

OAK GROVE LUTHERAN CHURCH

OCTOBER, 2008

135th ANNIVERSARY



ESTABLISHED 1873

OAK GROVE LUTHERAN CHURCH
432 HARKINS MILL ROAD
ZELIENOPE, PENNSYLVANIA
OCTOBER, 2008



REV. GOTTLIEB BASSLER

Rev. Gottlieb Bassler had organized the English Lutheran Church at Zelienople in 1843. This zealous man of God now saw the need for a church in this rural community. Thus, by him was Oak Grove founded. Services were held as early as 1867 in Bonzo's school house. This school was located on what is now the Hoffman farm about a mile west of the present building out the road that leads to the left across Harkin's bridge.

Too much cannot be said for this, the first pastor of Oak Grove. Few men were remembered so long and tenderly among the Lutherans of Western Pennsylvania as he. His first and only parish was at Zelienople from where he would drive or walk the nine miles to preach to the farmers along the Brush Creek. His salary was a mere pittance, but his wants were few and no one ever heard him complain. He was a man who had a kind word for all and had many loyal friends. A great lover of the Bible, all his sermons were rich in Biblical truth. He was elected president of the Pittsburgh Synod three times, and was the first president of the General Council. He was the first director of the Zelienople Orphan's Home and Farm School.

His death occurred in the home of his friend, Doctor W.A. Passavant, October 3, 1868, at the comparative young age of 55 years. That was the time of bitter feelings engendered by the controversy between the General Council and the General Synod, but these two bodies joined in acclaiming him.

REV. M.L. KUNKLEMAN

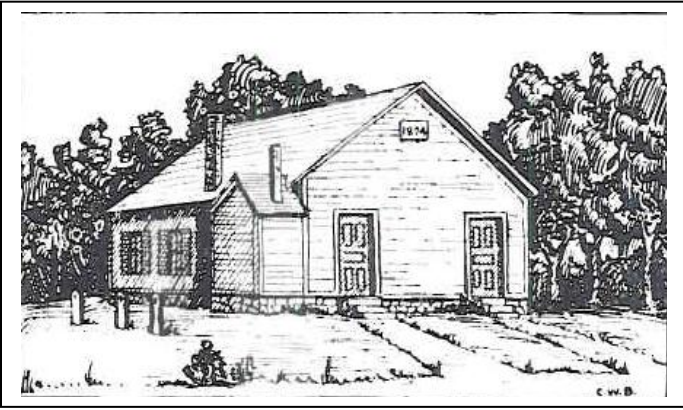
From that time until 1873 not much is known of the Oak Grove Church. The pastors from Zelianople perhaps came to preach occasionally. Our records show the presence of W.A. Passavant. The spark that Rev. Bassler had kindled, was kept going by the Sunday School. This Sunday School also met in Bonzo's schoolhouse and John R. Bonzo was the superintendent. No doubt the Rev. M.L. Kunkleman, the fourth pastor of English Lutheran Church of the Zelianople congregation preached between 1868 and 1873. The result was the organization of Oak Grove, March 15, 1873, when the first trustees were chosen: George Bonzo, Henry Bonzo, G.R. Bonzo, and Jacob Goehring. Twenty-four members completed the organization in January 1874 namely as follows:

| | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| George Bonzo | Andrew Deemer |
| George R Bonzo | Barbara Douglas |
| Margaret Bonzo | William Freshcorn |
| John R. Bonzo | Sarah Freshcorn |
| Henry Bonzo | Hannah Goas |
| Jacob Dambach | Jacob Goas |
| Christ Goehring | Henry Goehring |
| Amelia Goehring | Anna Powell |
| Jacob Goehring | John Powell |
| Charles Graham | Margaret Reader |
| Lottie Graham | Margaret Stout |
| Margaret Mckee | Callie Troutman |
| Joseph Powell | |

This list of charter members is not completely consistent with list given by Dr. Ellis B. Burgess in his history of the Pittsburgh Synod, because the latter does not check with the records of the church itself and precedence has been given to the church records.

Many unchurched families of the community were glad to welcome this organization and plans were made at once for the building of a church. A fine oak grove of one-half acre was donated by Henry Bonzo. A small frame church was then erected and stood on the exact spot where the present church now stands. It was built at the cost of \$1,150 and was dedicated by Rev. Kunkleman, August 16, 1874. On that date fourteen young people were confirmed.

| | |
|----------------|---------------------|
| Elias Goas | Callie Troutman |
| Alice Deemer | Matthew E Kirschner |
| Amelia Goas | Jacob Goas |
| John A. Kuhns | Adam Goehring |
| William Deemer | William Klink |
| Andrew Bonzo | Andrew Goas |
| Carol Bonzo | Jacob Deemer Jr. |



There is no known picture of this building but it measured 35 feet by 40 feet. About 1898, a small room was attached to the left side of this building and into this room a mother took her baby when it was unruly or in need of attention. The interior of the church was very plain. Two stoves, placed on opposite sides, supplied the heat. There was no altar. At a congregational meeting on April 24, 1875 it was

decided to buy an organ for \$140. During the same year the congregation was admitted to membership in the Pittsburgh Synod, General Council, and made a part of the Zelianople Parish. Services were held every alternate Sunday afternoon at 2PM. This was changed in 1879 to 10:30AM.

Rev. Kunkleman resigned in December of 1877 to assume duties with the English Synod of Ohio. He was a man of God, a tireless worker, and a true leader. In addition to this congregation, he served three others, Zelianople, Lilyville, and Middle Lancaster. His pastorate of four and a half years was a very successful one. Fourteen members were received by baptism and twenty-three confirmations. It is difficult to estimate the correct size of the congregation during his pastorate. The first communion records known were kept in 1877.

At that time fifty-three persons communed. It is obvious that the congregation under his guiding hand grew. Truly, this man was sent by God.

REV. J.A. KRIBBS

At a joint council meeting held February 23, 1878, with the Zelianople and Lancaster churches, Oak Grove extended a call to Rev. J.A. Kribbs for one year for the munificent salary of \$150. Rev. Kribbs had just been called as the third director of the Zelianople Orphan's Home and Farm School from the St. John's Lutheran Church of Kittanning, Pa. His duties then consisted of serving the congregation, the Zelianople congregation, and the directorship of the Home.

Perhaps the most significant single thing Rev. Kribbs caused to be done here was the formulation of a constitution. This was adopted by the congregation May 11, 1879, and signed by fifty-two members. On January 27, 1879, Mr. Jacob Panner was elected by the congregation to be the organist. The time of worship was changed from 2PM to 10:30AM. Pastor Kribbs was elected for a term of one year. However, in 1879, he was extended a unanimous call to preach for another year.

