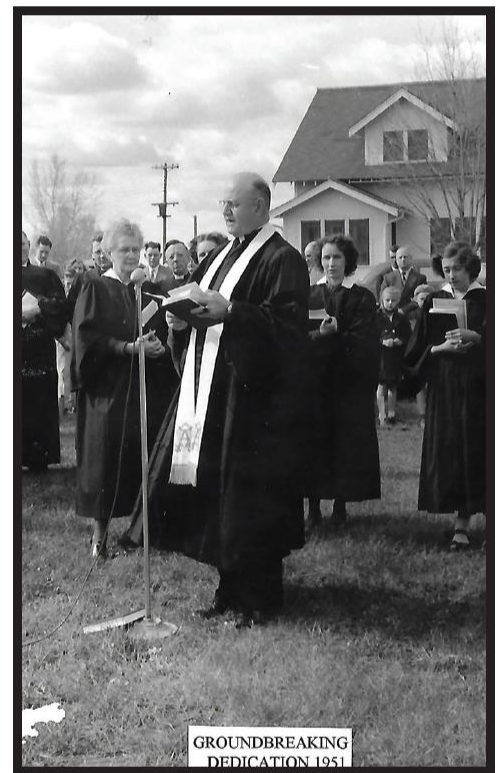


HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

Since 1949

CORNERSTONE SEALING 1951



HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

NEW PRAGUE, MN

HISTORY

FOUNDING

The history of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church finds its origin in the minds of a few women who felt the need for a strong Protestant church in the community; St. Wenceslaus (1907) and Community Baptist (1915) were the only two churches in New Prague at the time. The sincere desire and enthusiasm over the prospect of establishing such a church in New Prague led to several discussions with Reverend Conrad J. Buehler, pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church in the neighboring city of Montgomery.

Reverend Buehler was impressed with the fervor and began to explore the possibility of beginning a Protestant church in New Prague. Enthusiastic about the results, he applied to the American Mission Board for permission to start a mission in New Prague. On May 17, 1947, he received notice that his request had been granted. A survey of the community showed that 37 families expressed an interest in the new mission.

On Sunday morning, June 15, 1947, the first service was held in the Z.C.B.J. Hall (Czech Lodge) with the Reverend Conrad J. Buehler conducting the services. About 100 people met for the first time as the Holy Trinity Lutheran Mission to worship and implore God's blessing on the new venture. A faint vision became a reality. In the following months, more members joined and Rev. Buehler continued to guide the process. At the close of the first year there were 49 confirmed members.

In his annual report, Rev. Buehler intimated that he might receive another call in the near future. Anxious to see this new church in capable hands, he advised that the New Prague Mission immediately organize itself into a full-fledged mission congregation of the American Lutheran Church so that they might be eligible for both financial support and spiritual guidance. This would also allow the church to make application for a full-time pastor. The mission was organized into a full-fledged congregation on May 23, 1948. The Church Council had H. Frank Proshok, Wallace Miller, Fred A. Brandt, Chas. J. Koktavy, Marlyn Fahrenkamp, Kenneth Lewis and Emil Dvorak as its first members.

Acting on the recommendations of the Minnesota District of the American Lutheran Church, a recent Wartburg Seminary graduate, Alfred L. Oelschlager, was called to serve as full-time pastor. He accepted the call and was installed on July 25, 1948, at the Z.C.B.J. Hall. However, things did not go well and soon after he resigned from the position. The congregation was shocked when the American Mission Board then withdrew its support from this new church. The same evening, in spite of the bitter cold, icy roads and drifting snow, the entire church board made a trip to St. Paul to plead for reconsideration of the action taken by the Executive Committee on Missions with regard to New Prague. All to no avail.

The young congregation stood for a while in a very precarious situation, bewildered and disappointed, but firmly determined not to give up. Soon, a telephone call from a former member, Melville Skoog, gave cause for new hope. He suggested the Council contact Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. After presenting their case to Dr. Edgar M. Carlson, president of the college, the Council was assured of pulpit supply for upcoming Sundays until such time as the situation could be investigated more closely by the

Augustana Mission Board. All this happened within the course of a week; not a single service was missed. Reverend Arnold Carlson, Professor of Christianity at Gustavus Adolphus College, was designated as supply pastor. He served the congregation faithfully from January 9, 1949, through September 1949.

