

## Building Our Congregation

Coopersburg was one of the first villages to be settled in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1743 the village of Center Valley was formed at the intersection of the current 309 and 378. The Center Valley economy was based on area agriculture and zinc mining. The Northern Pennsylvania railroad was completed in 1832, and a station for passenger trains was established on the east side of Saucon Creek in 1856. The Allentown-Philadelphia turnpike road (Route 309) was chartered in 1874 and completed and opened for travel in 1875. These events shaped the growth of the church.

Building a congregation was a challenge as itinerant preachers and lay leaders served multiple congregations across the large hilly area that was reached by horse and buggy. Early settlers worshipped in their homes as informal small groups. The first parishioners were often farmers and tradesmen. Pastor Andrew Rudman traveled about visiting the settlers. From 1728, a new German immigrant, John Casper Stoever specifically ministered to Lutherans. In 1738 Pastor John Jacob Birckenstock arrived in the Lehigh Valley to serve the Lutheran community.

Although there is historical evidence indicating that Lutheran Christians had moved into the Saucon Valley and began worshipping together as early as 1732, the first recorded meeting of the Saucon (Blue) Church congregation occurred on November 18, 1739. The congregation charter was established on September 29, 1739. Some Blue Church records indicate baptisms in 1739. The Rev. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, who arrived from Germany in 1742 helped organize and solidify the congregation in the Lutheran fold. At the request of the congregation Muhlenberg sent schoolmasters to train the children. Subsequently, the Saucon Church sent representatives to the first meeting of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, held in Germantown (now part of Philadelphia) in 1748. Blue Church is one of 8 congregations still in existence from the 10 original congregations that chartered the Ministerium.

The church was served by multiple pastors with varying years of tenure between 1753 and 1820. Rev Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (Muhlenberg College) served the congregation and helped them to organize and attend the First Ministerium. Muhlenberg described the location as twenty-five miles from Providence in the center of Moravian Brethren. In 1820 The Rev Benjamin German accepted the call and served until 1848. The congregation again had a series of pastors serving several churches from 1848 until 1894. The Rev. William Kistler and his son The Rev. Daniel Kistler served the Coopersburg area from 1894 to 1950. The parish included Blue Church as well as St. Johns (Coopersburg) and New Jerusalem (Hellertown). Pastor William used his horse drawn buggy to visit parishioners and potential members. His pay was in food and goods collected from the parish members as he made his rounds.. In 1939 the congregation celebrated its 200th anniversary with both Pastor William (emeritus) and Pastor Daniel present. The Rev William Kistler died in 1940. The Rev. Daniel Kistler served in Coopersburg from 1933 to 1950. The Rev. Daniel Latshaw was the first full time pastor at Blue Church. He served the congregation from 1950 until 1967. The Rev. James Koones served the congregation from 1968 until 1997.





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