Because of the increasing demands made upon him by the Orphan's Home and Farm School, it was necessary for him to resign his pastorate at Oak Grove and Zelienople, in order that he could devote his full time to the care of the boys and girls at the home. He resigned March 14, 1880. His work was successful and noteworthy. His work at the Orphan's Home was above reproach. Oak Grove owes much to this consecrated man in securing the foundation already laid by Rev. Bassler and Rev. Kunkleman.

REV. V.B. CHRISTY

Rev. V.B. Christy of Holy Trinity Church, Irwin, Pa, in response to a call from the Zelienople-Oak Grove Parish issued jointly October 10, 1880, became the next pastor. Oak Grove promised to pay him \$250 annually. He was to preach on alternate Sundays in the forenoon and visit the Sunday School as often as he could.

In 1885, the condition of the church was such that the congregation decided to fresco and wallpaper the interior and paint the exterior.

On October 16, 1886, a piece of land consisting of one-half acre was purchased for a grave yard from John and Caroline Freshcorn and Elias Goas. This land adjoined the Wagner grave yard and is located about two miles west of the church adjoining the farm of Henry Alstadt.

Rev. Christy's pastorate was a spiritually profitable ministry. Forty-four were baptized by him. The number of communing members had grown to eighty-five. Thirty-seven were received by confirmation. A regular paid organist and sexton were elected. The organist was Jacob Panner and the sexton was William Freshcorn.

Rev. Christy was truly a loyal servant of the Lord. As a preacher, he was eloquent and forceful. The congregation under his guidance enjoyed a period of rapid growth. He was encouraged by a growing church. He guided the people skillfully and reverently in finding God. The acquisition of many new members can be listed as a real achievement.

Rev. Christy resigned the Zelienople-Oak Grove Parish in March of 1890 to accept a call to the District Synod of Ohio.

REV. R.R. DURST

After a vacancy of several months Rev. R.R.Durst became the pastor in July of 1890. Pastor Durst was called by the Zelianople-Oak Grove Parish from the Lutheran Church of Prospect, Pa. The congregation steadily moved forward under his leadership. During his pastorate, twenty-eight were received by baptism and twenty-four by confirmation and transfer by letter. Rev. Durst labored to make fast the broad foundation laid by his predecessors.

Rev Durst resigned the Zelianople-Oak Grove Parish in August of 1896 to accept a call to Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church in McKees Rocks, Pa. He was an untiring laborer for his Master and an eloquent preacher. Oak Grove owes much to this consecrated Christian man.

On April 13, 1895, the congregation decided to purchase additional ground around the church from Elmer Bonzo. This was done making the plot of ground about three-fourths of an acre, its present size,

REV L.O. BENZE

In September of 1896 the Rev. L.O. Benze received a unanimous call to become pastor of the Zelianople-Oak Grove parish.

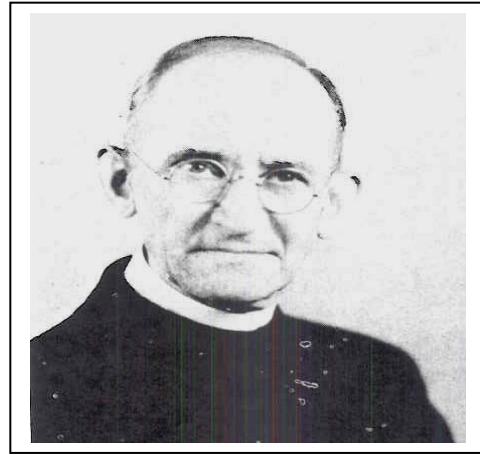
As under the former pastorate the congregation under him grew. Forty-four were received by confirmation. Thirty-six were received by baptism. During his pastorate the number of communing-active members grew to 164.

The records do not show much that was done during his pastorate, but certainly the figures given above show conclusively that he was a tireless worker for the Lord's Kingdom. It was a great period of advancement for the church and Pastor Benze took complete advantage of every opportunity to add another to His Kingdom. Pastor Benze was a fiery and eloquent orator in the pulpit. He was loved and honored by all who knew him.

In July of 1902 he resigned this parish. In 1905 he accepted a call to become pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church of McKeesport, Pa. At present he is pastor of the First English Lutheran Church in Ashtabula, Ohio

REV. E.H. DAUGHERTY

In August, 1902, the Rev. E. H. Daugherty was unanimously called as pastor of the Oak Grove congregation. Under the former pastors the congregation had grown to such an extent that it was able to become self-supporting. Thus it was that Pastor Daugherty was the first pastor of the Oak Grove congregation as it was to be for the next twenty years.



The congregation was growing. Extra chairs had to be added for the Sunday services. The members were, for the most part, prosperous, hard-working farmers. In 1904, Mr. Jacob Dambach Sr., endowed the church with \$2000. One thousand of this was to build a church if the congregation should ever decide to do so. The other \$1000 was to be held in a trust fund to be used to care for his grave and keep the grave yard in repair. Part of the interest was to be used for the Sunday school. Mr. Jacob Dambach, Sr. has perhaps done more in a financial way for this congregation than any other single person.

In view of all these things, some consideration was given to the erection of a new and larger church. Accordingly, a congregation meeting was called for September 10, 1905. It took place immediately after a special Harvest Home Festival service. At this meeting, three propositions were set before the congregation by the chairman, Mr. Ira J. Goehring: (1) Consideration of building a new church, (2) Lengthening the present building, (3) Roofing the present building. A committee had been previously appointed to secure pledges for a new building. This committee, composed of G.A. Bonzo and Levi Goehring, reported that \$2716 had been subscribed. This, together with the \$1000 from the Damach fund, brought the total of \$3716, with enough members yet to be seen to make the grand total \$3800.

It was obvious from the beginning what the sentiments of the congregation members were. After some discussion, a motion was adopted to build a new church providing that the cost would not be more than \$4100, thus putting the congregation \$300 in debt. A committee of the trustees was appointed to investigate plans for such a structure. This committee included G.A. Bonzo, L.H. Goehring and C.A. Freshcorn. The committee was to report at a congregation meeting on September 24, 1905.

On the appointed date, the committee reported its findings. A new church could be built for \$3907. This report, read by G.A. Bonzo, was accepted by the congregation. Since the report showed that a church could be built for \$4100, it was necessary to return to the original motion in order that a church might be built. Accordingly, Mr. Charles Zeigler moved that a church should be built. The congregation voted by secret ballot. The result was that sixty-four favored the building and four opposed. On motion it was made unanimous. The

building committee appointed consisted of C.A. Freshcorn, L.H. Goehring, G.A. Bonzo, Ira J Goehring and Rev. E.H. Daugherty.

The next item for discussion then was planning a suitable time to begin. Someone in the congregation answered, "Right Away!" So it was at daybreak of the following morning, Monday, September 25, 1905, that razing of the old church had begun, and by sundown of that same evening not a piece of wood remained of the original building. It is said that it takes farmers a long time to decide anything, but when they do, the hammers and saws begin to fly.

