

1948 - 2008

September 20 - 21, 2008

DIVINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

“Remembering the Journey”

September 1948

To

September 2008

“Founded in Faith, Gifted by Grace and Strengthened to Serve”

The Trinity Reredos

The Triune God, whom we worship, has revealed Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The artist, Harry Wheeler, sought to portray the undivided unity of God and yet show the distinctive work of the Three Persons. At the bottom is the print of the hands and fingers that have been active in creating. Seemingly cradled in this hand one can distinguish what might be the form of a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, or viewing it from another perspective, the face of Christ emanating light and reminding us that He is the true revelation of God, the Light of the World. Fused into all of this we see the shape of a dove descending with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is hoped the Trinity Reredos will continually confront us with the unity, mystery and saving work of our glorious God.

The Nave Windows

THE CHURCH

The center aisle is flanked by a six-panel window with six different symbols of the church. The Ship is an ancient symbol indicating there is safety and salvation in the church, as the Church on the Rock reminds us of Christ's promise to Peter that he was the Rock on which Christ would build His church, as the church is the Eternal City, as the Sheep in the care of the Shepherd, as Christ is the Vine in whom His people the branches live, and finally as God's people who are the “Light of the World.” The windows were designed by the Rudolph Sandon Studio.

MEANS OF GRACE

In this bay of windows are symbols for the Sacraments and the Word of God. The Shell is a common symbol for Baptism, the Chalice and Wafers represent Holy Communion, and the Cross on the World suggest that Christ is the Living Word for all the world. The other three windows depict the Word of God as a two-edged Sword, an open Bible and the Law.

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINES

Six disciplines for strengthening the Christian are suggested: the Altar refers to worship, the Chi Rho and Lamp refer to Christian study, the Praying Hands speak of Prayer, the Yoke tells of obedience, the Descending Dove and rays refer to confirmation, and the Koinonia is a reminder of the strength in Christian fellowship.

CHRISTIAN CHARITY

The people of God are expected to live out God's word as His Servants. In Matthew 25, Jesus instructs His followers to give water to the thirsty, bread to the hungry, clothing to the naked, attend those in prison, visit those who are ill, and welcome the stranger.

CHRISTIAN VOCATION

This window like the Charity window opens to the outside. It is another forceful reminder that the Christian goes into the world to live there faithfully as a Servant to God in whatever vocation God has called him. The window says: be a Christian in your home, as a scientist or technologist, as a student in school, as a citizen of our country, as a merchant or worker. The church is the People of God, assembled for worship or dispersed for service.

REMEMBERING THE JOURNEY

The year was 1947. After years of war and rationing, servicemen had returned home to families and jobs, and the future looked bright. Surrounded by farms and open fields, the village of Parma Heights was the perfect place to build a home and raise a family. Soon, pastors from Parma Lutheran, St. Paul Lutheran, Hope Lutheran, Martin Luther and Puritas Lutheran saw the need for a church in the growing community. In November 1947 at a meeting of the Cleveland Conference of the American Lutheran Church, a formal recommendation to establish a mission church was made: The Ohio District Mission Board approved the mission church and granted a loan to purchase property.

On land that was part of a 125-acre farm, Robert W. Henry labored six years to build a home at 6607 Pearl Road, which he completed in 1850. Nearly 100 years later on April 26, 1948 that home was purchased for \$22,000 to be used as a mission church and parsonage. The mission partners acted quickly to extend a call to Pastor Carl E. Hacker on June 28, 1948. He accepted the call on July 10, 1948 and on August 2, 1948 he arrived with his family to begin his journey as Divinity's first pastor.

Pastor R.W. Willmann and a dedicated group of people from Parma Lutheran Church started a Sunday School at the new church on July 4, 1948. Seventeen people attended the **first Sunday School** of four classes, and attendance increased each Sunday throughout the summer. When Pastor Hacker published the **first Sunday bulletin** on August 22, 1948 he proudly announced that attendance on the previous Sunday was 50 people. In that first bulletin he also invited everyone to the church's **first potluck dinner** on Thursday evening, August 26, 1948. Food has always been an important part of Divinity's history!

The first worship service was an outdoor service held on September 19, 1948 at four o'clock in the afternoon. Pastors from Parma Lutheran and St. Paul Lutheran assisted and music was provided by choirs from Puritas Lutheran and Euclid Lutheran. The offering from that opening service was set aside to begin a building fund. The new congregation charted its course early with the following statement in the bulletin: "There is not much question that within a few years this parish will require a church building in which to worship and praise the Savior and carry on the business of His Kingdom."

