



*Give thanks  
to the Lord,  
for He is good;  
His love  
endures forever.*

Psalm 107:1



# Harvest Festival *of* Memories

1977 – Present

October 29, 2017

*Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd  
168 Route 94  
Blairstown, New Jersey*

# The Story of Our Flock

The Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd

1977 to the present

## Conception

*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock  
of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.*

*Be shepherds of the church of God,  
which He bought with His own blood.*

ACTS 20:28

When Mr. and Mrs. Herman Kleindienst, Sr. left their home in Bergen Country in 1947 to move to rural Stillwater, they planted the seed that led to the birth of two congregations—Redeemer Lutheran Church of Newton and our own Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd.

It all started with a meeting of 60 adults and eight children at the county service building in Newton on Sunday, March 8, 1953. The Kleindiensts invited the Rev. Ewald Mueller, the pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, their home church in Ridgewood, to conduct the first service. The following year, the congregation of Redeemer Lutheran Church was chartered with 92 members, and by the spring of 1959, a church building seating 250 persons was dedicated.

By the 1970s, Redeemer was flourishing. Under the counsel of Rev. Arthur W. Lesslie, who accepted the call in 1962 and stayed until 1971, the congregation grew by 300 adults and children. In February of 1972, the Rev. Bruce E. Rudolf became pastor. During his thirteen-year tenure, he contributed many things, but among the most significant was the start-up of a mission church in Blirstown. A meeting was held on October 19, 1977 in the home of Connie and Herman Kleindienst, Jr., and it was from that small assembly that the Blirstown Lutheran Mission was conceived.

Rudolf remembers, “Redeemer was doing well in those years, worshipping about 250 in two services on Sunday mornings. Having been encouraged by both the Atlantic District and some of our members living in and near Blirstown, we prepared to develop the mission in that community.”

We invite you  
to worship  
The Lord  
with us

**BLAIRSTOWN  
LUTHERAN  
MISSION**

MEETING AT

**NEWTON TRUST COMPANY**

Blirstown Office — Route 94

**Services Begin November 20th**

9:00 A.M. Each Sunday

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL:

**362-6308 or 362-6807**



## Labor

*When a woman is in labor, she has pain,  
because her hour has come. But when her child is born,  
she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy  
of having brought a human being into the world.*

JOHN 16:21

The first service of the Blairstown Mission was held in the Blairstown branch office of the Newton Trust Company, on Route 94 on November 20, 1977. Rev. Rudolf led the service. “The opening service met in the main room of the bank with a table holding brochures and papers serving as our altar,” he recalls. “My wife, Dottie, made a frontal for the ‘altar’ and someone else a small box to cover the raised portion of the table holding the brochures. Members of Redeemer joined with those folks from Redeemer who lived in Blairstown and would become the founding members of the church. About 60 folks met that first Sunday.” The congregation would continue to worship there for almost a year. Connie Kleindienst remembers an occasion when the police, puzzled by the presence of cars in the bank parking lot on a Sunday, actually made a surprise appearance at a worship service.

“It was rather strange worshipping in a bank,” observes founding member Hank Kowalla. “We were probably the first Lutheran church to have closed circuit TV.” He also remembers, “(One) time, Pastor Rudolf was giving a sermon about casting cares on the Lord when he saw what he thought was his car leaving the bank parking lot. As it turned out, it was an off-hours depositor with a car like his.” Nonetheless, he explains, “I have particular fond memories of the bank. One Sunday, I entered church by myself and Herman (Kleindienst) asked where Judi (his wife) was. I said ‘pregnant.’ After trying to have a child for nine years, our prayers were answered.”

Stuart Schulz, a graduate of Concordia Seminary doing graduate work in Princeton, would conduct services on succeeding Sundays. Connie remembers the young Schulz staying at the Kleindienst home on the weekends he would preach. Rudolf recalls, “(Schulz) would either come to Blairstown and I would do the services at Redeemer or vice versa. I remember it being something of a rush to get from our early service in Newton to Blairstown and dressed in my alb and stole

was on one occasion stopped by one of Blairstown’s finest, who while not giving me a ticket, did admonish me to be a better example by not speeding.”

At a May 11, 1978 meeting concerning the Blairstown Lutheran Mission, a change of location was discussed: “We should check with the Presbyterian church in Blairstown, who have offered their building for our use as to what times are available. If this should seem feasible, we should plan to hold our church services there in the fall and perhaps have a Sunday School on Wednesday or Thursday evening at the Presbyterian church.” So on September 17, 1978, services were moved to the United Presbyterian Church on Main Street. An article that ran on September 13 said that children of Sunday School age were invited to attend the first half-hour with their parents and then attend the Presbyterian Sunday School at 9:30. Kowalla explains that attendance had fallen, and “we thought it might be a good idea to move out of the bank and into more religious accommodations.” The Kowallas’ daughter Laura was actually the first baby to be baptized while worshipping here, on March 29, 1979.

That same year, Rudolf and Schulz were joined by Vicar Brad Maxim from the Slovak Church in Westfield and Pastor Terry Herzberg, the then assistant pastor at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Flemington. Lay preachers Irwin Wackenhuth and Frank Gruber were also called upon to help with visitations. Rudolf explains, “this meant that the congregation had four different people taking turns from Sunday to Sunday... It was clear, however, that a rotation of four different pastors was not an ideal situation so we began to look for someone who could be a regular pastor of the church.

