

## **ATONEMENT LUTHERAN CHURCH: Milestones**

- Seeing that expansive growth was on the way for the formerly rural **Wesley Chapel area**, in 1985 the Florida Synod of the Lutheran Church in America (predecessor to the ELCA) purchased a 13.3 acre site at 29617 State Road 54, between Saddlebrook resort and Boyette Road.
- **Pastor Matthew G. Cox** was called to be Pastor Developer of the new mission start along the State Road 54 corridor. In the summer of 1987, Pastor Cox arrived in the area along with wife Deborah and their two sons, James and Joel, and began calling on prospective members. **Worship began** at what was then J. F. Hunt's Restaurant on All Saints Sunday, November 1, 1987. There were 34 adults and 6 children present.
- After several years of discussion between the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), American Lutheran Church (ALC) and Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC), these church bodies joined together and, on January 1, 1988, officially formed the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**.
- Atonement Lutheran Church was **organized** as a congregation of the new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on Palm Sunday, March 27, 1988 at the Professional Building of Wesley Chapel Village Market. There were 103 in attendance, and an offering of \$639 was collected. Beginning with 117 charter members, Atonement developed into a congregation with many seniors, snowbirds and people with varied church backgrounds. The original mission statement read:  
  
*“We the people of Atonement Lutheran Church, called by the Spirit of God in our baptism, claim the gift of being a people touched by the grace of God for the purpose of sharing His unmerited love and forgiveness in our world...We live in a broken world as people of the cross. We follow our Lord, the servant Christ, into the brokenness: We welcome the stranger; We feed the hungry; We shelter the homeless; We visit the prisoner; We bless the sick. This is our vision for mission!”*
- From the first congregational pictorial directory: “**Atonement** – the word means at-one-ment. It speaks of relationship between God and a people called by his name, a people who bear the holy signature of Jesus upon their breast and upon their brow. Born of water and the Word, we are one with God...”
- On October 17, 1991, a congregational banquet was held at the Quail Hollow Country Club to view the model and floor plans for the proposed church building.

**“Together We Build,”** a Capital Fund Campaign was conducted to gather money and pledges to purchase the site and erect a building.

- A construction contract was signed in January 1992, with **groundbreaking** ceremonies held on Father’s Day, June 21, 1992. Because severe weather in 1992 stranded many people in Florida, Atonement welcomed many worship visitors that year. The building was completed early in 1993 at a cost of \$796,000. The service of dedication was held on Sunday, April 25, 1993.
- Early musicians for worship services included Daryll Morris and Pat Todes. Pastor Cox acquired a large, beautiful natural shell to use as a baptismal font. During this time, Atonement participated in a “Share” program, a giving tree, and Christmas Bazaar. Use of the church building was opened up to weight watchers, scouting groups, rotary, and AA meetings.

## Ground breaking held for Atonement Lutheran



Florida Synod Bishop Lavern Frazen (back to camera) officiated the ground breaking ceremony for Zephyrhills newest Lutheran Church. Atonement Lutheran Church will be located about 1 1/2 miles East of I-75 on S.R. 54 West. Pastor Matt Cox said the church has a stable base of 70-80 families regularly attending, and the new building could be completed as early as September.

- Early mission statement: “We the members of **ATONEMENT LUTHERAN CHURCH** are a called, Christ-centered, faithful family who have been enlightened and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to respond gratefully and joyfully to the gift of God’s daily grace, by bearing witness to God’s unconditional love

through word and sacrament, teaching and learning, service and support, in the community and throughout the world for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

- **Cottage meetings** are held in 1995 with consultant Gus Smith, looking for ways the congregation can grow. That year, secretary Pat Smith worked on moving church records from card file onto computer. Baptized membership was 260, including a 14% increase for the year. Pastor Matt comments: “Atonement has tremendous potential, not only in terms of numerical growth, but more importantly we have both potential and opportunity to share in the work of God’s kingdom. We have gifted and talented people. Indeed God has given us everything we need to partnership with him in ministry.”

- In 1996 a sound system was installed in the sanctuary, a sprinkler system was installed in the yard, and a “tree of remembrance” developed for memorial giving was placed in the entryway. There were 42 new adult members, 6 youth who completed first communion, and confirmation class went from 6 to 16 as sixth graders are added to the program. Average attendance was 151, with over 500 visitors greeted in worship throughout the year. A monthly newsletter, The Shellseeker, was begun.

**ATONEMENT LUTHERAN CHURCH BUILDING RECAP**

CATEGORY	ACTUAL	BUDGET	DIFFERENCE
ELCA SITE	177,531	175,230	-2,301
BUILDING COST	407,366	406,440	-926
SITE	9,113	12,825	3,712
SEPTIC/SANITARY	20,710	18,000	-2,710
WELL/WATER SYSTEM	4,000	4,000	-
SPECIAL ASSESSMENTS	33,135	21,499	-11,636
PARKING & DRIVES	50,711	15,000	-35,711
CURBS & WALKS	6,000	5,000	-1,000
LANDSCAPING	11,541	5,000	-6,541
SIGN	2,875	2,000	-875
FURNITURE	31,627	35,000	3,373
SOUND EQUIPMENT	1,775	2,000	225
FUND RAISING	7,500	7,500	-
ARCHITECTURAL SERVICES	20,060	20,060	-
LEGAL	583	1,032	449
TITLE	3,730	2,000	-1,730
1 % FEE	6,968	6,968	-
BUILDERS RISK INS.	641	2,000	1,359
PERFORMANCE BOND	000	4,000	4,000
CONTINGENCY	000	15,646	15,646
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>795,866</b>	<b>761,200</b>	<b>-34,666</b>

**ELCA SITE**

\* 1993 REAL ESTATE TAXES NOT PAID BY ELCA

**SEPTIC/SANITARY**

\* SEPTIC PUMP REQUIRED AFTER BID (CHANGE BY PASCO COUNTY)

**SPECIAL ASSESSMENTS**

\* INCREASED AFTER RESEARCH AND BEFORE PERMIT  
 \* MORTGAGE FILING (NOT PLANNED)  
 \* DEED RECORDING (NOT PLANNED)

**PARKING & DRIVES**

\* COUNTY INCREASED SIZE OF ROAD AND DRIVES AFTER BIDDING

**LANDSCAPING**

\* TREE REPLACEMENT  
 \* SPRINKLER SYSTEM REQUIRED BEFORE OCCUPANCY PERMIT AFTER COUNTY  
 \* ORIGINALLY ADVISED US IT WAS NOT REQUIRED

