

Community Country Church
Pastor Gregg Valentine
42457 171st Avenue
Holdingford, MN 56340

Dear Candidate,

We are excited how God has been moving among our congregation here in Holdingford, MN. Our church just celebrated 125th anniversary in September of 2022. We can see the hand of God in our midst. Recently, the congregation has been growing at a rapid pace. This growth is why we are currently looking for an Associate Pastor for Community Country Church. The position would be full-time.

Below, you will find:

- Job Description for Associate Pastor - Full Time
- Church Description of our history
- Our Church's denominational affiliation

Protocol

After learning about Community Country Church, you pray about it and feel that God is leading you to apply by filling out the application the search committee will go through the following process.

- Review submitted application(s)
- Phone interview by Search Committee. (Some questions you will receive ahead of time.)
- Choose a weekend for candidate. (Preaching on Sunday, Meeting the Staff, Meal together following the Life Groups, Q & A from the congregants.)
- Two weeks of prayer followed by a congregational vote.
- Extend the Call
- Wait for Candidate response.

In God's Love,
Pastor Gregg Valentine (320) 630-7876

**Associate Pastor
Community Country Church**

The associate pastor shall serve as a right hand to the senior pastor and shall assist in carrying out the ministry of the church. The main responsibilities will involve assuming the pastoral role in senior pastor's absence, through building relationships with members while ministering to their spiritual needs and obtaining help for their physical needs when needed. This will include assimilating newcomers and visitors into the body of the church.

Ministry Area/Department	General staff/administration
Position	Associate pastor
Accountable To	Senior pastor
Ministry Target	Church in general
Position Is	Full-time Paid Staff
Position May Be Filled by	Church Member
Minimum Maturity Level	Solid, very mature Christian
Spiritual Gifts	Pastor/Shepherd-Administration
Talents or Abilities Desired	Able to serve as a support person to the Senior pastor. Experience in Teaching/preaching, A desire to Minister to people, Organizational Skills, some training in counseling is a plus.
Best Personality Traits	Dependable, Discreet, Friendly, and Compassionate
Passion For	Supporting the Senior pastor and Ministering to people
Length of Service Commitment	Two years minimum

Anticipated Time Commitments

1. Doing ministry/preparing for ministry: 40 hours a week, off on Saturday and one day during the week, except for emergencies and special occasions.
2. Participating in meetings/training: four hours a month.

Responsibilities/Duties

1. Participate in staff meetings.
2. Fill in when the senior pastor is ill or out of town. Handling emergency situations. Preaching and Teaching and leading services.
3. Support the senior pastor in carrying out the ministry of the church, help as needed with the administrative tasks, special projects and campaigns, teaching Life Groups etc....
4. Be heavily involved in outreach, visitation to church members, newcomers, visitors and handling special requests from members to visit loved ones they are concerned about.

Specific Duties Presently in Need at Community Country Church

- Life Groups are our small group time following our Worship Service. We are currently utilizing most of our space and need to organize for more groups at different times.
- Alethia Christian Academy will be starting as our Christian School on September 5, 2023. We would need the Associate Pastor to be closely tied to the ACA (on the school board) to keep the staff well informed.
- Our Senior pastor Gregg Valentine is out of the pulpit of about 8 Sundays per year. He is a full-time Law Enforcement Chaplain for the Morrison County Sheriff's Office. On 5th Sundays he will need the Associate Pastor to fill the pulpit. These Sundays are known well ahead of time, and it will give the Associate Pastor plenty of time to prepare.
- Many young families are currently attending CCC. We need to develop some ministries to these young families so that they can have fellowship, discipleship, and a deeper walk with the Lord. Planning a weekend retreat for these families to interact will build stronger relationships between them.
- When the ACA starts, we will be looking to hire a Secretary/School Liason to handle the administrative load that the school will bring. We would like the new Associate Pastor to play a big role in hiring this individual that would be a part of a growing multi-staff.
- The ACA will have Chapel(s) from time to time and the Senior pastor plans to be part of those Chapel(s). As time will allow, we would like the Associate Pastor to take on some of those Chapel(s) as well.
- Staff Retreat- Our Senior Pastor sees the value of having an occasional staff retreat or seminar that the staff and their families attend together. As the church grows, we also need to grow and learn a new form of management skills. The Associate Pastor could work with the Senior pastor to plan one fun retreat and one educational retreat per year.

The CCCC Statement of Faith

- We believe the Bible consisting of the Old and New Testament, to be the only inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative Word of God written.
- We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- We believe in the deity of Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.
- We believe that for salvation of lost and sinful man regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.
- We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by Whose indwelling power and fullness the Christian is enabled to live a godly life in this present evil world.
- We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.
- We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in Christ.

THE HISTORY OF COMMUNITY COUNTRY CHURCH

The Beginning

In the year of 1883, a group of Slovak families in Czecho-Slovakia (at that time a part of Austria-Hungary) decided to come to Pennsylvania. A few years later three of these families migrated to Minnesota where they settled in the area that is now known as South Elmdale in Morrison County.

