

Sermon 6-7-26
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Trinity Lutheran Church
W. Hempstead, NY
100th Anniversary of Trinity Lutheran Church

Trinity History, Part 2 — Beyond The Norwegians

Last week, we began Trinity's hundred year history from the time it was founded in 1926 up to 1985. As we noted last week, Trinity's high point was 1958. As the 1960's, 70's and 80's progressed, the congregation slowly declined. The Norwegian cultural glue that had initially inspired the congregation disappeared. However, the Pietism that the founders established remained, and was the spiritual glue that held things together, and continues to do so even today.

According to the history written for Trinity's 75th anniversary, morning Bible study began in 1972 as one of many activities for promoting spiritual growth and Christian fellowship. In the 50th anniversary year of 1976 the Vacation Bible School had 30 pre-schoolers and 120 other children. A women's group operating multiple sewing machines made blankets for the Lutheran mission on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota. This went on for many years.

The Rev. Raymond E. Lorthioir came to Trinity as interim pastor in February 1985 and was later called and then installed as pastor on June 2nd, 1985. He and his family moved into the new parsonage at 8 Trinity Court.

As was mentioned last week, two men from Trinity entered the ministry in the 1970's. Both were instrumental in the task of discerning the direction Trinity needed to take as the merger approached of the national Lutheran bodies that formed the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Pastor Bill Terjesen and Pastor Lorthioir became friends. In their studies together between 1985 and 1987, they concluded that abandoning the constitutional article of the American Lutheran Church that the Bible is the inerrant and infallible Word of God would result in eventual apostasy in the new organization.

In 1987 Trinity invited its other son in the ministry, Pastor Jim Minor of Calvary Lutheran Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, to come and address the congregation on the work he and others had been doing to oppose the merger. Enough people in the congregation were concerned that a vote was held in late 1987 to leave the American Lutheran Church. That vote failed to clear the two-thirds majority necessary by one vote. This threw things into turmoil. As it turned out, the main sticking point was that the congregation should not go independent, but should affiliate with a national Lutheran Church body that would uphold the principle that the Bible is the inerrant and infallible Word of God. Therefore, a special committee was formed to determine which of the conservative national Lutheran bodies Trinity should affiliate with. In the meantime Trinity had to become part of the new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on January 1st 1988.

In the spring of 1988, the committee recommended that Trinity join the newly formed American Association of Lutheran Churches. This was a natural fit since most of the congregations were former American Lutheran Church congregations. In addition, Pastor Jim Minor had become treasurer of the new association.

Two votes ninety days apart were necessary to leave the ELCA and join The AALC. Both the June and September votes cleared the two-thirds majority hurdle and Trinity joined The American Association of Lutheran Churches on October 1st, 1988.

One of the first consequences was that the Lutheran Book of Worship hymnal was abandoned and Trinity stocked its pews with cast off 1958 Service Book and Hymnals from the Lutheran Church in Levittown. Membership dropped by about a third during this difficult time of readjustment. But in 1989 people seeking a church built upon the solid foundation of the Bible began to attend Trinity. This began a pattern that persists to the present. People were willing to drive significant distances to Trinity and pass other churches on the way. And as a result an increasing percentage of the congregation came from communities outside of West Hempstead and eastern Franklin Square.

In 1989 a new electric organ was installed through a bequest to the congregation. In addition, an electronic musical keyboard was purchased to undergird contemporary praise music. In 1989, the church offices were moved to the Education Building and the fellowship hall was redecorated. The Sunday School was moved to the church undercroft and met during the sermon part of the Sunday service. At the behest of The AALC leadership, Trinity took on Mr. Jim Rosselli as a vicar for a year.

In 1990, Sunday School was suspended in favor of an after school Thursday Bible Club for children. This proved effective. However, Sunday School was resurrected in 1991 through the efforts of a new comer to the congregation, Mrs. Erica Schumacher. Later that year, the first laser copy machine was purchased — a big technological advance at the time.

