

HOLY TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH -
THE OLDEST SLOVAK LUTHERAN CHURCH
IN THE AMERICAN HEMISPHERE

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

As a spiritual son of Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Streator, Illinois (hereafter referred to as Holy Trinity), I felt almost obligated by conscience to set forth for future generations its history. After all, who else in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (an almost exclusively German Synod) really cares about the history of Slovaks? In addition, those who would most naturally be interested in Holy Trinity's history, the former members of the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church (later renamed Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, SELC), have been absorbed into Missouri Synod as a "non-geographical district."¹ ² The sense of being a Slovak Lutheran has been blurred further by the almost complete loss of the Slovak language in most homes and by the scarcity of SELC spiritual sons to serve the SELC district's congregations.

Holy Trinity is no exception to these general trends, and in many ways typifies the Lutheran Slovak experience in North America. But Holy Trinity's history begins even before the official organization (March 30, 1884) of the congregation as the first Slovak congregation in North America. The true beginnings of the congregation are found in the root causes of emigration from the Slavic homeland in the years following 1867.

Three dates of dire consequence in the history of the Slovak peoples were: 1) the Hungarian³ victory over the Slavic kingdom (Great Moravia) at Pressburg⁴ in 907; 2) the Hungarian revolution of 1848 (by which the Hungarians achieved a position of equality with the Germans), and 3) the establishment of the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary in 1867.⁵ The last gave the Hungarians complete control over Hungary. Almost immediately the Hungarian Magyars began a nationalistic policy designed to eradicate "foreign cultural elements" within their boundaries.⁶ ⁷

Unfortunately for the Hungarians (who actually were in the minority) a pan-slavic renewal was underway⁸ which brought to bear a bitter resentment against the repressive Hungarian government.⁹ The Hungarians stubbornly continued, using illegal and repressive tactics to stamp out the incipient Slovak nationalism. Dolak notes: "The Electoral Law of 1874 had the practical effect of making it impossible to elect Slovak representatives to the Hungarian Parliament."¹⁰ Also it was in 1874 that the forcible extraction of Slovak children from their homes to acculturate them to Hungarian ways was begun. A total of 889 children were deported to Yugoslavia during this attempt to wipe out Slovak culture.¹¹ In 1875, the Slovak Academy of Arts and Sciences was confiscated by the government and closed down.¹² In the assembled parliament of December 15, 1875, Premier Koloman Tisa proclaimed, "The Slovak is not a human being!"¹³ Dolak relates the sad state of affairs:

The Slovak people themselves considered their over-all condition to be extremely miserable. L'udovit Stur, a leader of the Slovak nation in the middle of the

nineteenth century, stated that the position of the Slovak in Hungary was worse than that of the Christians in Turkey. With this opinion many non-Slovak observers agreed. The Englishman Street declared that "the position of Slovakia as a province of the Kingdom of Hungary was one of virtual slavery." There were no lengths to which the Hungarians were not willing to go. [One of the Hungarian leaders] Bela Gruenwald declared: "It is impossible to gain the Slovaks for the Magyar state-idea by peaceful means. The only thing left to us is to exterminate them completely." The opinion has been expressed that had not World War I intervened, the plan of the Hungarians to destroy the Slovak nation would have succeeded, and the Slovaks would have disappeared from Europe as a national entity."^{14 15}

It really is no wonder that as the Slovaks saw their businesses, libraries, schools and churches being interfered with and closed down, many decided to look for greener pastures. When Jan Kozlej came to Streator in 1873 and opened up a bakery, some of his first customers were no doubt from the group of Slovaks which had already established themselves in the town.¹⁴ This trickle of immigrants in the 1870's became a virtual tidal wave by the 1880's. Alarmed by a loss of 470,089 people during the years 1870-1880, the Hungarian government began to take steps to halt the emigration.¹⁷ Many of those who were listed as "Hungarian" when they came to America were in reality Slovak. By 1883 there were 40 families of Lutheran Slovaks living in Streator.^{18 19}

THE CALLING OF HOLY TRINITY'S FIRST PASTOR, CYRIL DROPPA

The Lutherans who arrived in Streator were faced with a problem. How were they to worship God in this new land? They knew no language except Slovak! They got out their treasured Slovak hymn books and Bibles which they had brought with them and by 1879 were meeting together in each others homes, worshiping by reading the service together.²⁰ Although the congregation's basic needs for baptism and burial were served by a neighboring German pastor named John Hossfeld, they realized the need for a pastor.²¹ In 1882 the congregation had Jan Kozlej²² write on their behalf to the homeland of Slovakia, earnestly pleading for a pastor to come and serve the Lutheran Slovaks in Streator.²³ Droppa's reaction is recorded as follows:

"I received a letter from a friend in America, a John Kosley, and also from a German Lutheran pastor, John Hossfeld, from both of these letters we learned of the desire and yearnings of these Slovak people to have their own pastor, and the sooner the better. I was pleased and surprised to receive these letters and then through prayer my decision was made on March 6 to come to America."²⁴

It is not certain why the long delay ensued between the extending of the call by the congregation in 1882 and the acceptance of Droppa in 1884. Perhaps it is that the communication did not reach him as soon as it has generally been assumed it did. Then again, perhaps the call to come to America was intimidating to the young man who had never been out in his own pastorate, but rather merely assisting his father.

WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES A CHURCH?

Whatever the cause, it has been the occasion of an ongoing debate between the Slovak congregation at Freeland, PA²⁵ and Holy Trinity, Streator, IL. as to which congregation really is the oldest Slovak Lutheran congregation in North America. Pastor David P. Hudak (currently pastor at Holy Trinity) told me that one of the last things that Pastor Dizmar (Holy Trinity's 6th pastor: He served from 1964-75.) said to him in the week before he died was, "Don't give in so easily on the question of which church was first."²⁴

Here's the problem. Ss. Peter's and Paul's Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church of Freeland, PA. (hereafter referred to as "Ss. Peter and Paul") claims that February 22, 1883 is the date they founded their congregation.²⁷ Holy Trinity readily admits that it was only formally organized on March 30, 1884.²⁸ On the other hand, Holy Trinity's church building was finished by the latter part of September, 1884 and was dedicated officially to the Lord's service on October 5, 1884.²⁹ Ss. Peter and Paul's church building was not built until 1886.³⁰ The real question, then, is: "When is a church a church?"

Theologically speaking, a church is wherever two or three are gathered in my name: in other words, where the believers are gathered together to worship the Lord (Mt 18:20). The real question to ask is, "When did the believers at Freeland and at Streator start gathering together as a congregations to worship the Lord?" The evidence overwhelmingly shows that the members of Holy Trinity were gathering together already in 1879.³¹ On the other hand, a listing which shows the pastors of Ss. Peter and Paul says, "(Services by Lay Readers) 1880-1883."³²

What must one conclude? From a theological point of view the people in Streator started acting like a church (worshiping together in homes) a full year before the Freeland people. From a mere physical point of view the people in Streator had a church building built in 1884, a full two years ahead of the Freeland people. Streator even called their first pastor (Cyrill Droppa) a year before the Freeland congregation called their pastor (Karol Horak).³³ The fact that Droppa was not installed at Streator before Horak was installed at Freeland is not pertinent to the question at hand, since a congregation is a congregation regardless of whether it has a pastor or not.

Both sides have their standard answer of course. Holy Trinity staunchly maintains that it is "the oldest Slovak Lutheran Congregation in North America." Ivon P. Harris, a vice-pastor in 1974 at Freeland, PA responded to Mrs. Harold Osborn's request for information regarding her father [sic!]³⁴, Pastor Karol [Charles] Horak. In his answer he said:

"I joined the Slovak-Zion Synod of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) in 1968, and was soon acquainted with the controversy between Freeland and Streator. I really feel it is not worthy of argument - our books speak for themselves, and I am sure that people in Streator can produce similar writings that may substantiate their arguments as being the "Oldest Slovak Lutheran Congregation in the Western Hemisphere". Ss. Peter & Paul, from the records, was organized in February, 1883, with services held from 1880 [sic] in homes in the absence of a Pastor. In 1887 it was formally incorporated according to the law of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, but of course, this does not mark the founding of the Church, since we have churches in our area of worshiping for fifty years and more that have yet to incorporate! These are the facts as we know them in Freeland from diligent and careful study of the documents at hand."³⁵

One can surely agree with the Vice-Pastor at Freeland when he says that official incorporation (Streator beats Freeland by 3 years on this one) doesn't make a church. But by all accounts, Streator had a Slovak congregation, church building, and a charter before Freeland in each case! But the deciding factor is that Streator was worshiping in the homes by 1879, while Freeland didn't start till 1880.³⁶ Other histories have adjudged Streator to be the oldest also.³⁷

DROPPA'S ARRIVAL AND PASTORATE

Admittedly Droppa's delay has given occasion to much controversy, but the reason for the delay remains as much a mystery to us as it was to those members of the first Lutheran Slovak congregation in North America who anxiously awaited his coming. Finally, Droppa arrived in Streator on March 26, 1884. Droppa lets us know how he felt with the words,

"The trip was 20 days long, so on March 26th I arrived in Streator, greeted by grateful people, my congregation. March 30th shall henceforth stay as a memorable occasion, our first service, the 5th Sunday in Lent, the church known as #3 was held in a public school."³⁸

The 50th anniversary booklet describes the meeting held to officially organize Holy Trinity as follows:

"On March 30, 1884, the church was officially instituted and communion given. At this meeting solemn promise was given to uphold and support whole-heartedly this congregation and its pastor, Cyril Droppa. Signing this agreement were:

Jan Katuscak Jan Marinak
Jan Palya Jedinak Juraj Havira
Jan Marko Thomas Cizmar
Jan Kosley
Juraj Rubiscek Salary for the pastor: \$40 / month
Jan Bakalar plus room & board.

