

# Christ Lutheran Church

## Newburgh, New York

A History of Lutherans in Newburgh



Woodcarving by Lucas Cranach of the church at Wittenberg  
It was on the door of this church that Martin Luther posted his 95  
theses.

## 1709-1752

It is an interesting fact that the history of the City of Newburgh is closely identified with the history of Lutheranism here. Newburgh was settled by Lutherans and was named by Lutherans. The first church to be built in Newburgh was a Lutheran church.

In 1709, Pastor, Joshua Kocherthal and 54 Lutherans from the Palatinate, a rich farming region of the Rhine Valley, settled on 2190 acres of wilderness along the Quassaick Creek. These Palatines were driven from their rich lands by land hungry monarchs. They were seeking a home and religious freedom. They had fled first to England, where Queen Anne recognized their plight and agreed to pay their passage to America. She knew these people could help settle her new colony in America so she first granted 2,190 acres of land, followed later by another 500. This land was called the Glebe grant and was set aside for the parish. The boundaries of these two grants extended from the Quassaick Creek north to Balmville and Middlehope, and from the Hudson River west to West Street.

The land was not fruitful. Since it was difficult to cultivate this rocky upland soil, in less than 40 years, a good many of the original settlers moved farther north to the vicinity of Rhinebeck, Kingston, West Camp, Albany, Germantown and other places.

As the settlers moved north, Rev. Kocherthal went to West Camp and traveled far and wide to carry on his work. He died at West Camp in 1719. His grave is still plainly marked there.

After Rev. Kocherthal's death, the Rev. Justus Falckner became pastor (1719-23). In 1703 he was the first man to be ordained as a Lutheran minister in the United States. He wrote one of the great hymns of our church which is still sung today: "Rise, Ye Children of Salvation". When Rev. Falckner died, his brother, Rev. Daniel

Falckner, took his place (1724-25). The settlements were so spread out that the pastors could not spend much time in any one parish. Following Rev. Daniel Falckner came Rev. William Berkenmeyer (1726-31), then Rev. Michael Knoll (1733-51).

About 1733, a 20 ft. square log church was built at Liberty and South Streets, at the present site of the "Old Town Cemetery". A bell had been given by Queen Anne for the Newburgh church. Since the church was not built until 1733, the bell was loaned to Trinity Church in New York City for 24 years until the Newburgh church could be built. The bell also hung in the Old Free Academy (which later became the site of the "Horizon-on-Hudson" school) for almost 100 years. The bell had an interesting history. In addition, it was hidden in a swamp for 30 or 40 years. The last trace of it was in 1833, when it was sold for \$21.75.

This period was one of dormant activity for Lutherans in the Newburgh area. After Rev. Knoll gave up his church work in 1751, attempts were made to keep the Glebe and the little church active. The Governor refused, however, to act favorably and the right to the Glebe for Lutheranism was not sanctioned by New York State. The little church was lost to the Episcopalians despite the fact there were more than 30 families of the Lutheran Confession as tenants on both sides of the River in the Glebe.

## 1876-1987

The history of our present congregation began in 1876. A survey was made of German families in the area to ascertain how many there were who would want a church of the Lutheran faith. It was determined that a sufficient number were willing to attend and support it, Fred Geier and John Fremb asked the Synod to send someone to organize a congregation. Rev. Gustave Borchard was sent on April 12, 1876. On May 12 the congregation was formally organized, the constitution adopted and the church council elected. The initial meeting place was in a chapel of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian church at First and Grand Streets at a rental of \$2.00 per Sunday. A Sunday School was also organized.

**Rev. W. R. Buchler  
1876-1878**

The first pastor of the congregation, Pastor Buehler, was called on July 7, 1876. During his pastorate the church secured its own place of worship by assuming the mortgage (\$3,200) of a church building located on Johnson Street. When Pastor Buehler resigned on June 18, 1878, the mortgage had been reduced to \$2,500. The building was destroyed by fire in 1983. At that time the building was not owned by the church

One of the oldest organizations of the church, the Ladies Aid Society was organized on October 13, 1876. Until it dissolved in 1996, this was the only organization in the church with a continuous history coinciding with the congregation's.

**Rev. F. C. Fickeisen  
1879-1882**

Pastor Fickeisen was called as Pastor in November of 1879 and served until April of 1882 when he received a call to serve in Ohio.