The contract for the building foundation was let to George Klein & Sons. They were assisted by men of the congregation. On October 15, 1905, the cornerstone was laid with impressive ceremonies. The Rev. F.A. Bowers, Pastor of Grace Lutheran Church of Rochester, Pa., delivered the message. A liberal offering was made by the congregation. Many friends of the congregation were present for the blessed occasion, making a very large attendance. Among the pastors present were Rev. H.K. Shanor of Middle Lancaster, J.A. Kribbs from Zelienople, R.M. Smith of Baden, and J.G. Fischer of Beaver Falls.

It may be of interest to note what articles were placed in the cornerstone. This list follows:

One copy of the Holy Bible

Church Book

Luther's Small Catechism

The Church Paper

"The Lutheran" containing a notice of the service

The Conoquenessing Valley News

The names of the Sunday School scholars for 1905 by class and their teachers

The names of the Sunday School officers for 1905

The names of the members of the choir

The names of the officers of the Church Council

The names of the members of the building committee

Three coins- 1 cent bearing the date 1874, (the date of the erection of the old church), 1 cent bearing the date 1905, and a twenty-five cent piece bearing the date of 1905.

Under the leadership of Rev. Daugherty the building continued rapidly. When a tool or a piece of material was needed, it was usually the pastor who hitched his horse and went off in search of it. During the period of construction, the congregation met at Wagner's Church and at Bonzo's schoolhouse where the church was originally organized thirty-two years before. The contract for the erection of the church was let to Fogel and

Rape of Zelienople. The architect was Mr. Miller of the Edward Dambach Co., Evans City. The company furnished all the lumber, trimmings, etc., necessary to complete the church. The painting, frescoing, etc., was done by Harry Freshcorn and George Steinacker. There were many material donations. Perfect harmony in management and labor prevailed. The work progressed rapidly. The weather was favorable, with a mild winter.

Finally, the congregation was ready for the most important event in its history. The church was finished. On the afternoon of February 11, 1906, this most beautiful house of worship was dedicated. Just one hundred and thirty days after someone had said "Right Away" in response to the question, "When shall we begin?" the congregation was ready to go into its new home.

"Right Away" was the spirit with which the skilled mechanics came to work, each in his turn and on the conclusion of the dedicated service that day, it was a fact well worthy of mention that everyone was in his appointed place of duty at the appointed time.

The services, which were impressive, began promptly at 1:30 PM, when the President of the Pittsburgh Synod, the Rev. W.J. Miller, D.D. of Greensburg, Pa. spoke to the congregation that filled the church to its utmost capacity. The prescribed form of service of the church book containing the act of consecration was used by Pastor Daughtery. Dr. Miller spoke eloquently to an attentive audience using as a text Isaiah 6:1-3: The Rev. C Borchers, pastor of Burry's Church, was present and gave expression to a few well chosen words of instruction and congratulations. The Pastor, on behalf of the building committee, then took occasion to thank each and all who had performed a "work of faith and labor of love" in the erection of the new church.

Services were held in the evening at 8PM when Rev. L.O. Benze, a former pastor of the congregation, delivered an edifying sermon based on Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever." An audience that filled the church listen with rapt attention to the former pastor as he spoke of the unchangeableness of the love of Christ and also of the unchanging love which he had and always will have for the people of Oak Grove congregation.

It was truly a day of rejoicing and gladness for the congregation and everybody in the community. The weather was entirely favorable, an ideal wintry day, fair and cold. The amount of money expended, together with the estimated value contributed by members and friends of the congregation, left the congregation rejoicing with a church valued at \$5600 and free of debt. The small deficit of \$300 had been readily provided for by subscriptions and collection taken at the dedicatory services. At the conclusion of the services a feast of good things were provided, and all could truthfully say that they were glad to have gone to this new temple of the Lord on this day.

The church is a frame structure, 40 feet by 60 feet. It contains two Sunday school rooms and vestibule. The main audience room is 40 feet by 50 feet, and is so arranged that the larger of the Sunday school rooms can be made a part of the main room. It is constructed with a drop floor and contains twelve angular pews with a

seating capacity of three hundred on either side of the center aisle. The windows are of beautiful art glass with scriptural emblems. The altar, pulpit and lectern are ideal for a Lutheran church. The main style of the building throughout is Gothic. It is surmounted by a battlement tower in which has been placed a bell weighting two thousand-two hundred pounds, the gift of Jacob Dambach, Sr.

Truly this was an event in the history of Oak Grove which has not been paralleled since. The good resulting from the division of the Zelianople parish, thus separating Oak Grove, surpassed the expectations of the most hopeful. "God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform."

The first baby to be baptized as a member in the new church was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Freshcorn, Naomi Louella, who was baptized February 17, 1906.

The first confirmation class received Easter Sunday, April 16, 1906 included the following: Mable M Leonberg, Matilda E. Steinacker, Gladys M. Leonberg, Amanda R. Buehler, Gertrude E Dambach, Vernard A Kirschler, Rosa E Dambach, and Albert J. Reiser



On April 21, 1907, Rev Daugherty resigned to accept a unanimous call to serve the congregation of the Brush Creek Salem's Lutheran Church in Westmoreland County, Pa., thus ending a most fruitful pastorate. It was fraught with much hard work in the Master's cause. He accomplished what few ministers accomplish, namely, the building of a fine church and the entire payment of the same.

At the morning service June 30, 1907 Pastor Daugherty preached his farewell sermon to Oak Grove. It is a sermon that is still remembered by his former members. Thus ended a most successful and pleasant pastorate; perfect harmony existing among the members and ever thing connected with the congregation being in excellent shape.

During Pastor Daugherty's pastorate, the communing membership was increased to one hundred seventy-five, fifteen received by confirmation and fifty-eight by baptism.

His deep faith in God as his Master, his eloquence in the pulpit, and his willingness to give of his time and talents to the extension of the Kingdom of Christ, made his ministry here one of the most outstanding.

REV. J.J. MEYERS

On Sunday, May 26, 1907, Pastor John J. Meyers, of Reynoldsville, Pa., a graduate of the Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary, preached a guest sermon to the Oak Grove congregation. This was followed by a unanimous call on June 9, 1907.

On the morning of August 4, 1907, Pastor Myers preached his first sermon as pastor of this congregation. He was duly installed October 29, 1907 by the Missionary Superintendent of the Pittsburgh Synod, the Rev R.G. Rosenbaum. Thus began a brief but successful pastorate.

The minute's record that in September 1907 a committee composed of John Reiser, John Reefer, G.A. Bonzon, Calvin Freshcorn, John Bonzo and George Gaertner were appointed for the purpose of buying a horse and buggy for the pastor's use. The Ladies Aid purchased a fine lap robe, making the outfit complete. Thus this congregation as it has often done, expressed good will towards its pastor and showed that they appreciated the services of a man of God in their midst by providing suitably for his temporal welfare.

