

1987 - 2010

Community of Joy, originally called Rio Rancho Lutheran Church, got her start late in 1987. Pastor Jim Thompson was called as the first pastor of this budding ministry which first held services at the Inn at Rio Rancho (Best Western Rio Rancho Inn). They moved, in 1989, to the Italian-American Center where on Sunday mornings the air was perfumed with the stale smell of cigarettes and beer. There were not many alternative locations in those days, so it had to do. On May 20, 1990, Community of Joy officially became a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with 34 households. In September of the same year, the congregation moved Sunday Services to Stapleton Elementary School where the first Sunday School classes began under the leadership of Gladys Prekker.



1990—1996 Ups and Downs and Ups

The years between 1990 and 1996 were filled with great expectations and many ups and downs. People moved in and moved away. Because of struggle and discontent Pastor Thompson decided to resign in 1996, in the hope that a big change would turn things around. With the help of interim Pastor Ray Nyce, the hope of a future did not die as a remnant group of about 20 worked with the ELCA and the Rocky Mountain Synod to start anew. The people of Community of Joy were persuasive and received the needed funding to keep the dream alive.



The next step was to call a new pastor. Pastor Scott Hackler came from Greeley, Colorado to meet the congregation. Working together they decided to make him their pastor and he accepted. Pastor Hackler made Rio Rancho his home, and began duties on December 1, 1996. Because of the renewed sense of mission, committed leadership and the good work of Pastor Nyce, Community of Joy began to grow and look ahead, though still feeling like God's children in the wilderness.

Immediately, help came. Now a member of Community of Joy, Pastor Russell Lee led Faith Lutheran in Albuquerque to give a large financial gift which was used to purchase a new keyboard and sound system. During the next couple of years significant financial support came from St. Paul and All Saints Lutheran Churches.

Tom Robinson was the first staff person. He was a talented musician and composer who also helped in the office. Soon an enclosed trailer was purchased to make moving in and out of the schools on Sunday morning much easier. God led Community of Joy from Stapleton Elementary to Eagle Ridge Middle School in 1998 and before the end of 1999, to Enchanted Hills Elementary School. It wasn't to be the final move. In November of 2001 the congregation leased space in an office building at the far north end of Rio Rancho. Finally no more days of emptying the trailer, setting-up and then storing it all again for the next Sunday.

A Church Building is Erected

Back in April, 2000, Community of Joy purchased land that was being held by the Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA. With land on Northern Blvd. and the leased space Community of Joy was able to move ahead with an even greater hope.

Change has been a part of the life of Community of Joy. The office staff and music staff have changed through the years, but Community of Joy has always been blessed by dedicated and faithful workers. The lay leadership has also changed through the years. Pastor Scott Hackler answered the call to Joy! Lutheran Church in Gurnee, Illinois, in October of 2006. In November of 2006 we welcomed Pastor Tom Anderson as our Interim Pastor. God continues to bring great and gifted people to renew and guide the work we share.



Founding Member Willard Prekker digs the first hole for the new church.

During the spring of 2002, the congregation committed to giving \$325,000 over three years to support the building of our first facility. A building team was formed to develop plans and under the fine leadership of Andy Anderson and the rest of the team, space was evaluated, drawings developed, an architect hired and many other details completed. In May of 2004 we moved in to our facility and have continued the work for which God has gathered us.

TODAY

Community of Joy continues to grow. In 2009, we recorded 345 baptized members. Our average attendance for our two services total 170 a Sunday. We have expanded our facilities with a new educational wing which was completed in the late spring of 2009. In November of 2009 we welcomed our new Pastor, Michael Bastian, and his family at COJ. We are grateful to God for His guidance in leading us into our next chapter of ministry in His name. You are invited to be a part of the story that continues to unfold.

Our current staff includes:

Pastor Michael Bastian
Earlene Shroyer, Administrative Assistant
Anne Kinney, Worship Leader
Aaron Howe, Director of Music
Gretchen Comfort, Parish Nurse
Heather McCarthy, Nursery Attendant

*“According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is **Jesus Christ**.” I Corinthians 3:10-11*

“I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” Matthew 16:18



The Steel frames of COJ set against the backdrop of the Sandia Mountains in 2004.