

Rearview Mirror

Looking back as we move forward

March, 2010
Part 4

It's been said that Gordon "Gordy" Johnson was born in a Bethel pew.

Not quite. But it's true that Bethel has been his home church all his life. Besides that, his father helped construct one of Bethel's early buildings.

Previous Rearview Mirrors told of Bethel's beginnings in downtown Fargo dating back to 1891, and of its first two structures. Now we're up to 1922, when the congregation built its third building.

It was near the site of the present Fargo Civic Auditorium. It doubled the seating capacity to 300, and was constructed primarily by volunteers from the church.

One of them was Carl Johnson. Carl had emigrated from Sweden to the United States and to Fargo when he was a young man. He met a girl named Alice and married her. That led to four children, including Gordy.

Carl was a carpenter by trade, so he was a natural to help construct the new building for the congregation, which then was called the Scandinavian Congregational Church.



During its first years, the church conducted both its morning and evening Sunday services in Norwegian. But in 1922, it began using English in the evening service.

All went well for 10 years. But in 1932, a small fire damaged the building's interior. That meant a remodeling job was required in the hard years of the Great Depression. But once again, the congregation got the job done, and God continued to be worshiped in the small downtown Fargo building.

Then came 1933. That's when the congregation made two major decisions:

1. English would be used at both the morning and evening Sunday services.
2. The congregation would change its name to Bethel Evangelical Free Church.

But the congregation's vision was unchanged. It would continue to serve and worship the Lord and seek ways to introduce people to Him.

Gordy Johnson has held many positions at Bethel over the years. Today he is one of the ushers. He and his wife Marge (he is Swedish and she is German, proving that mixed marriages can work) raised their family at Bethel.

Gordy's father Carl died in 1974. But he lived long enough to witness some dramatic changes at Bethel: Rapid growth and another building -- only this time, in an entirely new location.

More about that next time, as we continue to peer, with thanks to the Lord, into the Rearview Mirror.

