

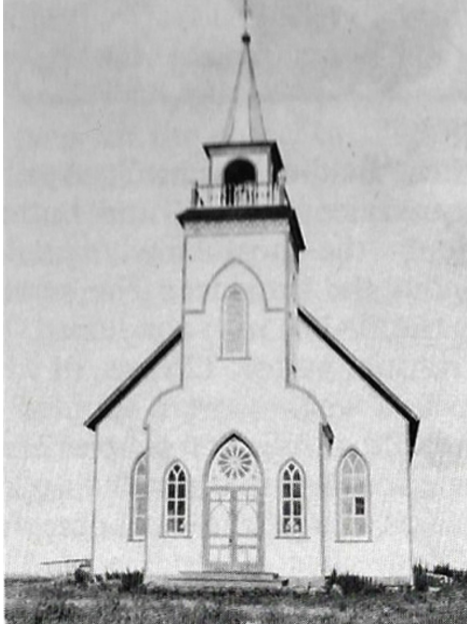
## Frelsis (Liberty)

For the pioneers Frelsis was not only a place of worship, it was the heart of the community. This is the story of Frelsis.

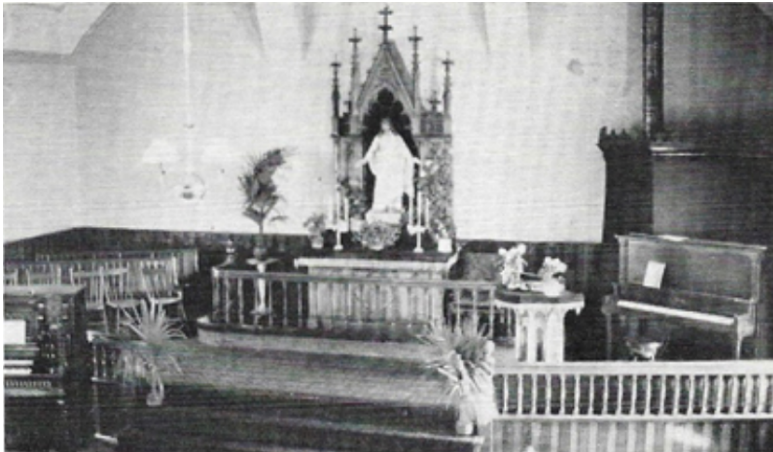
In the earliest days of the Icelandic settlement of Argyle, scriptural readings were held each evening in every Icelandic home. Layman services and Sunday School classes were held on Sundays in various homes as well. When the population became fairly large, a meeting was held on Jan. 1, 1884, at which time the "Frikirkja" congregation was established. Layman services continued in homes until they could be held in the newly built Hecla and Bru Schools. In the winter months only, Sunday School classes were held in four different homes in the district. Four men who taught some of these classes were Kristjan Olafson, Fridrik Jonsson, Kristjan Jonsson, and Hernit Kristoferson.

On July 26, 1885, at a meeting at Hecla School, a new congregation (accepting Synod laws), was formed - to serve the western part of the settlement. Kristjan Jonsson chaired the meeting and was chosen president. Fridrik Jonsson was elected secretary. Sigurdur Kristofersson made a motion to name the congregation 'Frelsis' (Liberty). Thorsteinn Antoniusson seconded the motion. It was carried. First trustees were: S. Kristofersson, Thorsteinn Antoniusson, and Ami Sveinson. First deacons were: Fridrik Jonsson, Kristjan Jonsson, and Thora Jonsdottir. Ninety members joined at this meeting. Fifty were confirmed, 40 were unconfirmed. Rev. Jon Bjarnason served the congregation with periodic visits.

At a joint meeting in 1888, the Bru and Grund congregations decided to invite the Synod to hold their 1889 convention in Argyle municipality, and they also agreed to build a church. The three Frelsis trustees and four other men (Johann Jonsson, Jon Bjornsson, Stefan Kristjanson, and Hernit Kristofersson) were elected to work on a committee with seven men from Frikirkja. At a Frelsis meeting in December, Jon Bjornson reported that the committee had voted 13 to 1 to build one church.



*Grund Frelsis Lutheran Church. Built in 1899 by the pioneers.*



*Interior of Grund Church. Note the chandeliers.*

The Ladies' Aid, organized in 1885, donated the first \$200. More funds were collected and added to this amount. Two acres of land were bought for \$10 from Sigurjon Snidal. Carpenters, Byring Hallgrimson and Ami Sveinson, with the help of volunteer labour, had the building completed by June, 1889, just in time for the synod convention! At a joint meeting in March, 1889, it had been decided to call a minister. Ninety dollars was collected and sent to Hafsteinn Pjetursson in Iceland. He came immediately, was ordained in Winnipeg, and served the district until 1893, for a salary of \$500. Built eight years after the first four families struggled through an early spring blizzard to their unbroken homesteads, Frelsis reveals the progress and priorities of this young community. Remember - most of the families were still living in their small, cramped, log cabins.

