

"God's Word is Our Great Heritage." What a wonderful theme for a centennial celebration. Truly, it is through God's word of love and forgiveness that we have come to know Jesus as the Lord of our lives. A congregation reaching its 100th birthday is an auspicious occasion. We stand in a long line of believers who from that first Pentecost have heard and believed in the God of life and salvation.

It is under the Word of God that we celebrate our Heritage. We stop in the midst of daily and congregational life to give joy and gratitude to God. It is in our considering our long history as a congregation that we discover the wonderful link with both the past and our future.

A procession of people, young and old, have heard God's Word through the years. It is this Word which has bound us together with the ties of faith, sacrifice, and friendship.

Each individual and every generation have made significant contributions to the life of the family of God. We now enjoy the work of those who have gone before. In fact, we are debtors to all who worked so hard to establish and maintain the teaching and fellowship of God's people in our community.

How can we ever show our appreciation of the gift that has been handed down to us? Clearly, we should always and in every way give thanks to God for the Gospel that declares that God has reconciled the whole world and made every man, woman and His own. It is in our responding to the gift that God has given to us in the Gospel, that we truly begin our centennial year of thanks.

A centennial gratitude involves more than words and sentiments. It is more than honoring our past. True gratitude comes as we, as Christ's body, rise up in obedience to our Lord to meet complex challenges laid before us. Surely no other generation has faced more complex and formidable problems of carrying out His mission.

Our prayers should be that we will be found worthy of our honorable past and capable of the tasks required of us in this generation.

May the Church continue to be an effective and dynamic instrument of God's love and peace as we the people of St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church begin our second century with the Gospel.

## **A Century of Ministry and Service 1888-1988**

"Go then, to all people everywhere and make them my disciples; baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you, and I will be with you always to the end of the ages."

Good News Bible· Today's English Version, Matthew 28:19-20.

On the day our risen Lord and Saviour ascended into heaven, this directive was given to the twelve apostles. These twelve heeded His words as did many of their later converts who also made the commitment to accept Jesus as their Saviour and help spread the Gospel throughout the world.

Among the followers who listened centuries later were our ancestors. The gospel spread to America when our forefathers came here bringing with them the Good News of the Gospel and the "Faith of Our Fathers". They, too, heeded the Ascension Day message.

By celebrating our one-hundredth birthday, we are also honoring the memory of the original members of our congregation, first known by the German name "Evangelische - Lutherische St. Johannes Gemeinde" (Evangelical Lutheran St. John Congregation). Among the names of those first families, we find some of the names in today's membership as well as children and grandchildren of those founders.

The names of descendants of our founders and former members can also be found on the membership rolls of hosts of congregations across our country.

For the many blessings our beloved congregation has enjoyed for the past century, we are very thankful. As we enter the next 100 years, let us be filled with the same zeal, challenge, spirit, and dedication to which our first members were dedicated.

It is indeed a wonderful coincidence that our new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was born this year when we celebrate our birthday. We are fortunate to be able to identify with this significant event in Lutheran unity.

Now it is our challenge to accept the same directive Jesus addressed to His first apostles according to Matthew and make

our influence felt not only in our community but to the whole Christian family in the new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Let us take a backward look to refresh ourselves and also preserve for our descendants a short history of St. John Evangelical Church of Rocky Ridge.

Rocky Ridge is located in the western part of Ottawa County, 16 miles west of the county seat of Port Clinton, five miles west of Oak Harbor, and 23 miles east of Toledo. Lake Erie, a vacation land, is approximately six miles to the north. Today Davis Besse Nuclear Plant is a great asset to the economy of the area, which is far different from its early days when lime products, stone quarries, and saw mills were the principal industries.

The village area was surveyed in 1835, and the village was laid out in 1874. The corporation was one mile square until the addition of the land (five acres in 1972) on which the present church is located which extended the village limits south of the original southern boundary of Kolb Road and Rocky Ridge Road.

In 1851, when the railroad cut a line from Sandusky to Toledo, it became a hub of activity for shipping products from this area. By that time the land was cleared of much of its trees for the lumber industry, and the community became an excellent farming area. The congregation grew as it attracted membership from the surrounding population who found it nearer to their homes. At first residents attended churches at Elliston, Blackberry, or Oak Harbor. It soon became evident that a home of worship nearer by was desired. In the fall of 1887, Lutheranism organized a new congregation. Rev. Samuel Kusthardt, who was sent to the community to gather in the believers, became its first shepherd.

The services were held in the public school building of Rocky Ridge located south of Third Street on Court Street.

On April 8, 1888, the St. John parish of 24 members was organized by Pastor Kusthardt. Among that first group were: Gottlieb Dehring, Gottfried Shoenwald, August Lehman, John Reaser, William Lehman, Joseph Bock, Carl Treter, Mrs. E. Blocky, Mrs. George Gotz, H. Brecklin, John Jensen, Andrew Michel, William Liske, Mrs. Hova, Fred Arndt, William Ferstnau, Christ Foreman, John Harder, Peter Carsten, G. Jess, F. Kardatzke, J.

Redman, A. Wangrin, H. Baumert, M. Bartel, C. Breitzkreutz, H. Hinderlich, F. Harder, Henry Lentner, Otto Meuller, and C. Nowach.

As soon as the congregation was organized, plans were made to construct a church building. Most of the material and labor were donated by the members. After working together faithfully during the summer months, there came the happy day of Nov. 5, 1888, when the new frame building was dedicated.

On Jan. 22, 1889, fire completely destroyed the building. The group was not discouraged, for with their humble means, they began the construction of a brick building that very spring. In October 1889, the brick church was dedicated. That was the "church home" for St. John congregation until moving day in 1967 into our present sanctuary.

In 1890, the Rev. Kusthardt resigned to seek a secular position. Rev. W. Weltner was called, and he remained with the parish from 1890 to 1894. From 1894 to 1899, the Rev. Carl Graepp was pastor. It was during his pastorate that the Ladies Aid (Frauenverein) was organized in January 1895 with the pastor and Mrs. John Harder serving as its first officers. Other charter members were Mrs. Carl Graepp, Mrs. August Bensch, Mrs. August Lehman, Mrs. Carl Breitzkreutz, Mrs. Fred Arndt, Mrs. Andrew Michel, Mrs. Henry Lentner, Mrs. Gottlieb Shoenwald, Mrs. William Ferstnau, Mrs. Charles Schroeder; Mrs. Banky, Mrs. Peter Carsten, Mrs. Fred Kardatzke, and Mrs. Herman Brecklin.

In 1925, a 30th anniversary was celebrated for which Rev. Dimke of Toledo was the German speaker and Rev. Wacke of Detroit the English speaker. German was the chief language for many years for the "Frauenverein."

These ladies met in their homes where elaborate lunches were served. Later rooms above the store (Mercantile Company) were made available to the church for their meetings. Until the basement under the brick church was completed, the Town Hall also served as the meeting place for all organizations of the church. These organizations were an important part of the social life of the parishioners besides being an important arm of the church for raising funds to aid in carrying out the various needs and ministry of the church.

