

History of Trinity United Church of Christ

(this document has no date on it but is thought to have been written near the date of the tenth anniversary of the church— late 1962- early 1963)

The First Decade

The story of the first decade of Trinity Church is indeed an inspiring one. It appears that Heaven's blessing attended the founding of this new church. Two notable factors were outstanding in the beginning. The first, that ***Dr. and Mrs. Charles Freeman***, just retired from a long pastorate in Doylestown, Pennsylvania and now spending the winter of 1952-53 in St. Petersburg, Florida, accepted the challenge of the Board of National Missions of the Evangelical and Reformed Church to initiate the undertaking of starting a new church on Florida's west coast here in St. Petersburg. The other factor was the Churchman's Brotherhood's decision to make the new church in St. Petersburg their financial project for the year 1952 to 1953.

This not only resulted on a contribution of \$17,000 but also gave timely publicity in the church at large to this new enterprise in Florida, and particularly in St. Petersburg where so many members from the North had made their new homes and therefore were most responsive to the idea of an Evangelical and Reformed Church in the community. Many who come here for the winter months were glad to help and to enjoy the services of a church of their own denomination. These and many other factors and interests, as we shall see, made for an auspicious beginning. Limitation of space forbids recording the story in detail. In the following pages, we shall try to sketch the phenomenal progress that was made in the short time of ten years, when a membership of zero has risen to more than 750 with property and building investment of \$350,000.00

During the first five months from November 1952 to May 1953, Dr. and Mrs. Freeman were in charge. They put their experience, their time, and their energy to work, backed by great zeal and enthusiasm as well as faith, hope and love. Things began to happen. On November 15, 1952, the Board of National Missions purchased a section of

Shelton's Grove on 49th Street North in a rapidly growing area of some of the highest ground in the City of St. Petersburg.

On **Sunday, December 21, 1952**, the first worship service was held. Eighty people had responded to Dr. and Mrs. Freeman's urgent invitation. It was double the number they had dared to expect. It was a Christmas worship service and a most promising beginning. Room had been secured in the nearby Mt. Vernon Public School. Services were continued each week thereafter. A weekly order of services was printed, including the hymns, because no hymn books were available yet. The weekly bulletin also included valuable notices and reports of interest, from which we have gleaned valuable items for this sketch. By January 18, 1953, sixty new hymnals were dedicated. They were the gift of the Brotherhood of Indian Creek E. and R. Church. On January 25, the choir is mentioned for the first time with Ms. Elsie Keller as pianist.

Additional hymn books were soon needed and were supplied by generous donors in the early group. Special music was also supplied by singers among them. The first Communion Service was a gift of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Maschke. A stream of gifts from local and out of state donors continued to meet promptly any need that became apparent as attendance grew and the work expanded.

Outstanding among these were gifts from the Women's Guild Thankoffering Fund and from Good Shepherd Church, Boyertown, Pa. By March 1, the attendance of the Sunday service was 145. There appears a goal of 50 new members, and \$1,000 in the building fund.

February 8 was a special day when Dr. Ralph S. Weiler, Secretary of the National Missions Board was present to bring the message. The Wednesday previous a dinner meeting had been held in the Pennsylvania Hotel with Dr. Weiler and Rev. Robert B. Frey of Sandusky, Ohio, who had become a prospective candidate for regular pastor for the fast growing congregation. March 22 was an outstanding day when Dr. Kenneth Kohler, Executive Secretary of the Churchman's Brotherhood, was here to fill the pulpit

and to present the charter to the newly organized chapter of Trinity's Brotherhood. Much other progress was in evidence through the untiring and efficient leadership of Dr. and Mrs. Freeman and the loyal and eager response of the merchants.

But now a new chapter was beginning. Rev. Frey accepted the challenge of the Board of National Missions to become the regular pastor. Looking forward to his coming after Easter, a house was rented for him and his family on nearby 20th Avenue N. This house could at once be used for weekday meetings. The congregation had been handicapped in having the school cafetorium only for Sunday services.

