

Mrs. G.O. (Astrid) Forde Interview
Mrs. Dorothy C.A. Pederson, Interviewer
April 9, 1976

The topic of this interview is the change of language of Pope county area Lutheran churches from Norwegian to English.

Now you wanted this from the beginning?

Q: Right.

So the first I have then is from 1918 and it shows that there were three English services that summer. I think the reason I don't find any English services in the fall is because in the fall there was always the communion services. There wasn't communion services every month in those days you know. So there was quite a number of communion services and perhaps that was one reason why he didn't have two services. Then also in the fall there was always the mission festival which we called Barnafest. That was an all day affair so it wouldn't be possible to have any English services. That was always three Sundays in succession, more or less.

Q: That's right..because he had the three churches, Immanuel and Indherred...

And the other two congregations were always supposed to go to this mission festival and they did. It was quite a Sunday.

Q: St. John's too?

Yes, so perhaps that's why he didn't attempt to have any new services in the fall like that.

Q: But there was no opposition, that wasn't the problem?

Then, no.

Q: It was scheduling actually?

Yes. Then I find the next year that he had five English services. So you see...

Q: Gradually...

He just went into it. Then in 1920 I find only three again. Now just what the reason was I don't know, but then perhaps maybe he didn't record it as English.

Q: But you mention now this first confirmant, in Starbuck, was it a girl or a boy?

Yes, it was a girl. That was in 1920. A member of the _____ congregation who came to be instructed for her confirmation because she did not understand Norwegian and the pastor in Starbuck just refused; well perhaps he didn't feel able to, maybe because he was from Norway, and so, he refused to instruct the confirmant in English.

Then in 1921 I find there were ten English services. I find that the first morning English service was conducted in Indherred, May 22, 1921, and there were morning English services in St. John's that same year in June.

Q: Gradual again.

Gradual shifting. Then in 1922 there was this class from Starbuck again that requested to be confirmed in the English language. There were five that were confirmed in Indherred and that was an English confirmation service. That was in the morning too.

Q: You said that was the year you were confirmed?

I was confirmed in Norwegian.

Q: You had been confirmed in Norwegian. Now were the classes entirely in Norwegian yet in the three churches or were a few shifting?

There was one that read with us I think that entire year, that was confirmed in English. But she lived right next door to the church and it was much handier for her because I think he had the meetings in Starbuck for the ones he instructed from Starbuck. So I know this one girl always came to our class because she could understand both but she preferred to be confirmed in English.

Q: There were no other parishioners then that this shift seemed to bother especially, they just went along with it?

No, it was just that, I think they realized the change had to come. I think the older people, of course, didn't feel that they got as much out of the English service.

Q: No, that's understandable.

So perhaps there were very few of them that came to the first English services. But it gradually increased. I find that in 1925 there was an English confirmation in Indherred. Now that would not be for any outsiders.

Q: Just from around here?

Just from the congregation. And in 1926, he had two confirmation services, one in Norwegian and then the following Sunday he had English. And so it just gradually...

Q: Right. It must've been gradual. For instance in Young People's Society then, they were shifting over or...

I think in your questionnaire here you asked which organization shifted first and I would say that it would be the Young People's Society. Of course, we didn't have so many organizations. We just had the Ladies Aid and the Luther League as we call it now. So I'm sure that the Young People's Society was the one that shifted to English first.

Q: And then you church services were shifting gradually?

Yes.

Q: And I suppose then you're in kind of a unique position to have seen all of this happen because first you were a parishioner and then you were a pastors wife, so you really got in on both sides of the question?

Yes. There is an incident that I don't think I'll ever forget. My folks too, at first they didn't feel that they could understand an (English) sermon. I think that was the case with so many you see, and they didn't attend at first.

Q: English...they didn't understand?

Understand. They could read English, they could talk English, but when it came to hearing a sermon, they just never felt that they really got much out of it so they didn't attend the English services from the beginning either. But this humorous incident happened while I was home. In those days whenever a son of the congregation would be here on vacation, come home and visit their folks, why they were asked to preach. And so one son of the congregation came home one summer and he was asked to preach. I remember my parents, oh, they would like to hear him but, I wonder if, I wonder if he's going to preach in English, if it's English services. So they said, you call up and ask. So I called and I said, "are the services tomorrow in English or Norwegian?" The father who was one the phone, said, "that you'll find out when you get there." What could I say? Thank you. I said goodbye, but I remember that so well.

Q: And did your parents take a chance?

I can't remember that part of it. I only remember about how I was the first to call up and find out what language it was to be in and was only told we'd find out when we got there.