The Ladies Aid that Pastor Graepp organized existed until cir-

cles of the American Lutheran Church Women (ALCW) replaced existing women's organizations in 1961.

In 1899, Rev. Edward Nest accepted the call to St. John. During his pastorate the old parsonage was sold and replaced by a new house in 1904. In 1906, the parsonage debt of \$650 was paid and the first public worship in the English language was held.

Pastor Nest was not married when he came to Rocky Ridge, but he married Miss Anna Reaser, a member of the congregation, who survived him and visited her parents here often. Rev. Nest served a pastorate in Riga, Michigan, after leaving Rocky Ridge.

In 1906, the Rev. George Rueter became the pastor. During his pastorate, the interior of the church was decorated, and beautiful stained glass windows were installed at a cost of \$1,700. Other improvements and additions to the church during his pastorate were a chimney, a furnace, and a pipe organ which was replaced in 1954 by an electronic instrument, a Connsonata.

In March of 1914, Rev. Rueter resigned to accept a call to Blissfield, Michigan. Several of his sons and grandsons became pastors who served the church not only in parishes but on the mission field of New Guinea as well. His family grew attached to their friends here, and they kept in touch with those their same age for many years. In fact, baseball was the sons' chief interest while they lived here, and one son played with the Rocky Ridge team years later.

On the twenty-first day of September in 1914, the congregation extended a call to Rev. J. Kaufman who accepted and was installed in 1915. The congregation then decided to have English services the last Sunday of every month.

In 1917, Pastor Kaufman resigned, and a call was extended to Rev. John Drewelow who became pastor in July 1917, and served until 1921. Some time after he left Rocky Ridge, he devoted time to writing. Besides religious material, he wrote the book "*From Denim to Broadcloth*," a story of his life in the ministry which included some interesting facts about Rocky Ridge and the time he spent here.

From May 1921 to July 1921, the Rev. H. Hoerig (father-in-law of Rev. Drewelow) filled the pulpit. Pastors F. Lambertus of Port Clinton and Max Schleicher of Williston served St. John alternately during the months of July, August, September, and

October until a call was extended to Rev. A. C. Misch of Wolcottsville, New York. Pastor Misch assumed his pastoral duties in November of 1921.

In July 1922, a basement was put under the parsonage, and a furnace was installed at a cost of \$1,320. In the same year, the concrete steps were built for the sacristy. In 1923, the interior of the church was redecorated at a cost of \$650. In 1926, a steam heating plant costing \$1,100 was installed in the church. In the same year, the church was wired for electricity at a cost of \$805. In 1927, an electric organ blower replaced the need for hand pumping the organ, which was one of the tasks of the janitor. Another task for the janitor was the ringing of the church bell on Saturday evenings at six o'clock to remind the people of Sunday worship. The bell was tolled for funerals on the day preceding the funeral at the exact time the funeral was to be conducted the next day. As the funeral procession arrived at the church, the bell was tolled, and as the cortege left the church for the cemetery, the age of the deceased was tolled. The bell from the old church is now in the bell tower in front of the present sanctuary.

Pastor Misch authored "*A Handbook for Church Members*" which was used as one of the resource books for his catechetical classes. Dr. L. H. Schuh, pastor of St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, Toledo, had this to say in the introduction to the handbook, "*A Handbook for Church Members*" is an effort in the right direction. This book touches on very many of the most vital doctrines of the Bible and the usages of the church and, if studied, will enable Christians to give a reason for the hope that is in them. Our times demand Lutherans who can defend their faith; and to do that successfully, they must know it. We congratulate Brother Misch on his effort to advance the laity of the church in Christian knowledge and believe that much good will result from his effort."

Other accomplishments during the pastorate of Rev. Misch were the adoption of new Sunday School hymnals, planting of shrubs and trees on the church property, and the adoption of the Common Service Book.

The Young Peoples' Society (later called the Luther League) produced plays and other forms of entertainment to generate funds that were used for buying such items as candelabra for the altar

and for sponsoring other projects.

The Ladies Aid conducted bazaars and entertainments which provided funds to supplement the coffers of the congregation to carry on not just local needs but mission work as well.

The Sunday School donated a copper cross for the altar. One of the big events for many years was the Sunday School picnic, which reached its hey-day in the '20s and '30s. It was held in Zipfel's woods near Limestone. A woods on the farm of H. Brecklin, south of Rt. 163 was also the scene of good fun.

In 1922, the exterior trim of the church was painted. In August of 1922, St. John's Sister Society was organized as a second women's group, which later became the Sewing Circle.

Quilting to earn money helped the congregation to purchase extras not provided by the church treasury. Mission projects were promoted as were Bible studies and various other topics related to the mission of the church at large.

The congregation assumed responsibility for building concrete steps, raising sidewalks, painting the parsonage, garage, and school building.

In 1923, the altar was beautifully remodeled by Mr. John Blocky, who was a fine craftsman and carpenter in the community. The pastor's study was located in the upstairs of the parsonage; it too was made attractive. The woodwork and pews of the nave were refinished. The candleholders and glass globes were replaced by the Young People's Society when the church was redecorated.

In 1923, a men's group known as the Brotherhood was formed. By 1924, on its first anniversary, it had a membership of 70 and was an important working arm of the church. In 1944, the Brotherhood sponsored the reactivated Boy Scout Troop 333. The organization no longer exists, but our men have dartball and softball teams which fulfill a need for fellowship for the male members of the congregation.

Pastor Misch resigned in 1931 and took up residence in Lindsey, Ohio, until his death.

The congregation was a member of the Iowa Synod, supporting the Synod in its general work of Home Missions, Inner Missions, Foreign Missions, Charity and Education. When the Iowa, Ohio,

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and Buffalo Synods merged, the congregation voted to remain independent, but the pastors could join the merger.

Although St. John was not a member of the American Lutheran Church until 1946, it took an active part in the support of the work of the church in the Michigan District even before it formally joined.

On May 1, 1932, Rev. S. C. Siefkes of American Falls, Idaho, was installed as pastor. During his pastorate through very difficult economic as well as "in-congregation" problems, Pastor Siefkes' tenure of four years was most profound and progressive.

In 1936, the church was redecorated at a cost of \$450. One hundred seventy-five members were added to the roll before he accepted a call to Baker, Oregon. The ill health of Mrs. Siefkes was an important factor in their decision to move back West.

It was during his stay in Rocky Ridge that he published the first monthly paper called "*St. John's Lutheran Messenger*." Volume 1, Number One, was published in September of 1932. The first message which introduced the most welcome caller said, "Beginning with this month we have a very welcome caller in your home each month. This caller wishes to spend a little time with you and bring you a real message. It wishes to bring you a message of joy, for it tells you that the Kingdom of God is still present and in your midst and in our dear congregation. It wishes also to bring you some serious messages in that it desires to direct you to your Saviour and warn you whenever you might be treading on a dangerous road. We hope that you will receive the messages that our little messenger brings you with a sincere and prayerful heart. It will regularly keep you in touch with your church and its activities, and it will serve to unite us to an even closer unity. It is going to make us feel once more that we are one large family of Christian believers who belong together because we have the same Father, the same Saviour, and the same faith and hope of salvation. May our dear Heavenly Father place His richest blessings upon everyone of us who reads these lines."

