

Church History of St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Coral Gables

St. Mark's Lutheran Church was founded in 1950 and incorporated in 1951. Its sanctuary at the corner of Bird and LeJeune Roads in Coral Gables was dedicated in 1955. Its national affiliation has changed over the decades as various Lutheran bodies have merged, and today it is part of the **Florida-Bahamas Synod** of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (**ELCA**). Here is a summary of its history:

March 3, 1950 – Seventeen people meet at the home of Bertha Cline to discuss the possibility of establishing a United Lutheran Church in the Coral Gables area.

April 11, 1950 – Our first worship service is held in the original Coral Gables Youth Center (now the site of a Publix Market) under the leadership of the Rev. J.L. Frantz. Fifty-one people attend. On this same day, the Southeastern Regional Committee of the National Lutheran Council assigns an area to us for development. Pastor Frantz and the Rev. William S. Avery supply our pulpit and provide pastoral care through the next few months.

May 8-10, 1950 – A formal petition for occupation of our assigned area and for organization as a congregation is presented to the Florida Synod. The Synod, in turn, petitions the Board of American Missions on our behalf. We survey our assigned area, as required by the Board, on May 28th.

June 11 – The Board considers our request for a mission developer, and a call is subsequently issued to the Rev. W. Baxter Weant, pastor of Union Lutheran Church in Salisbury, N.C.

October 1, 1950 – Pastor Weant assumes his duties as mission developer.

October 15, 1950 – Pastor Weant celebrates Holy Communion with us for the first time, with 50 persons communing.

November 1950 – The Women of the Church organize with a charter membership of 42. Mrs. C.R. Lindquist is elected president. The Luther League is organized with W. Scott Tefft, Jr. as president.

November 19, 1950 – St. Mark's United Lutheran Church is chosen as our name by popular ballot.

February 1951 – The Board of American Missions authorizes our purchase of a parsonage at 1426 Garcia Avenue, Coral Gables, at a cost of \$18,962.50. We raise \$1,800 as the down payment.

April 8, 1951 - Our first church council is elected. Members are Bertha Cline, A.F. Dickey, E.D. Hart, V.H. Julifs, C.H. Lindquist, P.D. Logendyke, A.S. Malone, C.E. Rogers, Mrs. Frank Shields, J.B. Sullivan, and W.S. Tefft, Sr.

April 15, 1951 – Our pulpit committee issues a call to Pastor Weant to serve as our permanent pastor. On the same day, we organize as a congregation. Pastor Frantz conducts the service, and Royall Yount, president of the Florida Synod, is the speaker. The roll of charter members includes 90 adults and 30 children. A constitution and bylaws are adopted. Following the service, we hold a community rally with the Rev. Dr. L.A. Thomas as speaker.

May 8, 1951 – St. Mark's is received into the Florida Synod.

June 13, 1951 – Twenty of our men organize The Brotherhood, with Robert Wavrek as president.

October 14, 1951 – Pastor Weant is installed as the first pastor of St. Mark's.

October 23, 1951 – We purchase 13 lots, valued at \$16,200, at the intersection of Bird and LeJeune Roads. (Charter member J. Fred Danker mortgaged his Danker's Motel Court on Southwest Eighth Street in order to help finance the construction project.)

December 1951 – The Coral Gables Zoning Board denies our petition for permission to build a church.

January 16, 1952 – The Coral Gables City Commission reverses the Zoning Board decision and grants us permission to begin construction. Preliminary plans are adopted, and A.F. Dickey is appointed chairman of the Building Committee.

April 19, 1952 – The congregation numbers 155 confirmed and 221 baptized members one year after its organization.

April 5, 1953 (Easter Sunday) – The goal of \$10,500 for the building fund is reached.

May 10, 1953 – The congregation chooses Norman Mansell of Philadelphia to design the buildings and Earl V. Wolfe as supervising architect.

January 1954 – Complete plans for St. Mark's are received and approved. Lyle Roberts, Inc., the low bidder, is awarded a contract totaling \$76,730 for construction of the sanctuary.

February 21, 1954 – Our Sunday School is fully organized, with classes for everyone.

March 21, 1954 – A groundbreaking ceremony follows the worship service, with Pastor Weant as liturgist and Synod President Yount as guest speaker.

March 22, 1954 – Construction begins. In the months that followed, many members visit the site, some on a daily basis, to watch the church go up.

April 11, 1954 – Our first confirmation class, consisting of five young people, is received into membership.

October 3, 1954 – We hold our first services in the new church building. Hundreds of visitors attended an afternoon open house.

January 16, 1955 – The sanctuary is dedicated. St. Mark's has more than 300 confirmed members and a Sunday School enrollment of more than 200.

January 1957 – A second Sunday service is added.

December 9, 1958 – The educational "L" wings are dedicated.

1959 – Pastor Weant resigns to accept a call with the Board of American Missions for the Florida Synod. The Rev. Charles Corbett (father of member Lois Higman) serves as interim pastor.

