

As I was thinking about this worship and the ministry of Immanuel since it began in 1870, I thought it would be interesting to hear some stories from those who have been active in its ministry.

There is a book about this area during the late 1800s and it includes a chapter about the first gathering of Swedish Lutheran Church. The people came together to worship and then enjoyed a meal with a potluck. One part of the story has stuck with me. Somewhere in this area was live music and a little bit of street dancing. One of the older girls from Swedish Lutheran Church decided to join in the fun and danced with a young man from town. Her family was shamed because of it and if I remember correctly, she was basically disowned by them.

Over the years, some things have changed and others have not. For instance, if you want to dance, you are welcome to do so. You will not be kicked out and we can even work a little liturgical dance into our worship. The part that has not changed is the food. We still gather for potlucks. Even after 145 years, we still enjoy food and fellowship.

Our ministry here at Immanuel is wrapped up in relationships. We begin in a relationship with God and then that expands into relationships with one another.

As I begin with some of the stories, does anybody know the oldest living person who was baptized in this building. Charlotte Roberts was the first person baptized in this building in 1926. That is a pretty cool statistic and she still has fond memories about Immanuel and she does wish that she could come more often.

Dolly said that the first thing that came to her mind when I asked about Immanuel were the Christmas programs and that the church was so full that an extra row of chairs had to be set up down the aisle. She still remembers Bill Roberts, Charlotte's husband, who was Santa as he gave a sack of goodies to each child. And then the next thing she remembers is the ice storm from a few years ago. After the storm, we had two teams of people go out and help people get the damage cleaned up. Jim and Dolly were one of the recipients of that.

Mary still remembers the first Sunday they were here. Her and Bud pulled into the parking lot at the same time as Mildred and Milton Peterson who were the first to welcome them to Immanuel. The Petersons made sure that Bud and Mary were properly introduced. Once they made it to a pew, Bud patted Mary's hand and said they found a home.

Friday morning, Connie, Bob and I were unloading a number of items for the rummage sale onto the stage when I asked them to share something about Immanuel. Connie spoke right up about the rummage sale. She had not been worshiping on a regular basis but one day she received a call from Peggy asking her to help with the rummage sale.

Connie said yes and I believe she is one of the co-chairs and is very involved in the ministry of Immanuel today. We have been blessed with Connie's presence because somebody asked her to join in just one activity.

These are just some of the stories about Immanuel and they don't even scratch the surface of the ministry that happens here. This ministry began in 1870 and will continue well into the future. As we move forward, council has been discussing what that ministry might look like. We are talking about who we are and what we are about.

As you think about Immanuel and some of the stories that come from here, it is obvious that we have a good understanding of who we are. We are the Body of Christ. We are God's church here in Salina, but also part of the church throughout the world.

And that brings us to what we are about. We proclaim the gospel in both word and deed. Our goal in ministry is to invite people to work with us as we do what we do. Even today, as we celebrate, we do so as the Body of Christ and proclaim the risen Christ as a result of what God has done for us.

It is important to remember how we got here, to remember past events that have helped shape us throughout time. That is what these celebrations are all about. A remembrance of where we have been. Those chapters of our ministry have been written.

We are the subjects for the new chapters that are currently being written. What those chapters will look like, we don't really know. What we do know is that God will continue to bless us and use us in ministry.