At an organization meeting on April 3, 1949, the congregation which had been incorporated on May 23, 1948, was dissolved and the group who were members of the so-called old organization reorganized into a new congregation. The above action was ratified at the first congregational meeting held on April 6, 1949, and a petition was submitted to the Lutheran Minnesota Conference of the Evangelical Augustana Synod for admittance into its membership.

In the early spring of 1949, the board of administration purchased a tract of land equivalent to four lots on the corner of Third Street and First Avenue NE. The work on the parsonage began. The whole congregation gathered and worked at every available moment to complete the building by the middle of September when a new pastor was expected to arrive. Reverend Birt D. Harris was, at the time, pastor of a church in Mayville, New York. Reverend Arnold Carlson's letter to Reverend Harris dated July 4, 1949, contained both words of encouragement and warning about the new congregation: "I sincerely hope that you will feel directed to come to New Prague. It will not be an easy field, but it is one where good honest work will be generously rewarded. It is a field where there are a great number who know little or nothing of what Christianity is. Many of these were baptized Roman Catholics, but have hardly graced a church door since. Our members are a fine enthusiastic lot, though they are certainly anything but pietistic. The broadmindedness which you must have accumulated or enhanced in your Navy experience will be excellent preparation for working there. Germans and Bohemians do not generally share our attitude toward beer, dancing, cards, etc. which are so loudly decried by some of our pastors. Please do not take that last statement to mean that they are especially worldly, or rounders. I think they are splendid sincere Christians, but they do not conform to some brands of Augustana piety."

After some deliberation and Reverend Arnold Carlson's continued encouragement, Reverend Birt D. Harris began work in New Prague in September of 1949. At this time, there were 69 communicant members and 48 baptized children. Pastor Harris's first yearly salary was \$2700.00 with an additional \$200.00 for auto expenses. The contract also included \$325.00 for moving expenses and a one-month paid vacation. Under Reverend Harris's able leadership, the church grew rapidly.

Ground was broken for the parsonage on July 4, 1949, and was dedicated on November 27, 1949. Church construction began on May 6, 1951. The total cost of the parsonage was \$12,000.00; the church was also built for \$12,000.00. Both lots cost \$1700, with 5,000 hours of labor contributed by the congregation. Ruth Johnson of Minneapolis donated her piano to the church for a delivery charge of seven dollars. On Easter Sunday, April 13, 1952, the first service was held in the new church with 230 in attendance; it was stated that "a goodly portion of the membership of Holy Trinity is composed of leading businessmen and farmers". Pastor Harris resigned on January 13, 1955, with the intention of leaving on February 13. He accepted a call from the Board of American Missions of the Augustana Lutheran Church to be Board Missionary

to a mission field in South Bend, Indiana. In his five years, the congregation grew to more than 200 baptized members.

1950s-1960s

Between pastors, Holy Trinity would often be served by several professors and students from Gustavus Adolphus College. Eventually, Pastor Earl E. Bergh arrived and served at Holy Trinity from July 1955-October 1957. He then accepted a call from the Board of World Missions and moved with his family to Tokuyama, Japan. Pastor Forest E. Chaffee, a graduate of Augustana Seminary in September 1958, served Holy Trinity until July of 1962. He then moved on to become pastor of First Lutheran in Olivia, Minnesota.

Pastor Larry M. Foreman served from July 1963 – July 1965. The congregation now had about 275 members. On March 21, 1965, Dedication Sunday, a \$33,000 remodeling project was completed. The old sanctuary was transformed with stained beams, an enlarged chancel platform, a higher pulpit, a new altar rail, relocation of the baptismal font, new carpeting and a lit nine-foot white cross. After fourteen years of worshiping on folding chairs, new pews graced the sanctuary. A new Parish Education building was also constructed that included a mechanical room, large kitchen and multipurpose room, which consisted of six classrooms and a conference room. Much of the construction was again completed by members of the congregation. Reverend Lynn Strand served from September 1965 through February 1970. Holy Trinity's numbers had now reached 359 congregants. Strand moved on to a parish in St. Louis Park.

