



Redeemer Lutheran Pastor Jim Erlandson meets in the sanctuary with members of the church's choir just prior to their practice last week. PHOTOS BY BRAD STAUFFER

Saving grace

Summit-U church marks 125 years living in the image of its Redeemer

BY ROGER BARR

Lutheran Church of the Redeemer is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year with the same blend of tradition and rebellion that has helped it thrive for more than a century in St. Paul's historic Rondo neighborhood.

"We have traditional worship, but open minds and big hearts," said the Reverend Jim Erlandson, Redeemer's pastor since 1994. "People who come here come for traditional worship that is not archaic. We can be very eclectic, using many musical styles, but we have a social justice and an openness to us."

Redeemer was founded in 1890 as a German Lutheran church, but used the English rather than German language in its services—a rebellious choice in the late 19th century. The congregation was formally incorporated in 1891. Its first home was a former Presbyterian church at the corner of Lafayette and Woodward streets in St. Paul's Lowertown, which was then an exclusive residential neighborhood.

In 1910 the congregation broke ground on property it had purchased at the corner of Dale Street and Carroll Avenue. The new church was dedicated in 1911. A decade later, the congregation had outgrown that building and decided to construct an addition that was completed in 1922. In 1974 Redeemer added a new learning center on its west side. Used for its children's programs, the addition has also provided meeting space for groups in and outside the church.

Through the decades, the combination of traditional worship and progressive thinking has attracted a diverse membership. Longtime member Diana Rankin, who chairs the congregation's 125th Anniversary Committee, recalled how she and her husband joined Redeemer. "We had been looking for a Lutheran church in the neighborhood," she said. "Redeemer used the liturgy straight from the hymnal, and that's what brought us here. We keep coming for that reason, but at the same time the church isn't stuffy. It's warm and spontaneous."

The Rankins moved to Hinckley in 2003, but they remain active members at Redeemer, making the 180-mile round trip for worship

services every Sunday.

Dorothea Burns lived next door to Redeemer years ago when her husband became acquainted with some of the church's African-American members. Her three children started attending Sunday school there. She became a volunteer aide for one of the Sunday school teachers and later joined the church herself.

At Redeemer, Burns said, "I could go to a church and be accepted for who I am without a problem. It has been a church that has refreshed my soul and kept me going, made me feel accepted as a person, not just because I was black." Burns has served as the congregation's president and has been a steadfast member of the Altar Guild that prepares the Redeemer's altar for services each Sunday.

Erlandson estimates that 20 percent of the congregation's members are African American. Rankin, who is white, delights in the multicultural membership. She and her husband have two adopted children, a Vietnamese daughter and an African-American son, and her son was able to find positive role models among the African-American men at the church, she said.

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The view of a stained-glass window from inside Redeemer Lutheran Church.



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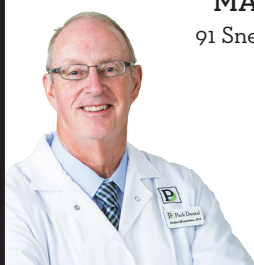


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