

# HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

FIFTY YEARS OF MINISTRY IN THE CONEJO VALLEY

1959-2009



*The Rev. Ernst F. Tonsing, Ph.D.  
Thousand Oaks, California  
October, 2009*



***Hymn to the Holy Spirit***

*Come Holy Spirit, God and Lord,  
With all your graces now outpoured  
On each believer's mind and heart;  
Your fervent love to them impart.  
Lord, by the brightness of your light  
In holy faith your Church unite;  
From ev'ry land and every tongue,  
This to your praise, O Lord, our God, be sung;  
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

*Martin Luther*



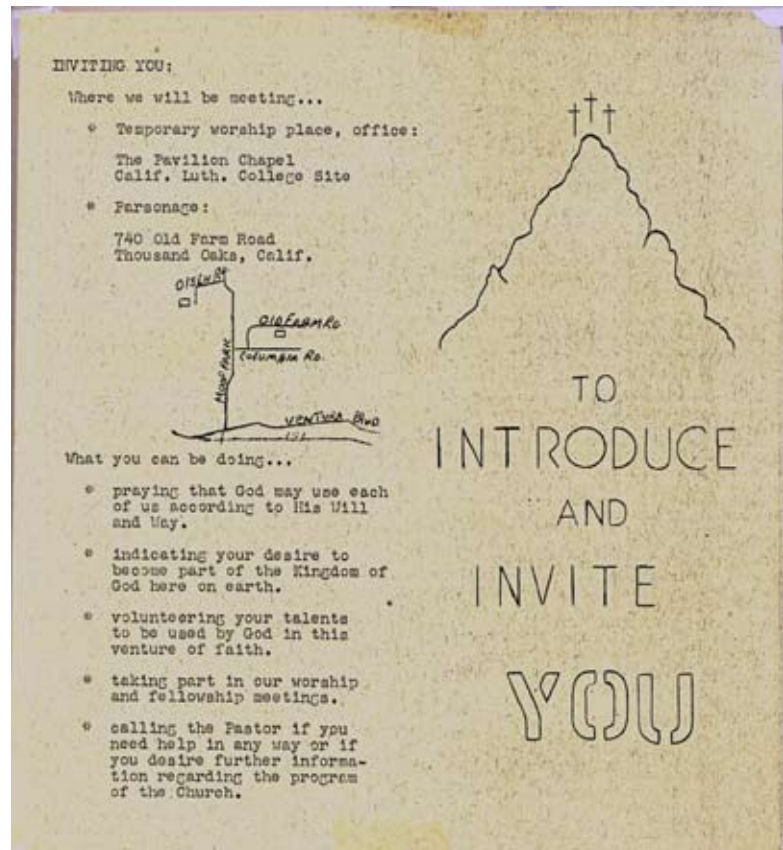
## THE FIRST DECADE: 1960's

### *Beginnings*

The first prayer—the first hymn—the first Creed spoken together: on October 4, 1959, fifty years ago, the worshippers had a sense of anticipation and elation hardly consistent with the congregation's circumstances. Its pastor, Robert Lawson, was newly ordained, there was no property, and the people were meeting in a converted chicken coop on a yet-to-be launched Lutheran college campus. Yet, by April 3, 1960, the membership had grown, and the church, now named Holy Trinity, was received by the California Conference of the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church as its newest congregation.<sup>1</sup>

### *Starting a Congregation*

It had been hard work. Lawson recalled that his last term at Augustana Seminary in Rock Island, Illinois, had had one of the “worst winters ever,” and that he, as well as the rest of his class



