

Redeemer's  
50th Anniversary

October 23, 2011

▶ 1961-2011

# Redeemer Lutheran Church: A History



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## BRIEF HISTORY OF MARTIN LUTHER

Martin Luther, who is considered to be the “Father of the Lutheran Church,” was born in Germany in 1483 and died in 1546. He began his life of ministry as a monk in the Roman Catholic Church, but could only find condemnation in the teachings of the church. He could not find peace through all his instruction and penances until he began to really study the Bible and came to understand that we are not saved by good deeds, but by faith in our Lord and the freeing work of the Holy Spirit.

In October of 1512, the University of Wittenberg conferred upon Martin Luther the degree of Doctor of Theology. Luther never planned to start a new Church, but was compelled to protest when Pope Leo the X authorized the sale of Indulgences as substitutes for penances. On October 31, 1517, Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the door of the Cathedral at Wittenberg. This was technically the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Luther was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church in 1520, after his debate at Leipzig in 1519, where he denied the infallible authority of the church over a man’s conscience and right to appeal his own sins directly to God.



The Emperor summoned Luther to a Council at Worms in 1521 because of this act of political insubordination. Here, he made his famous statement, “Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. God help me! Amen.” For this he was condemned and banned from the Realm, but his friends rescued him and hid him at Wartburg Castle. Eventually, Martin Luther settled in Wittenberg where he continued to support the Protestant movement.

Luther's later translation of the Bible helped to develop a standard version of the German language and added several principles to the art of translation. Luther's hymns sparked the development of congregational singing in Christianity. His marriage, on June 13, 1525, to Katharina von Bora, a former nun, began the tradition of clerical marriage within several Christian denominations. Martin Luther was a strong advocate of marriage and often referred to his wife as "Kitty, my Rib," or "my lord, Katie" when she was managing the household.

"Certain key tenets of Luther's theology have shaped Protestant Christianity since the 16th century. They include his insistence on the Bible, the Word of God, as the only source of religious authority; his emphasis on the centrality of grace, appropriated by faith, as the sole means of human salvation; and his understanding of the church as a community of the faithful—a priesthood of all believers—rather than as a hierarchical structure with a prominent division between clergy and laity. Luther was not the first to express these notions, and, indeed, recent scholarship on the 15th century has shown that much of what was traditionally considered Luther's revolutionary innovation had striking antecedents. Nevertheless, the vigor and centrality that these ideas received in Luther's thought made them, in important respects, dramatically new. Certain corollaries of Luther's central teachings also made his achievement new and noteworthy. His insistence, for example, that sacred Scripture be available to commoners prompted him not only to translate the Bible into German but also to compose hymns and to advocate the establishment of schools in the cities." *Excerpt from [www.biography.com/articles/Martin-Luther](http://www.biography.com/articles/Martin-Luther)*



## HISTORY OF REDEEMER LUTHERAN CHURCH JACKSON, MICHIGAN LCMS

September 24, 1961, Redeemer received its charter as a congregation of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. On that date, Redeemer numbered 45 charter communicant members and 77 charter baptized members.

### **Charter Members of Redeemer Lutheran Church**

Mr. and Mrs. (Jean) Glen Anderson  
Mrs. William Balcoff,  
    and children: Debbie and Lori  
Mr. and Mrs. (Lois) Robert Burkhardt,  
    and children: Ronald, Christopher, and Douglas  
Mr. Richard Caspersen,  
    and children: Richard, Kenneth, Charles, and  
Wendy Sue  
Mr. and Mrs. (Annabel) Ted Claus  
Mrs. Rose Clemons  
    and children: Connie Kring, Debbie, and Judy  
Mr. and Mrs. (Sybil) Arthur Ellis  
    and children: Mark and Marsha  
Mrs. Robert Engle  
Mr. and Mrs. (Bernice/Bunny) Donald Giroux  
    and children: Karla and Gregory  
Mrs. Winifred Iuni  
    and child: James  
Mrs. Kathryn Johnson  
Miss Karen Johnson  
Miss Karen Kring  
Mr. and Mrs. Norman Marks  
    and child: Tamara  
Mr. and Mrs. (Joan) Robert McColley  
    and children: Leslie, Mark, and Lisa  
Mrs. (Shirley) Gerald Pangle  
    and children: Rick and Karen