Dues were left to the conscience of each member.
Lord's Supper to be served 3 times a year; at
Christmas, Easter, and Trinity Sunday.
Offerings during communion belonging to the pastor.
For every school child parents should pay 25 cents
or more if they so desire.
Each family should pay to the treasurer \$5.00 as a
security of intentions.
Monthly dues will be 5 cents per family, the
unmarried's as their heart dictates."³⁹

At this formal organizational meeting of Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Congregation on March 30, 1884 were 49 charter members.⁴⁰

Apparently there was dissatisfaction with some of the groundwork that had been laid, and when Pastor Droppa sensed this another meeting was called sometime between the dates of 3/31/1884 and 7/13/1884. The account of this meeting says:

"New rules were laid:

Pastor: 1st 6 months \$40.00 per month
 2nd 6 months \$44.00 per month
Membership dues also increased \$1.00
 singles: .50

Marriages: \$5.00
Baptism: \$2.00
Funeral: \$2.00

At this meeting the prospect of building a church was discussed, as services were still in a public school."⁴¹

Needless to say, the legalistic approach of Pastor Droppa with regard to stewardship cannot be commended. On the other hand one should not think that this was unusual practice for Lutheran churches of the day. Most American Lutheran churches, if their records go back that far, will be able to find record of similar practices in their own congregations.⁴² Also, in defense of Pastor Droppa, one is constrained to point out that the congregation itself must have felt that these "dues" were not strict enough, for at their insistence the dues were raised as well as the pastor's future salary.

Now although the above salary of \$40-\$44 per month does not sound like much to us today, one must remember that the value of the dollar has changed significantly between then and now. In 1893 the wages paid a laborer in Passaic, N.J. were only \$12 per month. By 1900 \$1.25 was considered a good wage for a day's work in Chicago.⁴³ By the same token, the Pastor was usually one of the most learned men of the community and was often looked to not only for spiritual advise,

but also for legal, financial and sometimes medical opinions as well.⁴⁴

The really exciting thing that resulted from this second meeting was the discussion about building a permanent structure in which to worship. At once questions surface in our minds. Why did they pick the site of Old #3 way out on the edge of town? How much did it cost? How was the labor done? How long did it take? Who did the labor? One wishes that they had taken minutes of the meeting. Still, all in all, we do have a fair idea how the answers to these questions should go.

The reason they located so far on the outskirts of town was that the Slovaks were not very welcome in town.⁴⁵ To one who has grown up in Streator, this may seem a rather strange and outstanding statement! Not welcome in Streator! Streator is a SLOVAK town!⁴⁶ How could they not be welcome here? However, in the early 1880's one must remember that Slovaks were a newly established minority. However as the flood of Slovaks and other central Slavic immigrants came streaming into Streator for coal mining, the population increased from 5,157 in 1880, to 11,414 in 1890.⁴⁷

Biography in Black has this to say of the prejudice shown to the Slovaks:

Like many other Americans who have chosen to forget their own origin as immigrants, people in Streator felt superior to the newcomers, and settled on the term "Hungarian" as a hand catchall for central Europeans. It was inaccurate - some say that only one family in all of Streator was of Hungarian origin - and was resented as derogatory by Poles and Slovaks alike.⁴⁸ In an age that was outspoken about its prejudices, the local papers mirrored the feelings of the townspeople in their frequent disapproving references to the fights, drunkenness, and general "strangeness" of the newcomers. For instance, the Free Press in June 1881 reported on a wedding in 'the state of Hungary,' in Painter's Addition, Monday evening, at which they had the usual trimmings, resulting in a fuss." The fight was continued the next night, at which said the [Free] Press, 'an interpreter will be necessary to translate what they say into United States language.'⁴⁹ 50

There might have been another reason for locating on the edge of town also. It is known that in 1871 the the Chicago, Wilmington and Vermillion Coal Mining Company (CW+V) donated land for the first Methodist Church at the corner of Monroe and Bridge streets.⁵¹ Could Holy Trinity have gotten a good deal on the land from the company and been enticed to purchase land located near the old #3 mine?⁵² At any rate, surely one of the most compelling reasons for locating where they did was the most practical of all: this was the neighborhood where most of the Slovaks lived. A few years later this would not have been so exclusively the case since the Painter Addition in northern Streator attracted many Slovak immigrants also. But in 1884 the choice must have seemed a rather obvious one, for we hear of no discussion as to where to locate the church. However, by 1890 the

church's location had become such an important issue that an opposition altar was set up in another area of Streator! More on this later.

On July 14, 1884 we have record of a third business meeting of Holy Trinity at which plans for building the church were laid.⁵³ We are told that the church had already purchased a plot of land⁵⁴ across from the school⁵⁵ (though from whom they purchased it we know not). Authority to proceed having been secured, \$300.00 was given to a contractor to bind the agreement.⁵⁶ Construction of the oldest Slovak Church in the Western Hemisphere was underway.

The dedication of these early Slovak families to the congregation and to their faith can be seen in the short amount of time it took to erect the church. The church was started sometime after July 14, 1884 and was "ready for occupancy the latter part of September [1884]"⁵⁷ What is not recorded in the histories of the congregation is the back breaking labor that the men of the congregation contributed to lay the foundation for the church.⁵⁸ The stones, each weighing anywhere from 150 to 250 pounds, were brought up the steep bank from the riverbed of the Vermillion River and carted over to the site of construction on wheelbarrows. Usually there were two men to each stone. This work was done after the men had already been hard at work for 12 hours chipping coal in mine shafts which were so low in height that one was often forced to work on one's knees.⁵⁹ Working mainly in the early evening hours, it is amazing that they were able to do as much as they did so quickly. Truly the person who wrote the line "Our lives were very hard, and hard was the beginning of our church."⁶⁰ was writing from first hand experience.

Another thing that is not recorded in the official histories of Holy Trinity is that many of the Catholic Slovaks in the neighborhood pitched in and helped build the church!⁶¹ Relations were even friendly enough that in the severe winter weather some Catholics would go to service at #3 rather than walk all the way in to St. Stephen's Church.⁶² Another indication of the friendliness that existed between the Lutheran and Catholic Slovaks was that when a member of the Slovak Catholic parish of St. Stephen's died, Holy Trinity tolled its bell since St. Stephen's had no bell in their church.⁶³

If the above was not enough to shock you, listen to the description of the dedication of the church on October 5, 1884 as reported by one eyewitness:

"We arrived (via carriage) greeted by a great number of people. Our entrance hymn was 'Together We Gather'. All three pastors were before the Altar. Pastor Frit[zi]schel⁶⁴ had the sermon. Pastor Hossfeldt [presumably a pastor at Park Presbyterian in Streator, though there is no record of him having served there.] had the liturgy; he also played organ after the installation. Pastor Droppa gave communion."⁶⁵

It should be noted that Pastor Fritzschel did protest at the participation of the Presbyterian pastor in the worship service.⁶⁶ However, evidently he was not bothered enough by it to refuse to participate himself. At any rate, it shows that the doctrinal stand

of Holy Trinity, and Pastor Droppa, regarding fellowship was a little weak at the time when Droppa first arrived.⁶⁷

As for the cost of the building, the total cost is unknown, but there was a record of at least four bills having been paid, the total of which comes to \$990.75.⁶⁸ This was certainly no drop in the bucket for those days. The eagerness of the people to make good their pledge to Pastor Droppa to support the church wholeheartedly can be seen by the fact that by October of 1884 the church was already almost completely paid for!⁶⁹ The church collection was made each Sunday by ushers who held a blue felt basket with a long handle before the parishioners. If you didn't give at first, they would patiently wait, even prompting you to give if you didn't show signs of weakening under the public peer pressure.⁷⁰

Little else is known about Pastor Droppa's period of service. He served until 1887, when he resigned his pastorate⁷¹ at Holy Trinity to accept a call to Freeland, PA where "there was a greater number of Slovak Lutherans."⁷² After serving at Ss. Peter and Paul, Freeland, PA. from 1886-1889,⁷³ he returned to his homeland of Slovakia.⁷⁴ Thus one might appropriately prate: Droppa dropped out of American Lutheran history!

PASTOR HORACK - THE FIRST SLOVAK LUTHERAN MISSIONARY IN AMERICA

The next pastor to come to Streator was, ironically enough, previously a pastor at Ss. Peter and Paul, Freeland, PA. (the very place where Cyrill Droppa went after his pastorate at Holy Trinity). The new pastor's name was Carol (or Karol) Horack. The anglicized version of Karol is Charles. Carol Horack had the distinction of being the first pastor in this country ordained specifically for work among Slovak Lutherans. Dolak gives a brief history of Horak as follows:

"He was a native of Bohemia. He was born in Schlesichen, May 9, 1856. In 1879 the Rev. E.K. Lanyi of Cernilov, director of the missionary institute *Kommet Zu Jesu* in Prussian Silesia, offered young Horak free tuition at the school in order that he might prepare himself for the teaching profession. Horak passed his teacher's examination in 1882, but before he left the seminary, an urgent call came from the United States from the Mission Board of the General Council for young men educated as teachers to work among their own people in North America. Horak decided to follow the call, and in the autumn of 1882 he, together with other companions, arrived in New York City. They were assigned to the Rev. J.A. Dewald of New Brunswick, N.J., for training in theology. The urgent need for workers among the Slovaks, however, moved the Mission Board to assign Horak to work among his fellow countrymen soon after. He was sent to Pennsylvania, where he labored in the cities of Freeland, Hazelton, Mahanoy City, Mount Carmel, Wilkes-Barre, Scranton, Plymouth, and Nanticoke. At the same time he was to continue his theological studies under the

direction of the Rev. E.A. Bauer of Hazelton, Pa. On October 16, 1883, Horak was ordained to the Holy ministry by Drs. Speaker,⁷⁵ Rath,⁷⁶ and Sattler.⁷⁷ In March 1887 he moved to Streator, Ill., to serve Holy Trinity Slovak Lutheran Church."⁷⁸ ⁷⁹

Shortly after his ordination (Oct 16, 1883) Horack returned to Bohemia and married Miss Rosine M. Holececk. They then returned to America, arriving at the end of March, 1884. During his missionary activity in Freeland, Hazelton, Mahanoy, Mt. Carmel, Wilkes-Barre and Scranton, Horack was apparently under the general supervision of Dr. Benjamin Sattler (Cf. footnote 62). During the time that he served out East, Horack's salary was, for a time at least, supplied by the General Council.⁸⁰

A fact noted in the Golden Jubilee booklet of Holy Trinity is that Pastor Horak had a brief period (from October 1886 through March 1887) when he was not engaged in the work of the ministry at Freeland, PA.⁸¹ One wonders what the reason for this was, especially when the need for Slovak pastors was so intense. At any rate, in March, 1887, he received and accepted the call to Holy Trinity, arriving in Streator March 6, 1887 for his first service.⁸²

THE LOCATION PROVES DIVISIVE

At first things seemed to be progressing rather smoothly. Church was full every Sunday and all came to the Lord's Supper when it was served. Donations were coming in at a steady pace according to everyone's ability. But conditions changed dramatically around the year 1900. Streator was a coal mining "boom town", and with the opening up of additional coal mines in the northern and eastern portions of Streator, "many of the members of the church who lived near them found it difficult and often impossible in the bitter winter weather to walk the long distance from Painter's Addition to the church at Old No. 3."⁸³ Those who lived in Painter's Addition began to lobby for relocating the church to a more central location. It appears that Pastor Horack was willing to meet this group's desire. Plans were made to build a church in town on Sangamon St. However, the majority of the people who belonged to the church still lived in South Streator in the immediate vicinity of Old #3. They had no intention of moving the church, and must have felt as if they were being steamrolled over by the vocal minority from the northern part of town. Contributions began to be withheld. People began to stay away from church.

