

# **St. Mark's is 140!!**

*By George Kegley*

St. Mark's has come a long way since a small group of Germans began worshiping in the old Commerce Street schoolhouse in Rorer's Grove on Second Street, SW, the present site of the Commonwealth Building, in February 1869—140 years ago.. Many important events and significant people have been part of our rich history.

In almost a century and a half, St. Mark's has been served by 14 pastors and we have worshiped in five buildings—after we built our first church, the first in Big Lick, in 1873. It was behind the present Higher Education Building on Centre Avenue, Northwest..

We later moved to a frame building at the corner of Church Avenue and Second Street and we replaced it in less than 10 years with the stone church now known as Greene Memorial United Methodist. In 1902, we traded buildings with the Methodists who had a red brick church at Third Street and Campbell Avenue. Congregations don't exchange churches very often but we lacked funds to pay for ours and the Methodists needed more space. We stayed in the red brick church in downtown Roanoke until 1953 when we moved to Franklin Road.

We were organized in 1869—just four years after the Civil War--by the Rev. S. A. Repass of College Lutheran in Salem. Other pastors have been the Reverends E. E. Sibole, L. G. M. Miller, W. J. Smith, J. W. Bushnell, J. A. Huffard, Oliver C. Miller, T. O. Keister, J. Luther Sieber, J. Edgar Stockman, George K. Bowers, Charles Easley, John Hawn and Timothy Anderson. Three of them served 70 years, much of the last century. Dr. Sieber led the congregation from 1914 until his death in 1944. Dr. Bowers and Dr. Stockman each served here for 20 years. Assistant pastors have been Ronald Fisher, Larry Dooley, Tracie Bartholomew and Paul Hinlicky. Lois Knutson served an intern year as a seminary student.

Seven sons of St. Mark's who became Lutheran pastors were Lewis S. G. Miller, James R. Stephenson, William E. Parsons. J. Luther Mauney Jr., Fred Guy, Bill Van O'Linda and Matthew Henning. Mark Duncan of St. Mark's is a Presbyterian minister.

Through the years, three St. Mark's men have been mayor. John Trout was mayor of Big Lick and his son, Henry Trout, later followed as mayor of Roanoke. After World War II, Richard T. "Dick" Edwards was mayor and a Circuit Court judge. His widow, Augusta Farrier, remains at St. Mark's today.

Two significant events occurred at St. Mark's in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The United Synod of the South was organized in our congregation in 1886 and its last convention was held here 32 years later in 1918, before that synod merged into the United Lutheran Church in America. Secondly, Pastor J. E. Bushnell was recognized as the first Lutheran pastor in the nation to introduce the "common service" to a congregation—St. Mark's--on July 22, 1888, according to Our Church Paper, published at New Market, Va. This "first" was reported by Dr. Mark Oldenburg of the Gettysburg Seminary faculty.

For many years, St. Mark's had very close ties with the Virginia Synod. The synod held 35 annual conventions and two special meetings at St. Mark's between 1922 and 1969. Also, the synod offices were located in the former N. W. Pugh home next door from 1958 until they

moved to the Roanoke College campus in 1982 and St. Mark's bought the building and named it the Guinther House, A computer school was located there until it became a mental health facility called Mountain House.

Dr. J. Luther Mauney, president of the Synod from 1948 to 1976, was a member of St. Mark's. George Buchanan was Synod treasurer from 1962 to 1976.

St. Mark's, a mother church for Roanoke Lutherans, helped to establish Emmanuel in the Villa Heights section of Northwest Roanoke, also St. James in Vinton and a mission in Southeast Roanoke known as Second Lutheran but St. James and Second joined the parent church, About `1916, St. Mark's contributed to the formation of Virginia Heights Lutheran, now Christ Lutheran Church.

The long tenure of Dr. Sieber has been called the "Golden Age of St. Mark's." Membership approached 1,000 and a parsonage was built on Church Avenue, now the site of the Red Cross building, but hard times of the Depression led to belt-tightening and the annual budget was cut from \$10,000 to \$5,000. L. E. Lookabill, a veteran member, was honored for an amazing record of 63 years of perfect Sunday School attendance.

After Dr. Sieber's death, Dr. J. Edgar Stockman, a retired Air Force chaplain, led a long effort to find a location and build a new church home. The original plans called for a stone church with a basketball court in the basement and a projection room for "picture shows." but that proved to be too expensive. Our present modified Gothic church here on Franklin Road was dedicated on Oct. 11, 1953. During these post-World War II years, Boy Scout Troop 25 flourished and a total of 105 boys were enrolled in 1955. The troop had its own camp on Bent Mountain and a total of more than 2,200 Scouts participated in the troop's program and 60 were presented as Eagle Scouts over almost six decades until the troop closed in 1975.

Dr. Bowers started social ministry programs which are still active today. He led in the establishment of a food pantry, clothes closet and refugee sponsorship. St. Mark's sponsored 50 Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s. In those days, Bowers led a deaf ministry, establishment of a scholarship fund, a Friday night youth program at the Way Inn building formerly behind the church and the Free Clinic, now known as the Bradley Free Clinic, was one of the first in the country,. This work was recognized by a national Guideposts magazine Church of the Year award for St. Mark's in 1981. Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, head of the magazine, came to Roanoke to present the award at the Civic Center.

Dr. Charles Easley recognized a need to refurbish and expand the church. A wing was added, bringing new space for the food pantry, clothes closet, offices, youth area and a library, all connected by a valuable elevator. Easley was succeeded by Pastor John Hawn, who led a successful effort to pay for the improvements, with an emphasis on stewardship and evangelism.

Pastor Tim Anderson, a Bible scholar and a sound preacher, came in 2001, serving until 2008. He led Bible study and new approaches to evangelism, as well as planning for our new David's Kingdom daycare program. Pastor John McCandlish retired at Christ, Radford, and came to St. Mark's as interim pastor, providing steady leadership until we call a pastor.

Pastor James Armentrout, co-pastor of Holy Trinity, Lynchburg, accepted a call and began serving here in August 2010. A native of Rockingham County, he is a graduate of

Bridgewater College and Southern Seminary. He serves as chairman of the Virginia Synod Youth Ministry Committee.

Seven members of St. Mark's have been honored as Roanoke's Mothers of the Year. They are Barbara McLelland, Jackie Carmack, Eula May Stockman, Augusta Edwards Farrier, Genevieve Dickenson, Helen Killinger and Tommie Whitman.

St. Mark's has a reputation as a warm, friendly congregation of helpers who continue a longstanding heritage of spreading the good news and serving as faithful Disciples of Christ. We look forward to another 140 years and more of service.