1960 – The Rev. Ralph Bergstresser is called as St. Mark's second pastor. Baptized membership grows to 750.

February 2, 1968 – Pastor Bergstresser dies unexpectedly. The congregation is served by interim pastors while it searches for new leadership.

September 1, 1969 – The Rev. J. Bruce Weaver is called as our third pastor.

1970s – The choir begins a Shrove Tuesday tradition with a pancake supper and program. A new Lutheran Church Women (LCW) group is formed. They publish a cookbook of favorite potluck recipes and provide new cushions for the chairs in the sanctuary. The chancel is refurbished and new paraments are purchased. The congregation gives \$10,000 to the Fair Havens Center.

February 1979 – The new Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW) is first used.

January 1980 – The Lutheran congregations in Dade County form the Metropolitan Miami Coalition. The Rev. Dr. Arnold Perry serves as executive director, with an office at St. Mark's, and he and his family join our congregation.

October 2, 1983 – Pastor Weaver celebrates the 40th anniversary of his ordination.

September 1984 – Pastor Weaver retires, and the Rev. Howard Wessling steps in as supply pastor.

September 1, 1985 – Pastor Perry is called as St. Mark's fourth pastor. The confirmation class begins a tradition of planting a tree on the church grounds.

June 10, 1990 – The English-speaking members of St. Peter's Lutheran Church, a bilingual Miami congregation, transfer to St. Mark's, and their pastor, the Rev. Charles Robertson, is called as our fifth pastor, to serve with Pastor Perry.

1990 – The chancel undergoes a major renovation. All the furnishings are removed, and the space is redone at floor level with a free-standing altar on a small raised platform, a reading desk, and new communion rails.

1991 – Purchase of an Allen Electronic and Lauck Pipe organ, built especially for St. Mark's, is approved.

November 7, 1993 – The new chancel is dedicated.

May 8, 1994 – The chancel is rededicated with Bishop Laverne Franzen presiding.

June 21, 1998 – Pastor Robertson retires. (He continues to provide contracted worship services and pastoral care until March 2002, when he relocates to the Orlando area.)

January 24, 1999 – The Rev. Jean-Pierre Marc-Charles, a member of St. Mark's who pursued ministerial studies, is ordained at our church with Bishop William Trexler presiding, and begins his service, under Pastor Perry, as our sixth pastor.

February 1, 2001 – Pastor Marc-Charles begins a ministry through the ELCA Division of Outreach to the Haitian community in the Miami Shores area. (He is installed as pastor of Miami Shores' Advent Lutheran on May 19, 2002.)

November 2001 – Parish Administrator Roy Bassave creates St. Mark's first website.

May 26, 2002 – For the summer months, St. Mark's goes from two Sunday services to one for the first time since 1957.

2002 – In June, St. Mark's replaces its 200 30-year-old seat cushions. In September it installs four stained-glass windows in the sanctuary, and in December it installs a large stained-glass window, donated by music director Dr. Jim Ewing, over the main sanctuary doors.

February 1, 2003 – Following its approval at the annual meeting, a contract is extended to the Rev. Ulrich Rosenhagen, who will devote half his time to St. Mark's and, in cooperation with the Lutheran Church in Germany, half his time to German citizens living in South Florida.

April 20, 2003 – Pastor Rosenhagen holds his first German-language worship service on Easter Sunday with attendance of about 80.

September 21, 2003 – The Rev. Ulrich Rosenhagen is installed as a pastor at St. Mark's (our seventh).

September 1, 2005 – Pastor Perry celebrates 20 years as our senior pastor.

April 2006 – Jeanne Batridge, a member of St. Mark's, is installed as our deacon.

April 20, 2006 – Pastor Rosenhagen announces that he is leaving in June to take a position at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

Jan. 26, 2007 – Music Director Dr. James D. Ewing dies unexpectedly. He is honored on April 15 with the dedication of the Christ stained-glass window in his memory.

February 1, 2008 – Pastor Frank Kopania is called for the shared St. Mark's-German ministry, which he begins in August. (The joint arrangement with the German Lutheran Church ends with his departure in 2014.)

2009 – Pastor Perry and Pastor Kopania begin providing pastoral services to South Miami Lutheran Church with the two congregations sharing the cost of salaries and benefits. (This arrangement ends in 2016.)

2011 – St. Mark's enters into a contract with the International Christian School, which provides pre-kindergarten instruction in German, Spanish, and Italian. Our Sunday School wing becomes ICS's Coral Gables campus.

May 31, 2015 – Pastor Perry retires after 44 years of ministry and 30 years of service to St. Mark's.

2015-2016 – St. Mark's is served by interim pastors Father Kevin Goodrich, O.P., (June-December 2015) and the Rev. Dr. Thomas Chamberlain (2016) while a call committee searches for permanent leadership.

2017- The installation of Rev. Pastor David O. Guss