**TITLE**

\* ORIGINAL BUDGET NOT ENOUGH

- Consultant Gus Smith writes to the ELCA Mission Investment fund: “Over the years I have called and asked for assistance for other congregations who were carrying heavy financial burdens. This time I am going all out with the total of my being for this particular congregation...because I strongly believe in them, and feel that I want to help them in every way possible to fulfill their mission. **Every once in awhile a congregation comes along that has a special spark**

**about it, that you just know that it will take off eventually and become exceptionally strong in its Mission and Ministry. Atonement is one of those exceptional ones.** On this one, I think we need to think much less of the return on the financial investment in the congregation and more on the very essence of its being and highly promising future. It is not a country club or social organization or in business to make a profit. This is a church of God that has and continues to make a difference in this community and has provided worship services for over 50,000 people in the brief eight years of its existence...It is a young, multi-generational congregation of over half senior citizens, many associate members six months a year and young couples with children who are transient due to corporate assignments. Atonement continues to grow and mature in their faith and mission and ministry...This is a very unique and diverse group of people who are working very hard under exceptional pastoral leadership to grow in their faith and numbers, improve their outreach, in-reach, communication, stewardship and fellowship in the service of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.”

- After nearly ten years, “Pastor Matt” was called to a new position at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio to serve as Associate Director of Admissions. **Pastor Jim Horn** served as Interim Pastor for 15 months up to October 1998, when **Pastor Chris Kratzer** accepted the call to be Pastor of Atonement Lutheran Church.
- Council president Doug Peterson wrote about the theme of the 1998 council retreat -- **“Back to the Future”**: “To solve our problems as we move into the future, we must go back. Back to God’s mission for Atonement. Back to a mission congregation mentality. Back to basics. God’s mission is for us to spread the Good News of His Grace to our community, to reach out to those around us and comfort them, bring them His mercy, and build them up.”
- **Pastor Chris Kratzer** served Atonement for 13 months, concentrating his ministry on developing contemporary forms of worship. A praise band was formed, first called “Extreme Praise” then “Atonement Praise.” Many young people were attracted to the worship, and a strong children’s program culminated in over 50 children present on Easter. In parting comments, Pastor Chris shared that at Atonement, “I have witnessed courageous faith, an authentic positive attitude, and a passion for God’s presence in your life that has been a source of inspiration and joy for me...”
- Then came a difficult time when membership levels were declining and interest payments became burdensome. Atonement was served by **Interim Pastors Tom Rehl and Del Resmer** from December 1999 through January 2001. Then **Pastor Phil Kunder** served Atonement Lutheran Church during two years in which the difficulties persisted. Pastor Phil’s strengths included hospital visitation and work with the youth.

- In Christmas of 2001, **Ken Hanks** joined Atonement's staff as regular keyboardist

### **The Cross of Love: The Story of Atonement Lutheran's cross**

Atonement member Carl Haberland made the cross on the front of the building "as a sign to all people that this house and all in it are full of God's love and grace." After having a dream in which Jesus pointed out "something missing" from the blank church wall, Carl contacted some carpenter friends to come and build it. It wasn't till after Thanksgiving that he heard that they wouldn't be available.

Now Carl was plagued with many health problems – a disintegrating spine plus neuropathy causing 24 hour pain. But despite it all, Carl worked on that cross himself in the rain and cold weather. "When the cross was on the church, a peace and calm came upon me that I never felt before. The pain and suffering, even as a big sliver of wood jammed into my hand that bled onto the wood before I stained it, all had meaning to me. It is truly a Cross of Love to bless the people of the church."

The cross is 7ft long; the footrest is 12 inches for the 12 apostles that followed Jesus; three iron spikes represent the Holy Trinity; the two rings on the top of the arm span were used to pull crosses upright – two stands for the promise to any two people who ask for anything from the Father through Christ (Matthew 18:19); and the headboard is left blank to look forward to the Return of Jesus.

- A partnership was formed with the **1<sup>st</sup> Hispanic Presbyterian Church of Tampa** to allow them the use of the building for a new mission start. Pastor Julio Travieso began offering Hispanic worship services at Atonement as the "north campus" of 1<sup>st</sup> Hispanic Church in April 2002. On special occasions, Atonement and 1<sup>st</sup> Hispanic would worship together in joint bilingual services. An article in a local newspaper said the following: "Its a must," Raisy Oliveras said of the new service. Oliveras has lived in Wesley Chapel with her family for seven years but has traveled to the Hispanic church in Tampa to worship. "There are a lot of Spanish Presbyterians that don't know where to go," Oliveras said. "This is a wonderful idea, a real need in our area."
- **Pastor Lin Houck** came to Atonement as Interim Pastor early in 2003. The fourth interim pastor to serve in a period of 6 years, he ended up serving nearly three years. The time he and his wife Millie spent at Atonement is remembered as a time of renewal and re-commitment. Although many questioned the future of the congregation, Pastor Lin had great hopes for what God could do through their faith.
- Atonement experienced resurgence in attendance and financial giving. Creative financing and sacrificial giving helped the congregation not just maintain, but expand its ministries. New worship forms included the Wednesday night

**Chicago folk service and a monthly healing service.** Education classes resumed, including confirmation. Cantatas and musicales became part of the music program.

- **Projects and upkeep** began to happen around the church, including the addition of a window between the nursery and sanctuary, pressure washing, repainting and replacing defective siding on the church.
- A congregational meeting was held in 2003 to develop a **new mission statement** – one that people could easily remember and could help guide the direction of the ministries. After much prayer and conversation, the current mission statement was developed: “Sharing the love of Jesus by glorifying God and extending His kingdom.”
- The **first annual Golf scramble** was held in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2003.
- The “**Stars Too**” **Nursery Care and Daycare Center** was invited to rent the church building during the week beginning January 2004. Later, “Stars Too” would be bought out and consolidated with “Little Pioneers” Nursery School, which will continue to use Atonement’s facilities in a mutually beneficial arrangement, with Atonement providing weekly chapel services for the children.
- In July of 2004 **Eddy Perez**, a former doctor who emigrated from Cuba, began his pilot internship for pastoral ministry. His internship was a unique joint-venture under the supervision of Pastor Lin from Atonement and Pastor Julio from 1<sup>st</sup> Hispanic. Following his graduation from seminary, Pastor Eddy led a mission church in Miami. Atonement has continued the relationship by donating chairs and office equipment for his congregation.
- Negotiations began with **developer John Westfall**, who eventually purchased five acres along the west edge of the church site. Also, Florida Mission Coordinator Pastor Ron Ryckman interceded with the ELCA Mission Investment Fund on behalf of Atonement. Through his influence, the MIF agreed to accept “interest only” payments and not foreclose on the property. This, along with the sale of property enabled the congregation to retire the debt of \$685,000 on the building, repay a loan from the Florida-Bahamas Synod, and repay with interest \$47,000 which was loaned by members in 2005 to help continue the mission of the congregation.
- **Pastor Dave Kruger** took over the Interim position after Pastor Lin’s retirement. He assisted in the process leading to the call of Pastor Scott Lindner on March 19, 2006. Pastor Dave helped arrange for his brother-in-law, well-known hymn writer **John Ylvisaker**, to **lead worship** that day. Pastor Dave worked on planning for the **mortgage burning on May 21, 2006**. His wife Debbie also helped with the children’s sermons.

