

A Brief History of Gethsemane Lutheran Church



In the late 1940s, there was no Missouri Synod Lutheran Church in Northern Franklin County. A group of north Columbus people, mainly members of Zion Lutheran Church on South High Street and Concordia Lutheran Church in west Columbus, determined to start one. So it came to be that ten adults founded Worthington Lutheran Church on Thursday evening, February 12, 1948 when they met at 7:45pm for Lenten worship in the home of Bill and Ruth Mackensen, 55 West Lincoln Avenue, Worthington, Ohio.

Zion's pastor, Rev. Otto T. Stolzenburg . . .

“preached the sermon on Matthew 26 – verses 51-52, Hymns 354, 151, & 154 were sung. Those present were Mr. & Mrs. Ernest Prentice, Mrs. Ungemach, Mrs. Neumyer, Mr. Withrow, from Zion. From Concordia – Rev. & Mrs. Werling, Mr & Mrs. Mackensen, a total of 9 people, plus Rev. Stolzenburg.

After the service Rev. Stolzenburg gave a brief explanation as to why this service was being held & any further plans were tabled until after the Lenten Service, at which time an estimate of the attendance could be given. Rev. S. also mentioned he would take up the matter with his congregation at the April voters meeting, as to whether or not we should continue these services & start a north-end mission. A free will offering netted \$3.95 [Editor's note: A second report had this number crossed out and replaced with \$2.25], which was to go to Zion. It was agreed upon when Rev. Werling preached, the offering would go to Concordia. Rev. Werling will alternate & will conduct the Feb. 19th service.”

(as recorded by Mrs. Trudy Ungemach)

Rev. Stolzenberg and Rev. W. H. Werling continued weekly evening services. The first Sunday evening service was held April 4, 1948. The services began in the Mackensen's living room, but as the group grew they moved to the basement.



The original organ was purchased on June 26, 1948 for \$75.00, but was replaced a few months later on December 20 with an Estey Reed two manual organ for \$100.00. Ruth Mackensen was the organist.



During May, 1948, a neighborhood religious canvas revealed a general desire for a Sunday School. June 28 to July 9 a successful Vacation Bible School was held with a progressive enrollment of up to 38 children.



July 11, 1948 marked the beginning of the first Sunday School with a progressive enrollment of from 16 to 40 children. Adult education started in September. Also in September the first Junior Choir was organized. December 22 was the first Children's Christmas Program.

our
Charlotte
Ann



OUR
CHILDREN'S
CHOIR
(12/22/48)

SOME OF THE
SUNDAY SCHOOL
CHILDREN
(12/22/48)



The congregation celebrated their First Anniversary on February 13, 1949 with the singing of “Beautiful Savior”, “Stand Up! Stand Up for Jesus”, “Onward, Christian Soldiers”, and “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow”. The Sunday School opened their celebration of the day with the following prayer.

*Before my words of prayer are said
I close my eyes and bow my head,
And try to think to whom I pray,
And try to mean the words I say.*

*O help me, Lord, this day to be
Thine own dear child and follow Thee;
And lead me, Savior, by Thy hand
Until I reach the Heavenly Land. Amen.*

In June of 1949, at the Convention of the Central District of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LC—MS) in Fort Wayne, Indiana, the congregation was received into Synodical membership.



The following month on July 17, the Rev. John W. Constable was ordained and installed as the first resident pastor; he also served as the campus pastor for Ohio State University. The evening service took place at Zion Lutheran Church with a reception following at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Prentice at 214 West Royal Forest Boulevard, Columbus.

September saw the incorporation of the congregation under the laws of the State of Ohio. Other important developments in 1949 were the writing of the congregation’s constitution; the organizing of a very active ladies group—Mary Martha Society; the growing enrollment to 70 children in the second annual Vacation Bible school and 45 pupils in Sunday School; and the closing of the Land Purchase deal on December 9, with the assistance of a Church Extension Board Loan.

On December 23, 1949, the Building Committee met with architect Ralph Orr to discuss plans for a structure to cost approximately \$25,000. The preliminary plans were accepted on June 2, 1950, and authority was given to proceed with the detail plans which were received and accepted in October. Immediate steps were taken to secure bids.

The Worthington Lutheran Church completed the purchase of four 60-foot lots in the Sunnymede Addition on December 9, 1949. The lots are 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the addition, and are located on the south side of East Stanton Avenue about 200 feet from North High Street. They are now covered with trees, and require a fill-in job before building can begin. The lots are 170 feet deep and have a 22 foot easement in the rear.