One of these families was Mr. and Mrs. John Soltis. After buying some thickly wooded land, they cut and hewed logs to build their homes. It took long hours of hard work to improve their land; for years there was much hardship. After this beginning, other Slovak families migrated here until there were about thirty families of different faiths. In May of 1896, Mr. John Sabol, a student in the Oberlin, Ohio, School of Theology, who was in poor health and in need of a rest, came to spend the summer with relatives. After seeing how badly they needed someone to bring them the Word of God, he decided to stay on and do some missionary work among the Slovak people. He first organized a Sunday School with only seven children enrolled, but the work prospered, and the membership grew to thirty-five. Later, some of the parents also came so that he was able to hold afternoon worship services at John Soltis' home. The time went by rapidly, and instead of spending only the summer, Mr. Sabol spent fourteen months laboring among those early settlers and preaching the Gospel. The work was not in vain as a group of twelve men and women had accepted Christ and professed their love and faith in God. They were:

Mr. and Mrs. John and Mary Soltis, Sr.

Mr. and Mrs. John and Mary (Straka) Soltis, Jr.

Mr. and Mrs. George and Mary (Kohanowski) Soltis

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph and Emma Epsky

Mr. and Mrs. Andrew and Suzanna Porupsky

Mrs. Elizabeth Oravetz

Mrs. Susanne Konchar

Shortly after, on September 19, 1897, Dr. H.A. Schauffler, Superintendent of the Slavic Department of the American Home Missionary Society, and Rev. Philip Reitingger from the Congregational Church of Silver Lake, Minnesota came to organize the little group of Christians who chose to be called the "The Slavonic Church of Elm Dale, Minnesota." The church's Articles of Incorporation stated, "Its purpose shall be the inculcation of morality and instruction in religions and Christian doctrines. . ." Membership was open to "any person who believes in

Jesus Christ as his Saviour and in the doctrines of the Old and New Testaments. . ." Mr. Sabol then returned to the Oberlin School of Theology to continue his studies. The members of the newly organized church, hungering for the Word of God, expressed their desire to have Rev. Reitingner come a few times a year to preach and administer the Holy Sacraments, which he gladly did, although it required an 80-mile drive by horse and buggy.

A Church is Built

As progress was made and the Christians grew spiritually, the desire to have a place of worship became strong, and they began to plan for a church building. In 1894, John Soltis, Jr. had purchased 40 acres from the St. Paul and Northern Pacific Railway Co. for \$240. He and his wife Mary donated approximately one acre of land upon which the church was built. The Congregational Missionary Society contributed \$150; the sister church as Silver Lake contributed \$135; and a \$293 mortgage was obtained from the Congregational Church Building Society in New York. The new church, costing \$650, was dedicated September 17, 1899.

As this time Mr. Sabol returned and again took up his pastoral work. A year later four more individuals accepted Christ and joined the church. They were Andrew Konchar, Mr. and Mrs. Fredrick Rheal and August Rheal. There was also one death that year: Mr. John Soltis, Sr. passed away at the age of 73. By 1900, there were 16 members and an average church attendance of twenty to twenty-five. Hungering for the Word and enjoying sweet fellowship with God, He blessed them spiritually as their membership grew and in another year four more had accepted Christ. They were Adam Folta, his wife Anne, and John Marcinko and his wife Elizabeth.

In 1903, Rev. Vaclav Prucha of Silver Lake was asked to succeed Rev. Reitingner in coming here to administer the Holy Sacraments. That same year, Mr. Sabol was united in marriage to Miss Barbara Miklos of Cleveland, Ohio. Mr. Sabol had been living at the John Soltis home, but wanting a place of their own, he and his wife rebuilt a little log building, which stood on an adjoining farm, into a two-room house. The following year, after eight years of pastoral service, Mr. Sabol felt that an ordained minister was needed by the church and, therefore, handed in his resignation. Mr. and Mrs. Sabol moved to St. Paul and later took up residence in Pennsylvania. He served here from 1896 to 1904.

In 1904, a call was extended to Rev Paul Jamarik of Cleveland, Ohio, to succeed Mr. Sabol. Rev. Jamarik accepted and began his ministry in September of that year, living in the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Soltis during his three years with the church. After his resignation in 1907, it became evident that the lack of a parsonage would prevent the securing of another minister.

A Parsonage is Built

Plans were therefore made for building a new parsonage. Lumber and labor were donated, and with enthusiasm, all-out effort and good fellowship, the parsonage was begun (although not completed until late 1909). After the resignation of Rev. Jamarik, there was a vacancy for nearly two years during which Rev. Charles Trcka of Cyril Congregational Church in St. Paul came several times a year to administer the Holy Sacraments and to preach the Word. During this vacancy, Rev. Joseph Donat and Rev. Bastel preached in our pulpit.

In 1909, a call was extended to Rev. Andrew (A.J.) and Mrs. Moncol of Pennsylvania. They began their ministry in 1909, living from June to October in a room above the kitchen of the John Soltis home. It was here their second daughter was born. The Moncols moved into the new parsonage in November of the same year. In 1911, porches were added and well was dug. Also, this year, a congregation of German Lutherans met in the church until their own building was constructed in Holdingford.

In 1912, another member, Mrs. Maria Soltis, passed away at the age of 79.

