

History of Christ Church

In the late 1800's the area of "west" Salem was "on the very edge of civilization" according to the Moravian Archives. West Salem was also a fast growing area with a number of Moravians settling there, and it was thought perhaps a Sunday school and chapel were needed. In 1891 George Brietz and Maria Vogler, members of Home Moravian Church, made a survey of the community and found over 30 children interested in attending Sunday school. So a small building was constructed as an "experiment." The chapel consisted of two rooms and seated around 150 people. The 20 x 50 foot building was located in the general area of our present parsonage at the corner of Academy and Green Streets

The building was completed on March 18, 1892. Christ Chapel, or the West Salem Chapel as it was known as in the early days was dedicated on April 9, 1893 and the Scripture readings that day from the Daily Text were:

I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn from them.
(Jeremiah 32:40)

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him. (Colossians 2:6)

Brother John McCuioston led services in its early years and they were held on Saturday evenings with the Sunday school gatherings taking place of course on Sundays. Sunday school officially started on Palm Sunday, March 26, 1893 with 56 scholars and 7 teachers present. The experiment of "Christ Chapel" proved to be a success and barely two years later, on July 21, 1895, the cornerstone was laid for a large new sanctuary.

Here is a list of the articles placed in the cornerstone:

- Holy Bible
- Moravian hymn book
- Daily text for 1895
- Rules and Regulations of the Salem Congregation
- The Moravian
- The Wachovia Moravian
- The Union Republican (newspaper)
- Twin City Daily Sentinel (newspaper)
- Blum's Almanac
- History of Christ Chapel
- List of Sunday school (members)
- Pastors and Boards of Salem Congregations

Howard Rondthaler, the son of Bishop Edward Rondthaler was called as Christ Church's first pastor on July 1, 1896, and the new sanctuary was dedicated on July 18, 1896. Formal organization of Christ Church as a branch of Salem Congregation followed on October 25, 1896. A parsonage was built in 1898.

Today, Academy Street is a very popular cut through street for automobiles and oftentimes these cars are traveling faster than the allotted speed limit. It seems as though this has been a unique problem around Christ Church for a number of years. In the early 1900's Christ Church had a problem with cars driving across the lot in order to cut off corners, cows would sometimes be grazing on the lot, chickens and dogs would use it as a playground. It was decided by the leadership of Christ church to build a fence around the property and after much discussion and deliberation a wire fence 1,100 feet long was put around the property in 1902.

Electric lights were turned on in the sanctuary on October 25, 1903. Speaking of our sanctuary, you can still see that Christ Church's 1896 home is still in existence. The sanctuary has a seating capacity of 350 people. Fogle Brothers with the Salem Congregation providing financial aid constructed the building. Like many Moravian churches built in the late 19th century, it has an English Gothic flavor. But even more captivating is its 12-sided configuration, making it a wonderful place for worship. The acoustics in the sanctuary are wonderful.

Lovely as it is, the Christ Church building has also proved very serviceable for the last century and more. Additions have been made. Sunday school rooms were added in 1906 and again in 1919. By 1940 Christ Church was the third largest congregation in the Southern Province. During the 40's a group of young adults from Christ Church helped to promote a drive for a new building on the corner of Academy Street and Granville Drive. Today this fellowship building is a meeting place for church boards, women's fellowship, Mission Society of the Southern Province, West Salem Neighborhood Association, AA, and of course a great gathering place for one of our favorite pastimes in the Moravian Church—potluck and special dinners! A large brick parsonage was built in 1957 to replace the one of the previous century. This parsonage until January of 2018 served as office and meeting space. We sold the parsonage in January and are now building a smaller parsonage on the corner of Academy Street and Hunter Avenue that will serve as our office space. We expect to move into our new building sometime during the late summer or early fall of 2018.

That's enough about our building! Some fun facts about Christ Church:

1. Four pastors of Christ Church have been elected as bishops: Howard Rondthaler, J. Kenneth Pfohl, Carl J. Helmich & Samuel J. Tesch
2. Two of these elected bishops have the distinction of being the founding pastor and longest tenured pastorate at Christ Church. Howard Rondthaler was the founding pastor. Carl J. Helmich has the longest pastorate.

3. Over the years Christ Church has fielded many successful softball teams. In fact a former Major League Baseball Player and Coach was a long time member of Christ Church, Eddie Lyons.
4. As a young man when visiting the community, the late Andy Griffith sang in the Senior Choir of Christ Church.

Christ Church has provided strong support to mission endeavors over the years, adopting, among others, Fred and Anna Schwalbe for their work in Alaska and Sam and Grace Marx in Central America and today Michael Tesh and family and their Ray Of Hope Orphanage in Kenya, Africa.

Our mission statement is the following:

Christ Church seeks to be a caring congregation, worshipping God and encouraging one another, as we serve outside the walls of our congregation in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ.

We attempt to follow our mission statement by remembering our motto as a congregation: "Loving to Serve—Serving to Love."

Today our church membership is 263 people and we averaged 88 people in worship in 2017.