1970s

Reverend Don A. Fultz served from July 1970 through July 1980. During Fultz's tenure the link between the two buildings, the church and the education wing, was carpeted and a new furnace was installed. By March of 1974, the 25th Anniversary, there were over 500 baptized members. Pastor Fultz commented, "The church's influence in this community has flourished." That same year Holy Trinity added a second service in order to accommodate the growing congregation.

In September of 1974, the congregation voted to give Pastor Fultz a housing allowance and began the process of selling the current property and relocating. By September of 1976, the church had added a third service and offered two Sunday School periods. At its annual meeting in January of 1977, the congregation voted to sell its property and move out of the old parsonage. The original building served Holy Trinity from 1952-1977 and then served the Living Praise Alliance Church from 1977 through May of 1996. At that time, Queen of Peace Hospital purchased the property for an expansion of emergency and outpatient services. In May of 1977, the church agreed to buy the current Elmer Doherty property and in June of 1977 Pastor Philip V. Peterson became Associate Pastor and served both Holy Trinity and St. John's of Montgomery until October of 1982.

In June of 1977, "God's People on the Move" was the theme as the congregation made a symbolic walk from the old site to the church's new Highway 19 East location. Architectural Design Group of Rochester was hired to design the one-story structure. The general contractor for the \$338,000 project was Kratochvil Construction of New Prague. While under construction, church services were held at the public elementary school from June – December 1978. A \$399,000 Building Funding Campaign began in November of 1977. Holy Trinity broke ground at its current site on April 30, 1978, with actual construction beginning on May 1. The cornerstone was laid on October 29, and the first service held in the new sanctuary was on December 17, 1978. At this time, Holy Trinity had 679 baptized members.

The new church was dedicated on March 11, 1979. Pastors Fultz and Peterson were joined at the ceremony by Dr. Herbert W. Chilstrom, President of the MN Synod of the LCA. One of the most striking features of the new sanctuary is its clerestory windows covered with colored art glass panels depicting the Holy Trinity. The west panels represent the Son, the north/south panels portray the Spirit, and the east panels symbolize the Father. The seating in the church is provided with individually stackable chairs, interlocked with a hymnal hangar. The baptismal font is located at the entrance to symbolize our entry into God's Family. The cross is suspended atop a pole, prominent in the midst of the worshiping congregation.

One of Holy Trinity's longest running fundraisers was the annual Antique Sale held every April. Conceived in 1976 when plans were begun for the new church building, the Antique Sale Committee had one stipulation: Proceeds were always to be used for special projects and never to be included in the annual operation budget. Dennis Dvorak, George and Joan Winn and Don and Judy Conn were the organizers of this popular event. The first 22 shows netted over \$185,000 and paid for windows in the church and paving the parking lot. Holy Trinity and New Prague gained quite a reputation for hosting one of the finest and most unique antique shows in the five-state area. Honoring the Czech and German ancestry of the community, home-cooked ethnic foods were served in the Garden Café by costumed waitresses. The Bake Shop offered a taste of New Prague to take home. Because over 3,000 visitors attended the show each year, other community businesses also prospered. Fellowship among members was an added benefit of the show.

1980s

In January 1981, Holy Trinity welcomed a new pastor, Reverend Charles Anderson. Anderson was assisted by seminary interns, Jim Tetlie and Ray Claussen in 1983 and 1984. Pastor Claussen was especially loved by the senior high youth. On an outing to the Boundary Waters with the Junior League, Pastor Claussen broke his leg and had to be carried out by two of the senior high students. By May 20, 1984, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church was looking forward to its 35th Anniversary Celebration. A festive worship service was followed by fellowship and special reminiscences and greetings from former clergy and congregational members. Seminary interns Neil Gladen and Hans Lee served Holy Trinity in 1985 and 1986. Associate Pastor Peter E. Morin arrived in January 1987. By 1988, Holy Trinity had 649 adult members and 937 baptized members.