At this time, the financial system for supporting the church was by assessing dues, the same for each over-voting age and the same amount for under-voting age members. The envelope system and proportionate giving replaced the old system in January of 1933. "Give as God has blessed you" became the motto.



The Lutheran Welfare Service (then known as Lutheran Inner Mission Society), the Home of Mercy, and the Orphans' and Old Folks' Home in Toledo became a greater concern of our women's organizations. Canning fruits and vegetables and donating clothes and money were projects undertaken by our ladies of the church.

All through the various pastorates, the Christmas program by the Sunday School was one of the highlights of the year.

The Ladies Aid, the Sewing Circle, Lutheran Brotherhood, and Luther League were all alive and well as Pastor Siefkes served St. John. Dartball was born in this period of time, mentioned in the March 1933 *Messenger*. The Brotherhood instigated the new sport.

At the April 2, 1933, quarterly congregational meeting, it was decided by a large majority to conduct only one German service each month. There was no longer a need to provide services in both languages. In the early 1940s, only English services prevailed from then on.

One of the traditional services held annually in Lutheran churches was the Mission Festival. It was the forerunner of today's benevolence giving. These festivals produced our contributions to the mission work of the church for the year. In 1934, the Mission Festival (usually held in the fall) consisted of three services, two in the morning and one in the evening. Guest speakers were also outstanding visiting pastors. This one in 1934 included Rev. C. Wiederanders of St. Paul, Toledo, and Rev. W.G. Sordt of Columbus. The offering was \$96.26 which seems small by today's standards, but for that time during economic depression, it may have been generous.

Periodically the parsonage, too, needed repairs and redecorating. The Ladies Aid provided both the funds and the labor for making the home attractive and livable.

Introduced during this era of our church history were daily devotional booklets and new Sunday School hymnals. The church periodical, *The Lutheran Standard* (in English) and the *Kirchenblatt* (in German), became a household member when the Pastor and Luther Leaguers conducted a campaign to get members to subscribe. The aim was to place one in every home.

Some other projects and events are also worth noting. More chairs were purchased because of overflow crowds that at times filled the sanctuary. The ladies raised flowers in their gardens for Sunday's altar vases. The Brotherhood donated live hens for the Home of Mercy's chicken population. Expense for publishing the Messenger came from advertisements sold to Oak Harbor and area merchants.

During the depression, money for the operation of the church and pastor's salary was difficult to raise, so Pastor Siefkes voluntarily offered to take a \$150 reduction in salary. He asked to be paid weekly instead of monthly. After two years the \$150 was restored.

Every issue of the *Messenger* bore these words on its cover beneath the picture of the church -"The Church with the Gospel." When the last issue by Pastor Siefkes appeared, his parting words were, "We hope you have enjoyed reading it during these past four years, and that you have received many blessings from it. The Lord only knows how great a blessing this leaflet was, but we feel sure that it has done much, under God's blessing for our congregation. We hope and pray that it will continue to be a great blessing to this congregation in the future too." (Copies of the *Messenger* provided helpful information for this history 50 years later.) The *Trumpet* has replaced the *Messenger* since the 1960's with 1988 marking its twenty-second year of reading enjoyment for our members.

On June 14, 1936, Rev. Ernest Kempfer, Peace Lutheran Church, Port Clinton, was installed as pastor of St. John. The years of his pastorate were very fruitful and produced growth in all areas.

In 1938, the basement under the brick structure was completed. This facility then became the meeting place for all organizational meetings and activities. The nave also got new carpeting.

Mother-Daughter and Father-Son banquets became popular, in fact, so popular that the basement soon outgrew the needs to accommodate all the activities. Other programs and activities also flourished.

Easter 1937, Pastor Kempfer offered a German communion service. At that time, as all years previously for all communion, the partakers had to announce their intentions to commune ahead

of time, usually on Saturday. Today cards in the pews are used. For many years the Confessional was held preceding the worship service. Parishioners who did not partake of our Lord's Supper did not stay for the entire service. This was a very disruptive procedure until the long-standing habits were changed by very patient pastors to the more orderly procedure followed today.

Perhaps an example of an Orphans' and Old Folks' Home ingathering of the '30s and '40s might be of interest. The annual pickup of empty cans to be filled produced 167 quarts of fruit as well as 19 chickens, 4 1/2 bushels of potatoes, 1 1/2 bushels of turnips, 15 pumpkins, 1 box soap, 1 bushel cabbage, 3/4 bushel apples, 5 gallon honey, 1 peck onions, 1 peck red beets, 5 pounds dry lima beans, 1/2 bushel glad bulbs, 2 bath towels, 4 bars of soap, 2 washcloths, and 2 pounds raisins. Home canned goods are now prohibited due to government regulations, but our Harvest Festival Sunday decorations still are shared with others.

World Relief quilts, bed pads, school and health kits, supporting a child, and many other contributions to help others have taken the place of the earlier activities.

### **The Fiftieth Celebration Excerpt**

In 1938, the 50th anniversary booklet contained the following which should be a reminder of the attitude a congregation must have no matter where it finds itself in history:

"This 50 years of congregational history has been written. True, not every page reads well because of human faults, but God has been with his people. He has poured out His blessings in rich measure. Not unto us belongs the glory and honor but unto Thee, O Lord, to Thy mercy and truth. Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

"A congregation that has for 50 years received the Gospel grace has a great responsibility to bring the gifts and treasures of God's Word: Christ, forgiveness, and salvation to a dying world and sinful men. May this congregation continue to be a blessing to the community by making better citizens, to hallow friendships, to instill a spirit of neighborliness, to encourage kindness, to make people more honest and truthful in dealing with one another.

"The fathers of this congregation realized their duty. Of them who now sleep so peacefully in their graves, it is true as Scripture says, 'Their works do follow them. May that same faith, love to God and man, that spirit of sacrifice, be in us today.'"

From the 1938 bulletin, the following remarks are still up-to-date for all celebrations of the future:

"To those whose Christian faith and courage caused them to organize this congregation, to those who have entered the church triumphant, to all who served and sacrificed that this church be maintained, and to the youth who are to be inspired to continue the good work, this book is dedicated."

Speakers for the day were Rev. Edward Nest, Ionia, Michigan; Rev. August Klickman, Saginaw, Michigan; Rev. George Rueter, Jr., Napoleon, Ohio; Rev. Harold Yochum, President of the Michigan District.

A dinner and fellowship between services were enjoyed by all present. The anniversary committee members were Henry Foreman, John Carsten, Rollin Arndt, Mrs. John Bensch, and Mrs. William Banky.

