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CALVARY LUTHERAN CHURCH of Allendale

165 WEST CRESCENT AVENUE + ALLENDALE, NEW JERSEY 07401 + TEL. 327-4786

NEWS RELEASE - Immediate Use For Feature Article

March 5, 1971

Subject: History and Biographical Sketch of Calvary Lutheran Church of Allendale

RE: 15th Anniversary - March 14, 1971: "CALVARY - COME OF AGE"

Correspondent: Rev. John F. Nelson (Interview Style)

Calvary Lutheran Church of Allendale, New Jersey will celebrate her 15th Anniversary Sunday March 14, 1971. The Rev. John F. Nelson, Present pastor at Calvary, arrived in June, 1963 and has served half of the life of the congregation. It will be just fifteen years ago, March 14, 1956, that the congregation incorporated. Work had begun earlier. A group of interested people held the first worship service on December 5, 1954, in the upstairs of the old Allendale Fire House. That fire house has since burned down. The Rev. C.O. Pedersen, then of Brooklyn but now a resident of Allendale, preached at that first service and subsequent services to help the group get started. Significantly, Pastor Pedersen, now a member of the congregation, will open the 15th Anniversary Worship Service this Sunday at 10:45 a.m. and charter members will assist in conducting the service.

What began on the day of incorporation, 1956, as a congregation of 28 families and an annual budget of \$13,500, has grown to a congregation of 169 families and a program budget of \$75,750 for the current year 1971. "While Calvary has not experienced explosive numerical growth due to several factors," said the Rev. John F. Nelson, "the relatively small but steady growth in numbers has been matched or exceeded by an internal growth in personal response to Christ and responsibility to others." "If I were asked to characterize the congregation in one word, what I sensed when I came here eight years ago and what I feel at present," continued Pastor Nelson, "I guess I would use the word 'commitment'. In the people who are Calvary, there is a high sense of commitment to Christ and as a result accompanying commitments to serve in some capacity, to seeing that the Word is taught and heard, to generous Christian stewardship, to carrying out a ministry here and also outside of our congregation, even across an ocean. I speak of the 'family of faith' here at Calvary," concluded Pastor Nelson, "and while the family is far from perfect like everyone's, the faith and life that we share is kind of great. It is open; we try to keep it honest and thus it's real!"

Calvary Lutheran is a member congregation of The American Lutheran Church. The first resident pastor, the Rev. Luther Keay, arrived in August, 1956. Physical assets at that time consisted of a parsonage on Cottage Place, a portable altar and railing, some hymn books, the availability of the Fire House, and five wet acres on the corner of Ivers Road and West Crescent Avenue. In the last thirteen years, Calvary has been engaged in three different building programs. Phase 1 was the "first unit" of a home mission church completed in June 1957. It consisted of an all-purpose auditorium-sanctuary seating 180 people on folding chairs, pastor's study, secretary's office, kitchen and small fellowship room. The initial investment for the property, first unit and parsonage totaled approximately \$85,500. As soon as early 1960, Phase 2 was entered. The congregation needed class rooms and so built an addition that included a large fellowship hall and five new classrooms, also dividing the old fellowship hall into two rooms.

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At the same time they built a spacious four bedroom parsonage on an Ivers Road lot which was part of the original five acres. These two projects together totaled around \$47,500. With occasional improvements through the next years such as a new roof, curbing and paving the parking lot, and with periodic shifts in schedules to make the space available serve their needs, Calvary finally moved into building Phase 3 in June of 1968.

The conclusion of Phase 3 was a beautiful, contemporary 330-seat worship sanctuary of brick and wood which was dedicated just last fall. A study committee had worked for two years from 1966 to 1968. It was during that time the congregation considered relocating on a different site in Allendale and selling the existing buildings to the city for a new Borough Hall. But the decision was to stay and in June of 1968, a Steering Committee was formed consisting of Lawrence Peterson and George Heitman of Allendale, Bernt Carlsen and Karol Huber of Waldwick, Robert Hanson of Ramsey and Erich Sinner of Midland Park. The architectural firm of Harsen and Johns, Tenafly, was engaged at the same time. In May 1969 the construction contract was let to Romagnino Brothers, Cliffside Park and on June 8, 1969, the "stake-out" service was held for ground breaking. The completed sanctuary came to approximately \$196,000.

