

OUR JOURNEY CONTINUES

**40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
FOUNDING OF A CONGREGATION**

1970 – 2010

LORD OF LIFE LUTHERAN CHURCH

THE WOODLANDS, TEXAS

(3801 South Panther Creek)

DEDICATION

This historical narrative is dedicated to the charter members of Lord of Life Lutheran Church. Those founding families acted upon their vision to establish a church in this place and persevered in faith to grow the congregation into a significant community of active believers. We especially honor those charter members that were here at the inception of Lord of Life Lutheran Church and have remained faithful throughout its existence to this 40th Anniversary milestone.

Willard and Linda Fischer
Laura Stovall
Martha Patrick
Jean Slentz
Bill Zoeller
Ervin and Joyce Schoch



**Lord of Life Lutheran Church
The Woodlands Texas
Our Journey Continues 1995-2010**

"For the LORD your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through this great wilderness these forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing." Deuteronomy 2:7

Moses and the Israelites came to realize that forty years is not an insignificant amount of time. With our charter date May 2, 1970, God did not place LOL in the desert to wander forty years, but put us on a purposeful journey together. At times we doubted and sometimes it seemed about as hot and difficult as trudging through a desert, but the Spirit was always there to lead us forward. Together we sustained each other.

- 40 years of worship services, prayer, praise, sermons, and songs
- 40 years of forgiveness granted
- 40 years of bread and wine given and shed
- 40 years of sharing the peace of Christ
- 40 years of care for toddlers in the nursery
- 40 years of Sunday School both teachers and students
- 40 years of Bible study and sharing the faith story
- 40 years of social service and witness to the community and world
- 40 years of council and committee meetings
- 40 years of diligent staff work and support
- 40 years of pastoral care for members and others
- 40 years of support of local needs like Habitat for Humanity and Food Pantry
- 40 years of fellowship welcoming events, of potlucks and dinners
- 40 years of special projects and interim groups to build buildings and renovate
- 40 years of budgets and financial matters
- 40 years of giving time and talent
- 40 years of youth activities
- 40 years of coffee served
- 40 years of Sunday bulletins printed and folded
- 40 years of faithful benevolence given for the work of the church at large
- 40 years of grass mowed, walls painted, and floors cleaned
- 40 years of working behind the scenes quietly advancing the work of the Lord
- 16 years of golf tournaments

Forty years of life together with faithful service to each other, the community, the nation, and the world are accomplishments deserving our honor and observance.

Our desert has been the world in which we live and work, a landscape and environment that sometimes appeared as hostile as the Israelites faced in their exodus. We find our oasis in The Woodlands and surrounding neighborhoods. It is our comfort zone, a place we can come back to from the midst of the storm. The story of The Woodlands is not insignificant in itself. The history of The Woodlands is integral to the history of Lord of Life Lutheran Church (LOL). We were there in the beginning days, when Panther Creek, the second village, was only on the drawing board. Early negotiations placed our new church building on the edge of the forest. LOL was the third building in Panther Creek after Interfaith facility and McCullough High School, across the street from our church. The first location, and first five years of LOL, was across I45 in Oak Ridge North, approximately where the bowling center now exist, only to be subsumed by the need to build an overpass from Robinson Road to Woodlands Parkway. At the corner of Panther Creek and Glen Loch, on a cold January 14, 1979, a shovel was plunged into the earth and a new location for LOL was prayed over and dedicated to the work of the Lord.

Lord of Life celebrates forty years of existence and witness to the faith during 2010. The first years of our congregation, from 1970 to 1995, are covered in the history previously written for our 25th anniversary. This can be found at the latter part of this publication. This is to update our journey together over the past fifteen years. We do this not to present this as a boast of our successes but to remind one another that we exist for a purpose. That purpose is not of buildings and naming of employees but of binding ourselves together so that our response to the needs of people among our members and in the world can be multiplied by our corporate efforts. We can do more together than we can do by our own efforts.

We are designed in this manner by the leader of our movement from 2000 years ago. He clearly asked his followers to go into the world and to minister to the sick, the needy, and to the least of these, to spread the Word and to baptize in his name. We have an eternity to glorify God, but only a few short years on this earth to serve one another. Read in Matthew chapter five “The Sermon on the Mount”. The Gospel stands as our charter founding document and directs our actions as people of God. Nothing is mentioned regarding our primary focus as the maintenance of institutions. It is a tangential and necessary function to organize our work together but not the product of how we are to be known. We learn that love is the greatest commandment. We know that hope forms the skeletal part of our faith. The Spirit, true to the promise, has guided and certainly led this congregation of people known as LOL. Following is our story, in abbreviated form, as we lived out this command over the past few short years.

The history of Lord of Life like all history is a subjective matter. It can be written differently by any person who picks up the pen. It can offend some for what is included or omitted, or it can be a list of facts only, without the connective tissue of narrative.

This is an attempt to be as inclusive of facts as possible and at same time provide as much of the “story” of our life together as a community of faith. Errors are those of the writer only.

Suburbia in The Woodlands has come of age. The first generation of residents have handed off to the second. Over 90,000 residents now call The Woodlands home and many more in the surrounding area. It is amazing that only 50 years ago this was largely quiet forest only occasionally interrupted with the sound of timber saws and with only a few logging trails cut through the dense under growth vegetation. Panther Creek and Bear Branch were not names generated by a planner’s computer for suburban streets, but descriptive names of something elemental in days gone by. The old and tall virgin timber pines up to five feet in diameter were long ago cut and shipped to the hungry and developing areas in the East and to the burgeoning Texas cities. A few hunting cabins and a few scattered homes are all that occupied the area where we now live, work, shop, and attend school and church. About 2400 persons per square mile now live within this approximately 17,000 acre community.

Originally, the valuable timber was harvested in earnest when the railroad tracks were laid through the dense forest in the mid to second half of the 1800s, roughly parallel to I45 going north and into East Texas. Sawmills and small communities sprang up all along the rail line including Conroe’s Station, Medley, Egypt, Tamina, Spring, Cypress, Rayford, Westfield, Aldine, and Haltom, located somewhere on the back side of what is now Oak Ridge North near the rail bed. It was probably little more than a side track clearing in the forest to load rough sawn timber to flat cars picked up by a wood burning steam engine. Most of these named places are now lost in the fog of history. Prior to small villages that began to appear, early maps simply labeled the entire area as “Heavily Timbered with Pine and Oak.” In the early 1900s, Grogan Lumber Company, and later Grogan Cochran Company, removed most the timber from the area around Tamina and Shenandoah, and then merged with Lone Star Lumber Company of Magnolia to move south and west into what is now The Woodlands area.

Timber continued to fall up through the 1950’s when in 1964, George Mitchell purchased the first 2800 acre parcel with the idea to create a new community. The Woodlands Corporation was an extension of Mitchell Energy & Development. More adjoining land was acquired and long time sportsmen in the area complained about the loss of their primeval hunting grounds.

