

Zion's History – A Timeline

1825 The Erie Canal opens, connecting the Hudson River with the Great Lakes, and facilitating settlement and development of New York.

1832 Pastor Andrew Wetzel immigrates to the United States from Weilimdorf, State of Wuerttemberg, Germany. In autumn, Wetzel preaches his first sermon in Utica. The Pastor and his wife, the former Elizabeth Maurer, live in Verona, where a Lutheran congregation existed when he arrived.

The City of Utica incorporates in February.

1832-1840 Pastor Wetzel establishes missions in Utica, Rome, Boonville, West Leyden, Constableville, and Conrad Settlement. Walking long distances, he conducts services at each church once per month.

1840 Utica's population reaches 10,000, including about 400 Germans.

1842 The pastor's Utica congregation has grown to nearly 300 members and he spends most of his time there. Lacking a sanctuary, Roman Catholics worship with Wetzel's flock. Lutherans incorporate their society as "The United Evangelical Lutheran and German Reformed Congregation of the City of Utica." This was Zion's first name.

1844 Wetzel and his followers dedicate their sanctuary on September 29. Located on the corner of Huntington and Columbia Streets, the clapboard building is often called "The White Church."

1845 Pastor Wetzel displays Utica's first Christmas tree in the chancel of his church. He trims it with apples and flowers, attaches candles, and tops it with a star. Wetzel introduced Christmas trees at his Verona mission before this event occurred.

1846 The congregation starts its first Sunday school and an elementary school.

1848 Revolutions in European nations, including the German states, increase immigration to America. Wetzel's congregation grows.

1851 A fire destroys the church on February 27. The following day, the Church Council resolves to rebuild. A new sanctuary quickly rises at the corner of Fay and Cooper Streets and is dedicated in December.

1860 Pastor Wetzel establishes St. Paul's mission in East Utica. He preaches there on Sunday afternoons until our church hires the Rev. Gustavus Adolphus Schmidt to serve the mission in 1863. St. Paul's becomes a full-fledged church in 1868.

1860-1890 The Industrial Revolution makes the Mohawk Valley's economy boom. The textile industry thrives. The growth of Utica's factories encourages heavy German immigration.

1861 The Civil War erupts. Utica's German community contributes its share of soldiers to the Union Army. The war increases the demand for the products of Utica's factories.

1863 The New York Central Railroad connects to the Hudson River Railroad, opening the west to further development. The Homestead Act (1862) offers free western land. Thereafter, thousands pass through New York en route to new lives. Guaranteed factory employment encourages immigrants to settle here.

1865 The war ends. Pastor Wetzel helps many veterans secure their military pensions from the government.

1868 Our congregation enlarges its Fay and Cooper Streets' sanctuary to accommodate a rapidly growing membership.

1871 The German states unite under the leadership of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. Celebrations of national pride occur in Utica.

1877 Pastor Wetzel's church's name is formally changed to "The Evangelical Lutheran Zion Church of Utica, New York."

1878 Wetzel retires after forty-six years of ministry at Zion and in the greater Utica Lutheran community. The Rev. John Philip Lichtenberg is appointed to succeed him.

Members who support English language worship secede from Zion and form Redeemer Church.

1880 Andrew Wetzel passes to the church triumphant on August 17. Several thousand mourners gather at the family home on Whitesboro Street to bid their final goodbyes to "Father Wetzel."

Zion opens its elementary "School Hall" at 613 Columbia Street. Parochial education is common throughout Utica and the nation.

1881 Zion members who object to Pastor Lichtenberg's ministry organize Trinity Lutheran Church. This congregation joins the Missouri Synod two years later.

1882 During the 1880s, about 1,450,000 Germans arrive in this country, including a record 250,000 in 1882. Despite the Redeemer and Trinity secessions, Zion's membership steadily increases.

1886 The Rev. Reinhold Kessler, a son of Zion, is ordained in January in our sanctuary. Pastor Lichtenberg mentored Kessler, who taught at our elementary school from 1884-1886.

1887 Redeemer establishes Holy Communion Lutheran Church as a mission at the corner of Mulberry Street and Sunset Avenue.

1889 Pastor Lichtenberg leaves Zion in early May for a church in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. He and his family perish in the flood that consumed that city on May 31. The Rev. August Oscar Gallenkamp replaces Lichtenberg.

