

# History of Trinity Lutheran Congregation

## Compiled by David Apps and Jean Memken

In 1853, the Rev. C. Strassen of Collinsville, Illinois learned that a sizable population of Germans lived in Bloomington, but that no Lutheran Church had yet been established. Rev. Strassen soon visited Bloomington and held services the following Sunday. Over the next five years, Bloomington became a “Lutheran Preaching Station” with students from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis conducting services.

August 8, 1858, the Rev. Friedrich Ruff, came to Bloomington and first preached in the old McLean County Court House. On September 19, 1858, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church was organized. Pastor Ruff accepted the congregation’s divine call as our first pastor in October of 1858. Our Christian Day School began at this time as well and was taught by our first three pastors.

Over the first few years, the congregation rented a small hall in order for services, until a suitable lot on which to build a church could be purchased.

After serving less than two years under trying conditions, Rev. Friedrich Ruff accepted another call to a sister congregation in Wisconsin in the spring of 1860.

The congregation was without a pastor until they were successful in calling the Rev. Friedrich J. T. Jungck in November 1861.

Again, our congregation resolved to purchase a suitable location and build a new church. But instead of building, the old First Christian Church was rented in September 1862. After six months, the congregation purchased the building at a cost of \$250 and moved it to a lot purchased for \$450 at the northeast corner of Madison and Olive Streets. Our new church was solemnly dedicated to the Lord at the end of June 1863.

Later that year, Rev. Jungck was called into another field, and the Rev. Charles H. G. Schliepsiek accepted the invitation to become Trinity’s third pastor. Trinity’s first parsonage was purchased in 1964 for \$850.

Although our Christian Day School classes were taught in the church, Trinity called its first teacher, Mr. J. L. Backhaus, in the spring of 1865.

In 1867 the congregation was officially received as a member of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States, convinced that this body preached and taught the Word of God in its truth and purity. Later this Synod would become what is known as today as our Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

In this year, Pastor Schliepsiek and Teacher Backhaus would both accept calls elsewhere. Although Trinity was immediately successful in calling Mr. John Brase as a replacement teacher, Trinity would need to issue a call eight times before a pastor accepted our invitation.

During this nearly two year vacancy, the congregation’s numbers greatly dwindled and an opposition congregation had even formed, before the Rev. Ernst Mangelsdorf accepted our call as pastor.

In 1868, the congregation purchased the house and lot adjoining the church at 206 S. Madison Street, and after remodeling the house, it served as the church’s second parsonage until 1906.

By 1872, enrollment in the Christian Day School had reached over 100 pupils and the congregation realized that they had long outgrown their current church facility and decided to build two separate schools by 1873. One school was located on the south side of Bloomington at the northeast corner of Lincoln and Main Streets and was taught by Mr. John Brase, and the other on the west side of Bloomington on West Chestnut Street taught by Mr. E. C. Marr.

During his eight years as pastor, Rev. Mangelsdorf had developed severe chronic headaches and was compelled to hand in his resignation in 1876, which the congregation accepted with deep regret. The Rev. Erhardt Riedel was then called as his successor, and was installed in October 1876.

The congregation continued to grow and prospered through the year 1883. Now at this time, unnamed conditions arose which required investigations by synodical officials, whereby Pastor Riedel was advised to resign his pastorate.

In his place, the Rev. Carl F. W. Sapper of St. Louis, Missouri, was now called to serve as pastor and was installed on May 27, 1883.

Church attendance greatly increased. Crowding at services on Sunday mornings necessitated the building a new church home. On April 20, 1884, a resolution was passed to move the church building to a lot they owned near their school in the western part of the city and to erect a new facility.

All preparatory work for the new building was completed by August 1884. On September 7, 1884 the cornerstone was laid, and on June 14, 1885, the new church edifice, having a seating capacity of 905 people, was dedicated to the Lord. The cost of the new church amounted to \$19,000.

By the early 1890's, the congregation decided to consolidate its two schools and purchase property at the 700 block of South Madison Street. The new school building was built at a cost of \$7,500 and dedicated on October 30, 1892.

By 1897, the health of Rev. Sapper now began to fail. Over the next several years, the congregation granted him leaves of absence in order to help him regain his strength. He would manage to continue his duties as head pastor until 1904.

Upon his advice, the congregation called the Rev. Otto L. Hohenstein of Peoria, Illinois, as chief pastor. Rev. Sapper continued as an assistant pastor until the fall of 1908 when he moved to California for his health. He would officially resign as assistant pastor in January 1910 and entered eternal rest on Sunday, July 23, 1911 in Los Angeles, California. In total, Pastor Carl Sapper had served the congregation for 27 years.