<p>INTRODUCING YOU:</p> <p>Who we are as a Church...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holy Trinity Lutheran Church is a new mission congregation sponsored by the Board of American Missions of the Augustana Lutheran Church.</li> <li>• This Church Body is composed of 1,250 congregations in the United States and Canada and is represented by missionaries in Japan, Formosa, India, and Africa.</li> <li>• Members of the Lutheran Church, the largest Protestant Church in the world with a membership of more than 70,000,000.</li> <li>• In the United States the Lutheran Church is the third largest Protestant Church with a membership of more than 6,000,000.</li> </ul> <p>Who we are as a Pastor...</p> <p>Rev. Robert W. Lawson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is a graduate of Bethany College and Augustana Theological Seminary, Rock Island, Illinois.</li> <li>• was ordained into the ministry of the Augustana Lutheran Church at Hartford, Connecticut in June, 1959.</li> <li>• was called by the Board of American Missions of the Augustana Church to serve as Board Missionary in this area.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is married (wife, Joyce) and has two daughters, Roxanne 10, and Kirsten 4.</li> <li>• is now residing at the parsonage at 740 Old Farm Road, (Waverly Manor) Thousand Oaks.</li> </ul> <p>What we believe...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Bible is the Word of God and the only infallible rule for Christian faith and life.</li> <li>• Jesus Christ is our only Savior and our only Mediator between God and us.</li> <li>• We are saved by the Grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.</li> <li>• God uses the Means of Grace (the Word of God and the two Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper) to create and sustain Christian life.</li> </ul> <p>What we will be doing...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• providing a center of worship to meet your spiritual needs.</li> <li>• offering Christian instruction for your children and for you.</li> <li>• fostering Christian fellowship through our organizations and group meetings.</li> <li>• providing youth activities for the young people of your area.</li> <li>• presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ through a community-centered program.</li> </ul>	

of forty-four, were all looking for parishes in the southern climes. Only two were open in California, Santa Maria and the Conejo Valley, which as Joyce Lawson remarked, “we couldn’t even find on the map!” They were one of the fortunate ones to have been called to Southern California, perhaps because the Sponsor for his Ordination was Lawson’s former pastor, Carl W. Segerhammar.<sup>2</sup>

The Lawsons arrived even before Thousand Oaks was incorporated as a town, and supported by the Board of American Missions of the Augustana Lutheran Church, began canvassing for a church. In 1959, the Augustana Synod was celebrating its one-hundredth anniversary, and was anticipating a merger with several other Lutheran bodies. On February 27 of that year, Dr. Orville Dahl and the

Board of Regents had signed a document to establish a new school in the valley, California Lutheran College, a joint venture by the Lutheran churches. On April 5 the next spring, Governor Edmund G. Brown cut a ribbon to open the Ventura Freeway that connected the San Fernando Valley to Calabasas.<sup>3</sup> With the nearest Lutheran church, Ascension, some four or five miles away, the community was ready for a mission congregation.

Surrounded by lofty mountains, the valley was scenic but rustic. Farms and ranches still occupied much of the land, and large flocks of sheep, herded by their Basque shepherds, continued to pass through the grasslands, but new housing developments were springing up where Hollywood movies had been filmed, and there was talk about organizing for the incorporation of a town. Lawson began by “walking through the neighborhoods, knocking on doors, meeting people, and being blessed to find some who shared an interest in having a second Lutheran church in the town.”<sup>4</sup> The energetic Ethel Beyer, who was secretary to Dahl, made sure that the Lawsons were acquainted with the community and was a “tremendous help.”<sup>5</sup> People from other denominations sought to be joined to the new venture, including a couple of Missouri Synod Lutheran families who were instrumental in “getting things going, such as the Sunday Church School.”<sup>6</sup>

### *The First Meetings*

The first of a series of “Fellowship Meetings” was held in the Lawson’s home at 740 Old Farm Road (Waverly Manor),<sup>7</sup> September 24, at 7:30 p.m.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, at the nearby Pedersen ranch on the north side of the Conejo Valley that was eventually to become a college, members of the growing flock cleaned out one of the chicken coops, painted it in a stylish light gray with black trim, and fashioned it into a chapel,<sup>9</sup> with the altar and pulpit built by one of the first families.<sup>10</sup>



It was there that the first, formal worship service was held on Passion Sunday, April 3, 1960, with Dr. Carl W. Segerhammar, President of the California Conference preaching, and the Rev. A. G. Fjellman, Regional Director for the Board of American Missions leading the congregation with the prayer:



*O God, Who hast brought us to the day of organizing Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Thousand Oaks, California, hear the prayer of Thy people and grant that whosoever shall seek Thy blessings in this church may rejoice in his desires wholly fulfilled; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*<sup>11</sup>





### Holy Trinity Lutheran Holds First Worship Service Next Sunday

The first worship service of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church will be held on Sunday, October 4, at 11:00 a.m. The services will be held in the Chapel on the California Lutheran College site.