- **Pastor Scott Lindner** and his wife Susan came down from Michigan with their two boys, George and Brian, in June of 2006. Pastor Scott officially began ministry at Atonement on July 1. We celebrated with hot air balloon rides on “The Sky’s the Limit” Sunday August 6, and an installation service on the stormy evening of August 27. Monthly potlucks began (called “be-at-ones”) with members enjoying fellowship along with programs or discussions of the congregation’s mission.
- “A Whole New Ball Game,” a baseball-themed **family retreat**, was held at Luther Springs camp August 18-20, 2006. The weekend culminated in a worship service that included members signing a baseball bat as a covenant of renewal.
- The Sunday before Thanksgiving, the congregation posed after church for its first annual **Home for Thanksgiving “Church family portrait.”**
- In October 2006, an Atonement **women’s group** begins several monthly meetings as an affiliate of WELCA. The group again re-formed in November of 2007.
- The **church roof**, which had been leaking in several spots, was replaced in November of 2006.
- In December of 2006, a generous donation allowed Atonement to provide a **meal for the whole community on Christmas Eve.**
- In February of 2007, nine couples **renewed their wedding vows** at a special Valentine’s Day service.
- Throughout the Sundays in Lent of 2007, Atonement presented a special emphasis on world hunger, which brought in offerings of over \$1300 for the ELCA World Hunger Appeal.
- Pastor Scott was the featured speaker at the Zephyrhills **Community Sunrise Service** on Easter Sunday of 2007.
- Summer 2007 featured **fun family activities** themed around water, including an overnight at the Florida Aquarium, tubing, and an afternoon at the Fort DeSoto beach.
- October 2007: Atonement teams up with Shepherd of the Hills and Resurrection House churches in Dade City to provide a **joint confirmation** program on Sunday afternoons. More than 37 students attended, along with many adult helpers.
- Our partner in ministry Margarita Romo of Farm Workers’ Self-Help and Resurrection House speaks at a **bilingual Reformation service.** The Resurrection House band, Zoomdaddy, provided the music.

- Atonement's **20<sup>th</sup> anniversary** featured a Celebration Dinner at the Zephyrhills Eagles Hall. Founding Pastor Matt Cox and his wife Debbie attended the dinner as well as the service the next day, where Bishop Ed Benoway preached and presided.
- Property team leader Rich Keller arranged for the sanctuary to be **repainted** in Nov. 2007 – from bright white to blue and tan. Rich's wife Barb supervised repainting and redecorating of the fellowship hall.
- The Parish Education team organized Atonement's first ever **Living Nativity** scene in December 2007. The outdoor production includes sheep, goats, chicken, a donkey and a live baby Jesus. Children from Little Pioneers help with the singing.
- In April 2008, the first **Spring Bazaar** is organized by Laurie Chiaramonte. Many vendors are there along with a face painter and petting zoo.
- 20 people including youth and adults travel to the **Virgin Islands** to do renovation work at Reformation Lutheran Church on St. Thomas, June 7-14 2008.
- In August of 2008 the **Bea and Al Bidwell memorial scholarship fund** is put in place to benefit high school seniors going off to college.
- A **Synodical Deacon** Table Talk is held at Atonement August 2, 2008 to inform and inspire those who may be interested in training to become Synodical Deacons. Plans proceed to offer training for Synodical Deacons at Atonement beginning in 2009.
- The fall 2008 "**Enter into Joy**" **stewardship program** shows a great increase in giving commitments. Pledge results are up 75% over the previous year.
- December 2008 brings big changes to Atonement. Little Pioneers finished their new building on Boyette Rd. and moved in over Christmas. First Hispanic Presbyterian had the final meeting of their North Campus at Atonement on the last Sunday of the year. With funding for a paid secretary no longer available, **office work is done by volunteers.**
- Atonement's **choir goes "on the road"** with a special presentation of their Christmas cantata at Crystal Lake on January 3, 2009.
- A Pentecostal Hispanic Church, **Mision International Primicias de Cristo**, begins worshiping at Atonement on Sunday evenings in 2009.
- A "**Vision team**" begins working to develop a renewed and reinvigorated vision for the future of Atonement. Studying Rick Warren's The Purpose Driven



Church, the group develops long range planning ideas set forth in the Vision 2009 document.

- Pasco County officially purchases frontage from the church in order to **widen State Rd. 54** in the next few years. An initial payment of \$360,000 is made to Atonement, though negotiations continue on a final amount. In March of 2009, a tithe of \$36,000 is sent to assist missions, Hunger ministries and the Florida Bahamas Synod in thanks to God.
- Donations are raised in March 2009 for the purchase of **Lutheran Study Bibles** for memorials and use in worship. The Bibles are available in the pews and given to new members.
- A Boy Scout **Court of Honor** is held at Atonement, May 21, 2009 in which Alex and Nicholas Lenz are awarded their **Eagle Scout badges**. Alex's Eagle project was the installation of speakers in the hallways and rooms throughout Atonement. Nick's was building a picnic table for the Little Pioneers Daycare.
- 2009 graduating seniors from Atonement become the first recipients of the **Al and Bea Bidwell Memorial Scholarship**.
- In response to the economic crisis, Atonement begins a regular **food pantry** on Wednesdays. Articles in local papers help with publicity. By October 2009 there are over 140 families being served each week by the Helping Hands Food Pantry.
- In April 2009, seniors begin meeting on the first Wednesday of each month for fellowship. Called the "**Young at Hearts**", they spend time playing games, listening to special speakers and sharing a meal.
- In April 2009, Pastor Scott begins giving the opening prayer (and joke) at the annual **Relay for Life** held at Wesley Chapel High School.
- Pasco County Sheriff's employees help plan and implement a children's **safety fair** in October 2009.
- An additional Sunday worship service is added in January 2010. The **Heritage worship service** begins at 8:45am and features a liturgy developed by Pastor Scott based on American folk tunes. The service runs from January through May, when our attendance is highest due to snowbirds.
- In February 2010, Atonement becomes the first congregation to host a visit from the choir of our Mission Partner church, **Peace Lutheran in Tampa**. Peace is a mission to Oromo speaking people of African descent, led by Pastor Michael Birra.