Two notable events marked the dedication of the new Worship Sanctuary. On Sunday afternoon, October 10, an Open House for friends and neighbors was held. An invitation announcement was sent to the other four congregations in Allendale and was also hand delivered to every home within reasonable walking distance of Calvary. "During construction many people in the neighborhood of the church would walk by to observe the progress and try to figure out the architecture," the pastor said. "From their interest we took our cue to invite our neighbors to a special open house to see our new church home when it was finished." A narrative liturgy was conducted during the open house and one of the Youth Folk Services was demonstrated. "I was particularly gratified and honored to have all of the other Allendale clergy present at the open house and conducting segments of our worship service as it was explained. The Rev. Kenneth Polglase of Epiphany Episcopal, Father Joseph Stockhammer of Guardian Angel Roman Catholic, the Rev. Frank Thurston and Mr. Church Spicer of Archer Methodist, the Rev. Thomas Ward of Highlands United Presbyterian, they were all there to take part and share in our celebration. It was a good day," Pastor Nelson said.

The formal Service of Dedication on Sunday afternoon, October 18, was not common and ordinary at all. "It is customary to have the clergy officiating on formal occasions," Pastor Nelson began, "you know, invite the Bishop, pastors of sister congregations, protocol and all. They were invited," he said, "but to attend, not to officiate. I have taken part in dedications of someone else's new sanctuary and as I thought of this, it just didn't seem right. What did I mean to that congregation? Who was I to step in front and center to dedicate their new place of worship. I had done nothing, invested nothing, given nothing to bring it about. Even Calvary's new sanctuary, I had very little to do with the building of it. Three years previous I had told the congregation if a building was to come, they would have to do it since I did not consider that my mission as the purpose of my

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ministry. The congregation, the men and Steering Committee did a great job. It was a pleasant experience. So I thought, let's have a 'laymen's dedication', no pastors taking part! It is the people of God who have worked and given and built this. It is the people who will continue the work here and pay for their church home; they should dedicate their church home to the God they glorify! The Boards almost didn't buy it until I convinced them I would not in any way be offended or why would I suggest this. And so that Sunday afternoon, men, women, and youth read Scripture, a layman from our National Church offices who had helped the congregation in its younger days preached, the choir sang and the organist played... no professionals, and the men of the church, Christ's men, read the declarations dedicating the furnishings, appointments and building, and at the end from all over the sanctuary...the same laity offered the prayers of consecration for the parts and the whole. Here were the people who had built it,...dedicating their new worshipping place to their God and Father. Except for putting the service together, I had no part in it but to worship and share that thrilling experience as one of the congregation. Oh yes, there was one clergyman who did have a speaking part, but only as a member of the congregation. The Venerable Rev. C.O. Pedersen, who preached at the first service in the fire hall, offered a prayer of consecration from his pew for all of the pastors present or future who would minister in this new sanctuary in behalf of Christ." "Without exception," Pastor Nelson said, "that dedication service was one of the highlights of my sixteen years in the ministry."

"There are some indications that Calvary is not totally a self-centered congregation," Pastor Nelson commented. "For example, at the first worship service in the new sanctuary, September 13, last fall, one of the first things they did was to take an offering," he continued, "but not an offering for themselves or their debt, it was for 'Project Neighbor', a special synodical appeal to fund programs among the minority groups and disadvantaged. These people could have build their sanctuary some time ago if there was less of a sense of self-giving and less of a commitment to missions on their part."

"In January of 1959, when the congregation was not yet three years old, and their indebtedness stood at about \$75,000, they voted to support a foreign missionary family at \$3600.00 a year! The support for Missionaries Lloyd and Margaret Smith in Africa has continued ever since for twelve years now and the spirit behind it hasn't disappeared. Speaking of missions, a couple of smaller things have also been done. In 1961 the Hi-League adopted a Korean Orphan and supported him for about seven years. We received a letter in 1968 that he was out of school and on his own. In 1963 we started to partially support work at our Lutheran Student House near the University of Taiwan, Taipei, Formosa. The commitment to missions has been quite marked here," Pastor Nelson stated. "In addition to financial support there has also been the occasional program, speaker, a monthly sewing group for hospital gowns, bandages, etc. Our missionaries spend a week with us every five years when they are home on furlough! They are with us now! I thing it was appropriate," said Pastor Nelson, "that in 1965 Calvary Lutheran received the first World Mission's Award given by the Eastern District World Missions Committee as the congregation that had done the most for furthering the cause of world missions out of some three hundred congregations."

