

July 2026, Volume 49, Number 8

BIBLE SCHOOL THROUGH THE YEARS

Let's take a stroll down memory lane. Will you come along? This excursion began on the heels of this year's Vacation Bible School when a small group of individuals met together at Paul and Barb Lehman's house. The conversation turned towards Bible School and the wonderful news about how many children had attended all across our area, the memory work that was accomplished, as well as some children making decisions for Christ. It didn't take long for memories to begin surfacing of a past era when life somehow seemed simpler. You might know them as "the good ol' days".

Perhaps you are not aware of the fact that Bible School, specifically Community Bible School, has quite a precedence in our community, far exceeding its resurgence in 2013. The Adams County Witness reported in 1921 that a five-week Summer Bible School for children between the ages of 6 and 11 would begin on July 5. The classes were held in the various basement rooms of the Mennonite Church and the subject matter covered Bible history, biography, geography, and memorization of special chapters and verses. Believe it or not, tuition was charged: \$2 per child plus a small sum of 25-50 cents for books. God put it on the hearts of some at that time, and they believed that if this work proved worthwhile it could become a regular part of the church work. The article stated that the plan for this work was largely adopted from a similar endeavor conducted by Dr. A.L. Latham of the Third Presbyterian Church of Chester, PA.

There were four teachers that year: Miss Sybilla Sprunger: Kindergarten, Mrs. Leona Liechty: 1st grade, Miss Elda Sprunger: 2nd & 3rd grades, and Miss Zilla Soldner: 4th & 5th grades. Mr. Benj Sprunger and Mr. A.J. Moser each transported about a dozen children who lived northwest and southeast of town. A number of farmers arranged for their own children, yet a large number of families remained unable to send theirs. It was the hope that other routes would eventually be established for transportation. Prior to its start, a drinking fountain was attached to the pump to simplify the question of drinking water. "Many of the children come barefooted and all seem to enjoy it," recounted a teacher.

At the conclusion of this *first* Summer Bible School, it was reported in the newspaper to have been very successful with a large number attending. In fact, 155 ended up coming on opening day, which was 21 more than had enrolled. Immediately after the close of the last day a picture was taken of the pupils (*I wonder if anyone in our congregation has this*

update

photograph?). "Then the children marched to 'Lehman's grove' where they roasted wieners and ate ice cream. The afternoon was spent playing games and contests and singing."

Little did those pioneers of that initial Bible School realize their timely acts of obedience would surge well into the following decades. By 1925 what had been organized by the Mennonite Church became known as the Berne Union S.B.S., and a great number of churches encouraged parents to send their children. That year's attendance at the picnic held at "Lehman's grove" exceeded all expectations. It was described in a news article as one of the outstanding social events of the season. The exact number of people who were present wasn't known, but, "the grove was thronged with families and automobiles. There was a sufficiency of eats and an overabundance of sandwiches. Twelve hundred cones and about a hundred fifty dishes of ice cream were served." A photograph of the children was taken and a proof was later displayed at the Fair Store, where anyone desiring a picture could place orders in the store. The pictures sold for \$1 each.

It seems for many years that followed, the ministerial association (perhaps not yet named such) plus other men from the churches made up the Summer Bible School Board. Teachers and assistants were appointed by a committee of pastors. Typically there were two, and sometimes three, sections of each grade. The younger classes received assistants, but the older kids had just one teacher—the same teacher—for the duration of S.B.S. There was a period of time that teachers received payment: \$2 a day and assistants \$1 a day. By 1934 there were 400+ pupils attending. That year's annual picnic was held on a Thursday afternoon at what is now called Lehman Park. A basket dinner was featured at noon. "Sweltering heat cut the attendance appreciably and no program was carried out for the children." Commencement exercises took place at the Mennonite Church on Friday evening with 31 boys and girls receiving diplomas.