Following the excitement of its founding, church members settled into a routine of weekly worship, Bible study and a year of many "firsts." They witnessed the **first baptism** on September 26, 1948 the **first marriage** on October 9, 1948 the **first funeral** on November 13, 1948 and the **first confirmation** of 4 adults on December 19, 1948. At the **first congregational meeting** on October 10, 1948 members approved a temporary church council with Pastor Hacker as its president. Then at a meeting of the congregation on November 7, 1948 **Divinity** was chosen as the name of the new church.

Early church records reveal the hours of labor and supplies that were donated to remake the Pearl Road house into a church home. A wall was removed to create a larger worship area, structural support was added, painting was done inside and outside, a kitchenette was installed in the upstairs parsonage, donations of carpet were sought to cover the old wooden floors, a steep narrow stairwell was remodeled and cinders were brought in to enlarge the parking area. On November 15, 1948, twelve women attended the **first meeting of the women's guild**. They immediately began to contribute their time and skills by organizing social events, sewing altar paraments, creating Bible study groups, and assisting with clerical tasks and worship service preparation.

Enthusiasm and optimism prevailed as more and more people came to Divinity. Members tell stories about adding more Sunday School classes and constantly rearranging chairs to fit everyone into the old home. They fondly remember sitting in worship service and being distracted by the delicious aroma of Mary Hacker's pot roast cooking in the oven for Sunday dinner!

Forty-four members of the congregation approved the **first constitution** and by-laws on February 14, 1949. On February 27, 1949, the **first installation service** was held. With their pastor, 69 communicant members were received. Pastor Hacker and the temporary council were

installed. On April 17, 1949 four more members were received, the church was formally organized as Divinity Lutheran Church, and the charter membership was closed with the following 73 members:

Frank Baumert	George A. Langtry
Josephine Baumert	Martha R. Langtry (Kava)
J. Norbert Benedict	John Marker
Allene Benedict	Janet Marker
Charles J. Boland	Roland W. Miltz
Ruth E. Boland	Charlotte Miltz
Alexander Boris	Walter Mueller
Mildred Boris	Elaine Mueller
Edward Boris	William McMaugh
Betty Jane Boris	Ella Mae McMaugh
Robert DeHaven	William B. McPhetridge
Nellie DeHaven	Elsie E. McPhetridge
Eleanor Dowe	Paul Nielsen
Martha Fazio	Rufine Nielsen
Philip J. Fields	Everett Orchard
Ruth K. Fields	Martha Orchard
Carl W. Fisher	Robert Roesinger
Ethel H. Fisher	May Roesinger
Roland Fisher	Russell W. Shryock
Arthur C. Folop	Margaret E. Shryock
Margaret Folop	Sterling Simmerer
Charles Folop	Leila Simmerer
Emily Folop	Arnold E. Steenerson
Norman Folop	Mary D. Steenerson
Paul Freund	Andrew Sramo
Carl Gehrke	Ann Sramo
Ruth Gehrke	John A. Tinay
Bernhard H. Guthrie	Emma L. Tinay
Gretchen C. Guthrie	Walter E. Tober
Mary L. Hacker	Genevieve E. Tober
Joseph S. Humphrey	Francis Waznak
Helen M. Humphrey	Anna Waznak
Louis H. Karl	Gertrude Wehrle
Norma A. Karl	Vincent Weisz
Elmer Koster	Jean Weisz
Clarice H. Koster (Hiemer)	Thelma Wetzel
	Clara Zunt

Before Divinity's charter was closed, six infants were baptized and those people are recognized as charter baptized members:

Patricia Ann Freund (Antos)	Wayne Leonard Zunt
Gordon Bruce McMaugh	Sharon Lynn Koster (Florio)
William John Miltz	Paul Michael Guthrie

No specific listing of the older children of charter members appears in church records. Therefore, the following other charter baptized members were identified as accurately as possible using Divinity's membership and confirmation records.

Billie Maureen Langtry(Powell)
 Marlene Sramo (Cook)
 Ronald Orchard
 William McPhetridge, Jr.
 Elaine Ruth Gehrke
 Robert Allen McPhetridge
 Roger Fisher
 Audry Boris
 Ruth-ellen Benedict (Woods)

Charles Arthur Folop
 Rose Ann Sramo
 Robert Gehrke
 Sandra Gay Boris
 Barbara McPhetridge
 Lora Fay Baumert (Page)
 Nancy Zunt (Sanderson)
 Juilianne Benedict (Collins)
 Randa Shryock

At a congregational meeting on April 11, 1949, the church council was empowered to select and buy a site for a new parsonage and church building. On July 6, 1949 four acres of land on Blossom Avenue and two lots on Commonwealth Avenue were purchased for \$1,200 at a forfeited land auction. Church members enjoyed the **first church picnic** held at North Olmsted Community Park on August 7, 1949. Then they celebrated that historic first year at the **First Anniversary banquet** on September 16, 1949.