1890 Pastor Gallenkamp initiates English instruction in the Sunday school.

Utica counts approximately 4,000 German-born residents, plus several thousand second generation German-Americans. Two Catholic and five Lutheran churches serve that population. National institutions such as the *Maennerchor*, *Saengerbund*, and *Turnverein* thrive.

1892 After numerous disputes, the Council fires Gallenkamp. English lessons stop and the Council passes a resolution that states, "No child shall be confirmed in English." On December 12, John Carl Nestel, Pastor of Trinity Lutheran in Rome, replaces Gallenkamp.

The Rev. Carl Bergner, a son of Zion, is ordained at the First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Beardstown, Illinois.

1901 Financial pressures force Zion to close its elementary school on January 1. Pastor Nestel preaches his final sermon six days later.

Pastor Wilhelm Brucker succeeds Nestel in March. He contracts tuberculosis the following summer and, despite efforts by the nationally renowned Trudeau Sanitarium in the Adirondacks, passes to the church triumphant on August 6. On September 2, Otto Von Bueren takes over Zion's pulpit.

1911 The congregation rejects English language worship by a vote of 200-9 in November.

1914 World War I erupts in Europe. The United States remains neutral, but public opinion generally supports England, France, and Russia in their struggle against Germany and Austria-Hungary.

Zion's Council approves one service per month in English and increases this to two the following year.

1916 Utica's German-American community raises over \$8,000 to assist the needy in Germany and Austria-Hungary. Pastor Von Bueren preaches strong support for the German war effort from Zion's pulpit.

1917 A renovated School Hall is dedicated on January 18. The first floor contains a large auditorium/dining room, stage, and kitchen. The second and third floors house meeting rooms. Zion's "Crescent Dramatic Society" regularly uses the Hall for productions that draw large audiences through the 1920s.

Our church hosts a service that commemorates the 400th anniversary of the Reformation. All of Utica's Lutheran Churches participate. Zion also observes its 75th anniversary. Pastor Wetzel's daughters, Elizabeth Sloan and Ida Wetzel, are guests of honor.

The United States enters World War I. The Espionage Act (1917) and Sedition Act (1918) become law, allowing the government to suppress "anti-American" sentiments. German-Americans experience discrimination and persecution throughout the nation, and in Utica.

1918 Pastor William Carl Nolte begins his work at Zion on November 1. On Armistice Day, November 11, Pastor Von Bueren preaches his last sermon.

As persecutions of German-Americans increase, Zion's Sunday attendance falls significantly. This continues through early 1920. In response, Nolte and the Council publicize our congregation's patriotism. Newspaper articles depict a "red, white, and blue Zion."

1920-1929 The Roaring 20s witness tremendous economic growth. Utica prospers.

1920 - 1924 The sanctuary and Sunday school rooms of our Fay/Cooper Street building are thoroughly renovated. A three-arch motif highlights Zion's chancel. These building projects energize the congregation and it easily funds the costs.

1929 The stock market crashes and the Great Depression begins.

1930s Zion's Hall hosts numerous plays and celebrations in a congregational effort to promote "good times" during the Depression. A "German Group," formed to preserve their culture/language, sponsors well-attended programs. Our church establishes a Welfare Council to coordinate relief efforts for members. One third of the congregation's families depend on government or church assistance during this era. Nolte encourages members to give at least a quarter/week to the church.

1938 Carl Christian William Dabelstein paints the Good Shepherd mural above the altar of our church. Zion member Reinhold Pietsch, Sr., whose work adorns the Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C, carved this altar, given by the Ladies Aid in 1913.

1939 World War II begins in Europe when German armies attack Poland on September 1.

1941 In October, faced with a global conflict, the Council votes to eliminate German services. The German Group disbands. After the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor on December 7, the United States enters World War II.

Zion creates an honor roll of servicepersons and displays it in the narthex. By 1945, the roll will contain nearly 100 members' names. Pastor Nolte writes letters to every Zion serviceperson during the war. The Council sends Christmas cards to all.

1942 A "service flag," with blue stars for every member of the congregation serving in the military is placed in the chancel's right arch. Two gold stars represent the ultimate sacrifice made by two Zion members: Army Private First Class Frederick W. Doll and Marine Corps Staff Sergeant Henry W. Wolber.

