✝️ HOLY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE HILL OVERLOOKING ROBESONIA ✝️

A NEW BEGINNING ON THE HILL – THE DEDICATION OF ST. DANIEL'S

Less than two years after a devastating fire destroyed St. Daniel's Lutheran Church in December 1976, a new church stood on the hill overlooking Robesonia. What had begun with Pastor Edward Cloughen's declaration, "Let's get to work!" became a reality through the faith, perseverance, and hard work of a congregation determined to move forward.

From the groundbreaking on September 4, 1977, through months of construction challenges and then the laying of the cornerstone on October 22, 1978, each milestone brought St. Daniel's closer to its new beginning, culminating in four special Sunday services throughout November 1978 to dedicate its new church home.

November 5 – Dedication Sunday

The first celebration took place on November 5, appropriately coinciding with All Saints Sunday, a day set aside to remember the faithful who have gone before us.

During the morning service, Pastor Edward Cloughen and Rev. David Wartluft, a son of the congregation, conducted a special dedication of the memorials placed throughout the new church in honor or memory of loved ones. Mrs. Clara Leisey, widow of former St. Daniel's pastor Rev. Dr. Elmer Leisey, also addressed the congregation and presented a check representing a $50,000 loan from Trinity Lutheran Church in Reading.

According to the *Reading Eagle*, approximately 400 people gathered that afternoon for the official Service of Dedication of the Church Building. The service was also broadcast over Reading radio station WEEU, allowing others throughout the community to share in the occasion. Joining Pastors Cloughen and Wartluft were several visiting clergy, including Rev. Wilson E. Touhsaent, President of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Lutheran Church in America, and Rev. Harold R. Baer, Jr., Dean of the West Berks District.

November 12 – An Ecumenical Service of Thanks

The following Sunday was dedicated to expressing gratitude to the neighboring churches and community organizations that had opened their doors to St. Daniel's following the fire. Special recognition was given to Trinity Lutheran Church and St. Paul's United Church of Christ, both of Robesonia; the Conrad Weiser School District; and Bethany Children's Home in Womelsdorf. Each had provided assistance or space that helped St. Daniel's continue its ministries while the new church was being built.

Representatives of these organizations participated in the service, with Mrs. Betty Pettit, Assistant to the Synod President, serving as the guest speaker. Special music was provided by the Bethany Home choir.

November 19 – District Sunday

The third Sunday brought together clergy from the West Berks District. Among those participating were two former St. Daniel's pastors, Rev. James Miller and Rev. John Keener, along with Rev. Harold R. Baer, Jr., District Dean.

Music was an important part of the celebration, featuring the St. Daniel's bell choir and a combined choir from St. Daniel's, Trinity Lutheran Church of Robesonia, and Friedens Lutheran Church of Bernville.

November 26 – Dedication of the Pipe Organ

The month of celebrations concluded with the dedication of the new pipe organ.

Guest organist Corinne Eckert, a former St. Daniel's organist who was then serving Grace Lutheran Church in Shillington, presented an organ recital. The service also featured the Berks Chamber Orchestra, along with St. Daniel's vocal choirs and Tintinnabulators bell choir, under the direction of organist and choir director Miriam Borkert. Suzanne Hassler (now Sue Ellefson) was also featured in the musical program.

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The new sanctuary could accommodate more than 300 worshipers, and the building included a spacious narthex, social hall, kitchen, library, offices, choir room, and an education wing with 12 rooms available for classrooms.

During St. Daniel's 250th anniversary celebration in 2001, as part of a reenactment of the construction of the first church, participants paced off the dimensions of that original building. The entire first church could have fit comfortably inside the sanctuary of the present church – with room to spare!

The following is excerpted from the Architect's Statement for St. Daniel's Church, as found in the 1978 Church Dedication Booklet:

> *The worship area has been designed to link the best of the church's heritage with the finest of contemporary liturgical and architectural thought so as to present at one and the same time a place of obvious reverence and fresh relevance to twentieth century life. The "free standing" altar brings the idea of God's living presence in the midst of the congregation rather than "out there" somewhere. The curved communion rail where worshipers gather around the Lord's table*

symbolizes the closeness and fellowship of the Family of God. The wall-mounted cross centered behind the altar with its removable crown of thorns presents the focal point of our faith and the total worship area. Between the nave and the narthex you will find clear glass panels with sand-carved symbols especially designed in such a fashion to enhance the total interior beauty of the structure. Likewise, the stained glass helps to create an atmosphere which, along with the wood ceiling, carries the eye toward the chancel area.