From the time the church became self sustaining until 1908 the congregation did not have a parsonage for its pastor. Rev. and Mrs. Daughery lived with Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Goehring during his pastorate. Rev. and Mrs. Meyers lived in the Douglass house just west of the church. It became evident then, that a parsonage was a necessity. According, with the same attitude that characterized the building of the church, i.e. "Right away" a parsonage was built. It was started in May 1909 and completed in October at a cost of \$2500. It still stands and is being occupied by the present pastor and family.



The house stands on a one-half acre plot of ground (purchased from Mrs. James Harkins) just opposite the church. A chicken-house and spacious barn completed the building. The parsonage, a frame building measures 28 feet by 25 feet. There are three rooms and a large reception hall down stairs and four rooms on the second floor. A cellar is under the entire building. The surroundings are pleasant and ideal. The house was well planned and is well constructed. Ample room has been given for the pastor to develop whatever gardening ability he may have.

It is not at all impossible to raise enough for an entire winter's use. Working with the soil enabled the city-bred pastor to learn of the material problems of his members. Most of the pastors have taken advantage of this method of having something in common with their members.

Rev. Myers resigned on May 23, 1909 to take effect July 1, 1909, just 23 months after receiving a call to accept a unanimous call to the Trinity Church of Verona, Pa.

Rev. Myers is “Doctor” Myers now. His work elsewhere in the church has been successful and noteworthy. From 1912 to 1919 he was associate secretary of the Pittsburgh Synod (General Council). From 1919 to 1924 he was secretary of the merged Pittsburgh Synod. From 1925 to 1934 he was Missionary Superintendent and from 1934 he has been the Secretary of the Pittsburgh Synod. During his brief pastorate twelve were received in to the congregation by baptism, 23 by confirmation.

REV FRANK W. ASH

The Rev. Frank W Ash, of Barberton, Ohio, was tendered a unanimous call on August 8, 1909. Pastor Ash assumed duties in his new parish on October 3, 1909 on which date he preached his first sermon to a large audience. He was duly installed November 8, 1909. The Rev J. Ash of Doylestown, Ohio, Rev. G. C. Smith of Canton, Ohio and Rev C.W. White of the Zelianple Orphan’s Home, officiated.

Rev Ash had a most successful pastorate. A glance at the records that he kept, show us some of the happenings during his pastorate.

50 were baptized into membership

45 were received by confirmation

In one year, 1910, 170 communed.

On Easter of 1910, 145 communed. This was the largest single communion in the history of the church.

On January 22, 1911 Jacob Dambach, Sr. gave to the church \$500. This cancelled the debt on the parsonage.

An amendment was made to the constitution stating that the church would have a regularly elected delegate to Synod and Conference Conventions.

In 1911 the congregation voted its pastor an increase in salary. The minutes note that the increase would bring his salary to \$800.

The Ladies Aid was reorganized during 1913. This organization that year presented the congregation with a new carpet for one of the Sunday School rooms.

An incident of note during Pastor Ash’s ministry was the departure of Ira J. Goehring for the Lutheran Seminary in Chicago. Because of the fact that Pastor Goehring’s the only son of the congregation to have entered the ministry thus far, we believe it is pertinent to note some of the facts of his life and work. Rev. Goehring is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Goehring, one of the early founders of Oak Grove. After having

completed a course of study in the preparatory department at Geneva College he taught one term 1900-1901- at Steel's School. From then until 1912 he followed the occupation of a farmer on the family homestead.

From earliest manhood Rev Goehring was actively engaged in the work of the church, Sunday School and Luther League. He attended conference conventions as a delegate from Oak Grove. Having a natural inclination toward the ministry, Pastor Ash's encouragement caused him to enter the Chicago Theological Seminary at Maywood, Illinois, in the fall of 1910. He graduated in the spring of 1913.

During the winter vacation of 1912 he supplied the pulpits of Middle Lancaster parish. The result was that he was given a unanimous call to become pastor. He accepted the call and became pastor May 11, 1913. He was ordained by the Pittsburgh Synod in June of 1913 at Grace Church, Rochester, Pa.

Because of an affliction in his hearing Pastor Goehring thought it best that he resign from this parish. Consequently, he submitted his resignation in 1920, but the congregation refused to accept it and voted unanimously for him to continue as their pastor. Pastor Goehring continued to serve them, but in the fall of 1925 at the threat of a nervous collapse he was forced to resign.

The services on that last Sunday in November 1925 assumed almost a funeral aspect for both he and Mrs. Goehring had endeared themselves into the hearts of neighbors and friends as well as the members of the churches which they served.

The courtesy, cooperation and good will of all the people of the community toward Rev. and Mrs. Goehring was such that they decided to make their future home among them. They are living in a home erected by them on the Perry Highway within sight of the church which they served so long and faithfully. Oak Grove has been fortunate on numerous occasions to have him supply its pulpit.

On September 20, 1914 Pastor Ash announced his resignation to take effect October 15, 1914 to accept a call to the Saltsburg parish in Indiana and Westmoreland counties. It was regretfully accepted. On October 11, 1914 Pastor Ash preached his farewell sermon to a large audience, thus ended a pastorate of over five years which to human eye was successful and pleasant and left the congregation in the best of condition.

Too much cannot be said of the fine work done by this man of God. He was a good pastor, an excellent preacher. His records were well kept. Rev Ash was active in the larger work of the church. From 1930-1934 he served as secretary of the Pittsburgh Synod.

REV FRANK C SNYDER

On November 29, 1914 the congregation extended a unanimous call to the Rev. Frank C Snyder of Wheeling W.VA. Pastor Snyder arrived on the field February 14, 1915 and was installed April 25, 1915 by the Rev. G Franklin Gehr, president of the Pittsburgh Synod. The Duplex envelope system for raising funds was adopted August 19, 1915.

A new Mason and Hamlin Liszt organ was dedicated Sunday evening, April 16, 1916. The Rev. G Franklin Gehr, president of the Pittsburgh Synod preached on this occasion.

After the shortest pastorate Oak Grove has had, Pastor Snyder resigned August 16, 1916 to become effective September 20, 1916 in order to accept a unanimous call extended by the St. Paul's congregation of the Synod of Ohio.

Thus ended a short but effective pastorate

Twelve were received by baptism.

Thirteen by confirmation

There were 150 communing members at this time.

REV G.J. DIENER

After a vacancy of ten months the Rev G.J. Diener was extended a unanimous call on November 26, 1916. Pastor Diener arrived on the field April 1, 1917 and was installed by the Rev. C.W. White, Superintendent of the Orphan's Home and Farm School of Zelienople, Sunday, July 15, 1917. After a fruitful ministry Rev. Diener resigned July 4, 1920.

