

## **A Short History: Word of Life Deaf Lutheran Church in Lancaster, Pa.**

Word of Life Deaf Lutheran Church (WOLD) was formed in 1989 as a mission start of St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Lancaster, Pa. Deaf people were part of that congregation's life, and St. Matthew's recognized the need for Deaf people to have their own expression of worship.

WOLD started its congregational life by sharing worship space at St. Matthew's. The Synod selected and called the Rev. Kim L. Lengert to serve as pastor-developer for the congregation. WOLD's first worship service was held on Christmas Eve 1989.

WOLD worshipped twice a month and had Bible Studies and fellowship events. On Sept. 19, 1993, WOLD's charter was opened, and the charter members started signing on. On Feb. 20, 1994, the 1st Sunday in Lent, WOLD closed its charter and was received into the ELCA as a official congregation. Forty-four people's names were signed to the charter. After chartering, WOLD "left the nest" and relocated to Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in downtown Lancaster.

In 1995, Pastor Lengert began covering the pastoral vacancy at Trinity Deaf Church in Reading, while maintaining her work with WOLD. Pastor Lengert led worship twice a month at each congregation. In 1998, Pastor Lengert resigned from WOLD and accepted a call to Trinity Lutheran Church in Reading to serve Trinity's Deaf members.

WOLD's first pastoral vacancy lasted three years. Council President Donald Johnston, Sr., and his wife, Pauline (council secretary), are credited with keeping the congregation going during this time. The Rev. Jack Hoffman from the synod office aided WOLD greatly during their long search for a pastor.

The Rev. Russell A. Rockwell, then serving at Bread of Life Lutheran Church for the Deaf in Minneapolis, Minn., was called to serve WOLD. Rev. Rockwell's acceptance of the call to WOLD

had this distinction: it was the first time WOLD chose its pastor. The call was officially issued by the Synod in August 2001. In addition to the pastoral charge for WOLD, Rev. Rockwell was given responsibility for synod-wide Deaf ministry as "Deaf Missioner."

In 2003, WOLD began using a video projector with worship and bible study — the visual element significantly enhanced WOLD's ministry.

In Advent 2007, WOLD relocated to St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lancaster. St. Peter's had just expanded their building, and welcomed WOLD into their new space as part of their own mission to the community.

Bible studies and midweek services did not happen often at the downtown location, but they flourished at the St. Peter's site. Since 2008, bible study attendance has been comparable to worship — an average of 20 at worship and 18 at bible study. WOLD members also very much enjoy attending St. Peter's Lenten & Advent midweek services.

WOLD's unique ministry draws people from 13 different zip codes, some from as far as 30 miles away. Only 6 WOLD members live within a 3-5 mile radius of St. Peter's. Non-members actively contribute to the life and mission of WOLD, and are mostly Hearing people who know sign language, and attend for various reasons.

In 2010, WOLD increased worship from two to three times a month to three, and added weekly worship during the seasons of Lent and Advent. The goal is to achieve weekly worship.

WOLD shows movies of interest to the wider Deaf community, and is a big supporter of ELDA. WOLD remains a mission-support congregation, receiving support from the synod, the national church, local and out-of-state congregations.