Stables were built that same year. Families from Frelsis joined together in several groups to build three large barns - north and east of the church. The last of these stood until 1944, when it was torn down. The Frikirkja congregation had each family build its own stables at Grund, resulting in a large rambling structure of single-team stables running south to the cemetery road and a short distance east. These were torn down and the lumber used to build stables at Bru when Frikirkja Church was built.

In 1896, a belfry with steeple was added to the porch to house the 500 pound copper bell, which could be heard ringing clearly for five miles. Byring Hallgrimson hand-carved the pulpit in his own kitchen and he painted it soft shades of cream and orchid with touches of metallic gold trim. The coal-oil chandeliers were donated; these were converted to electricity in 1929. A two manual "Doherty" organ was purchased in 1911. It can still be heard playing for weddings and occasional church services held at Frelsis today. Approximately 1890, the minister's house was built just north and west of the church, but was torn down in the early 1930's. Johannes Sigurdson donated two acres of land to the district to be used as a cemetery - a half mile east of Frelsis.

When the church was built in 1889, the pulpit and altar stood on a platform in the centre of the east wall of the building. Steps on both sides of the platform led up to another platform behind the altar - this is where the organ stood, with the choir seated on both sides of it



*Grund Church around 1900. Sera Jon Clemens, Minister. Congregation attending a confirmation service.*

This choir platform was about as high as the balcony at the back of the church. The communion railing stood on the floor quite close to the altar platform. There were two aisles instead of the one of today. Rev. Fridrik Hallgrimsson did not care for this arrangement, and in 1905, it is recorded that the "Bandalags Felag" asked Arni Sveinson to meet with Byring Hallgrimson to discuss making changes. Subsequently one large platform was built across the entire east end of the church. On Easter Sunday, April 23, of the same year, 32 young people were confirmed and 200 members went to the altar for

communion.

Arni Sveinson has mentioned twice in his diary, the "Bandalags Felag", which is a young people's organization within the church.

On July 28, 1935, a celebration was held to mark the 50th anniversary of Frelsis Congregation. After a short service in the church, lunch was served to a large crowd in Argyle Hall. Rev. B.B. Jonsson was invited to be guest speaker.

*Organists:*

Mr. Jon Fridfinson until 1905 Hilla Johnson until 1965, except for a few years when Lauga Johannesson was organist.

Rev. Hafsteinn Pjetursson 1889-1893

Rev. John Clemens 1896-1901

Rev. Fridrik Hallgrimsson 1903-1925

Rev. K.K. Olafson 1925-1930

Rev. Egill Fafnis 1930 - 1945

Rev. Eric Sigmar 1947-1951

Rev. Johann Frederickson 1951-1957

Rev. O. Donald Olsen 1958-1961

Rev. Kristjan Robertsson 1962-1965

1966-1968

Rev Morris Green 1968-1972

Rev. Al Pope 1972-1975

Rev. Larry Glaeske 1976-1981

In 1965, with membership down, it was decided that Frelsis congregation merge with Immanuel in Baldur. By this time Frelsis was the oldest-standing Icelandic Lutheran Church in Canada. Its members wanted to preserve the church on its original site in memory of the pioneers. Immanuel congregation did not want the burden of an extra'church building, so it was agreed, under the guidance of Rev. Robertsson, that a committee of Frelsis members be set up to decide the fate of the church. Encouraged by many interested people, the committee requested that the Manitoba Government have the church declared an historic site. This request was granted. At a special church service on Sunday, Sept. 15, 1974, the Government of Manitoba assumed custodianship of Frelsis, to maintain it as a memorial to the Icelanders who contributed so much to this province and to this country.

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Quote from the "Baldur Gazette", April 27, 1905 - "Easter Sunday service in the Grund Lutheran Church was beyond doubt the most largely attended country service throughout

the province. The service was held from 12 noon until 3 p.m., conducted by the Rev. Fredrick Hallgrimson, pastor. 126 rigs, of which one-half were democrats and wagons, were counted - making an estimated attendance of fully 600 people. The church was crowded to overflowing, many standing outside. The Easter service was made the occasion for the confirmation of a large class of candidates, 33 in number, who were duly received into full church membership. A number of children were also baptized. Following the service, there was a celebration of the Holy Communion."