

## Ministers @ Bethesda Mennonite Church

Benjamin Ratzlaff		1874
Heinrich Epp		1874-1882
Isaac Peters		1875-1882
Gerhard Epp		1875-1893
Cornelius Wall		1878-1882
Johann Kliewer		1878-1883
Peter J. Friesen		1883-1909
Cornelius Regier		1883-1885
H.H. Epp		1883-1924
Jacob Friesen		1886-1892
Peter H. Pankratz		1891-1933
Deitrich Peters		1891-1904
F.G. Pankratz		1908-1910
H.D. Epp		1908-died February 23, 1970
Johann F. Epp		1916-1934
A.W. Friesen		1916-1947
Johann F. Epp		1947-1948
Arnold Nickel		1948-1956
John Thiessen		Interim 1950 and 1963
Arthur Isaak		1952-1955
John Gaeddert	1	1955-1965
J.R. Duerksen		1956-1958
Bernard Ratzlaff		1959 Summer
Paul Isaak		1959-1965
Walter H. Dyck		1965-1971
Abraham Krause		1965-1976
Benjamin Sawatzky		1972-1979
Mahendra Kumer		1975 Summer
Waldo Kaufman		1975-1978
Russell L. Mast		1977-1979
Ward W. Shelly		1979-1982
Brian Epp		1979-1996
Albert H. Epp		1981-1990
Jason Martin		Interim 1990-1992
Joel Schroeder		1991-2004
John L. Yoder-Schrock		1992-1999
Marcia Yoder-Schrock		1992-1999
Weldon Martens		1995-2010
George Kaufman		2000- 2007
Jeff Selzer		2005-2008
Rachel Friesen, Interim		2007-2008
Cathy Wismer, Lay Minister		2008-2009
Vernelle Epp, Lay Minister		2008-2009
<b>Andrea Wall</b>		<b>2009-Present</b>

**Jim Voth**

Miriam Book

James Lapp

Sherm Kauffman

Thayne Sparke, Lay Minister

Luann Yutzy

**Seth Miller**

**2009-Present**

Interim 2011 – September 23, 2012

Interim 2011 – September 23, 2012

Interim 2012/2013 - November 5, 2012 – August 21, 2013

Offsite Consultant through 2/11/2015

Interim May 15, 2014 – August 15, 2014

Interim August 1, 2014 – December 31, 2014

**July 1, 2015 - Present**

*Upon request of the 125th Anniversary Committee of Bethesda Mennonite Church, this paper was written and read to the congregation on July 18, 1999 by Elmer L. Friesen.*

When our forefathers and their families arrived in America and in this part of Nebraska in the fall of 1874, they began to have worship services immediately in this new land. But not until 1882, 18 years later did they begin to have a Sunday school. Why wait so long? I really don't know, except that many held to the concept that only ministers should teach and interpret the scriptures. Also, only ministers should pray audibly in church services. This was not unique with the Mennonite Church, but also many other denominations were of the same opinion.

In 1892 the first Sunday school met with 60 young people as students with four teachers, but not in the church building, as there was yet much opposition to such a new venture. They met in a country school house, District 31, which was located across the road from where Burton Peters now lives. Less than two years later, the Sunday school sessions moved into the church building, meeting on Sunday afternoons. It was not much later when the Sunday school sessions met in the morning before the worship service, and it has been a strong arm of the church ever since.

When our people came to America they brought with them the German language. The High German, as we generally refer to it, was the language of the church. The ethnic Low German dialect was the conversational language and used almost exclusively in the home.

My first recollection of attending Sunday school was as a pre-schooler, when I only knew the Low German, as did all the other pupils. My earliest teachers were Tina Epp and Helen Ratzlaff, who gave each of us a small picture card 3" X 5" on every Sunday morning with a scripture verse under the picture which was in the High German language. The teachers would then tell us about the picture and explain the verse underneath it in the Low German. As we got a little older, the teachers used the High German in their teaching, the language which was used exclusively in all of the singing, reading of the scriptures, praying etc. We slowly began to

understand more and more of the language.

I do not recollect exactly, but it must have been in the late 1920's when an option was given for young people to attend Sunday School classes taught in the English language in the "Fortbildungs Schule", commonly referred to as the college building located just to the east of the church building. The English language was introduced into all of the church services, including Sunday school, as years went by. This was a gradual process as there were a few classes who used the German language as late as in the 1970's. The first adult class for men and women combined was introduced in the late 1940's for couples who had babies and young children. Earlier, all classes, from the youngest to the oldest, were segregated as to gender.

When the congregation moved into the sanctuary built in 1931, the pre-school and youngsters of elementary age had their classes in the basement of the building.

All Sunday school sessions began at 9:30 a.m. The adult department began their period by having a song director suggest a number to be sung, after which opportunity was given for the people in the audience to select the following two numbers. The "Evangeliums-Lieder Buch" was used until about 1942 when the "Mennonite Hymnary" was officially adopted as the regular song book of the church. As song director for a period of time, I had to be very careful when the number acht und Siebzig was suggested that it was 78 not 87. The singing was followed by a prayer and a few introductory remarks about the lesson of the morning by the Superintendent, after which the teachers took over the discussion with their individual classes. People went to sit in the area where their classes were to be when they came into the building, so there need not be much moving around. After about a 30 minute class session the Superintendent would again appear on the chancel and close the Sunday school period with a congregational song and a prayer. This prayer was spoken by someone who had been contacted by the Superintendent, often a visitor.

The children and young people came from the basement at this time to join their parents or find a seat in the balcony for the worship service that followed. This practice was continued until we moved into the present sanctuary in May of 1958, at which time the worship service and Sunday school sessions were reversed in order as we have them today.

In closing I would like to make two statements:

The Sunday school has been a place where many have been introduced to the Anabaptist faith, as the scriptures teach, and where they have found and established their faith in Christ as Savior and Lord.

Secondly, even though most of our parents and grandparents, particularly of those my age, have passed from this life, we need to recognize and honor them for having been so submissive in sacrificing their German language to the English language for the sake of the next generation. This was not easy for them.