

## *The Rumbblings of Discontent*

The years immediately following the Civil War were very difficult ones for the people of Zion but adding to these difficulties the church was facing many personality conflicts between members of the church and outside the church. The Valley register was silent on the matter for as long as it could to prevent any unfavorable publicity but eventually did so that the community would know the facts and not be a part of the gossip chain. These conflicts dragged on for many years and so fierce at times that most, if not all our pastors that served during this time resigned because of the argumentative spirit the conflicts brought out. First it was the Civil War and the slavery issue and after the war the division of where ones belief stood held a dark cloud over many relationships. Then as the years go by the conflict became over loyalties over which local bank to support. As you can see these issues had nothing to do with the running of the church but the church became the arena where this conflict played out and many of the people that were fueling the conflict were Lutherans and people of the community. As early as 1891 a rift between council, the pastor and certain members of the council became apparent. Accusations flew thick and fast at a meeting putting the pastor on the defense. The accounts of the session were stricken from the minutes. In 1906 the strife arose again. It had remained dormant for some years but was always smoldering beneath the surface and it broke forth anew and caused another serious disruption of the harmonious conditions within Zion and the poor pastor got caught in the middle of it. I have to remind you that the center of all of this disruption is a community issue and had nothing to do with the church. This dispute was like cancer it grew and groups that operated within the church were greatly affected by what was happening and dragged in. After this meeting the pastor resigned and bade his sorrowful farewell collapsing over the pulpit while pronouncing the benediction. There was true lamentation over the loss of so valuable pastor and a distinct loss to the community.

One of the bright moments in all of this is on the eve of the pastor's departure, the pastor and his family was surprised by over 200 members of the congregation bringing departing gifts. In 1908 the strife surfaces again, this time over which bank the church was going to deposit their funds. There were disputes, charges brought against illegal church elections, not because of the elections but ill feelings towards him who won the election. In 1912, so severe was the conflict that Synod came to help resolve the festering troubles but so rooted in the hearts of some was to keep the fire going. In 1914, council requested the resignation of the pastor. This pastor wrote a pamphlet on "The Troubles of the Middletown Church," in which he describes the troubles as they unfolded while he was here in Middletown. We have a copy of this pamphlet in the archives.

Why is this so important to reflect on during our anniversary? God's story with his people is remembering the God of our ancestors. Remembering such a time in Zion's history is something we might like to forget but shouldn't because this is where God meets us, when we are at our lowest. It is a reminder that the church should spill out into the community and not the other way around. God tells us to press towards peace. It is the responsibility of every believer, every member of Zion to seek and work at resolving conflicts. As believers we share common beliefs and values but it isn't easy to live in harmony because of the tensions of living in a fallen world. The world wants to conform us to its standards where God is at work transforming us to be more like Him.