At this point the Painter's Addition people appeared to have backed off for a while. Perhaps it was due to Pastor Horack's mediation. The majority who lived around old #3 began to come back to church once again and to contribute to the work of the Lord. Then a major gaff occurred. Those who had been absent from church were asked to "give the dues they had missed."⁸⁴ They refused to pay up, at which point on October 9, 1890⁸⁵ many of the northern Slovaks from the Painter's Addition and the eastern part of the town left the Old #3 church and built a church at 221 South Illinois St. Pastor Horack followed them to serve the "town church" while Old #3 was left without a pastor. Both congregations continued to use the Holy Trinity name.

The Slovak version of the 50th anniversary booklet makes the sad statement, "None of this would have happened had there been more love and sincerity between them."⁶⁴ Written as it were on a banner painted to stretch from one side to the other of the arch above the altar, the town church professed their desired intent with the words,

"Hrod prepepny Se Pan Boh nas"

which translated means, "Glory to our God in the highest!"⁶⁷

The "town church" despite the advantage of continuing with Pastor Horack had a hard time of it. A financial depression was afflicting the country, and if work was hard to get, contributions were harder still. Meanwhile Old #3 was served for a while by Pastor Micatek.⁶⁸ After 1894, Pastor Ladislav Boor⁶⁹ came down from Chicago to conduct services for Old #3.⁷⁰ Also during the this period Slovak students from the seminary at Springfield came to help out: Martin Tomasko, Daniel Bella,⁷¹ and Andrew Olsovsky.⁷²

With the easing of the depression, the town church was beginning to run more smoothly. This continued until the year 1900, when "unrest returned and Pastor Horack left."⁷³ What caused the unrest at this time? A possible clue to the riddle is found in Dolak's cryptic comment regarding the Streator congregation's need to remind it's first 3 pastors to "lead a blameless life."⁷⁴ What is beyond speculation is that Horack did in actuality resign and was never a pastor again. The Golden Jubilee booklet merely says, "In the year 1900, he resigned his charge here and retired to private life."⁷⁵ I found out from talking to some of the members that they could still remember "Old man Horack" riding around on his three bar bicycle, selling insurance.⁷⁶ After his resignation as Pastor at Holy Trinity, Mr. Horack joined St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Streator,⁷⁷ a German Lutheran church which until recently was a member of the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and has since joined in the merger of 1988 to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

THE ARBITRATOR - PASTOR JURCO

The resignation of Pastor Horack left the "town church" without a pastor for a short while. Then they decided to call Jan Jurco. Here finally Streator began to see a different breed of minister. Jan Jurco was one of the charter members of the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC). He had been at a meeting in Cleveland on April 16, 1901 to promote the founding of a Synod which would "become affiliated with the Synodical Conference"⁷⁸ and was present for the actual organization of the SELC on September 2-4, 1902 in Connellsville, PA.⁷⁹ Under his able administration, the two "Holy Trinity" churches ("Old #3" and the "town church") were once again united as a congregation. As a compromise to the Old #3 group, services were held out at Old #3 once a month and held in town the other Sundays of the month.

Despite the great reconciliation which he effected, Jurco seems to have cast a cloud over his previous accomplishments. Both the 50th and 75th Anniversary Booklets record in identically telegraphic words:

"The Rev. John Jurco became his [Horak's] successor and served the congregation from 1900 to 1907. Under his leadership the two factions again merged and have continued as one congregation to this day."¹⁰⁰

Why do these booklets say no more? The next sentence give us a clue: "After the sudden departure of Pastor Jurco, the congregation was left without a pastor for almost a year." Why the adjective "sudden?" It could be that Dolak's statement was made on the basis of better knowledge when he said: "The Streator congregation found it necessary to remind its first three pastors of this [to lead a blameless life]."¹⁰¹ Perhaps it is only reading into words where nothing was meant, but the use of the word "sudden" to describe Jurco's departure is suggestive to say the least. At any rate, the Slovak version of the 50th Anniversary Booklet does not make much of the situation, but states rather matter of factly:

"In 1907 Pastor Jurco received a call to Chicago and he accepted. Trinity was without a pastor for more than a year. During this time this church looked to Rev. John Pelikan of St. Peter and Paul's Church of Chicago for occasional services and communion."¹⁰²

PASTOR CHOVAN'S PASTORATE - A PERIOD OF ASCENDANCY

Streator was once more searching for a pastor, the first two pastors having served only three years each, and with Jurco having served a total of eight years. Again they found a good man for the congregation in their next pastor, Rev. Andrew Chovan, a young graduate with a flair for teaching who came originally from Bethlehem, PA.¹⁰³ While still a student himself at Springfield Seminary, Andrew Chovan was an official instructor to 15 Slovak students who were obligated to study the Slovak language in addition to their theological studies.¹⁰⁴ After his graduation in 1908, he accepted the call which Holy Trinity, Streator, IL. had already extended to him while finishing his last year of studies at the seminary.¹⁰⁵ The Slovak version of the 50th Anniversary Booklet relates:

"At this time more young men were graduating from the seminary at Springfield, so a graduate was chosen and a call sent to Andrew Chovan, who graduated in 1908 and was ordained and installed in Streator on July 26, 1908 by Rev. [John] Pelikan."¹⁰⁶

Andrew Chovan proved to be a capable pastor and under his direction the congregation began to really flourish. One can see the energy of Chovan in the many endeavors which he undertook. One of the things that happened in July, 1908 (which may well have been a result of Chovan's urgings) was for Holy Trinity to join hands with the other Slovak Lutherans by entering officially into fellowship with the body known as the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church.¹⁰⁷ Membership in the SELC came just in time for the August 19-25, 1908 Synodical Conference Convention, which declared the SELC to be a member synod. By this

action, Holy Trinity entered into fellowship with the Missouri Synod, the English Synod,¹⁰⁸ and the Joint Synod of Wisconsin (which included Wisconsin Synod, Minnesota Synod and the Michigan District of the Michigan Synod¹⁰⁹). On October 5, 1909 Holy Trinity celebrated the 25th year of the congregation's existence.¹¹⁰ In 1910 he started a Christian day School for the upper grade students which continued through the year 1914. It was in session for 10 months a year.¹¹¹ Also in 1910 Chovan sold his printing press to the Slovak Synod for the sum of \$1,359.04. This had the effect of locating the Slovak Publishing House in Streator, IL., under the official name "Slovak Concordia Publishing House."

The official church paper of the SELC, the *Svedok* ("Witness") first rolled off the presses in Streator on September 1, 1910.¹¹² It continued to be published in Streator for the next 10 years, until, due to financial debts, the publishing house (reorganized in 1914 under the name Svedok Publishing House) had to be dissolved in 1920.¹¹³ Chovan in addition to supervising the printing of the *Svedok*, also served as one of its editors.¹¹⁴ Additional items that came from the Svedok Publishing House were the Large and Small Catechisms of Dr. Martin Luther, a Bible History, various special orders of service (Christmas programs, Lenten services), an Annual (Kalendar), the convention minutes and some church history booklets.¹¹⁵ That the circulation of the Svedok Publishing House was a healthy one is shown by the comment of Mary Hyduk, "Even the Catholics loved to read the *Svedok*."¹¹⁶

Already by 1911, the Holy Trinity congregation had increased in size to the point that the town church had to be enlarged by 22 feet.¹¹⁷ The growing importance of the Holy Trinity congregation to the Slovak Synod at this time was reflected in 1913, when the Slovak Synod received a new charter and changed its headquarters from Luzerne County, Pennsylvania to Streator, IL.¹¹⁸ Also, a change was coming over the congregation due to the influence of Chovan. The English version of the 50th Anniversary Booklet puts it this way: "Especially noteworthy was the change made in the inner-life of the members of the congregation."¹¹⁹ Years later Pastor Daniel expressed it this way, "His deeply spiritual leadership left an indelible impression on his flock."¹²⁰

Pastor Chovan also appears to have been regularly involved in Synodical affairs. A regular example of this was his presence at the Congress of Slovak Lutherans held in Pittsburgh on July 4, 1919, at which the SELC and the Slovaks in the United Lutheran Church (ULC) got together to discuss their doctrinal differences. It was at this convention that the character of the Slovak Synod of which Holy Trinity was a member became evident to all. Although the Slovaks who belonged to the newly formed Slovak Zion Synod of the United Lutheran Church in America wanted to pray with the SELC Slovaks *before unity had been established*, the president of the SELC, John Pelikan, stated the SELC position well with the words:

"Since there are among those here present basic differences in doctrine and practice, we ought first of all come to an agreement and then join in prayer."¹²¹

Despite his activity for the Slovak Synod, Pastor Chovan did not neglect his first calling. This is attested to by the favorable remembrances of his parishioners years afterward. Some of the comments were: "He was a good pastor and a good teacher."¹²² "He was a good preacher."¹²³ "Chovan had six children: Peter, Andrew, Jacob, John, Philip, and Bartholomew."¹²⁴ He used to come over to our house quite a bit. He used to help people out with their finances."¹²⁵ "Well, he was strict and you had to be in church or he'd come and visit you. And during summer school if there was a funeral that came up he would take the children along and let them observe."¹²⁶ During Chovan's pastorate services were continued once a month at Old #3 with the rest being in town. For those who lived in the north part of Streator, a streetcar ride down Bloomington St. was the adventure of the week in 1913.¹²⁷