1950 saw continued wide community support as the Berne Witness reported that Berne's Union Summer Bible School "is an institution of long standing and has served this community well. It is a vital part of our educational system." Already for many years the S.B.S. had been held in the public school and bus routes had been organized to cover the quadrants around Berne, so that every child in the community could attend. School buses transported the boys and girls for many years. Paul Lehman remembers when he was a kid walking to State Road 218 every morning, about a half mile

from his house, to get on the bus for Bible School. Particularly interesting in 1950 was that a tape recording was made of the final program where 50 boys and girls (grade 9) received their diplomas. It was broadcast over WOWO the following Sunday afternoon.

Kenlyn Sprunger voiced her opinion that, although she enjoyed it, five weeks was too long. Certainly, she wasn't alone. As time marched on things changed. The inclusion of children going into kindergarten happened in the 50's and by the end of that decade those who graduated were now going into grade 8. A shift happened in 1954 when a new curriculum was adopted and the school was shortened to four weeks. That year and subsequent years S.B.S. enrollment soared to over 700 students! Some 23 churches were represented in attendance. Rev. C.A. Schmid, one of its longtime leaders, is quoted as saying, "We have heard many testimonies by individuals as to the importance of this school in their later life." Children may not have always thought him to be the "most vibrant of fellows", but he addressed the chapel gatherings for many years.

Lana Schwartz could recall those mornings sitting on the bleachers in the gym for chapel. "We didn't have all the variety of specials like today. Mainly, it was a time of learning about the Bible and memorization. We had one teacher and pretty much remained in one classroom the entire morning." She continued with a chuckle, "There wasn't necessarily a snack each day, but one time I do remember being told to lower our heads onto the desks and close our eyes for a surprise. When signaled to look up we found a graham cracker lying there."

In 1956 Jane Mosser began her first year of Summer Bible School, which started one week after she completed first grade. "It's difficult to remember that far back but certain memories stand out. I remember all the local churches were involved and we met at the old Berne High and Elementary School. Our teachers were from local congregations. I loved being with my school friends, but it was especially fun with my friends that went to other churches and schools. Our classes were in the morning, Monday through Friday, spanning five weeks. Later years it was decreased to four weeks. I still remember my mother telling me that her Bible School lasted nine weeks!

We had Bible stories and worksheets. We learned the books of the New and Old Testament in a rhythmic way pronouncing each syllable: Gen-i-sis, Ex-o-dus, and to this day I often use it to quickly find a book of the Bible. Bible memory was a large focus, as we learned to hide God's Word in our young hearts. I received a star sticker when I recited it correctly to my teacher. I didn't realize at that time the impact it would have on my adult life. I can still remember many Bible verses which were all memorized in the King James Version. Today I can only quote them in the King James Version.

The chapel was fun and our theme song was sung at the beginning of every chapel: 'We love our summer Bible School with all its work and play.' The last day of Bible

School concluded with a trip to Lehman Park. We had fun playing and were treated with potato chips and small prefilled cups of vanilla ice cream that we could eat with a little wooden spoon. Summer Bible School has had a lasting effect on my life, which I will always cherish."

Floyd Liechty also has many memories of Bible School. He shared, "Truthfully, I didn't mind Bible School because it frankly was my only social time during the summer away from the farm and all its duties." He remembers quite well his seventh grade year. "There were so many verses to memorize. Because we lived on a farm, I had little time to memorize [or so he thought]. We would get up in the morning, milk the cows, go to Bible School, come home at noon, cut hay for baling the next day, bale the hay from the day before, milk the cows, put the bales in the hay mow, and then go to bed. The next day we would get up and do the same all over again.

Well, things didn't go so great when at the halfway point of Bible School Mom received the mail and found I had gotten a 'pink slip' in Bible Memorization. For those of you who remember Hazel, that didn't go over so well! When she inquired 'why' I told her the rotation of each day as above. I asked her when I was supposed to memorize verses when there was no time to do so. The result was that Mom wrote down the verses on a piece of paper, and I memorized them in the hay mow, waiting for each bale to come up on the elevator! We have been blessed with Bible School and our church. It's where we learned the majority of the verses we know today. — Shared in memory of my mom, the original Energizer Bunny!"