The first homes were built in 1972, in the neighborhood village of Grogan’s Mill. Officially The Woodlands marked the grand opening in October 1974, with the vision that this would be a master-planned New Town. This was HUD designation and experiment offering Federal loan guarantees to developers that would incorporate social and environmental conditions as a model for what could be done for new developments “Designed with Nature”. Urban sprawl was seen as out of control, therefore Title VII was an attempt to create a model for survivable communities, not just housing in subdivisions. A number of these ventures around the country failed, while two including The Woodlands were major success stories. The population from 1990 to 2000 increased

over 90%. Clearly residents found the resulting development of the master plan a very positive and appealing design. Villages continued to be added as more homes, residents, and businesses were added. Now we have Panther Creek, Cochran's Crossing, Creekside Park, College Park, Indian Springs, Alden Bridge, Sterling Ridge, and Town Center all organized into "neighborhood villages".

Not only would The Woodlands be a place to live, but also a place with significant employment opportunities as businesses and offices steadily move to this locale. Some of the major employers include Chevron Phillips, Anadarko Petroleum housed in 32 story headquarters building, Baker Hughes, CB&I, Hewitt Associates, and many others. Retailers and commercial space exploded around The Mall which opened in 1994. The expansion created Market Square and Town Center with high-rise office buildings and over 150 restaurants and half mile River Walk which features Waterway Taxi. The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion, regional concert venue, The Woodlands Resort, theaters, and golf courses round out the first class offerings. Golfers consider themselves in paradise as they can choose among seven major courses within The Woodlands and adjacent areas.

Part of the original design laid the groundwork for social infrastructure, chiefly by establishing Interfaith of The Woodlands. The intention was to offer services as multi-denominational agency that include Child Development center, Employee Assistance Center, Food Pantry, Family Services, Senior Services, and much more. It was instrumental in attracting religious establishments to The Woodlands. Churches followed the population increases and were part of the Master Plan. In a large part they were located next to schools so that parking lots on school property could be used for weekend services. More than forty churches now call The Woodlands home. Our own long time member, Don Gebert, the first manager and employee of Interfaith, can now look back with great pride at what the initial efforts have produced over the years in terms of social and human relief and support. In 1999, he was named Hometown Hero honoring his early and continuing contributions to The Woodlands as a true hometown to its residents. In addition, the original Interfaith building now on renamed Interfaith Way was named the Don and Barbara Gebert Building.

Schools, mostly in the Conroe Independent School District, were constructed to keep pace with the fast growing population. Now some pupils in The Woodlands attend Tomball ISD. The Woodlands High School, before the opening of College Park High School, educated over 4,900 students. TWHS has been included in Newsweek's list of best 1000 high schools in America. More than ten private schools are located in The Woodlands including The John Cooper School and The Woodlands Christian Academy.

The people of LOL live and work in the larger community of nation and of the world. Events have shaped our thinking, challenged our belief systems, and we should enumerate what members of our congregation have faced in the past fifteen years in terms of turmoil in the world. We do not live in an insulated cocoon but in the world where events shape our thoughts and fears. Indeed, what a world we faced at the end of the 20th century and first decade of the 21st century! Future members of LOL should

know that the human experience in this period of time was life, as in all other periods of time, filled with problems, difficulties, and struggles which have existed for a millennium and which will continue. We are privileged to have been the first generation in The Woodlands and to establish the Lutheran presence in this new place. With that task came a myriad of decisions and difficulties to face.

Over arching this period is the quantum shift of our feeling of insecurity and mistrust in looking into the face of terrorism, and to those with core beliefs to hate Americans of all kinds and nature and to the extent that they will go to any length to destroy innocent people and disrupt our way of life. If not by fear, we certainly have been forced to view and think suspiciously of all groups of people that may seek to do us harm. The effect of how we deal with terrorism invaded our life on a daily basis. Societal and political views became more extreme and polarized, dividing people into sharp groups that on a whole range of issues tend to widen the gap of what we can agree and how we can get to agreement and consensus. This effect reaches into the church at the local congregation level and at the national level as well. It is a response to the accretion of fear and mistrust we have all experienced during this first decade of the 21st century.

It is instructive and essential to present the backdrop of history that took place since our 25th anniversary in 1995. Our life together at LOL remained stable and one characterized by faithfulness to our vision and purpose in this place. Worldly events have not torn us apart but in some ways brought us together to share concerns and to pray for the loss and pain suffered. We need the comfort of the community of believers and not the feeling of floating free in a strong current without support and direction. The church cannot fix all ills and rage against evil in the world but we can share the sustaining strength we receive from our sure knowledge of salvation and in the peace and comfort we receive as the people of God. For the future, come what may, we have each other and we know to whom we cling in the storm.

The Oklahoma City bombing of the federal building in April 1995 shook our world when 168 people died at the hands, not of foreigners, but of our own citizens. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated at a peace rally and cultists in Japan attacked a Tokyo subway killing eight people and injuring thousands. An attempt was made a year earlier to bomb the World Trade Center but failed except to cause a lot of damage and panic. Of course a lot of good things happened as well. Netscape debuted along with Windows 95 and the dot com boom began. The Dayton Peace Accord ended the wars in Yugoslavia.

In 1996, the Unabomber, Kaczynski was arrested in Montana, ending another period of fear and anxiety. The US military barracks were destroyed in Saudi Arabia ending the life of 19 soldiers. A month later Flight 800 from New York crashed killing all on board. We lived through the story in England involving the divorce of Princess Diana and Prince Charles. Lance Armstrong was diagnosed with cancer. The Atlanta Olympics suffered two killed and 200 injured when bomb was exploded in the crowded pavilion. Nintendo 64 was released and Dolly the first cloned sheep was born.

What a strange and sad story as we started 1997. Thirty nine members of the Heaven's Gate Cult in California thinking a spaceship would take them to the passing Hale Bopp comet committed mass suicide. Princess Diana was buried in an emotional event with the countless of the world watching on live television. Mother Teresa died a week later. Our minds were diverted from all the bad news as we were entertained with the opening of the movie Titanic, the biggest box office success to that point in history and Harry Potter was published by J.K. Rowling. Even our leaders gave us reason for despair. President Clinton in 1998 admitted to the Lewinsky affair and the House approved impeachment inquiry.

Nature continued to provide evidence of our fragility with earthquakes and Hurricane Mitch which devastated the Caribbean while the worst storm since Andrew in 1992 hit Florida causing severe damages. Swissair flight 111 from New York to Geneva crashed off Nova Scotia leaving a mystery as to what or who caused the plane to crash. Three men associated with the KKK brutally dragged a black man to his death just a few miles to the north of our area. John Glenn, age 77, returned to space on board the space shuttle lifting spirits everywhere. We watched the International Space Station launched, the final episode of "Seinfeld," and Michael Jordan retire, for the first time.

In 1999, our world was shaken again by the Columbine tragedy where two students on a shooting rampage killed 12 students, 1 teacher, and themselves in Colorado. We learned that even our schools are not a safe place. In Turkey, we heard about 13,000 people killed in one of the most powerful earthquakes ever recorded. John F. Kennedy, Jr was killed in a plane crash in July of 1999. The entire country waited and watched with the family, hoping that it was not true and that he survived. A co-pilot was suspected of deliberately crashing another plane off Nantucket with 217 people on board. Close to home another tragedy occurred in November at Texas A&M when 12 students were crushed in the log collapse being built for the bonfire tradition. We feared for our kids going off to the college. In the political world, George W. Bush declared his candidacy for president in 2000.

