

TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH
2005 - 2012
Pastor Steven Erickson

Trinity continued to heal and repair relationships in 2005, led by an excellent interim pastor, Charles Steinke. Repair of the church building was also needed and consumed much of 2005. For several years, dormer/window and roof leaks had been patched, but not permanently fixed. The 25-year roof was on year 26 or 27.

A committee was formed to research funding options and gather quotes. At a lengthy congregational meeting in April, many people expressed their frustration with mounting repairs and the cost (to future generations) of maintaining the building. Comments were made about the Education/South wing, particularly the second floor Sunday School area, not being well-suited for current needs. One member encouraged attendees to consider what the vision for Trinity should be and whether it included this building or a different, simpler structure. Pastor Steinke pointed out that the church is valued at \$2.5 million, so while \$85-\$95,000 is a lot to pay, it is not a lot in comparison to the total value. Finally, most agreed that we must fix what we have, and this motion passed:

- Hire Ted Gesin/Marv Miller Construction, a Mt. Morris firm, to repair the dormers of the Education/South Wing, and install new windows and flashing; and
- Hire B & B Construction to remove the old roof and install sheathing, then a metal roof, including a ridge vent on the Education/South Wing, and to repair the cap over the Bell Tower. New roof warranted for 50 years, with a 100-year expectancy.

In a second motion, attendees agreed to fund the \$92,939.17 project with 50% from the Endowment Fund and 50% from a three-year pledge drive.

Early in the year we accepted, with regret, the resignation of Pastor Lisa Fike as Youth/Education Coordinator. With the passing of her husband the previous year, she sought a full-time job and had accepted a position at the Freeport Church of the Brethren. In 2005, we also accepted, with gratitude, the retirement and passing of the Financial Secretary “torch” from Helen Borneman to her daughter, Louise Suttman, who had assisted with financial reporting and a migration to computers over the last few years. Helen, a retired Trust officer with the local bank, served Trinity with wisdom, integrity, and dedication for 40 years.

Pastor Charles Steinke completed his time as our interim pastor, and in May 2005, Trinity extended a call to Rev. Steven J. Erickson, of Morton, Illinois. His Master of Divinity, awarded in 1981, was from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Pastor Erickson had served three congregations in the last twenty-two years — in Mt. Carroll and Quincy, Illinois, before his most recent post in Morton. Wife Carol was a nutrition educator who continued this career through their term at Trinity. Daughter Bethel was a college student.

With the parsonage on Lincoln Street for sale, Trinity now included a housing allowance in the compensation package: \$39,080 base salary; \$13,500 housing allowance; \$4,022 social security. An

expense allowance included \$2,000 for auto and travel; \$700 for continuing education; and \$700 for other professional expenses. Vacation was four weeks, including Sundays, and there were two weeks off for continuing education.

Pastor Erickson began serving on September 1 and was formally installed in October. Mindful of past problems, he and Carol began meeting with small groups of members in homes, to share their story and get to know us. We soon learned that he was kind and thoughtful, loved movies (which he sometimes worked into a sermon), and had a dry and quiet sense of humor. He was a very good listener, who was particularly good with Trinity's senior members. Pastor Erickson was also an excellent record keeper, and was able to clean up our member records, some of which must be reported to the Synod. That attention to detail benefitted Trinity in many ways. For example, he maintained a schedule to ensure he visited all shut-ins regularly.

In 2005, Cheryl Christians resigned after twelve years as the church organist. We again turned to long-time member, Carol Reckmeyer, to accompany worship services, and to Joanne Miller to accompany the vocal choir. Jan Christ continued as vocal and chime choir director. Jan welcomed new members to the vocal choir in 2005, including our new pastor. In subsequent years, we learned that Pastor Erickson also played the trumpet, and after leaving Trinity has played in the Kable Concert band. (The Kable Concert band is composed of area musicians who offer free weekly summer concerts at the bandshell on the campus in Mt. Morris. It has played every summer since 1896.)

