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The History of Peace of Our Savior Lutheran Church

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The history of Peace of Our Savior Lutheran Church began in the month of July 1962 and on November 21, 1982. Perhaps it seems strange for a church to have two beginnings, but in the following pages this peculiar fact will be explained. Along with this explanation the reader will see the many challenges and triumphs the people of God at Peace of Our Savior faced. Most importantly, one will find a church where the peace of the savior, Jesus Christ, has sustained its people for its entire existence.

In July 1962 Harry and Carolyn Schmidt set off from New Carlisle, Ohio to visit Grace Lutheran Church in Kenton, Ohio. The Schmidt family was a family of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod who had recently moved from Eagle River, Wisconsin to New Carlisle on the northeastern side of Dayton between Interstates 75 and 70. At that time there was no Wisconsin Synod church in the area for them to call home. After visiting the church in Kenton, Harry and Carolyn asked the pastor at Grace, Pastor Keith Haag, if it would be possible to start a church in the Dayton area. Around this time Pastor Haag had been in contact with the Michigan District Mission Board to consider starting a new church in some surrounding areas. Mansfield, Marion, Greenfield, Urbana, and Springfield, Ohio were the possibilities, but with the approach of Harry and Carolyn Schmidt they decided to put the focus on Dayton which is south of Springfield.

On July 14, 1962, shortly after the request and the approval of the summer convention of 1962, two seminarians and 20 young people from northern Ohio - from Grace in Kenton,

Immanuel in Findlay, and Trinity in Jenera - traveled to Dayton and canvassed the area for prospects. The day started off with a lot of rain, but by the time the canvassers arrived at the Schmidt home the rain had stopped. When they had been prepped for the survey of the neighborhood they were off. They first canvassed Park Layne which is three miles south of New Carlisle and often referred to as the New Carlisle area. In the afternoon New Carlisle was covered. In between the work the group enjoyed fellowship with lunch in one of the nearby parks. On that one Saturday the group of about 22 made between 1,200 and 1,575 calls from which a list of 50 family prospects developed.

After considering the results, the Mission Board gave approval to set up a preaching station and do exploratory work in the northern part of Park Layne. Within months the first church service was planned for Reformation Sunday, November 4, 1962<sup>1</sup> under Pastor Haag of Grace, and in December, after one Sunday's service, the members informally took on the name "Peace Lutheran." For the first service on Reformation Sunday 18 people gathered at the house of 720 Cliffside Drive for worship. The house was a place the Synod rented for Peace. Over the next seven years Pastor Haag of Grace in Kenton would make a weekly one hundred and forty mile roundtrip to serve as the pastor of Peace and help the congregation get its feet on the ground.

After recognizing that he would be making these trips indefinitely, Pastor Haag bought a roll-away bed in a hardware store in Kenton. He would travel down to New Carlisle every Sunday to hold service, and on Monday he would make evangelism calls and schedule meetings. Depending on the workload of the day he would return home Monday night or Tuesday morning. Even after Pastor Haag was married to his wife Ardis in 1966, he continued to make the long

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<sup>1</sup> The date listed in a brief history from the dedication of the church building in 1971 lists the opening service as held on November 14, 1962. According to Pastor Haag's interview and church records, it was November 4, 1962. Due to the fact that November 4, 1962 was Reformation Sunday and since November 14, 1962 was a Wednesday, the author has chosen to put forth November 4, 1962 as the date of Peace's first service.

trip. From that time on, however, the married couple would travel the distance together. (Pastor Haag's parents were kind enough to buy their son a bigger roll-away bed as a wedding gift for the two of them.) Even more amazing was the fact that the two continued to make the trip together after the birth of their first child in 1967. Pastor Haag said that under such circumstances, it could have been difficult for his family and for the people at New Carlisle. But he went on to say that his wife and family handled it well, and the members of Peace were dedicated to making the church grow under the help and guidance of the Lord.

From November 4, 1962 through the first part of April 1963, services were held on and off in the evening at 7:30 PM with Sunday school preceding at 6:45 PM. Pastor Haag would bring along organists from Kenton for each Sunday evening. Mrs. Lucille Heilshorn was one who was very dedicated in helping with the music from the beginning. The Kluckman family, Ardis Haag, and Louise Weber also became instrumental in supplying music for worship over the years. The first organ and straight back pews for Peace were gifts from St. Timothy Lutheran Church in Maumee.

At first because the numbers were few a service might have only one in attendance. For one service in their first December no one showed. These were very rare occurrences, however, and they only happened within the first month or two. Pastor Haag mentioned how the Lord blessed the congregation with dedicated people who were determined to make Peace grow. In the entire seven years Pastor Haag served Peace, there was not one time something prevented him from making the trip, and from 1963 on there was always someone from Peace to meet the traveling pastor for worship. Pastor Haag even spoke of one Sunday where there was a severe winter storm that prevented his coming to New Carlisle for over an hour. Concerned for the people, he called ahead and notified them that he would be very late and that if they did not want to travel out into the storm he would understand. When he arrived – as he recalled – there was

not a single person missing for worship. Pastor Haag was impressed and thankful to the Lord for what he was doing in this small faithful flock.

On Easter Sunday, April 14, Peace had its first morning service because Grace in Kenton only conducted an Easter sunrise service. The Lord blessed that first worship service with 38 people in attendance and its first 4 baptisms. According to the records three of the four baptisms are listed as Andrew Mark Turner, Alison Ann Morgan, and Mark Steven Otto, all of whom were infants less than two and a half years of age. This morning service with a high number in attendance encouraged the people to strive for an earlier service on Sundays as opposed to the evening services they were having. In the summer of that year on June 9, 1963, services were established on a regular basis at 11:45AM. (This was also according to the recommendation of the Mission Board.)

Everything was going well until July 1963 – one year after the idea of a Wisconsin Synod church in the Dayton area was first suggested – when the owners of the property at 720 Cliffside suddenly sold the house which the people were renting. The members were in a panic and were quickly facing the problem of not having any place for worship. In answer to the crisis the Schmidt family opened their house on 837 Weinland Drive as a temporary place for worship. The organ and pews were stored in the garage, and the door to the garage from the house was left open during worship so the music could be heard. Surprisingly, the attendance remained steady at the Schmidt's house, and the Lord provided at least one more blessing for Peace at this location. It was at the Schmidt's home that the first celebration of the Lord's Supper took place on August 11. The people ended up gathering at the Schmidt's house every Sunday until October 1963.

During the months at the Schmidt residence, the congregation was looking for another place to rent. Eventually Peace decided on a house at 371 Weinland Drive. Pastor Haag

nervously attempted to buy the house in his own name. After he and the members of Peace resolved the problem the Park Layne Corporation had with a bachelor's taking out an F.H.A. loan for a house, Peace had another place for worship. The next nerve-racking question – especially for Pastor Haag – was whether or not the Synod would again pick up the rent since they were no longer under obligation. Under the approval of the Chairman of Board for Home Missions, Otto Engel, Pastor Haag was relieved of carrying the financial burden of making payments for the house he owned.<sup>2</sup> Their first service there was on October 6, 1963. Finally, after the members remodeled their new home, it served the congregation's needs for years to come. The house at 371 Weinland would be the meeting and worship place for the members of Peace until their church was built in 1971 under Pastor Oliver Lindholm. The people were happy to receive the gifts of an altar, a better organ, hymnals, a cross and some candles from St. Andrew's Lutheran near Toledo, a communion set from Zion Lutheran Church in South Milwaukee, and a baptismal font along with a lectern-pulpit and some tables and chairs from Grace in Kenton. In fact, Don and Marcella Williamson said, "The little house on 371 was the nicest church we have ever gone to." Undoubtedly, having such a small group of people with so many challenges will cause such a group to cling to the Lord, to his Word, and to each other all the more.

In the fall of 1963 the District Mission Board granted Peace mission status. For many this marked the birthday of Peace.<sup>3</sup> This status meant that the members could appeal to the Synod's General Board for Home Missions for help in acquiring land and a chapel. On February 9 of the following year Peace held its first official meeting and organized as a congregation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> According to a "Mortgage Payment Analysis" document, the monthly payment demanded for the house was \$89 at the time.

<sup>3</sup> In 1988 under Pastor Free the church celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

<sup>4</sup> The date listed in a brief history from the dedication of the church building in 1971 lists the organization of the church and its first official meeting on February 2, 1964. It is stated as February 9, 1964 in Pastor Lindholm's ordination and installation service folder and in the official records of the church.

Five men were in attendance, each of whom was designated for an office in the church. The first president of the congregation was Jeruald Kluckmann. Harry Schmidt became secretary.

Donald Neuverth served as treasurer. Donald Williamson was elected as trustee, and Frank Schreier was designated as the head elder. At this meeting they decided to have a unified budget and apply for a loan to purchase land and a chapel.