Building Addition

The membership was growing, and it was becoming apparent that we needed a larger building. The congregation, with much prayer and consideration, appointed a committee to plan an enlarged church building. The design was drawn by Joseph Heisick, and once again men began cutting logs and sawing lumber. The lumber and labor were donated by the members and other contributions from neighbors and friends were received. According to Rev. Moncol, railroad magnate James J. Hill donated \$25 towards pews, and the bell was donated by President Pennington of the Soo Line Railroad. By cooperation, hard work and sacrifice, a new sanctuary was built and joined to the original building at a cost of approximately \$7,000. It was dedicated on November 21, 1915, with sermons delivered in both English and Slovak.

At the January 1, 1917, annual meeting, the corporate name of the church was changed to "The Slovak Congregational Church of South Elm Dale." At this time Joseph Kwitckak, a young Slovak man of the community, painted a oil reproduction of Hoffman's "Christ in Gethsemane." The painting served as a focal point in the sanctuary for over 100 years.

The Rev. A.J. Moncol Years

Rev. Moncol traveled by horse and buggy, which he bought in Bowlus for \$125 in 1910. Having no place to keep a cow and horse, he purchased an old building for a small price and used the lumber to build a small barn. His salary was \$775, of which \$175 was paid by the church and the balance by "missions" (probably the American Home Missionary Society). In

1920, the church purchased an additional 1-1/8 acres from John and Mary Soltis for \$200. Rev. Moncol planted some fruit and shade trees to help beautify the church grounds.

Rev. Moncol was fortunate in having a talented wife, who served the church by singing, playing the organ, and directing the choir. Before her marriage, she had been very active in missionary work, especially among the Slovak families in various towns in Pennsylvania. After coming to South Elmdale, she continued her work here and in the surrounding communities. Rev. and Mrs. Moncol not only served this church, but also held many services in Holdingford and North Elmdale. In addition, as director of the National Slavonic Society, he assisted Slovaks wanting to leave their employment in the steel mills of Pennsylvania and obtain land in this area on which to settle.

Following 13 years of ministry in the church, Rev. Moncol preached his farewell sermon after receiving a call to the Cyril Congregational Church in Cleveland, Ohio. He had served here from June 1, 1909, to September 26, 1922, and was instrumental in helping the church develop its own identity.

The Rev. Adolph Yuki Years

Soon after a call was extended to Rev. Adolph Yuki of Silver Lake. In releasing their pastor to serve the South Elmdale church, the Silver Lake congregation once again made a significant contribution to the work they had faithfully supported from the beginning. Pastor Yuki began his ministry on October 22, 1922, and an installation service was held on June 10, 1923. He continued the transition from Slovak to English services at the Slovak Congregational Church of South Elmdale. In 1930, sermons were given in English one Sunday per month. Even up until 1938, the adult Sunday School classes were taught in both English (by John Marcinko) and Slovak (by Joe Folta). Changing from Slovak to English was not a decision easily made, as one of the privileges the Czech immigrants enjoyed in America (and not always in their homeland) was the freedom to worship freely and openly speak their native language. Pastor Yuki assisted the Slovak people with business, legal, medical, educational, and political matters.

Rev. and Mrs. Yuki also served the churches in Holdingford and North Elmdale occasionally. Mrs. Yuki organized a woman's group at South Elmdale which was called "The Serving and Study Group." There were fifteen members who met on the last Thursday evening of each month.

In 1926, the porches on the parsonage were screened, a water cistern was constructed, a new chimney was built in the old church, and a stove was purchased to heat that area when in use. John Marcinko asked to have a younger man attend to lighting the kerosene lamps in the church. A few years later, battery-powered electricity was installed in the church and parsonage at a cost of \$125 for the wiring and fixtures. A new barn, chicken coop and garage were also built. In 1930, the interior of the church was painted, and a new chimney was built.

Steel posts and fence wire were purchased, and a fence was installed around the cemetery, the church, and the parsonage.

The 35th Anniversary

After these improvements were made, the church felt that they should have a “get-together” and invite guest speakers. The 35th anniversary of the church was drawing near, as well as the 10th year of Rev. Yukul’s ministry, so in September 1932, both anniversaries were observed. Guest speakers were Rev. and Mrs. Lisy of Silver Lake, Rev. and Mrs. V. Vavrina of Champlin, Rev. and Mrs. E. Wrbitzsky of Anoka and Rev. and Mrs. A.J. Moncol of Cleveland, Ohio. Those attending enjoyed good Christian fellowship together and received spiritual strength and blessing.

Due to inconveniences, Rev. and Mrs. Yukul experienced many difficulties here. In 1934, the well was going dry as a result of the drought. Water had to be hauled from John Soltis’ farm in hopes that rain would soon refill the cistern. In 1936, wood from two acres of land was purchased for \$60 to heat the parsonage and church. Each family was asked to contribute \$2 towards the wood. After serving the church for 16 years, October 1922 to June 1938, Rev. Yukul retired from the ministry and took up residence in Silver Lake.

