

THE PATHWAY OF GOD'S LOVE FROM THE WARTBURG SYNOD TO THE W.E.L.S.

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The God of all wisdom and power promises that his Church will endure until our Lord Jesus Christ comes in glory to judge the living and the dead. The history of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mount Carroll, Illinois is evidence of God's enduring love and grace. This assembly of believers has been blessed with God's Holy Word for over one hundred years and it is our prayer that such a blessing will continue in their midst.

The origin of Trinity Lutheran Church has its roots in the Black Oak Lutheran Church of Fair Haven, Illinois located approximately 8-10 miles south of Mt. Carroll, Illinois. The Black Oak Church, whose official name was St. Paul's Lutheran Church, was established in 1860 when immigrants from Heisen-Darmstadt, Germany settled near the Chadwick, Illinois area. 1 Black Oak Lutheran Church of Fair Haven was a member of the Wartburg Synod who was under the auspice of the the General Synod of 1820. St. Paul's Lutheran Church continued to operate until April of 1950 when it disbanded because of a lack of German influence. 2

Prior to the disbanding of Black Oak Lutheran Church there apparently was a conflict of interest concerning the use of certain hymnbooks. This conflict of interest caused a split in the congregation in 1878 which resulted in the pastor and approximately 35 families leaving and forming their own congregation. 3

In an attempt to keep the unity of those that had split from the Black Oak Church steps were taken to purchase property and

build a worship facility. A plot of land was purchased four miles southeast of Mt. Carroll, Illinois from Henry Weber, a near-by farmer, and in July of 1880 this worship facility was dedicated to service in the Lord's Kingdom. Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, also known as Salem Lutheran because it was located in the Salem Township, was established. 4

It is difficult to determine if the pastor that broke from the Black Oak Church was the same pastor that first served Trinity Lutheran Church. Although the author has no written record, he assumes that we are indeed speaking of two different men: one that broke away from Black Oak Lutheran Church and then one that served as the first pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church. According to the statistical report of the Statistisches Jahrbuch Pastor **Louis Schwartz** was the first regularly called pastor from the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. 5 The fact that Trinity received man power from the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod did not mean, however, that they were members of that synod. Trinity was merely affiliated with the LC-MS throughout its history as a source of man power, but it remained an independent congregation. Pastor Schwartz's salary consisted of housing, hay and oats for his horse, wood for fuel, and as much cash as was contributed for that purpose. This turned out to be a fluctuating figure, around \$250. 6 In 1884 the records show that the Lord had blessed Trinity Lutheran Church with 223 souls. 7

Beginning in 1880 the congregation supported a full-time parochial school on the church grounds. During the approximate 16 years of existence the pastor was responsible for the instruction of the children. The enrollment of the school started around 40

pupils in 1880 and decreased over the next 16 years. There are records that show an enrollment of 33 pupils in 1884, 21 in 1894 and 15 in 1896. There is no record of enrollment for the parochial school of Trinity after 1896. 8 There is, however, a record of a new school-house built and dedicated in 1887. The same year in which Pastor Schwartz accepted a call to Altamont, Illinois.

Pastor Jul B. Graupner was his successor and began his pastorate in June of 1888 and remained until 1898. On June 2, 1890 the original parsonage with all of the church records was destroyed by fire. In 1891 the parsonage was rebuilt along with a separate school house which served the parochial school until 1896. 9

Pastor C. H. Mueller was called to serve the approximately 130 souls of Trinity Lutheran Church in October of 1898. Pastor Mueller was listed among the clergy of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. 10 After four years of service in the Mt. Carroll community, Pastor Mueller accepted a call. During the years between 1902 - 1906 the Trinity congregation was ministered by Pastor C. A. Sommer. In 1906 a call was extended to yet another pastor from the the LC - MS, Pastor Ph. S. Estel. On October 28 of that same year Pastor Ph. S. Estel was installed as Trinity's fifth regular full-time pastor. His ministry extended until July 18, 1919 when he was forced to resign because of ill health and old age. 11

After a brief vacancy the Lord blessed the congregation of Trinity Lutheran Church with the service of Pastor John Buenger.

During his pastorate the congregation was privileged to celebrate the fiftieth year of the Means of Grace. A special anniversary service was held on the second Sunday of July 1930. Services were conducted by Pastor Louis Schwartz of Kansas City, Missouri, a former pastor, and by Pastor E. W. Schwartz of Pecatonica, Illinois. 12 After 13 years years of service to Trinity Lutheran congregation, Pastor John Buenger resigned his pastorate in February of 1932.