The other landmark events of 1964 follow: On January 26 – just a few weeks prior to the first official meeting – the Lord blessed the congregation with their first adult confirmands, Donald and Marcella Williamson and Frank and Cindy Schreier. These members are still a part of the Wisconsin Synod family, and Donald and Marcella Williamson still belong to Peace of Our Savior. On February 12, 1964, Peace began its first Lenten services. The first VBS was held in a rented school on July 6, 1964 with 54 children who attended. By 1967 the number grew to 98. In 1964 they were averaging 15-20 in Sunday school, and were therefore always “overwhelmed” by the turnout for VBS according to Pastor Haag. The last major event of 1964 was the drafting of the church’s constitution in September. The final draft was drawn up in 1968 and later adopted October 5, 1969 which officially brought Peace into membership with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

More blessings continued to pour forth from the Lord under Pastor Haag’s ministry. In 1965 the church became incorporated under the laws of Ohio, and the Ladies Aid Society also formed. On June 12, 1966 Joy Hickman completed the required two year confirmation instruction and became a communicant member. During that same year a number of Missouri Synod families left their synod and joined Peace because of doctrinal issues. Among these people were the Frederick Lueck family, the Walter Weber family, and the Paul Weber family. Pastor Haag said, “This strengthened and encouraged us considerably.” This would not be the

last time that former members of the Missouri Synod strengthened and increased the membership of Peace.

In 1967 the members of Peace embarked on an extensive search for land so they could finally build a sanctuary. A year later they began calling for a resident pastor. These two events were wonderful blessings, because from the beginning of their history the people of Peace desired a church building to worship in and a pastor who would live in their community, who could serve them full time. From 1963 through 1966, though they were eligible for both land and a resident pastor, both of these goals were unrealistic for them for one reason or another. Though they made concerted efforts to acquire both land and a pastor in 1967 and 1968, both years failed to produce either of the two. Opportunities had presented themselves at one time or another, but none of them produced results. At one time the city offered the congregation five free acres on the north side of Styer Drive between Cliffside and Weinland. Perhaps because of the flooding potential Peace refused the land. In the spring of 1968 the congregation asked for a graduate from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, but none were available. In October of that year a call was extended to Pastor Winfred Koelpin of Livonia Michigan, but he returned it. Following that call Peace called Pastor Haag, but the Lord had other plans.

In 1969 the Lord answered the prayers of seven years for land and for a resident pastor. Peace purchased from the McAdams estate a \$7,500 five acre plot of land which Carl Swartzbaugh surveyed at 1025 Cliffside Drive. On April 13, 1969 the news of the purchase was announced to the congregation. Also in the spring of that year a graduate of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Oliver Lindholm, found his first assignment at Peace in Park Layne. In response the members of Peace asked Pastor Haag and Don Williamson to find a home for their new pastor. The congregation bought the house at 924 Cliffside Drive for a parsonage through the Synod's Parsonage-Teacherage Fund. Pastor Oliver Lindholm was ordained and installed on

Friday July 11, 1969 at 8 PM in the New Carlisle Elementary School auditorium. The choir from Trinity of Jenera, Ohio assisted the people in the worship of their Lord on that day. Pastor Manfred Lenz, the President of the Minnesota District at that time, preached for the occasion. (Pastor Lenz was the Pastor from Oliver Lindholm's home congregation, and he was the one who had confirmed Oliver Lindholm years before.) Pastor Dan Gieschen installed Pastor Lindholm. One hundred twenty-five people were present for Pastor Lindholm's ordination and installation.

Pastor Lindholm remembers the day of his ordination vividly. He said that it was a hot humid day as is common for that part of Ohio in midsummer. His wife was eight months pregnant at the time. For some relief they decided to open the windows of the parsonage. Later on in the day the family headed over to the elementary school for his installation. With the cooling off of the evening a pretty strong thunderstorm sprang up, and the service was interrupted throughout by lightning and thunder. "It was the Lord's way of putting his signature on my ministry," said Pastor Lindholm jokingly. About halfway through the service his wife and relatives remembered that they left the windows open in the parsonage. Some of Pastor Lindholm's extended family left in the middle of the service to shut the windows and survey the damage from the storm. After the service Pastor Lindholm and his wife invited some of the called workers over to their house as is the custom, and they enjoyed their time entertaining their guests as they cleaned up the huge mess.

Before moving on to Peace's history under Pastor Lindholm's ministry, a few closing comments are in order for the time of the congregation under the service of Pastor Keith Haag. Dayton, the birthplace of aviation, in the 1960's and the early 1970's was a booming city for a couple of reasons. The Wright Patterson Air Force Base - which is "a city unto itself" according



to Pastor Wildauer<sup>5</sup> - made a huge impact on the area as it brought in people and jobs. At the height of the Cold War the United States government based their Strategic Air Command (SAC) as a wing of Wright Patterson which drew even more people to Dayton. (Because of SAC it has been suggested that Dayton was third on the Soviet Union's list of United States' cities to attack in case of nuclear war.) The other reason for the growth of the city at this time was due to the new businesses starting in the area. Not only did the business industry and the air force base of some 35,000 affect the city, it affected the church in a number of ways.

Pastor Haag had spent some of his time ministering to WELS members stationed at Wright Patterson which was only 15-20 minutes south of Peace. The decision to purchase the land at Cliffside was due to the fact that New Carlisle was projected to increase in population dramatically over the next number of years because of the influx of people and jobs. Members would soon describe the church as transient in nature because a number of members who were in the air force would only be stationed there for three or four years. The developments of Dayton at this time in the business community also gave rise to a high turnover rate which added to the frequent transfer of members in and out of New Carlisle. On top of all this, the particular area where the church was located was a lower income area full of starter homes.

Most of these factors caused the members to often ask themselves if they should relocate. Pastor Haag said, "We wondered if we shouldn't have gone further south of Interstate 70. Perhaps it would have contributed for a little more growth and helped the mission." All of these outside factors turned out to have a positive impact on Pastor Haag's and Pastor Lindholm's ministries, but, as will be mentioned later, these same factors would have a devastating impact at the beginning of Pastor Knuepple's ministry, which would almost deal a fatal blow to the congregation.

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<sup>5</sup> Pastor of Peace of Our Savior from 1991-2000.

One more factor which helps complete the picture of the outside environment surrounding Peace is the religious character of the area. Pastor Haag, Pastor Lindholm, and Dorothy Knuepple all characterized the people outside of the church as being on the northern end of the Bible belt. Pastor Lindholm said, “There were a lot of people with reformed background – the Assembly of God, Church of God, Nazarene Church and the like. There was a different kind of culture and philosophy that they had which was difficult to work with sometimes. They didn’t see church as all that important... Maybe religion was but it was more of an experiential religion – a feel good religion.” There was also a large portion of unchurched in the area. A 1970 canvass of Park Layne showed that 42% of 1,500 households had no church affiliation.

When Pastor Lindholm arrived in July of 1969 he said, “I hit the ground running.” Deb Hickman, a member of Peace of Our Savior presently and from the early days confirms that fact. She said, “When Pastor Haag left it was a blow to the congregation, but Pastor Lindholm was excited like Pastor Wildauer... He was a go-getter, and he’d quickly be out of his chair in his office to visit the people of the neighborhood... Shortly after he arrived the people in the neighborhood knew him by name. He also had a way with younger people, and he would even pick up confirmation kids if they couldn’t make it for class.”

The recorded history during Pastor Lindholm’s ministry also reflects his energetic nature. In 1969 Pastor Lindholm along with all the members of Peace continued to build on the work that had started under Pastor Haag. The women of the congregation joined the Lutheran Women’s Mission Society. An evangelism committee was formed, and Harry Schmidt was appointed to be the first Sunday School Superintendent. There was a successful Stewardship Night planned, drawing 25 people, and a children’s Christmas Eve service provided a worship opportunity to 52 people. In that one year attendance boomed several times beyond the seating capacity of 50. In the fall of 1969 the church tore down another partition of the house for more pews. During the

following year they would have to do even more remodeling as they were beginning to burst at the seams at 371 Weinland. Finally, the General Board for Home Missions informed Peace that a \$1,000 interest free loan from the Church Extension Fund had been allocated to it for its chapel building program. Needless to say, the Lord was providing very visible blessings.

In the early part of 1970 a group of 10 men met for Peace's annual meeting. At the meeting the voters adopted a budget for \$7,256. They planned communion for the last Sunday of every month, and they set a date to install the church's new officers on January 18. Lastly, they formed the Building Committee<sup>6</sup> with Frank Schreier as the chairman.

In February the committee began work on preliminary plans for the chapel with the Synod architect, Duane Anderson. Over the year, plans for the chapel would be approved by both the congregation and the District mission Board. By May of 1970 the congregation applied for a loan from the Church Extension fund in the amount of \$55,710, and in May the General Board for Home Missions along with the Board of Trustees granted the request for the loan. The committee then compiled a list of prospective contractors. All the bids were above \$82,000 which was disappointing because they were all well over the budget. However, after some negotiation with Wenrick Construction Company the lowest bid was brought to an approximate \$72,000. With a request to the Mission Board for an additional \$17,500 granted, the church went ahead with the building project. Groundbreaking commenced on October 25, 1970, and construction began the following week. Eighty people were in attendance for the groundbreaking.

Some other noteworthy events of 1970 are as follows: For the season of Lent, Pastor Lindholm and Pastor Keith Roehl of Grove City set up the first preaching rotation for Peace. This gave the people even more of a glimpse of what was happening with the Lord's work just

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<sup>6</sup> The other members of the building committee were Ron Meyer, David Anderson, Harry Schmidt, and Oliver Lindholm.

outside their congregation. Following Lent, the Easter Day services brought in 78 people for worship. That was an all-time high up to that point, but it was soon surpassed when at the end of the year 87 people attended the Christmas Eve service. The first wedding services were also held in this year. Jay Allen Miller and Marlene Ida Boundaruk, members at Peace, were married by Pastor Lindholm on June 14 in the Good Shepherd Methodist church building. Ellwood L. Webb and Karen Williamson were the first to be married at Peace on 371 Weinland by Pastor Lindholm on December 22.

