

# 35 Years of Growing in Christ



## The History of Divine Peace Lutheran Church Largo, Maryland

## The Early Years

Divine Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church began to take shape in 1969 when a group of families met to discuss the possibility of establishing a Wisconsin Synod Lutheran Synod church to serve the Maryland suburbs of the District of Columbia. These families resolved to do all they could to make their hopes of having a church of their own a reality. Many of the founding families were members of Grace Lutheran Church in Falls Church, Virginia. The families noted, in a letter to the WELS officials seeking mission status, that the roundtrip for them to Grace was on average 60 to 80 miles. Although the families were able to attend church services regularly, they were often unable to attend other church activities or participate in Vacation Bible school as teachers or students.

To organize the mission, the families sought the assistance of Pastor Walter F. Beckmann, the Pastor at Grace. They also sought help from Pastor Carl E. Pagel of Atonement Lutheran Church in Baltimore, MD. The first official meeting of those interested in starting a new church was held in April of 1969. Potential members for this new church that attended the organizational meeting were Roland and Elaine Beachley, Thomas and Pat Furnner, Paul and Janice Hennig, Jerauld and Mildred Kluckman, Robert Manteufel, Dale and Marva Mathis, Leon and Helen Pingel, Robert and Joann Prosek, Peter and Sandra Sievert, Richard Thimijan, and Mrs. George Thompson. After the decision was made to form a mission, the group decided that the best location would be one that would have convenient access from the major highways, such as: the Capital Beltway and the Baltimore-Washington Parkway.

Pastor Beckmann played a very vital role in obtaining mission status from the Mission Board for this new church. He made requests on behalf of those gathered both in a letter that April and an oral report before the WELS Michigan District Mission Board during the Michigan District's convention in the summer of 1969. The families formally requested permission to establish a mission from the Mission Board in July of that same year. At the same time, the families also requested the calling of a pastor and loan funds for a chapel and land site. In August of 1969, the District Mission Board granted mission status to the group.

A special meeting was then held a few months later in December 1969. Those who were present decided to locate themselves in the area between the Baltimore-Washington Parkway and Route 202 (Landover Road) as close to the Capital Beltway as possible. They decided also to name the mission the Wisconsin Synod Lutheran Mission of Prince Georges County. The group selected temporary officers with Jerauld Kluckman serving as President, Jack Pingel as Secretary, and Thomas Furnner serving as Treasurer. Robert Prosek volunteered to serve as Sunday School superintendent, with Richard Thimijan, Shirley Berg, Mildred Kluckman, and Pat Furnner serving as Sunday School teachers. It was agreed that the first service would be held on the first Sunday of 1970. Pastors Beckmann and Pagel agreed to serve the mission with afternoon services on alternate Sundays until the arrival of a pastor of their own.

The first service was held at Kenmoor Elementary School in Landover, Maryland on January 4, 1970, the first Sunday in 1970, with Pastor Beckmann officiating. A social hour followed the service. Five students attended Sunday School on January 4, 1970 – Beth Kluckman, Michael and David Sievert, and Eric and Kurt Beachley. The church continued to hold services in this place until the completion of a permanent building of its own.

During the following six months, church attendance ranged from 20 to 52. By the end of March 1970, there had been one baptism and one confirmation. Robert Prosek served as the coordinator for a new evangelism program. The congregation also decided that 15 percent of the envelope and plate offerings would be given to the WELS for mission and administrative support. A Ladies group was also organized and purchased altar cloths as one of its first actions.

During those first seven months of the church's existence, the congregation was served on a regular basis by Pastors Beckman and Pagel with rotating Sunday afternoon services. The small congregation did not have to wait long for a pastor of its own. Pastor John Mittelstaedt, a graduate from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in the spring of 1970, was assigned to be the mission's first pastor. He was ordained on July 25, 1970, and installed as pastor of the mission on that same day. Professor Siegbert Becker of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary spoke at the service. Pastor Beckmann performed the ordination, with Pastor Pagel as liturgist.