Mr. and Mrs. (Gertrude) Floyd Pierce  
Reverend J. Louis Oetting  
Mr. and Mrs. (Sandra) Allyn Saylor  
Mr. Henry Schelling  
Mr. and Mrs. (Kari) Karl Schelling  
    and child: Michael  
Mr. Leroy Schmidt  
Mrs. Fred Slaybaugh  
Miss Clara Tisch  
Mr. Emmanuel Tisch  
Mr. James Tisch  
Mr. and Mrs. (Alice) Richard VanderVeen  
    and children: Carl, Claude, and Caryn  
Mr. and Mrs. (Betty) Carsten Wegman  
    and child: Timothy  
Mr. and Mrs. (Phyllis) Donald Wright  
Miss Lorilei Wright  
    and child: Donald  
Mr. and Mrs. (Martha) Ivan Zahn  
    and children: Karen, Kurt, and Keith



The establishment of a mission congregation in Jackson began to take shape in 1960 when Trinity Church of Jackson laid plans for the construction of a parochial school on the western Jackson city limits. With the aid and encouragement of the Mission Board of the Michigan District of our Synod, plans were made for a new mission to begin by holding services in the auditorium of Trinity School at 4900 McCain Road.

In December 1960, a call was issued to Reverend J. Louis Oetting



of Rock Island, Illinois, which he accepted. He arrived in Jackson in January of 1961, and in the next three months, he conducted a door-to-door survey of 2,200 homes in the area around the school.

On May 7, 1961, the first worship service was held with 163 in attendance. The following Sunday, the first session of the Sunday School program was held with 17 children attending. During that summer, work began on a constitution for the congregation that was given the name of *Redeemer* on May 25, 1961. The first chairman of Redeemer congregation was Mr. Ted Claus. The Chancel Guild was started during this time.

In November of 1963, a planning committee began its preliminary work for the building of our first facilities. On April 15, 1964, the congregation resolved to purchase property on Spring Arbor Road and to construct a church facility on that site. The groundbreaking ceremony for the new building was held on November 21, 1965, and the cornerstone was placed on April 3, 1966.

On the day of dedication for our new facility, September 25, 1966, Redeemer congregation also celebrated its fifth anniversary. In October of 1966, Diana Lynn Brandt, daughter of Kenneth and Deanna Brandt., was the first child to be baptized in our new church facility. The tradition of the Chrismon Tree was also started during this time. Pastor Oetting continued to serve Redeemer congregation as



Pastor until 1969, when he accepted a call to Granite City, Illinois. Reverend Warren L. Paulson began serving the congregation as interim pastor on November 24, 1969.

In February of 1970, a call was extended to Reverend



end Richard C. Pflieger of Auburn, Alabama. Pastor Pflieger was installed on April 26, 1970.

The worship area of the church was enhanced, in September 1974, by the addition of pews, and in July of 1975,

with the addition of carpeting in the chancel area and down the center aisle of the nave of the church.

Pastor Pflieger served the congregation until June of 1977, when Reverend Paulson again served Redeemer as interim pastor.

In July of 1977, a call was extended to Reverend William Gatz of Mississauga, Ontario, Canada. Pastor Gatz was installed on December 11, 1977.



Although plans for an educational addition to our church facilities were drawn by a committee in 1972, it wasn't until April of 1978 that the voters accepted the recommendation of the building committee to proceed with this addition to the building. The groundbreaking ceremony for this new addition was held April 23, 1978.

At the end of September of 1978, the



congregation had 695 baptized members, 489 were communicant members. LWML (Lutheran Women's Missionary League) began making quilts for missions and so began the Quilters group at Redeemer.

Annette Sandtveit was Redeemer's Choir Director from September of 1978 through May of 2004. During that time, she connected many of our ministry areas



through this musical venue. She worked music into the Sunday school, VBS, and Women's Ministry areas. Her expertise brought together many talents: voice, drama, instrumentalists, and others. She involved Redeemer in Nurs-

ing Home ministry, adding children's singing voices and visits to the "Grandmas and Grandpas" at Countryside Care Facility on a regular basis.

Community outreach through musical contributions by the choir became annual outings to Malls and Festivals, including the Detroit Handbell Festival. Easter Cantatas and annual Christmas programs, along with these other celebrations were all a part of the mix that grew the music ministry here at Redeemer under Annette's direction.