Pastor Diener was a sincere man of God. He was a friend to all who knew him. During his pastorate nine were received by confirmation and 20 by baptism.

During the next two years and eleven months Oak Grove was without a pastor. However the pulpit was ably supplied by the Rev C.W. White, superintendent of the Orphan's Home and the Rev Yesley of Greenville, Pa. These men baptized, confirmed, preached and visited the sick of the congregation. Rev White became a fast and firm friend of the congregation. He was loved by every member. The congregation wanted to extend him a call but some of the wiser heads hesitated because of this larger and more important duties at the Home.

REV A.G. FISCHER

On January 7, 1923 the Rev A.G. Fishcer was called by Oak Grove to serve in his first parish after his ordination. Rev Fisher brought with him the large experience that he had gained as a soldier for his country during the war.

Rev Fischer was an active pastor. Catechetical instruction was changed from summer to winter and confirmation from fall to Palm Sunday. This innovation proved very successful. A strong and active Young's People's group was organized and maintained throughout Pastor Fischer's pastorate.

Pageantry reached a high level among the young people of the church. Oak Grove was widely known for its excellent religious pageants and was invited to perform in schools and institutions in the Beaver Valley. Not only the whole countryside would turn out but people would come from virtually every Beaver Valley town to witness these special programs.

Under the direction of Pastor Fisher, who was an accomplished singer a choir was organized. A men's quartet the envy of any church was directed by him. In order to have a larger stage for the performance of pageants an addition was made to the chancel. Two pews in the Southeast corner facing the center aisle were removed and a platform put in their place. This provided a spacious stage.

In 1923, by action of the Pittsburgh Synod, Hope Lutheran church was made a part of the Oak Grove parish. This church is eight miles from Oak Grove near Evans City.

During this pastorate

44 were received by baptism

46 by confirmation.

The communing membership numbered 152

Rev. Fischer resigned as pastor of Oak Grove February 22, 1931 to become effective March 8, 1931. Thus ended a fruitful active pastorate of more than eight years. Pastor Fisher was a man of God, first, last and always. He won many to the ways of God. His pulpit manner was exceptional.

REV G.M. WILSON

On August 23, 1931 the Rev. Guy M Wilson preached a guest sermon and was unanimously extended a call two weeks later. Pastor Wilson began his ministry at Oak Grove, October 4, 1931 and was installed by the Rev Henry H Bagger, D.D. president of the Pittsburgh Synod, on October 25, 1931.

Rev Wilson served Oak Grove during the world's worst depression. Perhaps the most significant fact that could be said about him was that he held together a church that was exceptionally hard hit by this depression. Values for the farmer dropped to near zero. The "go to town" movement was on in full force. However, the congregation was able to make some noteworthy improvements to its property. Both the church and parsonage were completely and beautifully electrified. The church and parsonage were both painted and new furnaces were installed in both.

Fifty-four were admitted by confirmation. Eight were received by letter. Thirty- six were received by baptism.

Pastor Wilson was a sincere man of God. Because of the financial condition his pastorate was made more difficult. Pastor Wilson resigned March 30, 1941 to accept a unanimous call to the Ringgold Parish of the Pittsburgh Synod.

REV E.G. HOFFMAN

The Rev E.G. Hoffman preached a guest sermon to the Oak Grove congregation on Palm Sunday, April 6, 1941. The following Sunday, Easter, he was extended a unanimous call pending completion of his seminary course at Gettysburg and ordination by the Pittsburgh Synod. Accordingly Pastor Hoffman assumed his duties May 18, 1941 and was installed at a special service, Sunday evening, June 1, 1941, by the Rev H. Reed Shepfer, DD, president of the Pittsburgh Synod. The Rev. C.W. Baker, Jr. DD, pastor of The First Lutheran Church of Duquesne, Pa., Pastor Hoffman's home church, delivered the sermon.



Work was immediately started on the installation of a bathroom and a complete water system in the parsonage. A new well was drilled and an electric pump installed. A new sink was added to the pantry. This

was completed July 3, 1941 at a conservatively estimated cost of \$375. During the summer the grounds about the church and parsonage were beautified.

On Sunday, August 24, 1941 the pastor consecrated a cross and two candleholders for the altar. This cross and holders were made by Mr. Harry Miller, a former member of the congregation and J.C. Deemer. At this service the pulpit Bible was rededicated. It had been rebound by the Young People's Society. The largest communion service Oak Grove has had in recent years was observed October 5, 1941 when 110 were present.

After a lapse of several years, mid-week Lenten services were revived during the Lenten season of 1942. These services were well attended.

June 28, 1942 three flags, Christian, American and a Service flag with six stars were dedicated. The flags were given jointly by the Young People's Society, the congregation and the Sunday School department. They were dedicated in honor of our boys in the service of their country.

The first candle light communion service was held on Christmas Eve, 1942. It had been the custom in previous years to have a pageant, but gasoline and tire rationing forced a postponement, probably for the duration of the war.

At the congregational meeting in January of 1943 the pastor was voted a substantial increase in salary. It was also voted to adopt the weekly bulletin service of the Lutheran Publication House.

At a council meeting held Sunday, February 7, 1943, it was decided to repaint the interior of the church sometime during the coming year. It was also decided that the northwest Sunday School room would be remodeled to make room for a coat rack.

Our actual anniversary date falls on the 15th of March. Due to possible weather conditions at this time of the year it was decided to postpone the celebration until the 6th and 7th of May 1943. (1)

The year 1943 witnesses a live, energetic congregation numbering 190 confirmed members. Everything connected with the church is functioning well.

At present Oak Grove is a thriving church. It is composed mostly of hard working, frugal farmers. It is no longer as strong as it once was. The last 20-30 years have seen a big decline in the rural population. Oak Grove has suffered heavily because of the "go to town" movement. However this is not to infer that the church is dying. Oak Grove has been one of the very few churches that have not had to close its doors in this community. Owing to the rush of people from rural districts to the city, at least five congregations in New Sewickley Township have been compelled to disband and raze their church buildings. Taking this into consideration, Oak Grove has great reasons for rejoicing today over her substantial membership, influence and prosperity

PRECEEDING HISTORY WAS COPIED FROM "SEVENTY YEARS OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS IN COMPILING THIS HISTORY

William Zeigler, Rev Ira J. Goehring and Mrs Ida Goehring

(1) Rev. H Reed Sepfer, DD was guest speaker on Thursday and Rev. E.H. Daugherty, former pastor of Oak Grove, delivered the message of Friday evening. Rev. Ira Goehring and Pastor Hoffman also assisted in conducting the services.