The Rev. A. G. Fjellman, Regional Director for the Board of American Missions of the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, will deliver the sermon. Rev. Fjellman formerly served parishes in Sun Valley, California and in Duluth, Minnesota and in 1955 was appointed to his present position. Rev. Fjellman has served, at various times, the

Church is a new mission congregation being sponsored by the Board of American Missions of the Augustana Lutheran Church. When Holy Trinity Lutheran Church is organized it will be a member of the California Conference, Dr. Carl W. Segerhammer, President.



Rev. A. G. Fjellman

Lutheran Church in the interest of its College and University work, assisting in the organization of Lutheran Student Foundations at both Southern California and Duluth, and serving as the first president of the Foundation in Southern California.



Rev. Robert Lawson

Robert Lawson, Pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, was ordained into the ministry in June, 1959. He was called to serve as board missionary in this area. As a part of this first worship service, Rev. Lawson will be commissioned as Pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church.

Everyone is cordially invited to attend.

Have the CONEJO NEWS Home Delivered to You Twice weekly, \$3 year



The organist, Sally Magnusen, played on an old "pump" organ, but, according to Lawson, "the music and hymns were a thrilling sound nonetheless."<sup>12</sup> Seventy-two adults and seventy-four children were enrolled as charter members.<sup>13</sup>

# Chicken Coop to Chapel

By ROBERT LAWSON



BEFORE

**A**N OLD chicken coop converted into a chapel was the scene of the first worship service of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Conejo Valley, California, held on October 4. The chapel is located on the site of the California Lutheran College, a co-operative venture by California and Pacific Southwest groups of the American Lutheran Church, Augustana, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church in America.

Approximately 100 people attended the first worship service and marvelled over the transformation from a crude shelter for chickens into a house dedicated to prayer and praise.

## A Gift to a College

The coop was a part of the property embracing 120 acres of land donated by

Richard Pederson as a site for the new California Lutheran School. As such, it belongs to the college, but was made available to the Board of American Missions of the Augustana Lutheran Church for worship purposes until Holy Trinity Church is in a position to build the first unit of its future church.

The Board paid half of the cost of remodeling the coop into a chapel, and the college paid the other half.

The coop was completely renovated, with tiled floor and ceiling, electrical fixtures and a speaker system. Even a small choir loft was incorporated into the chapel, and the entire building was painted inside and out. A small room is used for an office, and another for choir robing. The chapel is finished in tones of grey, coral and black.

The focal point in the chapel is a simple silver cross fixed above the al-

tar. Several planters filled with native greenery remind the worshiper of God as the Creator of all things. The planters are moveable and can be so arranged that the chapel is divided into a nave and a narthex. In this manner the worship area may be made larger or smaller, as desired.

Much of the labor employed in the renovation process was donated by volunteer workers from nearby Lutheran congregations.

Participants in the first worship service included the following: Dr. Orville Dahl, president of California Lutheran College; the Rev. A. G. Fjellman, West Coast regional director of the Board of American Missions of the Augustana Lutheran Church; the Rev. Glenn Johnson, pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Santa Maria, and the Rev. Robert Lawson, pastor of Holy Trinity.



AFTER





The Lawsons remember that so many of the people seemed always to come and go in the town with frequent job transfers, but, that the congregation was brightened by “the beautiful faces and the smiles of greeting as they pitched in while they were here.”<sup>14</sup> The first year was difficult, with “too much rain and only a dirt road going from the two-lane Moorpark Road to the Chapel.” It was so bad one Sunday that the services had to be called off. The members were informed through a telephone chain, but one woman had started for church early and missed the phone call. This devoted woman got stuck in the mud and left her car, trudging on in her boots to the chapel in case there were some children waiting for Sunday School. Such was the dedication of the early members of Holy Trinity!<sup>15</sup>

### *The First Organizations*



At the start, the congregation supported a variety of organizations. The Augustana Lutheran Church Women of Holy Trinity was organized on September 15, 1960.<sup>16</sup> The Mary-Martha, Lydia-Priscilla, Ruth, Esther, and Dorcas circles of the ALCW met for devotions, Bible studies, and catching up on the current Lutheran World Federation Assembly at Helsinki, Finland. Recognizing the Scandinavian heritage of the church, Christmas was celebrated with many of the women dressed in traditional costumes and singing carols accompanied by an autoharp.<sup>17</sup>

