

The History of the Monarch Reformed Church

A Century of Faith built with Christ as our Cornerstone (Eph. 2:20)

1909 – 2009

*** Hi and welcome to the Centennial celebrations of the Monarch Reformed Church. I'm Lee Moltzahn and my roots lie very deep in this church. I am a blood relative to 4 of the 10 charter families, being a great-great grandson of Tijmen and Heiltje Hofman and Hendrikus and Janna Veldhuis. I was raised in and still attend the Monarch Reformed Church, having been baptized and later confessing my faith in its sanctuary.*

August 12, 1909. It was a clear, hot afternoon. Amid the stands of ripening grain and native prairie range; against the backdrop of the Rocky Mountains to the southwest; a group of Dutch families crowded together in a pioneer home.

While leather buggy seats blistered in the sun and impatient horses switched their tails against the flies, the new settlers gathered in the kitchen, heads bowed in prayer asking God to bless the beginning of a new church in an unfamiliar and lonely land.

This first meeting took place at the home of Willem Jan van Lohuizen and was presided over by Rev. Barend Lammers and Elder Wolf of the Westfield Reformed Church in North Dakota. Membership papers were received from:

- Mr. & Mrs. Tijmen Hofman
- Mr. & Mrs. Hendrikus Veldhuis
- Geertje Nijkamp (widow of Mr. Hendrik Goldenbeld Sr.)
- Mr. & Mrs. Willem Jan van Lohuizen
- Mr. & Mrs. Roelof van Dijke
- Mr. & Mrs. Evert Aldus
- Mr. & Mrs. Rense Nyhoff
- Mr. & Mrs. Jacobus Nyhoff; and
- Mr. & Mrs. Hendrik Goldenbeld Jr.

Baptized members were as follows:

- Thys Dekker
- Arie Dekker
- Johan Huisman
- Willem Stotijn
- Wouter van Dam
- Hendrika Veldhuis; and
- Geertje Veldhuis

- Both Hendrika and Geertje Veldhuis became members at this same meeting after they had become baptized members.

Twenty communicant members were deemed sufficient to establish a church and the first consistory was elected with Elders being Tijmen Hofman and Jacobus Nyhoff and Deacons Willem Jan van Lohuizen and Evert Aldus. It is interesting to note that four of Tijmen Hofman's great grandsons make up our current consistory.

This formative congregation became known as the "Dutch Reformed Church of Monarch." The church would also be known as the "Reformed Church of America at Monarch" before it received its present name. Our congregation is the oldest Reformed Church of America in Canada still in existence. In the early 1800's, the RCA organized a cluster of congregations along the St. Lawrence River and the northern shores of Lake Ontario. All of these congregations later became Presbyterian churches or were disbanded long before Canadian Confederation. Therefore our church is also the first RCA church to be established on Canadian soil.

The original congregation numbered 68 persons representing 10 families and 4 individuals. These families were Dutch settlers who immigrated to the Monarch/Nobleford area in the early 1900's from the Netherlands and the United States. All but one family were from the Hervormde (Reformed) faith. Many of these families originally worshipped at the Nijverdal Christian Reformed Church, which was later reorganized into the Granum, Monarch (later Nobleford) and Burdett CRC congregations. However, the arrival of the Tijmen Hofman family in 1907 from North Dakota initiated a movement toward the formation of a separate Reformed congregation. Mr. Hofman grew up in the Hervormde Kerk in the Netherlands and was a member of the Reformed Church at Westfield before coming to Alberta. By 1909, the Hofmans and other Hervormde families decided to form their own Reformed congregation.

The first public service was held on August 15, 1909 at the Rose Butte School and the first consistory was installed into their respective offices in addition to the first baptismal ceremony. Five children were baptized, all of whom have since died with the most recent being Herman Nyhoff who passed away in April, 2009.

At a congregational meeting in September, 1909, the construction of a church was discussed. Five acres of land was donated by Jacobus Nyhoff. This is the same land on which the church stands to this day.

Budgeted to cost \$1000.00, the actual building of our little white church on the prairie didn't begin until the spring of 1910 after revised plans were drawn up by Luite Visscher and Pieter Berkhof of Carlstadt (Alderson) after the original plans prepared were deemed too cost prohibitive. The church is of wood construction and was built with a vaulted ceiling to aid acoustics. Although finished in V-joint, it nevertheless echoed distant and grander sanctuaries. However, in an effort to lower heating costs, the ceiling was lowered long ago with the white tiling present today. Dedication services for the church building were held in March of 1911, by Rev. de Beer of South Dakota. Until the construction of the church was completed, the congregation worshiped in the Rose Butte School.

Mindful of Canadian winters, a black pot-bellied stove was placed in the nave, toasting those nearby and ignoring those seated against the uninsulated walls. One member jokingly suggested that the stove should be painted red, so as to at least give the illusion of warmth.