Nothing can be stranger than the paranoia related to the Y2K hype and scare. Billions of dollars were spent and billions of man hours spent fearing what might happen to computers and software when the clock changed at midnight December 31, 1999. Impending doom caused by the Y2K bug did not happen. The world continued on as before.

The Decade of 2000s will surely be known as "The War on Terrorism". Events of historic proportion changed the collective psyche of the nation, sometimes pulling in one direction and then in the other. Instability in many domains of thinking set in. The 2000 census revealed an increase in population by 13% up to 281 million citizens with the south and west receiving most of the increase. This had far reaching implications with the increased surfacing of fear related issues for our borders, language, and culture, especially with regard to the illegal immigration issues. That along with anti-American sentiment around the world began to have impact on politics and society. George W.

Bush, defeated Al Gore for the presidency in a disputed election by a ruling that Florida would go to Bush by 527 votes. With the populace so evenly split, the result brought problems for governance and ultimately our diplomacy around the world.

We were devastated on September 11, 2001 by the attack on the two World Trade Center buildings in New York. Within a few minutes world political tectonic plates shifted dramatically. Terrorists hijacked several airliners simultaneously and crashed two into the Towers, one into the Pentagon, and apparently another intended for the capitol or White House crashed in a Pennsylvania corn field. We stood in absolute shock as nearly 3000 souls were taken that day in the airline crashes. We suffered the unthinkable, an attack in our homeland. We could only surmise what might come next, bombing of large cities, ports, chemical plants, and much more. Islamic fundamentalists were quickly identified as the radical group Al-Qaeda led by Osama bin Laden as the perpetrators. Shortly thereafter anthrax attacks occurred in New Jersey against government and news organizations. Also by November, the US along with British military, attacked Afghanistan in the War on Terrorism, the Taliban, and Al-Qaeda. It was not long that the Taliban abandoned the capitol city, Kabul. We feared for the Winter Olympic Games in Utah the next February, but they proceeded without incident.

Our own Pastor Kevin travelled, in April of 2002, on behalf of our local synod and LOL, to New York to assist Lutheran churches in the area coping with the tragedy. He stated that "it just seemed like the right thing to do." The tragedy touched many people, some who knew those that were lost, and many people stuck were in airports and could not return home when air travel was suspended. Pastor Kevin preached at King of Kings Lutheran Church in Melville, Long Island as part of the mission to support the New York area still suffering in grief and shock.

In September, 2002 George W. Bush addressed the United Nations and warned members that Iraq posed a grave danger to the world and that the US would act unilaterally if necessary. The Congress gave the president authority to use military forces if necessary to counter the actions of a rogue dictator. The War in Iraq began the next March to remove Saddam Hussein from power. In April, Baghdad was under US control and Saddam Hussein went into hiding until found in December of 2003.

On top of all this in the early years of the new century, we faced the corporate scandals primarily highlighted by the collapse of Houston based Enron. With the unbelievable fall from one of the top innovative and strongest corporations in America to full disintegration, many in our church and community suffered personal repercussions in the wake of this economic tragedy, losing employment and retirement savings funds.

Earlier in February, the Space Shuttle Columbia exploded over Texas during reentry, killing all seven astronauts on board. The nation was focused on NASA and space travel and the questions of whether it was worth the costs involved. The year 2004 ended with the reelection of George W. Bush over John Kerry by 50.7 % of the popular votes and 286 Electoral votes. Then on December 26, the terrible Southeast Asia tsunami occurred following a strong earthquake in the Indian Ocean. World relief effort was

mobilized to assist in an area that lost two hundred ninety thousand people, the greatest humanitarian tragedy in history.

In 2005, we were uplifted when Lance Armstrong won his 7th straight Tour de France, overcoming cancer and recovering completely, and then the Space Shuttle Discovery returned to space and back safely. The war in Iraq continued in earnest and then at home Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans area breaking levees and flooding the below sea level city. Over 1300 persons perished in one of the worst natural disasters to hit the US.

A few weeks later Hurricane Rita, another monster storm in the Gulf of Mexico threatened and scared the Houston area. What ensued was the largest evacuation panic seen in Texas since the Run Away Scrape in 1836 ahead of Santa Anna's invading armies. All highway arteries leading out of Houston were completely grid locked for two days stranding motorists in hot automobiles, with children, pets, and without food, water, or fuel. Members of LOL mobilized to help however necessary but the overwhelming need was monumental along I45. The storm actually moved further east with little damage to the Houston area but major affects to Beaumont and Lake Charles area. It took all of 2006 and beyond to begin to repair the damage from Hurricane Katrina. Thousands of New Orleans residents were displaced and were still housed in many cities around the south.

The economy continued to shift to the pressure of the online electronic industries displacing many brick and mortar retail establishments. Wal-Mart in moving into practically every community in the US with large discount stores played a major role in changing the face of local economies. The one billionth song was downloaded from the internet music store, Apple iTunes during 2006.

President Bush ordered in early 2007 a troop surge of 21,500 for the war in Iraq to stem the continued and renewed violence. The result showed positive results but was disappointing on the political front within the Iraq government. Baseball suffered bad public relations with the revelations of steroid use. Our collective admiration was shaken for sports figures and called into question. Soon after in August 2008, we were elated after Michael Phelps, a US Olympic swimmer won eight gold medals.

The next election for President started early and then captured our interest with nominations putting Barack Obama, Joe Biden, John McCain, and Sarah Palin into the national mix of emotions and debate. Before the end of President Bush's term, in October, the economy came under intense pressure with the stock market dropping precipitously after the development of the housing and subprime mortgage crisis and oil prices increasing to over \$140 per barrel. A \$700 billion bailout, Emergency Economic Stabilization Act was enacted to assist Wall Street and banks. The candidates for president both endorsed the measure. Our economic world was rocked as literally trillions of dollars in retirement accounts were lost to the stock price declines.

Barack Obama took the oath of office as the 44th President making him the first African-American to be elected to this high office. Big government spending expanded by hundreds of billions of dollars under President Obama thereby causing grass roots anger and some 750 protest Tea Party meetings. The divisions and polarization of opinion have created hard feelings from our national collective conscious to individuals and to members of our congregation. Joblessness increased climbing to over 10% nationwide. Our area may have suffered slightly less, but it is not of comfort to those that lost their long held job and security. The H1N1 virus was deemed a global pandemic by the World Health Organization, the first such designation since 1967.

On September 13, 2009, Hurricane Ike struck the Houston area causing major damage to the local infrastructures. The Woodlands was not exempt. Many large trees were lost damaging homes, autos, churches, and businesses. The electricity grid was lost for up to three weeks for some in The Woodlands and surrounding area. Flooding in neighboring areas caused extensive damage to homes. Members helped in many ways to alleviate the suffering and loss to other members and to others in the community. This was not a short term response but carried out over the next several months after the storm.