Pastor Ernest Kempfer answered the call to Epiphany Lutheran Church, Toledo, in 1943. Pastor Clarence Steinert of Okolona, Ohio, then accepted the call to St. John. His wife, the former Ruth Hepner of Cleveland, had been a missionary to India. During Rev. Steinert's stay, the first Vacation Bible School was conducted. This was before any prepared material was available, which meant self-made implementation.

A very important attitude toward mission giving was stressed during his pastorate.

After a two-year stay, he entered the chaplaincy of the U.S. government after which time he returned to a parish in Fowlerville, Michigan, and later returned to Okolona, Ohio. From there he retired to Florida. He and his wife are both deceased.

In 1945, Rev. Herbert E. Troge from Hope Lutheran, Bowling Green, accepted the call to serve St. John at Rocky Ridge.

A junior choir under the direction of Mrs. Troge was organized. She directed the combined senior choirs from St.

John and their former congregation of Bowling Green in a lovely concert.

Pastor Troge scheduled a number of important lecture series in which outstanding leaders of the church were guests. These attracted sizeable audiences from surrounding areas.

Rev. Troge accepted a call to Canton, Ohio, in 1948 where he served a congregation still conducting English and German services. From there he went to Saginaw, Michigan. He, too, is now deceased.

In December of 1948, Rev. John Palm accepted a call to St. John. During his pastorate the following items of note occurred: constitution booklets for each family were distributed, a memorial fund was initiated in 1950 designated for a new organ, and another attempt to place a *Lutheran Standard* in every home was made. In 1951, a Parish Board of Education was formed, and eighteen-year olds became voting members.

Easter sunrise services were held at the quarry at the edge of town. The choirs and leaguers presented a very impressive pageant-type service of the Resurrection of our Lord in front of the "hills" at the west-side quarry south of Rocky Ridge.

Pastor E. H. E. Winterhoff served St. John from 1953 to 1965. During his pastorate the Consonata Organ and chimes were purchased in 1954. Rev. Winterhoff served the congregation longer than any other previous pastor.

On April 21, 1963, the 75th anniversary of St. John was celebrated. The preface in the bulletin by Pastor Winterhoff expressed the sentiments of the congregation well:

"Greetings to all friends and members of St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church.

"Today we salute the founders of St. John. These early pioneers felt an urgent need for a church home, where they might meet with God and through the means of grace be kept strong in faith.

It has been said-- The Black Swamp of Northwest Ohio could not have been cleared, drained, and settled had it not been for the perseverance, thrift, and industry of the German immigrants. However, over and above all these natural characteristics, it was their faith in themselves that enabled them to overcome what must have seemed insurmountable obstacles, as out of the wilderness and swamp they carved homes and a church which has endured until this day.

"Truly they built better than they knew.

"Our prayer is -- may this generation prove worthy of its ancestry as it goes 'Forward in Faith' building, ever building the Kingdom of God to His eternal glory."

The speakers for that celebration were Dr. Norman A. Menter, Detroit; Rev. Herbert Troge, Canton, Ohio; Rev. E. H. Kempfer, Toledo; Rev. Clarence Steinert, and Rev. Norman Winterhoff. At noon a dinner was served at the Rocky Ridge School. The anniversary committee members were Albert Myerholtz, Velta Schimming, and Mildred Dipner.

Of course, the decision to build our present house of worship and its completion was the highlight unsurpassed by any other activity undertaken during his successful pastorate. Before the building was completed, Rev. Winterhoff retired and lived in Port Clinton. Both he and Mrs. Winterhoff went to their eternal home several years later.

Rev. N. Ralph Huget came to St. John from Coldwater, Ohio, in 1966. His first challenge was the completion of the new building, and the dedication plans were formulated. Two services for the summer months were initiated. In 1969, the 50th anniversary of Pastor Winterhoff's ordination was observed with a special service.

A Sunday worship exchange between a predominately black congregation's Luther League from Cleveland and our Luther League was a first. Members of our league spent the weekend in Cleveland and attended services there. In return, the Cleveland group came to Rocky Ridge for a similar experience.

Our first pictorial book was planned and published.

The Luther Leaguers attended a national convention in Texas, our first layman's Sunday was observed, and-it was necessary to locate additional storage space which was provided in the choir room and lounge.

The Benton-Carroll-Salem School conducted kindergarten in our Sunday School rooms because of overcrowding in the public school buildings.

## Dedication of the New Sanctuary June 18, 1967

The keynote speaker for the dedicatory services was former pastor Rev. E. H. E. Winterhoff, who retired before the completion of the building when Rev. N. Ralph Huget assumed the pastorate. Other speakers were Rev. Rex Heidmann of Peace Lutheran Church, Kalamazoo, Michigan; Mr. Larry Wiechers of Napoleon, Ohio; Rev. Herbert E. Troge of Vassar, Michigan, also a former pastor; and Rev. Robert L. Wietelman, President of the Michigan District of the American Lutheran Church.

This day of rejoicing occurred just 10 years after the planning committee was formed.

An introduction to our life in this sanctuary in the centennial year can best be expressed by using the words in the dedication booklet from Pastor Huget's remarks:

"Friends in Christ,

"Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

"It seems like a long time ago since this congregation with Rev. E.H.E. Winterhoff as your pastor, conceived the idea of building a new church and educational unit. After the retirement of Pastor Winterhoff, the congregation took on the responsibilities of moving into the building project.

"A remarkable spirit has prevailed within the whole congregation, the building committee, and the church council. I, as your pastor, cannot help but feel impressed by your faith and trust in God in undertaking this project.

"There is a holy joy as we come into this church on this Dedication Day, but let this not be a day of self-congratulation, but rather of giving thanks, honor, and glory to God and His Word.

"This is not the end of our work. It is only the beginning. The congregation will need even more men and women dedicated to carrying out the task that our Lord lays before us. With our new facilities, we are able to carry the message of the Gospel to more people in a more effective way. Let us rededicate ourselves to be servants of the Christ who died to save us all. With this as our attitude, we will be able to experience many more glorious days in which God will be praised for His unending goodness and mercy.

"The peace of God which passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Yours in His Service,"  
N. Ralph Huget

The building committee: Edward Fillmore, Albert Myerholtz, Wilbert Schimming, Justin Dehring, Robert Millinger and Rev. E. H. E. Winterhoff.

The finance committee: Mrs. Donald Genzman, Carl Bensch, Carl Kaiser, Lloyd Lickert and Mrs. Dale Almendinger.

The dedication committee: David Perry, Mrs. Earl Weidner, Mrs. Clayton Dipner, and Bernard Sprague.

Many special gifts in addition to the cash donations have made our parish proud of the cooperative spirit displayed during the building of our present sanctuary and educational plant.

The basic idea of the beautiful windows in the nave is to express the manifestations of God's grace to mankind, His great gifts to man, and the works of His Son, Jesus Christ: Creation, Covenants and Law, Incarnation, Aspects of Christ's Life, The Sacraments, the Passion Period of Christ and His Resurrection.

