirmed members. A new Sunday School building was completed in 1955. The new parsonage was built in 1958. Pastor Jorgenson resigned in February 1958.

Pastor Iver Haugen, his wife Ginny and their four children came in 1958. This energetic family brought several new programs to St. Olaf, reestablishing the Junior choir, a Mother's circle, the 79ers and a Sunday School for parents. The constitution was changed to reflect the Name change from the Evangelical Lutheran Church to the American Lutheran Church in 1960. The 75th Anniversary was celebrated in 1963 and there were 34 members who were members when the Rock Church was built. Pastor Haugen resigned in 1963.

Pastor Marvin Ottmers and family came in 1964 and served until 1977. Mrs. Ottmers was involved in many church activities, as well as tending the sick along with her nursing and teaching duties at Clifton Hospital. Their four children, Kathleen, Daniel, Elaine and Steven were an integral part of the school, church and community activities. The stained glass windows were installed beginning in 1965 with memorials given for loved ones.

Pastor Howard Ollila was called in 1977 and remained until 1980. Mrs. Ollila took much of the responsibility of raising funds for the Day Care Center.

Pastor Dave Smith, wife and two sons came to St. Olaf in June of 1981. Mrs. Smith directed the choir and initiated the special banners for each new baptism. The basement kitchen received a complete face lift in 1985. Pastor Smith resigned in August 1985.

Retired Pastor Lawrence Jenson capably filled the duties until April of 1986 when Mark Vinciguerra was installed. The membership was now 378. The 100th Anniversary of the Rock Church was celebrated in May of 1986. Pastor Vinciguerra resigned in 1992.

Pastor Ken Schmidt and family came in July of 1992 and continued to serve Saint Olaf until 1997.

Terry Atkins was called as the pastor in June of 1999. An Endowment Fund was established to provide funds for the maintenance and preservation of all facilities. The problems of leakage when it rained were corrected by installing

a metal cap on the two towers of the church. Terry Atkins resigned in November of 2008.

Following the service of several interim pastors, Joan Iker was called as pastor in September 2011. A new facility at the Rock Church called "The Gathering Place" was built with restrooms, kitchen, bride's dressing room and large reception area. St. Olaf and Faith Lutheran in Meridian began a partnership of sharing a pastor as finances were not sufficient for either church to afford a full time pastor. The partnership continued until Pastor Iker's departure in May of 2016 when Faith decided to hire a part time pastoral lay minister.

Pastor Ryan Pederson is currently serving as interim pastor while studying and teaching at Baylor University. He grew up in the Clifton area and has relatives living near and many ancestors buried in the Rock Church Cemetery. We are grateful for his faithful service.

As we celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Saint Olaf Lutheran Brick Church, we gratefully acknowledge all the faithful pastors and dedicated members through the years, who have shaped many lives and the members today who continue to uphold the faith of our heritage.