Our congregation celebrates its centennial during May.

1945 World War II ends. Pastor Nolte resigns to accept a position as Director of the Lutheran Home, Clinton.

1946 The Reverend Lt. Col. Edmund A. Bosch accepts a call to become Zion's ninth pastor. The dynamic veteran chaplain of the United States Army is very popular and attendance increases substantially.

1946-1948 Pastor Bosch conducts several veteran-centered commemorations. Zion's service flag is retired on Armistice Day, 1947.

1946-1960s America prospers in the post-war era. The "baby boom" generation is born. Suburbs grow around cities. As demographics change, Zion's membership spreads throughout the greater Utica area.

1948 Council discussions, initiated by Pastor Bosch, focus on relocating the church.

1949 Bosch resigns to become a chaplain for the New York City Police Department.

1950 The Rev. John H. Sprock succeeds Bosch.

1951-1952 Zion holds summer services at WGAT Drive-in Movie Theatre, creating a unique ministry.

1957 The Council authorizes the purchase of property at the corner of French and Burrstone Roads, New Hartford, to build a new church.

- 1958 Groundbreaking occurs in June. The sanctuary's cornerstone is set on October 12.
- 1959 The "new Zion" is dedicated on All Saints' Day, November 1.
- 1960 The New York Lutheran Synod's convention, which includes the ordination of twenty ministerial candidates, showcases the church. The Rev. George R. Long, a Zion son, is ordained with the class.
- 1964 President Lyndon Johnson escalates the Vietnam War. Several Zion members serve in that conflict.
- 1966 Zion member/artist Willard Sauter unveils his "Christ Triumphant" mural, which stretches from the altar to the stained glass windows above Zion's chancel. A professor of advertising/design at MVCC, Sauter dedicates his work to the memory of his wife, Muriel. Over 1,000 people attend the unveiling.
- Redeemer and St. Paul's congregations merge to form Our Savior Lutheran Church.
- 1969 Private Alan Youngkrans, who was baptized and confirmed at Zion, sacrifices his life for his country in the Vietnam War. His parents, Alan and Edna, remodel the Fireside Room in his memory.
- 1970 Holy Communion Lutheran, founded by Redeemer in 1888, merges with our church. Members of Zion who supported English language worship started Redeemer in 1878. Framed in the context of a family, Redeemer can be considered Zion's "child," and Holy Communion a "grandchild." Thus, one could say: "The grandchild returned to her grandparent's home in 1970."
- 1971-1977 The Rev. Ronald E. Meyer serves as pastor.
- 1972 Kim Cappelli Marscher becomes our church's director of music. She continues her wondrous, inspirational work today.
- 1974 Robert "Bob" Hunter, our church's organist from 1965 to 2006, remodels and expands Zion's organ. The instrument is dedicated prior to a performance of Handel's *Messiah*.
- 1978-1994 The Rev. Paul D. Joslyn's pastorate energizes and grows the congregation.
- 1979 A day care/pre-school program begins.

1981 Zion embarks on a major renovation project that expands its physical plant into the parking area. The project involves installation of an elevator to facilitate access to the nave.

1984 The Rev. Marsha Irmer becomes Associate Pastor. Mary Etta Skinner, a daughter of Zion, is ordained in September.

1988 Pews are removed and others shortened in the nave to make that area more handicapped accessible.

1994 Pastor Paul retires and is honored with the title "pastor emeritus."

1994-2012 Pastor Roger Beiswenger leads Zion. Youth ministries receive a renewed emphasis.

2001 On September 11, terrorists attack the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The Sunday following, without prompting, Zion's congregation vigorously sings the first verse of "God Bless America" at the service's conclusion.

2012-2016 During a time of pastoral flux, the Rev. David Cleaver-Bartholomew serves as interim minister. The Revs. Jeffrey Kane, Janet Hoover, Ann Zimmerman, Eldon DeWeerth, Jennifer DeWeerth, and Anita Mohr also provide pastoral leadership.

2016 In September, the Rev. David Cleaver-Bartholomew is installed as Zion's 14th pastor.

2017 Zion's 175th and the Reformation's 500th anniversaries.