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INDIANAPOLIS, Indiana
(Marion County, Indiana)

EBENEZER 1836

Some of the first parishioners of Ebenezer Lutheran Church were one-time Maryland farmers who had migrated to Marion County, Indiana more than a decade before the congregation was organized. Accompanied by their pastor, the Rev. Abraham Reck, several members of the Ringer, Smay, Brown, Easterday and Bower families settled near Indianapolis in 1824. While developing his \$1,800, 80-acre homestead, Pastor Reck found time to serve the religious needs of his old friends and new neighbors. For several years he conducted worship services in various places, including his barn. Then, on August 6, 1836 he organized Ebenezer Church with forty members. (Indiana had only a few Lutheran churches prior to 1836.)

The congregation's first house of worship was a log building, constructed in 1836 on Pastor Reck's land, just north of the present church on Millersville Road. There, forty-nine members participated in their first communion service on October 30, 1829. The Rev. Ezra Keller, a traveling preacher who later founded Wittenberg College in Springfield, Ohio, officiated at that service. About ten years later, on August 11, 1849, the first Sunday school classes were introduced.

Ebenezer's second church, a substantial white frame structure was erected in 1853 at the site of the first church. The dedicatory sermon was delivered by the Rev. D. Altman, and at that service money was received to pay off the congregation's indebtedness.

The Civil War had a significant impact on the parish. In all, fifteen parishioners served in the Union Army, and four of them were killed. Ebenezer contributed to the Freedman's Aid Society, an organization that cared for runaway slaves, as well as the U. S. Christian Commission, which ministered to Union soldiers.

There was a number of noteworthy developments at Ebenezer Church after the war. Within a few years, the communing membership increased to seventy-five, and the pastor's annual salary was raised to \$250. Then, in 1874-1875, the second church building was moved, and a tall, brick, 40 x 60-foot edifice was constructed on the site of the present house of worship. When dedicated, on January 10, 1875, the new building was the only brick church in Washington Township, and in time it became known as "the red brick church on the road to Millersville." Pastor Obadiah Brown, who was nearing the end of his first six-year ministry of Ebenezer when this structure was finished, died in 1885 while serving the congregation a second time.

Wars again disrupted the lives of many of the church's members in the twentieth century. Twelve men from the congregation served in the armed forces during World War I, while ten were in uniform during World War II. Two parishioners were killed in action in each of these tragic episodes.

Meanwhile, prior to the celebration of its 100th anniversary in 1939, Ebenezer modified its ministry in several respects. A Luther League was organized for the youth of the congregation, a regular schedule of Lenten services was adopted, a monthly newsletter was initiated, and a series of appointments were added in the sanctuary to enhance the worship services.

Fire destroyed the congregation's seventy-year-old church building on the night of February 12, 1942. The damage was estimated at \$20,000, but, fortunately, the church's records were safely filed in the Rev. Kenneth E. Hartman's parsonage. For the next fifteen months, Ebenezer's services and Sunday school classes were conducted in temporary quarters: first, the Millersville Masonic Lodge, then a place of business owned by Mr. and Mrs. Horace Beville (Bailiff?), members of the congregation. But after May 23, 1843, when an \$11,000 parish house (part of the present building) was dedicated, the situation began to return to normal. Eighteen months later, an \$8,000 parsonage was also erected near the parish house.

Nearly a decade passed before the congregation was in a position to construct a second unit which was designed as a permanent worship center. On October 18, 1953, early in the extended pastorate of the Rev. Wilbur E. Allen, ground was broken for the proposed building. The dedication of the long awaited, \$65,000 Gothic structure took place on September 26, 1954. Rustic in its external appearance, the edifice had room to seat 210 persons in the nave and 100 more people in an overflow area enclosed by a folding wall. The basement contained classrooms, a nursery, a stage, a kitchen, a storage room and a room for social activities.

In February 1965, Pastor Allen retired from the active ministry and was temporarily succeeded by the Rev. James S. Ford, who had been Ebenezer's associate pastor since June 1964. Pastor Ford resigned to pursue graduate studies. During the short vacancy that ensued, the congregation dedicated a large third unit in their physical plant—a \$160,000 educational wing.

On January 1, 1966, the Rev. Robert E. Cassell began a four-year term as Ebenezer's spiritual leader. Under his leadership the congregation marked their 150th anniversary and took an active part in both parish and community programs. Finally, in July 1970, the Rev. William A. Thoresen accepted a call to become the pastor of the historic Indianapolis church.

In its early years, Ebenezer Church belonged to a plural parish which included two other congregations in the Indianapolis area—Highland Lutheran Church and Pleasant View Church. Highland merged with Ebenezer in 1919, and in January 1945 Ebenezer became an independent parish.

Membership as of December 31, 1970: 385 baptized, 272 confirmed, 196 communing.

Previous synodical affiliations: Synod of the West, 1836-1847; Olive Branch Synod of the General Synod, 1848-1920; Indiana Synod (ULCA), 1920-1962.

Pastors who served the congregation:

Abraham Reck (1836-1840), A. A. Trimper (1840-1843), Jacob Scherer (1844-1846), A. H. Meyers (1846-1851), A. S. Hill (1852), George A. Exline (1853-1859), A. J. Cromer (1860-1864), Jacob Keller (1864-1868), Obadiah Brown (1869-1875), D. K. Hamma (1876), William Henry Keller (1877-1882), Obadiah Brown (1883-1885), A. M. Anthony (1886-1887), Daniel Marcellus Horner (1888-1890), Joseph Swick (1891-1896), George W. Getter (1896-1899), George Bahon Schmit, D. D. (1899-1905), George L. Courtney (1906-1909), William Wallace Criley, D. D. (1909-1916), L. William Gross (1916-1919), Carly K. Naffziger (1920-1921), Earl Coble (1922-1924), Knox Roberts (1925-1928), Arthur H. Abplanalp (1919-1935), Kenneth E. Hartman (1935-1942), William L. Pifer (1942-1944), R. Eugene Smith (1945-1947), Lewis C. Westenbarger (1948-1951), Wilbur E. Allen (1952-1965), James S. Ford (1965), Robert E. Cassell (1966-1969), William A. Thoresen (1970-).