During the process of gathering the information for this paper I talked to 3 of the people who were in Pastor Chovan's last confirmation class at Holy Trinity: Mary Hyduk, Ann Jacob, and Margaret Brassfield. Coincidentally, Margaret Brassfield was the first child to be baptized by Pastor Chovan when he came to Holy Trinity in 1908.¹²⁸ Ann Jacob had this comment to make regarding the catechism class, "I didn't know the catechism existed in English. It would have been a lot easier."¹²⁹ Mary Hyduk also told of the thorough instruction which they received from Pastor Chovan during the 6 weeks of summer school (summer school lasted 6 weeks through 1950, at which time they started cutting down the number of weeks that it ran).¹³⁰

EVERYONE HAS THEIR WEAKSPOT

As good as things were, a problem developed which is not written about in the official histories of Holy Trinity; the partial blame of which should really be laid at the footstep of some of the parishioner's consciences. It seems that as time went on, Pastor Chovan would make a habit of coming by the Svedok Publishing House after the press had finished running and the women and children workers had left. There he would hob-nob with some of the men of the congregation for some fellowship... and a little something to drink. Perhaps at first it was only to fit in that he started drinking with them, but soon it became a problem. Without exception, in spite of the great things that Andrew Chovan accomplished for the congregation of Holy Trinity, - if one asks the old members who can remember about Chovan one invariably gets the same answer: "He had a problem with drinking." Some comments: "He was well liked... They offered him something to drink and he got 'in the habit'"¹³¹ "Pastor Chovan was asked to leave because he drank dandelion wine too much."¹³² "It really was the fault of the men who realized that Pastor had a problem and yet kept offering him the wine. They were the ones that got him drinking and then the same ones kicked him out later!"¹³³

Thus it was that after a period of initial success, Pastor Chovan was apparently forced to make a new beginning elsewhere. The last project begun under Pastor Chovan was the purchase of land on which to build a new parsonage. On September 12, 1920 a plot of land on Illinois St. was purchased for \$2,500.¹³⁴ When Chovan resigned his ministry at Holy Trinity at the end of 1921, he took a call to St. John's, South Bethlehem, PA.¹³⁵ Evidently Chovan must have still had

somewhat of a problem, for he was also forced to resign that parish in August, 1923, after serving for only 20 months.¹³⁶ At any rate, Chovan's resignation, due presumably to alcoholic indiscretion, left Holy Trinity congregation looking for a pastor once again. Between the time when Chovan left and Pastor Daniel came, the elders conducted the services at Holy Trinity.¹³⁷ The congregation was poised for change.

JOHN DANIEL'S PASTORATE - THE GOLDEN AGE

As one example of change, take for instance the manner in which funerals were conducted. For the first 40 years of Holy Trinity's existence, funerals were conducted as a highly emotionally charged event, much as they had been in the old country of Slovakia. There was of course the 3 nights of watching at home, where the body was laid at state either in the kitchen or living room. There the body was viewed by friends and relatives during the day. Then after much reminiscing of the days when "so and so" was with us, came the funeral, inevitably accompanied by much loud wailing. Screaming was not only permitted at the grave side, but expected of the close relatives. And if a person wanted to really prove that they missed the dead person they might just fall in with the coffin in their fit of passion! Such was the stuff of funerals in the old days of Holy Trinity.¹³⁸ With the new Pastor, this as well as many other things would gradually change for the better.

Little did Holy Trinity know that it was headed for the most stable pastorate of its history. Pastor John Daniel is without a doubt the most highly revered pastor in all of Holy Trinity's history so far. Of all the comments made of Pastor Daniel, the worst was that he blew cigar smoke in the faces of the confirmands.^{139 140} In view of the importance of Pastor John Daniel to the congregational history, information on what I know of his background is included here.

John Daniel was born in Stroubsburg, PA. near the Delaware Water Gap. When he was two the family moved to Garfield, NJ.¹⁴¹ Pastor Daniel came from a poor family, a fact illustrated by the following excerpt from the Streator Times of 1950:

"When a visiting minister suggested that he [John Daniel] be sent into the ministry his mother was sure he could be spared [from the farm chores]. When asked how it could be managed [an older brother was already attending seminary at Springfield, IL] she said, 'We'll buy one more cow and sell that much more milk.'"¹⁴²

After three years at the preparatory school at Ft. Wayne, IN.,¹⁴³ he transferred to Springfield Seminary. There, after serving a couple of vicarages, he graduated in June, 1922. He arrived in Streator in September and was ordained and installed on September 17, 1922. That fall, the brick parsonage was built across the street from the town church at a cost of \$7,861.¹⁴⁴ The following summer he got married (June 27, 1923) to the wife who eventually bore him two boys and two girls.^{145 146}

The amazing energy and drive of Pastor Daniel is well known to every person who was a member of the congregation while he served. His son, Rev. Robert J. Daniel had this to say of his father:

A 42 year ministry at one place and in one congregation is an amazing accomplishment. Although it was quite common at the time - especially in the SELC. Uncle Andrew Daniel¹⁴⁷ served over 40 years in Detroit; my uncle Mike Estok for 37 years in Hazelton, PA. This is not true of the four of us who were their sons.

42 years means that those who they baptized they confirmed and then married; and baptized and confirmed and married a second generation. I've ministered long enough in one congregation to confirm those who I baptized, but have never married them.

42 years means preaching Sunday after Sunday to the same people. Dad spent a lot of time on his sermons - Slovak and English. He was dedicated, first and above all, to the proclamation of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament - 3 times every Sunday and for many years, up to the past few, every Tue., Wed., and Thur. night in Advent and Lent which included a Slovak Service at Old Number 3.

I'm not sure how he kept the schedule. He had no secretary and put out his own bulletins and newsletters - in two languages. YPS (Young People's Society) for Juniors every Monday night - for Seniors every Tuesday night. And a driver in education and confirmation classes - from 1st grade through 8th with 6 weeks of VBS (Vacation Bible School) every summer, although this may not have been true in his last ten years. From about the age of 50 to 68 he had a vicar.¹⁴⁸

Personally, I am convinced that one of the secrets to Pastor Daniel's stamina as a Pastor was his athletic interests. Rev. Robert J. Daniel commented:

Sports were always part of our household which involved everyone but our mom.... His [John Daniel's] balance wheel in life was his involvement in sports. He was an out-standing baseball player and city-champ for many, many years in tennis. Prior to graduating from Springfield Seminary, he had a contract from the St. Louis Browns. He was still a very good tennis player at age 45-50, for when I came from the Seminary during the summer months where I was no. 3 man on the team, my dad could still hold his own and battle tenaciously down to the wire. He was rather tenacious in most things.¹⁴⁹

At any rate, whoever knew the man admitted that he was a very thorough, energetic pastor who made sure that his congregation was cared for spiritually. Some of the comments of those who remembered him were: "He was a real caring man, concerned about real Christians. He was everything that characterized a good pastor."¹⁵⁰ "He was a

real likable man, a little strict - but everybody liked him."¹⁵¹ When Tom Yednock was interviewed he had this to say:

He was respected by all, a very hard worker. Some didn't like him with the hard line he took against Catholics. "Catholic" was a bad word with Pastor Daniel. He didn't want you to have anything to do with Catholics. He was a tireless worker, running the whole church by himself. He had at least 2 services in English and 1 in Slovak. He held VBS for 6 weeks in the summer.

He was a great athlete. He was city champ in tennis in Streator. Every Saturday he had you recite catechism till you finished confirmation. Then after confirmation, if you weren't involved in any of the societies he would have you come in for private confession and ask you questions from the catechism. It was pretty hard to get somebody in after Pastor Daniel.¹⁵²

But not everyone found Pastor Daniel exactly to their taste. Sue Gotch good naturedly admitted her feelings:

He was strict, and to tell you the truth I was kind of scared of him. You couldn't get close to a pastor like you can now. He was a good looking man. He used to hit the confirmands if they didn't learn right. Pastor Daniel never did get it straight that the reason my brother had trouble learning from him was that my brother was hard of hearing. Pastor Daniel always smoked cigars.¹⁵³

Mrs. Yuhas, the oldest member of the congregation alive at the present time, had this to say about Pastor Daniel:

Pastor Daniel was a good pastor. He was strict with the children and people... too strict some said, but this was because he told us you can't take a wife from a different religion.¹⁵⁴

BUILDING UP THE WALLS - I

One gets the definite impression that just as Pastor Chovan introduced confessional Lutheranism in its classic sense to Holy Trinity, Rev. Daniel completed the process by educating the people and holding to the line even in difficult situations. When I interviewed Pastor David P. Hudak (current pastor at Holy Trinity) he told me that animosity developed between the Catholic Slovaks and the Lutheran Slovaks during Daniel's time at Holy Trinity in the 1930's and 40's. This was quite different from the first band of settlers who in 1884 had erected Old #3 church with the help of Catholic neighbors!

Part of the difference was due to a growing awareness of being a confessionally Lutheran Church. However some of the difference can be explained by the fact that by the 1930's the pioneer spirit had pretty much died out. Also by the 1930's the Slovaks were no longer laughed

at and ridiculed by the "English" townspeople because: 1. The Slovaks were no longer a small minority. 2. The Slovaks had themselves become more acclimated to the cultural atmosphere of America. Therefore when the original cohesive forces were removed, the Catholic and Lutheran Slovaks began to slug it out among themselves.