Eventually, Berne's annual Union Summer Bible School shortened to three weeks in 1963 after many had expressed themselves in favor of the shorter term. It continued to be held in the Berne-French school building. A few years later the name changed to Berne Summer Bible School and other churches began to offer their own versions at different times. Attendance in 1971 was 285 and it was the first year to be held at First Mennonite and present-day Cross Community Church. By the late 70's Summer Bible School had become a joint effort of First Mennonite Church, Trinity United Methodist and Cross United Church of Christ. It was held at our church (K-6) and the Cross church (7-8). In 1980 it remained a cooperative effort, but was eventually held exclusively at our church. Fourteen graduated that year.

In 1984 the shift from "Berne" to "First Mennonite" Bible School occurred and it remained a two-week endeavor, welcoming everyone in the community to attend. The special offering project for that year was for the financial support of Tad and Barb Wulliman's four children, as their family would be leaving the U.S. soon after Bible School for Christian service in Manila, Philippines where they served for many years. Barb recounts, "Summer Bible School in Berne has really changed through the years but for as long as I can remember there was always an exciting competition between the girls and boys to bring their offerings for a particular project. After being involved in Bible School, and even serving several years as a co-director, it was humbling for our family to be recipients of the offering."

Perhaps these recollections have stirred some of your own memories. Whichever decade you claim as your own, take a moment to stop and thank God for the countless individuals who gave their time, talent, and treasure, not to mention prayers, so that you could have opportunities to learn about God's Word and hide it in your heart.

This continues in 2026, OVER A CENTURY after that initial step of faith. Times have continued to change and it's definitely no longer the *main* social event for kids, but the heart of those leading our present-day Vacation Bible School agrees with this sentiment from 1921: "The Bible can become the Book of Life to all the children if they are held up in prayer. The knowledge obtained can be used of the Holy Spirit in power if the church, the parents and the instructors work with obedience, energy, faith and love." Amen. †

(More Bible School memories would be appreciated for use in the future, no matter your age! Submissions are welcome and can be sent to Debby at rebreg71@msn.com)

WANTED/IN SEARCH OF...

Pastor Craig Maven is retiring his position at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church in Virginia after 17 years. His wife, Wendy, has asked that our church members share any photos they may have of him during his ministry here. If you find some, please bring them to the church office to be scanned by August 1. Also, shhh, this is a surprise! †

HOMEGOING

Twyla Jo Sprunger, 76, of Berne, Indiana, passed away Sunday morning, July 12, 2026, at Swiss Village in Berne, Indiana. She was born on February 12, 1950, in Decatur, Indiana, to the late David W. and Verna Louise (Nussbaum) Sprunger. Twyla was a member of the First Mennonite Church in Berne, Indiana, where she helped in the Children's Church and sang in the Chancel Choir. Twyla was a 1969 graduate of South Adams High School. She began her working career with Adams Wells Training Center in Vera Cruz, then Berco in Berne, EP Graphics for 23 years, DRG for five years, and the Edelweiss Flower Shop for 15 years.

In her spare time, she loved reading and completing cross-stitching. Twyla truly cherished spending time with family and friends. Survivors include her sister, Ruth (Von) Bixler of Decatur, Indiana; sister, Judie (Terry) Fralick of Convoy, Ohio; sister, Jean Sprunger of Berne, Indiana; brother, Rick (Sue) Sprunger of Berne, Indiana; seven nieces and nephews, Bobbi (Robert) Reichhart, Kristina (Phil) Kunes, Nathan Sprunger, Amanda (Andrew) Caffee, Loree (Kyle) Sprunger, Tim (Katie) Fralick, and Jon (Amanda) Fralick; and 12 great-nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by an infant brother, Wayne Sprunger. †

AMONG OUR PEOPLE

Malcolm Stauffer had knee surgery at Parkview.

Connie Yoder had knee surgery at Parkview.