The church was then fortunate to be served by Mr. Daniel Slabey for Duquesne, Pennsylvania, until a permanent pastor could be secured. A call was extended to Rev. Vaclav Vavrina of Champlin, Minnesota, and although he had retired from the ministry, he accepted the call temporarily. For a time, he drove from Champlin on Saturday, preached on Sunday, and returned home on Monday, receiving \$20 a month for preaching and \$10 for expenses. At this time the church had 101 members. Income for 1938 was \$706.21 and expenses totaled \$597.96. Rev. Vavrina’s ministry began in September 1938, but he and his wife did not move from Champlin until May 1, 1939. Having retired, they only expected to be here until a regular pastor could be found.

On July 31, 1939, the church and community were shocked and saddened by the sudden death of Mary Straka (Mrs. John, Jr.) Soltis, who was the mother of the church. It was in her home in 1897 that the church was organized with twelve members. Her death took away a most loyal and faithful member.

The 1940s and 1950s

Because the church building was now in need of a new roof, a committee was appointed to buy the material and in September 1940, with labor donated by the men of the church, the new roofing was installed, and the steeple was painted.

Up until this time, the church had used a single cup in the communion service, but because many had become dissatisfied, the Pilgrim Fellowship young people presented the church with a new communion set in 1941, and a dedicatory service was held after which communion was served.

An America flag and a service flag were purchased through donations, and the Christian flag was presented to the church by Mr. and Mrs. Mike Warga, Sr. in honor of their Golden Wedding anniversary. On July 26, 1942, flag dedication services were held with Rev. George McNary of Little Falls, Dr. Mrazek of Silver Lake, and Rev. E. E. Nygaard of the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church of Holdingford as guest speakers.

During the years that Rev. and Mrs. Vavrina were here, the times were very challenging. Our young men were called away to war one after another until 23 of them had answered their country's call, most of whom were sent overseas. The congregation was very thankful to our heavenly Father that all of them returned home safely.

Rev. Vavrina served the church from September 1938 until September 1943, when he resigned due to his age, and he and his wife moved back to their home in Champlin, Minnesota.

Which the church was without a pastor, Sunday School only was held on Sunday mornings. Rev. Keith Williams of Swanville was asked to serve us at least twice a month. As Mr. Williams pastored the church at Burtrum on Sunday morning, for a time both church services and Sunday School were held on Sunday afternoons. In May 1944, the Rev. Ralph Williams became our temporary pastor until January 1, 1945. Students from the St. Paul Bible Institute also came to fill the pulpit on Sundays, some of them coming as candidates.

At this time, Dr. Collins, state superintendent of the Central Association of Congregational Churches, secured M. William Huntley of Minneapolis to begin his ministry with the church on July 1, 1945. Leaving his wife (Joyce) and family here, he went to seminary from Tuesday through Friday; and then returned for the rest of the week. In June 1946, he graduated from Bethel Seminary in St. Paul and on September 25, 1946, was ordained in the church. The church sent invitations to the members of the Central Association, the Cech Congregational Church of Silver Lake, and a number of friends of both the church and Mr. Huntley. The women of the church presented their newly ordained minister with a sum of money to buy a pulpit robe as an ordination gift. In 2010, Pastor Huntley's daughter, Mary Kay Sauter, wrote that one of her earliest memories is of a gas lantern hanging in the archway at the parsonage. She mentioned that her family enjoyed their time at our church and living in our community. Return visits brought fun with the Soltis family across the street and with other children.

In this period, the church began receiving electricity from the new high lines. Families were asked to contribute \$3 for coal so that they would worship in warmth.

The 50th Anniversary

In 1947, the original constitution was translated from Slovak to English. A brief history was compiled, and the church celebrated its 50th Anniversary with former pastor, Rev. Vavrina, presenting the morning's message in both Slovak and English.

Marvin Thompson served as pastor from 1948-1950, and Ralph Oman from 1950-1953.

During the years of Rev. Peter Waller's pastorate (1954-1960), emphasis was placed on visitation by missionaries and guest speakers. Rev. Waller's salary in 1954 was \$1,900 (paid solely by the church, since the mission would not support a pastor who did not have a Congregational background), so he found it helpful to supplement his income by mowing the church yard. He received three dollars per cutting with a reel-type mower. A rotary gas-powered lawn mower was purchased a year later.

The 1960s

Rev. Harold and Annette Beatty served the church from 1962-1964. The church family appreciated his musical talents.

In the following years, many improvements were made in the parsonage. Church improvements consisted of a new roof and a larger furnace with heating units installed in the Sunday School rooms. In 1950 and 1963, the interior and the outside trim was repainted, and the floor was sanded and refinished. New steps and railing were installed at the back entrance of the church, while the front steps were rebuilt with a heating element. Major improvements were made in the basement: A new north wall was constructed, the floor lowered and cemented, the walls plastered, new lights installed, and a divider put in place to separate the Sunday School rooms. In the sanctuary, a step was constructed adjacent to the platform and new carpeting was laid. Water was piped into the kitchen, and new cupboards built.

Outside, landscape shrubbery was planted in front of the church. Evergreens and other trees were planted on the east and north sides of the building. The fence was improved, a well drilled, and a security light installed.