In the early years of Rev. Otto L. Hohenstein's pastorate, a third parsonage was built in 1906 at 803 South Madison Street and would serve as such until 1954.

In 1911, our congregation called Mr. J. F. Ruecklos to serve as our new school principal and 7th/8th grade teacher, a position he would hold for 34 years.

By 1915, congregation then called seminary candidate, Walter E. Hohenstein, as assistant pastor to his father. He was ordained and installed on Sunday, June 20th, 1915.

Pastor Otto L. Hohenstein served the congregation faithfully for 19 years, and after long and painful sufferings was taken to his heavenly home on June 9, 1923. His son Walter, the assistant pastor, was now called by the congregation as head pastor.

To assist with preaching and the other various pastoral duties of our congregation, student assistants or vicars from seminary began serving our congregation in the fall of 1931 which would continue until 1985.

In 1933, the congregation observed its 75th Anniversary with a week of special services. The climax of our Diamond Jubilee Celebration, was the Reunion of Confirmation Classes Service, which was held in the Bloomington Coliseum on Sunday, September 24 with an attendance of 2,013.

By the mid 30's, the congregation realized the need for a parish hall and improved school facilities, and proceeded with plans to build. After demolition of the school building, the new project begun on August 20, 1940 and a cornerstone was laid on September 22.

On March 2, 1941, the new Trinity Lutheran School and Parish Hall at 701 South Madison, at a cost of nearly \$80,000 was dedicated to the glory of God.

In 1946, Mr. Ernst A. Prochnow was called as our new school principal and teacher of grades 7 and 8, and would also serve as choir director and organist.

By the late 1940's, the attention of the congregation was then directed towards the need of a new church and better Sunday School facilities. It also became apparent that even with the recent completion of the new school, additional schoolrooms would be needed to accommodate the increased school enrollment and the new kindergarten class.

By August of 1952, Rev. Walter E. Hohenstein had taken seriously ill. During Pastor Hohenstein's illness, Vicars Arnold Ludwig and Henry Fingerlin served the congregation well, by conscientiously preaching and efficiently performing the many other pastoral duties of the congregation.

Due of Pastor Hohenstein's continued illness and his advancing years, it was felt that an ordained pastor should be called to assist in the work of the church. The prayers of the congregation were answered, when the Rev. Herman A. Etzold, a former vicar of Trinity from 1939-1941, accepted the call to our congregation and was installed as Associate Pastor on August 30, 1953.

At the October 11 Voters Meeting in 1953, after long and prayerful deliberation, the congregation decided to build our new church home next to the school building with additional schoolrooms, thus having one complete unit for the combined needs of the church and school.

Although in poor health, Rev. Walter E. Hohenstein was able to lead the groundbreaking efforts for the new church on November 22, 1953.

Despite the joy of the congregation's new endeavor, Pastor Hohenstein succumb to his long-term illness and was taken home to his Lord, just six weeks after ground breaking, on January 8, 1954, after 38 years of faithful and dedicated service to the congregation.

On March 9, Pastor Etzold accepted the unanimous call of the Voters' Assembly to assume duties as our new head pastor.

To assist with the many clerical duties and other detailed work of the church, the congregation voted to employ a church secretary and on March 1, 1954, Miss Doris Ehrlich, became the first church secretary.

Work on the new church progressed satisfactorily; Sunday, April 4, 1954, the cornerstone was laid.

On July 20, 1954, the three church bells which were originally cast in 1885 were lowered down from their high perch to be transferred into the new church tower at 801 S. Madison St.

The long-awaited day of dedication for the new structure was held on Sunday, February 13, 1955. Our new edifice provided not only a sanctuary and chapel with seating for approximately 1,100 people, but also new Sunday School rooms, three additional school classrooms and kindergarten for our Christian Day School, and pastoral and church offices. The total cost of the new building with all equipment totaled nearly \$725,000.

In honor and expectation of the 100th anniversary of the congregation, on May 8, 1956, the congregation voted to establish a new mission church, initially known as Centennial Lutheran Church, on the east side of Bloomington.

Due to the need for additional pastoral care, especially with the anticipated establishment of the mission church, Pastor August H. Lubkeman, a recent vicar of our congregation from 1955-56, was ordained and installed as our new Associate Pastor on July 28, 1957.