By October 2, 1949, when 92 people attended the **first Rally Day**, Sunday School enrollment was over 100, and the challenge to fit everyone into the small church continued. On January 9, 1950 the **first church council** to be elected and installed on the same date the constitution was approved by the American Lutheran Church. That event marked the beginning of a tradition of dedicated people who would serve as congregation presidents:

Charles Boland	1950-1954	Wilbert Drehs	1954-1958
Walter Mueller	1958-1963	Bill Mattson	1963-1967
Al Nespeca	1967-1971	Ed Kahl	1971-1973
Fred Lange	1973-1975	Don Spindler	1975-1979
Doug Raynow	1979-1981	Gary Kronenberger	1981-1985
Allan Hamula	1985-1987	Gary Kronenberger	1987-1989
Virginia Mock	1989-1991	Vic Stevens	1991-1993
Gary Kronenberger	1993-1995	Dennis Miller	1995-1999
Marilyn Sesock	1999-2003	Vic Stevens	2003-2007
Leslie Crowe	2007 - Present		

Twice during our history, vice-presidents have served as acting presidents for a few months to complete a term of office: Vic Stevens in 1991 and Darryl Tinay in 1995.

Several other important events are milestones of Divinity's life and growth at the Pearl Road church. The **first children's choir** of 25 performed at services on January 22, 1950. When the **first catechism class** of six youth was confirmed on Pentecost, May 28, 1950, confirmed membership of the church was 124. Five boys and girls held the **first Luther League** meeting on September 10, 1950. On May 20, 1951 the **first Divinity Digest** was published; and on April 1, 1951 Divinity created two Sunday worship services to accommodate the growing membership.

The parsonage was dedicated at the Fourth Anniversary celebration on September 21, 1952. By 1953 Divinity had clearly outgrown the Pearl Road church. A record attendance of 215 was reached at the Easter services in 1953; twelve Sunday School classes had an average attendance of 125, and they met in "every corner of the building from the second floor to the basement." On March 15, 1953, the congregation voted to move the church and sell the Pearl road property. On June 7, 1953 the first church service at Parma Park School was held. With more space available, church attendance improved briefly but overall income and attendance steadily declined throughout the year. Only 33 new members were received in 1953, and the first year-end deficit of \$76.25 was recorded. Divinity faced its biggest crisis when Pastor Hacker accepted an offer to teach at the University of Texas and resigned effective November 1, 1953.

As its first interim pastor, Dr. Edgar Ebert guided the young church through its most difficult time and the church council acted quickly to call Pastor Donald Hesterman on December 13, 1953. He accepted the call in January, and the spirits of the congregation were renewed as they prepared for

the Hesterman's arrival.

Pastor Hesterman's installation on February 7, 1954, was the first transition in strong pastoral leadership that would bless Divinity throughout her history.

Carl E. Hacker	August 2, 1948 - November 1, 1953
Donald F. Hesterman	February 7, 1954 - December 31, 1987
	<i>Pastor Emeritus - January 1, 1988 - Present</i>
K. Bernell Boehm	May 14, 1961 - December 31, 1971
Gordon "Tim" Huffman	March 26, 1973 - March 2, 1975
Tom Bernlohr	July 29, 1973 - December 5, 1976
Connie Sassanella	June 26, 1977 - May 31, 1981
F. Stan Christian	August 30, 1981 - August 25, 1985
Joy Heebink	September 23, 1985 - July 20, 1988
Terry E. Ruther	September 7, 1988 - July 2, 1995
Jerry L. Schafer	October 9, 1988 - September 13, 1992
Kathleen L. Kluck	July 23, 1989 - September 8, 2002
Bruce G. Trethaway	May 26, 1996 - November 1, 2001
Douglas S. Gunkelman	June 15, 2003 - Present

Divinity has also been served by six interim pastors: Dr. Edgar Ebert from November 1953 - February 1954, Joy Heebink from September 1985 - April 1986 at which time she accepted a call to become an associate pastor of the congregation, Maurice O. Gold from September 1995 - May 1996, Gustav Anton from March 2002 - September 2002, Ken Anderson September 2002 - March 2003, William Bordonaro November 2002 - June 2003.