In 1967, new by-laws were made for the cemetery, a system of perpetual upkeep was organized, and a new system of numbering lots was developed.

Pastor Leonard Bergstrom (Charmayne), who served as pastor from 1965-1968, conducted a weekly radio program on the Albany station. Initially done live, Rev. Bergstrom changed to a tape format after the ladies' group purchased a reel-to-reel tape recorder for \$151.75. His program used the theme song "Only Believe."

One of the most outstanding events of this era was the burning of the mortgage on September 8, 1968. Debts of \$2,293 (dating back to 1899, 1930 and 1933) were paid to the Congregational Church Building Society.

Pastoring the church from 1968-1971 was Rev. Edward Smith, assisted by his wife Finetta. Growth in our Sunday School classes was a major goal during this time.

In 1969, we began holding combined services for Good Friday, World Day of Prayer and Thanksgiving with the Community Covenant Church and the Gethsemane Lutheran Church of Upsala.

In 1970, the church joined the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference, an evangelical Congregational denomination. We trace our Congregational roots back to the Pilgrim forefathers who came over on the Mayflower.

The 1970s – the 75th Anniversary

In 1972, the church celebrated its 75th anniversary under the guidance of Pastor Ron and Shirley Hamilton. One hundred and seventy-four people attended the morning service, followed by a dinner and an afternoon anniversary service, during which Rev. Barry Jones presented greetings from the conference. Mary Kohanowski (Mrs. George) Soltis, the only living charter member, was in attendance. She passed away in 1976, marking the end of an era in the church.

Rev. Hamilton was succeeded by Rev. Jesse and Ellen James from 1974-1979. Pastor James was especially known for his musical and visitation ministries to shut-ins.

In 1976, the church constitution was updated. The following year the original clerk's records were translated from Slavic into English by Minnie Heisick and Edna Soltis Euteneuer.

The process of property renovations continued. In 1973, a new garage and entryway were added to the existing parsonage. In the years that followed, the ceiling in the back room of the church was lowered, the building insulated, and the church pews upholstered. In 1977, a lit cross was installed above the front entry in memory of charter members George and Mary Soltis. A major change in the appearance of the church was made in 1978 when the stucco on the outside of the building was painted white, a distinct change from the previous plum shade of brown.

The 1980s – Indoor Bathrooms!

With the need for more kitchen space and indoor bathrooms, plans were made in 1979 to construct an addition to the north side of the building. It was completed and dedicated on

October 19, 1980, with Rev. Milton Reimer officiating. Dr. Reimer also wrote "The Early History of South Elmdale Congregation Church as Recorded in the Annual Reports of the American Home Missionary Society."

Church improvements during this time included re-shingling and painting of the church steeple, the installation of outside railings, block edgings, and new sidewalks. The interior church walls and ceiling were sprayed, and ceiling fans installed. A new opportunity was presented in 1982 when the Harry Chuba family donated land for the future construction of a new parsonage. In 1985 new church yard fencing was installed and in 1986 a three-year window restoration project was completed.

Church Plant in Avon

It was also in 1986 that the Lord laid it on the hearts of the membership to pray for the planting of a new church in Avon, 12 miles to the south. Several families from the congregation were released to found the Avon Community Church. They held their first worship service in the Avon City Hall in 1986. South Elmdale's Rev. Bruce Pinke served as the founding pastor of the Avon Community Church.

Name Change

In 1988, the name of the church was officially recorded as "South Elmdale Congregational Church" with the Secretary of State of Minnesota, although the name had already been in use for a long time.

A New Parsonage

Memorial gate posts were built, and the congregation began working towards the goal of constructing a new parsonage. A fund-raising ethnic dinner was held, complete with apple strudel made by the church women under the direction of Edna Soltis Euteneuer. Many contributions and gifts were received for the project. The new parsonage was built and dedicated on September 17, 1989, with Pastor Raymond Moushon leading the service. The parsonage was constructed just west of the site of the former parsonage which was removed.

The 1990s

From 1990-1992 Rev. Harold Sanders (Hazel) came out of retirement to serve as interim pastor. He extended his service to the church when he became a pastoral assistant in 1993.

In 1991, the church constitution was revised and adopted. The price of cemetery plots was set at \$200 for two sites, including perpetual upkeep, and the old barn was torn down.

A replica of the wooden star, which had been on the steeple for many years, was replaced by a stainless-steel star as a memorial in 1992. The star was designed and crafted by Richard Konsor, a lifetime member of the church, and grandson of charter member Suzanne Konchar. A storage shed was constructed, and a new sound system installed in 1993.

Through the years, the church enjoyed a variety of traditional activities. Among the favorites were the Christmas programs which closed with the distributing of bags of candy, peanuts, and apples. The yearly Sunday School picnic held at Cedar Lake, Vacation Bible School and youth group activities also provided fond memories. All of these events continue to this day.

A change in tradition occurred when the serving and Study group/Ladies' Missionary Society was dissolved in 1994. For fifty-six years, this women's fellowship group was instrumental in supplying the church kitchen, planning church dinners, funeral luncheons, and other special occasions. It also provided support to missionaries and donations towards church and parsonage renovations throughout the years.

