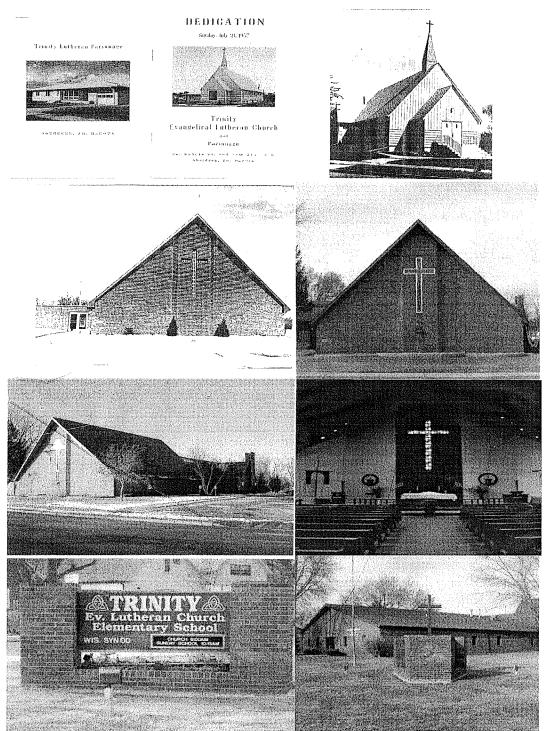
The History of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church Aberdeen, S.D. 50 Years of God's Grace



Justin Gosch

Fifty years of God's grace! That certainly seems like a long time. In fifty years time, many things happen. In fifty years time, the good Lord can quickly bless a congregation. The members of Trinity Lutheran Church have seen just that. The Lord has greatly blessed the endeavors of this small group of believers who worship at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran church in Aberdeen, South Dakota

The blessings that the Lord has bestowed upon Trinity Lutheran church began in the early fifties. On December 9, 1952, the mission board of Dakota-Montana District of Wisconsin Synod resolved to open a mission in Aberdeen, South Dakota. Pastor Warren Radtke was ordained and installed as the missionary in this new mission on July 5, 1953. Shortly thereafter, the young mission was able to begin Sunday school services. Trinity held its first worship services in the Seventh Day Adventist church!! This was located at that time on 6th Ave. S.E.

Unfortunately, Pastor Radtke was not able to serve at Trinity for very long. After only 6 months, Pastor Radtke had to resign due to health reasons. He resigned from the ministry the following January. There would need to be a temporary solution until another Pastor could be called. This solution was found in Vicar Henry Koch who came to temporarily serve Trinity until a new Pastor could be called. Vicar Koch served from February 1954 until June of 1954.

Trinity was very much in its infancy. Trinity was officially organized on July 27, 1954. Pastor James Fricke was ordained July 4, 1954. Later in the month of July, Trinity purchased its existing property at the corner of 10th Ave. S.E. and S. Dakota St. with the help of a loan from the Church Extension Fund (C. E. F).

In March of 1955, plans for a basement chapel were approved and the Schlomer brothers of Glenham began construction. In July of 1955, the chapel was completed and the congregation began worshiping in the basement. The chapel was only 26' X 60' and cost a little over \$8,000. Reminiscing about the foundation of this new chapel, Pastor Schulz wrote, "We often wondered whose decision it was to put the chapel basement on an angle. Pastor Fricke (later a professor at Northwestern College) once told me that when he returned from his vacation in the summer of 1955 the concrete basement was already in. 'There it was,' he said, and no one seemed to know why it was built on an angle. Many years later it was cleared up when the builder said that he had made the decision, thinking the church would have a nice appearance on an angle! Of course, such types of freedom with plans would not work with city planning and ordinances today." ¹

Trinity now had its own place of worship. But God continued to bless the growing congregation. In the latter part of 1956, plans were organized for a possible above ground chapel. When the plans were finally approved construction was begun by Mr. G. Grote a contractor from Aberdeen. Building construction was rapid. The total cost of the chapel was approximately \$28,000. A parsonage was also to be built at this time at a cost of \$16,000.²

Pastor Fricke was not to see the dedication of the new chapel. In October of 1956, Pastor Fricke accepted a call to St. Mark's in Watertown, Wisconsin. Pastor Waldemar Schuetze of Roscoe was called to serve as the vacancy pastor. "Four noon services were regularly conducted by Prof. W. Ten Broek and other instructors from our

² Notes from the Dedication Service (1957) of the new chapel.

