

## Risen Savior Lutheran Church

On Sunday, July 20, 2008, the members of St. Martin Evangelical Lutheran Church and Emmaus Lutheran Church joined together in worship for the first time as Risen Savior Lutheran Church. Both congregations share a turbulent history going back more than 100 years. One would consider closing three times in its hundred year existence; the second would disappear by 1914, to be reestablished a half century later in 1966.

In 1882 Rev. Carl Hafner was called to serve at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Leavenworth. He was also elected to serve as the Kansas District President between 1894 and 1906. In conjunction with both these duties he established and served mission churches in the surrounding counties. Two congregations he started were at Wallula in the mid 1890s, a small farming community in northwestern Wyandotte County, and in Bonner Springs around 1903, a small town in southern Wyandotte County. In 1907 a newly graduated seminary student, Carl Demetrio, was called as the missionary Pastor for both Wallula, with 73 members, and Bonner Springs, with 49 members. Within a few months of his arrival the Wallula church was formally established as St. Martin and Pastor Demetrio called to serve it. He continued to minister in Bonner Springs as well as establish other mission churches in Tonganoxie, Jarbalo and Stranger Creek.

St. Martin and Bonner Springs continued to grow during his short tenure reaching membership highs of 100 and 60 respectively. Tragically in February 1910 Pastor Demetrio and his wife died in a local typhoid epidemic. Over the next few years ministerial support for the two congregations was provided by seminary students, sporadically by the Pastor serving St. Paul's, and a called minister who left within 14 months over a salary dispute. Both congregations suffered. St. Martin would struggle to maintain its existence until the economic boom after the Second World War, and by 1913 services at Bonner Springs were being conducted only monthly and drawing less than 10 people. Ministerial support ended and it was disbanded.

In 1966 a mission church in Bonner Springs planted by the Kansas District was reestablished by Rev. Wilfred Ziekert. The members quickly decided to establish a permanent congregation, and in 1968 Emmaus Lutheran Church was formed with Rev. Ziekert as the Pastor.

By 2007 St. Martin, now in Basehor as a result of a doctrinal dispute from the 1970's that split the congregation, was losing membership during a five year vacancy. That year a newly graduated seminarian, Robert Weinkauff, accepted a call to serve the remaining 30 active members of St. Martin. In Bonner Springs, Emmaus was deeply in debt and having great difficulty in meeting its financial obligations having never been able to satisfy the original loan taken out to construct the 1968 church.

At the September 2007 Circuit Council meeting Pastor Galean Burrows of Emmaus announced that Emmaus had received an offer to buy the church property and they were looking for worship space after the sale. Pastor Robert Weinkauff suggested to him the two congregations consider working out something together. This idea was met with mixed emotions by each congregation. Combining the two congregations had been discussed at least twice in the past 40 years and soundly rejected by both. However, a joint meeting was held in October 2007 by the officers of the two congregations; the result was simply to continue to meet and talk. By February 2008 it was obvious to most that merging was God's will, and six months later the two became one.

None of the people who celebrated that joyous event in July 2008 could contemplate at the time the blessings God would shower down on Risen Savior: membership increasing more than five times to over 300 new members; a beautiful traditional church to receive God's gifts in; more than 50 children

involved in congregation programs; an eleven-hundred pipe organ; and the resources to double the facility's size in just ten years.

All due to God's blessings - Praise be to God!