We ended 2009, with announcement of another troop surge this time to Afghanistan of up to 30,000 troops in effort to decrease influence of the rising Taliban militia groups. On Christmas Day 2009, a Detroit bound Nigerian citizen tried to ignite a bomb to destroy an airliner from The Netherlands. He was apparently a 23 year old Muslim extremist, a soldier of the enemy in the War on Terror. We began the decade engaged in this war and we ended in the same manner. There seems to have been no diminution of hatreds and little desire to stop the fighting and killing. We remain, as a nation, with the mindset that we will continue to suffer the consequences of terror. Standing for good, fairness, justice, and pleading for peace seemingly leaves many with a hollow feeling.

As members of LOL, we meet every Sunday, to reconfirm our conviction of faith. In Luke, chapter eight, we can sense the fear of the storm. *“But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy. And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was calm. And he said unto them, where is your faith? And they being afraid wondered, saying one to another, what manner of man is this! He commands even the winds and water, and they obey him.”* We share their fears, tossed about with the disciples, in the small boat out on the Sea of Galilee, in the midst of this the fierce night storm. These are fisherman familiar with the storms on this inland sea and are well aware of danger they found themselves. He assures us that the raging storm will not take us down. He sees our fear and calms the storm with words of the faith. We are united, not divided, about what we believe: that Jesus lived, that he died, and that he rose to take his place in heaven, securing for us the redemption of our sinful lives on earth and a place in eternal life, therefore what manner of distress can overcome this promise?

The history of LOL is not about world events in history or how The Woodlands has grown in the past fifteen years, although these things have shaped our members and our life together. It is about the people of our congregation, and those who have joined with us, who over this period have been faithful to the calling to be servants in the world, the same as we know about how Jesus lived his life. We cannot save the world from dictators, prevent natural disasters, or direct government to our satisfaction, but we can witness to the faith by our actions that model we know to be the core of The Gospel message. By this we shall be known. LOL has a history of strong service to individuals and to the local community and to the world at large. Our actions are important and can be described as Good Works, but it is the spirit and model of our behavior presented to the world that is really reflective of our commitment to what we believe. As Senior Pastor Charles Kindsvatter (Chuck) would quote from a plaque on his wall, “The main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing.”

In 1996, we continued our journey together having celebrated our 25th anniversary in September of 1995. We observed the occasion with a 2nd Annual Golf Tournament at the North Course Country Club, a potluck dinner and dance and special worship services with special guests including Kurt Johnson, the original organizing pastor at LOL. Our Mission Statement was formed to give us focus during this period in our journey together “Sharing the love of Christ as a community, with the community.” That same year Susan Hoffman became Director of Music and LOL provided strong support for a new ELCA mission in The Woodlands “Spirit of Joy” that began officially in April of 1996 with Pastor Tom Grevlos as organizer and developer. A number of members of LOL attended the first inaugural celebration worship service March 2, 1997 with a baptism, special music, and champagne for communion. The theme of the day was “Jesus Feeds the 5000... not your Ordinary Picnic” along with aptly chosen opening song “Coming Alive.”

The following year Stephen Ministry program was established with a core group that was commissioned as our 1st class on February 8, 1998. In January of 1998, Pastor George Bement attended the annual National Prayer Day in Washington D.C. with the President in attendance. The church council approved a 3rd worship service to begin in February with the original intent to offer a somewhat more personal and “less liturgical setting” with the hope of attracting non-church goers in our community. The design was “a different church service that breaks from tradition.” The first service was attended by 174 worshippers on March 22, 1998. Three services made it necessary to encourage parking across the street at McCullough High School. It was well received by members and has continued as “New Life” Sunday morning offerings to this day.

A major and long term vision was realized with the dedication on April 26, of a ten rank Austin Opus 2106 pipe organ. It was built in 1948 for First Baptist Church in Camilla Georgia and was used until 1993. Over one hundred families contributed to a fund to have the organ rebuilt and renovated for use at LOL. Fund raising from July 1997 allowed for installation to be complete by March of 1998. It was first used at a Wednesday Lenten service on March 4. Hoisting the main components of the air box equipment into the space over the alter area was quite an engineering feat for Paul Sonnemann, Phil Scheidhauer, and their assistants. The Organ Committee was

comprised of Dean Cortwright, Richard Denne, Susan Hoffman, Bonnie Iverson, Bruce Johnson, Mark and Susan Ruch, and Mike Nicolosi, Paul Sonnemann, Bill Zwerneman, Pastor Chuck, and the church council with President Doug Nelson. Recitalist Ronald Wyatt filled the sanctuary with a new sound on the Sunday dedication of the organ April 26, 1998. What some termed a “Pipe Dream” had come true.

LOL Associate Pastor George Bement resigned at the end of August leaving service October 30, to pursue other opportunities in Houston within the social ministry field. An appreciation Dessert Pot Luck was held in the evening to thank him for his good service at LOL. He served from February 1995 having moved from Maui Hawaii with his two sons. Early in his ministry with us he was in need of a used car and after mentioning this need on a Sunday morning a member came forward and donated a car for his use. The following Sunday he thanked the member for helping his situation with the use of a car, and then jokingly mentioned that if it was that easy, he had need of a boat as well! Pastor Don Gebert accepted the position as Interim Associate Pastor, while a Call Committee was established to search for a new associate pastor.

Pastor Kindsvatter was honored on September 11, 1998 with a congregational dinner and program for 30 years of ordination as a pastor of the LCA and ELCA. We viewed some original film and pictures from his early days of ministry in Baltimore, presented him with a commemorative history of his service, and many stories from his past, including statements from Bishop of the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod, Pastor Blum. Ordained in 1968, he served congregations in Baltimore, Dallas, Austin, and LOL The Woodlands.

The Pig Roast was strongly supported with Stan Humphrey as emcee and chairperson, John Converse in support of this fellowship event. Tommy Daniels Polka Band provided the traditional music. In October we continued with the annual Oktoberfest and Angels in the Woods Craft Festival, which started in 1997 as a way to raise funds for assistance to women's relief causes. For our fall Stewardship emphasis we started to use the Covenant Chest, that remains on the altar, to receive member pledges which would be retained unopened until the end of the year when they would be mailed back to the members as their own personal accounting to their commitment to the church and God.

We were busy in 1999, as we accepted the resignation of Susan Hoffman, as Director of Music, after 3 years of service. She resigned to take a position as Music Director at Elim Lutheran Church in Petuluma, California. At the same time we extended a call to Kevin J. Meyer to become Associate Pastor to begin in December. His first liturgy was conducted on December 12 the same day Dawn Denne led the “Spirit Song” choir group in a Santa Lucia Procession symbolizing a beautiful Scandinavian tradition and wonderful legend. Pastor Kevin brought a sense of optimism and energy to his work at LOL assisting with various ministries. He previously served in Seguin Texas as associate pastor and decided on the move with his wife, Kristin. Pastor Gebert “retired again” on the arrival of Pastor Kevin. That same year we purchased our first church van

to support youth activities and various ministries. That year our mortgage was refinanced to obtain a better interest rate.