A service conducted by Pastor Hoffman in memory of Pvt. Howard K Deemer was held on Sunday, October 22, 1944. He was born September 7, 1914 and died according to a telegram from the war department, September 15, 1944. The name of Pvt. Deemer was memorialized by a gift from the congregation to the Home Mission Cause. American and Service flags were placed in the chancel and an outdoor Honor Roll (made by Clyde Deemer) was erected on the church lawn in honor of the men who served in World War II.

| | | |
|------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Harold Alstadt | E.Ray Kingsbury | J. Ross Schweinsberg |
| George Alstadt | Alvin Martin | Lester Schweinsberg |
| Jospeh Blackburn | Clayton Teets | Harold Stang |
| Edward Bonzo, Jr | Russell Rape | Leslie Schuler |
| Paul Bonzo | Blaine Schomburg | Donald Zeigler |
| James Burris | Lawrence Schomburg | Samuel Zeigler |
| Clair Deemer | Homer Schomburg | |
| Howard Deemer | Robert Schomburg | |

Rev Hoffman resigned December 1, 1945 after five years.



PASTOR FRANK H. MILLER

Pastor Frank Miller, former Army Chaplain, was called to serve at Oak Grove in 1946. At this time, the first Vacation Church School was held jointly with Burry's Church.

Seeing the need for more Sunday School space, Pastor Miller worked with the men of the congregation to cement the floor and finish the walls of the church basement to provide classrooms. Removable wooden partitions were also under the direction of Pastor and Mrs. Miller, who was an accomplished musician. The Moller self-contained pipe organ we now are using was bought. A Mimeograph machine was also purchased at this time.

Pastor Miller resigned in 1951, to accept a pastorate at Penn Evangelical Lutheran Church. He is now retired and lives in Jeanette, Pa. Surely the congregation of Oak Grove was greatly improved both spiritually and materially by the association of these fine people.

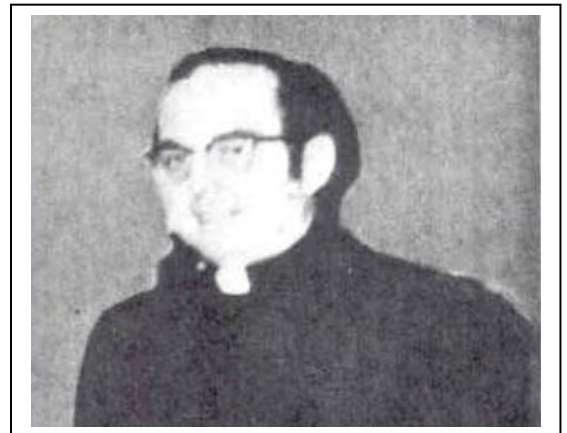


PASTOR LOUIS HETRICK

Pastor Louis Hetrick served the Oak Grove congregation from 1953- 1955. Although records are few, he was an untiring worker with the Luther League and the young people of the community. Pastor Hetrick taught Bible courses to elementary and junior high students in Freedom School District during the school year.

Material was donated for pulpit and altar covers by members of Pastor Hetrick's family. These were sewn by the members of the Women's Missionary Society.

Pastor Hetrick resigned in 1955 and is now serving a pastorate in Philadelphia, although we were not able to contact him.



PASTOR WILLIAM KUHRE

Pastor William Kuhre was called in March 1955, and was installed after graduating from seminary in June of that year. He, his wife, and daughter moved into the old parsonage. With the need for more Sunday School class rooms, the new parsonage and tunnel were soon completed and they became the first occupants.

The two story brick and stone structure contains four rooms and bath on the first floor, two large bedrooms and complete bath on the second floor, an attached garage and study, and a full basement. The tunnel, connecting the parsonage to the church, contains three Sunday School rooms. The old parsonage was sold to provide funds. During Pastor Kuhre's service, George Keck began his studies for full-time service in the ministry of the church.

Also, by order of the Pittsburgh Synod, Hope Church was dropped from Oak Grove Parish to become part of the Middle Lancaster Parish, and St. Mark's near Ellwood City was linked with Oak Grove. Ground was purchased from Russell Bonzo on the east side of the church to provide additional parking space. On December 1, 1958, Pastor Kuhre resigned to accept a call to become pastor of Mount Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church at Punxsutawney, Pa.

PASTOR OSCAR J. WARNATH

On January 18, 1959, the congregation extended a call to Pastor O.J. Warnath, of St. Paul's Church of New Castle, Pa. Pastor Warnath accepted the call and began his ministry April 5, 1959.

On September 14, 1959, the Oak Grove Council received its own official seal. In February, 1960, the men of the congregation began constructing the gallery in the church and by Palm Sunday, April 10, the renovation of the church was completed.

The church celebrated its 90th Anniversary, March 24, 1963, and Pastor Warnath delivered a sermon on the history of the church.

Pastor Warnath's fruitful ministry was cut short by his untimely death, May 10, 1965. During his ministry he won many people to the Kingdom of God. His well keep records show many activities and accomplishments of the church and Sunday School under his leadership.



PASTOR WILBERT T. WILSON

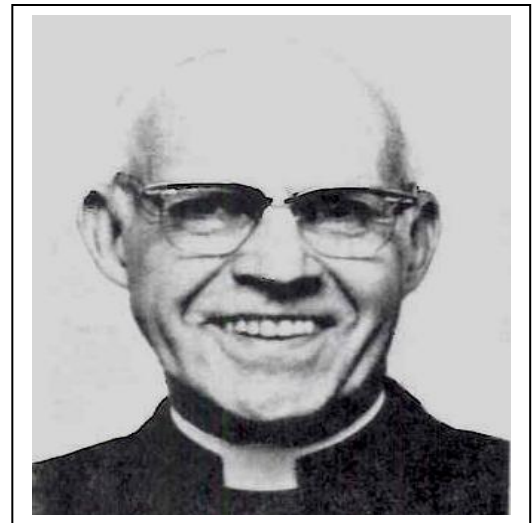
Pastor Wilbert T. Wilson was called to become pastor of Oak Grove and he began his ministry November 1, 1965 with a deep appreciation of rural life.

Under his direction the three-year catechetical program of the Lutheran Church of America was adopted.

A new Baldwin piano was dedicated to the Glory of God and in the memory of the Rev. O.J. Warnath. The piano was purchased by the donations from individuals and organizations of the church.

Improvements to the church were repainting of the interior and exterior, flood lights were installed for better illumination of the altar. Chrismons were used for the first time on the church's Christmas tree. They were made by members of the Luther League under the direction of Pastor Wilson. He also conducted a twelfth night service with the burning of the Christmas trees in the parking lot, followed by devotions, recreation, and refreshments. This service has become a tradition at Oak Grove.

After three years of leadership, Pastor Wilson suffered a stroke and was unable to continue his work. He resigned and spent the four remaining years of his life doing oil paintings which he called "preaching by the brush". The members of Oak Grove Church honored him for his faithfulness by bestowing upon him the title Pastor Emeritus.