**Rev. Charles Christian Manz  
1882-1890**

During Pastor Manz's term, the communing membership increased to 139 with 105 persons enrolled in the Sunday School. This was all attributed to the Pastor's youth and vigor, both being crucial in the continuing life of a struggling congregation. Lutheranism had been reawakened in Newburgh. The mortgage was reduced by another \$700.

On November 3, 1889, the congregation was incorporated as the "Evangelical Lutheran Congregation at Newburgh, Orange County, New York. On December 7, 1890 Rev. Manz resigned to accept another call. An additional \$200 was paid off on the mortgage.

**Rev. Emil F.C.A. Meyer  
1891-1893**

Under Rev. Meyer's pastorate the interior of the church was made distinctively Lutheran. The Altar, Pulpit and Lectern secured at that time are still being used in our present church. Pastor Meyer died on March 16, 1893 at the age of 27. His brother, the Rev. H. C. Meyer, provided confirmation instruction and confirmed a class in April of 1893 at the request of the Church Council.

**Rev. William J.T.T. Junge  
1898-1900**

During the two years of Pastor Junge's service, a parsonage was purchased at 14 South Miller Street for \$2,800. Five members of the church loaned the church \$1,000 and a mortgage of \$1,800 was taken. To help finance the church the minister was required to pay an annual rental of \$125. During Pastor Junge's pastorate, an evening service in English was introduced and in January of 1899, the Young People's Society was organized, this group combined later with the Brotherhood to become known as the Lutheran Fellowship Guild. Pastor Junge resigned in August 1900.

**Rev. Charles William Valentine  
1900-1905**

During Rev. Valentine's pastorate, the debt on the parsonage was reduced and the pastor was given the use of the house without payment of rent. The congregation received the first large bequest of \$500 from an estate and the church was to maintain the family plot in Woodlawn cemetery. Another member presented a building lot which was later sold. Rev. Valentine had married a member of the congregation during his ministry here, he resigned to accept a call to Toledo, Ohio.

**Rev. P.F.J. Becker  
1905-1906**

During the ministry of Rev. Becker, the remaining debt on the parsonage was almost cancelled. The interior of the church was renovated. Pastor Becker introduced the complete liturgy for the full English evening service. In August 1906, Rev. Becker accepted a call to St. John's Lutheran Church in West New York, New Jersey.

**Rev. F. W. Behnke  
1906-1918**

In November of 1906 Rev. Behnke became our pastor. Among many improvements were the electric lights in the church auditorium donated by the Luther League; (a society for younger members, organized in March of 1908). The new heating system in the church and parsonage was donated by the Ladies Aid Society. Other memorial gifts were the Communion set (used at present) given by the Confirmation classes of 1915 -1918. Five stained glass windows were dedicated as memorials at this time and are in the present nave. A two-manual electric organ was purchased and dedicated in January of 1909. Pastor Behnke accepted a call to Brooklyn in 1918.

**Rev. George J.V. Schorling  
1918-1928**

Pastor Schorling began his pastorate in Newburgh in December of 1918. The following month English services were begun on Sunday mornings as New Common Service books were introduced. The stained glass windows that now hang over our main front door and the Crucifixion window above the altar were dedicated.

The Confirmation League, the Women's Missionary Society and the Brotherhood (which later merged with the Young People's Society) were established. The latter organization later became the Lutheran Fellowship. A church paper ("The Messenger") was

published by the Brotherhood . A school of religion was conducted during the week. During this same time the congregation invested the legacy of \$1,000 for a building fund to establish a new church.

Pastor Schorling's pastorate covered World War I and twenty men from the congregation served, two losing their lives. The National Lutheran Commission's service medal was distributed to all men who served. In October of 1928, Rev. Schorling accepted a call from Zion Lutheran Church in Brooklyn and submitted his resignation.

**Rev. Paul Wasmund  
1929-1935**

In January of 1929, Rev. Wasmund came to Newburgh from Liberty, NY. The church was then located at Johnston Street. By 1930 all services were in English. The property on which our church is now located was selected, purchased and paid for, and during these years the vision of the present church evolved. The altar, 7-branched candelabra and missal stand still being used were given to the congregation. A memorial fund was established and many gifts were presented to the church. Pastor Wasmund left the church to join his father, also a minister on Long Island.

**Rev. Ernest French  
1935-1948**

The greatest monument of Pastor French's ministry is our present church building. In 1936, the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church and the 227<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lutheranism in Newburgh were observed. In that same year, the decision was made to construct the new church on the property purchased earlier. The money was raised by selling the Johnston Street Church, the South Miller Street parsonage, the reserve in the Memorial Fund, loans from members, friends and private bonds and pledges. A bank loan of \$30,000 was also granted.