- Helping Hands food pantry becomes the recipient of the local **Letter carriers food drive** in May, 2010. So much food is collected, we run out of storage and the remainder has to be directed to other local food banks. Also, the **Bridgewater** community holds a fair that raises \$7000 for the food pantry.
- **Boy Scout Troop 2** is chartered by Atonement in May 2010.
- In July 2010, youth from Atonement go on a **mission trip to Tallulah, LA** to help start the town's first racially integrated community vacation Bible school and to help with the clean up in the aftermath of tornadoes.
- A new plan for **facility upgrades** following the road construction includes provisions for parking on the east side of the property, a drop off area, bell tower and multipurpose building.
- The Primicias de Cristo church leaves, and the **First Unity Church of Pasco** (under the leadership of Pastor Enrique Amoros) begins offering Hispanic worship at Atonement on Saturday evenings.
- In August 2010, Atonement offers its first **Summer Day Camp** in many years – 17 area children attend.
- With the start of confirmation in August 2010, Atonement inaugurates the use of the **“Blessing Cup”** as a home ritual of prayer and blessing.
- Over 30 people from Atonement attend **Rock the Universe** at Universal Studios theme park in Orlando, September 2010.
- Atonement begins videotaping services regularly and sending **DVDs to shut-ins** and those who request them. In September 2010 a new multimedia website is developed at atonementlutheran.net by member Scott Giesking. Video of the services is uploaded, as well as newsletters and other info.
- Atonement offers a program of 6 **“Nights of Reflection”** on Wednesday nights beginning in September 2010 – meditative music with a guided spiritual reflection. One attendee drives from New Port Richey.
- **Parish Deacon training** begins October 2010 with 5 deacons in the class.
- A team from Atonement leads Sunday **worship at Resurrection House/Dade City** in November 2010. Over 30 people from Atonement attend.
- **New choir director, Ruby Agnir**, joins the staff at Atonement, February 2011.
- A large group from Atonement joins our **mission partner church, Peace Lutheran** in Tampa, for worship on the afternoon of February 13. Peace

Lutheran is an outreach to the Oromo-speaking Ethiopian community led by Pastor Michael Birra.

- Sheriff's Deputies are hired each week for **traffic safety** during road construction.
- **New projection screens** are installed in the sanctuary in March 2011.
- With the help of Thrivent, a large group of Pasco county Lutherans takes a bus trip to see the **passion play in Wauchula**.
- Atonement's bi-annual family retreat at Luther Springs took place in March 2011. The theme was "A **Spring Safari**" and featured a nature expedition and Biblical lion hunt.
- July 2011 – Atonement youth attend a week-long **mission trip in Daytona**. They work at a Food Mission, Cerebral Palsy institute, and school that provides daycare for underprivileged children.
- Audra Eldridge offers **Kindermusik classes** at Atonement. Tuesdays and Thursdays, she teaches young children about music and dance.
- September 2011: Jan Gerle takes on the **Sunday school** ministry, with help from her dog "Bitsy."
- Leaders from congregations all over the Tampa Bay area join in the first meeting of a **Gulf Coast Mission Table** to coordinate mission projects, November 2011.
- Fall events in 2011 include first-ever "**Trunk or Treat**" for Halloween, with members passing out candy from the trunks of their decorated cars; and a "**Stock our shelves**" fundraiser (including dunk tank for the pastor) for the food pantry, raising over \$5500 with the help of Thrivent.
- Winter 2011: the Zummo family **sells Christmas trees** out in front of the church to help raise money for the food pantry.
- With the **completion of the median on State Road 54**, all traffic must turn right coming out of the church driveway. Sheriff's deputies are no longer needed.
- The choir **sings their Christmas cantata** "Go Tell It" at West Winds Adult Living (Zephyrhills) and the Edwinola (Dade City). On Christmas eve, Pastor Scott's sons George and Brian play Christmas music at the local restaurant The Wolf's Den, which serves free meals for the community that day.
- On Christmas Day 2011, **bilingual worship** is held with the Hispanic Unity Church of Pasco, Pastor Enrique Amoros preaching.

- February 28, 2012, as the new parking lot is being constructed, a **Capital Campaign fund** (see below, February 24, 2013) begins to raise money for a new building.
- The majority of the parking lot **construction and landscaping is completed** just in time for the Spring Bazaar on St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 2012.
- Carla Haberland treats confirmation students to a **trip to Orlando's Holy Land Adventure theme park**, in memory of her husband Carl.
- Atonement joins the **Zephyrhills and Wesley Chapel chambers of commerce**, hosting the Zephyrhills Chamber breakfast at the Zephyrhills Golden Corral May 3, 2012.
- **Prayer Warriors** prayer group begins meeting Friday mornings, June 2012.
- Atonement youth attend the ELCA **National Youth Gathering** in New Orleans.
- Candidate for **Honorary Mayor** of Wesley Chapel Ken Stewart chooses the Helping Hands Food Pantry as his charity of choice. He puts together a campaign called "A Chicken in Every Pot," with assistance from Rocio Paulsen. Planned events include a bar-b-cue at Atonement and a "Chicken Run" relay rally.
- Atonement's Property team adds acoustic tiles and new lighting inside the sanctuary to enhance the sound and video quality.
- Pastor Scott gives the invocation at the **Making Strides for Breast Cancer** event at Wiregrass Mall, Oct. 20, 2012.
- On October 24, 2012 the number of **families** coming for food to the **Helping Hands pantry** in a single day reaches 250, representing 846 individuals.
- Atonement celebrates the **25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its first service** with a ribbon cutting on Nov. 1, 2012, a luncheon at Quail Hollow Golf & Country Club Nov. 3 & worship service (including **consecration of Atonement's first 5 deacons**) led by Bishop Benoway Nov. 4.
- November 24, 2012: A **prayer garden** built behind the church by Matthew Aeppel as his Eagle Scout project is dedicated.
- The Wesley Chapel Rotary begins giving out **Thanksgiving meals** at Atonement on Thanksgiving Day in 2012. The meals come from Metropolitan Ministries.
- December 2012: A new **storage garage** is constructed behind the church.