The first volley in the fight appeared to have been shot by the Catholics, who began insisting that the children in mixed marriages must be raised Catholic. Holy Trinity retaliated by a resolution of the elders which said that if any member marries a Roman Catholic they will be excommunicated. As a result of this resolution, 60 people gradually left Holy Trinity during the 1930's and 40's to join the more liberal German congregation, St. Paul's Lutheran Church.¹⁵⁸

Evidence of Pastor Daniel's healthy influence on Holy Trinity's consciousness of being "Lutheran" was a section in the 50th Anniversary Booklet (1934) entitled, "WHAT IS THE LUTHERAN CHURCH?" It said:

1. It is the church founded on the Bible as the verbally inspired, and therefore infallible, Word of God. It teaches all that the Bible teaches; it teaches not more than the Bible teaches.
2. The fundamental doctrine of the Bible is also the cardinal teaching of the Lutheran Church, namely, that "there is not a just man on earth that doeth good and sinneth not" (Eccl. 7,20), that "there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2,5), and that "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2,8.9).
3. The means of grace devised by God are the means used by the Lutheran Church, namely, the Gospel and the Sacraments - Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Man's hope of salvation must be founded on them. Whosoever despises them will be damned.
4. Faith is not the result of imagination or emotion, but the work of the Holy Spirit by means of the Gospel and the Sacraments. Hence there must be knowledge and the Lutheran Church purports to impart knowledge through the agencies of catechetical instruction preparatory for confirmation, doctrinal preaching and teaching, public and private.
5. The Lutheran Church acknowledges Jesus as her sole Master, and therefore, must refuse fellowship to the churches, organizations, lodges, and their constituents that either mar or mince the teachings of the Master.
6. The Lutheran Church is ever ready to serve all men with the Gospel, to baptize children that are brought to her by those in authority, to baptize adults after they have been indoctrinated in the teachings of the Scriptures, and to admit to communion such as have resolved to join the Lutheran Church by rite of

confirmation - as long as such are in the state of repentance.

7. The Lutheran Church upholds the distinctive principle; a Christian burial for a departed Christian only. A Christian burial for a professional unbeliever is a colossal fraud, pure and simple. In explanation of this principle it should be said that the Lutheran Church is not an undertaking establishment for the dead, but a hospital for the spiritually quickened or living. A Christian burial is of value to the bereaved, but only when it is honest. No church ceremony can cover up sins that have not been blotted out by the Lamb of God. Again, a burial ceremony is a testimony. When a person is buried by the Methodists, we logically assume that he was a Methodist; when buried by the Catholics, a Catholic; when buried by the Lutherans, a Lutheran. That is at least the way it should be. A lodge will not award a non-member a lodge funeral. That is out of the question. And only a soldier or an ex-soldier is buried with military honors. For the same reason a Christian soldier only should be buried as a Christian soldier. And, besides, why force something upon a person when he is dead that he positively refused when living? "Let the dead bury their own dead."
8. The Lutheran Church teaches that church and state are two separate and distinct organizations, and that neither has the authority to dictate to the other. The church is to direct man how to live, what to believe, and how to die as a Christian; the state is to direct man how to live as a citizen.

The distinctive doctrines of the Lutheran Church, Synodical Conference, are briefly stated in Dr. Martin Luther's Catechism.¹⁵⁶

SHADES OF THINGS TO COME

One can see from the inclusion of this rather lengthy statement of belief that Pastor Daniel was indeed inculcating a sense of "confessional Lutheranism" in the members of Holy Trinity. The length of #7 indicates how extensive a problems the lodges must have posed at this time.¹⁵⁷

Holy Trinity still fights the "lodge problem" in the closing years of the 1980's under Pastor Hudak, who has been slowly working on the problem. Then as now one of the problems is "secret" lodge members who never tell the pastor that they are a lodge member. It is hard for a pastor to act on rumor! The other problem is determining when to continue working with someone and when to discipline. A notoriously well known example of the latter is Andy "Fatty" Novotney, whom everyone in the congregation knows is a member of the Elks.¹⁵⁸ As of 1989, Pastor Hudak has dealt with the problem for the 8 years, evangelically striving to get lodge members to see the contradiction

between holding membership in organizations that deny Christ and yet wanting to retain membership as professing Christians.¹⁵⁹

THE TRANSITION FROM SLOVAK TO ENGLISH

As was noted earlier, by the 1920's there were young people in the congregation that could benefit from a service in English. Pastor Daniel was quick to move the congregation to meet that need. In January, 1923, after securing the consent of the congregation, services in English were introduced and the congregation began the long and painful process of switching from Slovak to English.¹⁶⁰ The dual services meant an extraordinary amount of work for the new pastor, especially in Advent and Lent when, as was customary for the Slovaks, services were held every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday night. During that season he had not only a Slovak service and an English on Sundays, but also dual worship services Slovak/English for 3 days out of the week. In all this meant 8 services a week during the seasons of Advent and Lent!

Some might have wondered at the wisdom of adding the English services to an already hectic schedule, but John Daniel was a man of insight who was proved to be right. As English began to be picked up by more and more of the Slovak youth, the congregation moved from being primarily Slovak speaking to a primarily English speaking congregation. The congregation was being "Americanized." Around 1930 the old world custom of all the men sitting on the south side of the church and the women sitting on the north side was done away with.¹⁶¹ In 1931 the Sunday School was "departmentalized" into grades and the instruction began to be carried out primarily in English.¹⁶² By the early 1930's the attendance at the English services was more than double the attendance at the Slovak services.¹⁶³ Despite the increase of English speaking people at Holy Trinity, Slovak was still the favored language in 1934. The 10:00 AM service was still held in Slovak, while the English service was relegated to the 7:30 PM service.¹⁶⁴

However, the handwriting was on the wall. On November 18, 1941 Anna Daniel started the Mary Martha Society as an English speaking society for ladies in the church.¹⁶⁵ In 1948 the congregation resolved to add another English service each Sunday because of the increased attendance. Slovak was on the wane. Although Pastor Daniel continued to preach one Slovak service each Sunday for the rest of his ministry at Trinity (he served actively till 6 months before his death at age 69)¹⁶⁶ and promised to find a Slovak speaking pastor who could keep the Slovak services going, Slovak died its final death under John Daniel's successor, Rev Cizmar. Even under Rev. Cizmar Slovak services were down to once a month, but when Cizmar retired in August 1975,¹⁶⁷ Slovak services were happily consigned to oblivion by the new Pastor, Wilton E. Hille (the first, and only non-Slovak full-time pastor that Holy Trinity has ever had). By then the Slovak services had an average attendance of only about 30.

BUILDING UP THE WALLS - II

As time went on Holy Trinity began to improve it's facilities. The "town church" (which had been built in 1890 and had gradually replaced Old #3 as the main meeting place for the members after the two merged again) had already had to be enlarged in 1911. Then a brick veneer was added on July 31, 1927 for a cost of \$7,442.41.¹⁶⁸ On November 9, 1930 another improvement came with the installation of a pipe organ at a cost of \$1,500.¹⁶⁹ Then in January, 1932, Holy Trinity moved out of the dark ages with the installation of new electric lighting for the church and the Sunday school, which replaced the original gas lighting that had been installed in 1908.¹⁷⁰

Along with all the improvements came increased membership. The members debated. Should they try to add on to the existing structure or should they go ahead and build a new church in a new location? After consulting an architect, it was reported that the cost of building a new building, without the furnishings, would amount to \$175,000! The year was 1947, and many as they looked at the post-war economy felt uncertain about the future. America had only recently emerged from the long, hard depression of the 1930's. At the April voter's meeting the project was voted down.¹⁷¹ But Holy Trinity did not stop growing. By 1950 the baptized membership numbered 792 souls.¹⁷² The church was already having three services every Sunday morning, and "proper facilities were sorely lacking for conducting Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, and meetings of the various societies within the congregation."¹⁷³ The time for action was overdue.

The 75th anniversary booklet details the strategy that Pastor Daniel adopted to clearly point out the need and convince those who were reluctant that it was time to reluctantly take action:

On December 4th, 1949, the first series of twelve publicity bulletins pointing up the need for additional facilities was published by the Senior Young People's Society of the congregation. These bulletins aroused new interest among our members for the projection of a building program. As a result, on January 22, 1950, the voter's assembly chose a Building Committee of twenty-five members and directed them to "take necessary steps toward bringing into being an active building program". This committee was to determine approximate cost, seek sites and make recommendations as to size and type of building needed. On the 5th day of March, 1950, five site locations were considered by the voters' assembly. It was resolved to take an option on a plot of ground on East Main Street, consisting of twelve lots, at the purchase price of \$12,000. On June 25th, 1950, after hearing a report from the Building Committee regarding a survey made among our membership seeking financial pledges, the voters' assembly authorized the committee to proceed toward actual construction.¹⁷⁴

The rest as is often said, "is history." An architect from River Forest (W.R. Kramer)¹⁷⁶ prepared the preliminary sketches and bids for the project were solicited from local contractors. W.S. Bills and Sons of Streator won the bid with an amount of \$248,693. The nine member Executive Building Committee consisted of: Andrew Hyduk, William Hayes, Thomas Novotney, Everette Brassfield, Charles Hamann, Andrew Babey Sr., John Yednock Jr., Michael Berta Sr. and Pastor John Daniel.¹⁷⁶ Ground breaking ceremonies were held on Sunday, September 14, 1952 and four days later construction was started. This was followed by the cornerstone laying ceremonies on May 3, 1953 and the dedication of the new church, fellowship hall and educational building on April 4, 1954.¹⁷⁷ ¹⁷⁸ The new facility was built in 19 months and was done at a total cost (including furnishings) of \$250,000.¹⁷⁹ One of the reasons that the cost could be kept this low was that many men of the congregation worked many long evenings giving of their talents in building the church.¹⁸⁰

An example of a typical paragraph included in the church newsletter ("Trinity Tidings") of that time read:

Your help is urgently needed at our new Church Building. Come out any evening at Six o'clock and Saturday morning at Eight o'clock. A member of the Building Committee will be there working each day at those times and will know what has to be done.

A number of very pressing matters must be attended to such as the dipping of all the lumber that is to go on the roof of our new church. This lumber MUST be ready by the time the carpenters are ready to place it on the roof. If We do not dip it ourselves it will be necessary to hire men to do this job. That of course will add to the overall cost of our project. Come and help in this urgent matter.