Fellowship Hall Addition – Pioneer Clubs

The church's steady growth contributed to over-crowding in the building and the construction of a new wing to the church was begun in 1994. Made possible by the sale of church cookbooks, an auction, and other fundraising events and contributions, the new wing was a multi-purpose area designed for education and fellowship events. The built-in fireplace was given as a memorial and movable wall potions were installed in 1996. Many other memorials were also given throughout the years. Dedicated in 1995 at a service conducted by Rev. Terry Wilkinson, the new wing was used extensively for the "Pioneer Clubs" program. This Wednesday evening program, spear headed by the Wilkinsons, replaced the traditional Sunday School in order to provide a greater outreach into our community as well as serving our own children. God gave a good response to this program.

Missions

One of the ways the Lord blessed the church was through greater involvement in missions. A work group was sent to a Navajo Indian Reservation in Arizona to assist the Navajo Gospel Mission in building renovation in 1995. In 1997, the church supported a number of missionaries serving in various fields, including former pastor Bruce Pinke and his wife Carolyn (Ivory Coast, Africa) and member Anita Wolters (Micronesia).

100th Anniversary and Onward

A special service was held on September 19, 1996, marking the start of the 100th year of South Elmdale Congregational Church. A re-enactment of the events surrounding the founding of the church was presented, followed by the partaking of the Lord's Supper in the original portion of the church building. In the spring of 1997 a through-the-years style show and ladies' luncheon was held.

A weekend of Centennial celebration led by Rev. Wilkinson was held on August 9 and 10, 1997. A concert was presented by current and former members of the church. The theme for the anniversary was "Find Us Faithful." Sunday activities included special music by Sylvia Marcinko Chai on the pump organ, soloist Helen Petric Johnson, and former pastor William Huntley on the bag pipes. Greetings were extended from Rev. Cliff Christensen on behalf of the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference, and from former pastors Rev. Leonard Bergstrom, Rev. Ron Hamilton, Rev. Jesse James, Rev. Bruce Pinke and Mrs. Hazel Sanders for Rev. Harold Sanders. Our sister church in Silver Lake also sent congratulations and was recognized for its many contributions to South Elmdale Congregational Church during its founding and early days. Thanks were given to our heavenly Father for His continual direction and blessings and for the faith, labors, and sacrifices of our ancestors. Our prayer was that the Lord would "find us faithful" in furthering His work until He comes again.

After the joyous occasion of the centennial, inevitable change continued. The sanctuary clock, with its constant ticking that either annoyed or comforted people, was moved to the fireside room. An electronic piano was purchased. While we continued with the tradition of hymns, newer worship songs were also introduced. Elmdale Township tarred the road in front of the church from the corner to the parsonage.

The 1998 annual report states that the children's Pioneer Club program continued to be an outreach to the area families. The Harvest Festival at the home of Bob and Shirley Clear had a good turnout, and the youth enjoyed a New Year's overnight with games, movies, and serious discussions about personal and family goals. In his pastor's report, Rev. Wilkinson asked, "Should we relocate to Holdingford?" Congratulations were sent to our daughter church, Avon Community Church, upon the ground breaking for their new building.

The 2000s

In 1999 the Wilkinson family departed, and Rev. Garry and Bridget Schick arrived. A new outdoor sign was donated as a memorial. The following year the church received a donation from the Harry & Helen Soltis family of five acres of land across from the church. The land was cleared to provide options for parking and recreational use. The windows at the front of the sanctuary were uncovered, but in 2001, it was noted that light coming through the windows made it hard for some people to see.

After having relocated to Minnesota, Pastor Jesse James became Pastor Emeritus at South Elmdale Congregational Church. He assisted with communion, hospital visits, Bible study, special music, and supply preaching. He and Pastor Schick were also participants in the telephone Dial-A-Prayer. Rev. Schick introduced the meaningful Maundy Thursday dinners and worship. We had a float in the Holdingford parade and Gospel music was presented on Main Street. Eight youth and two adults took part in a mission trip to Mexico through YWAM. Our first internet presence was at www.SECC4HIM.org.

As part of our outreach focus, in 2002 we held four weeks of Saturday evening worship services at the Holdingford school during the Christmas season. A change was made from Pioneer Clubs to Awana, whose goal is to reach boys and girls for Christ and train them to serve Him. Six children's decisions for Christ were reported. A group of youth returned to Mexico on a missions trip. For several years we sponsored Focus on the Family columns in the Holdingford area newspaper, often in conjunction with Avon Community Church.

Name Change and Land Purchase

In 2003, the church name was changed to Community Country Church, and the congregation voted to purchase 4-1/2 acres of land across from the school in Holdingford for \$70,000. Our hope was for a more effective and visible outreach in the community. The land was dedicated in July of 2004. After one year, the balance remaining on the \$60,000 land loan was down to \$27,000. The church again had a parade float and provided a puppet show and concession stand at the Holdingford summer event.

Dr. Rev. Ron Hamilton conducted a seminar to assist in evaluating our church ministry and to discuss relocation options to Holdingford. A committee was formed to research potential church building designs. More children accepted the Lord during Awana. The church board minutes mentioned a reminder to ring the church bell before the start of Sunday morning worship services.

