

## Salem Lutheran Church - A Brief History

The story of Salem's founding belongs to the German immigrant farmers and their families who left their homeland to move beyond the unstable political and economic conditions of the 1830s and 1840s in Germany. They found a bright future and a new home in the tiny community of Catonsville. What they did not leave behind was their love of God or their reverence for their Lutheran heritage. Having no Lutheran Church to attend here, they worshipped at the newly formed St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, where a clergyman on the church staff was able to offer worship in German. But his departure to a new assignment left them without German worship.

They were visited by an itinerant Lutheran missionary, Carl Frederick Heyer, who urged them to form their own church. Following his advice, they met on September 30, 1849 and organized the German Evangelical Lutheran Salem Congregation.

The early life of the church saw much activity. Their first task was to build a house of worship. They purchased a lot on Ingleside Avenue, and members of the congregation joined in the work of constructing the stone building, which was dedicated on June 16, 1850. Soon a decision was made to use the churchyard as a graveyard and to replace the school house that had been on the property at the time of purchase. They hired a teacher, who instructed in both English and German and had an additional duty of ringing the school bell.

Salem's first pastor was Charles A. Brockman. Popular at first, he fell out of favor with some in the congregation, possibly due to emotional stress caused by the death of his wife and two children over a three-year period. He was succeeded by Dr. George W. Ebeling in 1854.

Pr. Ebeling's pastorate included steady growth and significant change. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Salem's membership had doubled from its 1849 beginning, and the congregation looked beyond its original German ethnic orientation. As early as 1858, Sunday afternoon English language services were offered, in 1895 Sunday School instruction in English only was initiated, and at Dr. Ebeling's death in 1901, all worship in German was discontinued. The development of Frederick Road as the community center of activity was also apparent to the congregation. By 1901 Salem's worship attendance had outgrown its original modest church building. The congregation began to hold Sunday evening services at Library Hall, a meeting and multipurpose facility on Frederick Road.

Dr. Ebeling was succeeded by Dr. Martin Luther Enders, whose time at Salem included the move to Frederick Road. The new church home was an impressive addition to the development that was taking place in downtown Catonsville. Designed by the architectural firm of Owens and Cisco, the new building was constructed of Port Deposit granite in the Norman-Gothic style and was dedicated on Sunday, October 18, 1903. The cost of the entire project, including land acquisition, was \$26,100. An article appearing in a contemporary Lutheran publication described the new building in glowing detail. It concluded with the comment, "The church has a bright and glorious future before it."

Pastor Enders left Salem in 1910 to accept a new call and was succeeded by Dr. John Culler Bowers, whose long pastorate ended with his retirement in 1947. He initiated numerous building projects including the construction of a parsonage on Newberg Avenue in 1911, a new Sunday

School addition in 1917, and digging out the church basement to provide space for meeting rooms and a kitchen. He also stressed the value of enhancing the worship space, and through his leadership Salem purchased a mosaic reredos for the chancel, installed a new Moeller organ in 1929, created a center aisle, installed a brass and marble communion rail, and added a number of stained-glass windows. During Pastor Bowers' time, Salem served as a community center for its members, where a vast number of organizations offered opportunities for service and fellowship. In his last few years as Salem's spiritual leader, he was joined by Pastor Wilbur Newby, who served as assistant pastor.

Pastor Newby became Salem's sole pastor in 1947. In 1949, Salem celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with appropriate projects and events, including a ceremonial cake cutting by Pastor Newby and Pastor Emeritus Bowers. The post WWII period was one of rapid growth with membership rising to its peak. Salem's physical plant was challenged by the need for greater educational and meeting space. Salem recognized the advantage of a building project. After considering an expansion plan in 1949 that was never carried out, Salem constructed a new parish education facility, dedicated on October 23, 1955.

Pastor Newby left Salem in 1960 and was succeeded by Pastor G. Paul Lottich. His years at Salem were characterized by changes in society that led to changes in church ministry. Women were now serving on the Church Council, and lay assistants were taking a greater part in Sunday worship. Salem members were less likely to be involved in the various church groups (many of which ceased to exist) and more likely to assist with efforts such as Meals on Wheels or after school tutoring. Salem operated a paid kindergarten that transitioned to a day care center. During this time, there was a growing need for parking since many members now came to church from greater distances. In 1964 Salem tore down the parsonage and purchased a strip of land to its west. Together these areas became the current parking lot.

After Pastor Lottich's departure in 1976, a call was extended to Pastor G. Edward Whetstone, who served Salem for 32 years. Among the numerous changes that were brought about through his leadership was a project titled "Building Together on our Heritage for our Third Century." This addressed areas of congregational life that required improvement, including a more welcoming entry from the parking lot, greater accessibility throughout the building, more flexible meeting and classroom space, and an expanded narthex that could provide fellowship. After his retirement in 2012, Pastor Whetstone began service to Salem as Pastor Emeritus.

Pastor David Asendorf first came to Salem as a vicar in 2005. After his ordination in 2007 he was welcomed to Salem as co-pastor and continued to lead Salem after the retirement of Pastor Whetstone. In 2011 Pastor Timothy Jahn was called as associate pastor, serving for 4 years. Pastor Ann Dentry served as a pastoral assistant from 2016 to 2017. Jay Eckman, a native of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, served as vicar from 2017 to 2018. In 2019, Salem called Pastor Sarah Garrett Krey as associate pastor. She was called as Assistant to the Bishop in the DC Metro Synod and left Salem on June 5, 2022.