Bad things can sometimes happen to good churches. We arrived at worship services on July 18, 1999 to find plywood covering fifteen of the large windows on the west side of the sanctuary, facing the wooded area, as they were apparently broken out three days prior by someone throwing rocks. Over \$10,000 in damage was incurred by this senseless act of vandalism.

LOL has a continual record for active participation in community involvement with significant assistance various programs that help those in need. Some of these include Interfaith Pantry, Homeless ministry, Habitat for Humanity, quilting ministry, Kids of the Kingdom, Hug-a-Bear, county medical clinic support, Blood Drives, Hand—me-up Shop, Adopt a Family, Ruth House, Global Barnyard, Stephen Ministry, World Hunger and Lutheran World Relief. Active supporters of Habitat for Humanity included Don Hynek, Paul Sonnemann, Dan Kaldor, Joe Cox, Bill Steiner, Doug Nelson, Bobby Blair , and many other unnamed participants spent a significant amount of time on home repair projects, like Christmas in October, for the poor, and in building several new homes supported by our congregation.

Spirit of Joy! Lutheran Church on January 30, 2000 celebrated Groundbreaking for their first building as a church home three years after their first service in Barbara Bush Elementary School in Alden Bridge. With ancient walk-behind turn-plows pulled through the earth by members and visitors, a new sanctuary and building was begun.

Space for Sunday Church School, Kids of the Kingdom, and other activities continually surfaced as an issue for our ministry. In 2000, plans were finalized after many months of work, to present a renovation and building project to the congregation at a special meeting October 1, 2000. The plan was approved for the expansion and renovations along with a Capital Fund Campaign. The office area and the educational space were the primary focus of the renovation. The plan would expand the current plant to completely fill out the allowable space on the lot. We could go up, as we did to add a second floor for educational and meeting space, but with that we were virtually “built out.” Our commitment was to utilize this space to its optimum, rather than consider a move of the congregation to a different larger footprint and building. The original sanctuary space would also be remodeled to make it a good gathering space for fellowship and large group meetings.

In 2000, we celebrated a special event on October 7, the 25th Annual Oktoberfest with more than 150 members and guests in attendance along with Pastor George and Ethel Falk from San Diego, who helped organize the original event in 1975. It was a testament to the desire to maintain our fellowship bonds as a congregation and to honor an ethnic tradition, of celebrating the harvest with food and beverage. In July of 2000, Michael Wutzke became Director of Music. He came to us with a rich background in music and voice. He graduated with a Masters degree in Voice from California State University in Northridge, having sung roles in a number of operas. Shortly thereafter

Randy Partain was hired as keyboard accompanist. With Michael came a renewed focus on worship music, choirs, instrumentalists, and solos. Bonnie Adams, as well, provided strong support for the keyboard at the New Life service and others. Some of the instrumentalists included Colin Adams, David French, Connie French, Bonnie Iverson, Tom Flink, and Chad Koch.

Spreading Our Wings building Campaign program was initiated on April 8 of 2001 with the intention to raise capital funds to begin the building project that was estimated to cost \$2.8 million dollars. The event was celebrated in a single worship service at McCullough High School across the street on Palm Sunday at 10 am. It was dedicated to receiving pledges in support of Spreading our Wings campaign. The ground breaking ceremony was held on June 24th and the chaos began shortly thereafter with the staff required to move to an apartment complex and heavy equipment greeted worshippers on Sunday mornings as they made their way over plywood walkways and around barricaded areas. By March 2002, Spreading Our Wings Crossed the \$1 million mark. Pastor Kevin, Jeff Harder Building Committee Chair, Joe Lazenby, Property Committee Lasison, and Nancy Hauglie as Interior Design Committee leader, and others formed the administrative and coordinating team for the ten month construction project. Spreading Our Wings was co-chaired by Stuart Burbach and Greg Gohlke while Congregational Life issues were led by Dawn Denne.

September 11, 2001 numbed the senses of the nation and members of our congregation for weeks as recovery and then cleanup began in New York City. It was devastating and left everyone in shock as to the reasons and meaning of what happened to our nation to be attacked in this manner. LOL continued with on with our prayers and assistance to those suffering in New York. Plans were in place to offer Pastor Chuck a sabbatical for three months beginning in August and to return in November. This was a recommendation by the ELCA for pastors to have an opportunity to take a break from day to day ministry and to regenerate. Pastor Kevin stepped up to aptly cover all the duties and provided a clear sense of continuity. Peggy Crowell, Director of Christian Education, guided us in Christian learning opportunities through Sunday School programs, First Communion classes, Vacation Bible School, adult education, weekday Bible studies, and youth events. The popular Kids of the Kingdom preschool, led by Randa Martin and her assistants served ninety four preschool children and their parents.

The building expansion was completed in 2002, with the staff moving back into new offices in May. With red paraments, on May 19 Festival of Pentecost, the new facility was dedicated to remember the gifts of the Spirit. Jackie Gardner made new banners and paraments for dedication day. Joe Cox, the Congregation President opened with welcome remarks and to set the tone for appreciation of strong support of our new facilities. Other leaders to speak included Jeff Harder as Chairperson of Building Committee, Stuart Burbach and Greg Gollke as Co-Chairs for the fund raising campaign. Jackson and Ryan Architects along with Alliance Construction Company also spoke about the completion of the project. In appreciation of our Capital Building funds 10% would be tithed as outreach with over \$100,000 shared with other ministries both local

and worldwide. This was a significant ministry in itself to be thankful for what God has provided to our congregation and to share with those of needs and difficulties.

With Rita van Sickle, as chairperson for the Youth Committee, and youth ministries led by Eva Sellman and Chris Koch many events, activities, and trips were organized by these energetic and creative members and leaders. A short list includes ski trips, Disciples Project, beach camp, river tubing, Synod retreats, college campus trips, mission trips to Children's Haven in Mexico, and the youth famous Garage Sales.

In 2002, the Pastor's Discretionary Fund saw an increase of over \$8000 raised at the annual Pig Roast led by Jack and Nancy Hauglie along with Pastor Kevin. Some in ethnic dress and all others enjoyed the bratwurst, German potato salad, sauerkraut, and Bavarian beverages. Also in 2002 after having moved into our renovated space fifty one new families were added to the rolls, 31 youth confirmed, and 26 in First Communion class. Membership at the end of 2002 was 1620 baptized members.

Rachel's Remnants, led by Ruth Ann Wietstruck along with Kathy Greer, Joyce Schoch, Iris Hynek, and others have made hundreds of beautiful quilts that have been sent around the world by Lutheran World Relief for comfort of the sick and dying. In 2002, Lutheran World Relief shipped over 28,000 quilts and blankets to refugee camps in Burma and Thailand border area. On Palm Sunday 2003, one hundred and one quilts covered the pews. All would be sent on Good Friday to Lutheran World Relief.

Community support continued by member involvement with the local free Community clinic serving those that do not qualify for private or government insured medical and dental services. Our own Dr. Joel Reed was a key organizer and supporter of this worthy cause for our community. In addition, Mike Foster continued to gather donated eyeglasses and to fit poor persons in Mexico that could not afford eye care as we know it. Angels in the Woods raised \$6050 to assist Women Helping Women, Agape House, WELCA, and more. Homeless Ministry delivered on a regular basis 275 sack lunches to Houston and Conroe. The Hinderlies mission work in Africa was supported in \$2200. For Adopt a Family, a Christmas ministry, we offered 293 gifts to those in need.

