

## **Our History (1964 – 2011)**

### **God Is Faithful (1964 – 1967)**

Our history began in the summer of 1963 when the Southern District of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod sent the Rev. William Ameiss to Mobile to organize a mission congregation on the western side of the city.

The first service was held on January 5, 1964, at the First Federal Savings and Loan Association building in Skyline Shopping Center. Eighty-five people attended this service during which Pastor Ameiss was installed. The following week the congregation was officially organized and named. On May 24, 1964, 42 people joined the congregation as Charter Communicant Members.

A major threat to our young congregation occurred in 1965 when Brookley Air Force Base began to close down. A large percentage of the membership was transferred out of Mobile. Nevertheless, trusting in the Lord, the congregation purchased its present property.

Reflecting back on our beginnings, Pastor Ameiss wrote: “The meaning of my ministry in Mobile is simply that God is Faithful. The hopes and dreams of the District, the efforts of dedicated lay leaders and the stumbling efforts of a new seminary graduate meant very little. God in his grace used it all to bless his church, as He still does today.” Pastor Ameiss served from 1963 until 1967.

Pastor Henry Meyer, a pioneer Lutheran Pastor in South Alabama, served as Interim Pastor in 1967, as he did once again in 1970.

### **Years of Discovery (1968-1970)**

Pastor Monte Frohm became Pastor in 1968. Under his leadership, a wood-frame Sunday School Building was constructed in 1969.

Pastor Frohm wrote: “Our years with Our Savior were years of discovery. It was among you that we began to learn what the pastoral ministry is all about.” Pastor Frohm served from 1968 until 1970.

### **Concern for Children, Youth and the Elderly (1971-1976)**

Pastor Charles Aufdenkampe became Our Savior’s pastor in 1971. “Pastor Chuck” did significant ministry with our youth and our elderly members. This was also the first year that AA used the facility as a meeting place.

Early in 1974, plans were initiated for the construction of a new sanctuary. It was dedicated in April 1976.

In interpreting the meaning of his ministry among us, Pastor Chuck wrote: "It meant a group of happy people in a warm climate who were about to experience the active spirit and power of God's Word, which is the seed of life, bringing more souls into the fold of the One who is always our Good Shepherd. The warmth of southern hospitality is still in this northern soul. It meant a congregation that always was concerned for children and youth, and always had youth group activities. Our Savior was a balanced congregation of young families, yet with many mature members in the faith who gave it direction and power and purpose. It was a congregation of blended nature: native southerners, transplanted northerners, and new members from the west coast. It was a congregation that worked together: Saturdays with the lawn, families being "sexton" and taking their turn with cleaning duties. It was a congregation that prayed together and played together once the new softball field was completed. And then one Easter the new outdoor worship garden, and finally one spring a new church to worship and work in. And then it was time for me to leave, and yet my spirit has never left!" Pastor Aufdenkampe served until 1976.

### **The Priesthood of Believers in Mission (1977-1992)**

Pastor Theodore Streleow became pastor in 1977. Shortly thereafter we invited AA to return and use our facilities for their meetings so that this healing ministry could continue in our midst.

After the introduction of the Lutheran Book of Worship in 1979, "Pastor Ted" led us in a study of the history of liturgical worship. Our worship was enhanced as more lay people became involved in leading worship.

Hurricane Frederick refocused our attention in September 1979, by inflicting over \$100,000 worth of damage to our buildings, primarily the sanctuary. But as one youth pointed out the day after the storm, the sanctuary light had burned on throughout the pounding windstorm, regardless of the torn roof and battered walls. "God is still with us." We resumed worship in our rebuilt sanctuary in January 1980. During the recovery period, we participated in the work of the Area Interfaith Disaster Services.

In 1979, we entered into a challenging ministry to Southeast Asian refugees, especially to those from the land of Laos. The refugee resettlement committee addressed the social needs of a group that came to number 150 people. When the Lao people began to request instruction in the Christian faith, instruction classes were begun in 1982. Over 100 men, women and children were instructed and baptized.

Funding received from Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services helped us set up a welding school for one year, during which 36 men were trained. Funding received from Lutheran World Relief staffed the ministry with a Director of Cross-cultural Ministry.

In addition to this ministry, we received funding from Lutheran World Relief in 1988 for a major garden project on the Choctaw Indian Reservation outside McIntosh, Alabama.

"Shalom-building" was introduced in 1986 as a new way to understand and deal with congregational conflict. Elders were trained to function as "Shalom-builders" in the

congregation. Our Savior was the first congregation in the country to be introduced to the process.