- January 2013: Construction begins on **renovations to church front and new drop-off / portico area and bell tower**.
- Atonement celebrates its first **Scout Sunday** February 3, 2013, inviting members of chartered scout groups Boy Scout Troop 2 and Cub Scout Pack 148.
- A record number of couples come to renew their vows at the February 10 service. The **renewal of vows ceremony** is led by **Pasco County Clerk Paula O'Neil**.
- Atonement officially kicks off its **first Capital Campaign**. The program features a 3 year pledge drive to raise money for a second building to provide supplemental ministry space and a full kitchen. Called "**Laying Foundations for the Children of God,**" the campaign begins with a congregational meal held at Holy Trinity Lutheran in Lutz on February 24, 2013.
- May 2013: Construction on new church front is completed
- June through August 2013 - Pastor Scott takes his first **sabbatical**, which includes (with the help of the congregation) a trip to Wittenberg, Germany.
- August 2013: The church's road sign is replaced after a year and a half's absence.
- September 2013: Atonement becomes a **Stephen's Ministry** congregation, approving the program of lay training for care giving, small groups and spiritual growth.
- October 2013: Study groups begin using **DVD curriculum** authored by Pastor Scott. The first Bible study is called "Your Spiritual Survival Kit" and focuses on the Christian virtues as tools for everyday life.
- October 29, 2013: A **columbarium** is installed in the back of the church for the placement of ashes of deceased loved ones. Plans proceed for the formation of the Columbarium Committee to oversee its use and maintenance.
- November 24, 2013: Pastor Fred Aguir holds a **special benefit concert for victims of Typhoon Haiyan**, which devastated large portions of his native Philippines. Over \$2400 is raised for Lutheran Disaster Response.
- December 4, 2013: An anonymous donor pledges **\$25,000 in matching funds** toward the capital campaign, to expire at the end of February on the campaign's one year anniversary.
- December 7, 2013: The Lenz family holds a **going away party for Alex**, who heads off to Chicago to begin basic training for the Navy.

- Pastor Scott receives the “**Standing Ovation award**” from the East Pasco Networking Group. The award was presented by Zephyrhills Mayor Danny Burgess.
- December 15, 2013: The annual Christmas cantata, “**Joy, the Gift of God,**” includes strings, drums and brass instruments along with the choir and keyboard accompaniment.
- February 21, 2014: Atonement Lutheran Church and the Helping Hands Food Pantry are **nominated for “Outstanding Nonprofit of the Year”** by the Pasco Hernando Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.
- February 23, 2014: The **first anniversary of the capital campaign** is celebrated with a luncheon and a **talent show called “Acts of Atonement.”** During the talent show, the announcement is made that Atonement exceeded the amount needed for the \$25,000 matching funds (see December 2013, above), bringing in over \$31,000 toward the capital campaign since December. Additional donations of over \$5000 also came in that day.
- March 23, 2014: The Atonement council begins quarterly meetings after Sunday services called “**Glow and Grow**” meetings. These gatherings serve as a forum to discuss new projects and ministries, for questions to be asked and comments shared, and for communication to happen between the council and congregation.
- April 2014: A new prayer ministry called “**In God’s Hands**” begins.
- July 2014: The **Building team** in charge of the design and construction of the new building is reconstituted with Terry Martin as leader.
- August 2014: Pastor Scott completes and distributes the second DVD Bible Study in the OUTWord series. **Revelation: Prophecy remixed** explores images from the Book of Revelation and their relevance to our everyday lives.
- A new director for the Atonement praise band is hired. **Ken Watts** begins in the Fall, and the praise team begins leading early services in Advent. He will serve at Atonement through May of 2018.
- As one of the many new projects taken on by the women’s group (WELCA), a **prayer shawl ministry** is kicked off in Oct 2014.
- Throughout 2014, a group was working on an updated future ministry plan for Atonement. The group held several events throughout the year, including a session of asset mapping after the service on “God’s Work our Hands” Sunday in September, and a forum for community leaders in October. The completed

document, **Vision 2015: New horizons & projects** was presented and approved at the annual meeting in December 2014.

- The capital campaign begins a **“treasure hunt,”** challenging members to sell items of particular value and donate the money to the campaign. Atonement offers help to sell items valued over \$100 on craigslist.com
- **Christmas eve 2014** included a new afternoon (4pm) service, led by the praise band.
- December 31, 2014: 16 year old Atonement member Sean Bartell dies of complications arising from the rare condition toxic epidermal necrolysis. The funeral is too large to hold at Atonement, so it is moved to First Assembly of God church in Zephyrhills. A scholarship team is put in place to develop the **Sean Bartell memorial scholarship** for graduating seniors in local high schools. The first scholarship is given May 11, 2015 at Wesley Chapel High School.
- January 9, 2015: The first meeting is held to re-form the **Caring team**, with Karen Erickson as chair.
- February 13, 2015: An anonymous benefactor offers a **\$15K matching challenge** for money raised by the capital campaign through Easter (April 5)
- February 18, 2015: Pastor Scott is appointed by Bishop Schaefer as **interim dean of the Tampa Bay conference of ELCA congregations**. Along with Tampa conference secretary Scott Giesking & vice-president Nils Lenz, Pastor Scott makes 3 of the 5 conference leaders members of Atonement.
- March 29, 2015: **Live video streaming** of services begins online on Palm Sunday.
- April 4, 2015: A new **Stations of the Cross** service is added at noon on Good Friday. The stations used are drawings that were done as a final project for confirmation by Atonement member Dominick Santoro.
- June 6, 2015: A first round of **Eucharistic ministry training** is held for volunteers who would bring communion to people who are homebound or hospitalized. Five new people begin making communion visits.
- July 12, 2015: Pastor Jaime Dubon, assistant to Bishop Schaefer, preaches and leads **conversation about Hispanic ministry**. A group of interested people is formed to explore possibilities for Hispanic outreach at Atonement.
- July 15-18, 2015: A group of adult volunteers, chaperones, and youth from Atonement attend the **2015 National Youth Gathering** in Detroit, MI. Live feeds from opening and closing ceremonies are shown at Atonement.