“My wife and several other women from Redeemer attended a Lutheran charismatic gathering on Long Island and came back with glowing reports of a young graduate of Seminex, Edward Joseph Grant. Seminex—Concordia Seminary in Exile, as they called themselves—had been the temporary seminary for those who left Concordia Seminary during the painful break-up of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod back in the mid ‘70s. Most of the faculty had left the campus after the Synodical Convention had called their teaching into question. Many of the Seminex graduates later became pastors of what is now the ELCA. At any rate,” said Rudolf, “Ed Grant came onto our radar and had no call. Redeemer gathered togeth-

er for a Voters Meeting and called him as our Assistant Pastor for youth work and as a missionary to develop the Blairstown Mission.

“I remember leaving Redeemer after worship and rushing out to Garden City, L. I., where his home congregation was ordaining him,” Rudolf continued. “We got there after the service had begun and when the blessings were conferred upon him by area pastors I offered him the call to Redeemer. We had, of course, previously met and he knew me, but didn’t know I would be at the service, nor did he know he had the call. He physically reacted as I offered my blessing and the call to our church.” Pastor Grant remembered that day of his ordination, wondering if he would ever get a church. Then he heard the voice of Pastor Rudolf and heard that he was being called to the rural New Jersey congregation. “The Lord is never late,” he reflected, “but he is hardly ever early.”

Grant remembers, “we initially moved into the unoccupied parsonage in Newton, which is a dozen miles from Blairstown. I served a dual role, both as youth worker at Redeemer Lutheran Church and mission developer in Blairstown.” He continues, “Within the year, the work at the congregation required more of my attention and we moved into the first-floor apartment of an old home. Our growing family outgrew the two-bedroom house and we moved again not two years later into a larger home. The upstairs floor of the house,” he recalls, “was so sloped our children would have Matchbox car races without pushing the cars.”

On September 23, 1979, the Blairstown Mission moved to the United Methodist Church on Stillwater Road and remained there until September of 1980. “The new pastor at the Methodist church,” said Grant, “noticed all the cars in the parking lot and felt we weren’t paying enough rent; he wanted to double it.”

The next host, the Masonic Hall in Blairstown, would house the growing congregation for the next four years. “It was the only place of worship I have ever known with a pool table in the back,” Grant jokes. “The restrooms were just off to the side and everyone could hear the sound of flushing toilets during the service.”

It was the Masonic Hall to which Steve and Betsy Smith and three-year-old Jacob were directed when they first moved to Blairstown in December of 1983 looking for a church. “The Masonic Hall itself holds many memories,” says Betsy. “(There was) a small

altar which was rolled in and out each Sunday, faded rose-print curtains which hung precariously at the windows, poles, around which folding chairs were arranged and the bathroom with a VERY LOUD flushing toilet!” But, recalls Kowalla, “It was here that most of our growth took place. It was a place for many firsts. Our first choir, first Sunday School, first fundraising, Women’s Guild. Most of our baptisms took place here.”

And while the church was moving, so was the pastor. Grant describes his fourth residence: “From the sloped house, we moved onto a 50-plus acre farm and lived there about eighteen months. It was the most peaceful and beautiful place I’ve ever lived. The house was located down a three-tenths of a mile driveway over gentle hills with fields of clover and alfalfa on either side. As we looked out the front door we saw the large trees overshadowing the Paulinskill River less than one-hundred yards away. We raised chickens, refurbished a treehouse, and watched as our young children sold lemonade to those who came to purchase strawberries in June. During the summer, I went for early morning prayer walks, ran a few miles down an abandoned railroad bed, and then took my running shoes off to swim across the river and into our front yard. We were devastated when, after a year and a half there, the owner told us his son wanted to move into the house.

“During our 43 years of marriage,” Grant muses, “Sue and I have lived in 19 apartments/houses. I’m sure some of you, especially those who grew up in a military family or served in the military, have lived in that many or more. As I reflect back, I recognize how God used the discomfort of a current situation to prepare me for the next move, whatever it was. I wish I was able to say I was so surrendered to God’s will that I could simply discern it apart from the discomfort. The good news is that our faithful God knows how to speak and move in such a way that His children eventually recognize His will and join Him in it. Humanly speaking, if we weren’t forced to leave the strawberry farm, we might still be there.” The Grants then purchased their own home so they “wouldn’t have to move again,” and lived there for the next three years.

In a report to the Mission Board of the New Jersey District of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, dated January 14, 1980, Pastor Grant said, “In so many ways, the Lord has blessed and continues to

bless His work in Blirstown. In addition to the most obvious ways, i.e., the growth in worship attendance and Sunday School, there has been significant development in many unseen ways as well, which are equally rewarding. I have seen a deepening of relationships with the Lord, an increased awareness of His presence and vitality in everyday life, and a new joy in the lives of the people in Blirstown. Working with them has been the most fulfilling event in my life.”

Grant reported that weekly attendance, which had increased steadily over the last three-and-a-half months, averaged about 50 persons. Sunday School, which began on October 21, 1979, was taught to children in grades one through ten by four teachers, and a confirmation class, consisting of two boys, met every other week. Dottie Bell remembers this first confirmation class very well as her son Mark Allen and friend, John Dalley were the two boys in question. She says that Grant actually taught their classes in the boys’ homes. In a letter to the congregation dated November 16, 1979, Grant closes, “I am still looking for homes to have dinner with on Wednesday evenings before confirmation and new member classes. If you would like to have me over, please let me know.”

