

# **Our Redeemer Lutheran Church McMurray, PA**

## **Congregation History**

### **In 1963:**

In 1963, a news article about the dedication of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church stated: “The \$65,000 unit, first of three to be built, will be used as an educational wing when the complete church is finished.” Thirty-six years later, in 1999, that statement became a reality.

The congregation itself was formed in April 1959, when thirty-nine men, women, and children met in Peters Township High School. May 17th marked the first worship service of the mission congregation in McMurray Elementary School. One year later on May 15th, sixty-four individuals signed the charter for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer.

The dedicated young congregation met in schools for the first three and a half years as they struggled to gather the money to build their own church. Early congregants faced a tough challenge: each Saturday night volunteers assembled the portable altar and communion rails, set up chairs, and otherwise transformed a grade school cafeteria into a house of worship. The challenge of being a “gypsy” congregation served to strengthen the members’ commitment.

On August 18, 1963, they broke ground on the 5 1/2 acre site they had purchased earlier. These congregants had a fervent hope that they would be in their new church home by Christmas. By December 15, 1963, they achieved their dream. They held their first worship service in their new home. At the time, the church had 206 baptized members.

The new church was dedicated the following May 17th, Pentecost Sunday—the fourth anniversary of the congregation’s organization and the fifth anniversary of the congregation’s first service. The Rev. William C. Hankey, President of the Western

Pennsylvania-West Virginia Synod of the Lutheran Church in America –the equivalent of today’s bishop– preached the dedicatory homily.



## The Ensuing Fifteen Years:

The ensuing fifteen years proved challenging for the young congregation, still a mission church sponsored by the Western Pennsylvania Synod. In that short time span, six ministers came and left, each serving an average of only 2 1/2 years. That instability kept the church from flourishing, although commitment among many remained strong.

Despite the instability, good things continue to occur. The most dramatic was on Christmas Eve, 1966, when Mr. Art Schwotzer, one of the original members of the congregation, donated the organ. Throughout those years, the congregation acquired paraments, altar appointments, banners, furnishings, and equipment.

The period of pastoral instability ended in 1978 when The Rev. John F. (Jack) Yedlicka accepted the call to our pulpit, promising the call committee that he would remain at least five years. He was the pastor of Our Redeemer for 24 years.



## Throughout the Years:

Throughout all those years, the original dream remained—to build “a real church” as the original congregants had envisioned. The gully which ran the length of the front of the property was filled in 1989. A new sign was erected further enhancing our visibility. In 1990, the council formed the Church and Community Committee to study the congregation before entering into a building expansion project. After a year’s study, the committee recommended the establishment of a long-range planning committee.

A plan was presented to the congregation on March 4, 1996. It recommended a major addition, coupled with remodeling the existing structure to be accomplished in a single step and funded by a major fund-raising campaign. The original plan, estimated at \$1.5 million, was rejected and the scaled back version of \$1.2 million was accepted by the congregation on Palm Sunday, March 23, 1997. Construction began soon after the ground breaking on July 19, 1998 and once again the congregation held its worship services in the local high school during construction and remodeling. The first service was held in the new sanctuary on May 23, 1999.



## July, 2002:

In July 2002, Pastor Yedlicka retired and The Rev. Dr. Ann Schmid became the pastor at Our Redeemer. On September 28, 2003 Our Redeemer broke ground to expand the fellowship hall. In October, 2003, The Rev. Steve Broome accepted the call to become the Associate Pastor for Our Redeemer. We were bursting at the seams for more educational and youth activities space. Construction was completed and the new fellowship hall was dedicated on February 22, 2004.

Today we have more than 200 worshippers each week, and we are still just as committed to reaching out and welcoming newcomers. From our user-friendly bulletin, to nametags for old and new members alike, we are intentional about creating Christian community, being open to new ideas, and supporting each other in our journey of faith.