The building plans illustrated [below] are tentative. The first unit of the complex will be a parish hall which will be used at the present for a church. It will be approximately 24' x 60', and will seat 120 people. [Editor's note: The basement housed the restrooms, kitchen, Sunday School Assembly and the church office.]

The church proper will be constructed in the future and will be 40' x 120'.

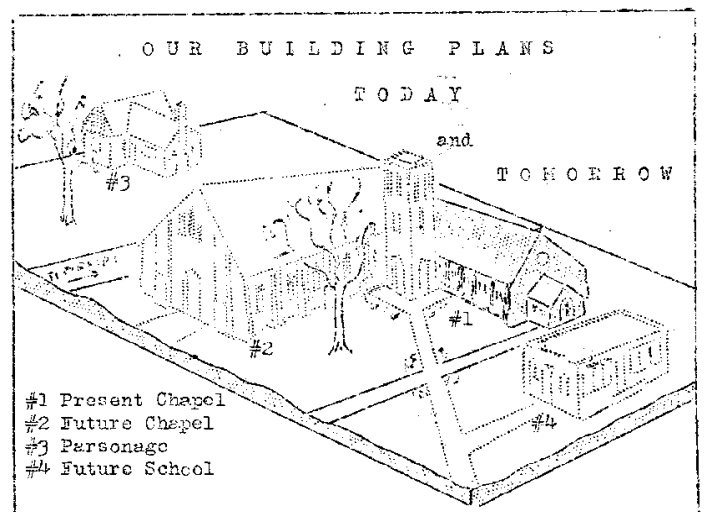
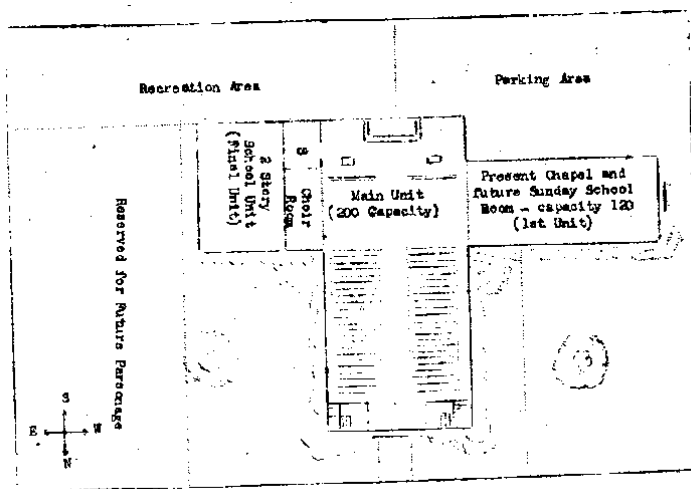
A parochial school may be added in the future to complete the complex which will resemble a cross when viewed from above, which is the traditional plan for a church complex.

The first unit will have a full basement on a 16 inch foundation. From ground level up, the walls will be 12 inches with four inches left on the outside for a veneer later. The veneer will not be added at this time so brick or stone may be matched with the surfacing of the completed complex.

The Church is affiliated with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which is one of the few Protestant Churches that sponsor their own parochial schools. Concordia Lutheran Church, 45 S. Brinker Avenue, Columbus, Ohio, has the only Lutheran parochial school in this city at the present time. Worthington Lutheran hopes to add the next one.

(prepared by the Publicity Committee

—Rev. John Constable, Mr. William Mackensen, and John Droege)



The year 1949 ended with a communicant membership of 36, 14 voting members, 57 baptized Lutheran souls, and 25 other children enrolled in Sunday School.