Planning began in 2005 for the 160th anniversary in 2006. All committees were busy, seeking more volunteers, more participation in Sunday School, and renewed attention to the finance and member records. Trinity Women of the ELCA (TWELCA) offered many ministries, as usual, including Lenten soup suppers, quilts, and health kits for Lutheran World Relief, and support of Rocky Boy Indian Reservation and the Nachusa home. Trinity Men again sponsored their popular spaghetti and pancake suppers, which raised funds for area charities. Trinity Men president Ron Bjorklund recalled crowds of 200-250 people from the community attending the suppers. Although they served for about two hours, "Everyone wanted to eat between 5:30 and 6!" Usually, Trinity youth were persuaded to clear tables and pour drinks.

The Education Committee reported many activities in 2005, including special outreach to inactive children and their parents, as well as a successful Rally Day on September 11 to kick off the new Sunday School year. On Rally Day, a picnic and balloon launch were held, and Robbie the puppet and friends were introduced. (The puppets were a memorial gift.) Rhubarb the Clown entertained both children and adults with stories and magic. Rhubarb the Clown was a member, Norm Nelson, a well-known and beloved professional clown for nearly all his life.

A new, ambitious event was produced in 2004, repeated in 2005 (and every year after, until the pandemic in 2020) – a free Christmas concert for the community. The Christmas Cantata was produced by Mt. Morris resident Nelson Miller and always presented on a Sunday afternoon in early December. It featured vocal and instrumental musicians from the region and was co-sponsored by Trinity, the Church of the Brethren, and Disciples United Methodist Church, in Mt. Morris. Trinity, having the largest sanctuary and "presentation" space, was the host. The concert was always offered free of

charge to the community, with a freewill offering taken for local food pantries. In 2010 Trinity began recording the expenses and donations. From 2010 through 2019, Lifeline food pantry in Oregon and Loaves & Fish food pantry in Mt. Morris received about \$600 each year from the event.

In 2005, the Finance Committee was benefitting from the new computerized reporting that financial secretary Louise Suttman had instituted. They also began discussions with the Trust Department of the local bank, Union Savings Bank, about alternative investments for the endowment fund, which would increase the income generated by the fund and protect the long-term, purchasing power of the assets. The committee acknowledged, with gratitude, the dedicated service each and every Sunday of the “counters” who counted the worship service offering and prepared the deposit: Helen Borneman, Chuck Diehl, Don Dusing, Walt LeFevre, Wayne Schelling, Lois Steffen, Bob Urish, and Louise Suttman.

Pastor Erickson was a great example of personal stewardship and confessed that he and Carol had given “above a tithe” in previous years. (A tithe is 10% of income.) In the pastor profile the Call Committee received, he admitted, “I do not feel that I can challenge others to give if I am not likewise willing to give.” Trinity’s annual budget deficit weighed heavily on his mind throughout his term at Trinity, and for four years (2009-2012) he refused a salary increase. He was both modest and an example of sacrifice and good stewardship.

Data from the last three years reflected our struggles with declining worship attendance after Pastor Lawyer left. This trend reflected the changing population and demographics in Mt. Morris, as well as a decline in Christian affiliation which affected every region in the nation, every age group, and every demographic as the 2000s progressed. (<https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape>)

WORSHIP ATTENDANCE			
	Average Saturday Attendance	Average Sunday Attendance	Average Weekly Attendance
2003	36	143	179
2004	33	121	154
2005	25	114	139

Trinity ended 2005 with a \$9,800 budget deficit, again drawing from reserves to balance the budget. Unlike many churches, Trinity was blessed to have reserves, thanks to the foresight of previous generations and the generosity of members who remembered the church in their bequests.

We began 2006 by hiring Bill Horst as the Education/Youth Director, effective February 1. Bill, a local farmer, had been a very active member for years, serving most recently as the Sunday School Superintendent. Trinity was blessed to have someone so devoted and faithful to replace Pastor Lisa Fike, who left in 2005. The position would be reviewed after one year, and if continued, the salary of \$8,000 (for 16-20 hours/week) would be added to the annual budget.

