



Benjamin J. Koehler  
Pastor 1935 – 1958

Family – wife Mildred and children Doris and Douglas.

Called to St. Paul's on August 5, 1935.

Congregation membership quadrupled between 1935 and 1954.

Church interior renovated in 1936 at a total cost of twenty-two thousand dollars. Added a three-pipe organ from the Grand Opera House in St. Louis. The total cost was approximately two thousand five hundred dollars. It was given to the church in memory of Sophia M. Keil by her children Martha, Rose, and her husband Walter Keil.

In 1939, the church was a hundred years old and on October 22, dedicated the Centennial Parish Hall. It housed the Fireside Room, church school, and hosted city meetings and activities. Centennial Sunday Celebration was held on November 5, 1939. In 1980, the Hall was torn down and eventually replaced with our present Activities Center.

Many organizations were formed: Fireside Club, Child Study Guild, Senior High Fellowship, Elders Society, Women's Evening Guild, and others. In July, 1948, our radio broadcast began.

Present church carillon is dedicated in Koehler's memory.

Three hundred sixty-seven members of our congregation served during World War Two and sixteen of them paid the ultimate price.

Reverend Robert J. Herman became the Minister of Music and Education in 1946. He was instrumental in starting the Belleville Choral which later became the current Belleville Philharmonic Choral.

In 1948, the church school became co-educational bringing in children of non- St. Paul families. The local radio station, WIBV, began broadcasting 10:30 Sunday church services in that same year.

Koehler held an annual series of Good Friday noon day church services at Lincoln Theatre and all downtown businesses closed for three hours during that time.

He conducted the last church service using the German language on Good Friday morning, 1954.

On June 24, 1957, the General Council of the Congregational Christian Church and the Evangelical and Reformed Church merged to form the United Church of Christ. St. Paul Church officially ratified the name change in 1958.

Our third and current church building, had groundbreaking on October 7, 1956 and was dedicated October 11, 1959, our 120<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, with the name "St. Paul United Church of Christ."

The first patient at Belleville's new Memorial Hospital was admitted on May 19, 1958. St. Paul's continues to support the hospital today by hosting its annual book fair fundraiser.

Koehler retired in December, 1958 due to health reasons. He became Pastor Emeritus. He died on September 24, 1962.

#### Information Sources:

The Church History portion of the Saint Paul United Church of Christ Pastoral Position document, 1984

Milestones of Our Heritage, St. Paul's publication celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year, 1989. Proof copy.

Moments in History pamphlets compiled by Archivist Alice Jerome for insert to St. Paul's Church Service Programs during the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year (1989)

The History segment of the St. Paul UCC 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary insert to the Belleville News-Democrat newspaper of Sunday January 12, 2014. Material researched and prepared by Alice Jerome, Archivist of St. Paul's Church.