The following people became Charter Members. The period of charter membership officially closed on February 12, 1950, two years after the first service.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Mrs. Frank (Luella) Neumyer | 19. Mrs. H. (Trudy) Ungemach |
| 2. Mr. Ernest E. Prentice | 20. Mr. Gerald Keinath |
| 3. Mrs. Ernest (Minnie) Prentice | 21. Mr. Grover H. Detmer |
| 4. Mrs. Frank (Cordy) Verhoek | 22. Mr. John Droege |
| 5. Mr. Leroy O'Toole, Sr. | 23. Mr. A. A. Thompson |
| 6. Mrs. Leroy O'Toole, Sr. | 24. Mrs. A. A. Thompson |
| 7. Mr. Leroy O'Toole, Jr. | 25. Mr. Robert Millsbaugh |
| 8. Mr. Waldo A. Suker | 26. Mr. Larry Hofman |
| 9. Mrs. Waldo (Lee) Suker | 27. Mrs. Larry Hofman |
| 10. Mr. William E. Mackensen | 28. Mr. Edward Harwart |
| 11. Mrs. W. (Ruth) Mackensen | 29. Mrs. Edward (Jane) Harwart |
| 12. Mr. Gilbert Winter | 30. Mrs. Irving (Lucile) Bauer |
| 13. Mrs. Gilbert (Evelyn) Winter | 31. Mrs. H. F. Kamman |
| 14. Mrs. Joseph (Trude) Hewlett | 32. Mr. Edward Krause |
| 15. Mr. Herbert O. Weinrich | 33. Mrs. Thomas (Muriel) Hartzler |
| 16. Pastor John W. Constable | 34. Mr. Donald Schmitt |
| 17. Mrs. John (Ann) Constable | 35. Mrs. Donald (Ruth) Schmitt |
| 18. Mr. Herbert P. Ungemach | 36. Mr. George Stump |

On August 16, 1950 the Lutheran Women's Missionary League in convention at Cincinnati approved a grant of \$5,000 to the congregation. The property for the church had already been purchased through a loan of \$5,000 from the Church Extension Board of LC—MS. Other funding came from \$4,000 in member contributions, another \$4,000 in personal loans, and a \$12,000 loan from the Synod.

Groundbreaking was set for February 11, but then was not held until April 1, 1951 with cornerstone laying on June 24 and the first service on December 9, 1951.



Rev. John Constable and Herbert Ungemach



The official dedication of the sanctuary was held at two services on February 10, 1952—The Order of Morning Service at 11:00 am and The Service of Festival Worship at 3:00 pm. The morning service had an attendance of 103 and the afternoon service 208.





The Building Committee members Herbert Ungemach and Bill Mackensen, Rev. John Constable, and church member and contractor Ernest Prentiss opening the doors on Dedication Day, February 10, 1952.



View of the chancel
in the completed sanctuary on
Dedication Day, February 10, 1952.



Organist Ruth Mackensen with the "Quartet".



Dr. Beikner (Mission Board, Central District),
Mrs. Frank (President Lutheran Women's Missionary League, Central District),
and Rev. John Constable, First Resident Pastor of Worthington Lutheran



On January 17, 1954, the Rev. George Robbert was ordained and installed



In 1955 the parsonage was built at a cost of \$17,875.96.

A rapidly growing congregation welcomed Rev. Edward Rauff as its next pastor in 1956.

Two years later, a second service became necessary. Sunday School had long outgrown the church facilities and expanded into the parsonage and a private home nearby. Following the recommendations of two study groups the congregation approved the expansion of the facilities and on May 1, 1960 authorized the signing of a contract with C. Melvin Frank, Lindberg and Maki Architects. A groundbreaking service was held on November 13, 1960 for the Trinity Hall education wing and kitchen; dedication was held on March 12, 1961.



Groundbreaking on November 13, 1960,
for the addition of Trinity Hall education wing and kitchen.
Rev. Edward Rauff holding the shovel.





December, 1962, brought
Rev. D. Marshall Begley.

Sunday School enrolled
over 170 children.



When the church started, the area was in the Sunnymede Addition of Sharon Township and the Worthington School District, hence the name. However, in 1955 Columbus annexed as far north as Sharon Square taking the Columbus School District with it. As a result, the church found itself in Columbus rather than Worthington. It was eventually decided that a change in the name of the church would be appropriate. The following is from the Church Council and Voters' Assembly meeting minutes.

Church Council, February 1, 1963—The Board of Elders recommended to Church Council that the name of the church be changed. They would decide on six suggested names with an additional name coming from the congregation.

Voters' Assembly, February 10, 1963—It was moved and seconded that the name of Worthington Lutheran Church be changed. Motion passed. After some discussion of possible names it was moved to table the selection until the next Voters' Assembly. Motion passed.

Church Council, March 1, 1963—Moved that the Board of Elders draw up a list of names for church and present them to the next Voters' Assembly. Motion passed.

Church Council, April 5, 1963—Dick Gast reported that the Board of Elders suggests that a letter be placed in the mailboxes of all members explaining the proposed name change for our congregation. It was moved and passed by council that the letter be distributed in the boxes on April 21, with plans to submit new names to the May 5, Voters' Assembly.