Due to the growth of our congregation, we recognized Pastor Gatz needed some pastoral assistance, and we had a series of vicars from 1982 through 1985. Redeemer discontinued the vicarage program due to support issues. In 1985, Barry Mueller, a Fort Wayne

seminary student, served with Redeemer for eight months as a field-worker. He left in May of 1986.

During this same timeframe, the Women of Redeemer, under the leadership of Birdie Rozelle as Director, became very active in all areas of ministry to women. This women's group became *Women's Ministries*, a vital, effective, and recognized church ministry area at Redeemer. Peggy Bennitt joined Birdie as Assistant Director in 1995, helping with the planning, organization, and implementation of events and activities. Women's



activities added during this period included: an annual Spring luncheon, Secret Sisters, annual Winter Retreat at Youth Haven Ranch, annual Ladies' Night Out, Women's Book Club, and Mother/Daughter Banquet

(later became a Mother/Child Dinner). LWML was also under the umbrella of Women's Ministries and several Conferences were held here at Redeemer.

The Quilters are mentioned for the first time in a congregational report in 1985, although the quilting ministry for LWML is believed to have started here at Redeemer as early as 1978. This ministry is still active in conjunction with the LWML today.



In September of 1991, Redeemer celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with Dr. John Heins as the speaker at both services. He was then the president of the Michigan District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. A pig roast and potluck followed in celebration of this Church milestone.

In November of 1992, John Rathje joined Redeemer as part-time staff to assist Pastor Gatz in the areas of family and personal counseling, and evangelism/outreach. On March 14, 1993, a call was extended to John Rathje to be the full-time Minister to Families at Redeemer, a call which he accepted on March 28, 1993.



The *Redeemer Reflection* church newspaper was started by Jason Bennitt in July of 1993. Members of the congregation contributed articles and poems, making this



a popular communication venue and informational resource for the membership. Leah and Peggy Bennitt assisted in the writing and production of this newspaper which began as a twice monthly newspaper with full support and encouragement of Pastor Gatz. In 1995, it became a monthly

newspaper and continued to feature interviews, book reviews, and reporting on current and upcoming church events. The *Reflection* newspaper ceased production in March of 1996.



In January of 1995, a Building Feasibility Study was authorized, and in November of that year, the committee recommended expanding our facility from its then 10,000 square feet to 33,538 square feet. This expansion was to include: Sanctuary, Teen Room,

Music Complex, additional Classrooms, Office Complex with Meeting Rooms, Library and Church Archives Facility, and Fellowship Hall. The voters approved having preliminary drawings made.

Children and Youth were growing ministry areas and included concentration on all age groups. VBS was another busy ministry with Pastor Gatz leading an opening with the children each year.



After over a year of fundraising through work projects and dinners, the STAR (Senior Teens At Redeemer) youth group attended the National Youth Gathering in San Antonio, Texas in July.

The STAR youth group worked at fundraising throughout the year, and in the fall of 1996, they attended the Michigan District's youth Gathering on Mackinac Island.

December 1, 1996, Reverend William Roper was installed as pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church. He served the congregation in that position until his retirement in June of 2010.



Redeemer had 570 baptized members on record in 1997, with 402 of those being communicant members.

In 1996-97, contemporary worship songs became a part of our Wednesday night summer services, adding a new dimension to our worship here at Redeemer. A praise band was added to the music venue and was called *New Day*. *New Day* recorded band-written songs in 1999; the CD released in 2000. These CDs were then used as an outreach tool in the community and were available for guests attending our

Services and activities. They were also available for purchase. Kristen Rathje was a major part in the writing of the lyrics for many of the songs for the CD. Members of the original Praise Band, *New Day*, included: Joe Brandell, Suzy Burton



(Director), Mark Cox, Brian and Deb Fall, and Kris Nowak.

The Praise Team has since “gone on the road” a few times, performing two concerts at the state prison in 2005 and 2006, several benefit concerts, funerals, and memorial services throughout the years.

Stephen Ministry became a reality at Redeemer in April 1998, with Marvel Jones and John Rathje taking the initial leadership training. They then



trained the first group of seven Stephen Ministers, and certified them for active ministry in the church and community in December of 1998. These first ministers were Peggy Bennitt, Jean Chan, Laurel Eding, Bob and Loretta Rice, Sue Simonsen, and Lori Zeidan. Stephen Ministers are trained to give one-to-one care to people during life-crisis situations, giving additional hours of care each week that supplements the care that the pastor provides.