We saw the fruits of his labors, and the dedicated work of the Education Committee, in an increase in spring Sunday School attendance to 25-30 each week. New Sunday School material was downloaded

from the internet, rather than purchased as printed materials. The Sunday School Christmas program was “All I want for Christmas is... Jesus.” Bill noted in the annual report that, “37 children and 26 adults participated in the program and proved it will all come together regardless of what the Director feels the week before.”

The Youth Group was likewise busy, with a ski outing (no broken bones or emergency room visits), the popular fundraiser Souper Bowl Lunch (on Super Bowl Sunday), Easter Breakfast, and a Mile Marker Campaign to raise funds for nine youth and three adults to attend the TeenServe work camp in Pleasant Hill, Missouri. Youth from St. Paul’s Lutheran in Oregon joined Trinity youth again that year for a trip to Six Flags Great America amusement park. On the last weekend in December, the youth led the worship services.

In 2006, cantors continued to assist with the Sunday worship service, a practice begun by Pastor Weber. Pastor Erickson favored a more traditional worship style, which was familiar and comforting to many. He was conscientious, and often went “above and beyond.” One member recalls that he would ensure that all church doors and windows were locked before leaving. At the 2007 Annual Meeting, Bob Urish asked that the “record show appreciation to Pastor Erickson and Carol Erickson for the positive direction of the church,” and that “this amounts to a vote of confidence in that direction.”

The 160th anniversary was celebrated July 16, 2006, with a special worship service led by Northern Illinois Synod Bishop Gary Wollersheim. A potluck followed, with a program featuring our honored guest and speaker, missionary and former member Dolores (Dohlen) Stykel. She recalled with appreciation, Trinity’s active Dolores Dohlen Missionary Society, in the 1950s and 60s, while she was a missionary in Rajahmundry, India.

A new initiative began in 2006. T.I.M.E. was an acronym for Together In Mission Engagement. It was a process that several congregations in the Northern Illinois Synod undertook to help recapture God’s mission for their churches. Trinity committee members were Pastor Erickson, Ed Handschuh, Carolyn Mielke, Steve Pearson, Rob Urish, Vern Welp, and Salley Wessels. The initiative involved, among many steps, looking back through memories offered by the congregation, and looking forward through interviews with community leaders, and the congregation. During Advent, the committee completed two outreach projects: Mailed 110 invitations to members and guests to join us during the holiday season, and distributed door hangers throughout Mt. Morris inviting people to attend the 4:30 or 10:30 Christmas Eve services. In 2007, the T.I.M.E. committee planned to start small groups and conduct a survey, eventually formulating a vision for Trinity.

The Social Ministry Committee was exceedingly busy in 2006, listing more than 16 significant ministries and services in the annual report. They included several ministries which continue today such as serving Home Communion to shut-ins once a month (which Pastor Steinke initiated and was only interrupted by the 2020/2021 pandemic) and providing clothing for kids at Christmas (accomplished despite the 2020/2021 pandemic). The committee responded to national events by spearheading Hurricane Katrina Survivor Month and adopting a family from Mississippi (the Bidwell Barnes) who received new furniture and appliances through the funds raised. Trinity also worked with 21 other churches to fill a semi for Hurricane Katrina survivors.

Once again, Trinity ended 2006 with greater expenses than receipts/income – though not as great a deficit as expected. We budgeted for \$185,880 receipts/income but actually received \$200,496. Expenses were \$4,000 less than forecasted. So, although we had expected to be \$36,000 in the red, Trinity ended the year (only) \$19,000 over budget. Pastor Erickson noted this as “positive financial news, but we can do better in 2007.”

It’s worth noting that Trinity received \$50,000 from the Ruth Hahn Bequest in 2006 so the non-budget cash increased considerably from the year before. The constitution detailed how undesignated (and designated) bequests must be handled.