Materials, both in interior and exterior, were selected for color, attractive texture, and low maintenance along with economy of initial cost. The building committee wisely agreed to face portions of the exterior with stone masonry laid in such a fashion as to give an appearance of a dry stone wall. The entire structure and furnishings have been developed in a contemporary style, keeping in mind, however, the traditional architecture of past ages. In this regard, the spire with its electronic bells clearly relates to both the bygone era and present day trends.

And although the fire had destroyed so much, reminders of the former church found a permanent home in the new one. Included in the narthex is a wall display case given by Pastor Cloughen and his family in memory of loved ones. This cabinet preserves items salvaged from the fire, such as Bibles, hymnals, a book stand, and offering plates. Also displayed are photos, the groundbreaking shovel, and one of the miniature bells created from the remains of the original church bell destroyed in the fire. These treasured pieces serve as a reminder that while the building was new, the congregation's history and heritage remained very much a part of it.

In his message published in the 1979 Church Record, Pastor Cloughen reflected on the extraordinary events of the previous year:

The year of 1978 was surely an exciting one in all of our lives, as we saw the completion and dedication of our beautiful new facilities. St. Daniel's has its new home! Our "New Beginning" is now a reality!

But what is now even more exciting is the fact that a beginning is only the start of something. And so it is that I look forward with eager anticipation to the months and years ahead as together, in the service of our Lord, we proceed to wear these facilities out!

"Behold, I make all things new..." The promise of our heavenly Father is nothing other than a ringing declaration that if we allow him, each of our lives will be constantly renewed, each and every day, until that time when we will be eternally with him. And that promise takes effect right now!

The dedications are over, but the excitement that can be ours as active members of the people of God is, if anything, heightened!

And so, as we look ahead, I hope for your help... not only in support... not only in attendance... but also in joyous cooperation, in willingness to say "Yes, I'll take part"... and especially in your continuing efforts to weld us into an increasingly caring family. May God continue to bless and direct us in His mission of witnessing and service.

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The dedication services marked the completion of the building, but another important milestone still lay ahead.

On December 7, 1986 – almost ten years to the day after the devastating fire – St. Daniel's gathered once again for a special celebration: the burning of the mortgage on the new church building. Rev. Dr. Harold Weiss, Bishop of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Lutheran Church in America, joined the congregation for this significant occasion.

From the church fire in December 1976 to the ceremonial burning of the mortgage in December 1986, St. Daniel's had completed a remarkable decade of rebuilding and renewal. One fire marked a heartbreaking loss; the other marked a significant achievement.

The fire did not bring an end to the congregation. Worship continued. Ministries continued. Neighbors extended helping hands. Members gave their time, talents, and resources. And together, they accomplished what must have seemed an overwhelming task in those first days after the fire.

The rebuilding of St. Daniel's was never simply about replacing what had been lost. It was about carrying forward the traditions and ministries that had defined St. Daniel's for more than two centuries. Today, as St. Daniel's celebrates its 275th anniversary, the church built through the determination and dedication of its members nearly fifty years ago continues to serve the congregation and community. Among those who worship within its walls today are members who helped make that new beginning possible. Their continued presence among us is a living connection to that remarkable chapter in St. Daniel's history. For their faithfulness and dedication through the years, we are deeply grateful!

What an amazing and enduring history we share!

Follow this space throughout the year for snippets of St. Daniel's history from 1751 to 2026.

Historical details taken from the 'St. Daniel's Evangelical Lutheran Church "Eck Kirche" 1751-2001' church history book written by the St. Daniel's History Committee in celebration of the 250th anniversary. More details regarding this topic are found in Chapter 2 – The Church Grows – Construction of the Third Church 1977-1978. Additional details from Church Records from applicable years and the 1978 Dedication booklet and bulletin. Photos and articles from St. Daniel's archives and albums owned by Margie Baerncopf and Joyce Hassler.

#StDaniels #StDanielsLutheranChurch #EckKirche #CornerChurch #OnTheHillOverlookingRobesonia #RobesoniaPA #1751StDaniels2026 #275thAnniversary #HolyHighlights #History #OurHistory #ThirdChurch #Groundbreaking #Construction #Rebuild #Cornerstone #Dedication #MortgageBurning #ReverendEdwardCloughen #ChurchRecord #ALotHappensIn275Years



Reading Eagle, Monday, November 6, 1978

St. Daniel's Church Dedicated

Approximately 400 people witnessed the dedication Sunday of a new church building for St. Daniel's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Robesonia, and presentation of a $50,000 check for a loan to St. Daniel's from Trinity Lutheran Church, Reading. Exchanging congratulations are, from left, Vernon Bright, St. Daniel's church council president; the Rev. Wilson E. Touhsaent, president of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Lutheran Synod; the Rev. Edward W. Cloughen, St. Daniel's pastor; Mark Wolfskill, building committee chairman; and Robert Koch, dedication chairman. — Eagle Photo by Owen C. Stout.