In April of 1990, the mortgage on the sanctuary was paid off. In January of 1989, the congregation celebrated a quarter of a century of God's love with a special banquet, service and reception. Pastor Ameiss returned to Our Savior as guest speaker for the celebration. The celebration also honored the late Rev. Henry Meyer, Pastor Emeritus, who served Our Savior so faithfully as interim pastor through two vacancies and was beloved by the congregation.

In late 1990, the congregation again embarked on a building program, although it was obvious with the economy in turmoil and the membership of liturgical churches in decline in the United States, that this was going to be a tough task, one which seemed to large for our group. The congregation voted to replace the wood frame structures that were the fellowship hall and Sunday school building with a new brick building to house both fellowship area, classrooms and staff offices.

The new building was completed in January of 1992 and dedicated to the work of our Lord. Throughout the building process, the congregation carried on its ministry to the people of Mobile, the mutual encouragement of each other as the Body of Christ, prayers for those who went to war and returned, sharing a portion of our blessings with the world's hungry, and supporting outreach to those Christians long under persecution in the crumbling Soviet Union. Even in adversity, it was a time of blessing! Pastor Ted Strelow led our flock from 1977 to 1992.

### **“Blessed to be a Blessing” (1992 to 1994)**

Rev. John Ellerman served Our Savior as Interim Pastor for two years and taught us that “we are blessed to be a blessing to others, and that the church is God’s pipeline for blessings to the world.” Shortly before Easter Sunday in 1994, we were blessed with an answer to our pastoral call. At a dinner in Pastor Ellerman’s honor, the congregation named him Pastor Emeritus.

### **Diverse Ministry (1994 to 1998)**

In the spring of 1994, Pastor Loren Delgehausen became pastor. The congregation was of diverse cultures and ages. “Pastor Delge” called on the shut-ins, the sick, and older members, while also capturing the minds of the young with his child’s chats.

In February of 1998, the congregation was once again vacant and once again dealing with conflict resolution. A lay leader of the congregation conducted services while the congregation wrestled with its future plans. During this time of vacancy, the people pulled together as several retired pastors in the Mobile area served on Sunday morning. We began a Mother’s Day Out program and had successful Vacation Bible Schools. Our membership grew. The strong love of our Lord and our strong love for each other helped us overcome the obstacles that stood in the way of our mission.

## **Looking Outward (2000 – 2005)**

In February of 2000, Pastor Bruce Hanson answered our call. “Pastor Bruce” and his wife, Pam, were an integral part of the Our Savior family. Pastor Bruce refocused our eyes and hearts to our mission to the community and the world. A website ([www.oursavior-mobile.org](http://www.oursavior-mobile.org)) debuted on the Internet, giving the congregation a World Wide Web presence for people who wanted to find where we were located, find out who we were and what Lutherans believed, seeking our help or prayers, or coming to join us.

In 2002, the congregation took part in a synodical program designed to determine church mission and our role in the community. The congregation did an intensive self-study and survey. From this program, Our Savior congregation embarked on “Becoming Contagious Christians.”

A new, lighted sign was erected making it easier for passers by on Government Boulevard to identify the red brick buildings as Our Savior Lutheran Church and giving the congregation a means of posting messages. Signs were positioned near the exits to the parking lot reminding those who were leaving that they were entering the mission field. The congregation approved the expansion of the Mother’s Day Out program to five days a week as a means of serving the community.

In the fall, the board of education instituted a new “active learning” program for the children of the congregation consisting of Bible study, arts and crafts, drama, and other group activities designed to teach by doing. T-shirts proclaiming that we were spreading the seeds of God’s love in our community were printed and became high fashion among congregation’s members, while youth “Christ-clowns” and “Christ’s Critters” puppeteers (programs that had been part of our youth ministry under Pastor Ted Strelow) again proclaimed the gospel to young and old.

## **Hurricane Katrina & Aftermath... Ministering to Those in Need (2005 – 2007)**

On Monday, August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast, devastating communities in three states, and leaving people from coastal Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana without homes. Several days later, levees broke in New Orleans, flooding large areas of the city. In Mobile, there were no shelters open to house the refugees escaping from the devastation. On Wednesday, August 31st, Pastor Bruce contacted the American Red Cross and Our Savior Lutheran Church was opened as a shelter for those displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Certified to hold a maximum of 65 people in the church fellowship hall, Pastor Bruce, members of the congregation and Red Cross volunteers found themselves with over 125 people in need of a place to stay and the resources to feed, clothe and “bed them down.” Pastor Bruce opened the sanctuary of the church and people slept on the church pews. Church members worked around the clock to house, feed and “lend an ear” to the victims of the storm. But the church needed more resources than church members could supply.

