

DAILY AMERICAN REPUBLIC

Zion Lutheran church turns 125

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By ALBERT MORROW, Contributing Writer



On Feb. 18, the neighborhood around 450 N. Main will resound with 125 tolls of the church bell of Zion Lutheran Church. The occasion is the 125th anniversary of the church's formation in 1897.

It will be the first event in the church's celebration of the anniversary.

Though the bell that will be rung is even older than the current church, the congregation has been on historic Main Street since 1947. Professional builders were hired to construct the one-and-a-half story Tudor Revival style church, but the male members of the congregation helped them at all stages of the construction, according to Carol Dorr of the church's anniversary committee.



Photo provided

“My grandfather did a lot of the masonry work on the church,” she said.

Through her efforts to collect Zion Lutheran’s history, she has become the congregation’s unofficial historian.

The church bell and the cornerstone located just inside the entrance were brought over from the first Zion Lutheran church building. That church was erected on donated property on Ninth and Cedar in 1899, two years after Zion Lutheran’s formation by Pastor H.C. Wm. Frese.

Prior to having a church building, the congregation met at various churches in the Poplar Bluff area, most notably a local Catholic church that was rented to them in exchange for their efforts to repair it.

In 1952, the church became home to the Zion Lutheran School. The students met in the basement fellowship hall until 1954, when a school building was built on Charles Street. There were only four classrooms back then and only two grades: kindergarten and first grade.

The school added more grades every year until local Lutheran children were able to attend all the way through middle school at Zion Lutheran. The school closed in 2004 after 52 years of service to the community.

Margaret Massey, Dorr’s sister and fellow member of the anniversary committee, remembers graduating from the eighth grade of that church.

It gave her the start to an education that would allow her to become a Lutheran teacher. She taught in North Canton, Ohio, and in St. Louis, Wentzville and St. Charles, Missouri. “I have been a member of the Lutheran church my entire life,” Massey said.

She returned to Poplar Bluff and her original home church when she retired.

“My church family is here,” she said.

The sisters are planning a summer event as part of the church’s anniversary celebration.

The details are not quite finalized, but include a community dinner with a special celebratory service and a quest speaker. They ask anyone interested in celebrating with them to watch the church’s Facebook page @zionpb or call the church at 573-785-3936. On Feb. 18, the neighborhood around 450 N. Main will resound with 125 tolls of the church bell of Zion Lutheran Church. The occasion is the 125th anniversary of the church’s formation in 1897.

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