The congregation purchased a house at 3416 Cheverly Avenue in Cheverly, Maryland as the first parsonage. The parsonage also served as a meeting place for the various councils and committees conducting church business. The parsonage was ready for the June arrival of Pastor Mittelstaedt and his bride, Marlene (Molly) nee Hallemeyer. After the construction of the new parsonage on the church grounds, the Cheverly property was sold.

With the installation of Pastor Mittelstaedt, the mission church began to grow and take on formality. At a September 1970 meeting the Sunday School superintendent reported that at least five classes would be conducted that school year. All known prospects for membership in that area had also been visited. A committee began to draw up a constitution and set of bylaws. Members were encouraged to suggest possible names for the congregation. In October 1970, the voters chose Divine Peace as the name of the congregation. Other suggested names were: Immanuel, Holy Word, Gloria Dei, and Redeemer.

In a December 1970 meeting ten families and one individual transferred into membership, making a total membership of 26 communicants. The officers of the church authorized the purchase of 35 sets of offering envelopes, 10 hymnals and a Lutheran Agenda. The newly elected Church Council was installed during the Sunday service on January 10, 1971.

By January of 1971 Pastor Mittelstaedt reported that instruction classes had started, and that about 2000 invitations to be used when canvassing the area would soon be available. Phil Becker organized the first church choir in March of 1971.

## **A Time to Build**

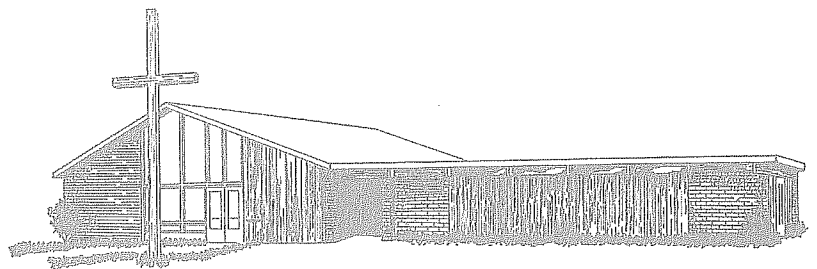
From the very beginning the congregation realized that if it were to proclaim the gospel of Christ effectively it would need its own church home. With the mission fairly well established and the assignment of a permanent pastor, the major priority became the search for a permanent church site. The congregation had been authorized to proceed with land acquisition according to WELS guidelines, with a maximum of \$40,000 allocated. Pastor Mittelstaedt, with the assistance of Robert Prosek and Jerauld Kluckman, began canvassing different neighborhoods to determine

the best location for the church, limiting consideration to locations outside the Beltway by no more than five miles and between the Baltimore-Washington Parkway and Pennsylvania Avenue.

A Building Committee was established consisting of the following members: Roberth Maichle (Chairman), Clair Ochs, Roger Cross, Donald Darrow, Jerauld Kluckman and Philip Becker. The WELS had approved an extra \$10,000 for land acquisition. At a March 1973 meeting, the Committee recommended a site about 500 feet from the intersection of Brown Station Road and White House Road. The committee was authorized to offer \$45,000 for five acres and to bargain for a final settlement. In April 1973 the Committee reported that it had received a counter offer of five acres for \$50,000 to be made in three payments with 5% interest on the balance. The congregation was permitted to tailor the boundaries of the five acre site, so it selected both wooded and non-wooded portions. In May 1973, the land was officially purchased from Mr. and Mrs. Finis Hammett.

The Building Committee had one prime objective – to construct a church that had a sanctuary that was a fit place for the worship of God, and that had a separate fellowship/educational wing. To achieve this Duane D.

Anderson of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, who was serving as WELS architect of the time, drew up preliminary plans based upon one of a number of models proposed by