This action left a flock of 68 souls without a shepherd. It is noted in the quarterly minutes of the congregation that LC-MS synodical debt was \$1,127,696.50 in 1932. This financial situation caused the members of Trinity to make a special synodical offering of \$44.50. This financial situation also caused the synodical mission board of the LC-MS to cut off all subsidy to Trinity Lutheran Church for support of its own pastor. As a result of this action the 68 souls of Trinity would now be served in a vacancy capacity by Pastor W. J. Voeltz of Sterling, Illinois, some 30 mile southeast of Mt. Carroll. At that time Pastor Voeltz was already serving 45 souls at the State Hospital in Dixon, Illinois and over 550 souls at First Lutheran of Sterling. This vacancy continued for over a year. 13

On May 28, 1933 Pastor L. C. Hoepfner was called and installed as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church. At that time the congregation had resolved to offer the pastor a salary of \$400 a year. In 1934 the congregation resolved to raise the pastor's salary to \$480 a year. It was 1936 before the synodical mission board of the LC-MS was in a position to offer subsidy again. At that time they offered \$120 a year subsidy. In order to complete

the financial picture of the thirties, it is necessary to mention that Trinity Lutheran Church of Mt. Carroll, Illinois went on record as being willing to become self-supporting at the Quarterly meeting held on October 18, 1937. (At the March 28, 1937 Quarterly meeting the discussion concerning joining the LC-MS was tabled until a later date). 14

After Pastor L. C. Hoepfner accepted a call to Matteson, Illinois in December of 1937, the 95 souls of Salem Lutheran were served by Pastor Erwin A. Wiedbusch. Pastor Wiedbusch, a Missouri Synod pastor, ministered to the souls of Salem Lutheran Church of rural Mt. Carroll from March 27, 1938 until May 3, 1942 when he accepted a call to Elizabeth, Illinois. 15

Following a short vacancy, Pastor L. M. Hieber was installed on July 12, 1942 and served until 1945 when he accepted a call to Pecatonica, Illinois. During this time period a new hymnal was introduced, THE LUTHERAN HYMNAL. At the quarterly meeting held on October 18, 1942 it was resolved to purchase 72 copies of THE LUTHERAN HYMNAL. 16

Pastor C. A. Noffke became the shepherd of the flock of 105 souls in 1945. During his pastorate Trinity Lutheran Church was privileged to celebrate their 75th anniversary. Commemorative services were held on July 17, 1955 with heart-felt thanksgiving to God for allowing this assembly of believers to experience 75 years of God's abundant love and grace. Former Pastors Wiedbusch and Hoepfner were asked to serve as guest speakers at a special Ladies Aid service and a young peoples reunion service held during the week. 17 The pastoral services of Pastor Noffke were

discontinued at the end of July 1955.

The Trinity Congregation found itself facing yet another vacancy. Pastor E. C. Beversdorf of Redeemer of Rockford, Illinois, circuit pastor, informed the members of Trinity that there were no candidates for them to call, but that he would assist them in finding a shepherd to serve the vacancy. In late July of 1955 Pastor Beversdorf strongly urged the members of Trinity Lutheran Church not to follow the suggestion of some and ask a Wisconsin Synod Pastor to serve them in their vacancy.

Pastor Roland C. Hilleman, who was presently serving St. Peter Lutheran Church and St. Matthew Lutheran Church of Savanna, Illinois, was the Wisconsin Synod pastor that had been suggested to serve the vacancy at Trinity. Savanna, Illinois is approximately 15 miles east of Trinity Lutheran Church. Pastor Theodore Dierks of St. Peter's Lutheran Church of Morrison was the Missouri Synod pastor suggested to serve the vacancy at Trinity. At that time St. Peter's Lutheran Church of Morrison consisted of around 350 souls. An assembly was called for the voters of Trinity Lutheran Church to determine who they would call to serve their vacancy. Pastor Roland C. Hilleman, a Wisconsin Synod pastor, was called and accepted to serve the vacancy at Trinity Lutheran Church of Mt. Carroll, Illinois. 18

In January 1956 Pastor Beversdorf encouraged the members of Trinity Lutheran Church to officially join the Missouri Synod and call a pastor in cooperation with Our Savior's Lutheran of Hopkins Township in Whiteside County, near Morrison and Sterling, Illinois. At the same time the members of Trinity discussed with Pastor Hilleman the similarities and differences between the

Missouri and Wisconsin Synods. The members of Trinity also asked Pastor Hilleman to write to Pastor Nitz of the Wisconsin Synod for advice and guidance in the problem of calling a full-time pastor to care for the spiritual needs of the congregation. 19

On March 4, 1956, it is noted in the quarterly meeting minutes that the members of Trinity requested a list of candidates from Pastor Nitz. Later that same month Pastor Beversdorf sent a letter announcing the proposal to offer the members of Trinity the opportunity to call for a graduate from the St. Louis or Springfield seminary. This proposal, however, was declined by the members of Trinity. 20

On March 18, 1956 the members of Trinity Lutheran Church extended a call to a Wisconsin Synod pastor, Theodore H. Mahnke from St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Bloomer, Wisconsin. Pastor Mahnke was installed on May 1, 1956 as the first full-time Wisconsin Synod pastor of the 91 souls of Trinity Lutheran Church of Mt. Carroll, Illinois.

