

Whitestown Parish of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

In 1835 the Rev Ezra Keller was sent out by the Missionary Society of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania on a Missionary exploration. Among other things in his report he says, "Another settlement I visited in Marion County Indiana is on Little Eagle Creek. Here are about twelve families of Lutherans" This I take to be the first members of Salem Congregation. Further he says, "From here I went to Boone County where I found a number of Lutherans from the East Tennessee settled about six miles south east of Lebanon" This must refer to the first members of St. Marks and Union Congregations. These people ever hardy pioneers who seeking to better their material conditions had removed from Tennessee, Pennsylvania and North Carolina to what was then little better than a wilderness. Their lives ever spent in hard annual labor. Means of travel and communication were poor. Educational facilities scarcely to be mentioned. These people had early Christian training and were persons of sincere piety. Reverend Keller says that the Reverend E. S. Henkel had visited these people before he had visited them. In 1836 John Klingensmith and wife Susan, Peter Anthony and wife Hannah, George Coble and his wife Sarah, Jacob Klingensmith, Micheal Kepole and wife Polly, Jacob Sourwine and wife Elizabeth, Isaac Myers and wife Catherine, met at John Klingensmith's cabin and organized what was then called Hopewell congregation. They continued to meet at Klingensmiths' until 1840 when he donated an acre of ground for cemetery purposes. On this ground, which is one mile south of New Augusta, a house was built for a place of worship. This building was so used until 1855. From that time until 1859 meetings were held in a school house, when Joseph Klingensmith donated the land and a frame building was erected on the east side of New Augusta. This house was used until 1880, when a brick building, the one still used, was finished and dedicated by the Reverend House, The Reverend Abraham Reck organized and was the first pastor of this congregation. The name was changed from Hopewell to Salem about 1859.

In 1848 we find the Lutherans of Whitestown meeting in a log cabin. If there was an organization before this date the records are lost. In 1854 Wm. Laughner, Christopher Bowers, Jacob Harmon, Ambrose Neese, Joseph Beeler, George Lucas, John Ottinger, John Neese, Solomon Buck, Jacob Ditzenberger, John Hull with their wives and Miss Elrod met and organized Newtown Congregation, with the Reverend Henkel as first pastor. They built a house just west of the present interurban station in Whitestown. In 1863 a new house was built where the present house now is, and the same was dedicated August 13, 1869 by the Reverend M. J. Stirewalt assisted by the Reverends Rudisell, Henkel, J. L. Stirewalt and J. E. Kesner. The name of the congregation was changed to St. Marks August 12, 1869. In 1904 the present beautiful house was dedicated January 29 by Reverend Dr. H. Peters. Just when Union Congregation was organized I have been unable to ascertain. I find a record of a communion service by the Reverend E. S. Henkel September 11, 1836. At this time seventeen persons communed, among them being, John Good, Adam Ketring, John Peters, John Isenhour, Austin King, Samuel Good, Henry Good, Peter Kesling, Catherine Hankel and Tykena Buck. When the first house was build I cannot say, but I find that on April 15, 1840, Reverend Henkel preached two sermons in English, one at a school house the other at Mrs Buck's. From this we may infer that at that time there was no regular place of meeting. January 6, 1844 Samuel Good, Adam Ketring, John Long, William Etter, Philip Lucas, George Lucas, John Neese, John Isenhour, Jacob Hull, Peter Kisling, and William S, elser adopted regulations for Union Church and congregated themselves into a church capacity. There must have been an organization before this time and I am under the impression in the parish as I find that Union is the oldest congregation in the parish, as I find in the The Synodical relations of these congregations, and in fact all Lutheran congregations in Indiana were very unsettled in these early days. The first pastors of the churches belonged to this parish came from the Tennessee, North Carolina and English District Synods. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Indiana was organized in 1835. The men serving these congregations united with this synod. In 1859 this body met in Newtown church at Whitestown, Ind. At this meeting difference and difficulties arose and the synod dissolved. At this time the delegate from Salem or Hopewell congregation left and this congregation stood independent until 1871 though served by the same pastors as the other congregations of the parish. After the dissolution of the synod the pastors and delegates remaining proceeded to form a new synod. This purpose was accomplished in November 1859. This body was known as Union Synod. At this meeting W. H. Laughner represented Newtown Church, Philip Lucas, Union, and Reuben Forest, St. James of Montgomery County Indiana. May 28, 1849 the Reverends David and Abraham Miller and John Lautenschlager met with seven delegates from as many congregations at Hopewell Church New Augusta and formed what they were pleased to call the "True Synod of Indiana". This was in opposition to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Indiana. This synod was short lived and Lautenschlager siad it died a nautral death. June 20, 1871 a meeting of all the General Council element in Indiana was opened in Wh testown Church. At this meeting the Pittsburg Union and Evangelical Lutheran District Synods were represented. Out of this meeting grew the Indiana Synod, organized October 23, 1871. This name was later changed to the Chicagg Synod the present organization to which this parish belongs. This parish at one time consisted of 5 congregations, Salem, St. Marks, Union, St James in Montgomery Co and St George Shelby Co. St. James united with Colburn, St. George with General Synod

Since this above was written the parish has been served by Reverend Westenbarger, Student Theo Broscha and the Preverend H. Grady Davis. Reverend G. L. Kleespie came on the field November 14, 1937, and is now serving.

*The above was possibly written by Rev J. L. Kleespie  
M. L. H.*