November 5, 1978
Dedication Sunday

Reading Eagle photo
by Owen C. Stout
November 6, 1978
Marge Baerncopf
clipping

Posted to Facebook by Kim Henning
October 29, 2026



Ecumenical Service Conducted

Reading Eagle 11/13/78

An ecumenical service was held Sunday afternoon in St. Daniel's Lutheran Church, Robesonia. The congregation also gave formal thanks to various churches and organizations for the use of their facilities during the construction of the new edifice. Taking part in the service were left to right: Vernon Bright, church council president; Mrs. Betty Pettit, assistant to the president of the Northeastern Synod; Dr. Richard W. Miller, superintendent of the Conrad Weiser School District; and the Rev. Edward W. Cloughen, pastor. — Eagle Photo by Owen C. Stout.

Above:
November 12, 1978
An Ecumenical Service of Thanks

Reading Eagle photo
by Owen C. Stout
November 13, 1978
Joyce Hassler clipping



Organ Dedication Slated

A dedication service for the Wickes organ in St. Daniel's Lutheran Church, Robesonia, will take place Sunday at 3 p.m. Corinne Eckert, right, guest organist, shows one of her concert selections to Mrs. Miriam Eckert, church organist. — Eagle Photo by Owen C. Stout.

Left:
November 26, 1978
Dedication of the Pipe Organ

Reading Eagle photo
by Owen C. Stout
November 24, 1978
From St. Daniel's archives



30 Times, Reading, Pa., Mon., Dec. 8, 1986

Staff photo by Owen C. Stout

Preparing to burn the mortgage of St. Daniel's Lutheran Church, Robesonia, are, from left, the Rev. Edward W. Cloughen, pastor; Samuel C. Thomas, president of the church council; the Rev. Dr. Harold S. Weiss, bishop of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Lutheran Church of America; and Richard Labe, church treasurer.

December 7, 1986 – Mortgage Burning

Reading Times photo
by Owen C. Stout
December 8, 1986
Joyce Hassler clipping

Reading Eagle photo
by Owen C. Stout
December 8, 1986
Joyce Hassler clipping



Monday, December 8, 1986 READING EAGLE

Owen C. Stout photo

Burning the mortgage of St. Daniel's Lutheran Church are, from left, the Rev. Edward W. Cloughen, pastor of the church north of Robesonia; the Rev. Dr. Harold S. Weiss, bishop of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Lutheran Church in America; and Mark Wolfskill, chairman of the building committee. The church, destroyed by fire Dec. 8, 1976, was rebuilt for $1 million.

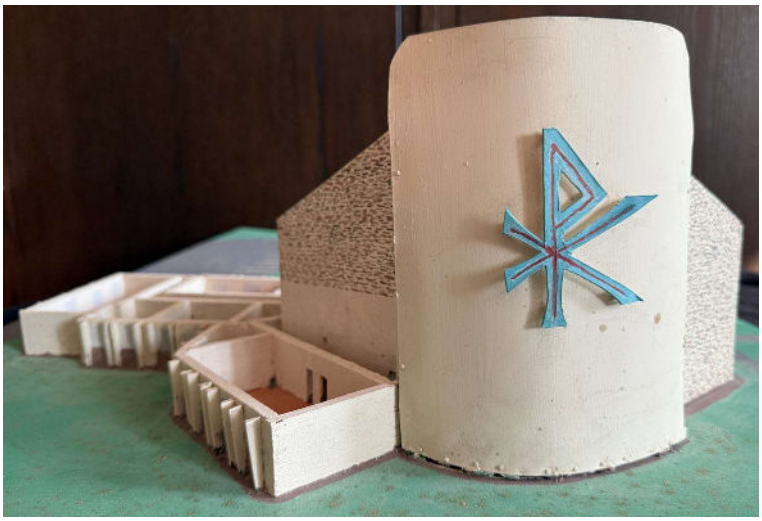
3D Model of the original layout of the church (prior to 2005 renovations)





The vertical wing shows the narthex with storage, office and Pastor's office, social hall (orange floor), restrooms, and kitchen.

The horizontal wing shows the Sunday School wing along with the sacristy and bell choir room to the right of the sanctuary.









Look at the details of the model! Stained glass windows, banners, hymn boards, pulpit, altar, lectern, flower shelves, organ and pipes... Amazing!



Stone wall to the right of the Chi Rho wall, including a view of the stained glass chancel window



Present day portico / office wing entrance



Present day Preschool / Clinic entrance



Aerial Survey view 1979 – St. Daniel's archives

Posted to Facebook by Kim Henning
October 29, 2026