

History of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Joseph McCoy came to Abilene in 1868. He built the Drover's Cottage and the stock yards. The business section of Abilene was south of the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. The city itself was organized in 1869. The Chisholm Trail which started in Texas, and came through Oklahoma, ended in Abilene where the Texas Longhorns could be loaded onto railroad cars and shipped to the "east." It was in 1870 that Tom Smith as marshal of Abilene brought law and order to this frontier town.

It was also in the year 1870 that a group of Lutheran citizens felt the need to establish a place of worship and have the assistance of a regular pastor. On Saturday, October 22, 1870 at 2:00pm thirteen men and women met in the Baptist Church, a small frame building on South Mulberry, and organized the "First English Lutheran Church of Abilene."

Mrs. W. E. Crebs, J. E. Tressler, M.D., Mr. & Mrs. W. H. Eicholtz, J. M. Shepherd, Mr. & Mrs. John Johntz, Mr. & Mrs. C. H. Lebold, Mr. & Mrs. W. L. Nixon, M. Senn, and Mr. G. Strome, were the charter members. They called W. E. Crebs as their first pastor. He served until August 1, 1871. The first church council was composed of J. M. Shepherd and J. Johntz, elders; C. H. Lebold and J. E. Tressler, deacons; and W. H. Eicholtz, W. L. Nixon and M. Senn, trustees.

At the first congregational meeting Mr. J. Augustine was chosen president and Mr. C. H. Lebold, secretary. Also at this first congregational meeting a building committee was appointed to proceed immediately to erect a parsonage and to make an effort to secure the funds for the erection of a church.

For the first year and a half, church services were held in the Baptist Church. The Metropolitan Hall (a building later destroyed by fire) was leased from C. H. Lebold at \$100.00 per year. Mr. Lebold furnished the lights and the fuel. Here the congregation worshiped until they entered the new church building.

Lots were donated for both a church building and a parsonage by C. H. Lebold and J. Augustine in the fall of 1875. Lots 32, 34, and 36, Cedar Street in Augustine and Lebold's sub division of Thompson and McCoy's addition to the city of Abilene, KS, and also lot 36 North Fourth Street, Thompson and McCoy's addition for a parsonage site.

The Reverend W. E. Crebs was followed by Rev. S. P. Harrington in August, 1871. He served the church for nearly five years. From September 1876 to April 1877, Rev. W. H. Lilly was pastor. Rev. A. J. Kissell arrived in September 1877. It was at this time the congregation began to grow and become permanently established. Self-support was one of his first positive moves. Next plans were adopted for the erection of a church building. The plans called for a brick building, 40 by 60 feet. The building was dedicated August 18, 1878. Rev. Joshua Crouse, D.D. preached the sermon assisted by Lutheran brethren from the surrounding area. The building cost with furnishings was \$5,500. The loan to build the church was paid off in 1883. However, in order to do this the church parsonage was sold.

The church was placed on the roll of the Kansas Synod in the fall of 1871. The first delegate from this church was J. M. Shepherd. Who attended the fifth annual convention of the Kansas Synod at Monrovia, KS in September, 1872.

Beginning in about 1878 the church became known as "Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church." This became the legal name February 18, 1879 when the church was incorporated under the laws of the state of Kansas for a period of 99 years.

Trinity's pastors following Rev. A. J. Kissell were: Rev. G. A. Bowers, D.D., October 1882 to October 1886; Rev. E. B. Killinger, (supply) October 1886 to October 1887; Rev. F. M. Porch, May 1887 to October 1890; Rev. W. L. Seabrook, December 1890 to June 1894; Rev. H. C. Haithcox, D. D. , November 1894 to May, 1899. In October 1900, Rev. Fuller Bergstresser, D. D. arrived, staying until October 1909.