Holy Trinity's 40th Anniversary was in 1989. That same year, a \$315,000 fund drive was initiated for an addition consisting of a ten-classroom education wing, fellowship hall and kitchen. The campaign was appropriately named "Here We Grow Again". Busch Construction of New Prague took on the building project and the ground-breaking took place on October 15, 1989, and the building was completed in April of 1990.

1990s

The 1990s in Holy Trinity history is remembered for the completion of the new fellowship hall, kitchen, education wing and foyer. Associate Pastor Peter E. Morin left in July of 1991, and Associate Pastor Steven C. Trewartha arrived in January of 1992. This was also the year in which a Rogers pipe organ, a new sound system and a carillon bell system were installed. Pastor Anderson in his 1993 Pastoral Annual Report wrote, "Another year comes and goes. We see signs of encouragement and hope. We find occasions of discouragement. Yet, somehow, we manage to move along, guided by the larger purpose of it all. It reminds us we are on an important journey of sharing faith and the good news of Jesus Christ in all that we do."

In 1992, Pastor Anderson asked Valerie Drommerhausen, high school drama director and Holy Trinity member, to use her expertise to put together a performance of the Living Last Supper. Pastor Anderson had received a script a fellow pastor had developed in 1983 for his church in West Allis, Wisconsin. The original script focused on the retelling of a familiar Bible story. Drommerhausen wanted to focus on Leonardo da Vinci's painting instead; she researched the painting and reworked the script so that there would be a minimum of three "freezes" depicting the painting during the performance. An extensive introduction to the work remained in the script. Actors were Holy Trinity members and several members acted in subsequent performances over the years. Other congregational members sewed costumes, built the set, handled the lights and Lisa Lehne painted the backdrop. People enjoyed the production in 1992 so much that it was performed under Drommerhausen's direction again in 1993 and continued in alternate years after that, with 2011 being the lone exception. The last performance was in 2015. After 23 years, it was time to give the production and its director a rest.

Reverend Charles Anderson left Holy Trinity in October of 1995. Dr. Marlo Miller became the Interim Pastor. Rev. Steve Trewartha was appointed Lead Pastor in June of 1996. In September of that same year, Holy Trinity's first full-time Youth Director, Erik Daehlin, arrived. Pastor Doug Thompson served from September 1997-1998 as the new part-time Worship Coordinator and new part-time Membership Care Pastor. Reverend Andrea Olson took over as Membership Care Pastor in September of 1998 and served until March of 2002, when she was called to First Presbyterian Church in Lake Crystal, Minnesota. The parking lot was expanded in July of 1998 and Kathleen Schafer was hired as the first-time Family Education Coordinator. Membership continued to grow. In 1998, Holy Trinity's congregation totaled 807 adults and 1124 baptized members. Sonshine Christian Preschool opened with 39 students. Later, at full capacity, Sonshine was granted a license for a second class in 2002 and again expanded in 2005 for up to a total of 160 students.

August 1, 1999, was a big day in Holy Trinity's history: it was the congregation's 50th Year Anniversary. Holy Trinity celebrated the church and the important role it has served in the New Prague community. Several former pastors reflected on their time in New Prague. Pastor Lynn H. Strand (1965-1970) wrote, "Holy Trinity is a respected church in New Prague, and the influence it has had and can have in the affairs of the community is great. The working relationships with the Catholic majority in New Prague have steadily improved and are now at the point where a combined Christian witness is not only possible but desired by our Catholic friends."

2000s

Pastor Steve Trewartha was on sabbatical leave at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, from summer 2000 to June of 2001. Beginning on June 18, 2000, Pastor Dave Dokmo, an ELCA pastor for over 25 years, served as substitute pastor. Pastor Dave came to Holy Trinity at the request of the Bishop of the ELCA in Minnesota. Dokmo suffered from an addiction to crack cocaine; it changed his life dramatically and eventually cost him his ministry. His tenure at Holy Trinity was a "last chance" situation. Dokmo was always very truthful about his addiction and the difficulties he faced and his "stories" made for riveting sermons. Shortly before Thanksgiving in 2000, Pastor Dave suffered a relapse and was replaced by Pastor Jim Lindekugel who served until June 17, 2001. After leaving Holy Trinity, Dokmo continued to struggle with his addiction until he crossed paths with Pastor Johnny Hunter from First Community Recovery Church in Minneapolis, a church designed by a recovering addict. Hunter helped Dokmo reconnect his relationship with God and this church gave Pastor Dave new meaning and

purpose. He worshiped, preached and taught Bible Study at this new church, and Dokmo later admitted that "it saved his life".