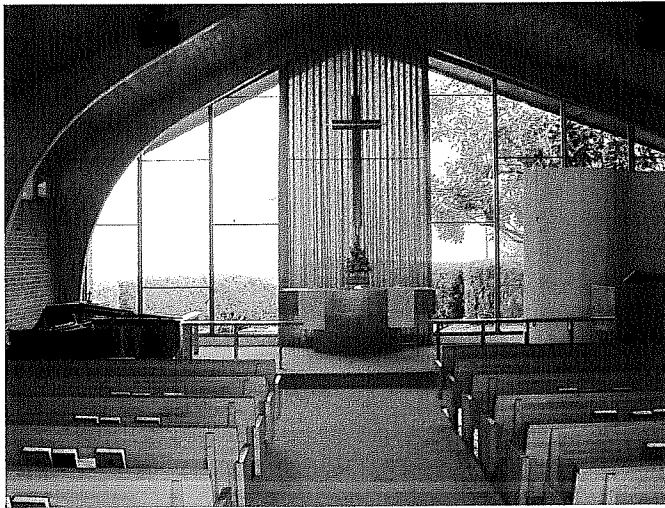


WELS. In October of 1973 the voters approved a modified design of the WELS-affiliated church in East Brunswick, New Jersey for the chapel and also decided to construct a parsonage on the church site.

A groundbreaking ceremony for the new chapel took place on Sunday, May 19, 1974. By July the Building Committee reported that a local architect from Greenhorne & O'Mara, Inc. had been engaged to supervise the chapel construction. They were also contracted to build the

parsonage. A small Zimmer pipe organ had been purchased, the possibility of purchasing used pews was under investigation, and the purchase of chancel furniture was being negotiated. Construction began in July 1974. By August 1974, the framework of the parsonage had already been completed, and by February 1975, it was occupied.

The new church measured approximately 4,000 square feet and had a seating capacity of 180. It included a sanctuary and a separate fellowship/education wing. This was a building that allowed the worshippers to express their joy to God in a building set apart for special use. It was never



the intention that those who would attend or see this church would stand back and marvel at what amazing things men had done in making this place. This was to be no monument to human accomplishment. It was the intention that the church building and all that filled it would demonstrate the love of God to all who would worship in it and as often as people would enter it they would say: This God is our God. The God

who is worshipped here is the true and Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, just as he has revealed himself to us in the Word and Sacrament which we have received here. This God is our God. This is His House.

One way this was achieved was through the extensive use of glass in the sanctuary itself. Glass was used to create the impression of openness and to let the beauty of the wooded section of the church's property add to the beauty of the church.

To finance the purchase of the land and the construction of the church and the parsonage, the congregation looked to the WELS as the major source of funds. Church construction ran about \$215,000, parsonage construction about \$33,000 and land of \$50,000 resulted in a loan from the WELS of just under \$298,000. In addition some planning costs and costs for some furnishings were covered by the congregation and special gifts from members.

For the Members of Divine Peace Lutheran Church April 27, 1975 was more than just another beautiful spring Sunday. This was a day of rejoicing, not in what the congregation had accomplished, but in their God who had brought them to this day. This Dedication Sunday was observed with two special worship services. In the morning service of dedication, John Mittelstaedt, the pastor of the congregation delivered the sermon. Dr. Siegbert Becker was the guest speaker for the afternoon Festival Service. Liturgists for that service were Pastors Walter Beckmann and Carl Pagel, the two who had served the congregation during its first months of 1970. A total of 335 people were present for these services.

A NEW CHURCH WITH AN OLD MESSAGE.....

Preaching Jesus Christ  
crucified for the sins  
of all mankind!



DIVINE PEACE  
Evangelical Lutheran  
Church 1500 BROWN STATION ROAD  
LARGO, MARYLAND, 20870

SUNDAY SCHOOL  
9:45 A.M.  
WORSHIP SERVICE  
11:00 A.M.

Since Dedication Sunday was also that Sunday of the Church year that was called *Cantate*, which means "to sing," Christian hymnody was used extensively in voicing gratitude to God. A highlight of the afternoon Festival Service was a mass choir made up of neighboring and sister congregations and directed by Mr. Phil Becker. Miss Ruth Muehlenbeck of Adrian, Michigan, was guest organist for that service. It was fitting, too, that the congregation's new pipe organ should have been placed into service on the same Sunday. A separate dedication service for the new church pews was held on October 26, 1975.