Many of our men have been faithfully coming out to the church. If you haven't yet - come now.¹⁸¹

Naturally the next consideration of the church was the parsonage. The old parsonage had been located right next to the church on South Illinois St. However, with the church now being located out on East Main, the congregation decided to sell the parsonage and construct a new one next to the new church. The old parsonage was sold for \$16,500 (it had been bought originally in 1923 for \$7,861) and construction was begun in June, 1956 on a new parsonage across the street from Holy Trinity's East Main location. Construction was completed the first week in December, 1956 and the parsonage was dedicated on December 9, 1956. The cost, excluding the value of the lot, came out to \$17,000.¹⁸² Again volunteer labor saved the day, making the cost much less expensive than it otherwise would have been. Already the final payment on the loan from First Federal Bank of Ottawa covering the church had been paid on July 20, 1958.¹⁸³ The burning of the mortgage ceremony was held jointly with the Ninth Anniversary of the Church Dedication on Sunday, April 21, 1963.¹⁸⁴

CHURCHES AREN'T BUILT WITHOUT MONEY

Hand in hand with building programs go financial concerns. We have already seen that Holy Trinity was concerned enough with money to do a lot of the work by volunteer labor. But Holy Trinity had prepared herself financially before the first brick had been put in place. Already we have seen how "dues" were assessed when the congregation was first started. This method of collection was not without its problems. As we have seen it served as a catalyst for the split which occurred in 1890. It also contributed to a loss of membership in the depression of the 1930's.¹⁰⁵ This system continued unabated through 1946. By the early 1940's the dues were \$2.00/couple and .50/single person.¹⁰⁶ Pastor Daniel had been against the "assessment" system ever since he had come to Holy Trinity in 1922.¹⁰⁷ The 75th Anniversary Booklet sums up the situation:

While several attempts had been made to institute voluntary contributions through the medium of weekly envelopes in place of the assessment system the voters' assembly repeatedly rejected the proposition. It was finally agreed to introduce the duplex envelope system for a trial period of one year, beginning with January 1, 1947. The result was so gratifying that a year later it was resolved by the voters' assembly to continue this method of contributing on a voluntary basis indefinitely.¹⁰⁸

The congregation had finally instituted a gospel motivated means of giving after 63 years of existence! As has been emphasized before, this is not to say that Holy Trinity is unique in this respect at all. Most who have looked into the history of their own congregations will find the same thing happened once at their church. This just goes to show how hard it is to trust in the Gospel to motivate rather than to compel good works with regulations and laws. Unfortunately, "giving by grace" rather than by law was short lived at Holy Trinity. When the building program started up, the voters insisted that the contributions of each individual be published so that all could see what each had given. They did this despite the objections of their pastor, John Daniel. This practice continued till the time when Pastor Hille fully took the reigns in 1975, at which time it was dropped for good.¹⁰⁹ An example of this listing from the year 1967 is included in the appendices. However, at least each was free to give from his heart, the amount was not mandated by the church.

THANKSGIVING IN THE TWILIGHT

On September 23, 1962 the congregation gave thanks to God for the 40 years of service which he had enabled Pastor Daniel to shepherd souls at Holy Trinity. By the end of his pastorate, Pastor Daniel served Holy Trinity 42 years, from September 17, 1922 to 1964. During those years Holy Trinity made the transition from Slovak to English, moved from S. Illinois St. to E. Main St., changed from assessing "dues" to letting members give voluntarily, and continued to grow in their appreciation and conviction of what it means to be confessional

Lutherans. At the end of Pastor Daniel's ministry, Holy Trinity was stronger than ever with a vigorous youth group program and a well informed and active congregation. Under his tutelage the following individuals served as vicars: Luther J. Bajus (1949-50), William Hinlicky (1950-51), Paul Grexa (1951-52), George Pivan (1952-53), John Obeda (1953-54), Stephen Mazak (1954-55), Paul Visoky (1956-57), George Pohlod (1957-58).¹⁷⁰ There was still much to be done, but much had been accomplished during the long service of Pastor Daniel.

Perhaps motivated partially as a means of remembering the recently departed Pastor Daniel¹⁷¹, but certainly in remembrance of all the dedicated pastors and forefathers who had served Holy Trinity in the past, the church erected a stone marker out at the old #3 church which was dedicated on August 16, 1964. The stone marker stands by the southwest corner of the church and reads:

MEMORIAL TO SLOVAK LUTHERANISM IN AMERICA

TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF THE
FOUNDING FATHERS AND MOTHERS OF TRINITY LUTHERAN
CHURCH WHO ON THIS GROUND DID ERECT ON THE
5TH DAY OF OCTOBER, 1884, A HOUSE OF WORSHIP, THE
FIRST SLOVAK EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA.
WE THEIR CHILDREN ON THIS DAY AUGUST 16, 1964
DO DEDICATE THIS HISTORICAL MARKER. TRINITY
LUTHERAN CONGREGATION, ORGANIZED APRIL 5, 1884.¹⁷²

Also at the same time it was announced:

By resolution of the voter's [sic] assembly, the Old No.3 church is being deeded to the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches to be preserved as a memorial to Slovak Lutheranism in America.¹⁷³

This resolution was evidently carried out, however when I questioned my grandmother on this she remarked, "The old #3 church was given back to Trinity from Synod quite a few years ago."¹⁷⁴

PASTOR CIZMAR - THE LAST OF THE OLD GUARD

Pastor Daniel "hand-picked" the man who would replace himself. The congregation wanted someone who could continue to preach the services in Slovak. Since the supply of pastors who could do this was dwindling by 1964, Pastor Daniel picked Pastor Cizmar.¹⁷⁵ This was viewed as an ideal situation. Pastor Cizmar was not in good health, but he would be assisted by Pastor Daniel who would go into "semi-retirement." In this way the congregation could be spared the shock of saying good-bye to the pastor who had served them for such a long time, and at the same time get to know the new man.

However, God in His wisdom had other plans for Pastor Daniel. After about six months of "semi-retirement" God called John Daniel home to the eternal Sabbath rest, leaving Pastor Cizmar to face the task all alone. Cizmar suffered from attacks of emphysema which hindered him in his work. His poor health meant that many of the normal activities were either shut down or neglected to a degree. The

elders helped out by doing the shut-in calls for the pastor. Pastor Cizmar stated quite bluntly to the congregation: "I just can't keep the youth activities up." and dropped all personal involvement with the youth except for confirmation class.¹⁹⁶ Needless to say this was a blow to the future of the congregation.

Not many commented on Cizmar's time of service at Holy Trinity unless I asked them directly. It was not that he was not liked. Most described him as "kind, but sickly." Perhaps any person would have paled in comparison to the previous Pastor Daniel. Sue Gotch had this to say about Pastor Cizmar:

He was a quiet man, and older when he came here. He had lung problems, emphysema I think. He had a real nice disposition, but his services were kind of boring. Because he couldn't visit the sick, the elders went for him. Cizmar was hurt that Hille took over so fast.¹⁹⁷

Basically for the period of 1965-1973 Cizmar held the fort alone, with the help of the elders. Everyone knew that he would retire as soon as he was eligible to receive benefits. However the suspense was in watching to see if he could last until he was 62 or not! In June of 1972 he ordained a spiritual son of the congregation, James Brassfield. Brassfield's call was to a mission in Silcam Springs, Arkansas. In the school year of 1973-74 reinforcements came in the form of two students from the Springfield Seminary who served as "supply preachers" on weekends. One was named Wilton Hille, who had been a school teacher for 14 years before he decided to enter Springfield Seminary and become a pastor. The other was Bill Dasch.¹⁹⁸

As the 1973-74 school year progressed, it became increasingly obvious that the congregation was going to have to call someone to help out Pastor Cizmar till he could retire.¹⁹⁹ The choice boiled down to Dasch or Hille. The congregation was in favor of calling Dasch, but didn't when they learned that he had a child that was asthmatic. The general sentiment was that it would not be fair to call Dasch to Streator when its medical facilities were not sufficiently advanced to provide adequate care for the child. The lot fell to Hille.²⁰⁰

A FIRE IN THE CHURCH

Expectations were high when Hille accepted the call to Holy Trinity. He had children who were from the ages of grade school through high school. He had been a school teacher for 14 years. There was no doubt in the congregation's mind that the youth of the congregation (who had been pretty well ignored by Pastor Cizmar from necessity) would benefit greatly from a younger pastor who could relate to them. Perhaps Holy Trinity would finally get a Christian day school started. In the face of these sorts of ideas, one can imagine the considerable shock of the people of Holy Trinity when soon after accepting the call Hille was heard to make the statement, "Frankly, I'm burnt out on youth after 14 years of being a parochial school teacher. I'll leave the youth work up to the congregation!"²⁰¹

This was not the only surprise the congregation was to receive from their new pastor.

The first surprise was Pastor Hille's wife, Sue Hille. The daughter of a pastor,²⁰² she was the most outspoken woman that had ever graced the floors of Holy Trinity. Perhaps women's voting would have been accepted without her, but she was surely an instrumental voice in accelerating the acceptance of this anti-Scriptural teaching during the time Hille was pastor at Holy Trinity. Pastor Hille once related a story in Bible class where his wife had gone out and bought him a set of books and said, "Here, forget what you learned at Seminary and read these books."²⁰³

The second surprise was a peculiar word that had never been heard in the hallow halls of Holy Trinity before... "charismatic."²⁰⁴ Most people in Holy Trinity had never heard of the word before, but Mrs. Hille introduced the congregation to it in this way: Mrs. Hille used to conduct a bi-monthly ladies' Bible class on Revelations, and they had gotten to talking about the rapture. One afternoon Mrs. Hille told the ladies, "I know I'm taking a risk sharing this with you..." and proceeded to share with them a "charismatic experience" that had happened around her kitchen table. (Later Holy Trinity paid Pastor and Mrs. Hille's way to a charismatic convention in Kansas City).²⁰⁵

Along with the word "charismatic" came all sorts of changes. Changes in the worship style²⁰⁶, changes in the evangelism techniques²⁰⁷, changes in the study of God's Word (there had never been so many Bible Studies!),²⁰⁸ even changes in the types of ministry at Holy Trinity with a new staff position being added entitled "Director of Christian Education" (DCE).²⁰⁹ Many of the changes were for the better, but as anyone who knows an old Slovak well knows, Slovaks do not like too many changes too fast. It seems Hille realized that although he had a flock that was for the most part spiritually slumbering, fattened by years of being fed by the pastor and not having to worry about watching out for false teachers, there was still a need to tread softly and move cautiously.²¹⁰

Besides the "charismatic" development, which most Slovaks did not know how to react to, there were other indications which made the more astute in the congregation take notice. One telltale sign was Hille's abandonment of the Small Catechism in confirmation class. Instead of having the children memorize the catechism (as had been the custom all along from the days of Droppa on to the present) Hille was content if he thought they knew the meaning. Mary Hyduk summed it up with the words, "Hille taught catechism like I never saw any pastor teach it. He didn't care if the children memorized, just if you understood. It was terrible."²¹¹ Another signpost along the way to trouble was a remark Hille once made to my father (Ralph "Bill" Sherod), Richard Stelljes, and a third party while talking to them in the pastor's study. He said, "You know, we don't have to follow what Synod says. We can withdraw and go by ourselves!"²¹² Another danger signal that comes to mind is the time when Hille publicly criticized Dr. David Scaer, a professor at the Springfield (later moved to Ft. Wayne) Seminary, whom Hille had had as a professor.

