

Cross of Christ Chronicles

Kvindeforening or Ladies Aid – Part 1 – Origins (*Continued from June, 2017 Parish Visitor*)

With the waning of the pioneer period and the strictures of its subsistence farming, the access to markets along with the more recent advancements in agricultural technology and techniques changed the dynamics of farm life, providing a better position for the women to commence thinking about organizing a church group of their own. This must have been a very desirable proposition since it took place in every congregation I've ever read about.

At Highland Prairie, our former sister congregation to the west (remember we were in a four-point parish with them from 1859-1873) the idea was put forth four years before it happened in Houston. This is not surprising since our formerly shared Pastor, Rev. Kristian Magelssen, and in this case more importantly the *Prestefrue* (pastor's wife) lived in the parsonage right next to the church. From the 80th Anniversary History of the Highland Prairie Church (written 1934, republished 1979) - p. 72: "Mrs. Gunnar Tveiten...confided in Mrs. Kr. (Sara) Magelssen who heartily approved of her suggestions and the two agreed to invite the ladies of the congregation to a meeting for the purpose of organizing a *Kvindeforening* (women's organization). The first Ladies' Aid met in the parsonage February 8, 1878."

I will continue with several more passages from the Highland Prairie History Book since the circumstances described concerning the early years of the Ladies Aid are pretty much typical and because (as Josie Lybeck Brevig would have said) they present a better and more complete "word picture."

"We can easily imagine the interest shown by those who were present at this first meeting, and how happy each one was looking forward to being permitted to actually do something for the church and its activities. It was not only sunshine, however, to organize a Ladies' Aid. While some were very much interested, others looked upon it as a "*sladreforening*." But in spite of uphill work the interest grew and the membership increased.

"The homes were not so convenient and large as they are now. Almost every house was a log house, but even so the women were welcome. The old saying: "*Hvor der er hjerterum er ogsaa husrum*" (Where there is room in the heart there is also room in the house) became literally true in those days. There were no automobiles then, so the women had to walk, and for the president, or *formand* who had the workbag or *taske* to carry, it wasn't so easy at times.

"The first Ladies' Aid elected a committee to prepare work for the members. They met and cut out garments which were distributed among the members to be finished. And when they had sufficient things ready to make it worthwhile to have a sale, they would plan to have a picnic in the Overland Grove near the church. Here the articles were sold to the highest bidders, and it was the most interesting time of the whole day.

“Lunches were also sold at these meetings. Long tables were set up and spread with white tablecloths, and when the ladies had emptied their baskets and placed on the tables all the good things they had brought, the families sat down together to eat, and it was indeed a busy day for the ladies until everybody had been served. But they all felt it was worthwhile, and were happy when they learned how much they had made.” –Highland Prairie Church History (1979) - p. 72.

A few comments on the above quoted text should be made: Paragraph 1- “*sladreforening*” was a somewhat derogatory term meaning a “gossip group” which was applied to the concept of a women’s organization in the church by some people, including many pastors, who were genuinely concerned that any *Kvindeforening* would become just that. Of course this was a rather sexist view since most men who frequented their local barber shop usually came home “pretty well posted” as well (to use a phrase I learned from my great aunt Vada). In any case the good that came out of those thousands of women’s groups has far outweighed any possible threat of indecorous discourse. This desire to come together and exchange information (or “visit”) reflects the social nature of our being. We in the church like to call it Fellowship. –*to be continued.*

Jim and Shelley, Cross of Christ Archives, June 2017