

History of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

Our country, the United States of America, having gained its independence in 1783, was beginning to expand westward in the 1790s. The unsettled lands beyond the Appalachian Mountains and across the Ohio River served as a magnet to hardy pioneers who were seeking land and new opportunities. These early settlers would have to make a long, hard journey on poor roads through the mountains, experiencing few comforts and many hardships. These pioneers were anxious to establish homes for themselves and for their children. Concerned about the spiritual welfare of those on the frontier, circuit-riders often traveled to these sparsely settled areas to preach the Gospel. One such man was Johannes Stauch (John Stough), who came into the area of eastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania, first as a candidate for the ministry (an elder) and later as an ordained minister. According to his personal diaries, he visited the Stark County area regularly, both for preaching and for organizing the German speaking settlers into congregations.

Stauch began his early ministry in the area as early as 1802, but it was not until 1806 that he organized what is now Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in the cabin of Jacob Lautzenheiser. The Lautzenheiser cabin is said to have been the third built in Plain Township, one of the first townships created when Stark County was organized in 1809. The original congregation was of the Lutheran and Reformed faiths and consisted mainly of farming people.

One of the earliest settlers was Henry Warstler who purchased from the government on letters of patent signed by Pres. Thomas Jefferson, the land which was to be his farm and the site of the congregation which was known as "Henry's" or "Warstler" church. Henry set aside through his inheritance to his sons in 1811 a portion of his property for use as a church site and a cemetery. The church cemetery was officially deeded to the congregation by Henry's heirs in 1814. In 1808 the first burial took place on the Warstler property, the child of Peter Swinehart. In the same year Elizabeth Warstler was buried there.

The congregation was officially organized in 1814. The Constitution governing the two denominations was finished and signed by 32 male members July 24, 1814. Among these signers were such names as the Bairs, Essigs, Smiths, Beards, Hoovers, Troxels, Werschelers, Ringers, Holtzs, Snyders, Wertenbergers, Lautzenheisers, Linds, Spanglers, and others. Just a few direct descendants of these signers worship in Holy Trinity today.

Regular worship services were begun and by 1814 a one room log church was built, 20 x 30 feet by the members and located on the portion of the land which is in the southwest corner of the cemetery on the east side of Middlebranch Road. Worship services were conducted alternately by Rev. Anthony Weyer, Lutheran pastor who was the first to be called to the congregation, and Rev. Benjamin Faust, German Reformed.

Rev. Weyer served the church until his death in 1829 and is buried with his wife in Warstler Cemetery.

On December 18, 1833, Valentine Spielman and his wife gave 54/100 of an acre to the church which has become the parking lot south of 55th Street.

German was used in the preaching of the Word in the early history of this congregation. In 1835 the language question arose and an election was held to determine whether or not the English might be used by the Lutherans and Reformed pastors in preaching without hindering the German preaching. The vote favored the use of English. The first communion recorded in English was in 1847 and by 1851 all records were in English.

The congregation grew quickly and by 1840 a second church building was erected on the current site, replacing the log church. The church was of frame construction in the Greek-Revival style, measuring some 35 by 45 feet with a balcony running around the interior of the east, south, and west sides with an elevated pulpit on the north wall. The organ and choir were located in the balcony on the south side. It was not until 1867 that the steeple was added to the church.

The last record of a communion service by the Reformed members at the Warstler Church was in 1857, at which time only 22 communed. This concluded the history of the Reformed portion of this congregation.

The first Sunday School was held in Plain Center School around 1879 for one year. The following year it was held at the Franklin Hill School (located at the corner of Harmont and 55th St. N.E.), after which the Sunday School was organized and held in the church. The reason for this was that some of the older people in that day were not certain that a Sunday School should be in connection with the Church and its services.

From beginning of organization the congregation owned and controlled the cemetery. In 1888 the congregation gave control of the graveyard to the newly organized Henry Cemetery Association.

In 1899 the second church building was replaced with the current structure, costing \$4000. It was during a worship service in the summer of 1911 that a tornado passed through the area and moved the west end of the church of the foundation about 8 inches. The effects of this storm upon this building are still in evidence during windstorms.

The names Henry's Church and later Warstler Church continued down the years until 1917 when the congregation chose Holy Trinity Lutheran Church as its namesake.

Around 1920 St. Jacob's and Holy Trinity constituted one parish, sharing a pastor. During 1923 a parsonage was built by joint action of the two congregations. An

annex, 30 x 38 feet was built adjoining the church and dedicated October 11, 1936. The Tschantz Pipe Organ was purchased and dedicated December 1, 1940.

In 1950 the church basement was excavated and made more adaptable for use by Sunday School classes. A room was provided for choir robes and Sunday School secretary, a P.A. system installed, a kitchen in the west end, lavatories, and a new heating system.

In 1957 the congregation purchased additional land to the north and west of the present site, making our total property site 3.7 acres. In addition, the congregation voted in separation from the combined parish with St. Jacob's and purchased their share of the parsonage.

In 1960 the nave was completely redecorated and two services of worship were inaugurated, which continued until 1965. In 1965 a new parsonage on Trinity Avenue was built and the old parsonage was converted to classrooms.

During the 1970s the church experienced a continual growth which led to a major building expansion project completed in 1980 which resulted in an expansion of our sanctuary, increased education and music facilities, office space and a fellowship room - Luther Hall - along with a renovated kitchen and lavatories.

During the 1980's as the congregation grew an associate pastor was added to the staff in 1987. In the 1990s as the needs of the congregation and the ministry of the church expanded in various outreaches, the implementation of another building project was embarked upon resulting in our current facility completed in 2001 with increased Sunday School classrooms, improved office facilities, a gathering reception area, and a multi-purpose fellowship hall.

In our 211 years, 21 pastors that have faithfully served Holy Trinity in its ministry along with several interims who assisted at various times.

In recent years, two congregations have chosen to merge with Holy Trinity. The merger of Martin Luther Lutheran church was completed May 31, 2009 and the merger of Bethel Lutheran church was completed December 31, 2015. The addition of these faithful Christians have greatly strengthened and complimented our congregation and have greatly enabled Holy Trinity to increase its ministry to others.

May we be committed to the legacy of our forbearers conceived more than two centuries ago and to our mission to:

Heal - Through Word and Sacrament
Teach - Through Word and Deed
Love – Through being Sent to Serve in
Christ Jesus.

October 4, 2017