



**50 years of God's grace through  
Bethany Lutheran Church  
&  
Eternal Life Lutheran Church**

November 11, 2012 – Concord, California

## **+ In the Name of Jesus +**

November 11, 2012, marks the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of WELS members gathering as a church in Contra Costa and Alameda Counties. For 50 years we have gathered around God's Word and Sacraments. For 50 years God has blessed us through those means with faith, forgiveness and salvation in Christ. For 50 years God has enabled us to reach others with his saving Word. For 50 years God has blessed us with brothers and sisters in faith to share joys and burdens. Thanks be to God for these blessings!

As you read the history and enjoy the pictures that follow in this booklet, something that you will notice that is not part of our history is a permanent church building. We can't point to a grand structure and say "that is our church." We don't sit in seats today before an altar and pulpit of which we say "we've been gathering here, in this church, for five decades."

But a church is not a building or property or location. A church is God's people gathering together to hear His Word and receive his Sacraments. A church is God's people gathering together to worship Christ, to teach his Word to young and old, to spread that Word near and far, to serve God and others, and to support and encourage one another. Our history especially shows that. We have gathered in homes and various facilities in Oakland, Castro Valley, Walnut Creek, Antioch, Pleasant Hill and Concord. We have gathered under the name of Gloria Dei, Bethany and Eternal Life. We have been served by different pastors, teachers and congregation leaders. Our history has not been one of building and location, but of people gathering around the Word. And that helps us focus on the greatest reason for giving thanks after 50 years – Christ and his Word. Our history is as Christ said, ***"Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."*** (Matthew 18:20)

Thanks be to God for these 50 years of Christ being with us!

In Christ,  
Pastor William Kant

## 50 Years of God's Grace

The founding of what came to be known as Bethany Lutheran Church took place in Hayward, California, at the Robert Lehman home on November 11, 1962, by Pastor Robert Waldschmidt of Belmont and eight worshippers. Services there and later in Oakland, Castro Valley and Walnut Creek were held monthly. Weekly worship began in March 1965 at Jenny Lind Hall in Oakland.

Worship began in Concord in February 1966. Pastor Waldschmidt held evening services in the Veterans Hall at the corner of Willow Pass Road and Colfax Street with the help of Pastors Robert Hochmuth from Santa Clara and David Valleskey from San Jose.

Pastor Armin Keibel (with wife, Marion) was called from Los Angeles and installed in October 1966. The congregation organized in January 1967 and chose the name Bethany because there Mary sat at Jesus' feet doing the one thing needed – listening to his Word (Luke 10:39 and 42).





Through loans from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), Bethany bought 2.7 acres in Concord on Treat Boulevard, put in improvements, built a chapel, parsonage and school for \$265,000. Communicant membership reached 111.

In the early 1970s Bethany survived a controversy over the doctrine of church fellowship.

Bethany conducted a Lutheran elementary school for eight years from 1976 to 1984 with Richard Janke (with wife, Debra) and John Kanter (with wife, Nancy) as principals. Enrollment reached 21.



In 1990 the WELS California Mission Board urged Bethany to sell its property and relocate due to falling membership and difficulty repaying the Synod loan. Bethany sought opportunity in east Contra Costa County. Interim services were held at the Community Center in Pleasant Hill. Pastor Keibel retired in January 1991 after 45 years in the ministry.

Pastor Larry Pautz (with wife, Karen) was called from West Bend, Wisconsin. He arrived in 1991 and led services in the Center the rest of the year.



Bethany bought a parsonage on Freedom Way and three acres of land on Jeffery Way, both in Antioch. In 1991 worship services were transferred to a business complex at 1866 Verne Robert Circle in Antioch. Pastor Pautz served the Lord at Bethany for six years until June 1997, when he was called to begin a mission in Wind Lake, Wisconsin.

Pastor Robert Green (with wife, Jeanne) of Pleasanton served as Bethany's interim pastor for six months. During this time a self study was held with Pastor Robert Hartman of WELS to determine the viability of Bethany and what direction to take. At the end of 1997 Pastor Green took a call to Temple, Texas.





Carl Klein (with wife, Lurine) came from Wrightstown, Wisconsin. He received a limited call and was installed January 11, 1998. This call was made permanent in May 1998. Due to the high cost of our lease and limited growth, the congregation decided to return to

Concord. The parsonage and property in Antioch were sold.

Affordable space for weekly worship, Sunday school and Bible class was secured at the Farm Bureau Hall, 5554 Clayton Road, in Concord. A home for the Kleins was leased on Edmonton Way until they could move into a parsonage purchased by the congregation at 4190 Chaban Drive. Under God's blessings through Pastor Klein's ministry, Bethany grew to 58 communicants and 95 baptized members. In October 2001, Pastor Klein accepted a call to Glenwood, Minnesota.

The findings of the self study conducted in 1997 suggested that Bethany initiate a fresh start by relocating and changing its name. With the move from Antioch back to Concord, it seemed appropriate to follow through with a new name. Effective January 2002 the members of Bethany Lutheran Church transitioned to Eternal Life Lutheran Church and, soon thereafter, filed for incorporation as such with the State of California.

The name Eternal Life was chosen aptly. Through the Word of God and Sacraments proclaimed and administered here, the LORD offers eternal life for all – here and hereafter – through faith in the Savior. As St. Paul says, "The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

It was decided in 2002 to call and to share the services of Pastor William Kant (with wife, Jill) of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Vallejo. Under God's grace Pastor Kant continues to serve Eternal Life and Good Shepherd to this day.



Christmas 2011 at Eternal Life Lutheran Church

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## **Prayer of Thanks for 50 Years of God's Grace**

Father in heaven, we thank you for the many years you have granted us in serving you in various communities, primarily Concord – for serving the spiritual needs of the individuals and families that have come through our doors during these 50 years, including those in job transitions and those serving in the military – for bringing new born babes (infant and adult) into the Kingdom of God through Holy Baptism and for strengthening faith through the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. But most importantly we thank you for your Word that has prevailed in its truth and purity these 50 years. We ask you to continue to bless us as we look forward to serving you until that Day when you come to bring us with all the saints to enjoy that heavenly feast you have prepared for us. We pray this in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **For Builders Bold Whose Vision Pure**

*This hymn was the Hymn of the Day at our Anniversary Service on November 11, 2012. The hymn masterfully pictures God's guiding love as he gathers his people from every generation around his life-changing Word and sacraments.*

For builders bold whose vision pure  
Saw more than brick or stone,  
Who laid in hope foundations sure  
With Christ the cornerstone;  
For those who honored your commands  
And trusted your strong Word,  
Who offered faithful hearts and hands,  
We give you thanks, O Lord.

As here they raised a soaring spire  
Which thrusts toward worlds above,  
So may our prayers, like tongues of fire,  
Leap kindled by your love.  
And let your living Word descend  
As seed on waiting hearts  
And, fruitful, there its grace extend  
To earth's most distant parts.

Here saints newborn  
you generate  
Through water and the Word,  
Through bread and cup  
communicate  
The gift of Christ the Lord.  
We gather, Christ's own family,  
Christ's meal of love we share.  
Come, help us live in unity,  
Each other's burdens bear.



We come, O Lord, inheritors  
From those whose work is done.  
Lord, make us now contributors  
To years beyond our own.  
Let faith's enkindled flame not fail;  
Let love's best gifts increase.  
Let hope in Christ's sure Word prevail  
Till earth and time shall cease. Amen.

*Christian Worship Supplement, #775*

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# Eternal Life

LUTHERAN CHURCH