In 1971 Peace continued to show the marks of a flourishing church. The budget increased to \$11,323 from the previous year of a little over \$7,000. Sunday School expanded to five classrooms. Lutheran Boy Pioneers under the leadership of Pastor Lindholm and Ron Schulz and Lutheran Girl Pioneers under the leadership of Debbi Fellers and Thelma Fideler began. The growing youth group set off for their first area youth rally in Indianapolis, Indiana. The choir also formed under the direction of Mrs. Pat Johnson. But the most obvious sign that the church was thriving outwardly was the completion of the church building which allowed for a capacity of one hundred fifty people.<sup>7</sup>

On May 16, 1971 the members of Peace dedicated their first chapel to the glory of the Lord which is still in use today and still exists for the same purpose. The worship folder used for the dedication of the building reads, "This Dedication Day is a long-awaited day for the members of Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church and is the answer to many prayers. The growth of our church has been relatively slow at first and relatively fast as of late. But through this all, one thing is evident – the hand of the Lord guiding and blessing our congregation. May He continue to bless our future history, as He has the past!"

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<sup>7</sup> The design of the building was known as the "Camelot" design, and it featured cedar shakes siding.

The church record simply states that Dedication Day was a “big success.” Was it ever! One hundred forty-nine attended the morning service which had as its presiding minister Pastor Donald Laude of Jenera. Two hundred sixteen attended the afternoon service where Pastor Daniel Gieschen, chairman of the Michigan District’s Mission Board at the time, presided as the guest preacher. A light meal was served following the afternoon service, and the church record also records that the day “was a great day of joy for the members of Peace.” From that time membership increased to sixty communicants and one hundred eighty souls.<sup>8</sup>

It should also be mentioned that in the summer of 1971 the mission congregation that Pastor Lindholm had been serving in Cincinnati, Ohio for a couple of years finally received its first resident Pastor. Candidate Daniel Koelpin was ordained and installed by Pastor Lindholm on July 25, 1971 as Pastor of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church,<sup>9</sup> and he in turn relieved Pastor Lindholm of his duties there. The church in New Carlisle had 24 members in attendance, and they also donated some of the furnishings from their old church to help out the new church in Cincinnati. At the present time the church in Cincinnati thrives with close to 200 communicant members and 300 souls under its second Pastor, Thomas Westra. Under God’s grace Beautiful Savior, the first church New Carlisle started, has also been instrumental in the formation and growth of at least two other churches.<sup>10</sup> One important thing that should be mentioned about Peace of Our Savior is that the Lord used it to begin other Wisconsin Synod churches in southwestern Ohio. It should also be said that Beautiful Savior would not be the last church that Peace of Our Savior would help begin.

After the dedication of the new building and work in Cincinnati were completed, the members of Peace sold the house at 371 Weinland under Harry Schmidt. The church profited

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<sup>8</sup> Following this work are three graphs showing (where possible) the number of baptized souls, communicant members, and average Sunday attendance for each year from 1962-2001.

<sup>9</sup> The author of this work who is a son of the Beautiful Savior congregation is forever grateful to the Lord God for sending Pastor Lindholm of Peace to Cincinnati.

<sup>10</sup> Abiding Word in northeastern Cincinnati and Amazing Grace in northern Kentucky

\$1,800 dollars and bought new pews for the sanctuary. In the fall everything picked up even more. Peace would even host a mission festival for the congregations in Jenera, Findlay, Kenton, North Columbus, and Cincinnati on October 3 where Pastor Keith Haag returned to be the guest preacher. (Pastor Haag had recently taken a call to serve in Manitowoc, Wisconsin leaving Grace in Kenton in need of a pastor for the vacancy. Peace supplied their mother congregation with Pastor Lindholm until Pastor Walter Voss could fill the vacancy permanently in late October.) By the end of the year the church had become the fastest growing church of the Wisconsin Synod in the state of Ohio. Peace would hold this title again for the year of 1972.

Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church continued to prosper outwardly and inwardly through the years of 1972 and 1973. The church prospered so much fiscally that they set a goal to build a parsonage on the church grounds and to be self-supporting by 1974. The members of Peace appointed Jim Fellers, Roy Rasmussen, and Lowell Deckard to the Parsonage Committee. The Parsonage Committee recommended a ranch home called "The Courtwood" for the design of the parsonage.

In the meantime - between the beginning of 1972 and the completion of the parsonage - there was a major landscaping project on the church grounds. The church also hosted a youth rally for nearby congregations as well as the Ohio Pastoral Conference of 1973. The involvement with other WELS congregations increased at this time. In fact, during these years there were so many congregations in the area that another division of the Michigan District was formed. Peace, which was formerly a part of the Southeastern Michigan Conference, was instrumental in forming the Ohio Conference which still exists today.

By the middle of 1973 all was going well, but then Peace had to say goodbye to Pastor Oliver Lindholm who accepted a call to serve two congregations in Shakopee and Prior Lake, Minnesota. On August 5 he preached his farewell sermon. Later that day he and his family

enjoyed a farewell dinner with his people. Peace, which was doing well with 146 souls and 87 communicant members, was now headed into the future without a pastor. Uncertain and difficult times lay ahead. In fact, these would be times that almost broke the people of Peace. The Lord, however, would provide the church with a pastor and a group of new members to bring the congregation through. The Lord would bring the members of Peace, their new pastor, and a group from Englewood, Ohio through what could be considered their most difficult hour.

After Pastor Lindholm left, Pastor Daniel Koelpin became the vacancy pastor. He was pastor at New Carlisle's daughter congregation, Beautiful Savior in Cincinnati. He served until Pastor Frederick Knuepple, a pastor in Connecticut at the time, received and accepted the call to serve at Peace. Pastor Knuepple's installation was on March 3, 1974. When he arrived, it was around the beginning of his thirty-eighth year in the ministry. This was unique for Peace because the two pastors before and the two pastors after Pastor Knuepple were all relatively new to the public ministry when they began to serve there.

At the time of Pastor Knuepple's arrival the members had already set plans in place for the parsonage. On July 14, 1974 a contract for the parsonage was signed, and on November 28 it was finally dedicated. This event would be the last visible highlight for Peace over the next several years. Perhaps this is due to the fact that from 1974 to 1975 the church lost sixty-two baptized souls, and after that one year, attendance would steadily fall until the early 1980's. For the rest of Pastor Knuepple's ministry it appears that the church would try to recover from its catastrophic loss.

Around the time that the parsonage was finally built, the Strategic Air Command of Wright Patterson Air Force Base was shut down. In the letter from Pastor David Grundmeier<sup>11</sup> to Pastor

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<sup>11</sup> Pastor of Abiding Word who served as the vacancy pastor for Peace after Pastor Knuepple retired

Keith Free<sup>12</sup> he mentions the impact SAC's withdrawal from the area had on the church; "Since its inception Peace of Our Savior has been linked with Wright Patterson Air Force Base on Dayton's northeast side. The congregation's membership was significantly affected when in the middle 70's the Strategic Air Command (SAC) Base at Wright Patterson was closed." Pastor Wildauer concurs with Pastor Grundmeier's statement as he estimated that eventually some 50 members or more from Peace transferred out of the area because of the event. He said, "This is devastating to any mission. If a situation like this were to occur today, the Synod would have pulled out, but at that time the Synod was somewhat new to missions so they just kept pumping money into it."<sup>13</sup> As a result of SAC's moving out, transportation and development for the northeastern side of Dayton also went. This along with some other factors ended the projections of rapid growth for New Carlisle and Park Layne. The church which had settled on a spot at the end of Cliffside Drive in the hopes that one day its city would grow around it now found that it would always remain on the very edge of a small city. Even to this day the church property sits on a dead end street with the building only first visible about ten feet from the entrance to the parking lot.

In spite of the major blow Peace carried on. Although Peace would have members transfer out as is clearly evident in the church records from 1974-1976, although attendance had dropped so much that Pioneers was suspended indefinitely, although the roof on the Sanctuary only five years old needed replacement, and although the church had their first funeral service for member Walter Weber,<sup>14</sup> the church carried on with the Lord's work. By the spring of 1976 the church

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<sup>12</sup> The graduate assigned to Peace after Pastor Knuepple

<sup>13</sup> In a very true sense the WELS was new to missions. Although they had always been mission minded from the beginning, the split with the Missouri Synod over doctrinal issues in 1961 allowed for the WELS to enter into more areas. A lot of places were areas where there were Missouri Synod members upset with their Synod's departing from the truth and purity of the Scriptures.