The gable windows are abstract and may be taken any way the observer wishes to interpret them. The idea that originated the gable end windows is the concept of the heavens opening up to receive all believers in Christ, as it is depicted in the book of Revelation, written by St. John, after whom this church is named.

### **Excerpts From Dedication Bulletins**

We must never lose sight of what a church building is for:

*Worship:* It is where the congregation assembles to confess its sins, to witness to its faith, and to receive the gracious God in Word and Sacraments. It is where we sacrifice ourselves in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, and lay our lives at the altar of His Service. We leave the church building to go back out into the highway of life to be a Christian.

*Education:* This congregation is not isolated but united with millions of people in a great church universal. This we need to know. The individual Christian does not automatically become a faithful disciple by a process of natural growth. He needs to hear



the Word expounded and applied, to have it illumined, to receive its message as he can understand it.

*Evangelism and Stewardship:* It is a proving ground for the application of the Gospel of Christ to individual lives and the proclamation of it to the world. Through studying and sharing experiences, Christians prepare themselves for the great task of witnessing their faith in all relationships. Through the fellowship activities we realize the joys of the church and initiate others into them.

### **(From St. John's Dedication Booklet-The Dedication)**

"This building, dedicated to God and His Service, is the product of His Grace, for His Grace has moved the hearts of men and women to work together in love and harmony for the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Into this building have gone the love, and the work, and the time, and the treasure of many. May it always be a house of God that calls us to worship Him who died for us on the cross of Calvary and to render Him our devoted service."

In 1972, Pastor Huget accepted a call to Tigerton, Wisconsin, after an exciting transition from one house of worship to another.

In the same year, Rev. Jeffrey Kimpel accepted his first call to Rocky Ridge from Lima, Ohio. A successful Mission Appeal drive was conducted, the congregation sponsored a Vietnamese family, Golden Agers met for communion and luncheon, lay readers were introduced for service participation, and the children's bulletins were first used. Children's sermons also were initiated.

Pastor Kimpel became a member of the Pastors' American Association of Pastoral Counselors. He often provided valuable counseling to many members of the congregation as well as to outsiders.

Burning of the mortgage was a real highlight on Sept. 12, 1976. Besides paying for the sanctuary, many other financial obligations were met. A sacrament table was purchased and a dossal curtain added much to the decor.

A new church directory was delivered, joint Thanksgiving services with neighboring churches of the Oak Harbor area became

an annual custom, and church picnics became popular again as the congregation met one Sunday in the summer either at the Graytown Park or Camp Sabroske for worship and fellowship.

Also, in 1976, Rev. Phyllis Rawlins, substituting for Pastor Kimpel, became the first female pastor to conduct worship services at St. John.

Pastor Jeff accepted a call to St. Mark, Toledo, Ohio, in 1977.

Rev. Charles Rogers of Ossineke, Michigan, was accepted as pastor of St. John in April of 1977. He served as pastor until October of 1980.

During his pastorate, the purchase of our present-day hymnals (Lutheran Book of Worship) was a special project which was quickly completed by generous contributions. Many members honored departed family members with their gifts. New hymnal workshops were held in Port Clinton and Toledo preparing us for its use.

A plaque honoring Velta Schimming for her long tenure as Sunday School teacher and superintendent was presented to her family. It now hangs in the narthex.

Capital University Men's Glee Club honored St. John by giving a concert for the congregation as well as for the community.

The custom of having palm branches on Palm Sunday became a significant asset to the service, a custom still observed.

Upon Pastor Roger's departure in November of 1980, Pastor Henry Tegtmeier served as interim pastor until the installation of Rev. Earl Schafer of Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, on May 24, 1981.

A 50th anniversary service and celebration for Evelyn Koepke, organist, was one of the first notable events in Pastor Schafer's pastorate at St. John. Previous organists were Rose Lehman Musolf, Mildred Misch, and Helen Banky Lowry.

The Seminary Appeal and Love in Action for the Home of Mercy were two successful campaigns demonstrating proof of the stewardship of the congregation.

Two Crossways Bible Study classes were completed successfully. The aim of Crossways from the author, Rev. Harry Wendt of Adelaide, Australia, stated, "that those who study it may gain a

fuller vision of God's purpose in and through Christ. May Crossways move those who study it to become more intelligently and joyously involved in the Divine Plan."

Vacation Bible School has been offered during Pastor Schafer's pastorate as well as during other past pastorates. Many loyal volunteers aid in this endeavor annually.

The choice of owning his own home was a first for our pastor. A paid church secretary was also a first.

Various committees were formed to expedite the work of the congregation including: Stewardship, Parish Education, Worship and Church Life, Building and Property, and Evangelism.

As always, necessary repairs and upkeep of the property have been important matters of business. The resurfacing of the parking lot, the construction of the entrance way on the west side of the church, and the additional lights in the nave were among some of these fulfilled needs.

On June 21, 1987, a cornerstone was laid in place on the east side of the building, which was also the 20th anniversary of this church building. An impressive ceremony made that an important milestone in our history.

Pastor Schafer's comments for the 20th year in our present church:

"Dear friends in Christ, we come together today to celebrate our 99th year of ministry and our 20th year in this house of worship. During the 99 years of our ministry, we have served many people and plan to enlarge our ministry in the future. To do this we must rededicate ourselves to the work of God and remember that this church stands as a beacon of light in a world in need of knowing God's love. The church is of God and will be preserved to the end of time for the conduct of worship, the proclamation of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments, the maintenance of Christian fellowship, discipleship, and growth of believers." (Quote from Sunday Bulletin of June 21, 1987)

Another very exciting highlight in Pastor Schafer's ministry was the purchase of the Allen organ in 1986 and the recital by Carlo Curley, a renowned organist.

Activities in which Pastor Schafer has participated in the community at large are: County Fair and Apple Festival worship

services, planning of the Oakwood Manor Retirement Village in Oak Harbor, Holiday Bureau, Oak Harbor Lions Club and the Oak Harbor Ministerial Association, which was responsible for establishing the local food pantry.

During this first hundred years, two members of St. John entered the ordained ministry. Rev. August Klickman was the first in the late 1920's and Rev. Norman Winterhoff, son of Pastor E. H. E. Winterhoff, in 1953.

Rev. Klickman served pastorates in Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois. Rev. Klickman is deceased. Rev. N. Winterhoff served as a U.S. Navy Chaplain (1953-1972) as well as pastorates in Michigan and Wisconsin. He retired in 1985 and is now living in Wausau, Wisconsin.

Hopefully, this history of our congregation will make us all appreciate our heritage. However, we must be careful that we do not forget the words of the Psalmist, "Show to the generation to come, the praises of the Lord and His strength and His wonderful works that He hath done: that the generation to come might know them--that they might set their hope in God." Ps. 78, vs.4-7. In these words the psalmist tells us what the purpose of history is, namely "to show the generations to come" the guidance of the gracious God.