Joshua Wutzke suffered with Juvenile Diabetes while his brother Caleb was diagnosed with arthritis throughout his body causing difficulties to walk. A special benefit was held for the Wutzke family raising \$43000 to support their need for extensive medical expenses and to support the Diabetes Foundation and more. In addition, a "Love Changes Everything" concert on Feb 22, 2003, collected more funds for research in Juvenile Diabetes. The choir presented songs from West Side Story, Porgy and Bess, My Fair Lady, South Pacific, and more to round out a very entertaining evening.

In 2003, the seeds were planted for a third ELCA congregation in The Woodlands area. Five acres for church property was purchased with LOL pledging \$20,000 to support this new ministry effort. The intention would be to focus in the area to the west side toward highway FM2978 and Magnolia. The Senior High Youth went on a mission trip to Florida and attended the National ELCA Youth Gathering in Atlanta where 35,000

Lutheran youth came together to proclaim the future of the church. Day Camp at LOL was attended by thirty three children. Senior Sages offered a variety of events to those over 60 years of age.

A new sound system was installed in the sanctuary. The “new space works so well, and the design is superb” was the general opinion of all who used the newly renovated facilities. After focusing on the building project for so long, church life continued with all the normal activities with council meetings, upkeep of the building, printing bulletins and newsletters, alter setup, yard and landscaping work, room preparation, committee meetings, staff work, and the innumerable tasks performed as a sharing people called to be servants of Christ.

The staff of LOL in 2003 functioned well under direction of Pastors Chuck and Kevin along with staff Lanette Jackson, Carol Lazenby, Kathy Greer, Joe Lazenby as building superintendent, Peggy Crowell, Danae Wilker, Anne Swetich, Michael Wutzke, Nancy Steiner, Eva Sellman, Chris Koch, and Randa Martin. Phil Beckler served as President of the Congregation with Marlene Hoffheiser as vice-president. Indeed we continued with a “can do” attitude in Sharing the Love of Christ as a community.

Spreading Our Wings outreach tithes reached \$150,000 contributed to worthy causes. Susan Gallop headed the Long Range Plan to re-identify who we are and where we go into the future, envisioning the future all the way to 2010. Our webmaster, Brooks Valls gave our congregation a significant presence online with a well designed and well maintained website. Church communications began to move from the printed page to the new and growing online community. Bill Tomarelli and Catherine Nicolosi served as Congregational Hosts with their greeting and warm handshake on the sidewalk welcoming all to worship. Roger Kolm completed five years of faithful service as chairman of the finance committee. Veterans Day was observed at LOL in early October with forty seven photographs displaying members in all five services. Attendance of 1288 worshippers celebrated at Christmas Eve services, the highest in LOL history. Thank the Lord 2003 ended without “earth shattering” events occurring.

We began 2004, with an announcement by Pastor Kindsvatter that he would retire November 28, 2004. A transition team led by Marlene Hoffheiser was set up to coordinate a change in senior pastor leadership. We would say goodbye to Pastor Chuck with a dinner and program on November 5, and his last sermon to be preached on November 28.

We continued what we do at LOL offering worship services, Christian learning, and support of those in need. One hundred twelve quilts and sewing, school, health kits were sent to Lutheran World Relief. \$2400 was raised for Lutheran Helping Hands, we continued our Homeless Ministry, support of the Salvation Army, and received “Most Outstanding Award” presented by Interfaith for support of the Food Pantry, Hand Me up Shop, and Senior birthday parties. High school students were introduced to the congregation in May during worship services and honored for their achievement and told us about their plans for college and the years to come.

On May 23, Bishop Blum preached at the conclusion of Spreading Our Wings campaign. With the project at end, refinancing with Thrivent secured 6.125% interest rate on a twenty year note. Twenty eight members and friends went on a trip to Scandinavian with Eva and Eric Sellman along with Pastor Chuck and Barbara. A special note of 2004, included the death of beloved member Herb Dankert at age 94. Pastor Gebert celebrated 50 years of ordination. The transition team met with Bishop Blum and Dick Monson as candidate for Interim Senior Pastor. Habitat for Humanity had three homes working in Conroe. Youth went to Orlando Florida to work at Messiah Mission for Migrant workers. Over \$5000 was contributed to the ELCA World Hunger Campaign. Pastor Chuck retired from active ministry on November 28, 2004.

From Jeremiah 29:11 *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”*. We take strength in our search for a new Pastor. Pastor Richard Monson assumed Interim duties as senior pastor at LOL. Things felt a little different after fourteen years of good and faithful service by Pastor Chuck. He came in 1990, at a time when the congregation was twenty years of age and beginning to experience growth as a second generation congregation. His steady and sure leadership provided the environment and definition of who we are and the impetus for new families in the community to find a church home at LOL. We progressed from a congregation of approximately 450 to over 1500 members during this period. Don Gebert, Associate Pastor from 1990-1994, was also instrumental being in charge of Evangelism and Social Ministry. Pastors Chuck and Don proved to be an effective tag team. As was the saying “Don catches ‘em, Chuck “reels them in.” Visitors often found Pastor Don in their living room the same week of their visit and many joined as new members.

Pastor Kindsvatter helped to chart our direction and our life together as a family and how we will serve our calling in this place. He gave us permission to act and to reach out and to take risks of faith that might prove difficult but ultimately would define our nature and behavior. We would miss those big red apples shared on Reformation Sunday in honor of Martin Luther’s statement of hope that if he knew for certain that the world would end tomorrow he would plant an apple tree today.

In 2005 Pastor Cigich worked hard to gather interested people as mission developer of the new ELCA mission in The Woodlands. Other key milestones for 2005 included Carol and Joe Lazenby retiring from positions on the church staff, Pastor Kevin celebrated his 10th anniversary of his ordination, and Pastor Monson continued as Interim Senior Pastor.

On May 15, an outstanding candidate preached at all three services and was received in a reception in the Fellowship Hall after each service. In June, a call letter was sent to Pastor Beth Marie Halvorsen to be the new Senior Pastor at LOL. She accepted the call and agreed to begin her ministry on Rally Day September 11, 2005. Installation was by Bishop Blum and Rev. Dr. Ray Pichett, a professor at the seminary in Austin where she was enrolled. She was welcomed at the Oktoberfest with a Polka band and

good German food. Two hundred fifty attended the event. On September 14 we also said goodbye to Pastor Dick Monson who served us very well as Interim Senior Pastor.

Pastor Beth came to LOL from Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in Westlake area of Austin where she was on the staff as associate pastor for fifteen years. Prior to that, she was pastor in Galveston at Zion Lutheran for five years. Pastor Beth originally was a native of Illinois and a graduate of St Olaf College and Lutheran Northwestern Theological Seminary. She came to LOL while working on her Doctoral degree in Divinity at Austin Theological Seminary for which she would later receive the degree in May 2008. She arrived here with her husband Russell and daughter Sarah. Pastor Beth brought to us her well developed and enthusiastic message of the Gospel.