In May of 1999, Redeemer officially began a Building Program with a Groundbreaking Ceremony on May 16,



1999. A Biblical Garden also was researched and designed by Jan Wetters and Marvel Jones at this time. The outer shell of Redeemer's new addition was completed by

the end of 1999, with the internal construction continuing into the new year. Much of the "finishing" work was done as a "labor of love" by many Redeemer members with talents

in the varying construction areas, sparing the congregation great expense. God continued to bless Redeemer with helping and willing hearts and hands.



The new construction included new offices, library, prayer chapel, narthex (lobby area), new lower level

classrooms and music room, additional bathrooms, kitchen, and gymnasium or activity center. The gym was given the acronym of the RAC, Redeemer Activity Center.



After 50 hours of intense training, a second group of Stephen Ministers was certified to serve Redeemer and its surrounding community in April of 2000.



In July 2002, Redeemer sponsored the LCMS "Lift High the Cross" hot air balloon at the Jackson Hot Air Jubilee. Redeemer provided the crew team, the chase team, and the hospitality tent with an evangelism crew who manned it, for this three-day event, which included 70 volunteers in total. We provided free bottles of water with our church name and logo on them, as well as brochures and coloring pages to inform those interested of our ministries and various services available to the community.



Susan Sloan was Director of Assimilation from 2002-2005, a position funded by grant monies.

Redeemer received a Herrick Grant in 2002. Projects proposed for the use of this grant in 2003 were: air conditioning in the RAC, new chairs and stage, audio/visual improvements, electronic sign, improve parking, and construction of a pavilion and storage facility.



In the fall of 2003, Redeemer took on the *40 Days of Purpose* focus for October and November, concentrating on Bible studies and ministry challenges from *The Purpose Driven Life* written by Rick Warren. NASCAR was the theme Redeemer used to focus us on driving our ministries forward with



the purpose of sharing the Word with the world.

Due to growing attendance at the second service, the 10:30 a.m. service was moved to the lower level activity center (RAC) in late 2003.



A third group of Stephen Ministers was trained and certified in 2004, with seasoned ministers re-committing to the ministry.

The Rathje family left Redeemer in June of 2004, moving to St, Louis, Missouri so that John could attend Seminary. The congregation was saddened to have this family leave, but thrilled that John was able to pursue his education toward the Ministry. We were greatly blessed by his many years of faithful service and by the many contributions of time and talent made by both him and his family.



In 2005, the Men's Choir at Redeemer was formed under the direction of Ted Miller, at the suggestion of the



Choir Director, Kris Nowak. Craig Britton joined the staff of Redeemer in August 2005, as *Director of Discipleship and Adult Ministries*, later to be Director of Ministries, with concentration to be on children and families.



Also, in 2005, the South was devastated by hurricane Katrina, and Redeemer responded to the emergency by sending several semi-trucks filled with food and clothing gathered from our congregation and the surrounding community. The semi trailers were parked in front of the church on Spring Arbor



Road, and we became known for the next year or so as “the church with the semi.” We sent two Katrina Relief Crews to the Gulf Coast, particularly Louisiana and Mississippi, partnering with Lutheran Disaster Response and staying in their portable work sites to help “muck out” homes and rebuild communities. Redeemer continues to be a congregation *Loving People To Christ*.



Redeemer implemented the Unity process in 2007. Completion of all interviews and the District’s *Unity Ministry Report* came in April of 2008. This included suggestions by the Ministry to handle pastoral and other ministry issues diplomatically. A Unity Task Force was selected by the congregation and charged with the task of responding to the *Ministry’s* recommendations.

*The Unity Task Force Mediation Report – Our Response* – was given to the congregation on September 21, 2008.



In 2009, Redeemer again began to focus on children and families under the direction of Craig Britton. VBS, KidsVenture

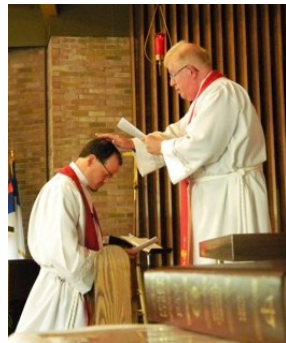


Bible study, and family-attended confirmation classes were implemented.

The Chancel Guild claims the Redeemer ministries' record for longevity. Chancel has been ongoing in one form or another since the beginning of Redeemer, with the LWML Quilters becoming an active ministry in 1978. Both ministries are still going strong.



