

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

Lutherans on the move

Several weekends ago I attended a reunion that reflected my life from 1958 to 1966. Shortly after I graduated from college I married and moved to Oak Park, Ill. My husband was a Missouri Synod Lutheran who was smart enough to know that because I was a Congregationalist, we'd better compromise and at least join a Lutheran Church of another synod. So we joined United Lutheran Church in Oak Park, part of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod with a Norwegian ancestry.

The reunion was for choir members, past and present, and was part of the church's 75th anniversary celebration. Most of our friends were active in this church and we were all in our twenties. In our group, as you can imagine, I was the token feminist, Democrat, smoker and non-baker. When my husband complained that I talked politics and current affairs with the men while the women compared recipes, I told him that the other men might enjoy my company, but they were sure glad I wasn't their wife!! And how true that was.

Many church members had graduated from St. Olaf College. When they talked about Augustana College, I learned they were talking about Augustana College in Sioux Falls, SD, not the college in Rock Island.

Most of them have moved from Oak Park. The former church secretary came from California, our choir director from Minnesota, the former wives of two ministerial interns and one of their ex-husbands were there. A couple traveled from Knoxville, Tennessee. People had divorced, spouses had died, some had remarried, tragedy had struck about everyone in the group, one way or the other. I came away realizing once again how lucky I am that I, my husband, my children and grandchildren are alive and doing well.

There were nearly 50 of us in the United Lutheran Church choir on reunion weekend. I sat next to my friend from California, whom

I had sung next to for eight years. One couple with whom I have remained close is named Eitrheim. (I-trum) Jim is from Baltic, South Dakota and can do a mean version of anything in a strong Norwegian accent, in fact he has an accent himself. He was finally convinced to tell Ole and Lena jokes and we laughed until we cried. He taught English and was head of the drama department at Oak Park-River Forest High school for his entire career. They have retired and built a house in the beautiful state of, you guessed it, Min-ne-so-ta. Fifteen years ago I attended this same reunion and enjoyed hearing that his wife, Diane, had just been elected the first woman president of the church congregation. She was very proud and understood the women's liberation zeal I had felt so many years before.

We laughed remembering the election night party we had in 1960, when we really didn't know before we left the party who had won — Kennedy or Nixon. My brother and I were the only Democrats there, but we got the last laugh. Then we had a party in 1964, when Lyndon Johnson was elected by a landslide over Barry Goldwater. It was a shock to my friends to realize I was actually in the majority. Of course, to be a Lutheran supporting John Kennedy for president in 1960 was a very lonely spot. Even my ex-husband was a staunch Republican.")

One recollection I have is of a prominent family in the church named Sexauer. After awhile, we didn't think anything of the name, but someone once told me they had tried to reach Mr. Sexauer at work. "Do you have a Sexauer there?" he asked. "No," the switchboard operator said, "but we have a really fun coffee break." Ba-dum.

So much for the racy Lutherans of Oak Park. Bless their Scandinavian hearts.

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