<sup>14</sup> According to the church records there were two burials prior to the funeral service for Walter Weber on May 1, 1975. Angela Wricht was buried on July 6, 1971, and Thomas Allen Fideler was buried on January 11, 1972. Both happened to be infants. Angela died six weeks after and Thomas was stillborn. It is



planned a meeting at the Jess Miller home to discuss the possibility of establishing a WELS mission in the Kettering-Centerville area in southeastern Dayton. In December Resurrection Evangelical Lutheran Church began. At that time there was a nucleus of 10 communicant members and 12 souls. In the spring of 1976 Resurrection received mission status, and in May of 2002 the church celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary under Pastor Joel Voss. This is another witness to the impact Peace of Our Savior has had on the churches in southwestern Ohio. It is remarkable that in such tough times Pastor Knuepple and the members of Peace did not focus on their hardships. Instead they were intent on bringing the Gospel to other parts of Dayton, and the Lord blessed their efforts.

Not only was Peace interested in encouraging the faithful and reaching the lost with the Gospel in southeastern Dayton, but they were also interested in helping the needy and troubled in its community. In 1976 the voters amended the Family Assistance Fund of \$200 to cover families in need. The Council designated Pastor Knuepple as the disbursement officer for the fund, and the voters accepted. Later on it became obvious to the members that Pastor Knuepple was serious about helping those members of the community who were in need. It even became his practice to allow people with troubled lives to live with him and his wife Dorothy until they could get their feet on the ground. This ended up being one of the trademarks of Pastor Knuepple's ministry at Peace.

There was another amazing event that became a shining moment in the difficult years for Peace. The ministry of the church became involved with the development of yet another church. On October 23, 1978 the board of Evangelism asked for permission to conduct exploratory services in the Englewood area which is in the northwestern part of Dayton. According to Glenn

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unclear, however, if either of the families of Angela and Thomas were actual members of Peace. There was obviously a connection since they received Christian burials from Pastor Lindholm. The services according to church records were not performed on church grounds.

and Marlene Hitzfield and Claude and Helen Duncan who are current members at Peace of Our Savior, their Missouri Synod Church, Mt. Calvary, which is located in the Dayton area became infected with the charismatic movement. The pastor was caught up in seeing the work of the Spirit and would tell his people that if they had strong enough faith all their frailties, disabilities, and illnesses would miraculously disappear. They said there were instances where people would take off their eyeglasses and those of their children, throw them away, and hope that the Spirit would heal their poor vision. Those who suffered from arthritis could simply pray and with enough faith they would receive healing. Because of this a number of members left Mt. Calvary and after searching through other Missouri Synod churches in the area many of them finally came across Peace of the Wisconsin Synod. In particular, Terry and Louella Gayes met with Pastor Knuepple and were impressed over his ability to teach God's Word in its truth and purity. After their meeting the word quickly spread to the members of the Missouri Synod church who were disenchanted with the state of their Synod in Dayton. The group very quickly asked for permission to meet with Pastor Knuepple in Englewood. As was seen from motion of the voter's meeting, the members of Peace were more than willing to lend their pastor to the cause, and the Michigan District Board granted both groups permission to conduct exploratory services in the Englewood area.

In Englewood on March 4, 1979, Pastor Knuepple conducted the new church's first worship service. After that time the congregation which would take on the name "Our Savior" met regularly at 8AM for worship. On Thursdays they would have evening Bible classes where everybody in their group would always come. The Hitzfields and the Duncans both said that they along with all the people loved to listen to Pastor Knuepple. They remember how he would teach for an hour or two and leave the people wanting an hour or two more. His preaching was described as the kind of preaching where the people would hang on every word.

The Hitzfields recall how the church which met in a rented office began to look more and more like a church every time the people would gather. They were studying the Bible, administering the sacraments,<sup>15</sup> and doing outreach. Both Glenn Hitzfield, who works in construction, and Claude Duncan, who is gifted in working with wood, supplied the new church with a walnut altar and a pulpit.<sup>16</sup> They were also able to come up with a little organ which Kathy Fashner would play for worship. When they put an advertisement in the paper, more Missouri Synod people from Mt. Calvary came. The church in Englewood was doing well, and after only a couple years it had grown to 24 souls and 22 communicant members.

In the fall of 1981 Our Savior, Peace, and Resurrection were faced with a problem. The Synod no longer had enough funds to support three mission congregations in the Dayton area. On October 27, 1981 the following was announced at a voter's meeting at Peace;

Due to the synod's budget crunch, the district would like to substantially reduce the subsidies in the Dayton area. The mission board suggested as one alternative that we join with Our Savior as one congregation, select a more central location between New Carlisle and Englewood for the church, and that one pastor serve that congregation plus the congregation in the Centerville-Keterring area. This is only a suggestion, but they would like us to come up with a plan in 6 to 8 months."

Although there was no official motion to carry out the suggestion from the Michigan Mission Board at the October meeting, it appears that Peace favored the suggestion. On January 17, 1982 the voters of Peace approved a motion to search for new land where Peace and Our Savior would form one congregation. Our Savior, on the other hand, seemed a little shocked by the news, and this is understandable. After all, Our Savior was only a few years old and doing well. How much Our Savior was involved initially in the approval of the suggestion and searching for new land is uncertain, but in time it would become evident that Our Savior approved of the

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<sup>15</sup> The first baptism in Englewood for Our Savior was Ben Hirsch.

<sup>16</sup> It was said that after Our Savior combined with Peace in New Carlisle the walnut altar aided at least seven other churches as it was passed along. One of those churches was Abiding Word.

suggestion. Its members would also have a great part in finding new property. This decision to combine would end up being beneficial for both churches as it would bring more brothers and sisters in Christ together. It would also serve to support Peace which was somewhat on the decline.

In January of 1982 the moving committee of Peace first researched Vandalia, an area between Interstate 70 and Route 40. Greg Stall said that there was an area of 12 acres to consider, but the estimates which all were around \$100,000 seemed too expensive. David Tilly researched the cost of moving the building at 1025 Cliffside and came up with a figure that would cost around \$35,000. The moving committee also gathered information on building a parsonage on the property. Through the year things kept progressing toward relocation. On October 26 more exciting news came when it was announced at the voters meeting that “an allocation in excess of \$160,000 has been made by the General Board for Home Missions for the planned merger of Peace and Our Savior congregations at a new location.” The news continued which said that the amount of the sale of the property was also to be used for the move.<sup>17</sup>

The minutes of the October voters meeting bring the recorded history of Peace to a close, and they also mark the end of the church of Our Savior. On November 21, 1982 at a joint voters meeting, a new church was born, and that is how one church can have two beginnings. The members of Peace and Our Savior joined together as the members from Peace unanimously approved a motion for merger. At the meeting Our Savior also adopted a similar motion. At this time, however, the members of the new congregation were unsure of what they would call themselves. Would they be known as Peace and Our Savior, Our Savior’s Peace, Faith

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<sup>17</sup> In the church records a statement is made that the property at that time was “appraised at \$220,000,” and “The district Mission Board... requested of the Synod \$275,000” for their relocation.

Evangelical Lutheran Church, Holy Scripture, or Peace of Our Savior? With 17 votes the church received the name it has to this day.<sup>18</sup>

With the approval of the motion to merge, the members had to make the decisions any new church would have to make. The congregation made plans for a new constitution, elections for church officers, and how the church would carry on the ministry. One of the major decisions for carrying on the ministry was the location of the church. Although it seemed that all was going well with relocation up to this point, the land issue would end up being one of the major hurdles the new church would overcome.

By the quarterly voter's meeting of April 19, 1983 there was a recommendation to purchase three and one quarter acres of land at 8668 Old Troy Pike on State Highway 202 which is a half a mile north of Interstate 70 and three miles east of Interstate 75. The area's location is in the city of Huber Heights, and \$81,000 was being asked for the property. (Although the council suggested to the voters that the land be purchased, the motion to buy the land was not made and approved until the voters meeting on June 17, 1984 for the price of \$88,500.) The reason for the change in the choice of land from Vandalia to Huber Heights may have been over cost or location. The records do not directly state the reason.<sup>19</sup> What is evident is the fact that Peace and Our Savior were on their way to building a new church on their new property with the support of the Synod.<sup>20</sup> At least that was the plan through the end of 1983.

By the beginning of 1984 the idea of building on the Huber Heights property came into question. With all the information the moving committee had gathered, the church realized that moving their present building would cost a great amount more than the high price of building a

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<sup>18</sup> According to the members of Peace of Our Savior, no other WELS congregation bears the same name.

<sup>19</sup> Pastor Wildauer believed that at that time the church was considering Vandalia, the payments for New Carlisle were too high and the property at Vandalia called for too many renovations.

<sup>20</sup> Claude Duncan who was originally from Our Savior was highly instrumental in doing research, meeting with the proper representatives from the city of Huber Heights, and relating as much information to the congregation as possible for a smooth transition from New Carlisle to Huber Heights.

new sanctuary in Huber Heights. On March 4, 1984 Peace of Our Savior held a special voters meeting in which a number of questions were presented for the voters to consider: “Do we relocate now? Do we relocate later? Do we stay here? Will we grow if we relocate? Why are we losing members now? ...What if we can’t sell the Church property?” By the end of the meeting the voters approved two motions in light of some of the answers to the questions asked. The congregation moved to ask the Mission Board for time to conduct new surveys in various areas. They also moved to notify the Mission Board of their decision not to move the present sanctuary to Huber Heights, “therefore, the \$161,000 can be released for other mission work.”