In 1992, a significant number of families joined Trinity from the Church of the Victorious King when they decided to cease operations. That year, a large bequest that undergirded the congregation's financial needs for many years was gratefully received from the estate of a West Hempstead woman who was not a member of the congregation. Between 1989 and 1992, an influx of new people brought additional new ideas and the congregation increased.

Roslyn Savings Bank donated a used IBM personal computer to the church in 1993. That year the first weekly bulletin and monthly newsletter were published by personal computer — another big technological advance at the time. 1993 was a significant year with a completely new slate of leaders for the first time since the early 1980's.

In 1994 Pastor Lorthioir created and introduced a new order of service which formally incorporated contemporary songs of praise into the liturgy. The church fair was held for the last time that year because the people who ran it had aged out. In the early 1990's Trinity began renting its Education Building to a series of small churches that came and went. In 1994 the Education Building was rented to a large, popular Alcoholics Anonymous group that stayed until the building was sold in 2018.

1992 had been a peak year, but decline set in again. Concerned about the financial condition of the congregation, Pastor Lorthioir took on a second job as a driver education instructor for Bell Auto from 1995 to the end of 1996. As a result, the Thursday Bible Club was discontinued. In 1995 the organist and director of the choir relocated and without a lead soprano the choir had to disband.

In 1996, although not ordained in the Lutheran Church, The Rev. Louis "Tony" Kaiser joined Trinity and soon put his evangelism training to work. By January of 1997 the financial situation of the congregation had improved enough that Pastor Lorthioir gave up his second job with Bell Auto. Pastor Lorthioir attempted a door to door canvas of the

northern part of West Hempstead in 1997 without much success. That same year, the choir pews were removed from the sanctuary and a new musical platform for a band was erected. In 1997 a replacement musical keyboard was purchased, and the permanent overhead screen was installed in the sanctuary.

In 1998, Pastor Kaiser introduced the first Alpha evangelism course. Courses continued throughout the early 2000's and a number of people joined the congregation as a result. In January 1999, a youth ministry was begun for the first time in many years, in cooperation with the former Faith Evangelical Church of West Hempstead. It lasted until 2004.

In the spring of 1999 Pastor Lorthioir hired a group of young musicians from West Hempstead High School to lead the music ministry. The group included his son, Matthew, on guitar. A men's early morning prayer group began in July. In the second half of 1999 a number of disaffected people from the Church of the Intercessor in Malverne found Trinity and average attendance increased from 35 in May to over 50 by the end of December.

In 2000 the congregation made a significant transition to a "charismatic" style of worship while retaining the historic form of the mass. Extraordinary things were done financially. Benevolent offerings to The AALC and other Christian organizations were dramatically increased. A renovation project costing about \$75,000 was begun on both buildings that was completed in time for the 75th anniversary in May 2001. This included a renovation of the altar area of the sanctuary and installation of nighttime lighting for the front windows of the church. In the fall of 2000, Pastor Kaiser was called to salaried staff as associate pastor and minister of evangelism.

2001 began on a high note. For the 75th anniversary, a donated ornamental plum tree was planted on the property. And the 75th anniversary festivities were held in May. In June, Trinity sent two teens to The AALC's national youth convention in Estes Park, Colorado. However, in July an internal division developed in the congregation and some significant leaders abruptly left. On September 11th of 2001, New York's World Trade Center was attacked and destroyed. Trinity was blessed and didn't lose any people in the disaster. The aftermath of the attack disrupted the regional Alpha Conference that volunteers from Trinity were heavily involved in. The youth group visited and prayed over the area around "the pile" in November.

In the early 2000's the trend that had begun in 1989 continued as a greater and greater percentage of the congregation traveled to Trinity from communities outside of West Hempstead. The Orthodox Jewish population of West Hempstead significantly increased in this period of time as more synagogues were opened and grew.

The mix of people at Trinity changed. Some left. Others came. By 2010 the congregation contained people whose native languages were Norwegian, German, Spanish, Urdu (Pakistan), Malayalam (India), Ibo (Nigeria) and also those who could speak the Jamaican Patois.