During the year 1958, the congregation marked the conclusion of its 100th anniversary celebration with a special service on September 14 with Rev. Dr. John W. Behnken, then President of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

A 7 ½ acre site for the new mission church, located at 1800 block of East Lincoln Street, was selected and approved for purchase by the voters' on November 13, 1956. Ground was broken for the new church at a special ceremony on Sunday, July 13, 1958 and cornerstone-laying ceremonies followed on December 14, 1958.

On June 2, 1959, 44 new charter members attended an organizational meeting for the new east side mission church and the name "Our Redeemer Lutheran Church" was chosen for the congregation.

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church was dedicated on September 20, 1959 with the first regular service held the following Sunday presided over by the church's first pastor, the Rev. Holland Jones.

In early 1960, Pastor Etzold and Pastor Lubkemann accepted calls elsewhere and Trinity was without a called pastor. In the interim, Trinity was well served

by the Rev. Herbert C. Pragman and assisted by Pastor Kurt Rosenwinkel.

After seven previous attempts to call a new shepherd, vicar from 1941-1943, the Rev. Ernest L. Gerike, accepted our call and was installed as head administrative pastor on May 7, 1961.

On December 12, 1961, 138 members of Trinity officially transferred their membership to Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, which also began operating as an individual congregation on January 1, 1962.

On a sad note in our church's history, the previous Trinity Lutheran Church building at Olive and Madison Streets was demolished June 1- 9, 1962, as the building had been deemed unsafe and was condemned by the city.

In September of 1962, Trinity began its bus ministry with the purchase of its first school bus with 71 students initially participating in the program.

With the need for additional pastoral care, the Rev. Herman F. C. Wetzel was called to be Trinity's new Associate Pastor and was installed on Sunday, June 2, 1963. He would serve Trinity for just 3 ½ years until his retirement from the ministry on December 31, 1966.

Shortly after, Pastor Wetzel's retirement, another called was extended for Associate Pastor to Rev. Victor F. Gerike, Pastor Ernest's brother. He later accepted our call and was installed on Sunday, April 23, 1967.

Trinity reached a milestone in its history, as Mrs. Laura Hohenstein became the first woman to register as a member of Trinity's Voters' Assembly on Tuesday, December 15, 1970 along with 15 other female members of the congregation. After 6 ½ years of service to Trinity, Pastor Victor Gerike accepted a call to Indiana, preaching his last sermon December 30, 1973. He was succeeded the following year by a new Associate Pastor, the Rev. Lawrence W. Saeger, with installation on Sunday, August 4, 1974.

The following year on June 22, 1975, our church and school recognized the retirement of Mr. Ernst A. Prochnow, after 29 years of serving as Principal, Teacher, Director of the Trinity Choir and chief Organist. Mr. David N. Heidloff succeeded him as School Principal.

By 1981, Pastor Ernest Gerike had served as Trinity's head pastor for 20 years. After eight years of service, Pastor Saeger accepted a call to Vandalia, Illinois and preached his last sermon on August 22, 1982.

Pastor Carl H. Miller was called as our new Associate Pastor and was installed on February 6, 1983. This same year, Trinity celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary with special guests, U.S. Representative from Illinois, Paul Simon, and LCMS President, Rev. Dr. Ralph A. Bohlmann.

In the fall of 1984, Mr. James L. House was called to succeed Mr. David Heidloff as Trinity's new School Principal.

The following year, Trinity extended a divine call for a second Associate Pastor with an emphasis in Youth Ministry. The Rev. Michael V. Klatt would accept and was installed on June 23, 1985.

In the meantime, on Sunday, February 10, 1985, Pastor Gerike had announced his intention to retire as Senior Pastor at the end of June. On June 30, 1985, Pastor Ernest L. Gerike preached his retirement sermon, completing 41 years in the Pastoral Ministry of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod with more than 24 years as Senior Pastor of Trinity.

With Pastor Gerike's retirement, Pastor Miller assumed the responsibilities of interim Senior Pastor, and was later extended the call to be Senior Pastor in January 1986. He was installed on March 2, 1986.

Once again the congregation looked to call a second Associate Pastor with an emphasis on Adult Christian Education, Stewardship and Evangelism. On July 27, 1986, the Rev. Mark R. Martin was installed marking the first time in Trinity's history of having three fulltime ordained pastors on staff.

On May 22, 1988, Trinity recognized 25 years of service of Mrs. Josephine Behnke as Kindergarten Aide, School Secretary, and Bus Program Coordinator.

With continued growth of enrollment in our Christian Day School, during July 1988, the four modular classrooms were installed on the northwest area of our parking lot and served as classrooms for the lower grades.

