



Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church is a family-oriented church whose roots date to 1820 when a dozen people would gather for worship inside a log cabin at the corner of Dogwood Lane and Stroop Road. It evolved many times through the years until the late 1950s when a parishioner sold land at the corner of Munger and Alex-Bell roads, just inside the Miami Township line, to the church. Worship services began inside Mullen Hall as early as 1959, and the current sanctuary was completed in 1962.

The church's latest evolution comes after months of construction that is finally winding down, complete with freshly painted walls, newly laid carpet, new lighting, updated restrooms and entrances that are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The pews are newly stained, and the old brick pulpit was removed. It is now replaced with a chancel area constructed with more flexible space for better worship leadership.

What sparked this \$930,000 labor of love is the church's 200th anniversary coming up in 2020. Committee co-chairs are just getting started brainstorming exactly how to celebrate the milestone.



*Rev. John Mittermaier*

"We hope it will be a year-long celebration of traditional events. Having fulfilled my goal of helping the congregation to reach its 200th anniversary, I will retire in 2020 and the congregation will install a new pastor to lead the congregation into its third century," Pastor John Mittermaier said. "I'll write an anniversary book about the history of the church and we'll ask the national bishop to attend."

Reverend Mittermaier came to Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in 2007 after serving as pastor at Miami University in Oxford. He is the fourth-generation Pastor John



Mittermaier in his family. His father served as pastor at St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church on Wayne Avenue in Dayton's Oregon District during the mid-1950s until 1963 when the congregation was 1,600 people strong. It dwindled to fewer than a hundred and is now closed. Mittermaier says churches continue to see a decline in congregation numbers, but he wants to set his church up to be a survivor. He has established three pillars of focus to guide

them into a prosperous future as part of Miami Township.

"First, we want a welcoming worship environment. The renovations are certainly part of that goal. Second, we want to give our congregation the opportunity to serve. We want to be more than just pew-sitters. And third, we want to see spiritual growth. We have a new program called Essential Jesus in which our readers commit to 100 readings about who Jesus is and what we should know about him."

Perhaps the ultimate road to success is making everyone feel welcome. "We just want to be a welcoming church. We have no designs to become a mega-church. We want to be a family-sized church where everyone is welcome."

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church has an on-site preschool, outreach programs and a nationally recognized community garden that offers plots of land to individuals and groups to grow fresh produce during the summer. Several of the 80+ plots are set aside for the West Carrollton food pantry. The goal is to grow a ton of produce for the pantry each year and that goal is usually met. The pre-school students grow pumpkins and the remaining plots are offered to individuals through a program with Five Rivers Metroparks. The garden is a hot commodity, though. More people apply for a plot each year than the garden space allows.

Church services were held in a temporary space at the church from August 2018 when construction began until mid-December when the congregation moved back to the main sanctuary among a few 'Excuse Our Dust' signs that are still necessary.

Bruns General Contracting should have the job complete in February 2019. A grand re-opening celebration will most likely happen in April 2019 when many of the snowbirds in the congregation return home from their winter respites. To learn more about Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, visit <http://www.zionelc.org/>.

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