Voters' Assembly, May 5, 1963—After much thoughtful discussion by members of the Voters' Assembly it was moved and seconded that the name of Worthington Lutheran be changed to Gethsemane Lutheran. This by general consent had been accepted to be the first reading of this proposed change, the second to be at the August meeting.

Voter's Assembly, August 11, 1963—Motion to table name change indefinitely was defeated. Motion to change name to Gethsemane Lutheran defeated. Move to consider name of St. Stephen's defeated. Move to consider original notion to change name to Gethsemane Lutheran Church Unaltered Augsburg Confession of Columbus, Ohio, Inc. This motion passed. It was then moved to make this name change official when we become part of the new Ohio District about the first of the year.

After filing the necessary papers the name became official on January 27, 1964.



Continuing change and growth brought Rev. Enno Gahl, who was installed on September 24, 1967 and was named Pastor Emeritus in December 1982.



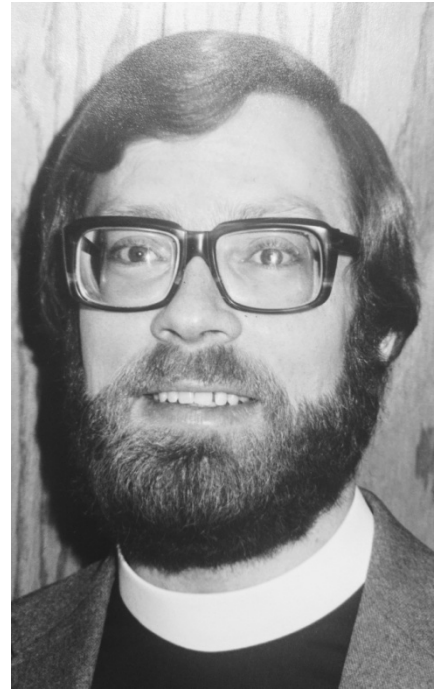


In May 1968, construction of a new sanctuary began with a groundbreaking ceremony followed by its dedication on May 25, 1969.

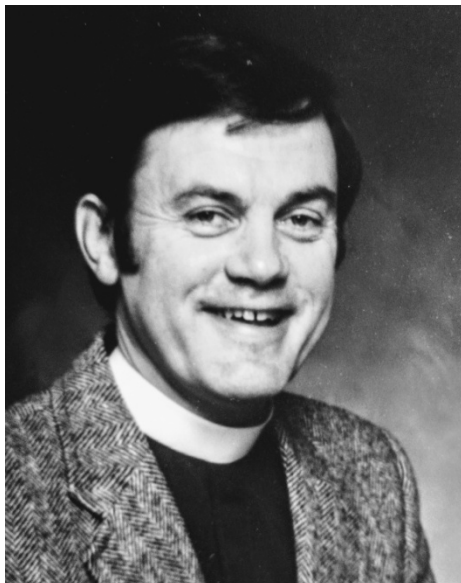


On June 23, 1974, the Voters' Assembly called Gerald Miller, president of the graduating class of what had been Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, to be Assistant Pastor for Christian Education. District President Arthur Ziegler authorized the ordination of Rev. Miller, but in the meantime, Synod President Jacob Preus and other national leaders determined that recent graduates required certification. A growing controversy between synodical leaders and seminary professors led by seminary President Dr. John Tietjen had by this time led to Tietjen's suspension and a large number of the professors breaking away to form the Seminary in Exile, Seminex for short. As a result, synod officials refused to recognize all uncertified graduates of Seminex of which Pastor Miller was one. They imposed requirements for certification that were unacceptable to many of the graduates. The particulars of this controversy filtered down to Gethsemane. Thus began a nearly 3-year series of events, study and deep soul searching by the congregation, Board of Elders and the Synodical Affairs Committee. Notification was received in August 1976, from the Synod's Commission on Constitutional Matters stating that "a congregation calling a pastor not properly endorsed by the synod forfeits its synodical membership". On November 21, 1976, Gethsemane voters removed references to the LC—MS from its constitution but refrained from formally leaving. This culminated on April 3, 1977, when the Voters' Assembly voted 71-24 (75%) to leave the Missouri Synod, then 81-5 (94%) to apply for membership in the English Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC) which consisted primarily of other congregations that had left the Missouri Synod (LC—MS). Gethsemane was the only AELC church in Columbus.

Prior to this, Home Bible Study Groups (now Care Groups) were established, the youth had developed formal groups, and various women's groups were formed.



