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Redeemer Lutheran dedicated its new church building at 285 N. Dale St. in 1911.

19◀ REDEEMER LUTHERAN

"I always think of us as a rebel congregation," Rankin said.

In 1975 the congregation left the Missouri Synod branch of the Lutheran church and became affiliated with the more progressive Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which performs same-sex marriages and ordains women as well as gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people as clergy.

Redeemer has spent much of 2015 observing its 125th anniversary. A series of articles about the church's history, researched and written by Rankin, is posted on the church's website (redeemerstpaul.org). On Saturday October 24, the church will honor its German roots by hosting an Octoberfest that is open to the public. Then on Sunday, October 25, it will celebrate the anniversary of the church's first worship service, which happened in 1890 on Reformation Sunday, the day when Lutherans commemorate the 16th-century events that led up to Martin Luther's decision to break away from the Roman Catholic Church and start his own church.

For Rankin, the anniversary is as much about proclaiming Redeemer's future as it is commemorating its past. "Even though membership has declined, I don't see Redeemer as a dying congregation," she said. "We continue to attract new members, we have a wide range

of ages among our members, we're baptizing babies, and we get new people involved in leadership positions."

Redeemer has faced the same struggles that many congregations have faced in recent years, according to Erlandson, including declining membership. "The idea of (church) membership is being challenged," he said. "People like participating, but not necessarily in the traditional membership approach." He estimated Redeemer's membership at about 300, average attendance at Sunday worship at about 100, with up to 250 people in the pews for special occasions.

"But our ministry extends beyond Sunday services," Erlandson said. The church is open for evening meetings of Narcotics Anonymous and other support groups. It hosts town hall meetings and candidate forums. The congregation partners with nearby Benjamin Mays Elementary School to provide backpacks and other educational materials to students, and it provides space for the worship services of four other congregations.

"When I look back over our history, I'm struck by the struggles the congregation has faced," Erlandson said. "People have the misconception that the church had 'glory years' and is something less than it was. We've never been a wealthy congregation. Our members stayed here and faced the struggles rather than move to the suburbs."

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