History, properly speaking, is to memorialize, not the accomplishments of men, but the deeds of God through men. The one object aimed at is transmission, that succeeding generations might set their hope in God according to God's Word – Our Heritage.

### **The Parsonage**

For the first 10 or 12 years, the pastors lived in rental houses. Sometime near the beginning of the century, the house west of the little school house was purchased and used as a parsonage until 1904. That dwelling was moved to Main Street, two houses from Second Street where it still stands.

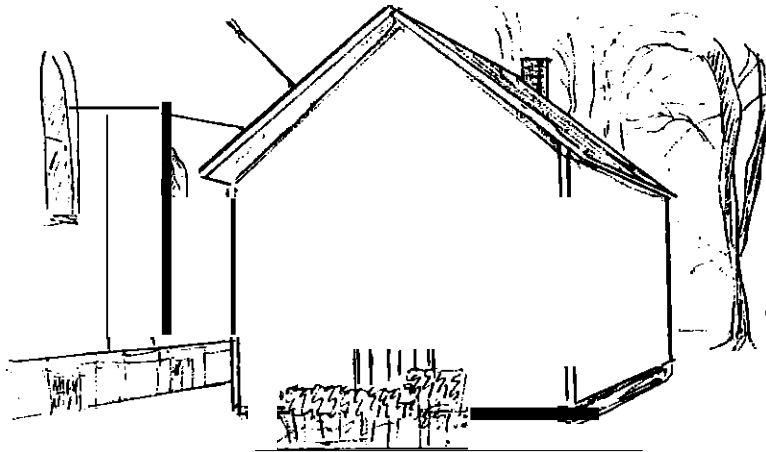
With the removal of the old parsonage, the home next to the old brick church was erected. It was modernized and redecorated many times, but it was sold when Pastor Schafer purchased his own home soon after accepting his call. For a few years the parsonage was rental property of the congregation. It was sold in 1981.



It once was considered necessary to have the parsonage next to the church, but like all other changes, it is no longer deemed a requirement.

### **The Church School - The Little School Building**

The founders of St. John not only desired their children's acquaintance with the three R's, but were especially concerned about a most important R (religion). Shortly after the erection of the church, a one room school was built adjacent to the church.



Here many of the young members received all their formal education. The school was taught by the pastors, and the language was German, therefore the term "German School" originated.

The school as an institution for formal instruction was discontinued many years ago, but the building was used for Catechism classes which met every Saturday morning for three hours. The first Vacation Bible School as well as Sunday School classes and church council met there.

The building was sold in the 1970s.

### **The Women's Organizations**

Rather than separating the different organizations as they existed, changed, and reorganized, a history of the organizing of women from the first ladies' group to the present time will be followed.

When St. John congregation was only eight years old, some of the women and Pastor Graepp conceived the idea that the church could well use the organized power of its women. On Jan. 4, 1895, the "Frauenverein" was brought into being. An account of its early history and membership is chronicled under Rev. Graepp's pastorate in the early pages of this historical account.

On Aug. 17, 1923, another group of women who were not familiar with the German-conducted Ladies Aid, formed the Sisters of St. John. Their purpose was to sew for Home and Foreign Missions. It also became the quilting group. Bible study and book reviews were introduced. Later its name was changed to St. John's Sewing Circle.

These two groups, the older women of the Ladies Aid and the younger ladies of the Sewing Circle, functioned separately, each having its own officers and conducting its own business, but with one purpose: "Serving the Lord," in whatever capacity was needed.

Later the Sewing Circle became the Women's Missionary Guild, a member of the Women's Missionary Federation of the American Lutheran Church. The youngsters, too, were a part of this program who met once a month; this group was called the Junior Mission Band with Mrs. Winterhoff as its leader assisted by women helpers.

The magazine was the *Outlook* which was used for mission studies.

After the next merger, circles were formed in the hope that every woman in the congregation would become more active in Bible study and mission work of the church locally and world-wide.

American Lutheran Church Women (ALCW) had as its Preamble to its Constitution the following:

"Mindful that our Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Head of the Church, made use of the service and devotion of women during the days of His earthly ministry, and desiring in our day likewise to follow and serve Him, we now with united effort dedicate ourselves to the furtherance of His kingdom by a stewardship of life and service to the glory of the Triune God."

Our ALCW functioned until the merger in 1988 when the merger of Lutheran congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) took place. A new body was formed, which promotes personal faith and spirituality, builds and nurtures community among women, and facilitates the expression of that community as it acts as the body of Christ in the world. In January of 1988, a new magazine, *Lutheran Women Today* (replacing the ALCW *Scope*), became the mouthpiece of the women's organization.

Women of the ELCA will be a vital part of the total ministry of the church and will be one of the ways women can express and expand the church's mission. Through this ministry the gifts of women will be recognized and affirmed. We are being challenged to be women of vision, to dream dreams and to renew our commitment to live out the gospel and ministry to which we have been called as Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. (from December 1987 *Scope*).

The purpose statement of Women of ELCA is: As a community of women created in the image of God, called to the discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world. The same call yesterday, today and tomorrow.

St. John at the end of its 100 years has two circles, Dorcas Circle that meets in the daytime and Ruth Circle that meets in the evening on a monthly basis.

Women have always played an important role in a congrega-

tion, so we look forward to the new merger's plans for the future.

tion, so we look forward to the new merger's plans for the future.

Beginning in the late '60s, adoption of a child through Christian Children Fund was initiated; this endeavor is still supported by the women's circles.

Old eyeglasses, stamps, and coupons for redemption are collected. Another interesting activity for several years was holding a shopping time for the children at Christmas time. Gifts were donated and the children shopped for family members without spending a lot of money.

Christmas boxes for service men and shut-ins have been filled with goodies spreading cheer at the holiday season.

Tecumseh Woods retreats in Michigan attracted ladies for two days of devotions, recreation, and fun.

Prayer chains, Lenten teas, mission studies, Golden Ager luncheons, conventions, purchasing draperies and carpeting, making salads for beef barbeques, World Day of Prayer services, and similar activities are all familiar reminders that the ladies kept busy being both "Marys and Marthas."

In 1925, the 30th anniversary of the Ladies Aid was celebrated. In 1955, the 60th anniversary of the Ladies Aid was mentioned in minutes still available.

In 1987, the following items were sent to World Relief: 30 quilts, 10 layettes, 8 health kits, 8 school kits, 5 sewing kits, and 8 pounds of soap.

## **Chancel Guild**

On March 1, 1954, the first meeting of the Chancel Guild was held during the pastorate of Rev. Winterhoff. According to the constitution, the members were communicant members of the church and other women in the community. "The purpose of the guild shall be:

- a. To care for the sanctuary of the church and to prepare it for each service.
- b. To furnish suitable vestments for the altar.
- c. To be custodians of the altar linens and furnishings of the sanctuary.



To foster a better understanding of the liturgical heritage of the Lutheran Church.