Even before the new church was occupied, the ladies of the congregation donated their time and effort to beautify it. In 1971, the Ladies Guild made Christmas tree decorations. In 1972 the Guild made Reformation paraments. Altar hangings were made by Jean Cross and Joanne Prosek in June 1973. The following women made banners, wreaths, and paraments for the church in the years following its completion: Pat Grabitske, Sandy Sievert, Bea Mann, Glenda Darrow, Lois Mittelstaedt, Marion Pledger, Lois Becker, Judy Moore, Kay Clarey, Gertrude Mittelstaedt, and Stacy Lancaster.

## A Time to Grow

The congregation began planning for a Christian Day School in October 1979, by establishing a special fund for the school. In January 1980, the voters of the congregation approved guidelines for establishment of committees which would work for promotion of the school. In June 1980 the congregation approved a proposal submitted by the Christian Day School School Committee (Dwight Grabitske, Chuck Oglebay, Jon Samms, and Pastor Mittelstaedt) calling for the school to be opened in September 1981. The classes were to be held in the fellowship hall. Although Divine Peace had received final approval from the Synod for the formation of school, on March 15, 1981 the voters of the congregation decided to delay the school opening one year in order to accumulate larger financial reserves.

The Divine Peace Christian Day School opened on August 30, 1982 with a Service of Pray and Praise. Miss Marlene Strandt, a 1978 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, was called in March of 1982 and installed as the first teacher of the school in July. Fourteen students enrolled covering grades 1 through 6. The school was expanded to include kindergarten and Grade 7 the next year, when Bonniejean Lomax was called to serve as the kindergarten teacher and installed in August 1983.

In 1984 Marlene Strandt accepted a call to serve at Messiah Lutheran in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In July the congregation called Ruth Muehlenbeck to serve as the Christian Day School teacher. During the same year the school expanded to include Grade 8, and a nursery school for children ages 3 and 4 was established. Debra Lowdermilk joined Bonniejean Lomax in directing the nursery school. A new classroom addition to the church was dedicated in December 1986.

*Divine Peace Lutheran School  
Kindergarten through Seventh Grade*

**ANNOUNCING**  
*Entrance Examinations  
for the 1983-1984 school year  
Call 350-4520 for appointment*

*Education...for today  
for tomorrow  
for eternity*



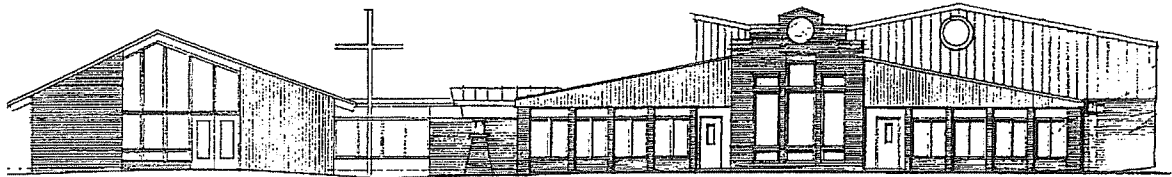
1500 BROWN STATION ROAD - LARGO



In August 1994, the congregation joined Ruth Muehlenbeck in celebrating 25 years in the teaching ministry. A reception took place between services and a gift was presented. Just a month later; however, in September, Ruth Muehlenbeck was suddenly called to heaven.

Elroy Bartsch, a retired WELS parochial teacher from Phoenix, Arizona, was called to serve as an interim teacher through December of 1994. In January 1995, Jonathan Roux, a midyear graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, was assigned to be the full-time teacher. Jill (Gaertner) Roux accepted a call to serve as part-time teacher starting in the Fall of 1995.

## **A Time to Build...Again**



In the early 1990s the members and faculty of Divine Peace began to identify a need for an expanded education facility. In 1993 the Board of Education in meeting of the Church Council made the identification of this need official. The school had been limited in the services it could provide based on the inadequacy of the facilities. The school could only accept a limited number of students in each grade and at the present there were no adequate facilities for a kindergarten. In addition to accommodating a larger student population, the new education facility would be designed to accommodate a kindergarten class.

In a congregational survey done in December of 1993 by the Growth and Planning Committee, consisting of the following members: Marty Clarey (Chairman), Alan Anderson, Dave Denbow, Areather Murray, Alan Lancaster, Charlene Lucas, Joseph Peters, Paul Start, Art Thieme and Nancy Trelstad, the members of the church expressed a desire to build the congregation by making greater use of the Christian education programs and by expanding the school.