In the very early years, men sat together on the right side of the church and the women, hatted and long skirted of course, sat on the left. In the absence of pews, rows of oak chairs and the odd orange crate or buggy seat sufficed until more formal seating was provided. It was said that a slow drying varnish on the chairs made rising after a lengthy service somewhat hazardous.

Over time, the church has seen numerous changes physically. In 1925, the New Holland Church at Alderson closed and the lumber was used to construct a Sunday school room and a new barn for the parishioner's horses. In 1951, a full basement was built underneath the church. Extensive renovations took place in 1954 and the south wing was added. Sunday school rooms, a nursery, and bathrooms were built on the north side of the church in 1975. In 1997, new windows were installed on the sanctuary and south wing, the siding was replaced, and the walls of the sanctuary were insulated for the first time.

Our first regular minister, Rev. Adriaan Van Dyke came in 1916 for a salary of just \$800.00 a year, which included free parsonage and three weeks' vacation. Before Rev. Van Dyke's arrival our church was served by student ministers or classical missionaries; however, their visits were infrequent, so elders read from Dutch sermon books. An elderly lady once admitted that as a child she watched the turning of pages impatiently awaiting the appearance of a partially blank one signalling the end of a lengthy sermon.

During the church's first 100 years, we have been served by 19 full time ministers, one of whom has served our congregation twice. For many, our congregation was their first charge. Eight of these nineteen ministers were ordained in our church. Twenty student ministers have also served our congregation.

When the church was first established, deacons visited each family once a year after harvest to collect their tithe. This onerous task was alleviated when offering envelopes were introduced. These envelopes were collected with tasselled black velvet bags attached to long dowel sticks which were passed by the deacons before the seated members. These bags were nicknamed "slaap-muts." Later on the offering was collected with wooden plates which were eventually replaced by the silver offering plates we have today.

Music has been a vital part of the life stream in our church. From the early days, many people have given their time and talents in this area. One member who contributed much in the early years was Willem Plomp Sr. He taught many in the congregation and community the rudiments of presenting a musical number. Mr. Plomp led the first church choir, as well as the "Singing School Hosanna" and the "Monarch Excelsior Band," the latter two groups being open to all members of the community. The "Singing School Hosanna" performed once for the Classis Cascades and so impressed a visiting minister that he offered to pay all expenses for the group to perform at several churches in Washington State. Mr. Plomp's daughter, Alice Dekker followed in her father's footsteps and was also very influential in the organization of music in the church. While there is no longer an organized choir, many willing members still present a musical selection to the congregation on a regular basis.

When the church was first established, we did not have an organ, so a "voorsinger" was appointed to set the key and lead the congregation in the singing of hymns from the old Dutch psalmbook. This task was given to Jacobus Nyhoff.

In 1916, we purchased our first pump organ. Our first organists were Jacobus Nyhoff, Bella Van Dyke, Jenny Nyhoff, Andrew Geerling, and Johanna Veldhuis. Today Carol Ann Zoeteman ministers to us as pianist.

When our congregation was first established all worship services were held in Dutch. This continued until 1933, when the younger generation made requests for at least one English service per month. Eventually all services were held in English.

During our 100 years, the church has been home to a number of organizations; some that are no longer in operation or have regrouped into new committees and others that are still going strong.

The Girls League of the Monarch Reformed Church was organized in 1930 under the direction of Mrs. Freda Elings (Rev. Elings wife). The purpose of this group was to raise money for missions. This was accomplished thru activities such as; plays, teas, pancake suppers, and the sales of handicrafts. One of their more well known events was the "Tulip Tea" held in the Rose Butte School. The Girls League operated for 5-6 years and averaged between 12 and 14 girls.

The Missionary Circle at the Monarch Reformed Church began when the Monarch ladies attended the Spring Conference of the Women's Missionary Union of Classis Cascades in Conrad, Montana, in October, 1958. At this conference it was decided there should be a missionary union for Reformed churches east of the Rocky Mountains, consisting of churches from Calgary, Bottrell, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and Monarch, Alberta and Conrad, Montana. So on October 27, 1958, the "Missionary Circle of the Monarch Reformed Church of the Reformed Church of America in the Classis of Cascades" was officially organized with 24 charter members. The purpose of this society was to make Christ known to all the world, unite women of the church for world evangelism, through education to widen their understanding of missions, to deepen the spiritual life of the individual member and to gather funds for the promotion of missions both Christian World Missions and Domestic Missions. The group dissolved as a society in 1976.