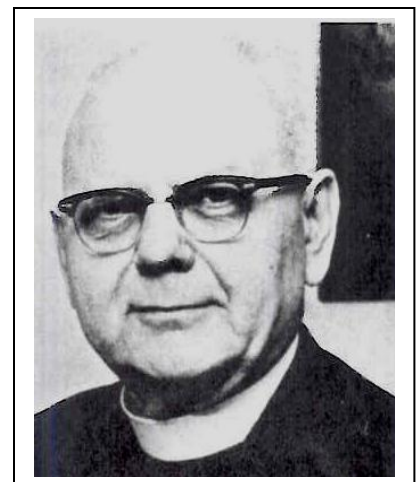


PASTOR STANNAGE SCOTT

Pastor Stannage Scott began his ministry at Oak Grove, February 2, 1969. Before his arrival, the parsonage interior was repainted by members of the congregation.

The Young Adult Group began the publication of a monthly newspaper, "The Nutshell", containing information and events pertaining to the congregation.

An altar to be used for outdoor services was constructed in the east corner of the church lot. The project was completed by the Luther Leaguers and members of the Church Council.

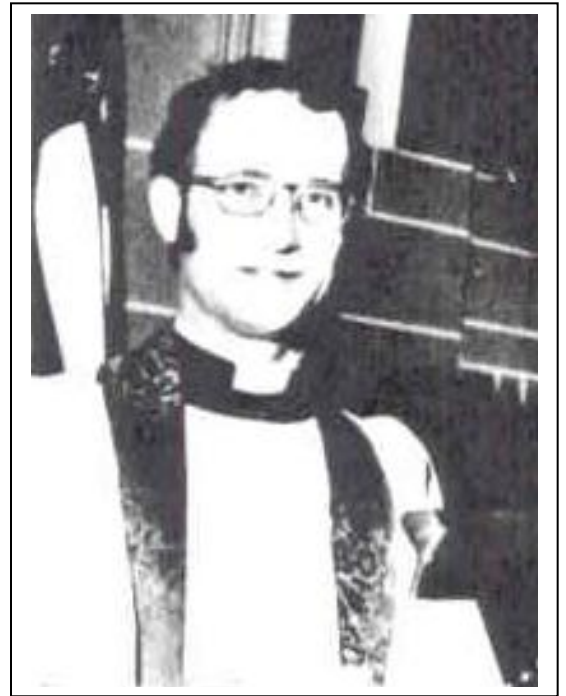


Death came to Pastor Scott, May 6, 1972, while visiting his family in Ohio. The following is an excerpt from one of his letters to the congregation that seems fitting to use in this part of the church history; “Oak Grove lives on, each year adding to the rich history of the congregation and the Christian Church on earth. We feel that our heritage is full and rich in the Lord and we can be proud of our place among the churches of the whole Christian Church. We dare not, however, be complacent and self-righteous. Our heritage is too fine for us to sit down and expect to rest upon the laurels, and accomplishments of past generations. What do we intend to do with our opportunities for Christian worship and service? What kind of witnesses for Christ are we here and now? Are we willing to dare to follow the calling, yes, the urging of the Holy Spirit to really be faithful witnesses not just on Sundays, but each day of our lives.”

REV RICHARD ROTH

To welcome Pastor Roth and to become acquainted, the Oak Grove congregation held a covered dish dinner at the Big Knob Fire Hall, on November 4, 1972. He began his duties in December and was installed February 11, 1973 by Rev Zundel, the District Dean.

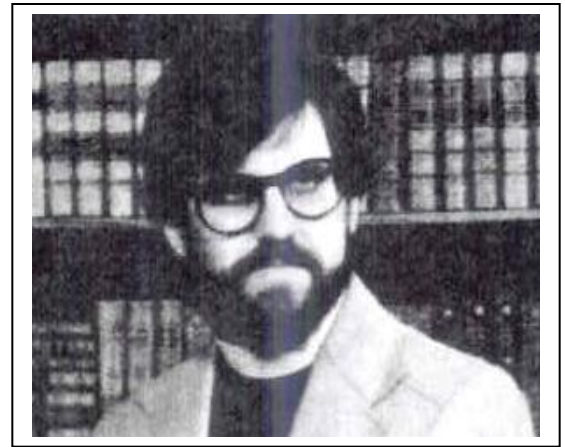
In, 1973, the congregation celebrated the 100th Anniversary. A time capsule was buried near the outdoor worship center. Ruth Freshcorn became the first woman to be elected to church council at Oak Grove, on January 13, 1974.



THE ABOVE HISTORY WAS COPIED FROM THE “100TH ANNIVERSARY”

PASTOR JAMES HIGGINS

In anticipation of his ordination, Pastor Jim Higgins came to Oak Grove directly from seminary in January, 1977. He was ordained in June. He brought with him a sense of well-being and a positive outlook. Clyde and Ramey and other multimedia sermons were often used. There were a large number of young children in the congregation and he connected with them.



New ceiling fans and lights were installed. A secretary's office was built behind the organ. Aluminum siding was installed on the outside of the church. Carl Ruckert and Brenda Zeigler refinished the Baptismal Font.

In June, 1982, a branch of the AAL was established. The Evangelism Committee started the BLT's (Breakfast and Lunch Time), which was a time for fellowship. They were very well attended.

Victor Denise Brown did her internship with Oak Grove at this time. She was a remarkable person and although she was hearing impaired she had a real connection with the youth.

At the November 28, 1984, Church Council meeting, Pastor Higgins read his letter of resignation effective January 31, 1985. He had accepted a call with the Chicora Area Lutheran Parish in Chicora, Pa.

PASTOR PAUL GAUSMANN

Pastor Paul Gausmann was installed on June 23, 1985, his first call out of seminary. For the first time in many years, the Gausmann's brought infants into the parsonage. William and Laura were welcome additions to our congregation.

In 1987, a new stairway was built in the back of the church and the men's restroom was remodeled. New carpeting was installed and the sanctuary was painted in



1989. In 1991, Sally Gausmann earned her Master of Divinity and became the first female member of Oak Grove to be ordained. In 1991, a second service began to be conducted year round. Baptized membership was over five hundred at this time. Cooperative plans for ministry to Lutherans in Cranberry Twp began. In April, 1993, Pastor Gausmann accepted a call to Faith Lutheran Church in Shell Rock, Iowa.

PASTOR ED ROBBINS

Pastor Ed Robbins came to Oak Grove as the stated supply on the first Sunday in May, 1993. He served as the stated supply until late summer when he became our part time pastor and on the first Sunday in Advent, 1993, he became our current pastor.