In 1995 the Church Expansion Planning Committee assessed the specific requirements for a building program. Also in this year the Congregation celebrated 25 years of growing in Christ. The original church mortgage, along with a balloon payment of over \$100,000, was also paid off. Later in January of 1995 the congregation voted to select an architect to develop preliminary drawings, and to begin a Building Fund drive. In 1996 the architect and engineer are selected. The congregation decided to work with architect Jacob Weaver to develop a building design that would address the needs of the congregation and that would also look to the future.

The new building was to consist of at least six rooms: three children's classrooms, a pastor's office, a large work and storage area for the school and church staff, and one room for a combined church library and adult classroom. The facility was to be able to support approximately 50 school children, grades kindergarten through eight grade. An additional multipurpose recreation and activity room was considered an important option if the funds would allow for such a room. This room was to be used for student athletics, games, and inclement weather recess, and could also serve as an additional church fellowship and activity area.

The ultimate goal in their construction project was to build buildings that would serve their Savior and give honor to his name. Based on a survey of the congregation, the Church Expansion Planning Committee and the Church Council, the following goals and reasons for expanding the church facilities were determined:



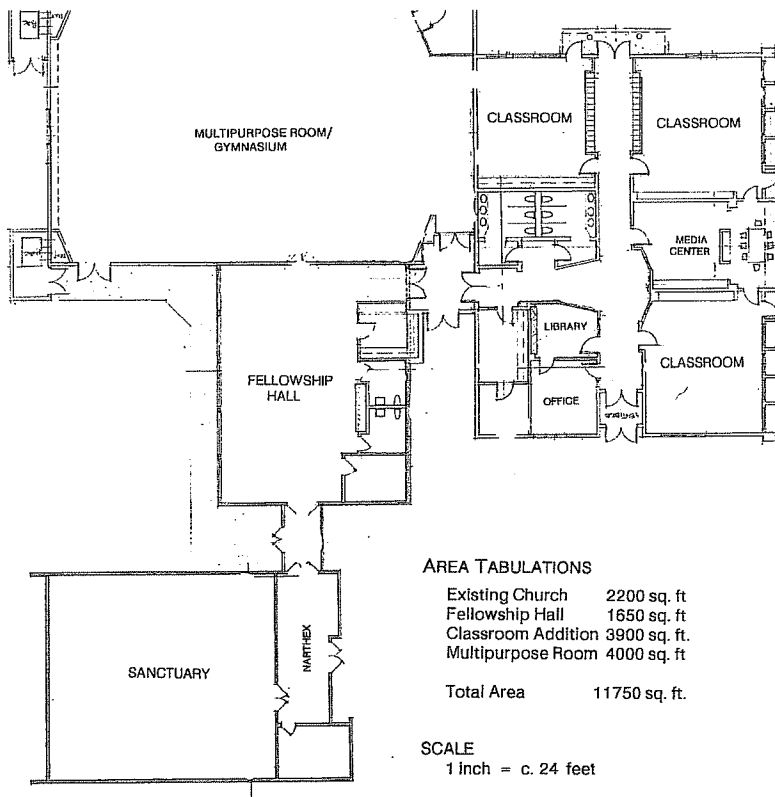
Tim Waggoner and Alice Long at  
Groundbreaking Ceremony on July 18, 1998

1. *To expand the Christian education facilities.*
2. *To make the facilities more accessible to the handicapped and elderly.*
3. *To improve and increase the capacity of the fellowship space.*
4. *To provide adequate workspace for the called workers and volunteers.*

In a special meeting of the congregation on December 29, 1997 the congregation voted to begin preparations for building a new education/administration building. Early in 1998 a Building

Committee was established consisting of the following members: Tim

Waggoner (Chairman), Erv Brandt, Fletcher James, Alan Lancaster, Clee Lucas, Jonathan Roux and Paul Stark. On July 18, 1998 a Groundbreaking Ceremony was held.



Initially the Church Expansion project was divided into two parts, Phase I and Phase II. Phase I was to be of primary importance and would be carried out even if the church was unable to undertake Phase II at the same time.