Hurricane Katrina required mobilization of relief efforts for victims by collecting needed items and \$5000 along with support of displaced residents. During the next month Hurricane Rita hit the Texas/Louisiana coast creating more need for shelter for evacuees. LOL responded to the Red Cross request to shelter 150 as a place to rest. The relief continued well into 2006 for aid to hurricane victims and other social needs.

On January 29, 2006, our first budget over one million dollars was approved at \$1,078,153 a milestone in our life as a congregation. The following Sunday we collected 410 cans of soup during Souper Bowl Sunday for donation to Interfaith Food Pantry. In March, Russell Halverson built the new baptismal font for Joyful Life in memory of long time member Merle Schilling. Merle was honored also by the Merle Schilling Memorial Pig Roast on April 26, 2006 in thanksgiving for his long time support of fellowship events at LOL.

A plan for Pastor Kevin was scheduled for a sabbatical in the fall of 2006. Senior High youth attended the National Youth Gathering in San Antonio combined with a mission trip to Reynosa Mexico. After a powerful sermon on July 16, 2006, as substitute preacher for the day, local psychotherapist, Joe Wise was afflicted with West Nile Virus as a very serious condition and with devastating symptoms. The Gebert Golf Tournament went over \$20,000 for the ongoing Gebert Mission and Outreach Fund.

In early November, Pastor Kevin sent a letter advising the congregation that he had accepted a call to Mount Calvary Lutheran Church in Boulder Colorado with December 17, as his last Sunday at LOL. Then during the next month Michael Wutzke informed LOL that he would also leave to take a position at New Life Christian Church Newtown, Pennsylvania. The following January, Pastor Don Gebert accepted the position as Interim Associate pastor in place of Pastor Kevin until a new associate could be found. Change is part of life; it is how we adapt that makes the difference and maintains our culture and personality.

In 2006, total outreach dollars reached \$300,000 aiding caring ministries and countless people in many ways. Average attendance was about 503 per Sunday. A \$10,000 gift to Joyful Life, the new congregation, supported the efforts of Pastor Scott Cigich. A Mission trip to Peru sent members of LOL, Joyful Life, Spirit of Joy, and

Living Word as representatives of peace and service to build relationships with churches in Lima, Peru. Anne Swetich gave an enlightening presentation of their trip and the relationships that were formed with individuals and congregations in Peru. Long time member Ursula Wagner passed away June 10, 2006 at Gander, Newfoundland, Canada while returning from a group trip to Europe. She was born in Frankfurt Germany and married to late Fred Wagner both strong supporters of LOL. It was Ursula and Pastor Falk that started the Oktoberfest celebration tradition at LOL that continues until today.

The Pig Roast in April 2007 raised \$15,000 for the Pastor's Discretionary Fund, an account that the Pastor could use to give aid to those in need, both to members and others. It has become a significant ministry which we support. Youth Garage Sales earned enough money to make another mission trip to Mexico. In May, Eva Sellman and Chris Koch resigned, by letter in the bulletin, from their long held positions as Youth Director and assistant. The Gebert Fund now reached \$265,000 and continued support to Resurrection Lutheran Church, a racially mixed congregation on the south side of Houston.

Pastor Steve Quill, retired senior pastor from New Hope Lutheran in Missouri City Texas from 1979-2006, began June 1, 2007 to serve us as Interim Associate Pastor allowing Pastor Don to "retire again." Steve has served congregations in Austin and San Antonio prior to Missouri City and has been active on numerous community, synod, and national committees. His years of experience yielded great sermons that enlightened and inspired us. He was keen to advance ecumenical interchanges and invited us to hear him speak at a mosque in Houston and to learn more about Islam.

During 2007, a new organizational design for LOL was put into place. It was the culmination of the Long Range Plan and committee considering feedback over an eighteen month period. Our basic ministry functions would be focused around Director and support teams in each area of our work together. It included Support Services, Ministry in Daily Life, Worship and the Arts, Community Life, Christian Growth, Outreach Ministries and the offices of pastors. This traditional ministry committee structure would be deemphasized in favor of this new design focused in the staff members directed by the senior pastor.

In August, of that year, Jennifer Seaks accepted the position of Director of Teen Life at LOL. She came to us from North Dakota where she served as Co-Director of Badlands Ministry and prior to that she was Director of Youth and Family Ministry at Holy Comforter Lutheran Church in Kingwood. The staff went on a retreat to Port O'Conner to meet with Pete Steinke, a leader in church life. They came back renewed and energized. Bev Bentzinger chaired "Gifts Galore" program to help members discover their unique gifts for working in the Kingdom.

About this time, a ground up effort by high school students Alana Berry, Linda McPherson, and Erin Moe offered a clear testament of what could be done by taking an active role. Their Silent Art Auction on November 10, to benefit Doctors without Borders raised over \$6000. In addition, we supported Danny Craft and his family with a

benefit dinner to help cover his excessive medical expenses during a forty nine day hospital stay and two surgeries.

We ended 2007, with the Advent sermon theme “The Light of Hope.” Average attendance in 2007 was recorded as 462 per Sunday morning. In 2008 the Frogs took over when two hundred fifty youth and adults committed to participate in Live Faith program in small group settings to study Christian faith and life issues based on the book “Frogs without Legs Can’t Hear: Nurturing Disciples in the Home and Congregation.” At the congregational meeting it was announced that the candidate for Associate Pastor withdrew his name from consideration leaving a decision as to how to proceed. We continued on with all of our activities including making walls for Habitat on Sunday mornings. Pastor Beth wrote in each Life Line newsletter her “From the Heart” articles that provoked thought and a call to the lessons of the Gospel.

We also marked 2008 by our own Carol Mann accepting in Rochester, New York the PGA First Lady of Golf Award. That same month of April, long time and loved member of LOL Jeanne Reed passed after an extended illness. Her infectious smile, cheerfulness, and long time support of LOL would be missed. Rachel Remnants carried on their ministry of quilting and sewing for refugees of the world. The Pig Roast raised yet again a substantial amount for the Pastor’s Discretionary Fund which would assist many in the congregation and the community.

Eagle Scout Grant Kern completed the meditation garden behind and next to the sanctuary. The Drama Ministry Team helped to raise \$3500 in support of “Water to Thrive” whereby water wells would be drilled in Ethiopia to provide clean drinking water to residents of impoverished areas. The annual golf tournament was postponed due to the visit of Hurricane Ike in September. Oktoberfest was dedicated to the assistance of hurricane relief efforts.

Toward the end of 2008, landscaping designed by Renee LeBon was put in place to enhance the entrance area to the church. It was part of the master renovation plan but delayed due to lack of original funding. With special gifts and memorials received, the work was completed with new paver stones put in place along with new shrub and flower beds. The circular pattern complemented the round stain glass window up above this area. In June, Vacation Bible School with theme “Power Lab” was attended by 160 kids, 24 youth helpers, and 50 adult volunteers

The beginning of 2009 brought surprise and shock. Pastor Beth in a letter of March 10, to the congregation announced her resignation as senior pastor of LOL. It was her decision to pursue a calling to develop her doctoral thesis based on “The Model of Centered Flexibility.” The continuance of this work would allow her ideas to be extended to handbooks, trainer manuals, DVD, and more as study materials and training sessions. With her resignation all work for calling an associate pastor was put on hold as well. Her last Sunday would be April 19, the Sunday after Easter. Interim pastor Steve Quill would stay to complete his agreed term until the end of May for which time we would need another Interim Associate pastor.