Schulz, Wayne. Notes from his summary of events leading up to the building of the present day church.

Academy at Mobridge. In the meantime the (sic.) congregation and Mission board

proceeded with calling another pastor. Their hopes and prayers were answered."³

In July of 1957, the chapel and parsonage were completed. Pastor Cyril Spaude, a

new graduate from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, was installed as the new pastor on the

21st of July 1957. This was the same day the new chapel and parsonage were dedicated.

The chapel was painted blue and the parsonage was painted pink!⁴

In the dedication notes for the new chapel, the chapel is described as having "a

very churchly appearance and atmosphere, enhanced by the beautiful stained glass

windows, altogether in keeping with the high and holy purpose which it is to serve. The

chancel with its various appointments breathes churchly dignity. The narthex or

vestibule offers a comfortable entrance into the church itself. The church provides

seating for about 140, and for more with extra placing of chairs. It is large enough to

allow for future growth in membership for some time to come. The attractive modern

parsonage will serve as a comfortable dwelling for the pastor."⁵

From 1953 to 1957 Trinity grew rapidly. By the end of 1957, Trinity's statistics⁶

were as follows:

Souls: 107

Communicants: 55

Children: 52

Average attendance at worship: 60

Averaged communed: 13

Average at Sunday school: 30

³ Notes from the dedication service of the new chapel.

⁴ Schulz, Wayne. Notes from his summary of events leading up to the present day church.

⁵ Notes from the dedication service of the new chapel.

⁶ Trinity Lutheran Church, Annual report, 1957.

The years of 58-59 brought two new blessings to Trinity. The first was that a ladies aid was begun. Its purpose was to use its members talents for the welfare of the congregation, to devote itself to works of charity in Church, study Scripture, look at timely topics and finally to foster Christian fellowship among the members.

Second, there was a committee elected by voters to explore the possibility of starting a parochial school. The members on this committee were L. Fredrickson, W. Castle, F. Hansen and F. Jundt. The committee followed the advice of the mission board to wait for a decision of the Synod's General Mission Board concerning starting schools in mission congregations. Instead of beginning a school they began a school building fund.

The Mission Board had determined not to subsidize parochial schools in mission congregations fearing that mission congregations would not be able to subsidize the school. It might not seem to be much of a blessing to have your school plans put on hold, but it showed that Trinity was growing and looking to expand its mission work.

From 1960- 65, Trinity saw more growth. A young persons group was begun for the younger individuals in the congregation. The group had eleven members. The purpose of the group was "to provide Bible study, Christian leadership, and fellowship for the confirmed youth of the congregation. The young persons group (or what we today call a youth group) were to meet on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of the month at 7 p.m. Some of the activities were to decorate the church and tree for Christmas, fill bags and wrap Sunday school gifts and paint basement tables and make preparations for a skating and bowling party as well as a spring outing and picnic."

⁷ Trinity Lutheran Church. Annual Report. 1961.

Another area of ministry was a youth choir. Trinity congregation began a youth choir for grades 5-9th grade. The purpose was to train and develop voices for the Senior Choir and to provide choir music for worship. They met for rehearsal every Wednesday at 4:15 p.m. By 1961 the total membership was 13.

From 1960-1965, Trinity steadily grew in numbers. By the end of 1965, Trinity's statistics were:

Communicants: 155

Children: 108

Souls: 263

In July, 1966, Pastor Spaude accepted a call to teach at Northwestern College in Watertown, WI. After Pastor Spaude left, there was only a one-week vacancy until the next Pastor arrived. In that weeks time the parsonage was repainted in preparation for the new Pastor. On July 24, 1966 Pastor Wayne Schulz was installed as Pastor at Trinity.

1966 was a very significant year for Trinity. Trinity started at only a handful of people, and in less than 20 years it had grown from a church meeting in the basement of a 7th Day Adventist Church to a congregation with it's own church and over 280 souls. Trinity would soon be able to stand on it's own two feet by becoming self-supporting.

In 1966, Trinity no longer needed Synod subsidy. Earlier, a committee had been established to formulate a plan for becoming self-supporting. Pastor Schulz writes, "It looked like a monumental task. At that time the weekly offering of the congregation was about \$150/ Sunday. So the congregation was concerned whether or not it could endure without the financial support of the Synod. In retrospect, after one month of self-support, the congregation never seemed to regret the move it had made or never asked about it

again." Trinity did this with confidence! You might ask why? Pastor Schulz writes, "Because the Lord was with us! He made it a special year of grace toward the proclamation of the Gospel in your midst. As a member of Trinity, let this be your thankful attitude in regard to 1966 as a year of grace: 'The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof... Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness" (Psalm 97).