While Pastor Steve was on sabbatical, the church considered purchasing additional land in anticipation of future growth, hoping to start building a new church within three to eight years. The preferred site was located east of New Prague on Alton Avenue just north of Highway 19 and owned by Dr. Bill and Patty Scheidt. A Futures Team was formed to develop possible options for the land and held five information sessions with members of the congregation. On December 10, 2000, a congregation vote of 179 to 28 approved a purchase of 30 acres of additional property. A "God's People on the Move" Capital Fund Appeal was launched to raise \$750,000, with a dedication Sunday on March 18, 2001. The property was to be closed on April 13, 2001. At the time of closing, two obstacles emerged involving a minimum purchase of 40 acres required by Scott County, and a proposed frontage road along Highway 19. Since time was needed to address these issues, an interim plan to develop the existing site to respond to immediate facility needs was approved by the church council on April 17, 2001. On June 19, 2001, the council voted and approved to move ahead with a purchase agreement for 40 acres with a future ten-acre sell-back effectively resulting in a 30-acre purchase for \$560,000.

Holy Trinity was experiencing significant growth during this time and members felt there was a need for additional staff members and services. There were three services in 2000 (8:00, 9:15, 10:45), reducing to two services in 2001 (8:30 Festive worship, 10:45 Celebrate! worship). In fall 2002, a Saturday night worship service was added, bringing the total number of services once again to three. In 2001, Holy Trinity supported Heather Oberdeck through seminary training while she worked on staff in senior high youth ministry. On August 12, 2001, HTLC bid farewell to Diane Goulson as she began her seminary internship at St. John's Lutheran in Belle Plaine. Several weeks later, HTLC members committed to 100 days of prayer after the 9/11 attacks. In July 2002, HTLC called interim pastor Dan Zielske to serve the congregation after a search committee was formed in June 2002 to call a Youth and Education Pastor. Paula Ziems was selected and served from 2003-2006. Ziems eventually moved on to write curriculum for Augsburg Fortress. In 2004, a building campaign for an additional wing called "Reaching People, Serving God" was launched.

Holy Trinity has always been committed to serving others. Beginning in 1997, parishioners traveled to Jamaica delivering medical and dental help and the Word of the Lord. Dr. George Winn organized nine 15-day trips through Medical Ministries International to the interior hinterlands of Jamaica and provided oral surgery services in parish clinics and at Black River Hospital. Several members of Holy Trinity volunteered to accompany Dr. Winn and were part of a team comprised of nurses, pharmacists, physical therapists, lay workers, surgeons, GP MDs, DDSs and other medical specialists. As a member of Gideons International, George was also able to secure and send hundreds of New Testaments and Bibles to the local people.

In 2002, Holy Trinity joined with the St. Paul Synod of the ELCA in nurturing a relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) based in Iringa, Tanzania. Former Pastor of HTLC, Reverend Don Fultz, and his wife Eunice established a close bond between HTLC and the Ruaha Mbuyuni congregation near Iringa, Tanzania. Holy Trinity provided both prayerful guidance as well as financial support for the fledgling congregation. Pastor Fultz and Eunice often presented adult forums at Holy Trinity where the impact of HIV/AIDS in Tanzania was discussed. Fultz encouraged HTLC members, Dr. Tim Miller and his wife Deborah, to travel to Tanzania and visit the sister congregation at Ruaha Mbuyuni in order to facilitate continued HIV/AIDS research.