A Couples' Club for married pairs began meeting on Saturdays in November, 1960.<sup>18</sup> The group reflected the rather young ages of the first congregants, many of whom were members of the first faculty to teach at California Lutheran College. Indeed, the faculty and staff of the college and their families have been the core of Holy Trinity throughout its history. Bible studies, excursions and pot-luck dinners comprised some of the Couples' Club activities. The first Sunday Church School was held at 9:45 a.m. on Sunday, October 25, 1960, opening with a film, “This Way to Heaven,” on the importance of Christian education both at church and at home.<sup>19</sup> Meetings of the Luther League, the church's youth group, were begun November 1, with,

*...an afternoon of fun and fellowship with ping pong, volleyball, basketball [the] order of the day. Following this, there will be a singspiration and, of course, refreshments.*<sup>20</sup>

Snow parties, beach parties, panel discussions of “Popular Music” (the advent of “Rock ‘n Roll”), and programs for the congregational pot-luck dinners were other activities of the League.<sup>21</sup>

*1960 News 2/11/60*

**—HOLY TRINITY  
LUTHERAN**

**By Pastor Robert Lawson**

**Boy Scout Troop**

A Boy Scout and an Explorer's Troop under the sponsorship of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church are in the formative stages. The first Organizational Meeting will be held next Monday night Feb. 15, at 7:00 pm., in the Chapel on the California Lutheran College Site. All prospective Boy Scouts (ages 11-13) and Explorers (ages 14-18) along with their dads, and any others interested in the organization of these troops are cordially invited

On February 15, 1960, two new troops of Boy Scouts were formed with nine enrolled in the Explorer Post No. 2611 (ages fourteen through eighteen), and eighteen enrolled in the Scout Troop No. 611 (ages eleven through thirteen). In May, 1960, a Cub Scout Pack was organized.<sup>22</sup> Pastor Lawson was enthusiastic:

*... they are open to all boys, regardless of race, color or creed. All interested boys are urged to attend and bring Dad. Many things are planned and we'll promise will keep you busy and having fun. So let's go guys. See you at the meetin' house.*<sup>23</sup>

Lawson noted that the campouts of the Troops went very well, except that most of the scouts came down with poison oak. All recovered, however.<sup>24</sup>

The first of a number of Easter Sunrise services were held after a hike up Mount Clef north of the college campus. Gathering around a Cross, the congregation had a commanding view of the farms and small clusters of houses in the Conejo Valley spread out below them.<sup>25</sup>

The chapel had to be used for many events, so the metal, folding chairs had to be rearranged in different configurations. When the men of the church planned a Mother's Day breakfast, they realized that everything had to be gathered up with haste to prepare the room for worship. They conceived of an idea: they would ask the manager of the new Thriftmart store if they could borrow some of the grocery carts in order to speed things up and get everything out of sight before church. According to Lawson:

*They took a pick-up truck belonging to one of the men and, having the blessing of the market manager, they showed up early that Sunday morning and began loading the carts, never realizing that an alert citizen was reporting to the police that someone was stealing grocery carts.*<sup>26</sup>

However, the men were able to avoid arrest by explaining their purpose to the policeman and verifying their permission from the manager, and thus, did not have to explain to their wives why they were in jail that morning rather than preparing pancakes for them!



## Holy Trinity Dedicates Site

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church dedicated its site upon which the first unit of its building program will soon be constructed. The dedication service took place following the morning worship service last Sunday. The site is located in the Starlight Rancho area and is immediately south of the California Lutheran College property. Over one hundred persons attended the Site Dedication Service.



## *Construction of a Church*

On May 29, 1960, the members of the church heard a report of the Building and Site Committee proposing the construction of a new church and acted on its recommendation.<sup>27</sup> An architect, Dennis Wehmüller, from Los Angeles, drew up plans,<sup>28</sup> and the master plan was accepted by the congregation at its annual meeting on January 16, 1961.<sup>29</sup> Five and a quarter acres of land at the corner of Avenida de Los Arboles and Mount Clef were purchased for \$30,000.<sup>30</sup>

Groundbreaking occurred on April 16, 1961, and construction<sup>31</sup> was begun shortly thereafter on the first building.<sup>32</sup> Dedicated on October 15, 1961, the rectangular, multipurpose room served as nave, and also a classroom both for the Sunday Church School and the college, and a pot-luck dining area.<sup>33</sup> A five-foot oak Cross with glossy finish now hanging at the west end of the room was originally above the altar on the east wall until the space was remodeled. Then it was replaced by the large, darkly stained Cross whose greatly extended arms conform to the low angles of the roof.<sup>34</sup>