In the middle of the task of searching for a place to relocate, Peace of Our Savior had to take on another difficult task of calling a new pastor. On April 17, 1984 Pastor Knuepple made the announcement that it was time for him to retire after 48 years of serving in the public ministry. On April 29, 1984 Pastor Knuepple preached his last sermon at Peace of Our Savior. Though he loved his people and desired to serve them, it became difficult for him to keep up with the many duties required of a pastor in a mission setting.

In interviewing some of the members who were at Peace of Our Savior before the two congregations combined and afterwards, all admired Pastor Knuepple for his love of God’s Word. It was also evident that he was an excellent preacher and teacher. The members were very sad to see him go. Marilyn Whitt, in particular, will be forever thankful to the Lord for Pastor Knuepple and his wife Dorothy, because it was during their time at New Carlisle that she said she came to know the Lord. She remembers very vividly sitting in the rocking chair in the corner of Pastor Knuepple’s kitchen when the Holy Spirit by the power of his Holy Word opened the Scriptures to her. Since that time she has been a member of Peace of Our Savior and has also brought her husband Bill to the church under Pastor Free. Both continue to be strong in the Lord. That is a testimony to Pastor Knuepple’s faithfulness to the Gospel.

Deb Hickman also talked about how Pastor Knuepple was a man who was wonderful at what he did. He especially did wonders for her father. She said that no one motivated her father, William Hickman, to come to church until Pastor Knuepple got him interested. She went on to say how Pastor Knuepple would constantly visit her father when he became deathly ill. He would bring tapes of sermons and other devotional materials to her father. William Hickman died in the Lord in 1983 under the care of Pastor Knuepple. That is just one more testimony to Pastor Knuepple's faithfulness to the Gospel.

The countless stories of the members' lives under the pastors who served Peace of Our Savior in its earlier years and to the present day cannot be all contained in a history work of this size or any other. A few are important to mention, however, because they are able to represent the countless stories only the Lord and a few others will ever know. These are the intangible blessings of the church's history which are prevalent throughout all its history. These blessings also happen to be the most important because they are the testimonies of how God has kept his Word in its truth and purity through both the greatest times and the darkest hours.<sup>21</sup>

When Pastor Free arrived at Peace of Our Savior, the people were facing a number of challenges. The membership was on decline. The members were deciding on whether or not to relocate. For any congregation this is a difficult decision because the choice to move entirely changes a church's identity. Add to this the fact that Peace of Our Savior – though it was officially one group of people - still had two congregations in the process of getting to know one another. The church was also recovering from the sudden retirement of Pastor Knuepple and was seeking some stability during a somewhat short vacancy period which Pastor David Grundmeier from Abiding Word covered well.

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<sup>21</sup> Pastor Knuepple is also the first Pastor who served at Peace of Our Savior to be called home to his Lord. He died in the spring of 2003. Dorothy Knuepple in her interview said of Pastor Knuepple, "He was a wonderful Christian man. He didn't talk about it. He lived it." Just a couple years before his death Pastor Knuepple sent a letter of congratulations to the members of Peace of Our Savior for the dedication of their addition. In the letter he once again affirmed his love for his people.

Pastor Free, who had just completed his call as a tutor, arrived in June of 1984. His installation was on June 24, and six weeks afterwards he married his wife, Rachel. Obviously, Pastor Free had a lot on his plate. He was new to the parish ministry. He was a newlywed, and his congregation was facing some of the biggest challenges a congregation can face. Pastor Free mentioned how the beginning of his ministry at Peace of Our Savior was filled with a lot of important meetings. In the first six weeks alone he met with all the families of the congregation, and after he was married, he and his wife met with the members again. Thinking back on that time when he was faced with a number of obligations he jokingly said, "And here I was as a new pastor still wondering how I could manage a sermon once a week." Obviously, he did well, as Glenn Hitzfield said of him, "God sent him to get us leveled out. He was so laid back. Like Jesus calming the sea."

Through the rest of the year of 1984 the congregation began to proceed with plans to move. The moving committee obtained a lawyer to handle the legal matters. The committee also talked to nine architects about the new building, and met with the city council of Huber Heights concerning the specifics of the property. When the Mission Board requested that the church create a building fund, the congregation was quick to set one up. Even around the end of 1984 after a small group of members made a request to the voters to consider delaying the move for a year, a sizeable majority of voters decided to continue on with the moving plans. According to the voters meeting on April 18, 1985, the church was determined to make their Huber Heights property their new home as soon as possible.

On July 8, 1985 everything began to change. After the Church Council met with the District Mission Board on July 8, a voters meeting was held on July 16 to discuss the issue of relocation. At the voters meeting Pastor presented 3 letters he had prepared for the congregation to consider for the relocation project. The letters were a result of the meeting with the Mission Board. They



pertained to relocation, staying, and transitioning to self support. After the presentation of the letters the voters immediately made a motion to vote on whether or not to move to Huber Heights. The congregation decided to stay at 1025 Cliffside with a vote of 13 to 6 with 1 abstaining. According to Pastor Free the decision was made to stay because the congregation would go deeper into debt with the move and because they could go off subsidy more quickly in New Carlisle. Under the section entitled “What Does it Boil Down to?” in the church records, three reasons are listed which apparently helped the members make their decision to stay. They are stated as follows;

“I. Financially – There isn’t that much difference financially if we are in Huber Heights or Park Layne and we make some arrangements with the Synod... Huber Heights: ...Our budget would be somewhat higher because of our repayment schedule on the debt... The debt in Huber Heights would be twice the size of Park Layne (\$200,000 versus \$100,000) ...We would have the opportunity to use a loan from the Synod...

“II. Opportunity of Growing – We recognize God grants the growth, we ask His guidance to work where that would be the best... Huber Heights has the better location (12,000-14,000 homes versus 1,500 homes)... (but) the past year we’ve seen from 49 to 62 communicants... The opportunity to continue this growth is present for the near future...

“III. The difference in work... Huber Heights will take a concentrated effort by all our members this next year... We will need help in our formal evangelism work... Park Layne: We will need to continue to work at keeping the property up... We will have to work to advertise our location.

(Finally two questions conclude the section.) (1) Do you feel the Park Layne area has been a hindrance to the growth of Peace of Our Savior...? If you feel that way, then the move to Huber Heights is necessary... (2) Do you feel that we can grow in the Park Layne area and that our present location with advertisement and personal evangelism work can work so that Peace of Our Savior will grow in Park Layne? If you feel that way, then the move to Huber Heights is not necessary.”<sup>22</sup>

On July 18, 1985 the property in Park Layne was taken off the market. Shortly after that the property in Huber Heights was put up for sale. They finalized the sale of the property for around \$88,000 at a voters meeting on December 20, 1987. On the motion there were no dissenting

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<sup>22</sup> The 3 letters from Pastor Free and all the information concerning the decision to remain in Park Layne can be found on pages 182-189 of the church records in the first of two bluish-green record books.

votes. It is estimated that after all was said and done from the purchase to the sale of the Huber Heights property, Peace of Our Savior added to their debt some \$20,000.<sup>23</sup> In August Pastor Free visited the families of the congregation to explain what happened at the July voters meeting and why the congregation would remain in Park Layne.<sup>24</sup>

It is amazing to see that in the aftermath of this major decision there was no fall out among the membership of Peace of Our Savior. Another amazing thing was that all of this took place during the first fifteen months of Pastor Free's ministry in New Carlisle. These two facts were a sign that the former members of both Peace and Our Savior and the leadership of the congregation had the love of Christ dwelling deep within. Out of love for their Lord and one another they proved that they could make it through the challenges of the ministry. The Lord in turn would shower blessings on Peace of Our Savior which decided to hold its ground in Park Layne for the glory of God.

From 1985 to 1986, even though the church lost about five families for various reasons, the church still increased in membership. At the close of Pastor Free's ministry at Peace of Our Savior the congregation would come within several communicant members of matching the highest number of communicants the church ever had. From 1983 to 1990 Peace of our Savior went from an average Sunday attendance of thirty to ninety.

A couple of reasons for the steady climb of membership (outside of the faithful proclamation of the Gospel) were the increase of fellowship and the emphasis on evangelism. For example, the congregation would faithfully meet every six weeks for Sunday potluck.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The land issue and conclusion to it caused some tension between the church and the synod for some time, but the tension has long since been resolved.

<sup>24</sup> Although the decision had been made to stay in Park Layne, the question on whether or not to move to another location – which was a question asked since the mid '70's - would come up again and again until the plan to expand the church's facility in 1996-1997 was approved. Only since this approval has the church put this question to rest, perhaps permanently.

<sup>25</sup> At this time there was also more of a push to fellowship with the surrounding WELS congregations. There had not been a lot of contact with these congregations since the early 1970's.

(That is a group of good Lutherans.) The best example of the evangelism emphasis which was prevalent in the middle to late 1980's is found in the Synod-produced "Phones for You" program the church ran in 1989. When Peace of Our Savior received a grant from the Weidman estate in the Michigan district for \$3,500 they decided to carry out an extensive outreach program, "Phones for You." According to the annual report of 1989, thirty members participated in the outreach effort. From their work they gathered an initial prospect list of nearly 400 people.<sup>26</sup> After some time spent excitedly explaining the details of the effort, Pastor Free concluded with a few laughs that only one couple visited the church as a result. Pastor Free pointed out, however, that the funny thing about it all was how during 1989 the church saw one of the biggest boosts for visitors it had seen in a number of years.<sup>27</sup> Pastor Free concluded the subject of "Phones for You" with; "We might have said, 'All was for naught,' but really as I think back to the fall of '89 and the year 1990 there were so many other blessings which the Lord gave to us. My point is: As we continue to be faithful in our ministry, the Lord, according to his will, will be the one who provides his blessings."