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One might think world missions is perhaps overdone at Calvary from the sounds of it, but such is not the case. At the same time benevolence giving to the budget of the church-at-large has been comparatively high and local causes have not been ignored. In the past six years the congregation and individuals have given more than \$13,000 in the development of Camp KOINONIA, \$3700 to Luther College in Teaneck, \$4000 plus to a nursing home on Staten Island and slightly over \$3000 for LIFE, a synodical appeal for higher education. Calvary has operated on a "unified budget" from the beginning and conducts only one stewardship campaign for pledges each year. No other special offerings, appeals, money raising ventures are practiced. The sense of Christian stewardship is one of Calvary's strengths. Even financing of the new worship sanctuary has been out of the general budget. There was no building fund drive or capital improvement pledges.

The worship life of Calvary has always been strong and a variety of worship is used through the month. Communion is celebrated the first Sunday each month and a full liturgical service is used with the pastor chanting or intoning the service. "While Lutheran worship by tradition has been liturgical," Pastor Nelson commented, "we have a good number of people who come out of a non-liturgical background. So on the third Sunday of the month we have an informal "talk-through" service. The people actually participate. They are invited to suggest the hymns to be sung and they call out their favorite by number. At the time for Scripture reading, I call on two people to spontaneously read the Epistle and Gospel for the day. The scripture is on a bulletin insert so they stand where they are and declare God's Word for that day. At the end of that service we take time for people to extend the hand of Christian fellowship to anyone near them.

The youth of Calvary are involved in worship also. Not only visible at each service but contributing their own style. Folk Services began four years ago at Calvary and until this fall the early service on the last Sunday of each month was folk with the youth leading, playing, reading, and preaching. Pastor Nelson had no part in the service except when they allowed him to sit in and play with the guitar section. Now with the new schedule the folk service is either early Sunday morning or in the evening, giving opportunity for some creative themes to be worked out. There is no abnormal generation gap at Calvary, adults and youth appreciate each other. Youth are invited to sit on the governing boards. Each December the Hi-League has a Christmas Party For Older Youth, meaning those over sixty-five.

"Our program of religious education is traditional," stated Pastor Nelson, "with Sunday classes from pre-school through adults. We have three years of confirmation instruction as a part of that. Vacation Bible School each summer is also a part of the program. There are some interesting things happening with the Adult School. There are book studies and Bible studies, but this month a faculty of high school youth are exposing us to the rock operetta "Superstar", as a Lenten stimulus. For the third year now on Wednesday evenings, we have a double program of Lenten Worship at 7:30 p.m. and a Lenten School of Theology at 8:30 p.m. with one of our seminary professors who is in the New York area on sabbatical preaching and lecturing. This year Dr. Fevold of St. Paul, Minn., and Dr. Meuser, Columbus, Ohio are dividing the assignment."

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"The church women's group is very active with a two-fold emphasis of study and service. Monthly circle Bible studies and general meetings every other month keep them busy. While we have no organized men's group I don't see any need for one. We have a large group of active men who are involved and serving already in many capacities. To burden these commuters with one more meeting would be un-Christian! Spring and Fall "clean-up days" are a tradition and men, women and children show up to fix, improve and maintain their church building and property. One of my neighbors commented after last fall's day, "I've never seen any group turn out for work days like your people. You sure get a good crew!" Our choir does a good job and the acoustics make them sound great. I suppose visitors are kind to every church, but many comment on the choir's ability and the discovery that Calvary is one of the warmest, -friendliest congregations they have experienced. Calvary incorporates weekend retreats in the year's program for every group in the congregation. We are a member of the Martin Luther Camp Corporation and shares ownership with sixty other congregations in 1200 acre Camp KOINONIA, Northwest of Port Jervis, New York. A joint board retreat, family retreat, retreats for Junior Choir, Confirmation Classes, Boy Scouts etc. are annual events and the Hi-League goes up there fall, winter, and spring. We also have people attending a three-conference ALC Men's Retreat each March and Women's Retreat each September up at the YMCA Camp, Holiday Hills, in Pawling, New York."

"There's nothing unusual about us," Pastor Nelson concluded. "These are ordinary, everyday people. We have sensed the grace and love of God. It's a good word we all need. We celebrate it and we try to respond to it, imperfectly to be sure, and live as people of God. We ask each other to take seriously our personal commitment to Christ as Lord and Savior, and make him a part of our lives. In some ways, some times when this happens, some great things take place. But there are no illusions about having arrived! There are other times, too, and we need a lot of forgiveness and maturity. The process of spiritual growth is like that. We only pray that Calvary keeps growing."