In May of 2010, Michael Geml was installed as the Senior Pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church, Jackson, Michigan.



Redeemer has had four of its members enter the Pastoral Ministry as of 2011: Dale Kleimola, Rick Preskar, Steve Williams, and John Rathje.



As Redeemer continues to grow and evolve, as our history continues with grace from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, may we always remember that this is a trust to us from Him. He has given this, His church, into our hands as His faithful stewards in this time and in this place.

Redeemer's history is not just a record of a church building and its renovations and expansions; it is a history of a people, a Family of Believers, and a celebration of their journey together toward one goal: Home—our Heavenly Home with Jesus. Our history shows a people dedicated to The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). Sharing the Good News with those around us and supporting missions, we work together...*Loving People To Christ.*



## Noted Events In The History of The Lutheran Church in America

1638 – Lutherans settle in what is now, Wilmington, Pennsylvania

1838-1847 – The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod had its beginnings

1966 – Women approved as voting members

## Highlights In The Recent History Redeemer Lutheran Church



## GOD'S VISION FOR REDEEMER LUTHERAN CHURCH

**God's Vision for Redeemer** is to be a catalyst for growth, a congregation where every member is actively involved in helping the people in the Jackson area grow to their full God-given potential. Everyone in the congregation will glorify God by faithfully and cheerfully using their talents, abilities, and spiritual gifts to help others.

By growing first in faith in Jesus Christ, we will open the door for each person to grow personally, as a family, and in service to others. We will grow in faith by focusing on Jesus Christ through the continuous study of God's Word, prayer, and worship.

Personal growth in our congregation is an ongoing life process through interaction, study, and reflection. Redeemer encourages personal growth by serving specific needs in all aspects of life from infants to the elderly.

Our Family growth is fostered through enriched relationships. Redeemer is an inclusive Family, committed to helping all people relate effectively to each other, enabling each person to reach his or her potential in Christ.

Growth by serving is important in all areas of life in our congregation. We serve God by serving others. Redeemer is a place where each person can make a difference in the lives of others through meaningful and satisfying service opportunities. It is a place where each person can grow, and in turn, use their God-given gifts to help others grow, also.

In this way, we will glorify God, build His kingdom, and improve life in the greater Jackson area.

## REDEEMER'S CORE VALUES

**We are committed to:**

### **Authority of God's Word**

We believe that the Bible is God's inspired Word. God's Word is the standard of faith and practice for Christians in all ages. Christ-centered preaching, teaching, and the proper administration of the sacraments is vital for our walk of faith in Christ. What the Bible teaches takes precedence over church tradition or human opinion. *2 Timothy 3:16*

### **Prayer**

We believe that God desires us to pray and has promised to hear and answer our prayers. Therefore, because of this special blessing and privilege given to us, the life of our church will be grounded in prayer, from beginning to end. *Matthew 6:5-15*

### **Reaching People for Christ**

We believe that God has called us to reach out with the love of Christ to meet the needs of people both outside and within our congregation. People matter to God and therefore matter to us. *Matthew 28:18-20*

### **Fully Devoted Followers of Christ**

We believe that becoming a disciple is a life-long process of growth, including good stewardship, continuing education, and a life of service using our talents, interests, and spiritual gifts. God did not call us to a life of comfort, but to a life of usefulness.

*1 Peter 4:10, 1 Corinthians 12*

## Being a Worshiping Community

We believe that participating in a celebrating, inspirational, and culturally relevant worship is essential. It is through worship that we offer praise, thanksgiving, and glory to God. Our worship should be Biblical, meaningful, and practical. *Psalm 95:1-7, John 4:23-24, Hebrews 10:25*

## Godly Leadership

We believe that God calls our leaders to be responsible, accountable, and spiritually qualified. God is glorified by faithful, gifted, and servant leadership. *Romans 12:8*

## Strong, Healthy Relationships

We believe that God's people are caring, friendly people, with Christ-centered relationships. These loving relationships should permeate every aspect of church life. We believe in the importance of developing healthy relationships with God and one another. *1 Peter 4:8, Ephesians 4:29-32*

## Excellence

We believe that God deserves the best we have to offer. Therefore, we will strive to maintain a high standard of excellence in everything we do, to the glory of God. *Colossians 3:2*



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