ADDING FUEL TO THE FIRE - THE LODGE PROBLEM

One of the biggest surprises surely had to be the acceptance of those who had long been excluded from fellowship, the lodge members. If one will remember, Pastor Daniel had instructed the congregation quite well on this issue. It is no wonder then that a spatter of protest quickly boiled to the surface when around the beginning of 1977 Hille accepted someone into membership who was a known member of the Elks. Later he also accepted into membership a woman who was a member of the Eastern Star. Ted Post, Jim Arrington, Ralph (Bill) Sherod, and others protested the action. Hille continued to defend their inclusion and made moves to gather his supporters into the board of elders.

Hille's one mistake was that he did not reckon with the tenacity of one Marilyn Sherod. After having tried to talk to Pastor Hille about the practice of letting lodge members be communicant members and getting nowhere fast, Mrs. Sherod stood upon her convictions at a time when most in the congregation were ill-informed or just too plain lackadaisical to care. Since she was not a voter she could not deal directly with the problem. However, she encouraged her husband Ralph ("Bill") to stand up against what was going on. Also she was on the phone to her brother-in-law Jim Arrington and her uncle Ted Post, supporting and encouraging them in their attempts to stop the ungodly acceptance of lodge members.

Since she did not know a lot about the lodges to begin with, Mrs. Sherod wrote the following letter to probe into the Synodical position on the matter:

March 7, 1977

Dear Dr. Hoffmann,

The devil is sifting us, forcing us Christians to dig into God's Word and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal God's Truth to us. Hooray for God -- I'm spending more time "talking" to Him and we can do all things through Christ. Your messages are great -- I'm so glad you are a man of God. I'm beginning to have doubts about our middle-of-the-road pastor.

The issue at hand concerns membership in fraternal organizations. Our pastor contends if a person wants to belong to such an organization for purely social reasons, we should not "cut them off" from us by excluding them from membership in our church. I say this is compromise. A Christian cannot belong to an Anti-Christian organization for any reason.

What do you say, Dr. Hoffman? If you have had a message on this previously, I would like copies for our members. Some seem so lukewarm. Thank you very much.

Marilyn Sherod²¹³

She received the following reply:

March 14, 1977

Oswald J. Hoffmann
Speaker - The Lutheran Hour

Mrs. R. D. Sherod
106 E. 12th Street
Streator, Illinois 61364

Dear Mrs. Sherod

Thank you very much for your kind and encouraging letter. It is good to know that there is someone like you who loves the Lord, and shows that love in consideration for everybody about you.

Information about fraternal organizations can be secured from the commission set up for that purpose by our church body. I understand that this commission is able to tell you about each organization, since each one is different. Some still maintain religious rituals, and others do not. You can obtain this information by writing to the commission at the following address:

The Rev. Philip Lochhaas, Exec. Sec'y.
Commission on Organizations
The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
500 N. Broadway
St. Louis, Missouri 63102

Your pastor, no doubt, is endeavoring to win people for Christ. You can help him with intelligent understanding of the particular problems he encounters. Each person to whom he ministers must receive pastoral consideration, for that is the mission your congregation has committed to him.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Cordially yours,

Oswald C. J. Hoffmann
Lutheran Hour Speaker

OCJH:em²¹⁴

She then wrote to Rev. Lochhaas of the Missouri Synod's "Commission on Organizations" to find out more:

March 23, 1977

Dear Rev. Lochhaas,

It has been brought to my attention that I can secure information about fraternal organizations by writing to you. I would appreciate information especially on the Masons, Eagles, Elks, Order of the Eastern Star and anything else you might consider helpful.

What is the position of Mo. Synod on belonging to one of these lodges for "purely social reasons"?

Thank you very much.

God's love and peace to you in Christ,

Marilyn Sherod²¹⁵

She received the following reply:

March 25, 1977

Rev. Philip H. Lochhaas
Executive Secretary -
Commission on Organizations

Mrs. Marilyn Sherod
106 East 12th St.
Streator, Illinois 61364

Dear Mrs. Sherod:

Under separate cover we are sending you our "releases" on the organizations you named in your letter.

Enclosed is a list of materials available from our Commission office. The releases we are sending are checked in red. Perhaps the list will suggest other ways in which we can serve you.

The packet is being mailed at the same time as this letter but will probably arrive at a later date.

You inquired about membership for social reasons. Since the lodges themselves officially do not permit such memberships, it would be less than honest for us to deal with them on a different basis. This is explained further in release No. 1.07 which is being sent.

Please let us know if we can serve you further.

Blessings!

Cordially,

Philip Lochhaas²¹⁴

On March 28, 1977 she received the packet that included the following tracts: "Ancient Free and Accepted Masons", "Is Freemasonry Religion?", "Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks", "Loyal Order of Moose", "Fraternal Order of Eagles", "Fraternal Order of Eagles - Ladies Auxiliaries", plus a more general tract on lodges entitled "Initiated vs. Social Memberships - Report on current negotiations." Bolstered by this information, she began to inform others of the facts behind the lodges. Since she was on a "prayer-chain",²¹⁷ she began informing some of the people on that chain about the facts that she had learned.

But events were moving forward too swiftly to be overcome by the determination of merely one individual. On Sunday, April 24, 1977 the following announcement appeared in the bulletin:

VOTERS ASSEMBLY MEETS NEXT SUNDAY - MAY 1st -
at 2:00 P.M. The Elders unanimously recommend the following Constitution change: that Article IV, Paragraph D., Item 7 read as follows: "Does not adhere to or participate in the religious rituals of any secret or unchristian society". The Elders also unanimously recommend that Article IV, Paragraph C, Item 4 of the By-laws be deleted. This reads as follows: "A person who becomes a member of an unchristian or antichristian organization terminates his or her membership in this Christian congregation. (See Article IV, D-7 of the Constitution)." These recommendations are to be voted on at the May 1st meeting.²¹⁸

At the voters' assembly on May 1, 1977 the change was adopted. It was with heavy heart that Mrs. Sherod typed out the following SOS to Oswald C. J. Hoffmann:

May 2, 1977

Dear Dr. Hoffmann,

Thank you for taking time to write me on March 14 and for sending me the address for information. I know you are a busy man.

It is with regret that I write to you that yesterday at our voter's meeting the following changes were approved.

Article IV, Para.D. (Item 7 was changed):

D. No one shall become or remain a member of this congregation nor enjoy the rights and privileges of such membership unless he;

Formerly: 7. Is not a member of any unchristian or anti-christian organization whose rituals are inconsistent or conflicting with the Word of God.

Now changed to: 7. Does not adhere to or participate in the religious rituals of any secret or unchristian society.

Also Article IV, Paragraph C, Item 4 of the By-Laws was approved to be deleted. This reads: "A person who becomes a member of an unchristian or antichristian organization terminates his or her membership in this Christian congregation."

Our pastor and all of the elders but one interpret Item 7 to mean that a person who transfers in or approaches us for membership and holds membership in an unchristian organization for social reasons only must be admitted to our christian congregation out of love. Our pastor was very anxious to get this approved as such cases "frustrate" him. He says we "close the door" on them if we refuse them membership.

I say they must make a choice. To take the oath of an unchristian organization is participating in their religious rituals. How can a person believe in Jesus and confess Him as his Lord and Savior and at the same time belong to an organization that denies the Triune God? Out of love, the pastor should explain this to such a potential church member and they must make the decision. If it is frustrating for him, it is no less frustrating than when I witness to someone that Jesus is my Lord and Savior and it falls on deaf ears. I do not fail. I've done my job. I then must leave it in the "hands" of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, he must, (after explaining to them according to God's Word why they cannot serve God and the devil), leave this also in the "hands" of the Holy Spirit.

I firmly believe that the devil is sifting our pastor. I understand that this change must be approved by the constitution Committee (District level - Synod) before it takes effect. Should this take effect, according to 1 Cor. 5:9-13 and 2 Cor 6:14-18, I feel that I could no longer belong to this so called Christian congregation. It would no longer be a Christian congregation.

But I rejoice, for I remember Romans 8:28 and maybe this is just what it will take to wake up our lukewarm members. Will you please remember us in your prayers?

God's blessings,

P.S. 1 Cor. 5:9-13 - Idolatry and willfully being unrepentant (staying joined to an unchristian organization). If repentant, a person would disassociate with such an organization.²¹⁹

Here was the reply Mrs. Sherod later received:

May 16, 1977

Mrs. Marilyn Sherod
106 E. 12th Street
Streator, Illinois 61364

Dear Mrs. Sherod:

Thank you very much for your letter and for the confidence you put in me when you wrote it. You may be sure that your confidence will be respected.

Since I am not an official of the church body, I do not invade the responsibilities of those who have been elected for that purpose. Your letter would properly be directed to the president of the Synod or the president of your district. They have been elected to responsibility for the congregations, and they are charged with that responsibility.

Thank you for the courtesy of telling me that you were writing about a problem in your congregation. If you had not, I could readily be accused of meddling in the responsibility of others.

As for your personal situation, it is good to know that you trust in the Lord as you say you do in the last paragraph of your letter. On the day of judgment only one thing will count: do you belong to Christ or not? Have you accepted the grace of God and His forgiveness for the sake of Christ, or not? Have you loved your neighbor and showed kindness for the least of his brethren, or not?