The Millers joined Reverend Fultz and his wife on their first HTLC mission trip to Tanzania in August of 2004. The group initially contacted the Ruaha Mbuyuni congregation as well as the Image Secondary School where the older students from Ruaha Mbuyuni were students. Additional visits were made to Tumaini (Hope) University in Iringa which is supported by all of the congregations in Bega Kwa Bega (Shoulder to Shoulder), including Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. In 2005, fundraising began in earnest at Holy Trinity; a fund-raising auction with Tanzanian fabrics, carvings, artwork and jewelry was held during the fall Mission fundraiser. The Millers traveled on a second Mission trip in 2006 and were joined by Pastor Steve Trewartha and church member Ann Niedermayer for a third trip in February of 2007.

HTLC fundraising for Tanzania provided over twenty student scholarships, a motorcycle for the Ruaha Mbuyuni pastor, bicycles for the evangelists, an upgrade to the Iringa Lutheran Center and funds for a clean water project. To support these mission trips, Holy Trinity began an annual "Used-a-bit" sale, while Heaven's Helping Hands prepared food baskets and LOGOS youth offered their time and effort to Feed My Starving Children in the Twin Cities. A joint prayer ministry existed between Tanzania and HTLC from 2007-2011.

This partnership between HTLC and its sister congregation in Tanzania was suddenly in jeopardy when Holy Trinity was threatened by its own issues starting in 2009. Unknown to many parishioners, Pastor Trewartha had become interested in Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC). About ten years earlier, the LCMC was born as a dissident voice within the ELCA. As years passed, it became a separate church body and its relationship with the ELCA became increasingly adversarial. In 2009, the ELCA adopted pro-LGBT policies at its national assembly. LCMC openly encouraged ELCA congregations and members to split from the ELCA and join their organization. The LCMC regularly provided speakers to conflicted congregations who supported their organization and spoke against the ELCA. During this time, Christine Uhlich was hired as Interim Associate Pastor.

The relationship between the ELCA and LCMC continued to deteriorate. Senior pastor, Steve Trewartha, and most council members from Holy Trinity, an ELCA congregation, looked into the possibility of dual affiliation with LCMC. ELCA secretary David Swartling, the principal person responsible for interpretation and enforcement of the ELCA constitution, issued a memorandum to Synod Bishops and Vice-Presidents on January 19, 2010, which stated that "dual rostering of ordained ministers and congregations is impermissible under the Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America." Despite being advised by the Synod that dual affiliation with LCMC was not permissible under the Synod and HTLC constitutions, the majority of the Holy Trinity Council at its June 21, 2011, meeting voted to introduce a congregational vote to obtain dual membership in the ELCA and LCMC. This action by the church council was based upon a unanimous recommendation made to the council by the personnel team. A special meeting of the congregation was to be held on August 14, 2011, at which time a congregational vote would be held whether to approve or reject dual membership.

A question and answer forum regarding the reasons for and benefits of joining LCMC was held on August 3, 2011, and on August 7, 2011, at Holy Trinity. A request from Interim Bishop Nyckelmoe to provide a similar forum for responses from the ELCA Synod was denied by both Pastor Steve and the majority of the council. As a consequence of the Bishop being denied the opportunity to speak at Holy Trinity Church, a letter was sent out from the Synod office dated August 1, 2011, advising members of the congregation of a meeting on Wednesday, August 10, 2011, at the New Prague Knights

of Columbus Hall for answers to the questions regarding the proposed resolution of dual affiliation.

Congregational members met with Interim Minneapolis Synod Bishop Nyckelmoe and Glenndy Ose, Assistant to the Bishop. Nyckelmoe and Ose answered numerous questions from people in attendance. Those attending the gathering let out a sigh of relief when Ose stated at the end of the meeting, "I promise there will be an ELCA presence in New Prague".

On August 14, 2011, a special congregational meeting was held to vote on the resolution of dual affiliation. This motion failed on a final vote of 117 for and 145 against. Sometime later, Pastor Trewartha penned an open letter to the congregation stating, "A short time ago I visited with our Interim Bishop Glen Nyckelmoe of the Minneapolis Area Synod. In the midst of our conversation, he presented me with several possible choices, including my resignation as your pastor." After a special congregational meeting held in the Fellowship Hall on August 30, 2011, and during the closed council meeting held right after the special congregational meeting, Pastor Steve informed the council that he would submit a letter of resignation to the Bishop. The resignation of Pastor Steve was to be effective September 30, 2011, and his last service and farewell took place on October 2, 2011.