A number of other highlights Pastor Free mentioned about the middle to late 1980's were the Family Bible Institute they held for a week at the end of July 1988, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration they threw in the fall of that year, the increase in offerings and the increase of young people among their membership. Peace of Our Savior also acquired an organ from Columbus in 1989. The Family Bible Institute was a highlight because about half the people from the congregation came to it. That is an impressive statistic for any summer Bible Study program. For the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Peace, Pastor Haag returned to be the speaker in the morning, and Pastor Lindholm also visited as the speaker in the afternoon. Concerning the increase of

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<sup>26</sup> "During the program there were 3,621 phone calls made, 3,489 pieces of mail sent, and 579 visits made to people on the prospect list. Some of these homes were visited more than once" (1989 Annual Report).

<sup>27</sup> For example, a record number of 45 visitors came for Sunday worship on July 16.

offerings, by 1989 offerings had increased to \$3,000 more than the year before. When Pastor Wildauer arrived, Peace of Our Savior was giving 12% of its offerings to the Synod which was in Pastor Wildauer's words, "spectacular!" About the increase in young people, Pastor Free said that when he came to New Carlisle in 1984 there were 3 children in Sunday school. From that time the average Sunday school attendance slowly increased to about 20. Pastor Free said that things began to liven up a little more as is often the case in the presence of children.<sup>28</sup>

Pastor Free also noted a few struggles for Peace of Our Savior during his time. He noticed that the members were spread far apart from each other within the Dayton area. The kids belonged to different grade schools and high schools. The members were of different communities including the Air Force Base. This made it tougher for the members to find more common ground beyond the church. In October 1988 through June 1989 when he was called to serve the vacancy at Resurrection in Centerville he said it was tough for him to keep up with all the members. The greatest time for him to keep in contact with members was right after the service, but since he had to leave right after worship he had to cut short this opportune time.

A bigger problem was that there was still debt. The debt, especially from the loss of the Huber Heights property, had diminished a great deal since 1985. Within the years from 1985 to 1990 the congregation was able to put \$10,000 more toward debt reduction than was required. The success of diminishing the debt and becoming more independent was evident at a voters meeting on January 10, 1988 where a motion was made to "become operating self supporting by January 1990."<sup>29</sup> The congregation accomplished that goal in 1989, and at the voters meeting on January 14, 1990 the church passed a budget reflecting this.

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<sup>28</sup> Perhaps one of the reasons why there was an increase in young people was for the fact that during the six years the Frees were there the Lord blessed them with four children.

<sup>29</sup> They would be completely self-supporting by 1993.

One other problem the congregation faced toward the end of Pastor Free's ministry was their organ. It was on its last leg. By October 1, 1989 Peace of Our Savior voted to purchase a Rogers Classical Church Organ Model 100 for \$2,500 from the Victorian Village Church of God in Columbus. All of the struggles mentioned before - including the organ problems - have been struggles common to the church throughout its history.

By the end of Pastor Free's ministry at Peace of Our Savior, the congregation was thinking about the future. From the voters meetings of 1988-1990 there is a sense that the congregation was looking to expand and reach out into the community all the more. The congregation was also coming into a position where it would be able to do so. Pastor Free, however, would not see all the developments firsthand because toward the end of the summer of 1990 he accepted a call to serve as pastor of Divine Word in Plover, Wisconsin. On September 16, 1990, Pastor Keith Free preached his last sermon as pastor of Peace of Our Savior. The church would again carry on with its ministry without a resident pastor.

As the members have appreciated all the pastors who served them, they too loved Pastor Free. Claude and Helen Duncan expressed their appreciation as they said of him, "He mixed well with the people, and he would listen to the people. He also didn't hesitate to ask questions if he needed to." Duane and Loretta Schneider as well as a number of other members said that Pastor Free was also a fun and laid back person. Most importantly, it was said of him as well as the other pastors of Peace of Our Savior that he was strong on keeping God's Word in its truth and purity. What a blessing from the Lord to see how God's people can care for each other so much and respect one another as the people of this church have.

All continued to go well with their ministry under their vacancy pastor from Resurrection, Pastor Joel Voss.<sup>30</sup> The only real disappointments they had at this time were a couple setbacks in their search for a new pastor.<sup>31</sup> By the early part of 1991 their search ended. The congregation found exactly what they had been looking for: Pastor Martin Wildauer.

How the church came across Pastor Wildauer's name is somewhat interesting. Peace of Our Savior had heard that a mission attempt in West Virginia was closing and that the pastor there would be up for a call. Pastor Voss mentioned that the mission in Beckley, West Virginia started back in the 1970's with Pastor Daniel Koelpin from Beautiful Savior in Cincinnati. Up to 1990 the mission had a number of pastors, but it could never get its feet off the ground. Pastor Wildauer who had just graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary was assigned to give the mission one last shot as Pastor Voss recalled. He said about Pastor Wildauer and his work in West Virginia, "He did a great job but couldn't make a go of it." Ultimately, it was agreed that the synod support for the mission should be cut off. That situation would be tough for anybody, but especially for a young pastor who entered into the public ministry there just six months before. While Pastor Wildauer was preparing to leave the mission in West Virginia,<sup>32</sup> he received a call from Peace of Our Savior. Pastor Wildauer prayerfully had to consider whether or not he should accept the call to serve in New Carlisle on top of another issue he was currently wrestling with - whether or not he should continue on in the pastoral ministry at all.<sup>33</sup>

With much prayerful consideration and overwhelming encouragement from the brothers in the ministry, Pastor Wildauer accepted the call. Shortly after, a number of members headed to West Virginia to move Pastor Wildauer and his wife Teri who were also expecting their first

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<sup>30</sup> Pastor Voss was also the one who suggested that a comprehensive history of Peace of Our Savior be done.

<sup>31</sup> Pastor Schoeffel and Pastor Schmugge both returned the calls extended by Peace of Our Savior.

<sup>32</sup> Although he would leave Beckley, West Virginia, Pastor Wildauer would return to preach at times, and he would organize canvass opportunities there with the support of WELS Kingdom Workers.

<sup>33</sup> Obviously the decision to cut off support to the mission in West Virginia carried a great impact.

child. The Lord greatly blessed both Peace of Our Savior and Pastor Wildauer as a result. The years that Pastor Wildauer ministered there ended up being an unparalleled time of great accomplishments for the history of the congregation. Pastor Wildauer attributes this to all the hard work the members and the previous pastors had done prior to his arrival. He concluded by saying, "It was an excellent opportunity to enter into."

Pastor Wildauer officially entered into the ministry at Peace of Our Savior in April of 1991. By the time he arrived, the group was united, and that was an accomplishment for a church which had two congregations come together less than ten years before. At the time of his arrival the members were very aware of the need for evangelism, and they were practicing good stewardship. Pastor Wildauer attributed those qualities to the study of God's word in the various programs they had, especially under Pastor Free.

One thing Pastor Wildauer noticed right away was something the members of the congregation had acknowledged for some time. The church still had a majority of its membership as a result of transferring from other WELS congregations. Proof of this is found in the high number of families from the congregation which were in one way or another connected to Wright Patterson Air Force Base. 40% of the families fell into this category in 1991. In response to this, the church set a goal to make the congregation consist of "less Packer fans than Bengal fans."<sup>34</sup> By the beginning of 2001 as Pastor Wildauer was finishing up his ministry there, the congregation accomplished its plan. This was a big step for the church which had always struggled because of the number of transfers.

In the spring of 1991 Pastor Wildauer hit the ground running, and from the descriptions of the members he never really let up. By the end of 1991 the congregation began work on adding two new classrooms above the narthex of the church which at that time was the fellowship hall.

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<sup>34</sup> Perhaps another reason Pastor Wildauer desired the makeup of the church to have less Packers fans was for the reason that he was a Detroit Lions fan. This is something the church never held against him.

The project would cost around \$6,000 and would demand a great deal of time from its members. Before this addition the lack of room forced the congregation to convert its former little nursery and little kitchen into classrooms for Sunday school every Sunday while the adults held their Bible class right next door in the sanctuary. On Easter Sunday of 1992 the church dedicated the two new classrooms. In November of 1992 Peace of Our Savior decided to celebrate its 10 year anniversary as one congregation. With this celebration they officially marked their beginning date as November 21, 1982.<sup>35</sup>

The next major goal the church tackled was to become self-supporting. In early 1993 they became self-supporting for the first time in their history. This ended their status as a mission congregation. For the occasion they had a special service with guest preacher Pastor Dan Gieschan who had installed the congregation's first resident pastor, Pastor Oliver Lindholm.

In 1993 the church accomplished a couple other major things. In the summer the members replaced the cedar shingles on the roof of their building with asphalt tiles. The roof had previously been a drain on the congregation, requiring \$700 and hours of labor on the members' part every couple years in order to repaint the cedar shingles. By the end of the summer the project was completed and has meant less maintenance ever since.