Plans were now also underway to **build a new parsonage as the first building project** on the church property. Ground was broken on July 12 and a dedication ceremony was held on Sunday, October 25. This same date marked the ground breaking ceremony for the new building that was to serve as the house of worship for the next five years, as well as to serve for all other purposes as a general parish hall. In gratitude to the Churchman's Brotherhood for their gifts which covered two thirds of the cost, this new building was named "**Brotherhood Hall.**" This dedication took place on **February 7, 1954.** Dr. Aaron Tosh, president of our Southern Synod, was present to preach the sermon.



One of the first services held in Brotherhood Hall

The use of this building opened up new facilities for the many-sided activities of a modern congregation. So far, the Sunday School program had been limited to nursery

classes, started by Mrs. Freeman very early and held in the parsonage, both the rented one and the new one. Now a full Sunday School program for all age groups could be started. February 14 was the first session, see report on the Sunday School. Now the auxiliary organizations could be organized. The men having already effected their organization, it was now the Women's Guild that became a reality. They organized the guild with three circles, for monthly group meetings. See elsewhere in this booklet the story of their organization and work, as also the youth division's beginning and growth.

The continued growth of the congregation was such that in a few months additional room had to be found for the children and teenagers. So on Sunday, July 11, 1954, a ground breaking service was held for two additional buildings. The one is bearing the plaque-

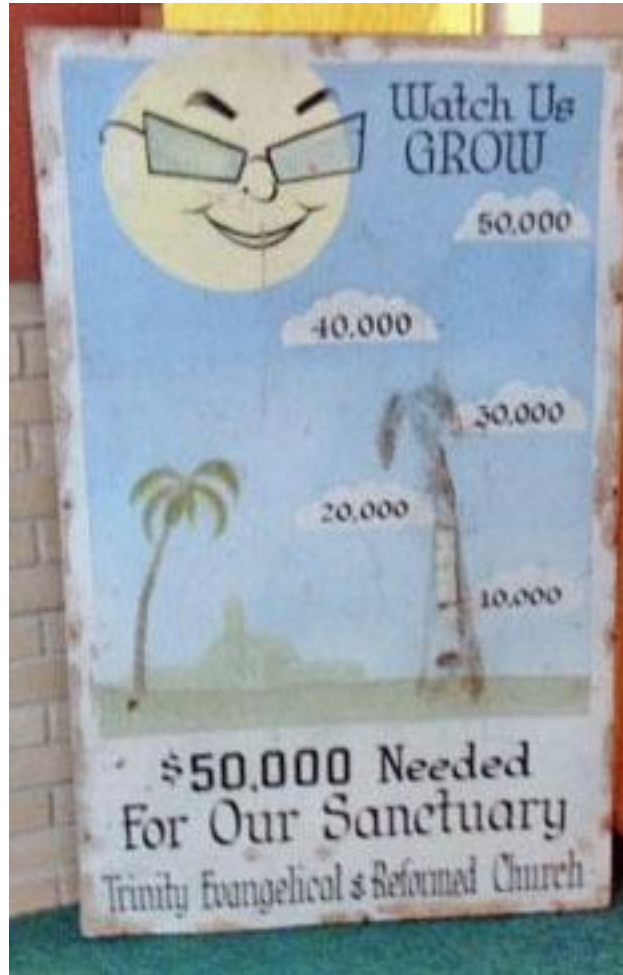
"to the glory of God and in honor of The Rev. Charles F. Freeman, D.D., who in 1952 organized this congregation these Educational Buildings are erected 1955."

There was also the pressing need for more off-street parking space. First there was the purchase of two houses adjoining the parish house to the west. They were purchased on August 15, 1954. Then on March 1, 1957, seven more lots north of 12th Avenue were bought for additional parking space, so that the congregation now had space for parking 200 cars off the street.

There was constant need of additional equipment for all the activities including literature, piano, tables, chairs, and kitchen equipment. To enhance the enjoyment of the worship service, a new Hammond organ was ordered on August 15, 1954. All this enlarging and expanding to meet the growing needs is evidence that the people had a mind not only to work, but also to give and sacrifice. The spirit of the congregation was magnificent, the assistance of outside friends was also a great help and should never be forgotten.