Total membership at year’s end was 636 members (34 new members joined that year). But, only 152 average weekly attendance (24%). This disparity, along with the financial deficit, was a source of ongoing concern for Pastor Erickson, as it had been for previous pastors.* In the annual report, he encouraged us to engage the new members in the life of the church as “there are many opportunities for service.” He continued, “There is also great need for us to encourage one another in our giving of resources. We must all do our part in supporting the life and ministries of the church with the bounty with which God has blessed us.” No doubt thinking of the difference between active and inactive members, he added, “We need to continue reaching out to those who are no longer actively involved in the life of Trinity – perhaps that means encouraging them to find another church where they can be involved!”

Throughout the rest of his term, Pastor Erickson continued to reach out to inactive members and was able to bring a few back. But, overall, the success rate for re-engaging inactive members was fairly low. In 2010, a formal multi-step campaign was undertaken to clean the membership rolls. The “Fisher” (of men) Campaign resulted in about 70 people being removed due to many years of inactivity. In total, 31 wished to remain members, 13 asked to be removed or transferred, and 32 did not receive follow-up contact because current information was not available. Despite the low re-activation rate over the years, Pastor Erickson was successful in reaching out to every member, inviting their return to Trinity, or offering help to find them a new church home. He ensured that Trinity’s member records were accurate and up-to-date by the time he and Carol left our congregation.

The ensuing years, 2007 through 2011 saw continued devotion to growing our faith, under the leadership of Pastor Erickson. He introduced the ALPHA program (no detail provided in the annual report), held ongoing Bible studies, reinstituted Adult Forums, and held a seven-week video series entitled Lutherans and the Bible.

The years of 2007 through 2011 saw growth and activity from the work of Education/Youth Director Bill Horst, whose contract was gratefully renewed each year. The youth continued to attend TeenServe work camps, hold game nights, fundraisers, and take trips. The puppet ministry continued successfully, and Sunday School attendance was steady. Every Rally Day averaged 100 attendees. Joint Vacation Bible School (VBS) attendance was huge – over 100 kids each year, with approximately 70% of them not affiliated with any local church. This was certainly the broadest community outreach for any of the three churches who jointly hosted VBS: Trinity, the Church of the Brethren, and the Disciples United Methodist Church.

Along with ongoing maintenance and repairs, a few big projects kept our Property Committee busy in these “middle” years of 2007 through 2011. After years of discussion, central air conditioning was installed in 2007. In 2008 we replaced the nearly 60-year old, held-together-with-spot-welding-and-prayer boiler (furnace) with a more efficient model. The \$56,923.69 cost was paid from the Parsonage Fund, which was proceeds from the sale of the parsonage. Trinity installed a video projection system in 2009 that projected onto new, retractable screens on both sides of the sanctuary. Although some did not welcome the new technology, it was a big step forward for Trinity.

Thanks to funding from an anonymous donor, we replaced the original linoleum in the basement Fellowship Hall, kitchen, and bathrooms in 2009. This was no small task because the original linoleum contained asbestos. Also, the two bathrooms were remodeled, and a new kitchen island was added. In 2011 Trinity approved a proposal to repair and protect the beautiful stained glass windows in the sanctuary. A firm from Minnesota installed vented Lexan covers for each window, for \$17,500. This meant that the windows could no longer be opened. But, the venting would allow the windows to breathe in both summer and winter. To fund the repairs, the Property Committee suggested that each family give \$165 in honor of Trinity’s 165th Anniversary.

In 2007 the T.I.M.E group (Together In Mission Engagement) completed its work to create a strategic plan to recapture God’s mission for Trinity. Goals were established for worship, ministry, evangelism, fellowship, discipleship, ecumenicalism, building and grounds, and stewardship. Due dates were set for the goals to be completed and they intended that each member of Trinity be an active participant in at least one of these eight areas. The goals, timing, and expectations were presented to the congregation at a special meeting in 2007 and unanimously approved. Results would be reported at the following year’s annual meeting and hopefully, the results would arouse a sense of pride in being a member of Trinity.

