Not many things that began shortly after the end of the Civil War remain today – but a little church high on a hill in Weldon Spring is one of them.

“The undersigned pastor with God’s help,” Reverend Johan Jakob Hotz wrote in the congregational record book, “on Feb. 7, 1866 began the important work of gathering and founding of an Evangelical congregation in and around Cottleville; St. Charles County, Mo.”

That was the start of it. Later that same year the constitution and order of worship were submitted and approved. The following year the congregation bought a 4½ acre tract of land, and promptly built a home for its pastor.

Things moved more slowly back then. Not until 1874 and the pastorate of Reverend Gottfried Doernenberg was the actual sanctuary finally built and dedicated. Gradually things began to fall into place. The congregation appointed a vorstehr – a precursor to today’s church council – consisting of four men: two to attend to the church’s spiritual needs, and two to its physical ones. In 1878 the congregation became incorporated with the name Emmanuel for the very first time, officially being recognized as German Evangelical Emmanuel Congregation at Weldon Spring.

In the coming decades, groups and traditions were planted and took root. The Ladies’ Aid and the Young People’s League were founded in 1911. The League no longer exists, but the Ladies’ Aid (now known as Women’s Fellowship) thrives to this day. Though a small group, the members faithfully conduct monthly meetings, make quilts, hold bake sales, publish cookbooks. They cook for receptions following weddings and funerals held at the church, and often sponsor charitable causes.

In 1926 the original hall (now known as Hoffmann Hall) was built. About ten years ago it underwent some renovations. Now comfortably heated or cooled as needed, Hoffman Hall is used for many church-related functions and can even be rented for use by the public. Underneath the hall is the old kitchen, which still is in service; it is used every October for Emmanuel’s well-known sausage supper.

For approximately twenty years (1942-61) Emmanuel’s congregation united with St. John’s in Cottleville, with the same minister serving each. In 1961 the two churches went even further, actually becoming one church and adopting the name New Hope. However, this arrangement lasted only a short time before the churches returned to their original identities in 1963.

The 1950’s brought changes too: we built a new parsonage and developed our version of the Vacation Bible School program.

With the development of Highway 94 in the sixties, Emmanuel lost some property and its spring, but built a new fellowship hall and extended the size of the church. Eventually this included in 1972 the installation of a beautiful circular stained glass window.
In the last twenty years or so, our church and property have had multiple renovation projects. But we also have received wonderful additions to the worship service itself—many donated and/or crafted by members. These include a beautiful wooden communion table, silver communion ware, and captivating banners.

That’s a lot of history. What about our church today?

Emmanuel is not a large congregation, but our members have large hearts. We are committed to our church family and always strive to make our worship and fellowship together more meaningful. Our Minister of Music has been with us for almost eight years now; his wonderful voice and beautiful piano and organ playing add extra dimension and spirit to the worship experience. We give generously to UCC special mission offerings each year—One Great Hour of Sharing during Lent, and Neighbors in Need in the early fall. We participate in the Backpack Program, F.I.S.H., Festival of Sharing, Heifer Project and Emmaus Home.

Emmanuuel fervently believes what has come to be our motto, and which we recite every Sunday: “Whoever you are, wherever you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.” And we work hard to live up to our mission statement, which states, “We reach out to the community by serving UCC-sponsored and other ministries.”

Jesus said, “Wherever two or more are gathered in my name, there I am also”—there indeed is power and strength, even in small numbers!

Emmanuel is now embarking on a New Beginnings program to learn how to adapt and serve our quickly-changing community. With God’s help, we will work to find and nurture the divine spirit in everyone we meet.