

OUR HISTORY AT ST. STEPHEN'S

By Nelvin Yeakel, St. Stephen's Archivist

The Year 1928

Imagine, if you will, going back to St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in the year 1928. Our church is in its 31st year of existence. Our minister is Rev. D. H. Frederick, who has been pastor at St. Stephen's since 1926. He is a very dedicated person, and he and his wife play a very important part in the success of St. Stephen's.

In 1928, the church has a membership of 274 people. Going over the membership list, I found an interesting count that was common in that time period and so different today. Of the 274 church members, 16 lived outside of Bethlehem, 10 lived in Bethlehem, but on the outskirts. The remaining 248 members all lived within walking distance of St. Stephen's, in areas like Washington Avenue, Center Street, High Street, Elizabeth Avenue, Chelsea Avenue, etc. Today, I doubt if we could find 16 members living within walking distance of the church.

The church in 1928 was very active for young and old. Almost every day of the week the church was being used.

- Senior Catechetical Class was held on Mondays at 7:30pm with 14 students.
- On Tuesdays, Boy Scout Troop 16 with 24 boys met at 7:15pm. (Interesting side note: the Scoutmaster then was Earl Schaeffer who later became Mayor of Bethlehem.)
- On the third Tuesday of the month, at 7:15pm, Luther League also met at the church with an enrollment of 16 youth.
- Wednesdays belonged to The Ladies Aid Society, meeting at 2:00pm. They had a group of 13 women who quilted 13 comforters and quilts that year.
- On Thursdays, the Junior Catechetical Class met at 7:30pm and had a class of 11.
- On the first and third Thursdays of the month, the Women's Missionary Society met with 38 members.
- The 22 members of the Junior Choir rehearsed on Fridays at 7:00pm and the Senior Choir, with 21 members, rehearsed at 8:00pm.

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- On Sundays, the Sunday School met at 9:30am with an enrollment of 263 and an average weekly attendance of 167. The Sunday worship service was at 10:30am and Vespers were held at 7:30pm.

Our Vacation Bible School was as popular then as now. It was held July 2 – July 20 (3 weeks), 9:00am – 11:30am, and had an enrollment of 46 children.

The following year, 1929, will bring big changes in America, and at St. Stephen's, with the "Crash of '29" and the beginning of "The Great Depression."

By the way, the year 1928 has a rather special meaning to me – it's the year of my birth!