Ground was broken on June 2, 1937 and the cornerstone laid on July 25. The church was completed and Dedication Ceremonies were held on December 12, 1937. The beautiful stained glass windows and the Crucifixion window above the altar had been moved from the Johnston Street location and The Lord's Supper Window was given as a memorial to the sons of Mr. and Mrs. Gerow who had died in World War II. Other church furnishings were given as memorials.

The parsonage on Roosevelt Place was built in 1938. On July 9, 1944 the 12 Apostle windows (located on each side of the large stained glass windows) were dedicated. Rev. Henry Cornish, the first son of the congregation to enter the ministry was ordained and installed as pastor of the church in Nanuet, New York.

By the time Rev. French left to accept a call in Buffalo in 1948, the bank loan on the church property had been liquidated as a gesture of recognition for his many years of faithful service.

**Rev. John W Klahn  
1948-1962**

In May of 1948 when Rev. Klahn became Pastor, our congregation had come to extend over a large territory. To better serve the members two Sunday morning services and Sunday school were established.

During Rev. Klahn's pastorate, three more young men of the congregation decided to become ministers and entered the seminary, George Handley, William Rittberger and Fred Bechner. Unfortunately, Fred passed away before completing his studies.

The stained glass windows in the Narthex were dedicated during this period as memorials, one in memory of Gretchen French, wife of Pastor French. The window in the cloak room was dedicated in memory of all those who made the supreme sacrifice in World Wars I and II.

Many changes occurred in the Newburgh church during the 50's one of those being the establishment of a church in Walden by the Missouri Synod. A number of parishioners transferred to the new church. By this time the property committee had recommended refurbishing particular areas of the church that needed attention. Those same areas have recently been updated again thanks to the present property committee on the recommendation of the council.

**Rev. Richard Siemann  
1962-1981**

An amendment was made to the constitution lowering the voting age of members from 20 to 16 during Rev. Siemann's pastorate, as well as changing the name and title of the church from "Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church", the name under which it was incorporated to "Christ Lutheran Church".

In October of 1966 the formation of 24 congregations in the counties of Dutchess, Orange, Sullivan and Ulster becoming the Hudson District, now called a Conference. Our present Pastor is now serving as Dean.

The Barton Street parsonage was purchased in 1970. It was intended that the parsonage on Roosevelt Place be used as an annex for meetings, Sunday School overflow and a counseling service, which at the time was administered and sponsored by area churches. The space was donated by our church as it's share in the expenses for same.

In September of 1972 first communion age was lowered to 5<sup>th</sup> grade level students following a Synod Task Force study led by Pastor Siemann who had been appointed by the Synod to head the study. A Youth Choir was also organized, encompassing students in Grades 3 through 8.

In 1972 a new Synod was also formed becoming the Metropolitan New York State Synod, of which our church is a part.

Pastor Siemann accepted a call to a Lutheran Church in North Boston, NY in 1981. Shortly after his departure from the church his young son, Eric died and the church established a memorial fund in his name.

**Rev. Kurt Ottway  
1981-1982**

Following Pastor Siemann's departure and a new pastor being called, Pastor Ottway, formerly of King of Kings Lutheran Church, located in New Windsor, served as an interim pastor, with great capability, love, caring and sensitivity.

**Rev. Barry Hawkins  
1982-1989**

Pastor Hawkins was installed as pastor of the church on June 6, 1982. Attendance and membership increased appreciably and many new groups were established. A contemporary worship service was held at 9:30 a.m. to coincide with Sunday School and the traditional service was held at 11:00 a.m. The use of the old parsonage was reactivated as the "Crossroads" – a community activity place which is still in use and a dedication ceremony was held with the Synod and the Dean of our conference participating.

In 1989 Pastor Hawkins resigned to become an administrator for an Alcohol Rehabilitation Program at Mercy Hospital in Port Jervis, NY.

**Rev. Gregory Tennermann  
1989-1990**

Pastor Tennermann served as interim pastor following Pastor Hawkins' departure until the call was placed and accepted for a new pastor. During this time the Allen Organ, presently in use,

was purchased using money from the organ fund established under Pastor Hawkin's pastorate.

**Rev. Frank Wilhelm  
1990- 2003**

On February 4, 1990 Pastor Wilhelm was called to serve our congregation. He had served as a pastor in churches in Ellenville, Buffalo and Stanfordville, New York as well as serving as Coordinator of Lutheran Family & Community Services for several counties.