In 1953, the "Daily Vacation Bible School" was started under the leadership of student minister Melvin Voss. The group's desire was to reach and teach children in the surrounding area who were not attending church or Sunday School in addition to our own. During the DVBS program's 22 year history, attendance averaged between 60 and 70 pupils; a considerable feat considering the size of our small community. Many felt we had played a small part in "train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it," Proverbs 22:6. Although the Monarch Reformed DVBS no longer operates, many of our children and their parents have been involved in a DVBS program at other local churches.

Since the advent of the Monarch Reformed Church, there has always been a Sunday School. It was started through the desire for the settlers to further the study of scripture for themselves and their children. The first Sunday School teacher was Evert Aldus, who had been a school teacher in the Netherlands and he led classes for both the young and the old. Sunday School classes were held mainly during the summer months in contrast to today's practice of having the summer off for holidays. This was due to the cold winters and the difficulties the people had in getting to church.

Beginning in the late 1930's and continuing until 1959, a "Badge and Bar" system was implemented. At the end of a Sunday School year of perfect attendance, the pupil received a

badge. After the second year, a wreath was added and for every year there after a bar was added. Many members still have these mementos and display them with pride.

The tradition of presenting the children with a Bible once they could read continues today. Countless Bibles have been given over the years to students at the end of grade one.

One of the major attractions that is still looked forward to by young and old alike is the "Children's Christmas Program."

Though its small, our Sunday School today remains a very active and enthusiastic group whose success would not be possible without the dedication and devotions of our Sunday School teachers.

The Dorcas Ladies Aid was organized in 1921 by Mrs. C. Vander Schoor, whose husband was our classical missionary at the time. The purpose of this group was to raise funds for the Children's Christmas Program by using their God-given talents for sewing, needlework, and baking. Each member was given a dollar to make an article that would be worth double its value. These items were sold at the first bazaar in November of that year. This event is still held annually 88 years later. The first bazaar brought in \$64.40, which was used to purchase 32 loaves of bread; 2 boxes of Japanese oranges; 1 box of apples; 4 bars of chocolate; 75 chocolate bars; 60 cigars; 15 lbs. of nuts; and 6 yards of leno for bags.

Over the years, in addition to the bazaar, the ladies aid has organized church picnics, chicken and pancake suppers, heart-pal parties, Mother's Day and hobo teas, as well as providing financial aid to the church, missions, and helping to meet some of the community's needs, such as supplying food hampers and visiting the sick. The group also did their part in the Family Variety Nights through their "Hat Parade" and "Alley Cats Orchestra."

In 1929, the ladies aid was reorganized and given a new purpose. Their purpose now was to continue financial support, to encourage each other in the faith, to perform deeds of mercy, and in make use of the talents God had given them for the furthering of his kingdom here on earth.

Therefore, missionary work became a major focus. Various donations were made to organizations such as RCA foreign and domestic missions, LAMP (Lutheran Association of Missionary Pilots), numerous charity organizations, and Sam and Helen Hofman in Chiapas, Mexico to name a few. Several children have also been sponsored by the ladies aid, a practice that the church carries on to this day.

In 1960, the Ladies Aid produced 2000 cookbooks. This was a major accomplishment that paved the way for a historical book, "Down the Trail of Memories," printed in 1963.

During the Dorcas Ladies Aid 75+ years of operation, they contributed greatly to the spiritual life of the church and community. Their influence is very present in the lives of our congregation.

In 1927, the "Christian Young People's Society of the Monarch Reformed Church" was organized under the direction of Rev. Dick Elings. The group's name was later shortened to the "Young People's Society" or Y.P.S. Today it is more commonly known as the "Youth Group."

Initially, Y.P.S. meetings were held every Sunday evening, but later were held every two weeks, which is the case at present. In the early years, meetings were led by the minister or an honorary president chosen by the society. Meetings consisted of a business portion, hymn singing, and a Bible study and discussion. Each meeting was finished off with a literary program designed to help the youth become more accustomed to public speaking. The individual could

choose to provide some musical entertainment, a recitation or reading, humour, or a book report.

To cover operating and social expenses, members were asked to pay 25¢ a month for dues in addition to 25¢ fines for members who were unprepared for the lesson.

Over the years, the Y.P.S. has contributed time and funds to the church and missions through collection of membership dues, production of group performances, church clean-ups, the sale of vegetables grown on the church property, and community suppers. Missions they have donated to include; Salvation Army, John Howard Society, the Red Cross, and more recently, the Lethbridge Food Bank, Bridges of Hope and World Vision.

Under the leadership of Rev. Martin Hoekman, the Y.P.S. started the tradition of presenting of a Bible to baptized newlywed couples with their names engraved on the front.

In 1970 with the arrival Rev. John Moerman, the youth group was split into a junior and senior group; however, the two groups became one again later on.

Throughout the year, the Y.P.S. in past and present years would go bowling, mini-golfing, ice-skating, camping, curling, and river rafting.