A majority of church council members and staff members resigned immediately or remained until October 2. Synod protocol followed and Pastor Steve's resignation was accepted. Because of Pastor Trewartha's desire to join LCMC and form a new congregation in New Prague, he was removed from the rolls of ordained pastors in the ELCA and the Minneapolis Synod. Two council members remained and substitute council members were appointed under constitutional guidelines. Their terms were to run until the next annual congregation meeting at which time all council terms would be vacated and an entirely new church council would be elected.

Pastor Steve Trewartha and his LCMC supporters moved to the former State Bank of New Prague building and established New Prague Lutheran Church, later changing the name to FaithPoint Lutheran Church. The congregation's first service was held on October 9, 2011.

After the vote, it was a difficult time for Holy Trinity Lutheran Church members. Friends and neighbors who had attended Holy Trinity for years were suddenly absent along with their families. It would take years for some members to overcome the pain and grief that the split of the church had caused. Our Tanzanian friends, whom we had assisted so much over the years, returned the favor in 2012. Reverend Andek Ngogo, Headmaster of Image Secondary School, visited Holy Trinity to thank members for their support and offer prayers of healing for those who remained at Holy Trinity as part of the ELCA.

Reverend Dr. Mark Bents received a call to serve as Interim Pastor and help the remaining members of Holy Trinity ELCA church get back on their feet after the split. His first service occurred on October 9, 2011. Pastor Bents walked into a church which had lost its pastor, the majority of its staff and one-half of the congregation. He served one year and left in October, 2012. Having completed nineteen years of service as an Interim Pastor, he was the first to write a doctorate on interim pastoral ministry and was often used by the ELCA to minister to large churches going through transition. He had previously helped churches in California, Pennsylvania and the Upper Midwest.

Bents was often challenged in churches that had three to four pastors and a large staff. He was charged with reorganizing the staff, often deciding who would stay and who would go. At Holy Trinity, the majority of staff had already left so his task was a bit different. There were only two musicians, a secretary and one Sunshine teacher

remaining. Since Bents was the only pastor, he also had to teach confirmation, something he had not done for a number of years.

Bents's sermons were inspirational and included everyone. He didn't use a podium, had few written notes, maintained eye contact with the parishioners as he wandered among them, and often included their names in his message. Concerned about getting us back on track as an ELCA church, he discarded the existing constitution and introduced the ELCA model constitution with follow-up work to come later. Pastor Bents reestablished all ties with the ELCA in mission-giving, donations to the Synod and using educational materials from Augsburg/Fortress. Without Pastor Mark Bents, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church might not be as strong as it is today.

Pastor Erick Thompson was called to serve Holy Trinity Lutheran Church and began his tenure on December 16, 2012. A graduate of Gustavus Adolphus College, Luther Seminary and the Lutheran Church of Theology at Chicago, Pastor Erick created a culture of stability after the split that had recently occurred in the church. His sermons, delivered without a script, often included stories of his travels and experiences in Europe and the importance of God's grace in our lives. He served as a great example to the youth in the congregation about embracing one's surroundings. While attending a National Youth Gathering in Detroit, he encouraged the youth from Holy Trinity to try different ethnic foods for every meal. Pastor Erick taught several Adult Education classes, often introducing non-Christian ideas; he explained them as a means to educate and reduce fear.

One of the most ambitious projects taken on by Holy Trinity in current years was the development of a Strategic Plan for Holy Trinity. Pastor Erick, the Church Council and several members of the congregation worked to develop a five-year plan which encompassed eight key areas: Worship, Operations, Shared Ministry, Mission, Hospitality, Stewardship, Spiritually Alive and Youth Ministry.

Fourteen years after purchasing land for a possible building site, the HTLC Council reconsidered and decided to sell the property and use the money for programs and activities both within and outside the church. Most of the council members felt the congregation's balance sheet was "heavy on real estate but light on cash". There were also concerns that infrastructure costs for sewer, water and site preparation for the property would be close to \$1,000,000. The land was officially sold on July 31, 2015, for \$500,000—\$300,000 in cash and \$200,000 as a charitable donation. The buyer wanted to remain anonymous and has remained so to this day. After closing costs, mortgage payoff and settling other accounts, \$330,000 was placed in a bond account where it still remains.

