

MINNESOTA HISTORIC PROPERTIES INVENTORY FORM

**MAR 15 1982**

HISTORIC NAME: Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Bethlehem Church COUNTY: Aitkin

CURRENT NAME: Bethlehem Lutheran Church CITY/TWP.: Nordland Twp.

LEGAL DESC.: Commencing at the SW corner of the SE $\frac{1}{2}$  of the SW $\frac{1}{2}$  of Sec. 10, T46N, R26W running thence West 138', thence North 398', thence East 417', thence South 208 $\frac{1}{2}$ ', thence West 170', thence South 189 $\frac{1}{2}$ ', thence West 109' to place of beginning ADDRESS: Township road east of County Road 12  
*04 SR 12*

CLASSIFICATION:	CONDITION:	SIGNIFICANCE:	THEME/S:
Building <u>X</u>	Excellent _____	Local <u>X</u>	Primary Settlement
Structure _____	Good <u>X</u>	State _____	Secondary Religion
Object _____	Fair _____	National _____	Others _____
District _____	Deteriorated _____		

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC: Yes X No \_\_\_\_\_ Restricted X PRESENT USE: Church

VISIBLE FROM THE ROAD: Yes X No \_\_\_\_\_

OCCUPIED: Yes X No \_\_\_\_\_

DATE CONSTRUCTED: 1897 ORIGINAL USE: Church

ORIGINAL OWNER: Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Bethlehem Church ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Unknown

OWNER'S NAME AND ADDRESS: Bethlehem Lutheran Church Glen Route, Box 115 Aitkin, MN 56431	ACREAGE: Less than one acre _____ approx. 3 acres _____
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LOCAL CONTACT/ORG.: Aitkin County Historical Society 316 1st Avenue NE, Aitkin, MN 56431	UTM REFERENCE: Glen MN Quad. 7.5 15 / 452685 / 5146920
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FORM PREPARED BY: Mark Haidet

DATE: February 1981

**DESCRIPTION:**

The Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Bethlehem Church is situated in a picturesque forested setting north of a township road in Nordland Township. The church sits in an opening among the trees and is accessible by a long driveway.

The church's simple and restrained Gothic design is characteristic of many Swedish Lutheran Churches throughout rural Minnesota. The rectangular clapboard structure rests on a stone foundation and is covered by a steep gable roof broken only by a chimney on the west side. Double-hung 5/4 light windows with pointed upper sash are evenly spaced on the east and west facades. A semipolygonal apse is located at the rear of the structure. The building's dominant feature is an extended square tower surmounted by a louvered belfry crowned by an octagonal spire. The principal entrance, a double door with arched transom is located at the base of the tower. A large circular window is situated above the entrance. Decorative shingles adorn the tower's upper portion.

A c. 1938 gable-roofed kitchen is located on the east side. Two recent frame outhouses and storage shed are also located on the property.

The simple interior retains much of its original integrity.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

The Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Bethlehem Church is significant for its association with the substantial Swedish settlement in the hilly lake region south of Aitkin. During the 1880s and 1890s, an influx of Swedish immigrants arrived in Aitkin County and many settled in the rugged lake region between Lake Mille Lacs and Aitkin. By 1900 the townships south of Aitkin (Farm Island, Hazelton, and Nordland) had attained 75% of their peak year population of 1508 (1940), and the Swedes, numbering 979, comprised Aitkin County's largest ethnic group. The Bethlehem Church, the second of five area churches to affiliate with the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod, was organized in 1891 three years after organization of the region's first Swedish Lutheran congregation. The present church structure, erected in 1897 with donated labor and materials, served as the religious and social center of the surrounding community well into the twentieth century. Today, the church continues to serve the religious needs of the area's inhabitants many of whom are descendants of the region's original settlers. The building, the second oldest extant church edifice in Aitkin County, is considered the best representative structure associated with Swedish immigration because of its physical integrity and longevity of service to the community.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

Bethlehem Lutheran Church 50th Anniversary Program, 1941. (Copy in Minnesota SHPO files).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

for Keeper Helena Lyman  
1/19/89

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

*Corrected*  
*1/25/89*

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**Note: These changes apply to  
Swedish Evangelical Lutheran  
Bethlehem Church in Aitkin County,  
Minnesota.**

**REFERENCE NUMBER:** 82002928

**STATE:** MINNESOTA

**COUNTY:** Aitkin

**RESOURCE NAME (HISTORIC):** Bethlehem Lutheran Church

*Current Name on map.*

**CITY:**

**VICINITY OF:** Aitkin

*- OK by Rd. map*

**ADDRESS:** off Co. Hwy. 12

*- OK by map.*

**CERTIFICATION DATE:**

**REMOVED DATE:**

**COMMENTS:**

*Nina M. Archabal*

**Nina M. Archabal  
State Historic Preservation Officer**

**JUN 17 1989**

**Date**