When the past no longer illuminates the future, 
the spirit walks in darkness - Alexis de Tocqueville

In public school our history teachers tried to instill in us that reading, studying, and learning history is a good thing. Why?, because without reflecting on our past we are bound to repeat the mistakes that were learned.

In this age of modern technology and immediate gratification we sometimes lose sight of the valuable resources that our predecessors and/or ancestors have left. All too often we look to computers and/or the internet to learn about our past. If it’s not on the internet, it never really happened – right?

*Did you know that* … In the April 17, 1986 Church council minutes they announced that ‘a computer will be purchased very soon’?

*Did you know that* … it wasn’t until the late 1990s that either the internet or the worldwide web (www) was available to citizens?

In piecing together the history of PRLC we cannot depend modern technology to teach us what came before. The good news is that our predecessors did a great job of documenting many aspects of their work. These artifacts can provide valuable insight into how it is that we got to where we are.

Let’s take a moment to look at the various artifacts that document the work of PRLC and its members. These are just a few of the questions that can be answered:

- How is it that we came to do that, that way?
- Why is it that dancing is/was not allowed in church?
- What are the types of outreach that we’ve tackled?
- Who got us started doing (fill in the blank)?

The weekly church bulletin – a printed page, or several pages, that provides the order of service, announcements, and introduction of new information. At PRLC, copies of all the past bulletins have been archived and can be reviewed. There are some fascinating details within.

The monthly news bulletin or newsletter – in our case this is the *Tower Echoes*, a publication that was begun in 1954 and continues today. It brings to members bits of news that cannot be captured in the weekly bulletin. Examples include: club/association news, youth activities, staff changes, family celebrations (baptism, marriage, etc.), educational opportunities, even ‘grapevine tidbits,’ and just plain insight into church work.

The monthly Church Council meeting minutes – chock full of news not found in the bulletin or newsletter, plus discussions of issues to be decided.

The Annual Reports – since the late 1940s, a yearly report was produced. It provided a summary of what had transpired during that year. Many of the early reports are 40 to 60 pages! All of them are stored in boxes in our basement.

Committee reports – many of the early church groups (such as the Youth groups, the Evergreen Club, the Ladies Aid, etc., kept meticulous notes. These were often put in binders and stored on a shelf. Many of these have excellent information about the daily life of the congregation.

**LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS**

Might you have an interest in helping to document our past, present and future? I’m looking for some volunteers that are willing to comb through the boxes, bound notebooks, envelopes of pictures, etc. and to put them in a ‘user friendly’ format. It may take many months (or possibly years), but we have to start somewhere.

If you have time to share, please contact me at ljbj@earthlink.net. Your assistance will be greatly appreciated.
Dancing -- Allowed or not allowed in Church?

Context from the Editor of the Centennial Communiqué

My mother is the daughter of a Norwegian Lutheran Pastor who served in North Dakota, 1908-37. He was a graduate of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, the same seminary that many of our PRLC pastors attended.

In 2000 I conducted an oral-history interview with her [Eunice]. The following story was among the insights she shared:

“There were certain things, because the Bible talked against it, you didn’t do. When in grade school they were going to have dance lessons for us in physical education, I was excused along with Jack W., whose father was a pastor of Pilgrim Lutheran Church at that time. We were excused because we did not dance. My father was no longer living at that time, but my mother told the school that my [Eunice’s] father would not approve of it and she didn’t approve of it either. So I couldn’t take dancing lessons. Jack and I got to walk around the school grounds while the other children in our class were taking dancing lessons. I don’t know if I felt privileged or abandoned. At least I didn’t do it alone.”

In reading through the minutes taken at PRLC Council meeting minutes, I came across the following discussion about PRLC’s policy on dancing in the church.

PRLC Council Minutes

March 13, 1990

Pr. Maier reported, “I recently blundered into a tense situation around dancing at a wedding reception in the Fellowship Hall. I ask that we develop a written policy to cover dancing on the church premises.”

April 17, 1990  Policy on Dancing

A random sample (every 8th member) was taken during the last several weeks. At present there is no policy on dancing within the church. The question asked in the telephone survey was: “In your opinion, do you think dancing should be allowed in the Fellowship Hall at PRLC during wedding receptions and similar social events?” It was possible to contact 85% of the sample group. 57% said definitely yes or yes, 35% said no or absolutely no, 8% had no response. It was moved-seconded-carried to postpone for another month a decision on this matter. There was 1 nay on the motion.

May 8, 1990  Dancing

The executive committee recommendation on dancing was discussed. The policy proposed was: Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church does not allow dancing within the church at social occasions such as weddings. This policy is not meant to pass any kind of moral judgment on dancing as a form of Christian celebration. Discussion on this bowing to the minority or showing a resistance to change and how to draw the line between folk dancing, aerobics, etc. was discussed. Voting with a show of hands, there were 4 yes votes and 8 nays. It was moved-seconded that the policy read: Social dancing on the premises of PRLC is allowed only with prior consent of the church council. This motion passed with one nay.

June 12, 1990

A request for dancing at a wedding was presented to the council. The wedding party is requesting to have a 16-piece band. Concern for the size of the band and the accompanying noise as well as lack of sufficient space was expressed. It was moved-seconded-carried that we deny the request for dancing at this wedding.

April 13, 2010

PRLC Dance Policy: In the “You Gotta Be Kidding Category”, Pr. Hoffman proposed to the group removal of the long-standing dance policy that is in place at the church. The policy does not allow any kind of social dancing within the building. Pr. Hoffman noted that historically this was a piety issue and social dance was not allowed. There was group discussion about the policy. [There was a] call for consensus on removing the dance policy. Consensus reached, the policy will be deleted.

There was a grass roots discussion regarding applying for a grant from the Endowment Committee for a church disco ball. [Sic]

For additional insight on the subject of ‘dancing’ see the following excerpts from books about Norwegian-American women:

“Particularly pious Norwegian Americans objected to dancing, placing it in the same category as drinking excessively. Some ministers used the pulpit to preach against the twin evils of drink and dance.”


“Standards of proper behavior excluded drinking, dancing, gambling, playing cards, using tobacco or foul language. The girls’ behavior was subjected to proper feminine standards.”

Source: As Sister, Wife, and Mother: Education for Young Norwegian-American Lutheran Women, by DeAne L. Lagerquist (Volume 33: Page 99)

Have you heard similar stories about ‘church rules’ that existed during the 20th century? Please share these with me at ljbj@earthlink.net.