



1900 - 2000
A Century of Blessings

First Lutheran Church

Missoula, Montana

Dear First family:

A 100th birthday is truly an occasion for celebration! As we give thanks to God for our 100 years together as a Christian congregation, we praise Him for the manifold blessings of life in the church. The body of believers gathered here at First is truly a family of brothers and sisters in Christ, and together we have shared years of joys and sorrows, we have grown together in God's Word, we have feasted together at His altar, and we have rejoiced together in the "new birth" of fellow family members at the baptismal font. In short, we have spent **A CENTURY OF SHARING HIS BLESSINGS!**

Think back to what life was like 100 years ago when First Lutheran Church was an infant. How many changes have occurred in this century! Still, in the midst of all the changes, one thing has remained constant: Jesus Christ and His enduring Word. Isaiah reminds us of the transitory nature of the "things" of this earth: "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:6). And in this world of change we are encouraged by the promise that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

Jesus Christ and His unchanging Word—this was the solid rock upon which our congregation was founded and has been our focus ever since. May we always keep our eyes firmly on Him as we seek to serve Him faithfully and as we lead others to a saving knowledge of Him by reaching out in Christian love.

The Germans have a word for a congregation: Gemeinde (community), rather than Kirche (church). The latter suggests a denomination or a building. The former denotes the living organism of a caring Christian fellowship. We are more than a building or a denomination, we are the First "family"—looking up to God, reaching out to others, and caring within the First family and beyond.

Happy Birthday, First Lutheran Church! May the name of Jesus Christ be lifted up in all we do together as a "Gemeinde." And may God be truly honored in our birthday celebration, for "the Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy!" (Psalm 126:3). Here's to the next 100 years of serving Him with *much* joy...

Your pastor and friend,

Pastor David W. Renfro





1900 - 1925

You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:5

The first public Lutheran worship in Montana was held in Helena, Montana on Sunday, March 23, 1884 as a result of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (then only 37 years old) seeking to serve immigrant settlers in the territory.

In 1890 the Reverend Martin Mertz was assigned to work as the first Lutheran pastor in the developing city of Anaconda. There was significant outreach to other communities in the area and in February of 1891 he conducted the first German Lutheran service in Missoula. Services were held, first,

in the old Presbyterian church which was opposite the courthouse and, later, in the Methodist church on East Main Street. He served the Missoula congregation until 1893 when he accepted a call to Helena.

At this time, Montana belonged to the Minnesota District and Gustav H. Mertz was assigned as a student assistant to his brother, Rev. Martin Mertz. While preaching and instructing children in a congregation at Douglas Creek, near Helmville, he would also occasionally preach in Missoula. In 1897 he left to continue his studies at the seminary in Springfield, Illinois.

The mission board of the Minnesota District then supplied the Missoula area with its first resident pastor, the Rev. Paul Kretzschmar, a graduate of the seminary in St. Louis. He was ordained and installed in Zion Lutheran Church at Douglas Creek by Rev. Martin Mertz. The ordination took place at Douglas Creek since Missoula was a mission station at the time. The new pastor divided his time between Missoula and Helmville and in 1898 began work in Hamilton. Rev. Kretzschmar served until May, 1899 when he accepted a call to St. Paul, Minnesota.

The work in Missoula was again taken over by Rev. Martin Mertz, who served as time permitted. In May of 1900, Gustav Mertz, as a member of the graduating class at Springfield Seminary, accepted a call for western Montana.



*Rev. Paul Kretzschmar
1897 - 1899*



*Rev. Gustav Mertz
1900 - 1919*



The original church at Hazel Street

At this time, there were not enough active male members in the Missoula congregation to organize a formal church body to affiliate with the Missouri Synod. However, on October 3, 1900, the Ladies Aid Society of the First German Lutheran Church of Missoula, Montana was organized. Later in the year the society was incorporated so it could be authorized to acquire, hold, and dispose of real estate. They began action to purchase a building site on Hazel Street in the spring of 1901. In June of 1901 the foundation was laid for a church building, however, work could not be continued until the congregation gathered more funds.

Finally, on September 20, 1902 the first Lutheran church building in west central Montana was dedicated. In January, 1903 enough men were available in the congregation to assume the duties of trustees and elders and a congregation was formally organized.

In September of 1903 Pastor Mertz started a parochial school and, with his love for teaching, he personally taught the 27 pupils. In 1906 the first eighth grade graduates received state certification and acceptance into the state university preparatory program. Quite an accomplishment! In 1905, the Missoula congregation built a schoolhouse adjoining the worship facilities. This was the first Lutheran parochial school building in the state. It closed in 1912.

During these first years of the church in Missoula, services were being conducted in both German and English. In fact, in April of 1898, Missoula earned the distinction of being the first Missouri Synod congregation to have used the English language to instruct and confirm a class of children. In 1917 the German language was dropped altogether.

Rev. Gustav Mertz served the congregation until he resigned in June of 1919. Rev. Henry Herman Kumnick succeeded Rev. Mertz in July of the same year. Rev. Mertz continued to serve other congregations in the surrounding area as minister-at-large.

On August 31, 1924 the church changed its name from the First Evangelical Lutheran Trinity Church to the First English Lutheran Church.

In 1925 land for the church site on Higgins Avenue was purchased with money donated by the Ladies Aid Society. Also, later in the year, a parsonage was purchased on Chestnut St. with a loan from the Church Extension Fund.



*Rev. H.H. Kumnick
1919 - 1927*



*“Ye also, are lively stones, are built up as a spiritual house.” 1 Pet. 2, 5
The Ladies Aid Society - after the Silver Jubilee Services - September 20, 1925
The photo and Bible verse are from the Silver Jubilee booklet of 1925.*



The congregation after the Silver Jubilee Service September 20, 1925



1925 Choir



A view, looking east, of the "new" church property on Higgins Avenue in 1925.