Two new committees were created during these years that reflected societal changes. A Technology Committee reviewed technology such as office equipment, the sound system, current computer hardware and software, and then recommended upgrades. We would turn to this committee, and select member experts, throughout the 2000s to help keep Trinity fairly up to date – or at least, not too far out of date.

A Communications Committee was formed, which was responsible for making Trinity more visible outside the church through different forms of communication. Although the formal committee disbanded after a few years, Trinity continued to use news releases to local media, our website, and social media to communicate. With the addition of Pastor Josh Ehrlar in 2013, we upped our game online, using a range of social media to inform about our programs, special worship services, ministries and activities. During the 2020/2021 pandemic social media, particularly Facebook® and YouTube®, became vital communication tools.

2008 was a year of change – a change in the nation, with the election of Barack Obama, the first black president. It was a year of significant change in the community of Mt. Morris. And, there was a big change at Trinity. Council president Al Ulferts began his 2008 annual report with the old joke, *“How many Lutherans does it take to change a light bulb. The answer is: Change!?”* But, change we did.

After much discussion and a three-month trial period, Trinity added a third worship service to the schedule. A praise service, with contemporary style and music, was added after the more traditional Sunday morning service. Bill Horst led the new service, with Pastor Erickson giving the sermon and communion. We hoped it would increase attendance by younger families and anyone seeking a more contemporary worship experience. Although piano accompanists tried the new music at first, we quickly fell into a pattern of singing along with CDs of contemporary Christian music. In later years, Carol and Warren Reckmeyer, retired school band and choral directors, assembled a small Praise Band for the service that was comprised of Carol on piano, Warren playing a brass instrument – usually the clarinet -- and a colleague on drums. We were also delighted to see Trinity youth and other guest musicians, who occasionally “sat in” with the band.

The praise service was a simpler order of service than the traditional, with a smaller, but engaged gathering and an upbeat feel. It was strongly supported by a group of dedicated attendees, under the charismatic leadership of Bill. (Averaging 30-35 weekly attendees.) But, when Bill left Trinity in 2013, it struggled to find a new rhythm. After too many Sundays with attendance in the single digits, it was discontinued at the close of 2015.

Trinity continued to wrestle with balancing the budget. As you can see in the chart, the deficit was significant in 2007 and 2008. Luckily, we could use the interest from undesignated funds to offset the deficit. But, that is not a good financial practice. Our inability to live within means had always grieved Pastor Erickson, and (as noted previously) he made a personal sacrifice by declining our proposed Cost of Living salary increase every year from 2009 to 2012. This was a tremendous sacrifice, and set quite a precedent for future pastors.

ANNUAL BUDGET				
YEAR	INCOME/RECEIPTS	EARNINGS INCOME & PRINCIPAL TRANSFERRED FROM 'OTHER BUDGET RECEIPTS' TO HELP OFFSET ANNUAL DEFICIT. IT IS INCLUDED IN THE ANNUAL "INCOME/RECEIPTS" AT LEFT.	EXPENSES	ENDING BALANCE
2007	\$219,224	\$15,272	\$235,054	-\$15,830
2008	\$227,012	\$11,735	\$239,946	-\$12,934
2009	\$225,057	\$9,579	\$226,913	-\$1,856
2010	\$219,428	\$1,132	\$221,875	-\$2,447
2011	\$225,735	\$679	\$227,474	-\$1,738
2012	\$222,211	\$875	\$230,277	-\$8,066

In 2008 Trinity was blessed by the generosity of members Walt and Irene LeFevre, and Bob and Crete LeFevre who gave the LeFevre Living Pledge Fund. The income produced by the fund was to be used to help meet the budget. If not needed for the budget, it could be used for special church projects or local charities. As you can see in the Annual Budget table we were able to dramatically reduce the deficit in the years following their gift (in large part, by reducing our benevolence), so Trinity did not need to dip

into the LeFevre Living Pledge Fund. However, in later years it became a vital source of revenue to offset a growing annual deficit.