Church members recognized that the church needed to reach out to the community for resources. Some members and friends of the congregation arranged for radio, television and print media interviews for Pastor Bruce so that he could appeal to the community for support. The church qualified with the Bay Area Food Bank so that they could get food boxes to distribute to those

who needed food supplies. The congregation worked with other faith-based and community organizations to get personal hygiene materials, diapers, bedding and other needs for hurricane victims. Holy Trinity Lutheran Church helped by bringing ice every morning and offering to take children from the shelter as students at their school. The Mobile County Public Schools sent school buses to the church to bring children to the local schools.

Every day for over a month, member volunteers would fax the church's "wish list" to local and state media, and faith-based and charitable organizations nation-wide, organize donations, and distribute food, bedding, personal hygiene packs and other supplies to those who came to the church for any type of help. Church members also drove food and other materials down to Bayou La Batre and into Mississippi for distribution and worked with the Missouri Synod disaster relief groups in Mississippi.

The Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod responded to the published needs by sending aid and personnel from Wisconsin, New York and New Jersey, and getting other Lutheran churches to "adopt" the small, Mobile congregation as a Katrina Mission. The media contacts even resulted in an interview with the Boston Herald which spawned help from all over the Northeast. The Bay Area Food Bank and the church were featured in a story in the national Parade Magazine. In terms of aid to hurricane victims, the church and the American Red Cross have conservatively estimated the number of people helped with food and supplies at over 5,000, with the number of people sheltered at the church as 280 (some short term, some long term).

The church shelter was closed at the end of the month of October, 2005, with three remaining Katrina victims being transferred to a Red Cross shelter in Bayou La Batre.

In August of 2007, the air conditioning units in the church fellowship hall failed due to the heavy burden they had been under during and after the storm. The congregation had used all available resources to aid in the mission of helping restore the Katrina-ravaged Gulf Coast, and had no funds to replace the overworked AC units. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod responded by sending the congregation a grant to help them purchase new AC units.

### **Come & See What God Has Done (2011 and beyond)**

In June of 2011 after 40 years of ministry, Pastor Bruce retired as pastor of Our Savior congregation. The congregation had a dinner honoring Pastor Bruce and Pam and their eleven years at Our Savior, with a packed house. Pastor Bruce was honored as "Pastor Emeritus."

On Saturday, July 2, 2011, the Rev. Kurt Schultz, president of the Southern District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, ordained Adam M. Lehman into the Office of the Holy Ministry and installed him as pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church.

In January of 2014, Our Savior congregation reached its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. An anniversary celebration was held in May. Special guests at the anniversary dinner and celebratory worship service included the Rev. Dr. William Ameiss, Founding pastor, the Rev. Monte Frohm, Second pastor, and Rev. Bruce Hanson, Pastor Emeritus.

During Pastor Lehman's time as pastor, the church held its first Langley Festival to raise funds for a young family whose father had cancer. The church also had its first "Bethlehem Walking Tour," where the members recreated the "Little Town of Bethlehem" on the church property and invited the community to come "register for the Roman census," shop in the market, meet the shepherds, and see the new born King laid to rest in a manger. After the tour, the guests were served refreshments and treated to Christmas music. Over 300 people attended during the three-night event. Emphasis was placed on "being faithful" in Word and Sacraments. Pastor Lehman began a Wednesday morning children's chapel for the children attending Mom's Day Out and the Adult Bible Study group was invited to join in for prayer and singing.

Pastor Lehman and his family accepted a call to become Missouri Synod missionaries to Spain in March of 2015. Pastor Bruce Hanson served as interim pastor during the vacancy.

In May, Our Savior congregation was blessed with a new under-shepherd, as the Synod granted the congregation's call to another seminary graduate. On Sunday, July 12, 2015, the Rev. Kurt Schultz, president of the Southern District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, ordained David L. Witt into the Office of the Holy Ministry and installed him as pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church.

In 2015, the congregation saw the revival of a youth group, seven more families joined as members, Sunday school was moved to 10:45 a.m. (after service) so that more families with young children could attend, and the second Langley Festival and second Bethlehem Walking Tour were held.

So it is with rejoicing in many years of past blessings and looking forward to God's continued mercy in our future that we rededicate ourselves to His work in our community, our nation and the world. Being lead by the Holy Spirit, who creates faith through God's Word and Sacraments, we will continue preaching and teaching the Good News of salvation through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, and serving in West Mobile.

**To God alone be the glory!**