Parish Worker, Wilma Schardt, served Divinity from December 1957 - July 1961. Minister of Education, Tom Tobey, served from March 1968 - December 1969. Vicar Louise Johnson Palmer completed an internship at Divinity from June 1997 - June 1998.

Others who have served the congregation as assisting and/or visitation pastors are George Swartzfager and Dr. Reuben Drefs from January 1988 through September 1988; during the 1990's Jerry Bauer, David Connor and Ted Pelikan served our congregation; and Pastor Cynthia Ishler from June 2007 - August 2007.

In January 1998 - Pastor Maurice Gold returned to Divinity to work in the capacities of visitation ministry and coordinating a ministry for senior citizens.

On June 6, 1954, Pastor Hesterman and his congregation erected a sign in the field where their permanent church would be built, and rededicated themselves to the building fund drive. The sign was a constant reminder to them and the surrounding community of their goal. Financed solely through envelope giving, tax stamp redemptions and paper drives, the building fund grew.

The church's mission status expired, and **Divinity became self-supporting** on January 1, 1955. July 24, 1955 was an historic day when **ground was broken for the first church unit**. The cornerstone was laid on September 18, 1955, Divinity's seventh anniversary. Church records note the importance of July 2, 1956 when the church council held the **first official gathering** in the new building. Payments were begun on the \$75,000, mortgage and 433 attended the **first worship service** on August 15, 1956. The **first unit was dedicated** on September 16, 1956. Divinity's eighth anniversary. Within a month, the church council had to deal with a big problem: FLIES! No one had thought about screens for the windows. During 1957 the church's baptized membership grew from 870 to 1,161. The confirmed membership grew from 488 to 631. In fact, Divinity was sixth in the entire American Lutheran Church in gross gain of confirmed membership during the first six months of 1957. More space was urgently needed. Divinity **broke ground for the educational unit** on April 13, 1958, secured a \$96,000 mortgage, and **dedicated this second unit** on September 14, 1956, the church's tenth anniversary.

On June 24, 1962 Richard Match was ordained. He was the first, of nine ordained pastors who are sons and daughters of the congregation:

Richard Match
Frank Paine
Timothy Zingale
Laurel Bobb
David Smith

Wayne Zavotka
James Zingale
Lori Schifano
James Fravel

It was an exciting, somewhat chaotic time for the church. The halls and classrooms were filled with people and the parking lot, already torn up with construction work, was jammed with cars. Pastor Boehm and Pastor Hesterman added a third worship service in the fellowship hall, the church retired the debt for the first two building phases, and looked forward to building a sanctuary. The building committee realized that the original sanctuary design was simply not large enough to accommodate the growing church. A new sanctuary was designed and approved; A \$400,000 bank loan was secured, and Divinity **broke ground for the new sanctuary** on: August 30, 1954.

On November 28, 1964 the biggest crisis of the building process was experienced when the west arm of the tower collapsed under the wind pressure of a storm. Construction was stopped for nearly four months while the design was reviewed and the concrete was tested. Construction resumed and proceeded as smoothly as possible for such a large project with so many details and decisions needing attention. On the eve of the dedication, a group of men and women worked feverishly to finish last minute cleaning and final construction details. The women finished their work at 11 p.m., but it was 5 in the morning before the men would go home to rest and prepare to return for Sunday worship. November 28, 1965, was a beautiful day and **1,843 people witnessed the dedication of the sanctuary**.

With its building complete, Divinity was ready to focus on its ministry to the congregation and the community and to finish the smaller projects in the church. On December 5, 1966, the board of trustees established a "chapel fund" as the recipient of memorials and gifts. Thirty years would pass before the **chapel was completed and dedicated** on June 9, 1996. The \$35,000 **organ was dedicated** at a special recital on January 22, 1967. When Divinity **celebrated the 450th anniversary of the Reformation** on October 29, 1967, the confirmed membership was 1486, the baptized membership was 2,347 and 499 youth were aged 3 through college. Twenty-seven members were in the military, and a class of sixty-six youth was the largest class to be confirmed in Divinity's history.

The **church courtyard was completed** in 1969, and the **church library was opened** in January 1975. During the early 1970's the country was experiencing political turmoil and Divinity was experiencing declining attendance. A third pastor was added for a few years and more time was devoted to home visitation. The **carillon bells were installed** in November 1975, and the **Divinity Voyagers** was organized in February 1976. The church survived the energy crisis during the winter of 1977, and on June 26, 1977, **installed its first female pastor**, Connie Sassanella. The **handbell choir was dedicated** on November 22, 1981, and the **35th Anniversary was celebrated** on September 18, 1983, with one worship service at Valley Forge High School.

