



ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH 275TH ANNIVERSARY

History Moment: The Fire of '44

Zion Lutheran Church is currently in the midst of a challenge and its members cannot attend worship as they have been accustomed. However, this is not the first time Zion's members have faced a challenge when they couldn't worship as normal.

On the afternoon of Friday, February 4, 1944, Zion Lutheran Church was destroyed by fire. There was no definitive cause of the fire, and the church had no insurance to use to rebuild. Zion's communion service set, a few anthem books, a few small chairs, and a burned cross were all that were saved. This pewter communion had been donated by the Queen of England. (Unfortunately, these items have since disappeared from the church.) The congregation had recently made many improvements to the property including new Bibles, brass candlesticks and lighter, brass vases, hymnals, and a Service flag. At the time of the fire the congregation had 20 young men and one young woman in the military.

Determined to continue to worship, the congregation assembled at the usual time the following Sunday morning and worshipped God with the blackened and demolished remains of the house they loved before their eyes. There was but one thought in their hearts, "build again." Temporary services were held at the Oak Grove School House.

On February 20, 1944, the congregation began clearing away the wreckage for the new building. The spirit of the congregation was unshakable even while the wreckage was removed. According to government regulations as the time, the only way the congregation could rebuild was to use the old foundation. Members of the congregation soon went into the woods to

cut and haul logs to the saw mill. The members of the congregation gave the material and labor to rebuild the church. Sister congregations and other friends helped financially in the effort to build the new church. Congregation and community members donated all the lumber needed for the construction. Members were asked to bring the tools necessary for cutting the timber. Members donated the funds necessary to replace the stained-glass windows, the gold altar cross, the pulpit Bible, and the altar vases. The motto for the church was, "Our church must be rebuilt." And it was! A year before the final furnishings were installed, adequate funds were available despite the financial hardships caused by World War II.

The new building was very similar to the one that burned. Four new windows were added. The chancel furniture was constructed by some of the boys from Lexington High School in the shop in one of the young men. Apparently, the young men enjoyed working on this project. On one occasion the boys decided to have a "block fight" using scraps of wood from the furniture. One enterprising young man used the uncompleted pulpit as a fort during this battle.

On November 9, 1947 the congregation dedicated the new building. The attendance for the service was over 500, exceeding the seating and standing capacity for the building.



Sources: *The Dispatch News*, Dates unknown;
The Lexington Sun, Jan. 24, 1945;
The State, Nov. 7, 1947, Nov. 10, 1947;
Zion Lutheran Church Dedication Service Bulletin, Nov. 9, 1947;
Interview – John Drafts, Aug. 18, 2020;
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