



Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church 330 Griswold Street

Elgin's first Scandinavian immigrants were Swedes, who arrived in the 1860s. They settled on the east side of town and founded the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1871.

Following the influx of Swedes by about a decade were Danish and Norwegian immigrants, who tended to settle on the south-west side. Desiring a church of their own, a charter for the congregation was signed on November 27, 1882. The original name was the Zion Danish-Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church of Elgin. The congregation obtained a building site for the new church from the George P. Lord family.

The original church building, constructed in 1884, was a white frame structure with a small steeple that looked like many country churches—and in some ways it was still out in the country. The building cost \$2,500 to construct, and of that, \$1,000 was taken on as a mortgage. When the congregation formed, there were still relatively few residents in the surrounding neighborhood. The small congregation had part-time and shared pastors for the first three decades of its existence, but during that time both the church and the surrounding community began to grow. In the decades between the 1890s and the 1920s, a neighborhood formed that was composed primarily of working-class people. The homes were modest but solid structures that were well-suited for families who worked at the watch factory and in other occupations.

The church continued to change along with the larger community. As Scandinavian residents assimilated into the American culture, English-language worship services were added to the ones held in Norwegian, the original language for the congregation. The "Danish-Norwegian" phrase was eventually dropped from the church's name and it became the simpler Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church. Norwegian-language worship services were finally discontinued in 1928 when the congregation completed the shift to all-English.

An interesting fact is that the congregation showed itself to be quite progressive early in its ministry, when it approved women voting in congregational meetings the year before women were allowed to vote in U.S. elections!



1884-1963 Old Church & Parsonage



1963 Gothic Revival

The congregation was able to call its first full-time pastor in 1926. That year, the Rev. Ingolf H.M. Rognlie came to Elgin. He served the congregation as its pastor from 1925 through 1976—more than 50 years, spanning from the Roaring Twenties until after the Viet Nam War. It is a record among Elgin clergy.

Following World War II, the congregation enjoyed a time of growth and was able to sustain and expand its work due to an increase in the number of people who participated in church life. The baby boom and the influx of children meant

that the congregation's small building was unable to meet the demands of the time. In 1963 the original building was razed, and the current facility was erected on the same site. During the construction period, the congregation worshiped across the street in Lowrie Elementary School.

In the period from the 1970s through the 1990s, the neighborhood around Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church changed, and the congregation declined significantly in membership and attendance. Following the Rev. Rognlie's retirement in 1976, Pastor Harold Heidegger, Pastor Richard Ryerson, Pastor Stephen Kottke and a few interim pastors served the congregation into the early part of this century. At times, the future of the ministry looked to be in jeopardy. Although various efforts were made to restore vitality, by 2002 there was some discussion about the congregation closing.

The current pastoral staff arrived in 2003. It is the team of Dave Daubert, pastor, and Marlene Daubert, diaconal minister. They share leadership with a committed membership and the current arrangement of multiple part-time-staff members. Today, Zion has a staff of six people—all of them part time. It is a model put in place to work toward a sustainable ministry.

Zion is the oldest congregation of any denomination in Elgin continuously serving residents west of the Fox River, and one of the eight oldest congregations in the city. Zion is once again a lively ministry, focused on the community, and offers two worship services each week. History is still happening, and the next chapter is yet to be written! ♡