- July 27-31, 2015: Atonement hosts its **largest Summer Day Camp ever**, with 38 children registered.
- September 13, 2015: Atonement members **worship at Resurrection House** in Dade City for God's Work Our Hands Sunday.
- September 20, 2015: A special congregational meeting is held after church to provide **an update on the plans for a new multi-purpose building**. The congregation votes unanimously to proceed with the creation of engineered drawings for a steel-framed building.
- September-October 2015: A Sunday morning **How-to-use-your-Bible** series took Atonement members through 100 important Bible passages.
- November 1, 2015: All Saints worship features **songs written by Atonement members** Robert Pope and Violet Moore.
- February 21, 2016: Members of Atonement attend an open house at the **Daares Salaam mosque** on Morris Bridge Rd.
- March 6, 2016: "Building Foundations for the Children of God" **Capital campaign project is officially finished**, with a celebration potluck. The 3-year "miracle goal" of \$300,000 is met and exceeded.
- April 2, 2016: The **Spring Gathering of the ELCA Tampa Conference** is held at Atonement. Atonement's praise band leads worship, and presentations include one by Atonement's Hispanic ministry.
- May 25, 2016: Generous donations allow 4 **Bartell Memorial scholarships** to be awarded at Wesley Chapel High School for members of Sean's graduating class. Scholarships were also given at Zephyrhills (May 12) and Wiregrass (May 26) High Schools.
- June 12-17, 2016: Pastor Scott, Alice Deyne, and Esthel Kane attend the Level II Intensive **Training for Latino/a ministries** in Austin, TX. A special grant from the national church office pays for half their expenses. Conversations emerge from the training about Esthel undergoing TEEM (Theological Education for Emerging Ministries) training, and Atonement's Hispanic ministry developing into a SAWC (Synodically Authorized Worshiping Community).
- August 28, 2016: An **informational meeting** about the building program is held for the congregation. Bids for construction of the steel building have come back around \$600,000, double the money we raised. Based on feedback from the meeting, the building team begins exploring more affordable alternatives.



- September 18, 2016: Atonement participates in the **Mission Possible** campaign for Luther Springs and Novus Way. Members are asked to pledge over three years to help support improvements at the camp. Members give temple talks, and end up pledging over \$20,000 to help the camp.
- October 1, 2016: Atonement sponsors a **Wesley Chapel history night** with Madonna Wise, author of Images of America: Wesley Chapel. We learn that part of Wesley Chapel's heritage included moonshining, gator-hunting and "Fifth Sunday sings" which were outdoor events described as a local Grand Ole Opry.



- October 18, 2016: National ELCA **Bishop Elizabeth Eaton** comes to Florida to speak at the Conference on Ministry. A group from Atonement get their picture taken with her.
- December 2, 2016: Curbside Prayer begins on Fridays from 11:30am-1:30pm out in front of the church. Signs tell people that "**Drive-Thru Prayer**" is available. The prayers are led by a group later to be named "The God Squad."
- December 4, 2016: A new plan is adopted for using funds raised from the Capital Campaign to **expand the present fellowship hall and add a full kitchen.**
- December 6, 2016: A partnership is formed with Michon Shaw, director of **Sign Language Interpreters** group at USF. They agree to interpret video sermons from Atonement websites for us to post online. Several videos are worked on, but technical difficulties kept the project from being completed.
- January 8-14, 2017: A team is sent to Orlando for week-long **Stephen Ministry leader training.** Pastor Scott, Jan Buland, and Chris Rymer are the initial leader group, and return home to begin plans to launch this new ministry.
- January 17, 2017: Bishops Assistant Jaime Dubon meets with the pastors of the Tampa Conference at Faith Lutheran Church in Tampa. He explains that

Atonement will be partnering with the Florida-Bahamas Synod and the national ELCA to develop our Hispanic ministry into a SAWC (Synodically Authorized Worshiping Community). Lay member **Esthel Kane** is to be the leader of this new mission, **Mision Latina Todos Unidos en Cristo**, which officially begins February 1, 2017. Esthel is preparing to enter the TEEM (Theological Education for Emerging Ministries) program which leads to ordained ministry.

- January 20, 2017: Pastor Scott and Esthel Kane participate in the **Joint Roman Catholic and Lutheran Common Prayer worship** service at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Largo. The service is one of several local commemorations of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation this year.
- January 29, 2017: A **“fifth Sunday sing”** is held in honor of an old Wesley Chapel tradition. According to the Wesley Chapel history book by Madonna Wise, the old Double Branch church which used to be across the street from Atonement was a cultural center of the early Wesley Chapel community. Every fifth Sunday, people would come and sing songs (sacred and secular), play games, and have a picnic. In recognition of that tradition, we invited musicians to come and play after worship. Atonement friends and members played some old-time gospel tunes, and special guest Zachary Erickson shared some of his original Christian rap compositions. Zachary is grandson to Atonement members Paul and Karen Erickson, and was 16 years old when he performed for us. In particular, he debuted his new song called **“God Taught Me”** which became a radio and internet hit, and eventually launched his career as the Christian rapper and recording artist **“Zauntee.”** And we heard it first at Atonement!
- February 2, 2017: Our Hispanic ministry begins teaching **English as Second Language classes.**
- February 17, 2017: Pastor Jefferson Cox shares an afternoon workshop with us exploring the demographics of the Wesley Chapel community through the online tool **Mission Insite.** We discover the unique characteristics of our very mixed community and discuss features that could help us reach Anglo and Latino populations.
- May 7, 2017: Stephen Ministry begins in earnest with the **commissioning of three Stephen Leaders:** Pastor Scott, Jan Buland, and Chris Rymer. Interviews will be held and training sessions planned to begin in September for the activation of our first batch of Stephen Ministers.
- June 4, 2017: Confirmation day includes the **consecration of our new outdoor sanctuary.** For their confirmation project, Thaddeus, Dustin, and Cassidy Kostialik worked with their father John and brother Kendall to create a cross and altar in the back of the property. See April 1, 2018 below.

- August 30, 2017: We are **visited by interim Bishop Marcus Lohrmann** of Toledo, Ohio, who came out of retirement and had been filling in following the resignation of Florida-Bahamas Synod Bishop Bob Schaeffer back in February. Bishop Lohrmann came by on this Wednesday morning after hearing reports of the wonderful work done by our food pantry. After meeting the food pantry volunteers and having a quick tour, the interim Bishop spent a couple hours carrying food for our recipients.
- September 10, 2017: A special **God's Work, Our Hands** project was planned for this date. The event was meant to recognize the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, and involve the ELCA churches of our Tampa conference working together with Roman Catholics of the St. Petersburg Diocese. Unfortunately, **Hurricane Irma** came through Florida this weekend, and the event had to be moved to December 16 (see entry for that date).
- September 14, 2017: **Tampa conference Fall Gathering** is held at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Tampa. Pastor Scott officially hands over the position of Dean of the Tampa Conference to Pastor Joshua Gyson of All Saints' Lutheran in Lutz. Atonement members Nils Lenz remains Tampa Conference vice-president, and Rebecca Parker is elected Tampa Conference secretary. Esthel Kane shares an update on our Hispanic mission, Todos Unidos en Cristo.
- October 9-12, 2017: A **special synod assembly** is held in Orlando for the election of a new bishop. **Pedro Suarez** is elected first Latino bishop of the Florida-Bahamas synod
- October 31, 2017: The **500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation** is celebrated with a special service and dinner. Nicholas Trejo leads the team that planned it and the subsequent 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Atonement as his Eagle Scout project.
- November 1, 2017: The **30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Atonement's first worship service** is celebrated as close to the original event as we can get. The original Hunt's restaurant (see above) is long gone, but across the street was a Cody's Steak House, where we made arrangement for a 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner. Guests from all over were invited, and original pastor Matt Cox was coming down from Columbus, Ohio to be with us. Two weeks before the date of the dinner, the Cody's restaurant suddenly closed down. Despite being officially out of business, charter member Cotta Ungerer was able to convince them to open up for one night just for our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. We had the place to ourselves on this amazing night of memories old and new.
- November 4, 2017: The **By Heart** study of Luther's Catechism for adults begins.