Succeeding pastors were Rev. W. H. Schrock, 1910-1914; Horace F. Martin, PhD. D.D., 1914-1916; Rev. W. D. Ziegler, 1916-1919; C. M. Maggart, D.D., 1919-1922; R. J. Wolf, D.D., 1922-1925; Fuller Bergstresser, D.D., 1926- 1961; Willard W. Alexander D. D., 1961-1974; Rev. Larry Siebrands, 1974-1984; Rev. Peter A. Balaban, 1984-1991; Rev. Franklyn Pekarek, 1991 to 1997; Rev. Ray Mai, interim pastor, 1997-1998; Rev. Gerald Weeks 1998-2001; Rev. Ray Mai, interim pastor, 2001-2003; Rev. Mark G. Klawonn 2003-2006; Rev. Peter Rupprecht, interim pastor, 2006 to 2008; Rev. Stephen Haverlah 2008 to present.

Throughout its long history, Trinity has had the support of auxiliary organizations which have contributed much in the way of financial support to the church. The Sunday School came first, 1878 followed by the Women ' s Home and Foreign Missionary Society, 1880, the Lutheran Aid Society (Ladies' Aid Society), 1882, Philadoras, 1910 and TFW, 1930's.

Land was donated to the church by G. C. Sterl in 1905 and the south addition was dedicated in 1907.

The Lutheran Aid Society purchased a parsonage at 514 N. W. 3rd Street in 1897. It was given to the church by the society. The original parsonage at 514 N. W. 3rd Street was remodeled in 1927.

Dr. Alexander was pastor at Trinity in 1962 when a tornado came through Abilene and ripped the steeple off the church. The total damage to the church was \$25,000. This money was put into repairs, painting and refurbishing of the interior and into changing the church tower .

May 20, 1973 marked the dedication of the new Education Building. Dr. Harvey L. Printz, President of Central States Synod, LCA assisted in the dedication.

The new church railings and "porches" were added in 1982. New oak doors, reproductions of the old doors, were installed in 1993.

Music has always been an integral part of Trinity's worship. The church has been fortunate in having dedicated musicians willing to share their talents. The most recent addition has been a bell choir which performs on special occasions.

On December 28, 1900, a dedicatory recital was held for the Moiler Pipe Organ which was given to the church by the Lutheran Aid Society at a cost of \$1,325. It was build by M. P. Moiler , Hagerstown, MD. It was 16 feet high, 12 feet 6 inches wide and 6 feet deep. It had a water motor which was operated by pressure from the city water works.

In 1932 when the present Reuter Pipe organ was given to the church, it was presented by an unnamed donor. Mrs. E. H. (Lois) Fomey, the donor wanted it to be kept a secret. She wrote to Dr. Bergstresser, "If people find that a poor woman like me has given away even part of her inheritance at a time when one cannot say what my investments will turn out to be, I am sure that my sanity will be questioned even more than it has been in the past." The organ, electro-pneumatic in operation has twenty stops, a set of twelve couplers, organ chimes, and a detached console. It is operated by a two horse-power motor. An organ room and pastor's study were added at this time.

In July 2003 repairs and restoration began on the stained glass windows in the sanctuary. Also that same summer work began on the trim and porches.

Trinity has had four sons of the church serve in the ministry: S. M. Leshner, E. E. Stauffer, H. F. Martin, and W. W. Klover. Jeanette Owen Ecklund, daughter of Mrs. Ella Romberger and Jean Pepper Johnson, daughter of Mrs. Helen Pepper, are daughters of the church who committed themselves to church service.

Church membership has grown through the years. Membership in 1870-13; 1877-32; 1887-171; 1907-200; 1938-250; 1968,-300; 1975-393; 1985-464; 1995-366.

Quoting from Dr. Fuller Bergstresser from the 70th and 75th Anniversary bulletins: "In this church, organized October 22, 1870, are clustered 'one hundred twenty-five years' of precious memories, of faithful ones who in pulpit, council, school, societies and pew honored the Master and made this church a power for good in their day and generation. Time is but a name. ..This church is only you and me...The failures successes, births, deaths are only you and me...Its past, present, and future are only you and me...God keep us faithful as were those of long ago. "

Beginning in July 2005 talks began about forming a new Geographical Parish between Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church and Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church in Junction City. The newly formed Parish would mean sharing a Pastor's services. A congregational vote was taken on Sunday May 7, 2006 and both congregations unanimously approved the formation of the Prairie Winds Evangelical Lutheran Parish.