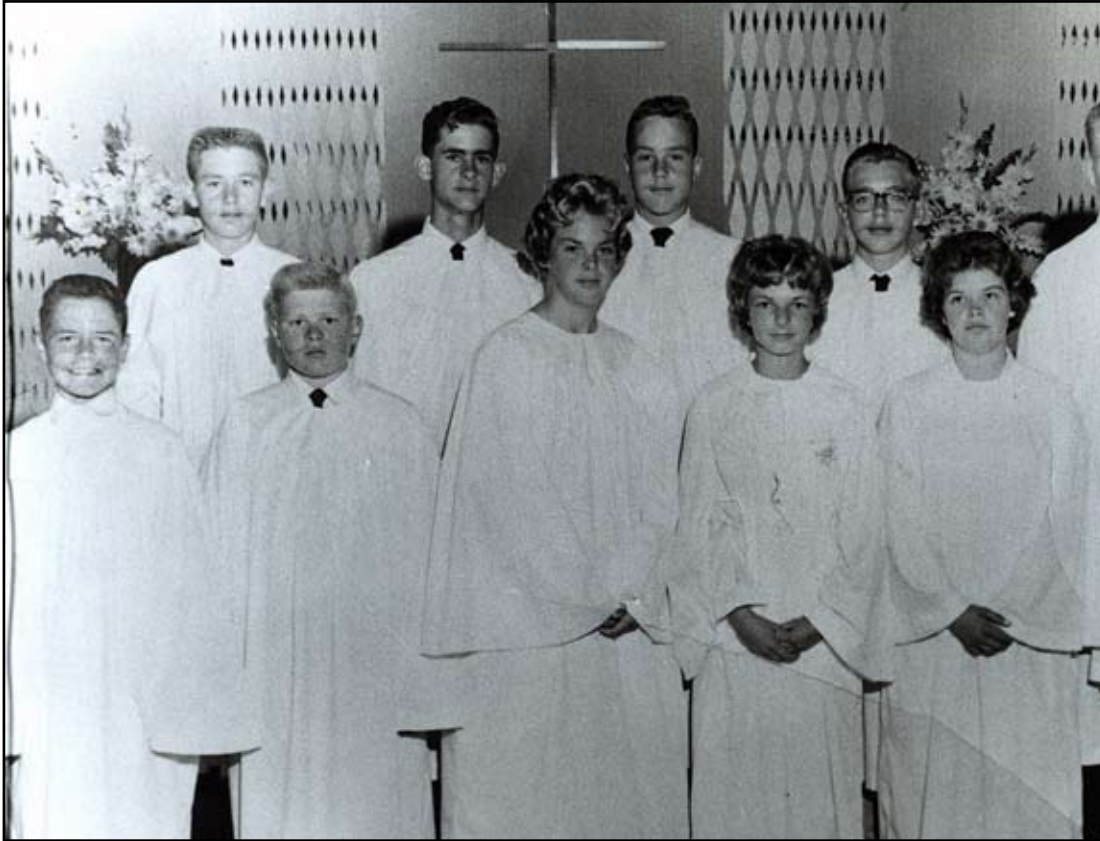


Much of the church property was covered by a grove of walnut trees. These had to be cleared, so, gradually, they were cut down and chopped into firewood. However, there was much more wood than anticipated, and, according to Anne and Jim Lieberknecht, members of the congregation since 1963, they put out the call: “Friends, Romans—Anyone—please come and get our wood!” Even that didn’t work, and still, there were huge piles of the kindling. The City of Thousand Oaks took

notice and issued a warning to clear out the heaps of wood. So, the piles were set on fire. According to Anne Lieberknecht, the heat was so intense that one could hardly bear to stand even fifty yards away!<sup>35</sup>

Other trees were planted in place of the walnut grove. For several years, some members of the congregation purchased live Christmas trees, and after the holidays, these were placed in the ground. Then another person gave fifty little pine trees in one-gallon cans. Many of these were planted alongside Mount Clef Boulevard to the east of the church, and still lend both grace and shade to the buildings.<sup>36</sup>

When students arrived for the first classes of California Lutheran College in the fall of 1961, the college had no room that would hold more than forty or fifty people. The large lecture classes



needed to be held in the new church building. Dr. Leonard Smith recalls delivering his lectures in history in the nave up through 1971 or 72. In addition, faculty meetings were held there.<sup>37</sup> Thus, Holy Trinity figured prominently in the early years of the school.