Many T.I.M.E. goals were implemented during these years, including Trinity's 'Be the Church' work days. Teams went out into the community to perform tasks like yard work, window-cleaning, etc., for people needing assistance. This ministry continues today. Trinity also began a three-year commitment to the Adopt a Highway program, keeping a one-mile section of Route 64 free of litter. (As of this writing, it is a 13-year commitment.)

The Mt. Morris business community and the economy suffered a large blow in 2008. As reported in the October 10, 2008 edition of the Rockford Register Star, "The New York-based parent company of Kable News Co. will move the vast majority of the work done in Mount Morris to the Sunshine State by 2010. The announcement by Amrep Corp., made this morning, means Ogle County will lose more than 425 jobs. But today's announcement is the third blow in two years to the village of 4,100's once-vibrant publishing industry. Last year, Quebecor World Inc., which has a massive printing plant in Mount Morris with 700 workers, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protections, and the privately owned Watt Publishing, which was started in Mount Morris in 1917, moved its headquarters and about 70 employees to Rockford." NOTE: Quebecor World Inc. was purchased by Quad/Graphics in 2010 and ceased production in May 2011, ending 113 years of printing at that location. (Ogle County Newspapers, January 29, 2021.) These were losses from which Mt. Morris would never fully recover.

After four very full and active years, Pastor Erickson requested and was granted a sabbatical leave, May 25 through August 2, 2009. It was a time of rest, reflection, and study, which followed a medical leave. Pastor Erickson was an active member of key committees, along with a full load of pastoral duties, and knew that he was prone to over-commitment and "the busyness of church life" (noted in his pastoral profile). The sabbatical would be a much-needed respite. He insisted that the sabbatical be unpaid, and that this might help us balance the budget in 2009. Trinity member Rev. Frank Lay was interim pastor during the sabbatical.

Unfortunately, there was turmoil in the larger church body, the ELCA, in 2009. After years of discussion, reflection and debate, the ELCA made a bold decision. As reported August 9, 2009, at [elca.org \(https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/6587\)](https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/6587):

"The 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) voted today to open the ministry of the church to gay and lesbian pastors and other professional workers living in committed relationships.

The action came by a vote of 559-451 at the highest legislative body of the 4.6 million member denomination...

The actions here change the church's policy, which previously allowed gays and lesbians into the ordained ministry only if they remained celibate...

During the hours of discussion, led by ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson, the delegates paused several times each hour for prayer, sometimes as a whole assembly, sometimes in small groups around the tables where the voting members of the assembly sat, debated and cast their

votes.

Discussion here proved that matters of sexuality will be contentious throughout the church...”

That was indeed the case. No doubt, Trinity lost some members due to this decision. But, it did not suffer a break from the ELCA, as some churches did (e.g., St. Paul’s Lutheran in Oregon). Within Trinity, there were many questions, and Pastor Erickson led a well-attended forum that year to discuss the ELCA’s new position.

There were positive staff changes during these years. Karen (Sundvall) Larson, who had “grown up” at Trinity, returned to Mt. Morris in 2009 with husband Reverend Ron Larson. Karen became the Saturday evening accompanist in 2009, and in 2010 was hired as Parish Musician, responsible for directing the Chancel Choir and serving as full-time organist. She brought renewed energy and passion to the musical ministry of Trinity. (The title of Parish Musician was chosen because Pastor Erickson hoped to hire other parish support staff, such as a Parish Nurse.)

In 2010 we hired Linda Duffy as Assistant Financial Secretary. In keeping with good financial practices, there was a separation of responsibilities apart from the Financial Secretary position held by Louise.

In the 2010 Council President’s report, Steve Pearson noted that “It has been a year filled with change, apprehension, hope and celebration.” And that “Our community is apprehensive concerning the economy and unemployment.” Despite the addition of the praise service, as noted previously, the weekly worship attendance continued to slowly decrease during these years, perhaps reflecting the parallel loss of Mt. Morris residents – and, a growing decline in church affiliation nationwide.