As our Lord said, the recipients of His grace on the day of judgment will be just as surprised by His goodness as all the people who trusted in their own righteousness will be surprised by the sternness of His condemnation.

You trust in the Lord. Live in the grace of the Lord. This means, as St. Paul said, being ready to forgive as you have been forgiven for the sake of Christ. That is hard, but it is necessary for every follower of the Lord. We all have to learn to follow in the footsteps of the Lord, and no one else. He is Lord, and no one else.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Cordially yours,

Oswald Hoffmann²²⁰

*One copy of
understanding
please bring
to get letter
and booklet
and no*

Even before she received the ~~less than helpful~~ reply of Oswald Hoffmann, around the beginning of May, Mrs. Sherod wrote back to Philip Lochhaas requesting additional informational booklets. Though her letter is no longer extant, from his reply it is obvious that Mrs. Sherod also wrote for an opinion concerning the Hille's constitutional change that had passed at the May 1st meeting. Here is Philip Lochhaas' reply:

May 29, 1977

Rev. Philip H. Lochhaas
Executive Secretary -
Commission on Organizations

Mrs. Marilyn Sherod
106 East 12th St.
Streator, Illinois 61364

Dear Friend:

I am sorry to be so very late in replying to your letter, but I have been very much on the road through the month of May, conducting "cult awareness" seminars. Now I have settled down again, buried under a mountain of mail, trying to catch up.

Enclosed are the releases that you requested. Added to these is the outline that I have followed in the seminars. It may not make much sense by itself without the accompanying lecture, but I thought you might be interested.

It is indeed an unfortunate change and deletion that has been made in you congregation's constitution. There is nothing that can be done about it except by the District constitution committee. They can approve or disapprove constitutional changes, since it is by acceptance of the

constitution that a congregation is accepted onto the District (and automatically then into Synod). But the wording as it now appears (if put into practice) would be out of line with the constitution of the Synod to which the congregation had voluntarily subscribed in becoming a member of Synod.

There is no doubt but that the lodge question is one of the most frustrating that a pastor must deal with, but things are not to be ignored for that reason. In factuality there are no "social memberships" offered by the popular lodges. If the local lodge offers such, it is involved in a breach of civil contract (the lodge officials maintain) and subject to civil action. They cite examples of when this was done. And they like to taunt us with the declaration that "you Lutherans don't really have deep convictions -- when you know it's a breach of contract, you still defend your members' involvement in such memberships. Isn't this a bit of hypocrisy?"

For the sake of your own peace of mind, remember that God's Word does not return void. Even though this surely causes you some heart-ache, keep in mind that the Gospel message cannot be diminished even though the hearing of it can and witness to it can. Rejoice in the Savior and maintain your own Christian witness, and the Lord will bless you with personal peace and joy, even though you may be grieved by the situation.

Blessings!

Philip Lochhaas²²¹

THE FLAMES LEAP HIGHER -
PASTOR HILLE THREATENS EXCOMMUNICATION

In the midst of the correspondence, Mrs. Sherod also stepped up her telephone calls, urging people that she knew to oppose the change to the constitution to attend the meeting and defeat the motion. Hille responded swiftly. On May 4, 1977, after he had gotten the resolution safely through the congregational voters' assembly, Hille came to her house to talk with her and deliver an ultimatum. She told me she did not know at the time why he had dropped in.

From notes jotted down afterward we can reconstruct the major line of the conversation as follows:

1. Hille threatened her with church suspension because in his words she was "subverting my ministry."
2. Hille used his knowledge of Marilyn's past to manipulate her and said, "You of all people have been forgiven by God for so much."

3. She responded, "We have all been forgiven much, Pastor." and she admitted to feeling vulnerable in the face of confidences which she had told him.
4. Pastor Hille responded, "You're not vulnerable, you're clever."
5. He then asked her, "Will you agree to stop talking behind my back and telephoning all these people about this issue?"
6. She responded that she intended to continue to tell others the facts and witness boldly for Christ.
7. He further ridiculed her by saying, "You don't even know HOW to witness, you turn people OFF for Christ!"
8. Then he told her, "You're hurting my ministry at Trinity. You are causing division in our congregation."
9. She responded, "You're hurting my ministry."
10. Hille then threatened excommunication if she continued.²²²

After Pastor Hille left she opened the envelope which he had handed her and read:

May 4, 1977

Dear Marilyn,

In view of the phone calls you have been making, please consider the following sections of Scripture and let me know before the Elders meeting to be held tomorrow night if it is your intention to continue.

In Honest love,

Pastor Hille.

2 Cor 3:6, 2 Cor 4:1, 2 Cor 5:18, Eph 3:7, Col 1:23,
1 Tim 1:11, Rom 10:15, Rom 15:30, 1 Cor 16:16, Gal 4:14,
Phil 2:29, 1 Thess 5:12-13, 1 Tim 5:17, Heb 13:7.²²³

When Bill Sherod got home that evening and saw the distraught state of his wife, he responded by calling up Pastor Hille and telling him in no uncertain terms that from now on the pastor had better not call on Marilyn unless he was home as well. The message was clear: Don't think your going to bully my wife into anything while I'm not around.

The following night, May 5, 1977, the Sherods were requested to attend a Board of Elders meeting. Both Ralph (Bill) & Marilyn Sherod went, as well as Jim and Eunice Arrington. Ted Post (another concerned parishioner) would have come to the meeting also, but he was convalescing in the hospital. After the meeting, two elders were appointed to visit the Sherod home and help patch things up. The representatives who came to talk about the problem were Merle Vissering and Gene Hoag. They set up a time and a few weeks later made their visit. Nothing important came of the meeting.

A special meeting was set up for the June, 1977 at which Walter Bernard (the president of the congregation) and the whole Board of Elders (as well as Pastor Hille) could sit down with the Sherod's and

discuss the problem and seek a solution. At that meeting, Bill Sherod requested that someone from synod be invited to come to the church and clarify the church's position on the lodge. Rev. Hille spoke against this idea saying that this was a local issue and that we shouldn't bother synod with it. The elders decided to have the president of the congregation call the district counselor, Pastor Emil Velebir, to get his opinion on whether a meeting of some sort should be arranged between representatives of the congregation and the synod.

When president Walter Bernard contacted Velebir (who happened to reside in Bloomington, MN, because the SELC district is non-geographical), Velebir advised that this matter was an internal affair and could be handled best by Holy Trinity itself. The result of this news upon Mr. and Mrs. Sherod was a bitter resignation to the fact that they were losing the battle to keep lodge members out of Holy Trinity. Hille was gaining more and more control over the situation. Rather than commune with lodge members at Holy Trinity, the Sherods began attending Emmanuel Lutheran in Dwight, IL. Emmanuel was served at the time by Pastor Merrell W. Wetzstein, a former missionary to Brazil. There, in isolation from the problem, the Sherods found a temporary peace. Pastor Wetzstein did much to inspire their high school age son to think about the ministry.

CALLING IN THE FIRE FIGHTERS

However, Mrs. Sherod, loved Holy Trinity too much to totally abandon the cause, and their membership was still formally at Holy Trinity. In the middle of 1978, Mrs. Sherod wrote a letter addressed to SELC District President Albert M. Marcis (Parma, OH); Circuit Counselor Emil M. Velebir (Bloomington, MN); and a good friend of the family who had vicared as a youth at Trinity and who had relatives who were members of Trinity, the Vice-President of the SELC District, Luther J. Bajus (Norridge, IL). She wrote the letter in desperation, hoping that at least one of them would take the initiative to respond. It went as follows:

Dear Pastors Marcis, Velebir, and Bajus:

Due to the controversy over the lodge issue last May, Rev. Hille came to my home threatening me with excommunication, saying I was subverting his ministry. I told him I was not subverting his ministry and had no intention of doing so, but I did intend to talk to fellow members about this lodge issue and I'd continue to witness boldly for Christ.

In June at a special meeting (with Rev. Hille, the president of the congregation, Walter Bernard, and the Board of Elders), my husband requested that we have someone from Synod come and talk with us about this lodge issue and clarify Synod's position. Rev. Hille implanted ideas that each of you were too busy with your own congregational duties to be bothered with what he referred to as a "local problem." He also said that we couldn't be calling someone from Synod every time we had a little problem. He said what are we going to do when

the ALC issue come up. (Instead of showing good leadership and moderating, he is accelerating the people to joint worship services. Can you imagine how heartless people of Trinity will think Mo. Synod to be if doctrinal agreement is not reached and we no longer have pulpit and altar fellowship with ALC?)

Pastor Velebir, we were told that Walter Bernard called you and asked you to come here; but you said we could handle it here-- that it was an internal matter. Did you say that? And if you did, I wonder how it was presented to you-- as a local problem perhaps or as it really was and is-- a synod issue. If the guidance and council we had requested by your presence could have been furnished at an earlier date, I firmly believe much of the present misunderstanding and confusion could have been avoided.

God isn't missing a thing, but He works through you and me. I've refrained from writing to you all, hoping Rev. Hille would be the pastor he was when he arrived at Trinity, but now I ask you to ask God how you can best serve Him concerning this situation.

I don't ever want to take my eyes off Jesus, but the rest of the Bible can't be ignored because if all we need to know is that Jesus came to be our Lord and Savior, why did God give us the whole Bible? Let's remember 2 Timothy 3:16. Perhaps Rev. Hille has never experienced loving discipline and doesn't know what it is to handle the flock with loving discipline.

I personally would like to transfer our membership to Dwight and forget this whole sticky mess at Trinity. Nearly all of the elders plus the new president echo Wilton Hille. I don't believe the Lord wants me to take the easy way out, but I can't talk on Rev. Hille's level. I'm not a theologian. He's educated and intelligent. I don't trust him with the spiritual care of myself and my family.

Rev. Hille said at a Sunday morning Bible class sometime ago that it's the elders' job to keep him in line and if they don't, then what happens is their own fault. Our elders are not qualified to keep him in line. Will you come and talk openly to the elders and let them know why Synod's protesting fellowship with the ALC? Will you share with them why out of love we must ask people to make a choice concerning lodges and how joint Bible classes and worship with other denominations can lead to confusion and frustration because of doctrinal differences?

I'd surely appreciate hearing from one of you.

Your sister in Christ,

Marilyn J. Sherod²²⁴