

## Les Bakke remembers Bethesda Lutheran Church

As a very young person, my family and I regularly attended the Bethesda Lutheran Church,



located about seven miles west of Newfolden, Minnesota. It was a small church, and we shared a pastor with at least one other church in Viking, Minnesota. I have very fond memories of attending. The congregation was rather old fashioned. The men and older boys sat on the right side of the church while the women and children sat on the left side. The basement was for coffee and lunch following services. The church had a furnace, well water but no indoor bathrooms. Two outhouses were located behind the church. It was the

responsibility of one of the men to come early, turn the water on and if cold start the furnace. Following services, many of the men would gather and smoke on the front steps. The congregation was comprised of all farmers from the neighborhood.

Christmas time was always the best time of the year for me. We had, of course, Christmas pageants when all the kids got a Christmas bag at the end of the service. I still remember the contents, peanuts, candy (including chocolate drops) and an apple. Summer ice cream socials were another treat. Someone would go to Nefolden and get a couple of five-gallon pails of ice cream in an insulated container. The church did not have a freezer.

I attended Sunday school each Sunday morning prior to the regular services. Since it was school, I enjoyed it. Each week, we were supposed to read a section of the catechism and parts of the Bible. Since I enjoyed reading and had a pretty good memory, the assignments were easy. I may have been the only one who did the readings. On a couple Sundays, my favorite teacher told me that I could not answer any of the questions but to let the others answer. I was perhaps 10 or 11 years old and my teacher, Anita Rokke was an adult. She was still in high school. I think I also had a crush on Anita even though she was six years older than I., Anita's family were members of Bethania Church, I'm not sure why she was teaching at Bethesda.



While in junior high school, we started confirmation classes. The classes were in Viking since the pastor also served the church there. For confirmation day, my parents bought me a new suit, I think it was the first one I owned. Sometimes, I had to wear my older brother, Pete's suit which was always too big for me. Confirmation was a series of questions from the pastor with all of us answering one or more. Although it appeared that the pastor asked questions with no

order to who answered, it wasn't true. We all had our assigned questions. I do remember my sister Arlene telling me how much she enjoyed it, so I had to tell her about the assigned questions. The pastor took me aside one day and suggested that I consider a career in the ministry. There was no way, because I had already set my sights on going into the Air Force and then teaching History. The following photo is of my confirmation class. In case you can't identify me, I am the one on the far left in the middle row. Most of the class members were from the Viking area.



The church is no longer there, but the cemetery remains, of course. Several of my family have their final resting place in the cemetery including my parents, three brothers, nephew, aunts and uncles.