Trinity's foundation was secure in the word of our Lord. However, the chapel's walls and over all structure were not so sturdy. Both the parsonage and chapel had developed water problems. During heavy rains water would seep into both basements. There were also structural problems. Pastor Schulz pointed out that "the east basement wall of the parsonage buckled somewhat to the inside and never looked real safe. There were structural problems also with the chapel. The weight of the roof put undue pressure on the sidewalls of the nave so that they bulged out and looked somewhat like the hull of a ship. Other WELS chapels with that design had similar problems. Some anchors were installed to pull the arches together. It made the building safe, but it still bulged out especially on the southeast side."

The years of 1967-68 brought great turmoil to the country and also to the community where Trinity was located. The Vietnam War controversy was blossoming and many students were protesting. A presidential election was coming and two candidates, Nixon and Bobby Kennedy visited Aberdeen in 1968.

Just a few blocks away from Trinity was Northern State college (Now Northern State University). The student enrollment ranged between 4,000 and 7,000. Many of the

⁹ Trinity Lutheran Church. Annual Report, 1966.

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⁸ Schulz, Wayne. Notes from his summary of events leading up to the building of the present day church.

students were there not to study but to protest. Many of the students were disillusioned at

people over 30 and churches in the area. Pastor Schulz mentioned that as many as 30

students would attend meetings of our Lutheran Collegian organization at Trinity. They

would come to ask him questions about the Bible. These kids were facing old tricks by

the world, which sought to place doubt upon God and his word. This provided an

opportunity to witness the truths of God's word to the younger kids who were facing the

lies of the world.

Tough times were certainly taking place in our country and the community of

Aberdeen, South Dakota. Nonetheless, Pastor Schulz stressed that they did not change

the way Trinity presented the Gospel. "We preached the Word and made an effort to

apply it to the questions and lives of the day. During those troubled years, the church

grew."11

The year of 1967 also saw the expansion of the services at Trinity. Church

attendance was growing and the average attendance for a Sunday was 200 by 1970.

Lenten services had become so full that two services were begun. The first service was

held at either 5:30 or 6 with the second following shortly thereafter.

By the end of 1970 Trinity's statistics were:

Communicants: 229

Pre-Confirmed: 116

Total Souls: 345

Pastor Schulz writes, "I recall that when Ed Knittel went off the council when his

term expired, at the end of his last meeting he said that he wanted to say something

¹⁰ Schulz, Wayne. Notes from his summary of events leading up to the building of the present day church

important before he left: 'I am leaving, but I think the new council better begin thinking about establishing a planning committee to figure out what we are going to do with crowding in our facility, and not overlooking the possibility of a building project.'

Maybe people had said something similar privately on other occasions, but this was the first time anyone said something about it in an official capacity. I believe that was at the end of 1969."

12

On the 15th of November, 1970, a planning commission was established to determine what the future needs of the congregation were. The commission worked for over a year and came up with a 14-point plan. The fourteen points covered such things as future projected growth of the congregation, an evaluation of the present growth of Christian education, a third service on Sunday morning rather than expansion, a building design, study the basement water problems for a future building, a target date for construction, when to meet etc, etc.¹³ The commission worked for over a year and gave their report on February 13, 1972.

At this February meeting, a preliminary building committee was formed. Pastor Schulz pointed out that both committees struggled with how to add a building structure to the original chapel. They finally decided that they would have to build a separate structure from the original chapel. It was decided that the new church would be a separate building facing tenth Avenue S.E. instead of Dakota Street.

Trinity was venturing into some big expansion plans. Schulz writes, "While all this was occurring, we were working on debt reduction of the original chapel and parsonage. We were one of those congregations that had what was known as a

Noted from the proposed Assignment to Planning Commission, November 15, 1970.

¹² Schulz, Wayne. Notes from his summary of events leading up to the present day church.