Now we come to the greatest of all challenges; namely the securing of a sanctuary adequate for the constantly growing congregation. Encouraged by the successful projects of the past few years, the congregation now took steps to meet again this challenging need. In the 5th Annual Meeting of the congregation, held January 21,

1958, the congregation gave approval to sanctuary building plans submitted by the Consistory. The next step was a successful drive headed by Elder Clarence Snyder to raise a building fund of \$50,000. The entire cost was estimated to come to about \$175,000. By Sunday, April 25, 1958, a ground breaking ceremony was held which service was attended by 552 members and friends—a record attendance to date.



Old fundraising poster for Sanctuary.

By the middle of May, the building operations began and then progressed steadily. For the benefit of future generations, we should mention here that the items were placed in the cornerstone, according to an item written by our pastor in “Trinity Church Life” as of August 19, 1958. We quote, ‘the inscription on the plaque reads: ‘1958 Jesus the Chief Corner-Stone.’ “

Items selected by the committee for preservation in the corner stone were described in

the service by the pastor as they were placed in the container. Some were chosen as showing our antecedents, like the Heidelberg Catechism given by Mrs. John Gottschalk; the Evangelical Church history given by Mrs. Arthur Roeder, and the study guide of the now forming United Church of Christ. Other items were general documents of our faith and church life, such as the New Testament long used by Dr. Charles Freeman and given by Mrs. Freeman for this purpose; a copy of "The Messenger" containing Dr. Wagner's letter written for inclusion in a corner stone and a copy of the hymnal. Still others were records of our own congregation; our history; the brochure "**In His Name We Build**"; the list of charter members; our present membership list; the directory of the officers and organizations; copies of *Trinity Church Life*; Sunday bulletins. And the leaflet used for neighborhood distribution. Such were the mementos selected.

By late fall the congregation was given assurance that the Christmas services could be held in the new sanctuary. So it was that on **December 14, 1958**, the **first service** was held with great anticipation and gratitude. All the Christmas services were held in the new church. In the meantime, the date of the dedication services was set for Sunday, January 4, 1959, with special services the two following Sundays. On dedication Sunday, Dr. Purd Deitz, General Secretary of our Board of National Missions from St. Louis, MO., gave the message. The following Sunday, January 11, witnessed the first service of the Holy Communion in the new sanctuary when Dr. Harvey Fesperman, president of our Southern Synod, was the guest speaker. A special feature in the dedicatory service was an organ recital in the afternoon of January 4 by organist David Elwood. It was a special dedicatory service for our new three manual Allen organ, the gift of Mrs. Adelaide Hinkle in loving memory for her parents, Allard and Florence Doepken. This was followed by a reception in the Brotherhood Hall given by the Women's guild.

The **Schulmerich Carillon bells** have added much to the spirit of joy in worship as they peal out from the tower which together with the bells are the gift of Salem Church, Doylestown, Pa., relatives and friends, in memory of Dr. Charles Freeman. The bells

were dedicated in our evening Christmas program when they were used for the first time in the Christmas play, "When the Chimes Rang."

For a record of all the many and precious gifts we refer you to the booklet published for the dedication of the church on January 4 to 18, 1959, and to the special bulletin issued for Sunday, May 3, 1959, when a service of dedication was held for memorial and special gifts.

Sunday morning, January 18, was set aside for a service of dedication for scores of memorials and special gifts made toward the equipment of the new sanctuary. All have been previously acknowledged and recorded. There are too many to be enumerated here, although they are not forgotten, and speak to us as we enjoy our well equipped, beautiful and worshipful sanctuary. The dedicatory booklet issued for these services states: "In all, some \$300,000 have been invested in property, buildings and equipment. An indebtedness of \$110,000 remains." By the time of this our tenth anniversary, this debt has been reduced to \$60,000. But life goes on and a growing church in a rapidly expanding city continues to face and meet growing needs. Thus it happens even now the congregation acted in a special meeting held Tuesday, November 20, 1962, to approve the Consistory's plans and programs for an extensive building operation for our children's and youth activity. It is hoped that ground can be broken by early spring.