Louise Lehman had hip surgery at Lutheran. †

PLEASE JOIN US

June 21, 2026, marks 15 years of ministry for the Cline family with Freedom International Ministries in the Dominican Republic. God's provision and continued faithfulness are evident in their lives and in the many lives that have been impacted through the ministry of Freedom. To celebrate this milestone, we want to gather together and praise the Lord for all the great things He has done. You are invited to join us on **Saturday, August 1, from 2:30-4:30 p.m. in the Family Life Center.** It's going to be a time full of reflection, laughter, gratitude, worship and more. God deserves all the glory, and we are excited for the opportunity to come together. Please join us as we celebrate the goodness of God! †

KIDS VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Once the 4-H Fair and Swiss Days are upon us, we know how quickly time flies. School will already be in session by the printing of next month's *Update*. As summer winds down please consider the following spots that remain open in the children's department:

- * Preschool children's church teacher
- * Preschool children's church helper
- * Elementary children's church teacher
- * Ages 4-Kindergarten Sunday school teacher

Each of these would be scheduled just once a month. If you feel nudged by the Holy Spirit, or if you are at all curious about what this entails, please talk to Chris Hyman for a description of duties and/or to observe those already serving. You can see if it would be a good fit for you. †

BOOKMARKS

Following are four selections recently added to our church library collection:

- ♦ *Open the Flood Gates: Welcoming Grief into Our Seasons of Loss* by Cecil, Cheryl A. – 248 CEC
- ♦ *Stuck in Space: An Astronaut's Hope Through the Unexpected* by Wilmore, Barry – B WIL

"Before commanding the first crewed flight of Boeing's Starliner, Captain Wilmore had already walked through trials that formed a deep confidence in God's providence. When this mission turned into an unexpected stay aboard the International Space Station, he wasn't left scrambling for hope. He continued trusting the same sovereign God.

- ♦ *This Light of Mine: Living Like Jesus in a Non-Jesus World* by Stowell, Joseph M. – 248 STO
"Drawing from the Scriptures and the life of Jesus, Stowell provides a hope-filled, courageous response that empowers us to light up the darkness by living like Jesus in a non-Jesus world'."
- ♦ *Hitler's Cross: How the Cross Was Used to Promote the Nazi Agenda* by Lutzer, Erwin W. – 261.7 LUT †

Update is the publication of the First Mennonite Church, Berne, Indiana. It is published once a month to keep our people informed about the news and events in the church.

Senior Pastor.....Jeff Linthicum
Editor.....Debby Neuenschwander
Among Our People.....Jim Schwartz



First Mennonite Church

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
AUGUST 2026 						1
2 10AM: "Spiritual Gift Review" - Pastor Jeff Linthicum 6:30PM: Revelation 18 - Pastor Jim Schwartz Offering for Lancaster Conference	3	4 6:30PM: Sunshine Hour	5 7PM: Genesis 50 and Exodus Intro Pastor Jim Schwartz	6	7	8
9 10AM: "Instead Seek" (Matthew 7:7-12) - Pastor Jeff Linthicum 5PM: Back-to School Picnic at Lehman Park Offering	10 	11 6:30PM: Sunshine Hour	12 7PM: Exodus 1: Bondage and Affliction Pastor Jim Schwartz	13	14	15
16 10AM: "Careful the Path" (Matthew 7:13-14) - Pastor Jeff Linthicum 6:30PM: Revelation 19 - Dr. Kent Lehman Offering	17 7PM: MINISTRIES COUNCIL MEETING	18 6:30PM: Sunshine Hour	19 7PM: Exodus 2: Moses - Birth, Flee to Midian Pastor Jim Schwartz	20	21	22
23 10AM: "Careful of False Prophets" (Matthew 7:15-20) - Pastor Jeff Linthicum 6:30PM: Mikaela Fox sharing Offering	24	25 6:30PM: Sunshine Hour	26 Wednesday Evening Kick-Off	27	28	29
30 10AM: "Careful of False Disciples" (Matthew 7:21-23) - Pastor Jeff Linthicum 4PM: Worship Service At Enlive Healthcare Offering	31					