"sweetheart" contract with the Church Extension Fund. The congregation was paying off a small amount on the chapel loan each month. Pastor Eckert of the Synod's Board of Trustees came to Trinity for a meeting and informed everyone that we also had about \$15,000 debt on the parsonage—that's what it took to build a house in those days! Everyone seemed surprised at that bit of news. Shortly thereafter we made contact with Lutheran Association for Church Extension (LACE) out of Michigan. We consolidated our loans with LACE and paid off the CEF indebtedness. When the building opportunity drew near, we worked with an Aberdeen bank and learned how much they would lend us for a new building. It would be somewhere around \$100,000. This seems like a pittance today, but it was enough to raise eyebrows and concerns at that time."

The construction company chosen to do the work on the new church was Curtis Construction Company out of Fargo. They were a design-construct company that built churches. Plans were made with the company to design a fellowship hall that would be connected to the new church. The bid for the new church and fellowship hall was \$130,000. That was more than the bank would loan. This was a major blow to the hopes of the congregation.

But all was not lost. After a few days of the unfortunate news, it was back to the drawing board. Pastor Schulz was called over to the house of the chairman of the congregation, Mr. Ruben Schwefel. Pastor Schulz recalled that Schwefel said to him, "We are in definite need of a new church and we will find a way to do it. We took out some paper and drew a design that would keep the basic church design the same (as it is now), eliminate the fellowship hall, and put a smaller entrance off to the side in an L-shaped design. We would keep the old church and use it for a fellowship and education.

¹⁴ Schulz, Wayne. From his paper on the events leading up to the building of the present day church.

The building committee decided to ask Curtis Construction Company to re-draw and price the project this way. The bid came in at \$101,500." 15

On January 28, 1973, the voters approved the revised building plan. The fellowship hall and education wing would have to come in a later phase. On March 4, 1973 the building contract was signed during a family night. A groundbreaking service was held on April 8, 1973. The Lord's blessings were being poured out onto Trinity. Big things were happening. Pastor Schulz remembered that moment when he wrote, "I recall that when the earth mover started work, I had a sick feeling in my stomach. This seemed like a huge project at the time! I also worked with the builder to design the chancel/altar area so that it would be open, have a definitive focal point, be meditative in nature, and emphasize baptism with the placement of the font in the center. Construction moved forward and there was a cornerstone laying service on July 22, 1973."¹⁶

The chairman of the building committee was Virgil Pochop. Other members were E. Fowler, Delmar Fuller, Edward Mathwich, and Ruben Schwefel.

In June Mr. Kennith Gosch had replaced Roger Schipke as secretary who moved away. Pastor Schulz writes, "Mr. Kennith Gosch had to keep two accounts going, one for the congregation's operating budget, the other for the building project. The building of the new church proceeded and many members got involved. The members donated many items including the decralite blocks, which formed the chancel cross. There was cement donated for the sidewalks and other misc, items. Many people donated there time for clean up and also for landscaping."¹⁷

¹⁵ Schulz, Wayne. Notes from his summary of events leading up to the building of the present day church. 16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.

The final services were held in the original chapel on November 11, 1973. The sermon text was Psalm 89:15-18 with the theme: "Blessed Is the People That Know the Joyful Sound." Pastor Schulz noted how it was an upbeat and joyful service. After that service there were people and trucks waiting outside to pick up the pews in from the old chapel. The pews were brought outside and made ready for delivery to North Dakota. Pastor Schulz remembers that for some it was a sad moment because of all the memories of the old church and there were a few tears shed. 18

Preparations for the dedication of the new church continued throughout the week until the cold morning of the 11-1873. Pastor Schulz wrote, "We had decided to do a true dedication and lock everyone outside so that we could begin the service outside the door with a prayer, receive the keys from the builder and then march in. We relented to a certain degree because a few elderly people were getting cold waiting outside. After the door opening, we led the people into the church. District President Kell and I went to the pastoral chairs in the sanctuary. It was an awesome sight to see people come marching in for what seemed a long time." There were a total of 510 people who attended the dedication service. Later on there was a dinner in the old church, which had now become a fellowship hall. In the afternoon praise service, which was held at 3 p.m., there were a total of 339 people who attended. Pastor Schulz noted that it was not until Thanksgiving Day that he was able to preach in the new church.

In 1974, talk began again about starting a new school. In February a parochial school committee was assigned to gather information on a new school. Later in

¹⁸ Schulz, Wayne. Notes from his summary dealing with the events leading up to the present day church.
¹⁹ Ibid.

September a new constitution was adopted for Trinity. In April of 1975 the department of education began investigating a new Christian Elementary School.