Pastor Ed continued in the fine tradition of Word and Sacrament ministry established by his predecessors and the congregation of Oak Grove working together to support Gospel ministry and mission in this place. Some particular events which have occurred during the course of his pastorate with Oak Grove to date include the following:

The Men's Group came together again and has become the once a month Saturday morning Men's Breakfast Fellowship. A monthly liturgy of Evening Prayer and the liturgy of Compline (Prayer at the Close of Day) after each council meeting have been added to the congregation's worship life.

At the invitation of synod in the summer of 1994, the congregation participated in a "12 Keys" training for the purpose of orientating the congregation to assessment of our mission life. Out of that invitation has come an initiative to annually assess our mission direction. The Mission Development Project Steering Committee has helped the congregation identify where it will go with its mission for the follow year.

Growing out of the mission assessment project has been the decision to refurbish our current church building, including the restoration of all of our stained glass windows, installation of new side walks, and the painting of the sanctuary and all other areas of the church.

Pastor Robbins has helped the congregation to reach out to the world beyond our doors. The congregation volunteers their time at the Jubilee Soup Kitchen, Global Links, Rochester Salvation Army and the Beaver Valley Cooperative. The congregation has been very involved with our prayer partner church, Trinity Lutheran Church, North Side, Pittsburgh.

During our celebration this year (1998) the congregation has developed a mission statement, produced an pictorial directory and most importantly, is continuing to think about how the congregation will minister and mission on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ in its 126th year and beyond.

THE ABOVE HISTORY WAS COPIED FROM "CELEBRATING 125 YEARS"

On October 19, 1998 the Mission Development Project Steering Committee met to discuss the building of an education and fellowship hall. Carol James and Bill Smith were willing to co-chair a committee focusing upon such a building. From this meeting a new committee was formed known as the NBC which stood for the New Building Committee. The mission statement from the NBC was as follows:

“Our sanctuary is a strong asset base from which our ministry of Word and Sacrament can operate. However, other aspects of our church building, our bathrooms, classrooms, and basement are very weak assets. Therefore we need to develop a Vision for Ministry in our congregation and community in addition to Word and Sacrament. A mission statement of this vision may lead us to develop an educational/fellowship building which will provide another strong asset” “VISIONS, DREAMS, AND POSSIBILITIES”

At the November 21, 1999 Congregational Meeting, a recommendation was made that the congregation authorize the NBC to identify several architectural candidates to serve as a consultant resource in the development of an architectural plan and to bring recommendation to the congregation at a later date. The recommendation was accepted. On January 10, 2000, Ken Nagy, a registered architect, gave a presentation to the NBC outlining his views on the building. In April of 2000 Ken Nagy was selected as the architect. Ken became a strong force within the committee and did so without financial compensation. Oak Grove will be indebted to Ken Nagy for the time and dedication he gave to the planning of this building.

At the September 2002 congregational meeting a recommendation was made to fund the construction of a single story building. It was decided that the project would advance when the congregation has developed 60% of the cost of construction, which means approximately \$360,000 in hand on a \$600,000 building project.

On November 2, 2003, Pastor Ed informed the congregation by letter of his resignation effective November 30, 2003. He had accepted a call to Zion Lutheran Church, Glen Rock, PA. He was a man of great energy and love toward the members of Oak Grove. Pastor Robbins was strong in the outreach to others in the community.

During Pastor Ed’s ministry was the departure of Brian Bennett for the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, SC in the fall of 1999. Brian is the son of Bill and Charen Bennett and had been a life long member of Oak Grove. He was ordained at Oak Grove by Bishop Ralph Dunkin of the West Virginia- Western Maryland Synod on October 25, 2003. At present he is serving St. Paul Lutheran Church in Morgantown, WV.



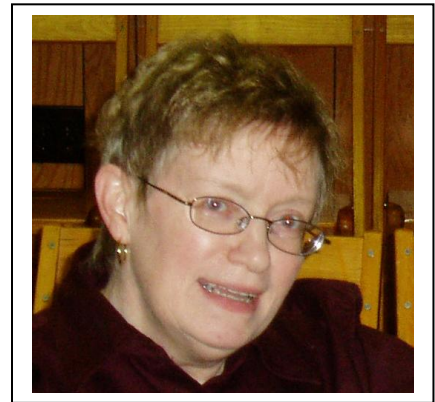
Improvements to the parsonage included a new roof, soffit, fascia, and gutters. The congregation proceeded to plan and implement the building of a new educational wing and fellowship hall.

PASTOR JANICE ALTENBERGER

Pastor Altenberger accepted a call in June 2004 and was ordained in July 2004.

At the September 7, 2004, Ken Nagy brought with him an artist concept of the new building with three views, a front, back and an inside fellowship view. It was not until April 5, 2005 the selection of a contractor began. Lengyl Construction Co., Coraopolis, Pa. was given the job. A ceremonial groundbreaking was held on October 16, 2005 in anticipation of the construction.

On November 2, 2005 the Noble Tree Farm, Industry, Pa removed two white oaks, two maples and one walnut tree to make room for the building. It was estimated that one of the trees was over three hundred years old



In November 2005 a ground breaking was held in anticipation of the building of the new education and fellowship hall. A new septic system was installed in preparation of the new building. The cost of building had escalated to an estimated sum of close to a million dollars. The congregation wrestled with what to do with building plans. As of February 2008 the building is on hold. Pastor Jan submitted her resignation as of June 1, 2008.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

PASTOR

YEARS

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Rev. Gottlieb Bassler | 1867-1868 |
| Rev. M.L. Kunkleman | 1873-1878 |
| Rev. J.A. Kribbs | 1878-1880 |
| Rev. V.B Christy | 1880-1890 |
| Rev. R.R. Durst | 1890-1896 |
| Rev. L.C. Benze | 1896-1902 |
| Rev. E.H. Daugherty | 1902-1907 |
| Rev. J.J. Meyers | 1907-1909 |
| Rev. F.W. Ash | 1909-1914 |
| Rev. Frank Snyder | 1914-1916 |
| Rev. G.J. Diener | 1916-1920 |
| Rev. C.W. White | 1920-1923 supply pastor |
| Rev. A.G. Fischer | 1923-1931 |
| Rev. Guy M. Wilson | 1931-1941 |
| Rev. E.G. Hoffman | 1941-1945 |
| Rev. Frank M. Miller | 1946-1951 |
| Rev. Louis Hetrick | 1953-1955 |
| Rev. William Kuhre | 1955-1959 |
| Rev. O.J. Warnath | 1959-1965 |
| Rev. Wilbert T. Wilson | 1965-1968 |
| Rev. Stannage Scott | 1969-1972 |
| Rev. Richard Roth | 1972-1976 |
| Rev. James Higgins | 1977-1985 |
| Vicar Denise Brown | 1985 |
| Rev. Paul Gausmann | 1985-1993 |
| Rev. Edward Robbins | 1993-2003 |
| Rev. Janice Altenberger | 2004-2008 |