After serving the church for six years, the Schick family left for a pastorate in Nebraska. Pastor James took on more responsibilities in his role as Pastor Emeritus. We provided meals for the homeless through the local Interfaith Hospitality Network. A concert was held on the land in August of 2005.

The next year we held an Irish-themed luncheon in honor of Pastor Emeritus Rev. James. The land in Holdingford was paid off and we held three concerts there. The youth once again traveled to Ensenada, Mexico for a missions trip. After serving as interim pastor for eight months, Rev. Greggry Valentine accepted a call to serve as our senior pastor.

In 2007, Vacation Bible School was held in tents on the Holdingford land. Even after heavy rains, wind and hail requiring the tents to be set up twice, the event was deemed a

success. Ten adults and youth took part in a missions trip to Panama. Child protection policies were adopted, and we began providing sandwiches for Awana children and staff. Since there was some question about the church and cemetery property boundaries, a survey determined that in fact a portion of the land on the norther and eastern boundaries did not belong to the church. In future years, a fence was erected on the actual boundaries.

To increase our presence in Holdingford, an office was opened on Main Street in 2008. Twenty-two people crammed into the new office to enjoy breakfast hosted and prepared by Pastor Gregg. A mission trip to Alaska took place and a worship service was held on the land. Due to failing health, Pastor James was no longer able to serve the church, and went home to the Lord in 2010.

Plans for a Church in Holdingford

Plans were drawn for a new church building; a model was constructed and a project cost of \$1,200,000 was established. The financial goal was to be reached with 1/3 of the funds coming from cash on hand and from the sale of the parsonage and five acres at the South Elmdale site, 1/3 from a bank loan, and 1/3 from pledges from the congregation. The trend for pastors to have their own home made the sale of the parsonage possible.

In April of 2009, decisions had to be made due to our financial goals not being met. At a special congregational meeting to discuss what should be done, we learned that we would be receiving over \$100,000 from the estates of Ernie and Ann Pokorny. We had previously received a gift from the Leonard Pokorny estate which assisted us with the land purchase. Ernie and Leonard had attended South Elmdale Church when they were young. It was then decided to continue moving forward with the building, waiting on God to see what he would do. We asked for loans from church members until all pledged funds were received and the parsonage was sold. God provided donations from unexpected sources and, in His goodness, provided water after several dry wells were concerns. A ground-breaking ceremony for the new church was held on May 17, 2009. The five acres of land at the old site sold for \$35,000. By August 2009, the new church building was framed in. A special celebration service was held where individuals wrote scripture verses and names of family and friends needing Christ inside the walls. Volunteers provided labor for the in-floor heating, installed wall insulation and ceiling tiles, and donated meals.

The 2010s and the Move to Holdingford

One June 27, 2010, we transitioned from the old location to the new, with a worship service in the old church followed by a procession to the new building. On October 24, we held a dedication service and banquet in our new facility.

In his 2010 annual report, Pastor Valentine stated that sound Biblical doctrine and core values are what we are about, with the Bible being our sole source of authority. Other items of note in 2010 included the completion of spiritual gifts inventories to discern areas of service; Charles Warga, assisted by his wife Taunja, came on board as youth director; and work was done on building a new church web site.

South Elmdale Church

The South Elmdale fellowship hall area was converted to living quarters for Christian workers even as we discussed the future of the rest of the building. In the meantime, the parsonage sold for \$130,000 in 2011. The cemetery was split from the building, and a vote to sell the former church was approved. In 2020, the proceeds from the on-line auction were \$88,000. Prior to the sale the church bell was removed from its home in the steeple, and pews from the building were offered to those who had a relationship with the church. The blue cross and the steeple star were returned to the families that had originally donated them and the old pump organ was given to a former member. The picture of Christ in Gethsemane was returned to the relatives of Joseph Kwitchak, who had painted our reproduction. It now offers comfort to visitors of the family's funeral home in Brainerd.

Growth and Outreach

The years following the move brought challenging times when we were stretched in various way, but we could see God at work. We experienced growth in changed lives and discipleship.

In 2012 twenty individuals were welcomed into membership. Fifteen people went on a missions trip to Belize. Administrative duties were handled by several women in the church until Bethany Giinthir was hired as our part-time Administrative Assistant/Children's Ministries director. She expressed the goal of having each child build a foundation in God's Word and having a personal relationship with His Son. Beginning in 2015 Laura Klein took on these roles. Eleven 3rd-6th graders prayed the prayer of salvation one night in Awana. Another night we had 159 people in the building, including 40 adult volunteers. The Students With A Testimony (S.W.A.T.) youth group saw tremendous growth as they dug deeper into topics, tackled the hard questions, and built relationships. They purchased Christmas gifts to assist a family within the church, participated in Feed My Starving Children and attended World View Retreats. Testimonies of changed lives were given by those in our fellowship. An addendum to our constitution was developed to confirm our alignment with the Biblical view of marriage, gender, and sexuality.

