

# *A brief history of our Church*

## THE BEGINNINGS OF LUTHERANISM IN OUR AREA

The history of our church in Western Canada dates back to 1894, when candidate Emil Eberhardt accepted a call to take up duties as "a general travelling missionary west of Winnipeg." He was ordained in September of that year, and stationed in Stoney Plain, Alberta. In the early 1890s the Canadian prairies were opening up, settlers were coming in from everywhere; the railroad was flourishing, offering work and opportunities for new Canadians. Many of these people were Volga Germans, coming from the steppes of the Volga regions in Russia. They eventually settled in Calgary and the surrounding area. A Christian life gave them peace and strength despite the barriers of hard work, little money, language and large families.

In 1899, a woman from Calgary (a city of about 5,000 inhabitants at that time) went to visit relatives in the Stoney Plain area. While there, she desired the use of a sewing machine; the only one available was in the parsonage. The woman was assured she would be welcome to use the machine. Subsequently, she told Pastor and Mrs. Eberhardt of the influx and presence of Lutherans in Calgary, who were without adequate spiritual care. As a result of this casual conversation we find Pastor Eberhardt taking an exploratory trip to Calgary in the fall of 1899. During this visit he conducted services for 19 families, numbering 93 souls. While in this area he also travelled further south. A number of persons from the Pincher Creek area had previously invited him to conduct a service in their midst. He complied with their wishes, preaching to a congregation of 71 souls.

When the report of Pastor Eberhardt's missionary journey reached the Mission Board of Minnesota (which had sponsored the western Canada mission) it commissioned Reverend G. Mertz of Missoula, Montana to take the Lutherans of Calgary and Pincher Creek under his spiritual care. This was a big assignment indeed, considering the means of travel in those days. However, next to Pastor Eberhardt, Reverend Mertz of Missoula was closest to the south Alberta scene at that time.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH – MISSOURI SYNOD IN CALGARY

Pastor Mertz made three trips to this area in 1900 and remained for several weeks in Calgary and in Pincher Creek, endeavouring to organize a parish. Calgary, which was growing apace with immigration along with Pincher Creek, issued a call to a pastor who was to minister to their spiritual needs. The new parish promised to contribute the full salary of \$500.00 per year. There were 112 communicants, 66 families, and 46 voters in the parish. Approximately two-thirds of these were in the Calgary congregation.

In his report to the Mission Board of the Minnesota District, Reverend G. Mertz had stated: "Both Calgary and Pincher Creek anticipate a great influx of people. Great droves of immigrants for Western Canada came through Calgary during the last month. On March 7<sup>th</sup> a wagon-train of four came from Iowa, and on March 11<sup>th</sup>, a second one consisting of 21 wagons. There will undoubtedly be much mission material for the new pastor of this new parish, who ought to live in Calgary since this is the larger congregation."

The first call extended to a pastor by the newly formed Calgary-Pincher Creek Parish was issued to Reverend Paul Schulz. The call was returned by him, on account of reasons of health. Pastor E. Treu was then called. He accepted and arrived in Calgary in the fall of 1901.