In September of 1975, Pastor Schulz accepted a call to St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Rapid City, South Dakota. Pastor Loyal Schroeder served as vacancy pastor. His service as vacancy pastor was from October 1975 through April 1976. Trinity called a new pastor and on May 2, 1976 Pastor Douglas Weiser was installed.

The desire for a school continued. The committee resumed their work in May 1976. The department of education gathered materials on starting a parochial school. After studying the committee's projections and proposals, the voters approved a Christian Elementary School on October 2, 1977. On January 22, 1978 Mr. Alan Draeger was called to be principal and teacher at Trinity. He was installed on June 18, 1978.

From February through August, the members of Trinity helped to prepare the old worship facility to be a classroom. Volunteer help did the majority of the work. On August 27, 1978 Trinity Evangelical Lutheran School was dedicated. The first day of classes began on August 29, 1978. In 1979, Miss Doris Johnson was installed as the teacher of the elementary school.

Trinity would see the Lord bless them with new called workers in the coming years. In June of 1980, Miss Jacqueline Dorn was installed as teacher of the Christian elementary school to replace Miss Johnson. On May 31, 1982, Pastor Weiser accepted a call to Bellevue, Washington. In July of 1982, Pastor Greg Schulz was installed as the new pastor. He was a recent graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. In May of 1983, Trinity bid farewell to Miss Jacqueline Dorn. In June of 1983, Miss Sharon Becker was installed as installed as a teacher.

Trinity had continued to grow and by May of 1983, the decision was made to establish a committee to look into a much needed fellowship facility. There was also new construction for the Pastor that year. The old parsonage that had been there since 1957 was removed and a new parsonage was built at a cost of 60,424.09.

On April of 1985, an anonymous gift of \$75,000 was received with the condition that Trinity match that amount within three years. This gift was to be used for building a Fellowship Hall with needed Sunday school rooms, expanded kitchen and pastor's study. By April of 1986, the Fellowship Hall update indicated that there were matching gifts of \$29,135. On May 31, 1987, the church council recommended hiring Curtis Construction to draw preliminary plans for the Fellowship Hall. The congregation met the \$75,000 match and raised much more. By April 17, the Fellowship Hall update indicates monies of 110,608 to date.

By June of 1987, Trinity saw another change in its pastor. Pastor Greg Schulz left to take a call to serve in California. From June 7 through September 20, Pastor Tim Winkel served as vacancy pastor at Trinity. Trinity called a new pastor and on September 20, 1987, Pastor Richard Kanzenbach was installed to serve as the Pastor.

There was a real need for a new school so in March of 1988, the voters of Trinity passed a motion (23 yes -2 no) to build a Fellowship Hall and new school at an approximate cost of \$360,000.

The year of 1989 brought new changes in called workers. In January of 1989,

Pastor Kanzenbach resigned for personal reasons. In April of that year, Miss Becker

accepted a call to teach in Wisconsin. In June, Miss Gretchen Kempf was installed as the

new lower grades teacher. In June of that year Pastor Kevin Mckenney was installed as the new pastor.

Through 1990 and 1991, more changes came again to Trinity. In June of 1990, Miss Gretchen Kempf finished her service at Trinity to be married. Miss Christine Winterstein was installed in July of 1990. Trinity also said good-bye to Mr. Alan Draeger who had been the principle since the school's beginning. He accepted a call to serve in Monroe, Michigan. At the start of the 1991-1992 school year, there was an enrollment of 39 students. Trinity was growing and expanding so as two more teachers were added to the staff. They were Jeanine Aasen who taught grades 3-4 and John Nass who taught grades 5-8. John's call was a one year emergency call.

At the start of the 1992-1993 school year, Trinity had reached its greatest enrollment of 51 students. Richard Brei was called as the new principal and Jolanda Jarus was called to be the kindergarten teacher. There were also ministry opportunities during this year with 63 kids attending Vacation Bible School.

As times change, so can the focus of a congregation's ministry. Over a period of time it is beneficial to re-examine your mission statement so as to see how best your congregation can serve the Lord where you live. In 1992 Trinity Lutheran Church revised their mission statement, redirecting their ministry focus. The mission statement is as follows:

"As men, women, young adults and children, called by God and to Christian faith and fellowship, we gather as Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church. (Hebrews 10:25)

We exist to publicly workshop the Triune god and to make disciples in our community and throughout the world, reaching out to win the lost for Christ an

nurturing those in fellowship with Christ so that together we grow in faith, love

and lives that glorify God. (Matthew 28:18-20a)

The Holy Spirit promises to accomplish this as we faithfully use the gospel of Jesus

Christ in Word and Sacrament. (Isaiah 55:11)

Objectives:

"Therefore, moved by the gospel and in humble obedience to God's will, we shall...