In 2011 we held a joint National Day of Prayer with the Holdingford Catholic churches by the City Hall flagpole, and the tradition of community Thanksgiving services continued. Celebration with our daughter church, Avon Community Church, took place in 2012 on their 25th anniversary and the completion of their new sanctuary. Former pastor Dr. Rev. Ron Hamilton conducted a Natural Church Development workshop, resulting in a vision for discipleship and loving/caring relationships. A well-received Love and Respect Marriage Conference was held. Minnesota Adult and Teen Challenge presented a concert. A drive-through prayer event was offered. Christian films were shown, and Dave Ramsey Financial Peace seminars were held. The Fare for All food distribution program took place for several years. A faith community nurse was appointed with other nurses in our fellowship assisting. A Christmas Eve meal was offered for those alone for that evening. More mission trips took place to assist with hurricane home repairs in Texas and to Haiti in later years.

A building use policy for the new facility was adopted. We began making loan payments on the building that exceeded what was required. The long-awaited steeple was constructed and installed. A silent auction and hog roast building fund raisers took place as well as special year end debt reduction offerings. Christmas cookies sales to assist in funding women's events were begun. The men sponsored bow hunters' eve parties and annual Sportsman's Expos to glorify God through their gifts, passions, and appreciation for His creation.

In 2018, we saw a growth in small groups, whether on Sunday morning, during Bible studies or interest in groups that gathered to honor Christ and become His disciple. We noted the unexpected ministry of presenting the Gospel at funerals of people outside our fellowship. We were saddened by the Upsala Ministerial Association separating because of doctrine, but the churches continue to work together in regard to the Helping Hands fund.

The next year we were pleased to offer a marriage seminar presented by well-known author, Dr. Jim Burns. The transition to the ESV Bible was made in order to use a Bible that was easy to read and was as close to the original Bible text as possible. Generous on-going contributions to the Brotherhood Fund allowed the church to assist individuals and families with financial needs. The youth (and some younger children) played kickball and had a New Year's lock-in.

In 2020 the arrival of COVID-19 found us suspending fourteen Sunday in-church services, but through the use of technology, Pastor Valentine presented messages from his kitchen table. We were able to appeal to a broader group of people that would not have otherwise heard the Gospel.

2020 also brought the acquisition of one additional acre of land adjacent to our northwest property line. The three-year process of pouring concrete ribbons for under cemetery monuments was begun. Energy-efficient lighting upgrades were made throughout the new 10-year-old church building. Smiles were brought to our faces one Sunday morning in

August when three cows visited the church parking lot, appearing to be patiently waiting for the doors to open!

Mortgage Burning Ceremony

Amid a morning temperature of -35 degrees, February 2021 brought the much-anticipated arrival of an outdoor mortgage burning ceremony. God was praised in that this took place years ahead of the scheduled pay-off and that funds were freed up to increase staff hours. It was a joy to once again meet together to celebrate Good Friday and Easter services. Due to limited space in our building, the S.W.A.T. youth group began meeting at the youth director's home. Transportation was a drawback, but the more informal setting provided opportunities for a lot of discussion and understanding to the teens and extended conversations with their parents. A granite historical bench was installed in the cemetery.

Moving Forward

Through the years we have lost many who were near and dear to us, but each home-going served as a reminder of the hope we have in Christ Jesus. Some of the old events and traditions remain in the form of a fall Harvest Festival, children's Christmas programs with their accompanying treat bags, the church picnic at Cedar Lake, hosting Memorial Day services, and supporting missions and missionaries. Newer traditions have also come along side. Among them are bi-weekly prayer time with the pastor, a kids' Fall Fun Night, annual men's retreat, Bible character night, assembling gift boxes for Operation Christmas Child, providing monthly donations to the Holdingford food shelf, presenting indoor and outdoor concerts, supporting the Pregnancy Resource Center, and hosting Red Cross blood drives.

Where are we now in 2022? We continue to see children accepting the Lord and new members joining (current membership is 118) and being disciplined within our fellowship. We do, however, need improvement with integrating these new people into our church body. The Lord has been laying on our hearts some possibilities for the near future. These include the addition of an assistant pastor and continuing our focus on Christian education. The main emphasis as always is that building change, pastors change, but God and His Word never change.

Whether in word or deed, our goal is to carry the Gospel to as many as we can before Jesus returns. We may not always know the way to reach our goal, but we know the one who does, and **"On This Rock We Stand."**

South Elmdale Congregation Church and Community Country Church

John Sabol	1897-1904
Paul Jamarik	1904-1907
Andrew (A.J.) Moncol	1909-1922
Adolph Yukl	1922-1938
Vaclav Vavrina	1938-1943
William Huntley	1945-1948
Marvin Thompson	1948-1950
Ralph Oman	1950-1953
Peter Waller	1954-1960
Harold Beatty	1962-1964
Leonard Bergstrom	1965-1968
Edward Smith	1968-1971
Ronald Hamilton	1972-1974
Jesse James	1974-1979
Milton Reimer	1979-1982
Bruce Pinke	1982-1988
Raymond Moushon	1988-1990
Harold Sanders	1990-1992
Terry Wilkinson	1992-1999
Garry Schick	1999-2005
Greggrey Valentine	2006-present

He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

Psalm 62:6