

[grandforksherald.com](http://grandforksherald.com)

## 70 years of Smorgasbord: Red Lake Falls church celebrates 70 years of food and friends

*Sydney Mook*

4-5 minutes



**i** Marie Seeger and Pastor Gary Graff stand in front of the serving table at the 70th Annual Smorgasbord on Saturday at the Bethany Lutheran Church in Red Lake Falls, Minn. Sydney Mook / Grand Forks Herald1 / 3

RED LAKE FALLS, Minn. — The Bethany Lutheran Church celebrated 70 years of Smorgasbord Saturday evening and Marie Seeger has been there for every one.

The 97-year-old Seeger has been a part of the church's annual gathering since the beginning. The Smorgasbord brings together church and community members every year to share classic Scandinavian dishes like lefse, Swedish meatballs and lutefisk, all while having fun and sharing stories.

The first Smorgasbord was held in December 1948. The Lutheran church was new in town with very few members, so the idea came about to organize a dinner as a way to introduce themselves and their Scandinavian food to the community, Seeger said.

After getting together members' families to help cook, the small congregation had three long serving tables filled with food and fed around 100 people.

"(The woman who started the Smorgasbord) had every food that every Scandinavian had ever made," she said with a small chuckle. "... But it's a tradition that's been established and we've had it every year since."

Although the Smorgasbord has moved locations and dates over the years, the heart of it has never changed.

Vicki Duden, the chairperson for this year's Smorgasbord, has been helping out for about a decade since she and her family first joined the church. It's tradition for families who have joined the church to enjoy the first Smorgasbord, she said and after that everyone pitches in to do something. The students who attend the church's youth group also help serve as a way to give back, she said.

"I think it's been a good thing for our church," Seeger said.

Seeger has helped with the Smorgasbord every year since it began, whether its preparing the food or designing the hand-painted aprons for the servers and other helpers to wear. Her

favorite food is the lutefisk casserole that is made every year.

"It always seems to get people together and have fun," she said.

Seeger's son, who is now 70, was just eight weeks old at the first dinner and often brags that he has been to every celebration as well, Duden chuckled.

It hasn't always been easy, though. There's been rain, snowstorms and even one year when they cooked outside with sand flying all over the place, Seeger said as she and other church members reminisced about Smorgasbords past.

"You think back and we struggled on sometimes but then next year came whether it was snow or sand, and then all of the sudden it's 70 years," she said.

The Smorgasbord is much more than a meal, Duden noted. It's a time for people to come together, bond and have fun.

"For me, Smorgasbord is a party and you need to have the parties and have a good time together and enjoy each other because oftentimes a church is there for somebody during their worst times ... so it's nice to be able to enjoy each other and like each other, so that way when times are tough you know how to pull together," she said.



[Sydney Mook](#)

Sydney Mook has been covering higher education at the Grand Forks Herald since May 2018. She previously served as the

multimedia editor and cops, courts and health reporter at the Dickinson Press from January 2016 to May 2018. She graduated from the University of South Dakota with a bachelor's degree in journalism and political science in three and half years in December 2015. While at the USD, she worked for the campus newspaper, The Volante, as well as the television news show, Coyote News. She also interned at South Dakota Public Broadcasting and spent the summer before her senior year interning in Fort Knox for the ROTC Cadet Summer Training program. In her spare time, Sydney enjoys cheering on the New York Yankees and the Kentucky Wildcats, as well as playing golf. If you've got an idea for a video be sure to give her a call!

(701) 780-1134