WORSHIP SERVICE ATTENDANCE	
YEAR	AVERAGE WEEKLY ATTENDANCE
2007	156 (2 services)
2008	148 (3 services)
2009	147 (3 services)
2010	144 (3 services)
2011	135 (3 services)
2012	121 (3 services)

In his annual report, Pastor Erickson challenged us to ask what God is calling us to be and to do. This was in line with the Council’s work of reviewing, re-thinking, and re-writing Trinity’s Mission Statement, ‘Making Christ Known.’ Pastor Erickson wrote, “... we need some concrete strategy which will allow us to **use** our statement to direct our mission and ministry at Trinity. A few carefully and prayerfully chosen words will help **all** members of Trinity to be reminded of our Mission in this place and time.”

Trinity rose to that challenge in 2011, and adopted a new mission statement, “In Christ we are called to grow and are sent to serve.” There were seven goals.

1. Evaluate and expand our affinity-based ministries by developing interest-oriented ministries, accessing each ministry, and increasing participants.

2. Provide targeted ministries and services to help teach a skill or provide a service. For example, a handyman service, cooking, financial learning, and continuing education.
3. Spread the word of Christ through church and community celebrations. For example, the 165th anniversary, participation in July 4th activities, a stained-glass project, and rock-n-roll ice cream social.
4. Offer educational programs for use in the church. For example, confirmation, new member classes, small group ministries, the Alpha program, Lot 12 ministry, and explore mission work in Africa and India.
5. Make Christ known in the wider community by expanding Be the Church service projects, partnership with Habitat on foreclosed homes, the Crop Walk, movie night, talent night, and a rock-n-roll ice cream social
6. Feed the hungry in our community by assisting with the community garden.
7. Demonstrate good stewardship at Trinity by ensuring that our resources, including staff and utilities, are used wisely.

Trinity celebrated the 165th anniversary on November 6, 2011, with a special all saints worship service and visit from Northern Illinois Synod Bishop Gary Wollersheim. A large anniversary choir sang, accompanied by the organ and the Blackhawk Brass Quintet from the Oregon High School. The chime choir also performed. The congregation was surrounded by a large paper chain strung around three sides of the sanctuary, which contained the names of saints – past and present – who were meaningful to members. After the service, everyone stood in the shape of a large cross, down the center aisle and across the front of the church, so that member Lisa Suttman could take a photo from the balcony, commemorating the celebration. Trinity also offered church tours in October and November to view the stained glass windows and learn more about their history.

Over the course of 2007 through 2011, committees experienced a noticeable decline in volunteers. This would continue through the decade. Nevertheless, community ministries like Habitat for Humanity, and the newly-formed Lot 12 Ministry (teaching and feeding kids residing in the mobile home park, during the summer) were supported in some way. Trinity's ministries continued, such as providing clothing for kids at Christmas, community movie nights, and the work of the Trinity Women of the ELCA. Social Ministry recounted a moving experience on a trip to the Rockford Rescue Mission to serve a meal. Several Trinity members met with a room full of women who, hesitantly at first, began to share what had led them to that moment, and ended with all praying the Lord's Prayer.

Encouraged by our new mission statement, Outreach made a bold move in hot weather and participated in the July 4th, 2011, "Let Freedom Ring" parade. A float held coolers with over 2,000 bottles of water which walkers handed to onlookers. At the same time, ice cream was (quickly!) distributed by a group on the church lawn.

In 2011, we were only \$1,738.11 over budget – the closest we came to a balanced budget during Pastor Erickson's term.

That term ended in 2012. We received, with much regret, Pastor Erickson's letter of resignation in March, effective April 12, 2012. The decision was made "with a deep sense of gratitude for your

ministry to and with us..." And, appreciation for "Your many kindnesses and prayers." He acknowledged the return to a sense of normalcy in congregational life during his term, and the expansion of music, and youth and education programs, as well as the addition of new programs. "New people have joined the church. Budgets are much nearer balanced than they had been. I sense wonderful opportunities for growth and outreach ahead."