- December 10, 2017: An **initial groundbreaking** is held in anticipation of the building of our fellowship hall annex. Delays in permitting will lead to a drawn out time between groundbreaking and commencement of construction.
- December 16, 2017: Pastor Scott had worked with officials from the Roman Catholic Diocese of St. Petersburg in planning a work project for the Lutherans and Catholics to do together for this year's God's Work Our Hands Sunday (see Sept. 10, above). Hurricane Irma meant the project had to be moved to a later date. We spent the **afternoon at Pinellas HOPE**, a homeless community operated by the Catholic Church which includes housing, food, health and social service resources for the residents there. We made some adjustments in the project, including adapting the worship to become a memorial service for residents and their families who had passed away in 2017. Atonement people provided the meal with the help of a Thrivent Action Team card.
- January 6, 2018: A **new service begins on Saturdays at 5pm. Called "godify"**, this service is led by Atonement's Synod Parish Deacons, along with Pastor Scott. **Brian Lindner is hired** to be the music leader for the service, which is based around contemporary Christian music and includes occasional secular songs.
- January 20, 2018: The **installation of our new bishop Pedro Suarez** takes place at St. Mark's Catholic Church in New Tampa, not far from Atonement. Both Esthel Kane and Nicholas Trejo from Atonement are part of the ceremony.
- January 22, 2018: A four-week **seminar on Creation Health** begins today, with nurses from Florida Hospital offering health screenings. They will return in 8 weeks and screen participants again to see if there are any improvements to their health.
- March 30, 2018: Our first **Easter prayer vigil** begins after the 7pm Good Friday service. People are stationed outdoors as guards at a makeshift "tomb" erected in the front of the church. Members are there continually, taking shifts from the end of the Good Friday service to the beginning of the Easter sunrise service.
- April 1, 2018: A very special Easter service begins with the first use of the outdoor sanctuary which was commenced by the Kostialik triplets as their confirmation project in 2017. We held a **sunrise service at the outdoor sanctuary**, beginning at 7:15am.
- April 8, 2018: A special breakfast is held for office workers as we transition from a volunteer-led office to leadership by a paid employee. The following week, our **new part-time Office Administrator Lynn McCurdy** begins work. This new position is for 25 hours a week is open to non-members.
- April 28, 2018: Choir director Ruby and her husband Rev. Fred Agnir hold their **57<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary celebration** with a special service. Fred was in the

- late stages of pancreatic cancer, but attended and sang at the service. Music features the Atonement choir combined with the choir from Trinity Church in Zephyrhills, which Pastor Scott refers to as the “Agnir Tabernacle Choir.”
- May 14, 2018: Atonement begins having occasional **Beer and Hymns nights** at O’Brien’s Pub in Wesley Chapel.
  - May 30, 2018: A meeting is held with instructors from fitness group, **Camp Gladiator**. They will begin meeting at the church in the mornings, twice a week.
  - “Seminarian Sundays” have been taking place on the first Sunday of each month recognizing our **seminarian, Esthel Kane** (see above, Jan. 17, 2017). Esthel preaches for the first time on a Sunday, July 1, 2018.
  - July 17, 2018: A **storytelling workshop** is held, organized by Christian Ed director Jan Gerle. The workshop is first in a series of training sessions for a proposed new service, the **Child of God service** for families. The Child of God service will be the next step in the evolution of our Sunday morning Christian education. Designed to take the place of Sunday school, Child of God is a children’s church concept with elements added for parents. It is determined that once a month, sample elements of the Child of God service will be incorporated into the 10am service from September through December. The launch date for the Child of God services is January, 2019.
  - September 2, 2018: Seminarian and scholar of Dietrich Bonhoeffer **Gabriel Morgan** preaches at Atonement. Some from Atonement will attend his ordination on March 29, 2019.
  - September 9, 2018: **Bishop Pedro Suarez and wife Aura** visit Atonement for God’s Work, Our Hands Sunday. The bishop’s son Rafael and his family join them, and they all come to our **God’s Work, Our Hands project at Everyday Blessings** halfway house. Rafael’s family ends up worshipping with us regularly for a few months until they move to Texas.
  - October 4, 2018: Pastor Scott meets with the Florida-Bahamas Synod staff regarding the **Todos Unidos en Cristo** mission (see January 17, 2017). Because of lack of growth in the mission and reduced funding from ELCA headquarters, the SAWC will be ended. However, Esthel Kane will continue to receive funds through the end of 2018 and is encouraged to continue in pursuit of her pastoral call.
  - October 29, 2018: After a search and selection process using “indeed.com,” Pastor Scott meets **with new Office Administrator, Marybeth Gandiosi**. Marybeth starts work the following week.