In 2002 the congregation recovered from the troubles of 2001. The Alpha program was expanded and some Alpha people began to attend on Sunday mornings. At the end of the year Tony Kaiser resigned his call as Associate Pastor of the congregation.

2003 was a year of change. There were funerals of significant people and significant people moved out of the area. In that year Trinity began a series of short term mission trips. The Hoving Home in Garrison, NY, a live-in facility that rescues women from the streets, was one destination. Another destination was The Father's Heart, a church on the lower

East Side of Manhattan that had a government supported Saturday breakfast program for the poor and indigent. We went multiple times to assist in that program.

A third destination was The Mission of the Loving Shepherd in Nogales Arizona. The leader of the mission, the late Pastor Louis Escobedo, was a member of The AALC, as was the mission. Nogales, Arizona is on the Mexico - U.S. border and the mission had established a Lutheran congregation in the city of Nogales, Mexico. The first team from Trinity went in February and a second team in November of 2003. The teams worked on repairs for the mission and prayed over people on the Mexican side, where there were some divine healings. One team built a shack on the Mexican side for a family to live in.

In June of 2003 Pastor Lorthioir and his son, Matthew again attended The AALC's youth convention in Estes Park, Colorado. That year we took on Mr. Jeff Tischler as an intern. And the first floor windows of the parsonage were replaced.

2004 was a year of "downs." The youth ministry was ended. The response to Alpha was poor and only one was attempted in that year. Recent analysis of the 2000's says that church attendance across the board began to decline rapidly as the New Atheism gained strength in the wake of the September 11th attacks. General interest in Christianity also waned. Perhaps this was a reason that Alpha became difficult for us.

However, members of the congregation embarked on another short term mission trip to the Mission of the Loving Shepherd. A decision was also made to raise \$58,000.00 over three years to make major repairs to the congregation's physical plant.

2005 continued downward trends, especially in giving to the general fund. However, enough was collected in the building fund so that the church roof was replaced. Tony Kaiser rejoined the congregation and another attempt was made at Alpha.

In 2006 the congregation received the gift of a digital video projector and laptop computer. Pastor Lorthioir transferred all of the praise music lyrics onto Powerpoint so projection could be done from the computer instead of the ancient overhead projector. Mr. Max Krueger created a table for both computer and projector. The congregation also continued supporting the Mission of the Loving Shepherd's projects in India.

In 2007, new leadership was elected in The AALC, bringing several years of turmoil to an end. The AALC began pulpit and altar fellowship with a much larger conservative Lutheran body, The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. (LCMS). Part of the agreement was that our seminary students could attend their seminaries. For a number of years Pastor Ray's wife Carol had become leader and organizer of the Sunday School. We had been holding a summer Vacation Bible School program for the community and a community Easter Egg Hunt on Holy Saturday since 1985. Carol ran those events as well.

A new musician took over in 2008 as we said goodbye to the last of our 1999 youth musicians. Family and friends of Mrs. Denese Joyner gradually made their way into the congregation over the next several years. After many years of preaching extemporaneously, Pastor Lorthioir began using written text sermons again so that the text could be projected on the screen for the hearing impaired, and to keep the length of the service within bounds.

A number of repairs to the Education Building became necessary in 2009, especially stopping a leak in the flat roof. In that year a Trinity website first went live on the internet. Pastor Lorthioir began audio recording his sermons and these were posted on the website. A new musical keyboard was purchased with a generous gift to the congregation.

In 2009 the liberal Evangelical Lutheran Church in America voted in national convention to permit homosexuals committed to a long term relationship to be ordained

into its ministry and to serve as pastors in its churches. This caused a lot of turmoil and caused some people from ELCA churches to look into Trinity.

In 2010 the country was still recovering from the economic collapse of 2008 and the church ran a deficit. A Wednesday morning bible study was begun by Pastor Lorthioir. A talented layman, Ed Martyrosian began a Tuesday evening bible study. Both prospered.