The changing of hymnals was also another mark of 1993. Pastor Wildauer remembered that some new members of the congregation who were transplants suggested that it would be nice to have Advent services. Pastor Wildauer agreed on one condition. Parts of the new hymnal were to be incorporated. The congregation agreed. In a short time, to Pastor Wildauer's surprise, Glenn Hitzfield made a motion that they replace their current hymnals with the new hymnals.<sup>36</sup> The motion was approved. As a result, the church held a fundraiser to supply the \$1,200 needed

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<sup>35</sup> This celebration strengthened the bond of the members from the two former congregations all the more.

<sup>36</sup> The older hymnal referred to was "The Lutheran Hymnal." The new hymnal was "Christian Worship."



for the new hymnals. Although the fundraiser brought in a little over half of what was hoped for, Bill Fader made up the difference with a \$500 donation.

The church's history continues with more tangible blessings from the Lord. In 1994 the congregation built a garage to alleviate the hassle of not having any storage area for the church's maintenance equipment. It seems that the \$3,000 project was accomplished as quickly as it was suggested. Glenn Hitzfield commented on Pastor Wildauer's ability to raise funds. He said that all he would have to do is mention the need and the donations would come. This also would hold true for the addition that would come a little later in time.

In 1995 the church supported and was blessed to have the aid of Chris Pluger who is recognized as the first son of the congregation. He held the title of "Summer Minister of Education and Outreach" for that year. The church supported him and his desire to pursue the pastoral ministry by giving him \$2,000 for his help over the summer. His work involved heading up a couple of evangelism programs for the church as well as a number of other duties. He along with many volunteers completed a massive survey of the 1,500 homes in Park Layne. The survey also covered the area of New Carlisle. Chris Pluger also led Sunday School and Vacation Bible School for the summer. Under the guidance of Pastor Wildauer, Chris gained a lot of experience. Although Chris Pluger did not go into the pastoral ministry, he is presently serving the Lord in the public ministry as a Spanish Teacher at Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It is evident that the church's encouragement helped Chris enter into the public ministry.

In the annual report of 1995 another blessing among many is mentioned. The communicant membership reached over 100. That had never happened before in the congregation's history, and it would not be the last time it would happen either. The church records show that in 2001 Peace of Our Savior had 109 communicant members.

In 1996 the members of Peace of Our Savior were presented with an exciting challenge. They were up for paying off their mortgage which included a large balloon payment at the end. This need spurred on member Doug Hirsch to put the word out so they could pay off their mortgage by taking care of the balloon payment. Members responded to the need by giving 15-20% above what they had been giving. Peace of Our Savior paid off their mortgage without any problems. On September 29, the congregation held a special mortgage burning service. The guest preacher for the occasion was Pastor Oliver Lindholm. During the service Don Williamson and Glenn Hitzfield took part in a burning of the mortgage ceremony where they burned the mortgage which was marked "paid in full." As the two came forward at the beginning of the ceremony, the congregation joined in singing "Praise to the Lord." During the service they also dedicated their new communion ware which the church purchased for \$500 out of the Roy Rasmussen estate.<sup>37</sup>

If it was not obvious up to this point how devoted and energetic Pastor Wildauer and the people of Peace of Our Savior were, the close of the 1990's and the beginning of the new millennium will remove all doubt. After they paid the mortgage off, the offerings kept coming in at the steady rate of 15-20% more than in years past. Pastor Wildauer jokingly said that he was not about to tell the people to stop giving so much. The members agreed and they decided instead to plan for something big. They were not exactly sure what they would do,<sup>38</sup> but they knew they were at a point where they could accomplish something great for the glory of God. When they coupled this thought with the general consensus that their present facility was too small, they hatched a plan.

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<sup>37</sup> Roy Rasmussen was a long time member of Peace of Our Savior who was instrumental in beautifying the church grounds and taking care of the property. He also was influential in other areas. Bill Whitt said that he was wonderful in making himself and others feel at home in the congregation.

<sup>38</sup> To figure out their options and decide on which option was the best, they attended an Evangelism Workshop. The ideas from the workshop led them to finally end the discussion on moving from 1025 Cliffside. They also decided to focus on reaching out to the people of surrounding areas who traveled their area more frequently.

After the voters agreed that they needed to expand their facility the church formed a Building Committee and a Preschool Study Committee.<sup>39</sup> In 1997 the committees submitted their suggestions, and the voters unanimously agreed to expand their facility and start a preschool. The unanimous decision was a confirmation that Peace of Our Savior was at just the right time for building. The only problem was that no one really knew how to accomplish what the church envisioned or how to raise the money needed for a building project.

After a little searching Pastor Wildauer found that Pastor Dan Malchow of WELS Capital Funding Services would be an excellent resource to consider. The only problem was that the fee for his services to provide information on whether or not they should proceed at all would be \$6,000. The members' first reaction was to proceed without Pastor Dan Malchow's assistance, but Pastor Wildauer said he was pretty persistent with the congregation to change its mind. A majority of the voters trusted Pastor Wildauer's suggestion, and Pastor Malchow was able to lend his help.<sup>40</sup> He suggested that the congregation should start a capital funding drive.

In 1998 Pastor Malchow presented a "Strategy Report" which the voters approved. The report was full of helpful suggestions on how to proceed, and throughout the pages of the report the overriding message came through loud and clear. Pastor Malchow had indeed encouraged Peace of Our Savior to expand. The people had completed the feasibility phase of the project with flying colors, and they began to follow the recommendations. A team was put together entitled the "Forward in Faith Team" in order to make the congregation aware of what was going

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<sup>39</sup> The Building Committee: Glenn Hitzfield (Chairman), Doug Hirsch, and Marvin Israel. Advisors to the committee were the Head Elder, Chairman of Property, Chairman of Christian Education, and Chairman of Evangelism. Representative of Servae Christi were Claude Duncan and Marilyn Whitt. The Preschool Study Committee: Duane Schneider (Chairman), Bill Whitt, Kathy Fashner, Pam France, and Darlene Pluger.

<sup>40</sup> Pastor Malchow said that Peace of Our Savior was the smallest church with which he has worked. He added, however, that it had the greatest spirit of family he had yet seen.

on in the building project and to encourage members to help out wherever they could.<sup>41</sup> The congregation also signed a contract with architect Jim Mitchell. By this time the congregation saw how Pastor Malchow's work of research and suggestions was well worth the amount they invested in him.

In the middle of the year when plans were well underway in pursuing building a new addition, Pastor Wildauer received a call from Omaha, Nebraska. Pastor Wildauer said that this was a difficult period because he really thought that it might be his time to go. With some encouragement from the members and brothers in the ministry and with prayerful consideration, the Lord led him to see that he could serve God's kingdom better at New Carlisle. Pastor Wildauer stayed, and it was a good thing that he did because Pastor Malchow said that the move of a congregation's pastor in such a time could kill a building project. Glenn Hitzfield concurred with this statement when he said, "We would not have the new addition without him."<sup>42</sup>

In 1999 the church carried on with the different aspects of ministry as usual. During this time they also approved the architects' drawings, and continued on with the capital fund drive with Pastor Malchow. The funds for the project were coming in very well, and everything was going as planned.

Before moving on to the groundbreaking some other events which took place at this time should be noted. In the late 90's there were other important developments in the area of outreach. In 1998 Peace of our Savior involved itself in the New Carlisle Hometown Celebration Parade and Picnic which they have continued to be a part of a number of times. The whole event is geared toward getting the good news of the Gospel out as it makes the church's identity more

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<sup>41</sup> Forward in Faith Team: Larry Jones (Chairman), Bill Whitt (Secretary), Claude Duncan, Glenn Hitzfield, Pam France, Deb Hickman, Karen Beattie, Marilyn Whitt, Fred Requarth, and Kim Fashner.

<sup>42</sup> One other problem the congregation faced which may have ended the project and brought financial trouble to the congregation was over the fact that LACE rejected their request for a loan because their numbers were too small. At the time they already had received confirmation from LACE that the loan was theirs and had already signed with contractors. Pastor Wildauer and the members were persistent in their appeal to LACE to reverse its decision. Eventually LACE granted the loan it originally promised.

visible to the people of the community. Under Pastor Wildauer the church began presenting weekly articles in the local paper, The New-Carlisle Sun. The articles often speak about current issues with pure Law and Gospel preaching. During Pastor Wildauer's ministry the church also approached the community with a request to set up voting booths for the city on the church grounds. The request was granted. This has provided another opportunity for the community to see a church which otherwise may have gone unnoticed because of location.<sup>43</sup>

In early 2000 the church agreed to make Charles Waldron of C. Waldron & Co., Inc. its general contractor for the project.<sup>44</sup> On April 16, 2000 the church broke ground. Throughout the rest of spring, all of the summer, and part of the fall the contractors with a great deal of help from the members completed the addition.<sup>45</sup> The completed project including the other remodeling projects of the chapel cost over \$400,000. Peace of Our Savior praised the Lord for this accomplishment with their dedication service on November 5, 2000. The theme for the service brought the purpose of the building to the forefront of all the members' minds once again. The people were to "keep moving forward in faith" as they "strengthen the stakes" and "enlarge the tent."<sup>46</sup> In other words the people were to continue to grow in their love for their Lord as they strengthen one another and reach the lost. It is the author's opinion that they have done just that.

