

Trinity Lutheran Church History Sharing Event Minutes

11 January 2025

As part of Trinity’s Ministry Transition Team’s activities, a Congregational History Sharing Event was held in Jeppson Hall on Saturday, January 11, 2025. Forty-two Trinity members were asked to sit at tables representing the decade that they joined or became active at Trinity. The decades spanned from 1950-2020. Due to the number of participants, the 1950s and 1960s were combined and the 2010 decade was further divided into 2010-2014 and 2015-2019. After an opening prayer by Pastor Mark and a potluck breakfast, the table groups were assigned large Post-it sheets and were asked to record major world, religious, community, and congregational events of their respective decade and to also indicate the major focus/foci of the Trinity congregation during the decade. These Post-It sheets were then placed on the wall and a spokesperson from each group verbally summarized the key points. Synopses of each decade are presented in the tables below:

1950-1960s:

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| <p>World:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sputnik I • Korean War • Bomb/Air Raid Shelters and drills • Television • Political Assassinations (JFK, MLK, Jr., RFK) • Vietnam • Civil Rights Era | <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family-centered homes (3-Deckers) and neighborhoods |
| <p>Religion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worcester Ecumenical Council • Catholicism Dominant Christian Denomination • Area Lutheran Church Gatherings at Worcester Memorial Auditorium | <p>Congregation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 worship services on Sundays • Once monthly communion and communion cards • Large Confirmation classes • Intergenerational Activities • Potluck Dinners • Scouts • Dorcas Society & Circles • Men’s Club • Youth Activities 7 days/week • Chapel & Educational Wing Built • New Organ Installed • Pastors Olander & Bergstrom • Pastoral Interns • Camp Calumet started (replaced Lutherwood Camp at Webster Lake) |
| <p>Main Focus/Foci: Family, Church, Neighborhood</p> | |

1970s:

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| <p>World:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vietnam • Political and Social Unrest • Oil Crisis/Gas Lines • Riots • The Draft • Kent State Protest/Shootings • Roe v. Wade • Women's Rights • Segregation/Bussing • Earth Day/EPA formed | <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-war protests • Worcester Center Galleria opens and many downtown businesses close • Segregation by culture, religion, ethnicity • Good music scene • "Bad" fashion/hair • Blue Laws |
| <p>Religion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catholicism dominant • Interdenominational marriages rare • 90% of Americans identified as Christian • Evangelical movement and rise of televangelists • | <p>Congregation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived as a "safe space" • Lots of members (especially Swedish) • 3 worship services with Standing Room Only on holidays • 3 pastors • Interns • 2 parsonages and intern apartment • Pr. Bergstrom's daughter killed in car accident • Strong youth group, basketball leagues, cheerleaders • Strong choirs and music • Lots of committees • Archives important |
| <p>Main Focus/Foci: Church family, fellowship, "Trinity-centric", very strong active congregation</p> | |

1980s:

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| <p>World:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HIV-AIDS • Reaganomics • Reagan Assassination Attempt • Fall of Berlin Wall | <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HIV-AIDS • Worcester = "Paris of the 80" • Growth of UMass Med/Research • Bulger runs Mass Legislature • Galleria Mall/Outlet Mall |
| <p>Religion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ELCA founded • New England Synod Office stays in Worcester (LCA office previously at Trinity until Synod House established) • Volunteers from Trinity helped at Synod events | <p>Congregation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long pastorate (Pr. Kennedy) and multiple associate pastors • Some conflict associated with the Pastor also being President of the Congregation • Big and popular music programs (Steve Long) |
| <p>Main Focus/Foci: Authoritarian leadership with little input from laity</p> | |

1990s:

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| <p>World:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hubble Telescope • Dissolution of USSR • Persian Gulf War • Clinton Presidency • Dolly the Sheep (cloning) • Recession | <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merger of UMass & Memorial Hospitals • Continued growth of UMass Med/Research • Commuter rail service to Boston expands (Worcester’s “bedroom community” status increases) • Kids sports scheduled on weekends |
| <p>Religion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church attendance decreases (competition with Kids sports events) | <p>Congregation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long Interim Pastorate (Pr. Lindstrom) • Weekly communion initiated • Co-Pastorate (Prs. Hoyer and Nachtigal) initiated • Large Youth Group and Sunday School • Stephanie Pope led Youth • Coop Pre-school formed • Huge music program • Liturgy became “high church” • Two Sunday services • Treasurer arrested for embezzlement from his town |
| <p>Main Focus/Foci: Change from Lead Pastorate to Co-Pastorate Model</p> | |

2000s:

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| <p>World:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Y2K (New Millennium) • Bush/Gore (hanging ballot chads) • 9-11 • Iraq War/Weapons of Mass Destruction • Gay marriage legalized in MA • First iPhone • Banking Crisis/Recession • Increase in Unemployment • Obama Election • Increase in hate speech | <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased diversity of residents • Increased refugee resettlement • De-industrializing (Blue Collar to White Collar) • Worcester Commons Outlet (continued deterioration of downtown business district) • Continued expansion of UMass Med/MA College of Pharmacy • Increase in homelessness • St. Vincent’s Hospital moved downtown |
| <p>Religion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death of Pope John Paul II • Election of Pope Benedict • Rise of Evangelicals/Moral Majority • 2009 ELCA Vote to Allow Gay Clergy • Some Congregations leave ELCA • Declining Attendance Mainline Christian Churches | <p>Congregation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active Adult Forum, Youth Group, Sunday School • Pr. Hoyer left; Pr. Susan continued • IHN hosted homeless families twice yearly at Trinity • Abby left and Donald arrived as Director of Music • ELW introduced |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TV Ministry started (Date?) • Stephanie Pope departed • TLC Preschool and Elm Park Ministry started • Failed Call Vote (Pastor Beckman) • Interim pastors (Lindstrom, Flanders, and Wilburn) • Pr. John called • Deaths of elderly members • Increased focus on LGBTQ+ rights/ministry (RIC conversations begin) • Wednesday Night Dinners/Ministries start |
| <p>Main Focus/Foci: Conflict over failed call vote/process/Synod's role, Welcoming/Outreach</p> | |