In the spring of 2016, Wednesday evening services began as an experiment and were launched year-round starting in the fall. Pastor Erick recognized that staff levels needed to be increased in order for our church to grow and take us to the next level. In June of 2016, HTLC began the process to hire a full-time Associate Pastor, with an intentional focus on youth ministry. Suddenly, another opportunity for Pastor Erick came along, and he left Holy Trinity on October 15, 2016. The church's search for an associate pastor ended when Pastor Erick resigned. He was installed as Senior Pastor of St. John Lutheran Church (ELCA) in Fargo, North Dakota, on July 23, 2017.

Pastor Hans Lee, who had completed his student internship at Holy Trinity in 1986, returned as Interim Pastor on October 16, 2016. Since Pastor Hans was familiar with the town of New Prague and Holy Trinity, the transition was a smooth one. Blessed with intelligence, an ability to engage people both inside and outside the congregation, and a beautiful voice, Pastor Hans brought a calming and stabilizing presence to the congregation and served through July 29, 2017. However, before the newly-hired pastors would arrive,

Pastor Phil Formo led the congregation from late July through September 2017. A kind and gentle man, Pastor Phil made a significant impact in a short time, as he was appreciated for his heartfelt sermons. He seemed to connect with each individual at church, and everyone knew when his sermon had ended—he began to joyfully sing a favorite hymn.

Meanwhile, the Call Committee began the process of looking for a new pastor, a high-energy leader who would make a long-term commitment to the church and guide us through our next phase of growth and transformation. In communication with the Minneapolis Area Synod, the Call Committee noted that "HTLC is called to proclaim God's love for all people. We are a congregation that comes from a wide variety of backgrounds who find a common spiritual home here. Holy Trinity's purpose is evolving into an ever-expanding invitation to people in the New Prague area to worship God, learn more about God's love for all people, and join us as we bring love to everyone." A revived enthusiasm along with a sense of stability arrived at Holy Trinity when Ben and Alicia Hilding were hired as co-pastors in September of 2017. Pastors Ben and Alicia expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to serve together, and their desire to plant roots in New Prague. Both graduates of Gustavus Adolphus College, the couple attended Luther Seminary and served as associate pastors at Bethel Lutheran Church in Hudson, Wisconsin, and Calvary Lutheran Church in Alexandria, Minnesota, before arriving in New Prague.

Holy Trinity, although it has experienced some turmoil and instability over the past few years, has always provided strong programs for the congregation and the surrounding community. The church offers Sunday Worship as well as expanded worship services on Wednesday evening including a meal, youth education and confirmation. A lively group of talented musicians performs at both Sunday and Wednesday night services and the Bell Choir is featured monthly. There is a Children's Ministry from birth through senior high, an Adult Christian ministry, Bible Study groups, a Ladies sewing group and Mission Global Outreach through Hope House and Adopt-a-Family projects. Amazing Grays, an active group comprised mainly of seniors, meets weekly and often takes field trips to interesting businesses and organizations in the area. The Christmas Tea, Rib Fest, "Trunk or Treat" Halloween Event and Community Thanksgiving Dinner are open to all members of the community. Holy Trinity's building is accessible during the week to several organizations including AA, Cub, Girl and Boy Scouts and PFLAG.

One of the most difficult issues faced by the congregation was the decision in April 2018 to close Sonshine Preschool which had been in existence since 1998. A thriving program in the local school system contributed to the decreasing Sonshine student enrollment. Many of the preschool's furnishings and curriculum items were donated to worthy causes both in the New Prague community as well as Baby's Space, a child development center in Minneapolis, and Camp Noah of Lutheran Social Services.

Although the history of Holy Trinity is rather short compared to other congregations in the area, the stories and events of the past have nevertheless shaped the church's legacy and will continue to determine its future. Holy Trinity Lutheran Church will continue to move forward and fulfill its mission and the words found on the sign in front of the church: "All Are Welcome".