## *Birth*

*Like living stones, let yourselves be built  
into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer  
spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

I PETER 2:5

On Reformation Sunday, October 31, 1982, fifty members of Good Shepherd signed a charter. The following people were called forward to sign: Rev. and Mrs. Edward J. Grant, Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Bell, Mrs. Eileen Dalton, Miss Sue Dickerson, Mrs. Pat DiPalma, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Duda, Mrs. Anna Fish, Mr. Gus Gaisler, Mrs. Hedwig Gebart, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Kleindienst, Mr. and Mrs. Herman Kleindienst, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Kowalla, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Kowalla, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. Charles Krueger, Mrs. Ann Kurchien, Mr. and Mrs. Alan Little, Mrs. Barb Lothian, Mr. and Mrs. John Maines, Mr. and Mrs. William Rogers, Miss Laurene Rogers, Mrs. Dawn Romanczak, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Sadlon, Mrs. Margaret Schiller, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Seggel, Mr. and Mrs. Martin Semken, Mrs. Gail Squero,

Mrs. Susan Washburn, Mr. and Mrs. Alan Johnson, Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Gebhardt, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Burd, Mrs. Lynn Carrick, and Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Ackerman. Grant remarked in an article, “the new church comes into formal existence with the ‘opening’ of the charter.” A noon dinner followed and District President Walter Ziele was in attendance.

Then on December 5 of the same year, the congregation voted to accept a proposed building project submitted by the Building Committee, which was comprised of Dottie Bell, Herman Kleindienst, Al Johnson and Marty Semken, among others. The project was to be done in two phases—the first would be a multi-purpose fellowship hall, and at a membership level of approximately 250, the sanctuary would be constructed. The first phase would cost \$260,000, and construction would not begin until the congregation could secure \$60,000 in contributions.

On September 14, 1983, the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd was officially received into the membership in the New Jersey District of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. On September 8, 1984, under a big tent provided by the Walnut Valley Methodist Church, groundbreaking festivities were held for a new House of Prayer on a five-acre lot along Route 94 across from Eldan Place. The “property in Blirstown was purchased some years earlier,” recalls Rudolf, “probably in the ‘50s or early ‘60s by the Atlantic District under the guidance of Pastor Vic Albers as a potential mission.” Connie Kleindienst says that Herman had been given the task of finding the property, and according to an article in *Press Publications*, it was “rented to farmers until the congregation was ready to build.”

Groundbreaking activities included a service, during which Rev. Bruce Rudolf spoke. He observed that the members of Good Shepherd “had been rather like the children of Israel, settling down in one place after another.” He also said that while the church had received money and grants to start building, “the true building of the church (was) with the people themselves, by the people who are united in Christ. The church is built not by erecting a steel cross,” he explained, “but by holding the cross before your eyes and the eyes of those around you.” The choir of the Evangelical Free Church also sang an acapella version of the hymn “Rise Up, O Men of God.”

The actual groundbreaking followed, with Pastor Grant, Sunday School student Kris Johnson, Sunday School teacher Karen Burd, and Church Council member Art Kleindienst each turning up three spadeful of soil. After the service, there was a light snack reception and craft display by the members of Good Shepherd. Organized games “for the young and the young at heart” followed and a dinner, hosted by the Evangelical Free Church for post-high school members held at the Community Hall, finished off the evening.

During the dinner, a slide show and brief history of Good Shepherd Church were presented by Hank Kowalla. The church architect, Roy Bertelsen, also gave an in-depth preview of the proposed building; and Rev. Grant led the congregation in a closing devotion. In an article that appeared in the September 5 edition of *Press Publications*, Grant talked about why the building was referred to as a House of Prayer and not a church: “The people see themselves as the Church, not the building. Since they began to meet seven years ago they have been a Church wherever they have worshiped.” He further explained, “The Church is alive; it is a body—the body of Christ—not a building; it is an organism, not an organization.”

Construction was due to start at the end of September and depending on what the winter was like, was originally scheduled for completion in February or early spring of 1985. However, in an article that ran in the March 1985 *Grapevine*, the official publication of the New Jersey District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the then congregation numbering 70 to 80 announced that their building project was only about 25 percent complete. The article also reported, “Gen-



erous grants from The Lutheran Brotherhood and the New Jersey District’s Lutheran Women’s Missionary League have coupled with the dedicated offerings of members in meeting the financial needs of Good Shepherd, and as a result, the congregation has never received any subsidy from the New Jersey District.”

On October 25, 1985, the first service was held in the new facility. An October 30 article describes the building as “an elaborate and attractive edifice” that “is built of dark frame with a belfry and a bell and a high window of glass enclosing the pulpit.” It houses “large rooms for Sunday School, the adult Bible classes and the pastor’s study, a well-equipped kitchen, and a large meeting room (to be) used for worship.” There were no pews so folding chairs were to be used for seating. “Much of the work of the church was done by volunteers, who donated their time and labor,” the article explained. Kay Kleindienst remembers her husband Art spending many hours working on the kitchen. At the time, attendance at the church was about 80 to 85 people each Sunday. It had a “flourishing choir under the direction of Debbie Powers, the organist, a youth group, a women’s guild, a Mission society and two adult Bible classes.”

The new House of Worship was officially dedicated on November 3, 1985. The guest preacher was Rev. Lynn Podoll of Redeemer Lutheran Church. Three choirs—the Redeemer choir, the Evangelical Free Church choir, and the Good Shepherd choir—sang with trumpet and flute accompaniment. The altar, communion vessels, eternal light, processional cross, baptismal font, lectern, offering plates and organ were also dedicated at the service.

