

## Salem Lutheran Church: 150 Years and Counting

More than 150 years ago, the congregation that became Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church of Gretna got its start, thanks to a group of German immigrants living in Mechanikham. To start off a celebration of that milestone, on January 1, Salem planned to ring its 100-year-old bells 150 times, says Carol Scioneaux. She heads a committee that is planning activities in honor of the anniversary.

"We will celebrate this momentous history all year in 2023 and invite you to be part of its activities," she said in a post on the neighborhood app "Next Door."

Salem got its start on September 3, 1871, when F. Gerhard and John B. Kundert were elected as church elders, and they organized the "German Evangelical Presbyterian Church of the North." The first pastor was the Rev. J. Gottlieb Gruber. Elected to the first board of directors were Ernst Robert, president; John Hepting, secretary; Louis Meier, treasurer; and Andreas Kleinmann and J.N. Laque, trustees.



The first building of Salem Lutheran Congregation, constructed in 1872. It faced Fourth Street in Gretna.

That December, preparations began for the first church building at Amelia and Fourth Streets. But according to an article in the Gretna Historical Society newsletter, the members "felt a strong call for the Lutheran ministry of their forebears." And in 1880, the congregation transferred to the

"German Evangelical Lutheran Salem Congregation in Gretna."

By 1912, a building committee was appointed to consider building a new church "to replace the rapidly deteriorating first church." Familiar names were on that committee – Dr. Charles Gelbke, chairman, and members Richard Thalheim, William Kleinpeter, Ernest Strizinger, William Gruhler, Henry Schiffler and Henry Kleinpeter. Construction began in 1913 for the new church, facing Fourth Street at the current site of the Parish Hall. The third and present church faces Amelia Street; it was constructed and dedicated in 1951.

"Because of Covid there has been a little delay but we are honoring our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary this coming year," said Salem Pastor Larry Beane. "We're planning once a month on having something to remember our anniversary."

Celebrating the church's century-and-one-half birthday is "really extraordinary," Pastor Beane said. "Gretna is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, and St. Joseph Church is the hub of the community. For us to remain a part of Gretna for so long is really wonderful."

Stay tuned for more information to come as Salem plans remembrances during 2023.



Salem Lutheran Church today.