1. Remain faithful to God's inerrant word (2 Peter 1:21, 2 Timothy 3:16) and nurture

ourselves to maturity as Christ's disciples through lifelong study of the Bible and the

Lutheran Confessions. (2 Peter 3:18; Ephesians 4:14-16)

2. Spread God's Word to lead unbelievers to repentance and faith. (Mark 16:15-16; John

3:16)

3. Train ourselves and encourage each other to use the spiritual gifts that God has given

each of us. (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

4. Imitate Christ, using our ministry of compassion and love to serve God's kingdom of

grace. (Ephesians 5:1-2; 1 John 3:17-18)

5. Urge members to pursue full-time ministry at our synod schools. (Matthew 9:37-38;

Romans 10:14-15)

Trinity ended 1992 these statistics:

Souls: 399

Communicants: 295

In 1993, Miss Christine Winterstein left Trinity to be married to become Mrs.

Brian Kjenstad. She was replaced by Mrs. Connie Lake. Enrollment was under what

was predicted and future growth was projected to be down as well for student enrollment.

During the 94-95 school year, there were only 35 students and three teachers. The education board suggested that the staff be reduced to only two teachers.

In the spring of 96, Mrs. Aassen finished her time as a teacher at Trinity. The council had decided to reduce the staff to only two called teachers. The cutbacks were certainly disappointing but the Lord would continue to bless Trinity in other areas. The library in the school was converted into a computer media center. Also, all of the graduating class went on to attend Great Planes Lutheran High School in Watertown, South Dakota. Finally, Vacation Bible School that year was blessed with 78 children attending.

In the fall of 1997, Sarah Kleist was installed to replace Miss Connie Lake who accepted a call to teach in Wisconsin. At the start of the school year there were 37 kids attending the school.

In 1998, Trinity would again go through the changes of called staff. Mr. Brei accepted a call to teach in Minnesota. Miss Kleist served as principle until a new principal could be called. Trinity had resolved to call for a new principal in January of 98. Also in January, Trinity had re-started the Parent Teacher's Organization or P. T. O. There was also a new addition in Miss Heather Walth who was called to start a preschool. This was certainly a blessing.

Pastor Seefeldt accepted a call to Litchfield, Minnesota in 1999. Soon afterwards, Trinity was blessed with the services of Pastor Rawerts. In July of 1999, Mr. George Kellerman was called and installed at Trinity to be the new principal. Heather Walth was also called to no longer be a temporary teacher but a full time pre-school teacher. The

Pre-school was blessed with 15 children. The Sunday school was blessed with 75. The grade school that year had 23 enrolled.

In 2000, Trinity said goodbye to Miss Sarah Kleist who would be married to future Pastor Heath Butler who was serving at the time as a tutor at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN. Miss Rachel Heckman was installed to replace Miss Kleist. 2000, was also a great year in that the mortgage for the church was finally paid off and the church was debt free.

The pre-school at Trinity went through its first changes. Mrs. Overland (formerly Walth) was no longer the pre-school teacher. Trinity called and Mrs. Diane Flack who was installed as the new pre-school teacher. Average church attendance was down from previous years and was only 134 people per service on Sunday.

In 2003, Rachel Heckman resigned her call to be with her husband in North Carolina. Melissa (Draeger) Brown was called to finish the school year as the lower grade teacher.

Trinity has certainly seen the Lord's blessings over the years. Trinity has seen the ups and downs that come from the sinful world that we live in. But through it all, the Lord has continued to bless the congregation. A committee has been established to look into future growth once again. Right now there are no definite plans. However, some of the thoughts are to work for a higher enrollment of school kids. If the Lord would bless Trinity with a higher enrollment they could move towards a possible new gymnasium, youth baseball diamond and football field to go with a new school. The pastor's study could also be moved and enlarged. Lord willing, these plans can be put into effect and the ministry at Trinity can keep growing.

Since it's founding with a small group who met in the 7th day Adventist church,

Trinity has been blessed with the pure word of God. What a wonderful blessing to have
as its solid foundation, the pure word of God and our Lord Jesus Christ.