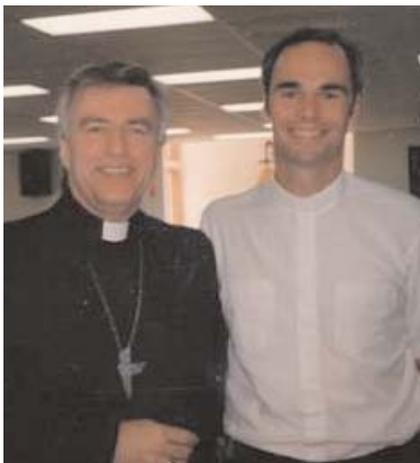
“I remember the dedication service,” says Betsy Smith, “and how excited and thankful we all were to be worshipping in this new facility. So much labor from numerous members had gone into building and finishing it. That was a ‘mountain top’ occasion!”

During the summer of 1986, Good Shepherd sponsored its very first week of Vacation Bible School. Forty-six children attended and participated in classes, crafts and music, all centered around the theme, “It’s About Jesus.” According to an article in the church’s newsletter, *Good News Chronicle*, the offerings were donated to the Heifer Project, and “the children were thrilled to discover they contributed to sending a goat, two rabbits, and a flock of chickens to needy families.”

Betsy Smith, who ran Good Shepherd's VBS for a number of years, remembers: "Vacation Bible School was always a tremendous outreach to the community. I recall planning well in advance, trying to make our program for each year meaningful, fun and Jesus-filled. Though VBS was a great deal of work, a huge blessing was received by all who participated. It was particularly successful during the mid-'90s into the early 2000s. There were a number of years when we had daily attendance of well over 100 students." (Maureen Konecnik took over leadership of VBS in 2005 and ran the program until 2015. Andrea Beatty is the current coordinator.)

Church picnics began to be held at Range Lake, off Glider View Lane, in Blairstown. Initially they would begin after the worship service at the church. "Kids and adults swam and splashed while the cows looked on," jokes Smith. "There was always a baseball game to participate in, and, of course, the food was delicious. Each year, Herman (Kleindienst) made sure we had plenty of sweet corn. Yum!"

On December 13, 1987, the Rev. Edward Grant was installed as Pastor of the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd. Rev. Dr. Donald W. Sandmann, president of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod's New Jersey District was the installing officer and many other Lutheran clergy participated including our friend Rev. Arthur Doring, who served as pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Stanhope.



Rev. Dr. Donald Sandmann,  
New Jersey District President,  
and Rev. Edward Grant

In March of 1988, the church announced the opening of Good Shepherd Preschool. Susan Patti served as the school's first teacher and her assistant was Mimi Gulick. An Open House was held on Saturday, May 21, 1988, where Mrs. Patti answered questions regarding the school's philosophy and curriculum, and School Board members conducted tours and answered questions about the facilities and program structure. School began on September 12, 1988.

In an article that ran in the February 1989 *Good News Chronicle*, School Secretary and pastor's wife Susan Grant wrote, "The first year of Good Shepherd Preschool has been a very good one, and we anticipate even greater things in the year to come. We have 9 four-year-olds and 16 three-year-olds enrolled in our morning sessions this year." She further reported, "We are currently enrolling our September 1989 classes and will add a four-year-old afternoon session, as our morning class is already full." In August of 1989, Kathy Belton took over as the new director and head teacher, and Sue Sandry joined Mimi Gulick to round out the staff. (Presently, Kathy Belton is the only teacher and Bea Pandone is her assistant.)

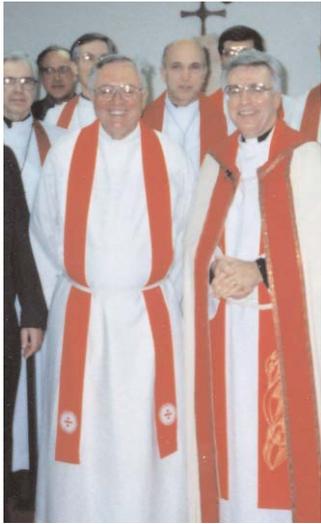
"The preschool at Good Shepherd was and is such an effective outreach to the community," Betsy Smith recalls fondly. "I feel blessed to have been on the preschool board, to have worked at the preschool and to have sent our son to the preschool."

That same month, Pastor Grant celebrated his tenth ordination anniversary. Pastor Bruce Rudolf surprised him and conducted the service highlighting events in his ten-year ministry. In June of 1990, Pastor Grant and his family moved to Flushing, New York, after accepting a call to Resurrection Lutheran Church.

From July of 1990 to February of 1992, Pastor William Hausmann served as the interim pastor.

In a letter published in the January 1992 edition of the Good Shepherd newsletter, Pastor Hausmann wrote: "The time between a pastor's leaving a congregation to serve the Lord and the calling of a new pastor is a time of difficult decisions. It is also a time of challenge, a time for the people of God to become more involved in the work of the Lord...It has been a privilege for me to have served you this past one-and-a-half years as interim pastor...Now we look forward to a new chapter in the book of serving the Lord, as Pastor Robert Klemm takes up his work and ministry as the shepherd of this congregation."

On Sunday, February 16, 1992, Rev. Robert C. Klemm was installed as the new pastor. A cousin to Herman and Art Kleindienst, he attended Sunday school and worship service at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Ridgewood, the grandparent congregation to Good Shepherd. He graduated from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1961, and served congregations in Manchester, New Hamp-



Rev. Robert Klemm and Rev. Dr. Donald Sandmann with other pastors

shire, Delray Beach, Florida, Preston, Maryland, and Topsfield, Massachusetts.

“I received the call to come to the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd while serving as pastor at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Topsfield, where I had served ten years,” says Klemm. “This would be my final call to serve a congregation in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Also during this time, I served as the vice-president of the New Jersey District.”