2010-2014:

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| <p>World:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recession • Housing Market • Obama Presidency Continues • Terrorism • Arab Spring • Crimea Invasion • Global Warming • Same Sex Marriage | <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boston Marathon Bombings • Higgins Armory Closes • Worcester Pride Parade Begins • Sunday Morning Kid's Sports Continue • Hanover Theater Re-opens |
| <p>Religion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many Retiring Pastors • Less Church Attendance • Less Important in US/Western Europe • Evangelical Ministries Rise | <p>Congregation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pr. John departed • Pr. Susan continued to serve • Pr. Nathan arrived • Prs. Matt and Ted departed • Cantor John departed • Cantor Mark arrived • Church spending increased • Decline in commitment • Wednesday Night ministries continued • Sunday School and Vacation Bible School • Large Confirmation Classes • Youth Mission Trips • TV Ministry Initiated • Lutheran Interparish Youth (LIPY) • Elm Park Ministries Day Camp • LGBTQ+ ministry (other churches) |
| <p>Main Focus/Foci: Community access, LGBTQ+ ministry, Interfaith Youth Activity</p> | |

2015-2019:

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| <p>World:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obama presidency ends • Clinton/Trump Election • Trump presidency • Distrust of news • Social media/distrust • Afghanistan War • Same sex marriage nationally • Political polarization • Black Lives Matter • Heatwaves • Border Issues | <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth in Healthcare • Downtown Renaissance • More multicultural • Fewer refugees during Trump administration • Minority school populations • Infrastructure |
| <p>Religion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More churches closing • Welcoming people • Pope Francis elected • All Creation Sings released • Bishop Eaton, Presiding Bishop, ELCA • Expansion of Mega Churches • “Green” Church | <p>Congregation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pr. Susan departed • Jena Hill arrived (Youth & Family Ministry) • Change in Leadership Style • Renovation of Nave • Office & custodial staff turnover • Stability of worship style • TEC School opened/expanded • TLC Preschool thrived • Worcester Pride/RIC activities • Elm Park Day Camp continues • Large US and “Christian” Flag removed from Nave |
| <p>Main Focus/Foci: Large-scale staffing changes, distrust of professional staff, challenges with adapting to changes</p> | |

2020-2025:

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| <p>World:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 and vaccine • Wars (Ukraine, Israel/Gaza, Syria, Sudan, Yemen) • Climate disasters • AI rising • Income inequality • Targeted gene therapy | <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 • Polar Park opens • Biotech increases • Urban development • Police department abuse of power • Increased immigration • Refugee resettlement • Habitat for Humanity homes |
| <p>Religion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decline in church membership and participation • More diversity of religion • Rise of Christian Nationalism | <p>Congregation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pr. Nathan elected Bishop and departs • Lack of organization • Ad hoc evangelism to small groups |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian Zionism • Christian Disunity • LGBTQ+ • Rise of Spiritualism and Individualism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jena leaves • LGBTQ+ affirming • Ability to converse about difficult issues? • Outreach – where are we? • Roof repairs • Change and increase in church tenants • Change in financial status • Aging population • New Pastoral search process |
| <p>Main Focus/Foci: Reacting and responding to rapid change distracts from congregational mission</p> | |

Participants were asked to place a sticker next to the Main Focus/Foci that they believed was most prevalent/important. The highest 5 number of votes were received for:

- Expanded Community Access
- Adapting to Change
- LGBTQ+ Ministries
- Community Outreach
- Family & Neighborhood

The table groups were also asked to reflect on lessons learned, future directions for Trinity, etc (note: these are representative of the individual comments made and not necessarily the consensus of all in the group).

These included:

- Do not change!
- Music/liturgy is our niche.
- Outreach is key to growing the congregation.
- Importance of strong pastoral, staff, and lay leadership.
- Communication/consensus-building is important.
- Welcoming and Inclusive ministries are important.
- Improving relationship with New England Synod is important during Call Process and at other times.

Participants identified patterns and recurring themes to these discussions:

- Importance of strong and high-quality music/worship ministry
- Decline in membership (although acknowledged that this is not unique to Trinity)
- Strong history of preaching (but some thought too academic or theologically dense)
- Outreach to youth, under-resourced, and refugees important
- Money/financial tensions
- Gradual increase in Welcoming ministries

We were also asked what we should continue and what we should let go:

Continue:

- High church liturgy
- Quality music
- Welcoming LGBTQ+ in a strong way
- Dedicated volunteers
- Growing young people and youth

Let Go:

- Inward focus
- Emphasis on Swedish/Germanic heritage
- Current and past prejudices and biases (i.e. covert racism)

Finally, participants were asked to indicate words and/or phrases that best characterize Trinity's congregation and to vote for which of these resonated the most (each participant had 2 votes). These included (vote totals in parentheses):

- Importance of worship and music (19)
- Outreach (14)
- Have to Adapt (13)
- Following Jesus (8)
- Welcoming (8)
- Traditional (4)
- Legacy and continuity (2)
- Central location
- Changing (3)

The event ended with a Closing Prayer from Pr. Mark.

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