- November 1, 2018: As conclusion to a Bible study series on grief led by Esthel Kane, a special **All Saints Day service of remembrance** is held.
- December 30, 2018: Pastor Scott begins contributing a series of short articles that will appear in rotation in the **Wesley Chapel Times**.
- February 17, 2019: After waiting a year to receive a permit to build the new Fellowship Hall Annex, we find that the cost has gone up. A loan will be needed if the congregation is to move forward and complete the project. At a special congregational meeting, **the congregation authorizes acquisition of a \$200,000 loan from the Mission Investment Fund (MIF)**. Ultimately, only \$150,000 will be approved from MIF, and that loan will be re-amortized at \$125,000. A fund will be established to cover the cost of loan payments called the “10-4-10 fund,” indicating that our 10 year loan could be paid off in 4 years if each family gave an extra \$10 a week.
- March 2, 2019: The **Atonement Beer and Hymns band plays at the ALOAFest** (put on by the group Adult Lutherans Organized for Action) at Christ Our Redeemer in Temple Terrace.
- March 14, 2019: The **Helping Hands Food Pantry celebrates its 10-year anniversary** with a special Volunteer Thank-You Luncheon at Texas Roadhouse.
- March 15, 2019: Regular construction meetings are held every 2 weeks as **construction begins on the new Fellowship Hall Annex**.
- March 26, 2019: Diagnosed with breast cancer, **Pastor Scott’s wife Susan begins chemotherapy**.
- March 30, 2019: Bishop’s Assistant **Rev. Khader El-Yateem** spends the weekend with us at Atonement. He gives a moving account of his faith story at the Godify service on Saturday evening, then leads a service of commissioning for new synod parish deacons Esthel Kane and Rebecca Parker on Sunday.
- April 25-26, 2019: Pastor Scott flies to St. Paul, Minnesota for training as an internship supervisor in the **MDivX program**. **Esthel Kane** was approved to be a part of the first cohort of students in this new experiment in pastoral education at Luther Seminary. MDivX stands for “Accelerated Master of Divinity” degree. This pilot program trains pastoral candidates for ordination in 2 years, including seminary coursework, internship, and CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education). Beginning June 16, Esthel will stay at Atonement as an intern pastor, while engaging in studies online. Every few months, she will travel to Luther Seminary for orientations and intensives.

- May 18, 2019: A regular **Safety and Security team** begins meeting in order to oversee and recommend policies regarding the safety of the church grounds and members.
- June 1, 2019: Led by synod parish deacon Detlev Aeppel, the **Faith Action Coordinating Team (FACT)** begins meeting once a month on Saturdays to discuss and act on advocacy issues.
- June 13, 2019: Looking for help running a financial campaign to pay down the loan for the new building, Pastor Scott contacts stewardship consultant Mike Ward who is leading the synod's stewardship program "**Stewardship for All Seasons**" (SAS). Pastor Scott attends a training at Hope Lutheran in St. Petersburg at which Mike recommends Atonement sign up for the SAS program, and additional help will be given for a Special Appeal to help pay down the loan.
- August 7, 2019: At the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Milwaukee, the ELCA delegates **vote to declare the ELCA a "Sanctuary Church Body,"** the first denomination to label itself in this way. There are immediate concerns from Atonement members that this may be a call to participate in illegal actions on the part of ELCA congregations, although official ELCA communications deny this. Although the meaning of the sanctuary designation is vague and the process of defining it is ongoing, an **informational/discussion forum** for Atonement members is held **on August 31**, based on information we had received at the time.
- After much preparation by Marybeth Gandiosi, design work by Cara Chiaramonte, and input from Scott Giesking and many ministry leaders, **the new Atonement website is now live** at [www.discoveralc.com](http://www.discoveralc.com) . The new website features inviting and up-to-date descriptions of services and ministries, interactive forms for prayer requests and online giving, leadership directory, access to the live stream, and a blogging page for ministry team leads.
- August 17, 2019: A "**New Building Use**" **meeting** is held to brainstorm and dream about ministries and community partners who might use the new building. A group led by Cotta Ungerer is organized to work on equipping the new building.
- September 7, 2019: Rally day activities are held at Atonement, along with a **Ribbon Cutting for the new building**. Though the certificate of occupancy had not yet been granted, temporary use was granted for this weekend, including the first use of the new building for the Child of God service on Sunday. The **official Service of Dedication** for the new building is held during the opening of the Child of God service on the following Sunday, September 15.
- Sunday, September 29, 2019: A special fundraising concert called "**A Night of Music**" **is held to raise money for a new keyboard** for the sanctuary. The collective musical talent of the congregation is showcased by over two hours of

performances from the Atonement Praise Band, Choir, godify Band, and others. Enough money is raised, along with other contributions, to purchase the new keyboard.

- October 13, 2019: As part of our **Stewardship for All Seasons** program, a special appeal to help furnish the new building and pay down the loan begins. Walt and Robin Frank are the lay leaders working with consultant Mike Ward (see June 13, 2019).

**WESLEY CHAPEL**

# Neighborhood

**NEWS**

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On page 14 . . .

## Atonement Lutheran Church Cuts A Ribbon On New Fellowship Hall

**By CELESTE McLAUGHLIN**

The newly built structure in front of Atonement Lutheran Church may be somewhat nondescript, but the fact that it exists at all is something of a miracle, considering the church was once facing its last rites.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held on Sept. 7, to officially mark the opening of the church's new Fellowship Hall.

At about 2,800 square feet, it is triple the size of the church's former multi-purpose rooms, which only held about 70 people. The new room's capacity is 300.

Pastor Scott Lindner says it's an exciting sign of growth for the small church, which has been a part of the community for 30 years, but almost closed its doors for good in the early 2000s.

Lindner says instead of giving up, a former pastor sold five of the church's original 13 acres to a developer to create the neighboring office park.

"When I got here in 2006, they had just burned the mortgage," Lindner explains.

As Wesley Chapel has grown, the church has grown, too. Atonement Lutheran church regularly sees about 100 families in worship during the summer, and that number doubles in the winter when the "snowbirds" return to Florida.

The church also just celebrated the 10-



he calls a "hoose blueprint" relating to the message.

"It's like children's church, but also a parent support group," explains Lindner. "There's a story, questions, prayer guides and suggested activities, so you can make your house an extension of the church."

Five years ago, Atonement Lutheran held a capital campaign that raised \$300,000 to fund the building.

"It took six years to figure out what would work and what we could get permitted and what we could afford," Lindner says. Over those years, prices increased, and the church will take a loan to cover the rest of the costs, which are expected to come in at about \$125,000, once all of the final expenses are tallied, including permitting, landscaping and other expenses.

"We've been able to be generous to nonprofits by allowing them to use our building at no cost, and we will continue to do that," says Lindner. "We believe this is a special place; that's what keeps us going."

The Wesley Chapel Noon Rotary Club also has announced that it will again feed hundreds of people in need at Atonement Lutheran for the club's annual "Turkey Gobble" meal on Thanksgiving morning.

**Atonement Lutheran Church is located at 29617 S.R. 54. To learn more about the church, visit DiscoverALC.com or call (813) 973-2211.**

*A ribbon was cut in Sept. 7 for Atonement Lutheran Church's new building, which has added more space for the church's many ministries, including a food pantry that feeds up to 250 families each week year anniversary of its food pantry program, which feeds up to 250 families each week with 15,000 pounds of food.*

"Our ministries have grown so much in the past five years," says Rebecca Parker, a church member who also is a volunteer and chair of its worship and music committee. "We needed more space, so this is very exciting for us."

Pastor Lindner agrees. "We've known for years this time would come."

The new building will be used for not only Atonement's own full congregation,