On January 16, 1990, Pastor Martin resigned his position as pastor of Trinity. In February, Pastor Miller was called to the position as our Associate Pastor and Pastor Klatt assumed responsibilities as interim Administrative Pastor.

Trinity's first Contemporary Worship services started on Wednesday evenings at 6:00 on August 29, 1991.

Pastor Barry Kolb was installed as Head Pastor on June 16, 1991 and in August 1991, Pastor Klatt preached his final sermon at Trinity after having accepted another call to Nebraska.

In 1993, Trinity called its first Director of Christian Education in Mr. Charles A. Bahn, for the position of Minister of Nurture and was installed on August 28, 1993.

In 1994, our School Principal, Mr. Jim House, accepted another call and Mr. Mike Zimmer served as interim principal for the 1994-95 school year.

After having approved a new constitution in the summer of 1993, many in our membership had grown dissatisfied with leadership direction of the congregation. After unsuccessfully attempting to work out a new constitution through Voters' meetings in 1994 and 1995, a segment of our membership left to form a new congregation of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Bloomington. In February 1995, Pastor Barry Kolb announced his acceptance of another call and Pastor Thomas C. Wirsing, then campus pastor of Wittenberg Lutheran Center at Illinois State University, was asked to serve as interim pastor of Trinity until a new senior pastor could be called by the congregation.

By the fall of 1995, Trinity Lutheran School had a new School Principal with the acceptance of a call by Mr. Patrick Leupold.

A Senior Pastor Call Committee was formed in July of 1995, and after two unsuccessful attempts, Pastor Thomas C. Wirsing had accepted our call as Trinity's new Senior Pastor and was installed on Sunday, September 29, 1996.

The following year in 1997, Trinity was successful in calling a new Associate Pastor, when the Rev. Allen Steinbeck accepted our call and was installed on Sunday, October 12, 1997.

Director of Christian Education, Miss Mary Schlecht, was installed the following year as Director of Youth & Young Adult Ministries on Sunday, August 9, 1998.

Now with two fulltime pastors again on staff, Trinity was better able to refocus our attention on meeting the current and future ministry needs of the congregation. Over the course of 1997 and 1998, after a thorough assessment and feasibility study, a Planning and Building Committee was appointed in January 1999.

As a result of the work of the committee, three-fold plans were accepted by the congregation to build a new educational facility offsite to meet the growth needs of our school, to purchase property on which to build our new facility, and to renovate and update our current church facility.

In April 2000, a 48.6 acre tract of land on Bloomington's south side was identified and purchased in June, as the future site for our new educational facility. In the meantime, our new capital stewardship program entitled "Envision The Possibilities" kicked off with a special commitment dinner held at ISU on November 12, 2000.

In March 2001, our congregation approved the educational facility plans and the renovation plans at our current facility to include construction of a new south parking lot with lighting; installation of new sanctuary lighting; construction of a handicap-accessible, covered drop-off entrance; construction and installation of an elevator; upgrades of the

electrical system of the church; and renovation of the lower level church restrooms.

The groundbreaking ceremony for the new educational facility was held on June 17, 2001 with close to 550 people in attendance. In the following months, trees were cleared, land graded, and the foundation was begun on November 15, 2001.

In March 2002, the renovation projects were underway starting with the elevator, followed by the covered drop-off canopy in April. Most projects were completed by November of 2002 and were dedicated on December 1, 2002 at the end of our second year of our Envision campaign.

After a year and a half of construction, the new educational facility had been completed. The last day of classes of Trinity Lutheran School at 701 S. Madison St. was held on January 18, 2003 and classes began at the new facility on Monday, January 21st. A special dedication service of the newly-constructed Trinity Lutheran School at 1102 West Hamilton Road was held on Sunday, March 2, 2003.

On November 9, 2003, Trinity celebrated a joint worship service at 9:00 a.m. marking the completion of the 3 year campaign of Envision The Possibilities, but also the beginning our of next campaign in Envision<sup>2</sup> which included renovation of the former gym stage and locker room area into new youth room facilities completed in December 2005.

In the spring of 2004, Mr. Pat Leupold accepted a call to Florida and was succeeded by Mr. Shawn Hoffmann as interim principal. He was called to be our current school principal starting in the fall of 2005.

On July 2, 2006, the Rev. Christopher Nitzel was installed as Assistant Pastor with emphasis on Young Adult Ministry and Assimilation.

On Sunday, September 23, 2007, Trinity began our celebration of our 150<sup>th</sup> year as a congregation with a special combined worship service held at the Interstate Center with former Trinity Pastor, Michael V. Klatt, as guest preacher.