In 1961 there developed a situation that required the Trinity Congregation to offer aid and support to a sister congregation in the Wisconsin Synod. Pastor Wilmer G. Hoffman of St. Peter Lutheran Church of Savanna, Illinois accepted a call to Our Redeemer of Madison, Wisconsin in 1961. At that time a special meeting of the councils of Trinity and St. Peter was held to extend a call to Pastor Theodore Mahnke as Vacancy Pastor for the St. Peter congregation. After the St. Peter congregation of Savanna had called several times and because of the shortage of pastors, the possibility of combining the parishes of Trinity and

St. Peter under one shepherd was explored. At the annual meeting held on January 19, 1962 the voters assembly of Trinity Lutheran Church approved the forming of a parish agreement with St. Peter Lutheran Church of Savanna. The pastoral care of the newly formed parish was carried out with the assistance of vicars from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary of Mequon, Wisconsin. 21 Pastor Theodore Mahnke faithfully served the members of Trinity until July 27, 1971 when he was called to his eternal rest. 22

Those that served as vicars under the pastorate of Pastor Theodore Mahnke were as follows: Gerald Plitzuweit 1962-63, Ronald Roth 1963-64, Charles Flunker 1964-65, Douglas Bode 1965-66, Alfred Jannusch 1966-67, LeRoy Martin 1967-68, Jon Schmugge 1968-69, Ralph Stuebs 1969-70. 23

At the annual voters meeting held on January 14, 1972 the question about joining the Wisconsin Synod was raised but no motion was made and the matter was tabled until a later date. Again at the July quarterly meeting members of the voting assembly held a lengthy discussion on the possibility of joining the Wisconsin Synod, but the matter was tabled once again. In October of 1972 a motion was made and second to join the Wisconsin Synod upon approval of Trinity's constitution by the Synod committee. The congregation of Trinity Lutheran Church voted to join the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod rather than remain independent. That same year they were accepted into membership of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. This decision, however, was not unanimous. But the majority of the voting members felt that it was time to become a member of the Synod and take an active part in the work of the Synod. 24

Pastor Wayne E. Schneider was installed on January 17, 1971 as the second full-time Wisconsin Synod pastor of the joint parish of Trinity, Mt. Carroll and St. Peter, Savanna and is presently shepherding over that flock of believers. During the pastorate of Pastor Wayne Schneider the Trinity Congregation has also provided an opportunity for the training of future pastors by participating in the vicar program of the Wisconsin Synod.

Those that have served as vicars under the pastorate of Pastor Wayne Schneider are as follows: Richard Agenten 1974-75, Michael Frick 1976-77, Gerald Blobaum 1977-78, Jay Gottschalk 1978-79, Thomas Horner 1979-80, John Dorn 1980-81, Robert Fleischmann 1981-82, Shawn Kauffeld 1982-83, Donald Main 1983-84, John Hartmann 1984-85, William Favorite 1985-86, Kevin Hanke 1986-87, David Haugly 1987-88, Kurt Uhlenbrauck 1988-89.

Throughout the years general improvements were made on the church building and parsonage. In 1958 the parsonage, especially the kitchen, was renovated and completely modernized with pastor Mahnke doing much of the work himself. In 1960 the worship facilities of the sanctuary were enhanced by the addition of a new pulpit and communion rail, and a new electronic organ.

The members of Trinity had a real need for a new parish hall with modern facilities such as kitchen and restrooms. Such a hall would serve the congregation in the areas of Sunday School classrooms, fellowship and youth gatherings, and meeting rooms. In the summer of 1973 it was learned that the congregation would receive a large gift from an estate of one of its members, John C. Heinbaugh. The trustees were instructed to use this gift for

the building of a new parish hall.

On September 1, 1974 ground was broken for the new facility. The architectural plans for this new facility called for the existing worship structure to be raised off its foundation, while the new facility was constructed on the newly dug basement level. Upon completion of the new construction the existing worship structure was lowered and capped off the new construction. On September 7, 1975 the new parish hall was dedicated to the Lord's service. Pastor Donald Bitter, President of the Western Wisconsin District, served as guest speaker for the dedication.

Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mount Carroll, Illinois has indeed been under the guidance and protection of the gracious hand of God. Amid the vacancies, the lack of man-power, and the lack of funds, God has blessed his flock with the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, for over one hundred years. It is the God of the harvest that has also blessed his followers with faithful and dedicated servants of Gospel. May the Kingdom of God continually come among the members of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Letter of Correspondence: Mrs. Viola Rath
- 2 Ibid
- 3 A Century of God's Love
- 4 Letter of Correspondence: Pastor Wayne Schneider
- 5 Statistisches Jahrbuch; 1884
- 6 A Century of God's Love
- 7 Statistisches Jahrbuch; 1884
- 8 Statistisches Jahrbuch; 1896
- 9 A Century of God's Love
- 10 Statistisches Jahrbuch; 1898
- 11 A Century of God's Love
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Quarterly Meeting Minutes; October 1932
- 14 Ibid. March 1937
- 15 A Century of God's Love
- 16 Quarterly Meeting Minutes; October 1942
- 17 Ibid. January 1955
- 18 Ibid. July 1955
- 19 Ibid. January 1956
- 20 Ibid. March 1956
- 21 Letter of Correspondence: Pastor Wayne Schneider
- 22 A Century of God's Love
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Letter of Correspondence: Pastor Wayne Schneider

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- , A Century of God's Love: Trinity Lutheran Church, Mt. Carroll, Illinois, 1880-1980.