The students quickly adopted the church as their own, and as the campus streets were largely unimproved, the students would carry their “Sunday shoes” and change outside. Dr. Jim Esmay recalled coming out of services to see rows of muddy shoes perched on the hood of his car awaiting their owners.<sup>38</sup> The street upon which the church stands, Avenida de Los Arboles, was still unpaved beyond the corner. On Easter Sunday, 1965, the organist, Professor Carl Swanson, recalled, the congregation had to walk on boards to keep from sinking in the mud as they came to church.<sup>39</sup>

When Swanson came in 1964, the congregation was using an Allen electronic organ with a flat pedal keyboard, donated by Sally Magnuson, whose husband, Dr. Walter Magnuson, was Assistant Professor of Science at CLC.<sup>40</sup> Swanson served until 1970. Already in 1964, there were three services on Sundays (8:30, 9:00 and 11:00 a.m.), with different hymns for each service, according to Swanson.<sup>41</sup>

At that time, Swanson was conducting his organ lessons on stage in the college’s gymnasium, and had to schedule his lessons between various athletic events. It became even more difficult when a dance class met just feet away using their own music, so Dr. C. Robert Zimmerman, chair of the Music Department, arranged for the pipe organ to be moved over to HTLC. This instrument remained until the 1980’s when it was installed in the Preus-Brandt Forum on CLC’s campus and a new organ was set up in the nave.

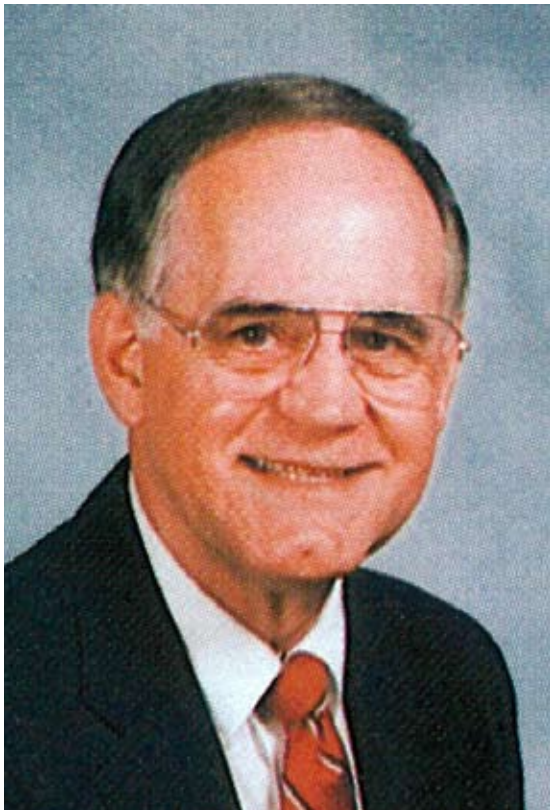


As soon as the first worship center was erected, it became a popular site for weddings. In response to the need to help brides and grooms on their big day, the “Wedding Belles” organized to host the services both before and after, meeting the couple, checking the master calendar, the sound-system, the bride’s room, candles, etc. A Wedding Host conducted the rehearsals, prepared the brides before the wedding, and arranged for the Wedding Belles to decorate the Fireside Room, mix the punch, blow up balloons, decorate the tables with flowers, serve at the reception, cut the wedding cake, clean up the Fireside Room and wash the table cloths. This dedicated group hosts weddings to this day for the church.



### *Pastor J. Roger Anderson*

In 1967, Pastor Lawson resigned after throat surgery made it difficult for him to speak in public for a while. He accepted the offer to become Director of Admissions at CLU for several years before taking a call to begin another new mission in Westlake Village on the southeast side of the Conejo Valley.<sup>42</sup> The Rev. J. Roger Anderson was called and served until February 26, 1978, when he was installed as Assistant to the Bishop of the Pacific Southwest Synod,<sup>43</sup> and subsequent to that, Bishop of the Southern California (West) Synod of the new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.<sup>44</sup> Anderson found his ministry at Holy Trinity “an exciting new venture in this young, vibrant and challenging congregation.” He enjoyed the mix of “town and gown,” with the nearby college.<sup>45</sup>