- d. To prepare a flower calendar, to see that flowers are properly placed and rightly disposed of after services.
- e. To join the Women's Missionary Federation of the ALC and promote its work.
- f. To promote a closer fellowship among our young women."

Money-making projects were regularly conducted to raise funds for the mission programs which covered such areas as Christian Service, Indian Mission, Junior Mission Band, Life Membership and Memorials, Missions of Education, New Guinea Mission, Special Needs, Thankoffering, In-gathering, buying books for the library, and supporting Cub Scout and Boy Scout projects.

Social activities were also a part of their busy existence. The 1958 minutes were the last on record.

Presumably our present-day (1969) Altar Guild is the outgrowth of the Chancel Guild whose functions carry out many of the same duties, but the congregation supplies funds for its needs.

### **The Sunday School**

Just when the Sunday School was begun is not in the records. The classes were held in the nave scattered about in the pews far enough apart to prevent too much interference between classes. Even the sacristy was a classroom.

After the basement was completed, cloth curtains separated classes. The kitchen and the little old school house were used for many years. The adult Bible Class continued to meet in the nave of the church.

Today the education unit and the fellowship hall named in honor of Pastor Winterhoff provide ample space for our educational program.

Many dedicated men and women have and still serve as teachers to tell the story of salvation to our children.

Besides the usual instructions weekly, the big event of the year was the annual Christmas program consisting of "saying their pieces," producing the pageants, and distributing the big paper sack containing an orange, nuts, and candy. Other gifts such as

books were often given.

Before electricity in the church, the tree had real candles that were lit. A long pole with a wet cloth or sponge on its end was kept in readiness in the event a branch caught on fire.

One year a revolving tree was the center of attraction when the audience thought their eyes were deceiving them.

Today our Luther Leaguers assume full responsibility for artistically beautifying the tree and the sanctuary for Christmas; this has been one of their projects ably supervised by the adult sponsors, usually a young married couple.

The Sunday School has a superintendent who conducts the necessary procedures for a smooth operation of the young Christians' training.

## **Luther League**

The first meeting of young people was held Nov. 21, 1921, to organize a young people's society which soon was called the Luther League. Members' homes, Mercantile Store, Town Hall, and the church basement became the meeting place for many years.

This organization provided the social life before modern-day activities crowded out some of the league's attractions.

Money raised through programs and plays supplemented congregational needs besides league projects.

One such project was covering the cross on the spire of the church with gold. In the 1930s, the league initiated the first *Lutheran Standard* subscription campaign.

" Halloween parties, all-day trips to Put-in-Bay, Bell Isle, and other places were special treats annually.

More recently, our Luther League has had devoted adult couples to be its sponsors. Going to national conventions every three years has been its primary focus, besides the programs suggested by the church. Contributing to the general growth of our youth in service to God and the community, as well as participating in fun activities, have also been vital parts of its program.

Money making projects have consisted of serving lunches at farm sales, selling frozen food, and sponsoring luncheons and

breakfasts for special occasions.

## **Choirs**

The aim of the choirs is to sing to the glory of God and to assist the pastor to carry the message in song.

Volunteers have always answered the call to use their talents to sing praises to our Lord; others provided the means to supply the robes for both the junior and senior choirs.

The first Junior Choir was organized by Mrs. Herbert Troge.

Many hymns were memorized and sung for church services and programs for special occasions.

Directors of both choirs have offered their services voluntarily ever since we have had choirs. Our congregation is grateful to those talented individuals for generously giving their time.

## 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Update 1988 – 2013

October of 1988 marked the end of the official celebration of the church's centennial. Pastor Earl Schafer offered these words to the congregation in the September issue of The Trumpet:

“It has been a busy year for those involved in planning our events. I want to thank all those who worked so hard to make this year a memorable celebration. I appreciate all who shared their stories of faith during our 100<sup>th</sup> year. We can surely say that 'God's Word is our Great Heritage' as it has been lived out through the life and ministry of the members of St. John Lutheran.

We have completed 100 years of history. It is like we have a jar filled with a little bit of God. God promises us that there is plenty more of love and grace to come, if only we would allow him to work in our lives. Do we hold on to the God we have, or do we pour Him into our world, our church, our community, our lives, trusting that there is a deeper well of grace and glory beyond our understanding.

It has been a great year to share as your pastor. I urge you to think about the future and what we are going to do with a jar of history, and a well of the future before us.”

In honor of our centennial celebration, the congregation presented a monetary gift to Hosanna Lutheran, a mission church in Grand Rapids, Ohio.

Pastor Schafer accepted a call to Peace Lutheran Church in Palm Bay, Florida and conducted his last service at St. John in January, 1989. Reverend Eugene Loehrke served as interim pastor until a call was accepted by Reverend Larry Knigga of Defiance, Ohio on October 29, 1989. Pastor Knigga began his pastorate on December 1, 1989 and was officially installed on December 19, 1989 by Bishop James Rave of the Northwestern Ohio Synod.

Several traditions that began during Pastor Loehrke's interim pastorate that continue to this day were the greeter program, the Kaffee Klatsch and pre-Lenten service soup and sandwich meals.

Held in the narthex following worship service, the Kaffee Klatsch was championed by the Evangelism Committee and provides coffee, punch and cookies as a way of promoting fellowship and welcoming of visitors.

The soup and sandwich meals have been hosted each Lenten season by various groups within the church. Proceeds received as free-will donations have been donated to various organizations such as the local food pantry, Luther Home of Mercy, Lutheran Social Services and Habitat for Humanity to name a few.

An external storage building that has been utilized to house grounds maintenance equipment and Christmas decorations was completed in 1989.

Significant events that took place during Pastor Knigga's tenure were as follows:

- ✧ Nave roof was replaced at a cost of \$10,000 in 1990
- ✧ New constitution patterned after an ELCA model was adopted in 1990
- ✧ Monthly card parties open to the community were first held in 1992, continuing until 2011; this event attracted both members and non-members and drew as many as seventy attendees
- ✧ Flat roof covering fellowship hall was replaced in 1993 at a cost of \$28,000
- ✧ First annual steak feed fundraiser was held in 1993; over the years, proceeds from this event have been used to provide funding for various renovation projects and more recently, donations to various charities and the synod's Lutheran agencies
- ✧ Chicken & biscuit dinners, which were popular in the 1950's in our old church, were reinstated as an annual fundraiser in 1996; proceeds have also been used for various renovation efforts as well as providing funds for confirmation camp fees
- ✧ Emergency replacement of hot water heating pipes completed in 1996 at a cost of \$36,000
- ✧ Church Council decided in 1997 that the church be locked when no one was in the building
- ✧ "With One Voice" supplemental hymnals were acquired in 1997
- ✧ Holy Communion instruction was extended to baptized members entering the fifth grade in 1998

- ⤴ Saturday evening worship services were held during the summers of 1998 and 1999
- ⤴ Bell tower was replaced in 1998 at a cost of \$19,828
- ⤴ Holy Communion began to be offered on the third Sunday of each month in addition to the first Sunday beginning in March of 2000
- ⤴ Interior painting of walls and ceilings and installation of new draperies (all rooms except the nave) and new carpeting in both offices and the lounge was completed in 2000

Pastor Knigga accepted a call to Hope Lutheran Church in Fostoria, Ohio in November, 2000. Reverend Stephen (Wally) Seibel was appointed as interim pastor in May, 2001, and he served the congregation in this capacity for a little over a year.