But I think the one other thing that you asked about was, let's see-- what type of person objected to the shift from Norwegian? I think that would be mostly the older people.

Q: Older?

They didn't feel that they understood English. Then also, there weren't too many people that moved into the community in those days, but there were boys that married girls of other nationalities. As they moved into the community, I think the pastor felt that he should have English services too for their sake. I know that was the case as far as Festival Sundays were concerned. They were continued in Norwegian for many years after he was having just as many English services as Norwegian I think. But then I guess it was brought up at a congregational meeting one time that they ought to have some English on Festival Sundays, for the sake of the people that I mentioned there. So for quite a number of years, he would have two sermons on Festival Sundays and then that again gradually shifted to all English. So we really didn't realize the change. I do remember one time Gerhardt was telling about a comment by a parishoner which he enjoyed very much. They were talking about the change from Norwegian to English and this parishoner said, 'of course we have mostly Norwegian' and the fact of the matter was that they had maybe two thirds English and one-third Norwegian, so you see, it just came so gradually they never realized.

Q: Do you think the shift was about the same in each church? It wasn't more difficult in one than in another?

I don't think so, I really don't.

Q: No, but there again I think the leadership enters in probably too.

It had to be handled with tact you know.

Q: Oh yes, that's understandable.

Because the older people, it was hard for them to shift from Norwegian to English.

Q: Well, I don't have to ask you who was neutral, because there was no cause to be neutral.

No.

Q: No?

I don't know...that's why I thought I wouldn't be of much help to you because...

Q: No, I wanted to know. If you didn't have any trouble, that's marvelous.

And now another question you had here... when were women allowed to vote? That was not until 1964.

Q: Is that right? So that didn't make any difference then?

No, no.

Q: Well, I was kidding one individual that I interviewed a little bit. I said well, do you suppose it was kind of decided before they left home, some of these votes talked over at home? Well, she said she thought maybe it was in some cases. The man maybe represented two votes actually, while the woman was down fixing the dinner.

Yes, oh yes.

Q: In the church basement; maybe he spoke for both.

Now Ronnie, who was out here the other night mentioned the fact that as long as Gerhardt was pastor here, which was until he resigned in 1961, he always continued a Norwegian communion service. One in the spring and one in the fall. Wednesday night out here he mentioned that his folks had gone to the last communion service that was held. After that there were no more in Norwegian.

Q: No, I suppose gradually over the years, even if they appreciated it, the attendance gradually...

Yes, that's right.

Q: Diminished.

Towards the last the Norwegian services then more or less shifted just the other way so that he always continued to have some Norwegian but the English was in the morning and the Norwegian in the afternoon; while in the beginning it was Norwegian in the morning and English in the afternoon. But that gradually just changed. So there were Norwegian services; but I think that towards the last it probably was only twice a year that he'd have Norwegian and that would be in the spring and fall.

Q: And you were kept pretty busy all those years. How many churches were you organist in during this?

Two.

Q: Two, and that would be Indherred and St. John's.

But I was junior choir director in the third, so I went to all three churches

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and everything. But of course, we didn't have services in three churches until Sumption. He was the one that started that.

Q: So you were organist in St. John's and Indherred and then choir director in Immanuel. Then you raised a batch of kids and ran the parsonage. You had a full time career.

Oh yes, it was a busy life; a joy to remember it.

Q: Well, can you think of any other interesting things that happened even if there weren't many things that bothered...as far as language was concerned. Or can you think of other interesting things that happened in the church during those years? The old timers adjusting and Ladies Aid meetings and...

I don't know right off. I can't think because I've been just kind of thinking in terms of the shifting period.

Q: Now Ladies Aid meetings, I suppose they shifted gradually to English as the younger women took charge.

Yes.

Q: And there were no big issues?

No.

Q: There either?

No.

Q: Really divided up pretty much the Ladies Aid. Now for instance in our church we had the split where the women had to walk to Ladies Aid. In the early part of the church, the Ladies Aid in each church would be split into different groups.

That was the case in Indherred, but I don't think it was in the other two churches. But in Indherred they called it East Ladies Aid and West Ladies Aid or something like that because the distance was great; but I don't think that was the case in the other two; I can't quite remember. I don't remember when they merged the east and the west, but I suppose after the automobile came into being. So there was a time when there were two because the ladies walked.

Q: This is the end of the interview with Mrs. Forde. Her maiden name was Astrid Flack. Her parents were members of Pastor Gerhardt O. Forde's parish consisting of Indherred, Immanuel, and St. John's churches of rural Starbuck. She married Pastor Forde who was a widower. The Reverend Nils Forde served this parish from 1892 to 1917. His son Gerhardt O. Forde served from 1917-1961.