In 2011 a number of significant long term Trinity people entered eternal life. Our 1989 Galanti Organ also died. Pastor Lorthioir found a computer program that could reproduce real organ sounds and attached the computer to the musical keyboard. The sanctuary sound system was also upgraded by members of the congregation. Two rooms in the Education Building were set aside and redecorated to provide a coffee house. We ended the practice of a Thanksgiving Service on either Thanksgiving Day or the night before, and instead began celebrating Thanksgiving on the Sunday immediately preceding Thanksgiving Day. Overall 2011 was a good year.

In August 2012, Pastor Lorthioir had to undergo spinal surgery and the consequent recovery. A chairlift was added to the staircase between the church undercroft and the sanctuary. Unfortunately, our evangelist, Tony Kaiser left the congregation in early October. Then, on October 29th, disaster struck as Superstorm Sandy brought down two enormous oak trees on the church property. One of them damaged the windows and roof of the Education Building, making most of the second floor unusable because of water leakage from the roof. A long process of repair was begun. Help came in the form of donations from other TAALC congregations.

A 2012 study concluded that the cost of heating both our buildings with oil had become unsustainable. Therefore, money was raised, and both the church and education building were converted to gas heat in January of 2013. In September a Christian Education program of bible reading called "The Story" was begun that lasted until June of 2014. More of the large trees were cut down, especially two very close to the parsonage. From 1999 to 2012, lawn care had been provided by professionals. In 2013, the decision was made to invest in equipment and have the work done by volunteers. Pastor Lorthioir wound up being the main volunteer. In that year David Nevin stepped forward as the master of Trinity's front sign.

The first half of 2014 was a growth year. But trouble came in the summer. Lutheran Social Services of New York (LSS) was under contract with the federal government to care for the thousands of illegal alien children that were pouring across the Mexican border because the Obama administration had chosen to ignore U.S. immigration law. Therefore, LSS was seeking to refurbish underutilized Lutheran Sunday School buildings like Trinity's for the housing and care of these children. Therefore, the director of Lutheran Social Services of New York attended a service in July when Pastor Lorthioir was on vacation. Ignoring all proper protocol, the director publicly made a direct offer to the congregation at the end of the service. This caused quite a stir. And in the ensuing weeks the congregation became divided over the issue on political grounds. Because the congregation hesitated, the offer by LSS was withdrawn before a vote could be taken on the matter. But the seeds of a devilish controversy had been sown. For, at that point in U.S. history, any political discussion of illegal immigration had been poisoned at the national level by the party in power and the media who had framed opposition to the administration's policy as — pure racism of the most virulent form! Therefore, charges of racism began to circulate in the

congregation, something that had never happened before. This was the source of the controversy that caused the congregation to fall apart over the next four years.

By 2015, it had become clear that the Education Building was an albatross around the congregation's financial neck because of the continuing roof problems. At the end of 2015 a vote was taken to lease the building to a Jewish Daycare center. It failed to pass a two thirds majority by one vote. Turmoil resulted.

In 2016 it was found that renting the building would eliminate the property tax exemption on the building. Therefore, an outright sale was contemplated. But opposition arose on religious grounds. This only fueled the "racism" problem simmering below the surface. In the spring of 2016, Pastor Lorthioir attempted to address the racism problem on a biblical basis through a carefully constructed email. However, the attempt only escalated the problem. It didn't help that 2016 was a presidential election year where illegal immigration was a bitterly contested issue. Therefore, by the end of 2016, about half the congregation had left, including our musician. Trinity then hired Mr. Oswaldo Machado, a West Hempstead native and student at Adelphi University, as Trinity's musician in the fall of 2016. In December, he organized the first of several classical music concerts at Trinity that were quite successful.

The Education Building was put up for sale in 2016. By divine intervention a contract to sell the building to a group of Roman Catholics of Indian background was signed in March 2017. However, it took 18 months for that group to raise the necessary funds. Despairing of the long wait, people continued to leave the congregation.

Pastor Lorthioir and his wife, Carol, turned 65 in 2014 and went on Medicare. This relieved the congregation of the health insurance burden. Then when the congregation began to fail, Pastor Lorthioir went on half salary for 2017 and 2018. He had wanted to wait until age 70 in 2019 to take Social Security, but circumstances forced him to take it in 2018 at age 69. From that point forward, he took no salary from the congregation and lived on retirement income.

