

The Fearful Epidemic

As the World War I was winding down and the Armistice ending the war was being signed, people in Middletown were more concerned with a battle of a different kind. An invasion of an epidemic known as the king of all disease, the Spanish Influenza struck Maryland at an alarming speed, the name given to this disease back then. Research shows that the War had a huge affect of the spread of it. Our military was mobile and being transported to all ports east, for shipping out to Europe, along with them arrived in the east this deadly influenza. What they believed started in Kansas had spread east and over into Europe causing what some experts to believe that millions had died of this devastating disease.

For the weak, the flu cut their victims with merciless speed; become ill one night and were dead the next day. It swept through entire families. Neighbors helped neighbors, taking every precaution to protect oneself as well as their own families, in spite of the fear they might catch the deadly disease. Maryland and Pennsylvania was hit the hardest because of being seaport towns. The flu hit Maryland about September 20, 1918 and October was the deadliest time during the influenza. There was no remedy. There was no cure. According to newspaper articles people wore white gauze face masks and drank whiskey for its medicinal value. The health departments suggested to the public to stay away from public place. In time, the epidemic took its course and ended.

In October 1918, this fearful epidemic reached the Middletown Valley of which there were numerous deaths. On October 7th of that year the State Board of Health ordered all schools, including Sunday schools, to be closed; many businesses were closed, movie theatres, theatre doors were closed. Churches were allowed to have half hour services as long as the windows were open otherwise, they were to be closed. Older members of the congregation remember hearing from their parents how the church bells rang continuously mourning the loss of another member of the community. By October 30th, the State Board of Health permitted a partial lifting of the ban against the closing of churches. On November 10th, the bans were lifted as the influenza was waning.

Rev. Veronica Webber Smith

Many of you sat and watched this young girl grow up never realizing that she like so many other young persons from our church will enter into the ministry. Unlike all the others, Veronica is our first female member of our congregation to be ordained. She not only holds this distinction, but she is our only female of Zion ordained...for now.

Zion Lutheran Church holds an important role in Veronica's family history. Her family's five generation history as church membership has been matriarchal. There were a lot of first in getting Veronica to her destiny, a first woman pastor at Zion and her mentor was Rev. Elizabeth Platz, first ordained woman in North America. Zion is the place where many of her family members were married, including her parents and her two sisters. This is also the church where Veronica and many of her family members were baptized and confirmed.

She grew up in the Broad Run area and attended Brunswick High, graduated in 2002, and then went on to earn a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Maryland. She received her Master of Divinity Degree from Lutheran Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. And ordained right here at Zion in May of 2011.

Her first call was to Grace English Evangelical Lutheran Church, in Luther-ille, Maryland where she lead the congregation through one of the roughest times. The congregation had dwindled down to less than 100 people and as a new pastor, led them with grace into a merge with another congregation.



On October 27, 2013, Veronica was transferred to the Northwest Washington Synod, accepting a call from Grace Lutheran Church in Bellevue, Washington. Welcome Home veronica!