On November 1, 1992, Good Shepherd celebrated its fifteenth anniversary. Pastor Bruce Rudolf returned to deliver the sermon. On November 22, the church recognized the paying off of its mortgage with a mortgage burning. A

newspaper article cited, “The retirement of indebtedness for the first unit fellowship hall and educational area allows the congregation to seriously consider the building of a worship/church building to be attached to the existing narthex/office area.”

On Sunday, November 5, 1995, Pastor Grant, who had since moved to Family of Faith Lutheran Church in Middletown, NY, served as guest speaker at Good Shepherd’s tenth anniversary of the dedication of its House of Prayer. The church bell, given in memory of Betty Sadlon and Alexander Bell, was dedicated prior to the service.

During the ‘90s, the youth became very active and actually published their own monthly newsletter, *The Good Shepherd Gazette*. Kyle and Shane Kleindienst, Seth and Erin Washburn, Abby and Jeremy Belton, and Mike Pilote, among others, were regular contributors. The group sponsored spaghetti dinners, car washes and hoagie sales. They hiked, camped, canoed, roller skated and even sponsored a child from the Dominican Republic. “Our boys, Jake and Peter, were blessed to have good Christian friends at Good Shepherd,” remembers Betsy Smith. “Youth group during those years was a positive outlet for their energy.”

The group was also involved in the Lutheran Youth Encounter

(LYE). This was a Christian non-profit organization that offered relational youth ministry. Teams of college-age youth would share the Gospel using music, witness, puppet shows and drama sketches. In February of 1996, the senior youth group went to see one such team, “Captive Free” at Kittatinny High School. “It was fun to see college students play songs and act out a puppet show for the younger kids,” wrote Kristina Pilote in *The Good Shepherd Gazette*.

Former youth leader and Elder Rich Pilote remembers the group going to encounters in Virginia Beach for nine consecutive years. “We did it at no cost to the youth or counselors. Donations were made by members of the congregation.” He adds, “The youth of the congregation were encouraged to invite non-churched friends. I believe we had a high of sixteen participants. These are some of my fondest memories. The Lord truly used this time to touch so many people. Some of the counselors who helped on occasion were Mel Kent, my daughter Jennifer and Don Borbone.”

The group would leave on Friday morning and drive for eight hours. On one such occasion, wrote Rich Pilote in *The Good Shepherd Gazette*, “It was nothing short of ‘miraculous’ how five girls could fill a fifteen-passenger van with luggage and food and barely have room left over for my overnight bag and jacket.” The first night,



Rev. Edward Grant, Rev. Robert Klemm, Rev. William Hausmann, and Worship Assistant Andy Sadlon with members and friends of the congregation

after settling in, there would be some speakers and music before curfew. Saturday would be the really busy day, however, “packed with speakers, music and seminars we attended.” And then there would always be a dance that capped off the evening. On Sunday, the group would attend a worship service before packing up and heading back to Blairstown. The attendance at these events averaged about 1,500, and said Pilote, “To see the excitement and joy as all these youths raised our Lord Jesus Christ up in music and praise was truly an honor and a pleasure. The spirit of the Lord was truly in this place.”

Long-time member and former secretary, Judy Coniglio says three LYE teams also visited Good Shepherd: Captive Free, Watermark and Cross Fire. On the day that they arrived there would be a potluck dinner followed by a concert, she recalls, and then they would spend the night with different church families. The next morning, they would visit with the preschool before leaving for another church, and if they were with us on a Saturday night, she adds, they would be part of the Sunday service. “This was a high point at Good Shepherd during the nineties,” says Coniglio. “I always looked forward to their visits.”

## *Growth*

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord  
and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now  
and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

2 PETER 3:18

It was during the time that Klemm was pastor that the sanctuary was added. He explains that every congregation that he had served in the past, with the exception of Maryland, had gone through a building program, so he was no stranger to the process. In an interview in the June 1996 edition of *The Good Shepherd Gazette* entitled “Catching Up with The Kleindienst,” Connie remarked, “We look forward to the day when work will begin on the addition of the church and we can worship in a sanctuary...WITH PEWS!”

The initial meeting of the Building Expansion Committee, was attended by chairman Frank Howard, Mark Haynes, Herman and Connie Kleindienst, Ann Kurchien, Marty and Esther Semken, and Susan Washburn, who met on October 2, 1995. A year later, in November of 1996, the congregation voted to start the building pro-

gram, which commenced with an 18-month planning and pledging period. A year later, Frank Howard Builders was chosen as general contractor, and in April 1998, architects Harvey Meyers & Associates had offered their first drawings.

On November 1, 1998, the sanctuary groundbreaking ceremony was held. Pastor Klemm and other members of Good Shepherd participated. Anna Kleindienst, the oldest member of the congregation, offered a prayer during the ceremony. In an article that ran in *The Blairstown Press* in March of 2000, construction was reported to be well underway and expected to be completed in the summer. “We are ready to move from temporary to permanent,” said Esther Semken, who was the coordinator of the building committee.

“The project is truly a congregational effort,” wrote staff writer Chris Grape-Garvey. “General contractor Frank Howard belongs to the church, as does Steve Belton, who is in charge of framing and roofing. Semken’s husband, Marty, is a church trustee and a member of the work crew. Richard Kleindienst, who is responsible for plumbing, also belongs to the congregation.”

More than \$300,000 was raised through a building fund and no loans were ever taken out to cover the cost of construction. In addition to the sanctuary, which would seat up to 170 people, a vestibule and foyer, a new office for the pastor, a larger sacristy and a conference room connected to the worship space were also included in the project. “We are building for the future growth of the church,” said Pastor Klemm.