The German language Christmas Service which is still conducted annually was introduced during Pastor Wilhelm's pastorate as well as multiple services for Easter and Christmas and the Acolyte-Crucifer program was reintroduced.

In 1994, Marilyn Fleming, who had been the organist and choir director at Christ Lutheran for 28 years retired. At that time several faithful volunteers filled the void, one of them being David Anderson. David served as an organist until his untimely death in August of 2011.

Orange County Safe Homes, presently occupying our Roosevelt property, started using the facility during this time, rent free when the YMCA closed.

Pastor Wilhelm retired in 2003 and moved to Kingston, NY. He died in 2010 and a memorial service was held at Christ Lutheran Church.

**Rev. Michael Church  
2003-2005**

The Rev. Michael Church is a son of the Hudson Valley. He was born in Kingston, New York and raised in Woodstock. During his

time as Interim Pastor here at Christ Lutheran, he lived in Poughkeepsie where his wife was an Assistant Pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church. After his ordination, in 1996, Pastor Church served for three years at St. John's Lutheran in the Bronx. He later served as an assistant at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Farmingdale. In addition, he has served as interim pastor at three other congregations. Since 2009, he has served with his wife, the Rev. Terri Luper Church, as Pastor/Developer of the International Church in Cluj, a shared mission of our synod and the Evangelical Church in Romania.

Pastor Church holds a B.A. from Vassar College, a Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary, and a Master of Sacred Theology from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He was an exchange student at the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, in Kerala, South India.

As a scholar, he has a special interest in the history and theology of Christian worship. He has published articles in *The Journal of Anglican and Episcopal History, Worship, Pro Ecclesia, and The Essays and Reports of the Lutheran Historical Conference.*

The Churchs reside in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, with their son, Theodore.

**Rev. Ernst A. Mossl**  
**2005-present**

Pastor Ernst August Mossl was born August 13, 1964 to Ernst and Anneliese Mossl of Kingston, NY. He has two sisters, Barbara Claunch and Andrea Noel. Barbara is a Lt. Colonel in the Air Force, and Andrea is a professor at the State University of New York at New Paltz.

Pastor's father worked as a navigator on a ship in the merchant marine for forty years, retiring in 1984. His mother stayed home to raise the family until the children were all out of high school. She then earned her associate's degree in data processing from Ulster

County Community College and worked for the County of Ulster for ten years, retiring in 2000.

Because of the German background of his parents, Pastor Mossl and his sisters grew up speaking German. They were raised in the Roman Catholic church.

Pastor Mossl earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminal Justice from the State University of New York at Albany in May 1986, and worked as a police officer in Richmond, Virginia from 1986 – 1988. In March 1989 he was hired by IBM where he worked for 12 years.

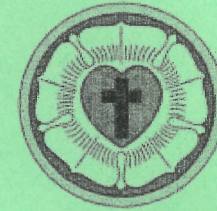
Pastor Mossl has two children with his first wife. Audrey is now 20 years old, is a communications major at SUNY – New Paltz, and is interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement. Conrad is 16 years old and a student at Wallkill Senior High School and active in choir, band and National Honor Society. Pastor is immensely proud of both of them.

In 2002 Pastor entered the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia “after a long spiritual journey and much contemplation and prayer in order to search out the strong internal stirrings that beckoned [him] to the ministry of Word and Sacraments.” After earning a Master of Divinity degree, he served his residency internship at Christ Lutheran Church, Newburgh in 2005 and was subsequently called as permanent pastor of this parish. He was ordained on July 19, 2006.

On July 30, 2011, Pastor Mossl married Theresa Ruth who is his sister Andrea's long- time friend and whom he knew at Kingston High School. They were wed in Ticonderoga, NY among family. The Rev. Richard Mueller, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Kingston, officiated. Pastor Mueller was Pastor Mossl's supervising pastor during seminary.

The congregation of Christ, Newburgh held a reception for Theresa and Pastor on September 18, 2011 to welcome Theresa to the

church family. Theresa and Pastor live in Modena and are looking forward to God's continued call to parish ministry at Christ, Newburgh.



This brief history, has been, for the most part, copied and condensed from one prepared by Florence Ekhardt and Alfreda Kastner Tesman in 1986 which was edited for the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration in 2001 by Allana Pitts Alexander. Many references to memorials have not been included. The church is grateful for all memorial gifts.

Prepared by Trudy Patrick with the assistance of her husband, William Patrick for the 135<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration and the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of Pastor Mossl's Ordination.

Reformation Sunday  
October 30, 2011