

Dear Members of the First United Presbyterian Church of Ebensburg:

My siblings and I greet you and congratulate you on your Anniversary! The Reverend Donald Shamble, Dad, served as the pastor there from January 1970 to August 1988. His sole ambition was to lead a church of his own and he felt happy, comfortable, and at home in Ebensburg.

Mom and the girls sang in the choir so they attended church sitting behind Dad when he was preaching. My brothers (John, Bob, and David) and I preferred sitting in the balcony where we would occasionally earn a few side-eye glances from him during the service.

When we think back about our time in Ebensburg, most of our memories center around the Holiday Season. We remember the times spent assembling a huge wooden wreath covered in chicken wire (so that fresh boughs of pine could be added to it) to decorate the sanctuary. Also, the advent dinners when we would make Chrismons (Christmas ornaments made of Styrofoam and decorated with glitter). Probably most prominent in our memories are the candlelight services held on Christmas Eve. There was a row of candles down the middle of the sanctuary and every attendee, old enough to be trusted with one, was given a candle. At the end of the service the candles were lit, the lights turned out, and then the congregation would sing Silent Night. My brothers and I and some of our friends would be recruited to set out luminaries (white bags that were filled first with sand then wood blocks with a hole in them that held candles). We would leave the service early to light the dozens of luminaries that lined the sidewalk in front of the church building so that when people left the building they would be greeted with rows of glowing lights. We would also put them out in front of the manse. They were especially beautiful on those Christmas Eves when we were blessed with a blanket of snow.

That wasn't the end of the Holiday Season. In January we celebrated Epiphany Sunday. The congregation would have dinner that night in the basement of the church where the highlight was dessert - a piece of spice cake. The cake took up several tables in the center of the room and was shaped like a cross. Volunteers would cut the cake as we sang Christmas carols (especially We Three Kings) and then pieces were served to the members of the congregation. What made it extra special was that hidden in the cake were several silver Celtic crosses. Whoever found one in their piece of cake got to keep it for a year. There was an extra special gold one as well. I remember the big fear was that someone would swallow one of the crosses so each year we would get the directive to check each bite before eating it just in case there was a cross in it. The crosses were all collected during the following Advent Season so that we could do it all over again.

In the spring, the church would take part in getting Pine Springs Camp ready for the summer season. Dad would lead what was known as "Work Camp" and many of us teens would spend a week at Pine Springs painting cabins, cutting trails through the woods, or working on other projects while enjoying time away from home in that pastoral environment. Then for several summers we enjoyed church picnics at the Magley's Mustard Seed Farm where we ate fresh picked corn-on-the-cob and played volleyball.

And of course, there were all the families that made up the church.

On behalf of all my brothers and sisters, congratulations on your 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and wishing you many more!

Tim Shamble