One of the most striking features included in the sanctuary is the large stained glass window of Jesus as the Good Shepherd that “beau-





tifies” the wall behind the altar. This was given by Ann Kurchien and Grace and Ed Range in memory of Pauline and John Gaisler. Two coordinating stained glass windows, to the left and right of the altar, were given in memory of Al Bell by his family.

Mary Lou Hawkins remembers when she and her husband Vince—a former property manager and choir member who passed away in 2014—first joined the church in August of 1999. “It was so small,” she says, and Vince told her, “I think they need us here.” He was very handy, a quality that did not go unnoticed by Herman. He told Vince, “we got a place for you.” The two worked together on various projects including the wood trim around the church, the shelves on the altar and the trash can enclosure outside the kitchen.

The first service held in the new sanctuary was Christmas Eve 2000. Connie Kleindienst remembers the whole altar adorned in poinsettias donated by long-time member and acting council vice-president Scott Turner. And Judy Coniglio says they used “glow sticks” instead of traditional candles that year just so they wouldn’t get wax on the brand new pews. On June 24, 2001, the new worship sanctuary was dedicated. Hank Kowalla delivered the sermon entitled “Building Temples” and the choir and Water Gap Singers provided the music.

On May 1, 2000, Pastor Klemm retired from the active ministry.

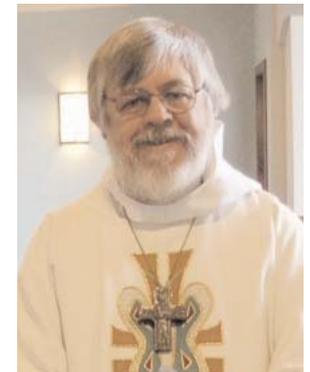
During the two-year call process for a new pastor, Kowalla lead the congregation in worship. Long-time member Luzie Lang says she remembers Kowalla starting every service with, “This is the day that the Lord hath made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!” Over the years, Kowalla had served as Sunday School Superintendent and Elder and had preached often. Then, on June 16, 2002, Pastor John Welge was installed as Good Shepherd’s third pastor and a new chapter in the church’s history began.

During Welge’s thirteen-year pastorship, an annual Blessing of the Animals in October was instituted, a Wednesday Morning Song service was added, and the Red, White and Blues concerts, during which Welge’s skilled organ playing was highlighted, became a regular prelude to summer. Pastor John was also the first pastor to bring the worship service to Range Lake at the yearly picnics in August.

Other highlights include several visits from Welge friend and well-known Lutheran pastor, author, hymn writer (*Earth and All Stars*) and speaker Herb Brokering, who, sadly, passed away in November of 2009. Carol Hawthorne, director of Dayspring Ministries, shared her experiences with the poor and orphaned children in Haiti, and Tony Wood of Carmen Ministries, frequently filled in on Sunday mornings with sermons about his work with young men in the prison system. There was also a presentation by Pastor’s daughter Mary Welge Eng who served for many years in the Peace Corps, and a visit from Lieutenant William Keegan, Jr., who was part of the rescue and recovery mission at Ground Zero on September 11, 2001. He authored a book called *Closure* and signed copies for those who attended the event.

On June 5, 2012, a new steeple was installed at Good Shepherd. And during the worship service on July 15, the steeple was dedicated in loving memory of Art Kleindienst, described by Welge in *The Shepherd’s Fold* as “one of the literal pillars” of the church.

Kay Kleindienst says that following her husband’s sudden passing in 2011, “there were many contributions to a memorial fund. In consideration of how to use it,



Rev. John Welge

I petitioned the council to erect a permanent symbol of Art's love for his Lord and devotion to his faith. And so in 2012, the present steeple was erected and then dedicated. With Jack Kalafut's expertise, it was lighted and now serves as a symbol and beacon for others to join us in worship."

That same year, on June 10, the church celebrated the fortieth anniversary of Pastor Welge's ordination and tenth anniversary of his ministry at Good Shepherd with a special service and dinner. Pastor John Reynolds delivered the sermon. Welge continued to serve Good Shepherd for another three years. He retired in October of 2015.

In January 2016, the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd lost its founder, Herman Kleindienst, following a series of health issues. The building was filled to capacity on the day of his funeral as family and friends gathered to pay homage to the gentle soul whose dedication to the Lord brought a Lutheran church to Blairstown.

In the meantime, in the absence of a minister, Good Shepherd called upon the services of retired pastor Art Doring, acting Redeemer Lutheran Church pastor Rev. Brian Hendrich, and Carmen Ministries' speakers Tony Wood and John Wheeler to keep things running in the pulpit. Then, in March 2016, the congregation was introduced to Peter Bradford, an ordained Lutheran Brethren minister and friend of long-time member and church treasurer Mel Kent. In addition to being a minister, Peter is a registered nurse and board certified hospice nurse. He is currently serving full-time as the pastor at Good Shepherd and working towards meeting the proper criteria necessary to being called as a Missouri Synod minister.



Rev. Peter Bradford

Since his arrival, Bradford, along with his wife Cynthia, has injected new life into Good Shepherd. He has introduced a variety of new outreaches including a deaconess program (M&Ms), a men's discipleship group (Boots), the Believer's Living Theology (BLTs) class and an arts council to beautify the building to reflect its renewed mission. Local musician and vocalist Steve Yeager has been hired to assist organist Carol Kraemer. Under his direction, a newly-formed praise band offers a more contemporary sound and alternates

with the choir to provide music for Sunday worship. Steps have also been taken to revive the church's once thriving youth program. Needless to say, there is a lot going on. Good Shepherd plans to install Peter as soon as the "call process" is complete.

