



ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH
201 S. MAIN ST.
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Chapter One: What We Remember

A look into the past of any organization or institution will certainly be tinged with sentimentality, wistful longing, and perhaps even grief for what has changed or what has been lost. So it is with our memories of St. Paul Lutheran Church--"Glatfelter's Church," the church on the Codorus modeled after the great cathedrals of Europe, the church on the National Registry of Historic Sites--once a hub of activity for the congregation and the community. A sense of nostalgia--the desire to "return home"--shapes our story as we recall a vibrant, welcoming place of worship filled with families, active volunteers, multiple choirs, and well-attended, well-staffed Sunday School and children and youth programs (Cradle Roll, SPARK, SPY).

The pastors established strong relationships with the congregation (youth, in particular) and community members, many of whom were their neighbors. Their enthusiasm and personal involvement encouraged others to participate in the two worship services, committees (with a regularly scheduled all-committee night), education programs, and special events. They taught confirmation classes, led adult programs such as Word and Witness, and developed expectations for the congregation (assisted many times by seminarians). A sense of quiet reverence pervaded the services of traditional liturgy (though we never knew quite what to expect during those children's sermons on the steps of the nave).

A passionate, enthusiastic lay leader promoted mission work by St. Paul members, who traveled to Montana (Rocky Boy), Mexico, and other locations in need. Outreach efforts included Habitat for Humanity projects, meals at the York Rescue Mission, sponsorship of a child by Sunday School classes, quilts sent to other countries, the CROP Walk, Appalachian Outreach, and others. In addition, members of St. Paul helped families from Poland and Vietnam relocate to this area. Visits from missionaries sparked interest in these efforts.

Undoubtedly, the financial support of P. H. Glatfelter (who pledged 90% of the cost of building the church in 1895) allowed St. Paul Lutheran to focus on mission work and community outreach without financial stress. In the 1980s Glatfelter support ended; yard sales and cookouts provided mission funding and the budget depended much more heavily on envelope donations.

Affected, of course, by personal experience, our individual memories of St. Paul's past combine to reflect an appreciation of and desire for tradition, enthusiastic and dedicated involvement of the staff and congregation, and a strong community role for St. Paul Lutheran Church.

Chapter Two: What We Experience Now

Throughout the entire 20th century, St. Paul Lutheran Church stood as a community landmark—the cathedral-style church across from the mill in Spring Grove. With the brownstone and beautiful rose window restored and the Legacy Garden flourishing, it remains a majestic place of worship and an architectural treasure.

The 21st century has brought challenges and disappointments, along with a sense of determination to continue as a dynamic partner in the community. Traditional liturgy still characterizes worship, with everyone now participating in one service at 9 a.m., in place of the 8 and 10:30 services of the past. Communion is offered every Sunday, and some Sundays feature special settings (Land and Seasons, Bluegrass Mass).

Faith Formation follows the weekly service, though low youth attendance, an insufficient number of volunteers and inconsistent programming have become concerns. While St. Paul's recent pastor was a strong and knowledgeable preacher, he did not appear to be actively involved with the programs for the children and youth of the congregation; fortunately, the current youth leader has a dedicated (though small) following. Confirmation class size has also decreased as membership numbers have declined. The congregation has expressed concern about youth programs, as well as the need for leadership training and more positive relationships with the congregation on the part of the staff. There is a definite need for updated office equipment and techniques; for example, membership records and mailing lists must be current and easily accessible.

Mission work remains an important endeavor, especially on the local level. While overseas benevolent support and mission trips continue, the list of local activities is substantial—from the Mission House, Harvest of Hope food pantry, on-site food pantry, Adopt-a-Highway, blood drive, and Habitat for Humanity and God's Work Our Hands projects to Kennie's cookouts, quilts, Christmas caroling, and soup deliveries. St. Paul partners with other congregations for such events as the Palm Sunday Processional and Vacation Bible School. The church building provides the setting for many activities, such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, AA, Spring Grove Alumni Chorus concerts, and exercise classes, in addition to various church groups and events.