Phase I included the construction of the administration and education wing, improvements to the bathrooms and kitchen, and a new entrance driveway and handicapped parking spaces. This phase, according to an estimate made by a local contractor would cost approximately \$400,00.

Phase II would include the Multipurpose Room/Gymnasium. This phase would cost approximately \$300,000. It would only be constructed as further expansion funds would become available. If both phases were to be constructed at the same time, there was to be a savings of approximately \$100,000.

Enough funds were collected that both Phase I and Phase II could be completed at the same time. Construction began in late 1998 and was completed by the start of the second semester of the 2000-2001 school year. The buildings were occupied and the on February 5, 2001 the teachers and students held classes in the new education building for the first time.

On Sunday, April 8, 2001 A special service was held for the dedication of the new school building. In the service led by Pastor Mittelstaedt various members of the church and school parents participated in connecting experiences from the building project along with readings from the Holy Bible. They were: Phil Pettway (Treasurer and school parent), Chuck Schwalbe (Elder), Paul Stark (Elder and school parent), and Gary Murray (President and school parent).

The new building was dedicated in Memoriam of Ruth E. Muehlenbeck, with gratitude to God for her faithful services. She served as a teacher at Divine Peace from 1984 to 1994. She was responsible for setting the high standards and traditions of the school. Through her years of dedicated service to Divine Peace she touched the lives of many children and parents. Her work lives in the lives of young men and women who now serve the Savior and live as his children.

## Divine Peace Historical Facts and Figures

### TEACHERS:

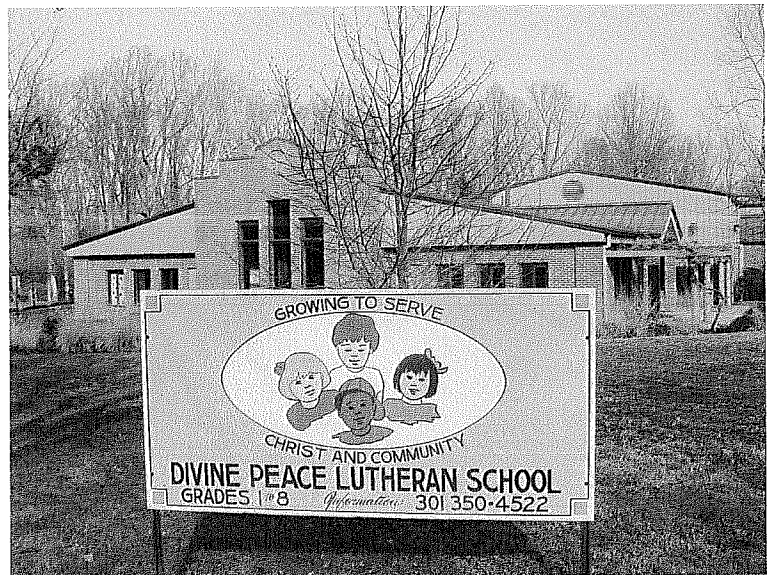
Marlene Strandt (1982-1984)  
Ruth E. Muehlenbeck (1984-1994)  
Susan Anderson (1991-1994)  
Elroy Bartsch (Sept. – Jan 1994)  
Jonathan Roux (1995-present)  
Jill Roux (1995-1999)  
Tamara Waggoner (1999-2006)  
Stephanie Kleman (2000-2002)  
Melissa Leslie (2002-present)  
Abigail Flister (2006-present)

### PASTORS:

John Mittelstaedt (1970-present)

### VICARS:

Nicholas Maglietto (2005-2006)  
Daniel Berg (2006-2007)



### FAMOUS FIRSTS:

**Baptism** – Billy Ray Singleton (1970)  
**Confirmation** – Billy Ray Singleton (1970)  
**Wedding** – Capt. James Jaeger & Dianne Nuckolls (1975)  
**School Graduate** – Sara Mittelstaedt (1985)

For the past 36 years God has graciously nurtured and grown the congregation of Divine Peace Lutheran Church. May he do the same in the future so that many more will come to know him as their one and only Savior and so that his Holy name may be glorified.

Nicholas Maglietto

Paper Written: December 11, 2006