The story of this church is ongoing, and the next forty years, as were the first, are totally in the hands of God. But it looks like we're off to a good start. Amen (for now).

## *Impressions*

*I thank my God every time I remember you,  
constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers  
for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel  
from the first day until now.*

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-5

"Art and I joined the emerging congregation at the Masonic Hall in Blairstown under the guidance of Pastor Ed Grant. Our son Jim met his future wife, Ellen, at this church. We had a beautiful wedding in what is now our fellowship hall with Steve Belton singing the solo. Years on, two of our four grandchildren were baptized in the church. I remember Connie and I taking turns baking and serving coffee hour every Sunday. Art served on the council, property was his 'specialty'—doing small repairs on the church and always participating when Jack Kalafut put out a call for Fall and Spring clean-up. The windows gleamed! (I remember) the many dinners in concert with AAL for various needs and I especially remember those congregational dinners where the residents of The Clover Home were included.

I remember the excitement of anticipating the building of the church itself—in choosing the architect, builder, etc., and watching the progress as it moved along to a reality. I remember the tremendous turnout of children for VBS—the themes and staging were incredible; by now my grandchildren were in attendance. And I remember several concerts at the church when my eldest granddaughter Katie performed solos with her rich, beautiful voice."

*Kay Kleindienst*

“I first came to this church about seven years ago. It brought me back to my Lutheran roots as I went to Lutheran parochial elementary school. I lived in Germany for three years, where I had the privilege of being confirmed at Worms Cathedral, where Martin Luther started the Reformation! So much is familiar here to what I call ‘my roots.’”

*Laura Morrow*

“I remember when our children, Connor (21) and Amanda (19) made their First Holy Communion and their Confirmation. We fondly remember renewing our wedding vows at our 20th Wedding Anniversary in 2009 and when Gary and I bought a Celtic wedding band in 2014, Pastor John Welge offered to bless it and we happily did!”

*Gary and Maureen Konecnik*

“I remember when our congregation shared our Christmas dinners with the residents of The Clover Home in Columbia. Members picked up the residents to bring to our church for a time of fellowship, joy and sharing. Other times we visited with them. One of the younger residents was even here to help out with VBS one summer.

Each fall I look forward to Operation Christmas Child, a project of Samaritan’s Purse, which has been an ongoing outreach for our congregation and Good Shepherd Preschool—an opportunity to bring Christ to children throughout the world with simple shoe box gifts.

In 2000 the youth group was part of Good Shepherd’s float—complete with live sheep—in the Blairstown Memorial Day parade. The float even won first prize.”

*Judy Coniglio*

“In my childhood when my parents, Jim and Ellen, my brother Michael and I attended here, there is one memory that I remember most: My grandfather, Art Kleindienst, was an active member here his whole life, and as a kid, I was always so proud to watch him collect the offering as an usher. Papa lived his life so that all, especially his grandkids, could see his love for Christ and I praise God for the legacy of a God-filled life he left for us and this church.

I also remember when my Grandma, Debbie Selesky, used to help in the kitchen for preschool and VBS. All the ladies in the kitchen always made sure I felt welcomed and loved, and always made sure I got an extra treat. God’s love shown through and I am grateful for the love this church has always shown me and my family.”

*Sharon Kleindienst*

“I remember when I was younger and the church was, and still is, warm and bright and accepting. We are like a family here, and I always enjoy coming here. Even now, as a teenager, I will always come here and never forget what this church preaches and what it has done for me.”

*Rachel Zwerver*

“My favorite memory of my church life at Good Shepherd is attending services with my parents, John and Anna Maines.”

*Eileen Duffy*

“I remember when the choir used to go caroling with the youth group to The Clover Home at Christmas time. The first wedding that Pastor Klemm officiated was my daughter Ingrid’s, and he baptized her twins.”

*Luzie Lang*

“We began attending this church after preparations had already begun for the children’s Christmas pageant. The members of the congregation are so welcoming, they immediately included my son into the program and welcomed our family into the congregation.”

*Anonymous*

“I was so lost and struggling in the aftermath of the sudden death of my husband on July 4, 2015. Finding this church and learning about God’s word has made it possible for me to tackle my challenges. For this, I am truly thankful. I am also thankful for all the church people I have met, Bible Study, and for Pastor Peter coming to my house to help with our tragedy. I am in a much better place because of all the blessings I have received.”

*Marlies Junge*

“Women’s Bible study group was a special thing for me. The women involved were a support group for me. Not only did they contribute spiritual insight to my life, they gave me Christian friendship and strength which I coveted, since our closest relatives were six hundred miles away. To all of you women—thank you from the bottom of my heart.

When I think of Good Shepherd, I think of family...a family of believers who loved each other, encouraged each other, laughed together, cried together and most importantly, worshiped our Lord Jesus together. We were (and you still are) a very special group.

In November of 2008, Steve and I moved to Brownstown, Indiana, my hometown. At that time, we had lived in Blairstown and had been a part of Good Shepherd for almost exactly twenty-five years. You (the congregation) gave us a lovely going-away party. The well wishes, the cards and the two beautiful bird prints are among our most cherished earthly possessions.