Anderson inaugurated his role as pastor at Holy Trinity in an especially inspiring way. After a pot-luck dinner one evening, he had everyone stand and line up around the Fellowship Hall. He then asked them to hold hands as he said a prayer. Following this he said, “I want you people to know that this is not my church, but your church. I want to be your coach and your glue when you need it.”<sup>46</sup>

## THE SECOND DECADE: 1970's

### *Music at Holy Trinity*

Throughout Holy Trinity's history, its organists, Senior Choir, Children's Choir, and Hand Bell Choir have been distinguished in their endeavors to lift the congregants' spirits and hearts to the contemplation of the mysteries of salvation through Christ. Arlene Judd became the organist of Holy Trinity in October, 1971. She had received her B.A. and M.A. degrees in music at the University of California, and was active with the American Guild of Organists in its New Music Project.<sup>47</sup> She sustained the tradition of the church to have the finest music in praise of God in its worship services.

From the beginning, choir director, Dr. C. Robert Zimmerman, formerly assistant director of the Robert Shaw Chorale and then professor of music at California Lutheran College, insisted upon the highest quality from its members. Each Easter and Christmas, the choir performed a cantata by the preeminent Lutheran composer, Johann Sebastian Bach. He served until 1965, when Swanson assumed directing the choir as well as playing the organ. For a year, 1966-67, the position was empty, when Zimmerman reassumed conducting the choir.<sup>48</sup>

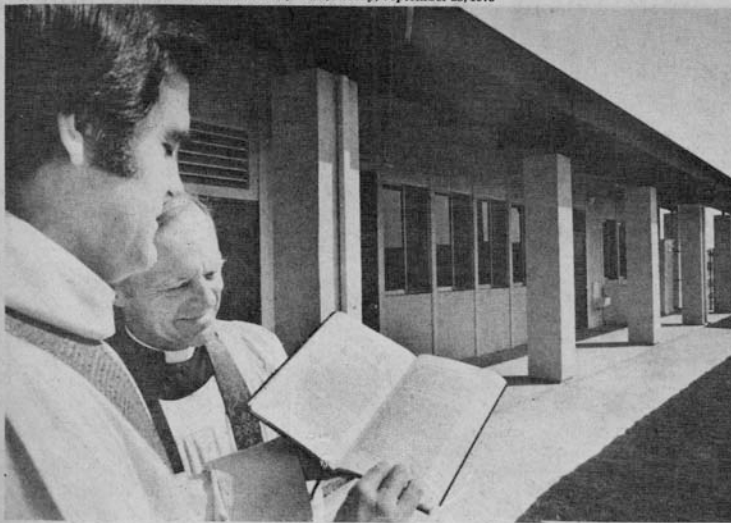




## The Honey Tree

By the early 1970's, it was clear that more room was required by the church, so a congregational study was made to resolve the "clash of commitments" of needing a new worship center and the "calls for strong mission outreach." The clear result of the poll was that Holy Trinity could best serve its community through a nursery school.

Page 6—NEWS-CHRONICLE, Thousand Oaks, Calif., Friday, September 28, 1973



### Education building added to Holy Trinity grounds

#### Sharing plans

With a Bible in his hands, the Rev. J. Roger Anderson discusses plans for what will be taught in the new education building at his church. Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Thousand Oaks. Joining the pastor is the Rev. Robert W. Lawson, past leader of Holy Trinity who is now serving as pastor of the Westlake Lutheran Church in Westlake Village. (News-Chronicle Photo by Greg Lewis.)

It was a grand occasion last Sunday, Sept. 23, for that was the day members of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church participated in dedication services for a new Christian education building and the refurbishing of the main church building.

Church members joined in the celebration and welcomed Holy Trinity's first pastor, the Rev. Robert W. Lawson, who preached

the dedication sermon. Pastor Lawson is currently serving the congregation at Westlake Lutheran Church in Westlake Village.

The festivities, lead by the Rev. J. Roger Anderson, capped three years of planning and a year of construction.

The new building is designed to house a nursery school in four classrooms along with facilities for a multipurpose room. The room will be used for a classroom, library, conference area and a choir rehearsal area.

The refurbishing at the church included a new altar, pulpit, communion railing, cross and pews. A fireside room with patio and six carpeted classrooms completes the renovation.