In 1980, the congregation began Play and Learn Christian Day Care Center, a full-time facility. By 1987 the center expanded into the renovated parsonage to offer child care to infants and toddlers. Also that year saw the first female president of the congregation, Nancy Feole.



Pastor Miller resigned in August of 1982 to accept a call to Messiah Lutheran Church in Fairview Park, Ohio. Rev. Fredrick Wiese accepted Gethsemane's Call and was installed on January 30, 1983. The Voters' Assembly approved an extensive renovation project (1984-85) and the hiring of a second full-time staff person. The congregation called Sister Betsy Green, Deaconess, who was consecrated on September 8, 1985. Her main duties were Christian education and youth.

In 1988, the AELC merged with the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC) to become the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) of which Gethsemane is a charter congregation.

From 1989-1991 a Long-Range Planning Committee followed by a Prioritization/Implementation Committee gathered data, brainstormed, prioritized and defined a schedule for implementation. Their report recommended the hiring of a part-time staff person and the expansion of the facilities. Rev. Karen Asmus-Alsnauer was installed as Associate Pastor on April 1, 1992. When Sister Betsy, now Williams, resigned to go to seminary, Heidi Stover, an Associate in Ministry, was installed on April 25, 1993 to lead our Christian education, youth, and junior and senior handbell choirs.



At the Voters' Assembly in May 1993, the congregation

approved the construction of a two-story \$900,000 addition. *(We had burned our mortgage for all our previous building projects on September 21, 1986.)* Ground was broken at a ceremony on June 5, 1994, followed by the demolition of the original sanctuary on October 6, 1994. The new structure which included a large fellowship hall, second kitchen, library, atrium, expanded narthex, four classrooms, restrooms, janitor's closet and storage was dedicated at a special service on September 10, 1995.

A year-long 50th Anniversary Celebration was observed during 1998 with worship sermons by Southern Ohio Synod Bishop Callon Holloway, Trinity Lutheran Seminary President Dr. Dennis Anderson, former pastors, former members who had entered the ministry and other special guests. The year also saw many other activities and a seven-presentation Concert Series. A ceremonial re-sealing of the cornerstone from



our first sanctuary on November 22, 1998 brought all the festivities to an end. Among the items included in the cornerstone were a church directory, bulletins from our two festival services, a newsletter, a copy of Good Things, a 1998 budget, an anniversary brochure, photos from the past year, *The Lutheran* magazine, the front page of the Columbus Dispatch, and a 100th birthday card (if it is opened at Gethsemane's centennial).

A contemporary service was added in September 2001.

Pastor Wiese retired at the end of December 2003 ending a 20-plus year pastorate at Gethsemane. After a year-long interim period, Pastor Asmus-Alsnauer was Called as Administrative Pastor and installed on March 13, 2005. She remained with Gethsemane until June 30, 2010.

After another interim period Pastor June Wilkins was Called and installed as pastor on August 28, 2011.

In 2004, the congregation acquired for future expansion the property to the west fronting High Street and entered into a long-term lease for income in the interim with Tim Horton's.



The most recent development has been the institution of a monthly Swahili Service in conjunction with Ascension Lutheran Church for the many Tanzanian members and friends. The first service was May 3, 2009. On June 1, 2014, Pastor Ipyana Mwakabonga was installed. Until that time the services were led by guest preachers. In January 2015 they expanded to two services a month.



The congregation has fostered the growth of professional church workers with frequent Ministry in Context (MIC) students and with interns serving as Vicars assigned to us for practical training, encouragement and development. Over the years five of our members and our deaconess have entered the ministry. We reach out to our local community through our own food pantry and the food pantry of Lutheran Social Services, tutoring program, neighborhood cleanup day, Habitat for Humanity-Thrivent Builds, B.R.E.A.D Justice Ministry; and the larger community with a quilting project for Lutheran World Relief, SE Ohio Disaster Response, and ELCA World Hunger. We have especially been involved with service and fundraising for Faith Mission, including continuous leadership since the late 70s as members of the Board of Directors. Church member, Nancy Feole, was director for five years. Nancy's Place was named in her honor.

Our history shows development of a rich variety of resources in worship, music and education. Many new members have mentioned our welcoming friendliness. We are using these gifts to extend our charge to grow in faith and serve others as messengers of God's grace through Jesus, our Redeemer.



A 1958 aerial view of High Street, Stanton Avenue, Meadowlark Lane, and Charleston Avenue.