In early 2018 Pastor Lorthioir was in recovery from heart surgery. After Easter, a final group of people left the congregation — some for the Church of the Intercessor. The church council was down to three people plus the pastor. Sale of the Education Building closed in September of 2018. Flush with the funds from the sale, plans were made to remodel the church undercroft by carving out classroom space and remodeling the offices and kitchen area. This was done over the winter of 2018-19. In addition, both the sanctuary and undercroft were air conditioned for the first time. An endowment fund was established to grow the remaining funds so that Trinity would have funds to redevelop as a mission congregation.

In 2019, new people gradually began to find Trinity. In 2019 we contracted with a Lutheran organization called GELnet to supply evangelistic services. Plans were also made to call Lutheran Pastor Edwin Mendivelso of Columbia to begin an hispanic ministry at Trinity. The process of getting a religious visa for him lasted until March of 2020.

The advent of the Covid-19 crisis in March of 2020 upset many things. It delayed Pastor Mendivelso's arrival until September 2021. Churches were ordered to shut down. However, after much prayer and careful consideration, Pastor Lorthioir decided to keep Trinity open since only about 15 people were worshipping on Sundays. Unrelated to Covid, Mr. Machado resigned as music minister just before everything was shut down. Therefore, Pastor Lorthioir became the musician for the next six years.

With help from GELnet, new technologies were put in place in 2020 to broadcast a bible study on Zoom. And the service was broadcast for the first time on YouTube. In the spring of 2020, the Rev. Steve Maloney, newly released by Church of the Intercessor, began to worship at Trinity. In the fall he was called as an Assistant to the Pastor in charge of social media and evangelism.

In 2021, people displaced from their churches because of Covid began to find Trinity. A number of these were from the Church of the Intercessor. Pastor Mendivelso arrived in September and immediately went to work. By the end of the year he had started an hispanic service on Sunday afternoons that was growing.

On February 28th, 2022, the congregation installed Pastor Mendivelso as Assistant Pastor. For reasons still unknown, he immediately sought to resign and return to his native Columbia. The growing hispanic ministry could not be sustained without him and was ended. However, people continued to find Trinity throughout the year.

In 2023 the congregation continued to grow. But there was some attrition through funerals and people moving south. A candidate to replace Pastor Lorthioir was interviewed but took a call elsewhere. In the weeks after the start of the October 7th Israel-Hamas war, a message on Trinity's front sign made the rounds of social media. Thanks for it poured in from Jewish people all over the country. Unfortunately, Steve Maloney resigned in the fall.

People came and went in 2024. In the summer, Carol Lorthioir took ill with a series of medical crises that lasted until January of 2025. A decision was made to refurbish the first floor of the parsonage. The Lorthioir's moved their furniture into a storage pod just after Halloween 2024 and work commenced. A new floor was laid down. A new kitchen was installed. And the entire first floor was repainted for the first time since the 1990's.

In June 2025, the congregation gave a celebration for Pastor Lorthioir in honor of the 40th anniversary of his installation as pastor of Trinity. On September 7th, 2025, Pastor Lorthioir celebrated the 50th anniversary of his ordination. He and Carol invited friends, family, Trinity alumni and the Presiding Pastor of The AALC, Dr. Cary Larson, to celebrate with them at a special service and barbecue.

Here in 2026, Mr. Oswaldo Machado has again become Trinity's musician. We are in Trinity's 100th anniversary year. What began as a Lutheran ministry for ethnic Norwegians is quite different today. At this point, the demographics of West Hempstead mean that there are fewer and fewer Christians that we can serve locally. Trinity must have the biblical and spiritual vitality necessary to cause people to pass other churches as they commute here from other communities. Lord willing, this will continue to be the case. For there is evidence that the emptiness of the present culture is causing the youngest people to investigate traditional, historic Christianity.

I close with these words from this morning's first lesson. Hosea 6:3, "Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth." (ESV) Amen.