He continued, "Pastors complete a confidential report to the bishop of their synod each year. In my last three reports, I have indicated to our bishop that a younger, more energetic pastor (perhaps with children) would be a desirable change for Trinity. I say this with a sense that my own energies have been reduced in recent years. Perhaps the second surgery (2009) in the past decade has something to do with that. Accordingly, we have accepted a part-time call to St. James Lutheran in rural Forreston."

Pastor Erickson added that he and Carol would continue to live in Mt. Morris. This was good news, and we continued to see them around town. In 2017, he left the pastorate of St. James to retire. We are blessed that they have remained engaged members of the Mt. Morris community.

Pastor Erickson was the healing shepherd we needed in 2005. He was a living example of Ephesians 4:1-2, to ... "live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." As he did every year, he also expressed thanks to the dedicated staff for all the work they did to enhance an atmosphere of caring and loving ministry at Trinity: Barb Diehl, Floyd Drumheller, Bill Horst, Karen Larson, Carol Reckmeyer, Jan Rungren, Louise Suttman, and Linda Duffy. Pastor Erickson and Carol would be greatly missed.

*A concern about inactive members was nothing new to Trinity pastors. Frequently in the late 1930's, Pastor Clarence Hightower urged campaigns for more faithful church attendance. In 1941 the average church attendance fell to 34% and he recommended an Every-Member Visit. At one of his last Council meetings, he complained that one-third to one-half of the congregation was leaving after communing before the service had ended and also that people were communing and presenting their children for baptism who hadn't been to church for 2 or 3 years. (TLC History Pastor 22-Hightower, 1924-1942, by Rev. Phil Schroeder)

Under Pastor Alfred Stone, resolutions about increasing participation were formally adopted in 1947, 1948, 1952-54. For example, in 1953: Make every possible effort to reclaim 168 lapsed members, add 100 new members in 1953, and increase attendance from 35.4% to 50% of the total membership. (TLC History Pastor 23-Stone, 1946-1954, by Rev. Phil Schroeder)

Trinity reached a peak of 999 baptized members in 1957, under the ambitious term of Pastor Luther Cooperrider. Yet, the percentage of inactive members was still of grave concern. He reported that average weekly worship was 53% of confirmed members and had a stern reproof for the congregation, and himself. (TLC History Pastor 25-Cooperrider, 1955-1962, by Rev. Phil Schroeder)

A steady decline in membership followed Trinity's peak in 1957. It is telling to read this edited excerpt from the history of Rev. Ralph Ryberg's years, written by Pastor Phil Schroeder (TLC History_Pastor 26_Ryberg, 1962-1970):

The years ahead seem to have been years of some agony for both congregation and Pastor (Ryberg). The congregation agonized to find that the religious revival of the 1950s did not continue and that the high level of enthusiasm and commitment generated by the building program of the 1940s and 1950s were difficult to sustain. They had a pastor who tried very hard to do it all and found it was too much. He agonized to keep the statistics up, to see that the budget was met, to get all the work done, and to find and develop new leaders to fill the shoes of those who had lived through the golden years of the (Pastor) Stone Age. Pastor Ryberg was frequently fretful about his inability to do all that needed to be done. He searched for reasons to explain the declining statistics, wondering if it was the Pastor, fewer confirmations, more leisure enjoyments, or less concern about the life of the Spirit, about Christ and His Church.

NOTE: This is one member's perspective of Trinity's years, gathered primarily from select information in the Annual Reports for this period. It is not meant to be a complete or comprehensive historical document. For more information, please read the Annual Reports, found in the church office or archives. Many thanks to Ellen Finrock, Arlene Sangmeister, and Rob Urish for their review and input. Any opinions, errors, or omissions are solely my own. Respectfully submitted, Sandra Stengel.