A call was extended to Reverend Keith Baker of Sylvania, Ohio in May, 2002. He was installed by Reverend Dennis Maurer, assistant to the bishop of the Northwestern Ohio Synod on July 14, 2002.

Events and activities of note that occurred during Pastor Baker's pastorate were as follows:

- ⤴ A lounge was created for the Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO) in the southeastern corner of the Sunday School wing in 2002
- ⤴ Internet service was acquired in the summer of 2004
- ⤴ The "Divine Drama" Bible study series was conducted by Pastor Baker in the fall of 2004
- ⤴ Holy Communion instruction was extended to baptized members entering the first grade in the fall of 2004
- ⤴ Major sound system upgrade was installed in 2004 at a cost of \$16,496
- ⤴ New energy-saving windows and panels were installed in all rooms in 2005 at a cost of \$67,976
- ⤴ Evangelical Lutheran Worship hymnals (cranberry) were first used in December, 2006, replacing the Lutheran Book of Worship (green)
- ⤴ Flat roofs on either side of the nave were replaced in 2009 at a cost of \$20,386
- ⤴ Original nave carpeting was replaced in 2009 at a cost of \$5,496

- ⤴ Holy Communion was extended to baptized members regardless of age with parental consent
- ⤴ A Heritage Bible was donated and will be in the possession of the congregation's oldest living member
- ⤴ Furnace was replaced in 2011 at a cost of \$34,315
- ⤴ Roofs on both the nave and storage building were replaced in 2012 at a cost of \$22,100

Shortly after completing the 10<sup>th</sup> year of his pastorate, Pastor Baker retired in October, 2012. Reverend Glen Stadler of Toledo was appointed as interim pastor in November, 2012. Reverend Ralph Schibler of Port Clinton followed Pastor Stadler as interim pastor in February, 2013.

Our women's organizations as part of the Women of the ELCA (WELCA) have continued their important contributions to our mission. The Dorcas (evening) and Ruth (morning) Circles met monthly for devotion and fellowship until transforming into a monthly Bible study group that was organized in 2011.

The monthly sewing group has made hundreds of quilts for Lutheran World Relief (LWR) and other needy local recipients over the past twenty-five years. Health, school and sewing kits for LWR have also been a mainstay project each and every year. The quilts and kits along with funds collected via WELCA thank-offering have been dedicated every November during worship service before being sent on their way.

Annual Advent Brunches were started in 1997. They have served as a special way to begin the Christmas season for women of our congregation and others throughout the area. Proceeds from the Advent Brunches have supported a variety of church-wide and local charitable causes.

The Altar Guild, a group that had its beginnings as the Chancel Guild in 1954, has continued its stellar tradition of tirelessly preparing the nave for worship services each and every week. Lilies at Easter and poinsettias at Christmas given to memory or honor of loved ones have become annual altar adornments.

Both the Junior and Senior Choirs, under the direction of very dedicated volunteer directors, have maintained their long-time status as an integral part of our worship services. Other talented youth and adult members of the congregation have also provided special musical numbers during worship service preludes and offertories. An electronic carillon system, donated to the church in 2001, has enabled the organist to fill the air with beautiful bell melodies. Handbells used by the Junior Choir (along with very willing adult volunteers) were donated in 2003 and have been used several times each year to enhance our worship experience.

Youth programs have continued to provide meaningful experiences for all age groups. Committed adult leadership has been instrumental in giving our youth a strong foundation in Lutheran education through the Sunday School program. The traditions of Christmas programs and Vacation Bible Schools have been maintained and eagerly anticipated. Confirmation camps at Lutheran Memorial Camp and Camp Luther have also continued to be part of the catechetical education experience.

The LYO has made its presence known over this period in a variety of ways:

- ⤴ Assistance with worship services such as Easter Sunrise and volunteering as lay readers
- ⤴ Taking responsibility for annually setting up the outdoor nativity scene in front of the church
- ⤴ Participation in the ELCA's Souper Bowl of Caring on Super Bowl Sunday, with proceeds donated to the local food pantry
- ⤴ Sponsorship of an annual chili cook-off beginning in 2005, with proceeds supporting charitable donations and national assembly expenses
- ⤴ Volunteering at Luther Home of Mercy (LHM) resident activities and serving meals at area homeless shelters
- ⤴ Raising funds for cancer research by participating in the local Relay for Life
- ⤴ Attendance at several national assemblies, including St. Louis in 2000 and New Orleans in 2009 and 2012; the latter two included service projects at sites devastated by Hurricane Katrina



- ▲ Picking up trash on a two-mile stretch of State Route 590 beginning in 2009 in conjunction with the state of Ohio's Adopt-A-Highway program

Dartball has continued its popularity among area churches, and we have been annual participants in a league comprised of teams from western Ottawa County. The team captured a tournament championship in the 2011-12 season and a regular season championship for the recently completed 2012-13 season. Other fellowship activities that we have kept alive have been potluck dinners for special occasions and summer picnics. More recently, we have attended Toledo Mud Hens baseball games.

In recounting the past twenty-five years, one can see that we have maintained many of the traditions of our first one-hundred years as a congregation. We have been good stewards of our church building, but we have also not lost sight of Christ's call and our mission to serve those less fortunate outside of the church walls. Church-wide programs have been supported through benevolence giving to the synod. In addition, local support to the needy has been in the form of annual contributions to the Oak Harbor area food pantry, the Ottawa County Holiday Bureau and Christmas sock tree. Disaster relief has been supported on an as-needed basis. For the past twenty years, we have provided Christmas gifts for residents at the Luther Home of Mercy. Many of our organizations as well as individual members have contributed over the past four years to Operation Christmas Child, a program sponsored by Samaritan's Purse that provides gifts and a Christian message to children all over the world.

As we pass another milestone year in the life of this congregation, let us ever be thankful for the many blessings that we receive each and every day from our God and Father Almighty. Thanks also to all members past and present who have given of their time, talents and possessions to make this church a haven for all who believe that Christ is Lord and Savior of all!

## **125TH ANNIVERSARY CALENDAR**

**Jan 20** – LYO Chili Cook-off

**Feb 13** – Oak Harbor High School Mixed Choir

**Apr 7** – Worship service commemorating our founding date of April 8, 1888. Bishop Marcus Lohrman will be joining us for this special day. Following the service, a catered meal will be served in the fellowship hall.

**Jun 30** – Picnic potluck with fun and games to follow

**Oct 13** – Final celebration at which we will be recognizing former pastors and confirmation classes