It has generally been the responsibility of the presiding minister to lead the Y.P.S., especially in the early years; however, various members of the Consistory and the congregation have donated their time to leading the group.

For two years starting in 1978, the Y.P.S. had an organized choir, accompanied by Len Zoeteman on the accordion and Susan Harbers on the piano that provided a lively, musical ministry. This group had upwards of 35 members.

Except for a brief hiatus in the late 1960's and the 1980's, the Monarch Reformed Y.P.S. has run continuously for 82 years. Our close group of youth today remain active in the church and are lead by Rev. Bob Derrick and Lee Moltzahn.

While the Monarch Reformed Church has contributed to countless missions in its 100 years, three have been of very special interest; the Alberta Indian Gospel Mission, Rev. and Mrs. Sam Hofman (Chiapas, Mexico), and the Rainbow Sunday School.

In 1963, through encouragement by Pastor Simon Ter Louw, the Monarch Reformed Church became supporters of the Alberta Indian Gospel Mission at Glenwood. Eventually the mission became the responsibility of the church and was managed by the Dorcas Ladies Aid Society and members of the congregation. William Plomp Sr. and John and Dena Havinga were very involved with the mission until 1970 when Mr. and Mrs. Rudy DeVries were hired to minister to the native people. When the DeVries' left the mission in 1973, John and Dena remained active on the board to oversee the mission work. This work continued until 1976.

Sam Hofman, a former baptized member, and his wife Helen became RCA missionaries to the Chiapas, Mexico mission in 1958. This mission was started by the Presbyterian Church. While there they helped to develop a Bible school to provide leadership training for the Tzeltal Indians. In addition to the Bible School they were involved in teaching the Tzeltals skills such as agriculture, carpentry, sewing, and cooking. After working in Chiapas for over 40 years, Sam and Helen retired in 2000. During their four decade career in Mexico, the Tzeltal church membership rose from 7000 members to over 60 000 members.

In 1948, the Rainbow Sunday School from the Village of Monarch came under the auspices of the Monarch Reformed Church; it had been discontinued for some years. Mrs. Frank Millward asked Christina Van Den Broeke if she would start the Sunday school up again so

her children could learn Bible stories. On the first Sunday, 8 eager students showed. The next Sunday 16 pupils arrived, the third Sunday produced 28 children and by the fourth Sunday 36 students were enrolled. Due to this rapid growth, Hendrika Veldhuis and Tim Stotyn were enlisted to help.

Since the group was affiliated with the church, the children received their weekly Sunday School papers from the church and were taught Bible stories from the "Bible Story Book Set." When Christina moved away, Hendrika and her husband Ben Nyhof continued on as teachers with help from Arie Stotyn until 1957, when the Sunday School was discontinued. In 1964, Jake and Alice Dekker along with Arie Stotyn started up the Sunday School again. This very important Christian teaching carried on for years to follow. In 1971, the Rainbow Sunday School became independent of the church by covering their own expenses. Jake and Alice continued teaching until its eventual dissolution.

During our 100 years, many marriages have been performed within the church's wall. A few of these are of particular interest.

The first wedding performed in the Monarch Reformed Church was between Hendrik (Hein) Van Tol and Hendrika (Rika) Veldhuis on April 8, 1917 with Rev. Van Dyke officiating. On July 3, 1928 the church witnessed a double wedding. Twin brother and sister, Tennis and Geertje Hofman were united in marriage with their respective spouses, Winnie Zoeteman and Charles Lund. Rev. Elings performed the ceremony. The 1970's saw John Moerman and Jeanne Scholten exchange vows; the only instance where a child of the presiding minister married a member of the congregation. Our most recent wedding was on June 13, 2009 between Heather Hofman and Chad Lyons. This is the first time in the church's history where four generations of the same family have been married in the church.

Much has changed in the last 100 years. Travel is no longer made by horse and buggy; automobiles have taken their place. Trips to Lethbridge, once few and far between have become an everyday occurrence. The use of a gestetner has become as foreign and unknown to the younger generation as a computer is to the older generation. Home gardens and root cellars for many have become a thing of the past and big box stores have become the norm. Long past are the days when children were taught in one room schools on the open prairie without a fence in sight.

The church has seen its share of change as well. New wings have been added. New stained glass windows shed a kaleidoscope of color on the pews below. An electric organ has replaced the old pump organ which still plays old familiar hymns as well as more contemporary music.

We are still surrounded by a farming community, but our members come from various walks of life. Many of us are descendents of that first group of settlers. Today we are blessed with many new members who have fresh ideas and talents. Our close knit congregation today is guided by Rev. Bob Derrick.

Over the years the church has changed, services have changed, faces have changed. But "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Heb. 13:18. From humble beginnings, through difficult seasons and years of thankfulness, by the grace of God, the Monarch Reformed Church has served its first 100 years for Christ.