After nearly 34 years of faithful service, **Pastor Don retired** on December 31, 1987. Pastor Don and Arlo were honored at a retirement celebration on January 24, 1988. The Divinity family worried about "life after Pastor Don" but with three capable pastors on staff again, the transition was smooth and the church continued to prosper.

By the time the church became "officially debt free" at the **mortgage burning ceremony** on September 15, 1985, Divinity was showing serious signs of age and exposure to the weather. A Blue Ribbon Committee, formed in 1983, announced results of a three-year study and kicked off a \$180,000 capital improvements appeal for renovation and remodeling of the roof, tower, bathrooms, parking lot, and energy conservation improvements. After repairs were begun, it was discovered that deterioration in the tower was even greater than anticipated. Therefore, in 1992 the congregation faced the difficult choice of demolishing the tower or making an even greater financial commitment.

After much discussion and soul searching, the congregation decided to keep the tower. During 1993 over \$284,000 of reconstruction work was completed. A \$207,000 twenty-year loan was secured from Lutheran Brotherhood, and once again the church was making monthly payments. However, a group of dedicated members set a goal of retiring the debt by the 50th anniversary and they accepted responsibility for an accelerated

repayment program. Church members responded by supporting their activities and the debt was erased on **Miracle Sunday** held on September 29, 1996.

During the years since our 50th year celebration we have continued to remodel our church home and expand Divinity's ministry. **Forward in Faith** was a successful campaign from 1999 to 2002 which saw new carpeting, windows, air-conditioning of offices and meeting rooms and a newly renovated kitchen. Divinity dedicated its new organ and pipes in 2005 and audio-visual system in 2006. Ongoing projects include the Walk of Faith, Prayer Garden, Prayer Shawl Ministry, Stephen Ministry and Arts in Action. In 2003 Divinity called Pastor Doug Gunkelman to lead the congregation. Divinity celebrated the 20th ordination of Pastor Doug in June of 2005; and Pastor Hesterman's 60th anniversary of ordination in September of 2008.

Today Divinity Lutheran Church is a congregation of 1201 baptized members, 892 confirmed members, and 629 households. Since 1948 we have witnessed 2532 baptisms, 2042 confirmations, 1196 marriages, and 1133 burials. We have been served by 13 pastors, 15 assisting pastoral ministers, 16 congregation presidents, and boast of 9 sons and daughters in the ministry.

Over the years we have worshiped together, worked together, laughed and cried together. We have experienced dissension and reconciliation. We have grown up together and grown old together. But most importantly, we have remained together as one Divinity Family. Sixtieth birthdays always bring good wishes accompanied by jokes of being "over the hill". However, as children of God's family we are secure in the knowledge that 60 years is just the blink of an eye and we are not over the hill. In fact we have barely begun the climb.

Divinity Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In July of 2004, Denise Kronenberger and I accompanied a group of Divinity teenagers on a journey to Sky Ranch Lutheran Bible Camp in Colorado. Before backpacking into the Rockies, we spent a day rafting the white water of the Poudre River west of Fort Collins.

As you can see in the picture, at the end of this message, we needed to learn very quickly to coordinate our efforts if we were to survive the journey. We needed to be good listeners as our steersman shouted out orders from the back of the raft. We needed to paddle in unison which meant using our peripheral vision to keep an eye on our neighbor across from us. Sometimes one side paddled forward while the other side paddled backward. Sometimes it took many strokes to get us through while at other places it only took two or three strokes and we rested. During a scary stretch, our raft was turned sideways when we hit a rock and two of our youth were thrown over the side. One (my son) went under the raft and somehow popped up on the other side of the rock. After maneuvering around the obstacle, we pulled both lost souls back into our raft and continued down the river.

As Divinity celebrates 60 years of ministry, we have learned we need to coordinate our efforts in being the Body of Christ on our journey together. We learn to be good listeners of God's Word and guidance. We learn to work in unison while keeping an eye on our neighbors out of our love for them. In the church there are often those moving forward while others are holding on to meaningful traditions of the past. Both paddling forward and backward are sometimes necessary. Sometimes we work really hard and run out of energy while at other times we can work a little and then take time to rest. There are scary times when people are hurting, suffering, crying out, grieving, separating, dying, and we do the best we can to see them, to hear them, to pull them in to the sanctuary of God's house and people to be loved and comforted.

No matter where we are at in our faith journey, for 60 years Divinity members have learned to coordinate our efforts to make it to the end. We've learned to love and trust each person to do his/her share to help get us to the promised land and the crown of righteousness that awaits God's people.

²Timothy 4:7-8 – ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

With you in Jesus' raft,

Pastor Doug

