

Gethsemane: A Great Heritage Of Grace

"A Great Heritage



A Great Future"

A History Celebrating Gethsemane's Sixtieth Anniversary

By Eileen Herr, Church Historian

Gethsemane Lutheran Church
1892 E. Auburn Road
Rochester Hills, MI 48307
Fall, 2004

A Great Heritage...

At Gethsemane
By Eileen Herr, Church Historian

Gethsemane had its humble beginning as a mission effort of Trinity Lutheran Church, Utica, Michigan. Rev. Louis Heinecke and Vicar Harold Nuoffer held the first worship service on Sunday evening, May 7th, 1939. It was held in a rented frame building (with a dirt floor) on the corner of Harrison and Marlowe Streets. Sunday School was also held each week.

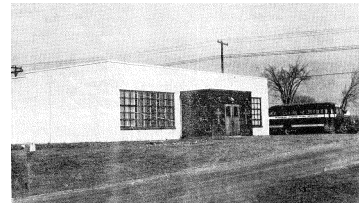
Rev. Knorr St. John Lutheran, Rochester, was Gethsemane’s first interim pastor. He served the mission until retired Pastor Ernest Kuehn took over in June, 1944.

In 1941, Gethsemane purchased its first sanctuary from Jehovah Church in Detroit. It was moved 18 miles to 1892 E. Auburn Road. On April 19, 1942, the newly-renovated sanctuary (pictured right) was dedicated.



Gethsemane was incorporated as a congregation of the Michigan District-LCMS on December 26, 1944 with 11 voting and 41 communicant members. On August 26, 1945, Gethsemane called her first pastor, Rev. Edward Schulte (pictured left), from Stillwater, OK.

During these formative years, St. John Lutheran, Rochester, held school in Gethsemane’s sanctuary. In 1945, Gethsemane opened her own school in the church basement. School was held there until a new two-room school (our present Preschool and Education Building, pictured right) was built on Hessel Street in 1949.



Under the guidance of Pastor Norman Kuck, Gethsemane tore down the existing church and built a new church (our current facility, pictured left) on the present site. It was dedicated on December 1, 1957. Total cost of the new church was \$90,000.00, a remarkable step of faith for Gethsemane congregation.

With the leadership of Gethsemane’s succeeding pastor, Rev. Donald Krueger, many new ministries and programs began. Wednesday Weekday School, Morning Bible Classes and Vacation Bible Schools continued. In 1967, Gethsemane opened a Youth Center in the education building as an outreach to the community.

After Pastor Krueger accepted a call to teach religion at Lutheran High School East, Pastor Howard Reinschmidt from Faith Lutheran, Troy, served as vacancy pastor. He served until Rev. William Otten of Lane, S.D. accepted the call to Gethsemane. He was installed on September 29, 1968.

During Pastor Otten’s tenure, Gethsemane celebrated Christmas with a new Chrismon tree, made by the ladies of the church. As part of the 25th Anniversary Celebration, Gethsemane purchased a new Conn organ for \$4200. This organ served Gethsemane until it was replaced in 2002. During Otten’s ministry, Gethsemane sold 3 lots west of the church for \$1800, while purchasing two lots east of the church for \$22,500. Gethsemane members fondly remember the weekend camp-outs and the Wednesday Night services added by Pastor Otten.



Under Pastor Otten’s leadership, Gethsemane provided facilities for Lutheran High North’s initial two years. Confirmation classes were held in the narthex. Education classes were held in the Preschool/Education building. Physical Education was held in the Fellowship Hall. A library was made in a storage garage. A small office (pictured left) was constructed inside the Education building for the new Lutheran High North Principal and school staff (pictured left). Many area pastors including Rev. E. Paul Burow, Rev. Ronald Irsch and Pastor Otten assisted in these early years (1974-1976).

Under Pastor Otten’s leadership, Gethsemane also led the efforts for the establishment of Lutheran High North. Mr. Roy Plaumann led Gethsemane members to pledge over \$56,000 of the initial \$60,000 needed to purchase a forty-acre site for Lutheran High North on the southwest corner of Hall and Schoenherr Roads (the present Sears store at Lakeside Mall).

Pastor Otten’s leadership enabled Lutheran High North to realize a remarkable profit on the land, enabling them to purchase—and build—it’s first facility (pictured right) at its present location at Romeo Plank and 24 Mile Roads.



Rev. Herman Christiansen succeeded Pastor Otten and accepted Gethsemane’s call to serve as pastor on August 15, 1973. During his tenure Gethsemane introduced individual cups for use in communion. The congregation also took a step of faith to build a new parsonage on Hessel Street to replace the old parsonage on Weaverton Street. The Hessel Street parsonage was dedicated on April 30, 1978 and was built for \$43,420. The parsonage on Weaverton was sold for \$35,000.

Gethsemane moved out in faith again by re-opening the Christian Day School in 1980. Rev. David Burgess of Milford, Nebraska, was called to succeed Pastor Christiansen who left Gethsemane in 1985. Pastor Burgess was installed in 1986. During his tenure Gethsemane held a Sunrise Easter service on the Larry Haff farm. A “Celebration of Friendship” was attended by 294 people! Most significant was Gethsemane’s four-year

support of a new Lutheran Church in Romeo, now Grace Lutheran Church beginning in 1990.

Gethsemane’s 50th Anniversary marked the beginning of Rev. Jeffrey Schlueter’s ministry. During his time Gethsemane began “Saturday Night Alive” contemporary services on December 4, 1993. Upon his resignation in August, 2000, Rev. Thomas Fischer of Midland, Michigan accepted our call. He was installed on April 22, 2001.

Since 2001, Gethsemane has seen several changes. Together with Teri Barnaby, our first paid music director, Gethsemane’s music ministry has expanded to include adult, jazz and youth choirs and several hand chime choirs.

Sheryl Landreth, Preschool Director and Director of Family Ministries, began her ministry at Gethsemane in April, 2003. Gethsemane’s Preschool began in 2003 (pictured right) and numerous other family-oriented ministries continue to be developed to help pave the way for “A Greater Future.”



As the members of Gethsemane celebrate our “Great Heritage” of God’s blessing for sixty years of ministry, we are committed to build “A Great Future” as we prepare for our 60th Anniversary Building expansion. This expansion will including a renovation of the sanctuary and additional classroom and office space.

To God be the glory!

Mrs. Eileen Herr, Church Historian
September, 2004