By the end of 2000 Pastor Wildauer received another call. St. Matthew in Port Washington, Wisconsin was in desperate need of a pastor with the God-given gifts of Pastor

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<sup>43</sup> One week after the dedication of the addition over 1,000 people came to vote at the expanded facility for the presidential election of 2000.

<sup>44</sup> Pastor Wildauer commended both Jim Mitchell and Charles Waldron for their excellent work.

<sup>45</sup> How much the congregation helped in the project is impressive. The members not only helped to prepare the grounds for construction, but they also saved Peace of Our Savior thousands of dollars in a full weekend of painting their new facility. While the project was going on the people were also busy renovating portions of the original church building such as expanding the sanctuary by removing the kitchen and nursery. The Lord has blessed the congregation with a number of people who are capable of a variety of tasks.

<sup>46</sup> These were the theme and parts of the sermon for that day from Isaiah 54:2.

Wildauer. This was a call that Pastor Wildauer ended up accepting. Peace of Our Savior once again had to say goodbye to a pastor. A number of the members mentioned how they were not only sad to see him go, but they were sad that he would not be able to enjoy the addition the church erected for the glory of God.<sup>47</sup>

As the history shows, Pastor Wildauer made a great impact on the congregation. This is not just evident by the many accomplishments the church experienced under this shepherd, but it is evident by the members' words themselves. Glen Hitzfield summarized well the members' views of Pastor Wildauer when he said, "Pastor Wildauer had the ability to make you want to perform. He never pushed, but he did expect things to get done." Concerning his work ethic Glen characterized Pastor Wildauer by saying things such as, "He was relentless in his hours...<sup>48</sup> He got people involved... He was very energetic."

One final thing that should be said of Pastor Wildauer concerns the area of music. Pastor Wildauer was able to instill in the people at Peace of Our Savior more of an appreciation for music in worship. He was involved in helping the choir, and he was always trying new ways to enhance the worship with music. Members commented on how he was musically gifted, and when they obtained a \$3,000 keyboard from Wright University they were able to do things musically they were not able to do before.

After Pastor Wildauer accepted the call to Port Washington, the church went through a vacancy period. Pastor Pieper from Columbus, Ohio and Vicar Jay Cook would alternate in assisting the worship services. At this time they also opened up the parsonage to retired Pastor Tom Krauss and his wife Lois. Bill Whitt mentioned how vacancies were always tough because the congregation did not have a pastor close by to turn to. He went on to say that Pastor Krauss

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<sup>47</sup> Pastor Wildauer did get to see everything except the new carpet before he left.

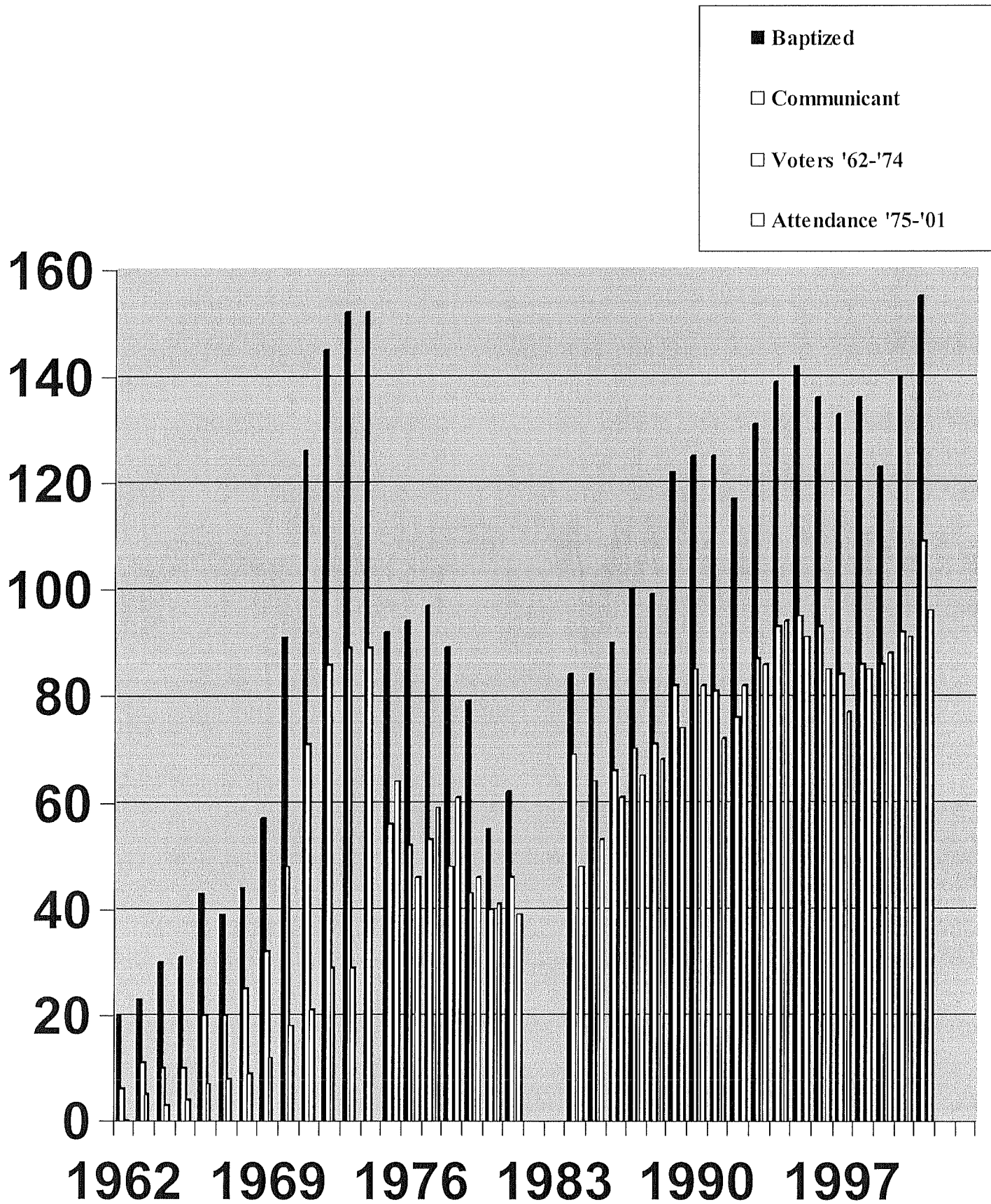
<sup>48</sup> Duane Schneider said that he called Pastor Wildauer up one time to tell him that it was time for them to go golfing. Pastor Wildauer was working too hard.

and his wife played a key part in getting the people through the tough time. They were bright personalities and they were humorous too. He said, "They were what we needed at the time."

The vacancy ended in January 2002 when Pastor Marc Frey and his wife Elaine arrived from Oklahoma. This was the beginning of Pastor Frey's 22<sup>nd</sup> year in the public ministry. In almost two years since they came to Peace of Our Savior they have been busy getting to know the people. The first impressions have all been good, and there is a sense of excitement about what the Lord has in store for the next number of years. One of the highlights in the short time that the Freys have been at the church is the beginning of its preschool in the fall of 2003. The preschool started with an enrollment of 9 children and only two are WELS. Elaine Frey serves as the preschool teacher. Currently the church has 110 communicant members and 152 souls.

The ministry under Pastor Frey in the last half of 2003 concludes the history of Peace of Our Savior at this time. As can be seen, there has been a lot of history. One of the most impressive things about the congregation is the love that they share for each other and more importantly for their Lord. If only there were more time to write the many stories the people shared about how they enjoy each other's company even more than the company of their biological relatives who do not know the Lord. They also were able to express their undying love for their Lord in various ways. For instance, when the members who were interviewed were asked what the greatest qualities of each pastor was, all of them said without hesitation that each pastor was dedicated to keeping God's Word in its truth and purity.

It is the author's prayer that the Lord would continue to shower the people at 1025 Cliffside Drive with innumerable blessings both tangible and intangible. May the Lord be with them through both the challenges and triumphs that may come in the future! Most importantly, may the peace of the Savior sustain them as it always has!





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### Pastor Interviews:

Free, Keith. Divine Word: 2500 Magnolia Dr. Plover, WI 54467-2879: (715) 344-8185  
divinewd@coredcs.com

Frey, Marc. Peace of Our Savior; 1025 Cliffside Dr. New Carlisle, OH 45344-2442: (937)  
849-9642: revmfrey@aol.com

Haag, Keith. (Retired); Box 774 Peridot, AZ 85542: Office (928) 475-7537: Home – (928)  
475-4524: ardkehaag@earthlink.net

Knuepple, Dorothy. 2499 S Lake Michigan Dr. Sturgeon Bay, WI 54235-8347 (920) 743-  
3518. (She was interviewed on behalf of her former husband Pastor Fred Knuepple  
who died in the spring of 2003.)

Lindholm, Oliver. Risen Savior; 2485 Pinto Trl. McFarland, WI 53558-9035: (608) 838-  
3872: risensavior@powercom.net

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(262) 284-6501 / Office (262) 284-3360: pastorwildauer@wels.net

### Peace of Our Savior Member Interviews:

Duncan, Claude and Helen: 937-434-5170

Hickman, Deb: 937-235-1247

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Schneider, Duane and Loretta: 937-964-0247

Whitt, Bill and Marilyn: 937-325-3167

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