It is this building, though, that creates a financial challenge. The structure's age makes it more costly to maintain, and recent renovations have resulted in debt. While the current members are giving more than ever before (both designated and weekly giving amounts have increased), declining attendance causes financial concern.

The congregation of St. Paul has typically risen to the occasion when needs have been identified. As we face the future, we must take into account the needs of our building, our members (youth, in particular), our education programs, and our community. St. Paul's strong traditions and impressive building will require our strong and impressive support.

Chapter Three: What We Hope For In the Future

“The future of our nation depends upon the Christian training of our youth” (George Washington), and a review of the comments and concerns of our congregation indicates that the future of St. Paul Lutheran Church depends upon the involvement of and relationships with **our** youth. Nearly every category of the Transition Team conversations includes thoughts about children, youth, and families: How can we attract young families?; How can children and youth become more involved in church services and activities?; Will such groups as Cradle Roll, SPARK, and SPY be able to resume?; Will the church nursery reopen?; Will we be able to find a pastor who will build strong relationships with our younger members and motivate volunteers to staff our education programs?

In addition to an ability to connect with and encourage the participation of members of **all** ages, other characteristics of St. Paul’s “ideal” full-time pastor include a warm, welcoming, and non-judgmental personality; strong preaching, problem-solving, and organizational skills; and a willingness to become involved with the community.

Community partnerships and mission work have been listed as high-priority needs for the future. Reaching out to needy families, welcoming mill employees, connecting with groups that use the church, and making our building available to community members and additional groups are among the suggestions in the mission category. Furthermore, St. Paul’s worship services and activities can be promoted through the Chamber of Commerce, the Borough Council, the Historical Society, and the Glatfelter Foundation. As we continue our current outreach activities, we should consider opening the church building to the community more often (at lunchtime? for community breakfast and/or lunch programs? during the Christmas bazaar?), developing a community-service component for confirmed youth, and sending postcards and social media announcements to community members with information about St. Paul’s worship services and ministry.

Traditional liturgy has always characterized worship at St. Paul, and as we look to the future, many in our congregation would like to see that structure continue. Perhaps it will be possible to move once again to two services, one traditional (with the familiar hymns) and one contemporary (with greater variety in the music). Increased participation of church members—as instrumentalists (bell choir, brass, guitar, and others), vocalists (choirs of all ages), and worship assistants—would be an asset to the services.

Such participation brings us again to the topic of volunteers. We hope for a dynamic leader who will be able to create a sense of optimism and enthusiasm—an atmosphere of joy as we share our time and talents. Individual talents must be recognized and cultivated; members should be encouraged to participate in any ways they are able (whether or not they’ve had a chance to sign up for a task). A volunteer coordinator could assist the pastor in making personal contact with potential participants, some of whom may be able to complete tasks at home.

A vision of St. Paul's future includes a revitalized education program with workshops for teachers and a curriculum of our own creation, adult study programs on weekday evenings, young adult classes and seminars (preparation for married life, parenting skills, and other relevant topics), breakfast events, and special programs with featured speakers (from the congregation and/or organizations such as Leadership York). Community members will be encouraged to attend; a particular program or class might become the avenue leading to church membership.

Additional members that result in increased giving will be needed to fund a new pastor, pay off debts, and care for our aging building. As we look for ways to economize, we must also consider more convenient ways to give, opportunities for donations (in honor or memory of . . .), fundraising events, and more frequent publication of financial information.

What we hope for in the future depends a great deal upon an experienced leader who will inspire the congregation and connect with the community. Our hopes also depend upon the active involvement of all of our members as we worship together, meet the needs of our community together, and work together as stewards of our bountiful resources. In one of the Transition Team conversations, someone posed this question: If St. Paul Lutheran Church were to disappear from Spring Grove, what would be missed? Our answer to that question is expressed in our vision of St. Paul as we look toward the future: a vibrant place of worship, a moral backbone of the community, a site of educational and social activities for our members and neighbors, a welcoming church whose grand building houses a generous, loving congregation.

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