As you celebrate memories from Good Shepherd’s past, please know that you, as a congregation and as individuals, have had a tremendous impact on our family. Steve and I count you as some of our greatest blessings. Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

*Betsy Smith*

“I remember the many holiday dinners we had at the now meeting hall and New Year’s parties at our house. I remember my husband’s funeral was presided over by Pastor Klemm, Pastor Hausmann, and Pastor Grant (present, interim and past pastors) in April of 1993. I remember the church bell that was donated in memory of Betty Sadlon and my husband, and the two side stained glass windows also donated in memory of him. I remember the trip to Sight and Sound organized by Ray and Jeanne Socha. And I remember the many council and committee meetings, some good and some not so good.”

*Dottie Bell*

“My father-in-law William Grefe was involved in maintaining the church library and worked with Debbie Selesky, as well. I myself taught Sunday School for three years and served as Church Council president for ten years. Both my daughters, Chelsea and Jaimie,

had their first communions and confirmations and went on church youth group trips.

Upon the death of my husband Richard in 2002, I purchased all the vestments for the pastor and altar cloths in his name. In addition, two pascal candles were also purchased in his memory. Upon the closing of our home in 2014, we donated items for the church yard sale amounting to over \$800 (so I was told!).

And Jeff and I were married at Good Shepherd in 2012.”

*Debbie Grefe*

“Vince loved Good Shepherd. For seven years, he did nothing but work around the church. Things needed to get done around our house, he said he’d get around to it. But anything for the church. The church has grown a lot, which is good. We were concerned that wasn’t going to happen.”

*Mary Lou Hawkins*

“I remember the servants heart of those committed to pray and work for the establishment of a Lutheran congregation in Blairstown exemplified by the Kleindienst family. Herman Kleindienst, a plumber, seemed to know everyone in Blairstown and, whenever there was a need for a new place to live, he found it. The entire family exemplified people who loved the Lord and delighted to serve Him, all the while avoiding the spotlight.

I recall summer church picnics at Range Lake where we shared food under an outdoor picnic area, played softball and had fun games for the children.

Our first Bible study group met at the home of Al and Judy Johnson on High Street before they moved to the farm on Jacksonburg Road. At one point, so many filled their living room that people sat on the floor and on empty buckets of spackle.

Though four years of seminary gave me the head knowledge to be a pastor, it was among the people of Good Shepherd that I learned what it meant to serve as a pastor living in relationship with God’s dear people. Three out of four of my children were born in Newton Hospital and were raised with other young children in the congregation.”

*Pastor Edward Grant,*

*Calvary Lutheran Church, Charleston, SC*

“As I am sitting at my desk, I thank the Lord for all His gifts to me and my family. God has been very good. And now what does God have in mind for the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd? The best is yet to come, and God will bless you. Now, I urge you to build up the Body of Christ with all love and charity toward one another. God is good and His will is peace and joy. And it has been my joy to serve this congregation.”

*Pastor Robert Klemm*

“I have to say that one of my favorite things about Good Shepherd is our closing song. From that very first time my family joined the circle of clasped hands around the church, I have felt ‘His grace surround’ this congregation. I have felt like part of a bigger family, united in our love for the Lord. The members have changed a lot over the past ten years that I have worshiped here, but that feeling hasn’t.”

*Gretchen Wolfrum*

“On my fortieth birthday, my mother sent me a birthday card with the phrase, ‘Life Begins at Forty.’ I think her thoughts were that you have gotten through childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and are now positioned to take what you have learned and experienced so far—into the best parts still ahead. Reaching forty is a milestone to be and to do and to receive the blessings that go with reaching that year with a genuine understanding and desire for living.

The Bible has much to say about the number forty. In both the Old and New Testaments, it is mentioned over 90 times. Moses wrote that it rained 40 days and nights when God destroyed the planet earth by water. The Israelites wandered 40 years in the desert. Moses stayed with God on Mount Sinai for forty days before giving the Ten Commandments, the prophet Jonah gave the city of Ninevah 40 days to repent before God’s judgement, Jesus was tempted by Satan and fasted for 40 days and 40 nights before his public ministry began.

The number 40 is a significant number for those of us here at Good Shepherd. In particular, the Kleindienst family. Connie and Kay Kleindienst are still present with us today to celebrate 40 years

since Good Shepherd’s conception on October 19, 1977. How many of those original charter members are still here today? Without our founding families’ vision and commitment of those who have built this church over these past forty years, we would not be here celebrating 40 years of faithful ministry on October 29, 2017.

It has been a blessing and a privilege for me to be a pastor with such a faithful and committed group of believers. Many of you have gone through the thick and thin of Good Shepherd’s 40-year lifecycle. Those of you who have remained and those of you who are new friends and members are deeply loved and appreciated by many within our church family.

By God’s mercy, as we celebrate our fortieth year anniversary as the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, may we do so with the same vibrant historical, once-in-a-lifetime connection in memory of Martin Luther’s faith document written and attached to a Wittenberg church door 500 years ago on October 31, 1517. I am glad to say, as a church body, we still faithfully follow the Biblical truths that Luther wrote, and both lived and died for. May all of us do the same as God gives grace to do so.

What does the future hold for Good Shepherd church and its dedicated people here in Blairstown, New Jersey? The best answer to that question is to leave it all in the hands of our living Savior and good shepherd, Jesus Christ, who is the head of this church. What we do know is that in order to go forward we must trust in Jesus as our Savior and Lord, live in and with His Words of life and Sacraments of forgiveness, help each other to grow in our faith and love for Jesus and bring the lost to salvation while waiting patiently for Jesus to return as King or take us to heaven.

May we be blessed celebrating the past 40 years and be hopeful going into what God has ordained for us into the near future.”

*Pastor Peter Bradford*



**With abundant thanks to our creator God, our founder Martin Luther, and all the good people of Good Shepherd who made this history possible!**

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