The Transition Team quickly assessed our options and in conjunction with the synod office chose Pastor H. Eldon “Cliff” Akerman as Interim Senior Pastor. He was selected from a choice of two very well qualified candidates. Pastor Cliff, native of Iowa, graduated from Hamma School of Theology, and was ordained in 1963. After coming to Texas in 1983, except for a short stay in Ohio from 1991-1996, he has served congregations mostly in the Houston area the entire time. He retired from full time parish ministry in 2003, at Holy Comforter Lutheran Church in Kingwood, Texas. Since that time he has served in six interim positions.

Not long afterwards in June, Pastor Nancy Simpson was chosen to join the staff as Associate Pastor being installed on July 26. She is a native Texan born and raised in San Antonio. Pastor Nancy received her Masters of Divinity from Lutheran Seminary Program of the Southwest in Austin, a division of Wartburg Seminary in Iowa. Her specialty is in multicultural ministry. After ordination at Atascosita Lutheran Church in Humble, Texas, she served at Grace Lutheran Church in Conroe. She is married to Dr. Greg Simpson and lives in Dayton, Texas.

The economic crisis of 2009 did not help matters, affecting the church financial situation in many ways but primarily reducing overall giving levels by seven percent over the past year. Good planning and financial management helped the church maintain programs as best we could. Membership at the end of 2009 was recorded as 1373 members and 1089 confirmed members. Clearly due to the pastoral transition period, the economic crisis, and moral and philosophical issues, like homosexuality that continues to confront the church at large, a number of members sought church homes in other congregations around The Woodlands. As Pastor Cliff stated in one of his sermons, “the church is at its strongest when times are difficult, not when times are easy.” We will continue on, to keep the faith, and to persevere. Early members of the church could easily conclude that this is but a small bump in the road. There was a time when keeping the doors open was the issue at hand. A single Sunday special fund raising averted the crisis and the church carried on.

In 2009 Beth Goetting took over as Director of Ministry of Daily Life from Bill Tomarelli and Vicky Roberts as Director of Family Faith Formation (formerly Christian Education). The pastors along with Mark Ruch taught confirmation classes along with a host of mentors who faithfully supported the youth of our congregation in this learning experience. Adult Sunday School classes remained strong with most Sundays offering several classes to choose from. Al Reese and Lois Payton faithfully continued to facilitate discussion for adults on Sunday mornings after many years of doing the same as a very complimentary team.

The ELCA Global Barnyard collected \$3700 for animals in support of efforts to alleviate poverty in overseas settings. LOL was the lead congregation in Habitat Home completed in June for a family of five. Meals-n-Wheels became part of ministry at LOL. The Gebert Mission and Outreach Fund increased to over \$300,000 as a result of the Golf

Tournaments and other giving to support various social ministry causes. The Life Line changed to primarily online newsletter, as sign of the changing times in technology.

In November we said goodbye to Dr. Randy Partain, as Director of Worship and Arts. Randy provided years of very creative and beautiful music to our congregation. He helped establish the Drama Ministry Team that provided well supported presentations including “3 Chicks – 3 Hunks and a Frog” in August 2009 that raised money to support “Water to Thrive” a ministry to Ethiopia. Randy was also instrumental in support of the Evening worship service evaluated as an alternative to Sunday morning settings. He released his piano instrumental CD “Mysteries” with nine original pieces based on the miracle stories in the Gospel of John. Marshall Maxwell remained as organist and keyboard accompanist and later Pamela Tamburello accepted the position as Interim Director Worship and Music. The choir director, David Plummer continued in that position. Sarah Schlack for many years now has provided leadership to the bell choirs that from time to time fill the sanctuary with the beautiful sound of bells and chimes.

The Senior Pastor Call Committee was installed in October to work with the Synod Bishop in locating suitable candidates for LOL. At the end of 2009 long time member and one of the founders of Rachel Remnants group, Ruth Ann Wietstruck died suddenly at the age of 67. She was a long time member of the contemporary music group Saints and Sinners and instrumental in getting the quilting and sewing group started many years ago. On Palm Sunday beautiful quilts adorned the pews in the sanctuary. She leaves a legacy of dedication and faithfulness to LOL. During 2009, we also said goodbye to Roger Jacobson and Gerald “Bud” Smith, both strong and faithful supporters of our congregation. Prayer quilts continue to be placed in the narthex as a call to prayer for those with serious illness, surgery, and to those facing chemotherapy.

Here we are in 2010, with earthquakes in Haiti and Chile that have devastated nations and the lives of millions of people. Wars continue in the Mid East and enough economic uncertainty for all. At our congregational meeting in January we elected several new council members and approved an optimistic budget for the coming year. Third graders accepted a Bible, in our long tradition at LOL, by receiving a drop of honey on each Bible to taste the word of God. From the Psalmist “your word is as sweet as honey.” At Ash Wednesday solemn service on February 17, we again were reminded of our temporal and mortal nature by the marking of the cross on foreheads using earthly soot, a powerful symbol of our elemental nature. Pastor Chuck is planning a summer group trip with members and friends to attend the Passion Play in Oberammergau Germany, presented at ten year intervals.

The Pig Roast this year, in April, is touted as the “Piggest Ever” dedicated to the support of long time members, the John Converse family who face difficulties as a result of John’s illness. After a long and wet winter we gathered on March 14, a beautiful spring day to worship and enjoy a breakfast presented by the Men’s Group also in support of member John Converse. The Drama Ministry Team presented as the sermon “The Prodigal’s Daughter.”

We end the decade Googling, texting, Facebooking, and Twittering and cell phones that seem to do everything but make coffee. Interpersonal social interactions seem to be changing with the new technology. It is mind boggling to consider what might be in store during the next twenty years of technological advances and how it might affect the life of our members and congregation. Through it all the “core” of what we believe does not change.

The Call Committee continues to work diligently to consider new candidates for our senior pastor position. The results of their work may only be known in the next history of LOL. “Above all, trust the slow work of God” seems to be appropriate as the committee identifies suitable candidates for our senior pastor leadership position.

Go forth, Lord of Life! Our journey continues!

“This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health but healing, not being, but becoming, not rest, but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but growing toward it. The process is not yet finished, but it is going on. This is not the end, but it is the road.” Martin Luther 15th Century



In 1974, recently married and moved to Conroe, Kathy and I visited one Sunday at Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Oak Ridge North. If someone that day would have told me that thirty-six years hence, Kathy would be a member of the Congregational Council and I would compile and write the 40th Anniversary History of the congregation, I would have been quite skeptical of that prediction. We became members at Lord of Life fifteen years after that first visit. The Spirit leads. We must discern the path.

Larry Gaskamp
April 2010