

HISTORY MINUTE

Presented by William A. George

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Sunday School at New Jerusalem

As this is my last history minute, Ed has asked me to talk about an old friend. You are going to get a little history, but I don't really know if I am to give a eulogy or a cheerleader's pep rally! I am talking about Sunday School. As Mark Twain said when his death was reported in many newspapers, "The report of my death was an exaggeration." Can this be so for Sunday School? Sadly, in our minds, I think we know the answer. But I certainly hope I am wrong.

When we look at New Jerusalem we see that this congregation has always been about school. I didn't say Sunday School, I said school! When our ancestors arrived here they had an overwhelming need for a school. I think an argument can be made that it was more important to establish a school than a church. They had their religion but they needed a school. They had just fought for and founded a new country and the language both written and spoken was to be English. Religion was taught as well as the good old three Rs. As the area grew, new schools were founded within walking and horseback range such as the Brookland School and the George's Mill School. Now, the church needed Sunday School for religious teaching. So the glory days of Sunday School began.

And we can see those glory days in that picture down stairs posted of the Sunday School picnic in the early 1900s at the Picnic Woods. There were 60 to 70 people attending. That picture clearly reminds us in those days church and Sunday school included functions of social gatherings as well as a community center. The educational building had not yet been built, so there were classrooms downstairs (I am talking about this building, our fourth building), in the balcony tower room and in these pews here. Where we have our fellowship hall it was petitioned off with curtains, adult classes in these pews and, if I remember correctly, the teens in the tower room. In November of 1962, a dream come true for Pastor Kretsinger, the groundbreaking was held for the new educational building, completed with cornerstone in 1963. So lots of space was

created for fellowship, meetings, and Sunday School class space. Ironically, we can see many churches nationwide during the 60s and 70s build on to their sanctuaries just as in retrospect we saw Sunday School reach its peak and begin its journey down.

I encourage you, if you have not done so, to read part of my writings in the anniversary booklet that discusses my memories of Sunday School and the Sunday School parties. There I mention the teachers, the goals that we had to attain as these mementoes that I have brought along.

So what about the future? I personally believe that Sunday School, as we knew it, is a thing of the past. We are in a continuing new information distribution age. Most of the world has never seen a rotary dial telephone. Most have never seen the evening half hour (or less) of local news followed by a half hour (or less) of Walter Cronkite or Huntley/Brinkley. Our little computer toys that we see today will probably be obsolete in 18 months. The way we learn and communicate is changing constantly. The church—and I don't mean Pastor Joel or New Jerusalem or even the Lutheran Church—but the universal church has to develop how we pass on these teachings. We have to keep working and hope for the best. And our thanks to Diana Zapf as we still have a little taste of Sunday School here. But I can say for our overall Sunday School of days past, whether we start up again or not, New Jerusalem has had a darn good run! As a church our goal has to be to get this started again, in some format, in some form of communication so the children today can be taught a whole well rounded life that Christians aspire to live.