At that time, the three, four, and five year-old Sunday Church School children met in The Hut, a temporary building on the southwest side of the property. There was no restroom or running water. The four original classrooms were for first through fourth grade classes, and the older Sunday School students had to walk to CLC for their classes.<sup>49</sup>

The congregation voted to refurbish the nave, the Fireside Room, the classrooms of the first unit, and to add a new educational building with spaces for a nursery school and four classrooms, along with a multipurpose room to be used as a classroom, library, conference area and a choir rehearsal area. A playground also was added next to the education building. These were dedicated September 23, 1973.<sup>50</sup>

The new facilities opened the way for a new ministry by Holy Trinity. Alyce Schuldt related the genesis of the preschool called "Honey Tree":

*At a final building committee meeting, after the completion of the new building and refurbished classrooms and a refurbished Fireside Room, Jim Esmay said, 'This new building is so beautiful, and it could be used during the week for a preschool. That is your area, Alyce. What do you think?' 'It's possible,' I said.'*<sup>51</sup>

The church council endorsed the plan. However, the council president warned, "We'll give you one year to make it work; otherwise, we won't support it." Commented Schuldt, "Nothing like a little pressure!"<sup>52</sup> The new building was built according to both the city and fire codes, and a state license was received to allow classes to begin in the fall of 1973. There were two morning classes, with a third class added in the spring of 1974. The following year yet another was added in the afternoons, and still there was always a waiting list of students.<sup>53</sup>



Despite congregational support and tuition monies, the budget was limited. Doris Edmund, wife of Dr. Rudy Edmund, Dean of CLC, hosted showers for the school, with the results that “used toys, puzzles, dolls, trucks and other used items as well as new items such as paints and paint brushes” were received. A second-hand desk was obtained, and Ray Volkmar installed bulletin boards.<sup>54</sup> Working with the students was a joy. Some of the husbands of the teachers “told those of us who were teaching that we didn’t have real jobs because we were having too much fun.”<sup>55</sup>

And, whence the name, “Honey Tree”? CLC Professor of English, Armour Nelson devised it from the initials of the name of the congregation that sponsored the preschool, Holy Trinity.<sup>56</sup>





## *Ordinations*

“Take thou authority to preach the word of God and minister the sacrament in the Holy spirit. Go and bring forth fruit and that your fruit may remain,” were the words spoken by officiating minister, the Rev. Paul I. Nussle, Secretary for the Pacific Southwest Synod of the Lutheran Church of America, to the ordinand, the Rev. William Noah Coombs, on June 14, 1974. In the first such service in the area, the Thousand Oaks resident was commissioned as pastor in the nave of Holy Trinity with Pastors Robert Lawson and Roger Anderson acting as sponsors.<sup>57</sup>

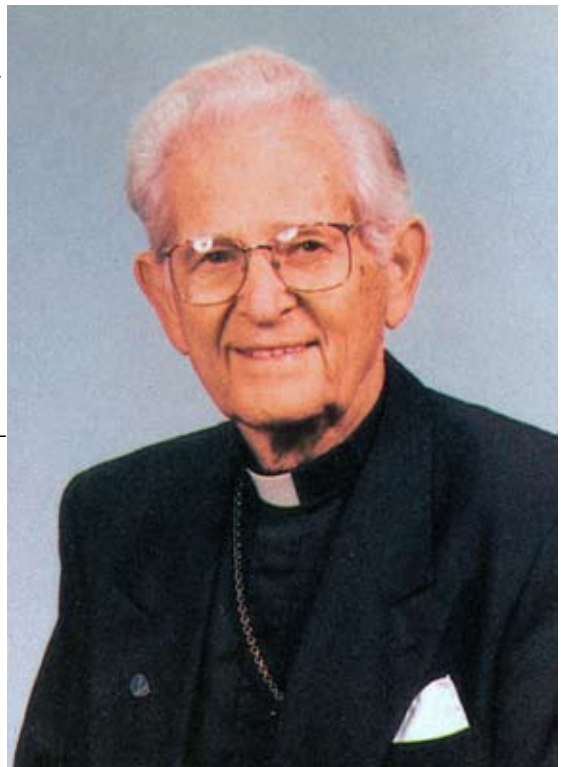
Pastor Nussle told Coombs that he is “stepping out on a journey. There is no greater privilege than to be a pastor and live out among the people who called you.” But, he warned, “If to follow Jesus Christ is to have security, I don’t think we’re hearing Him correctly when He calls us to follow. There’s a great temptation to be a kind of tourist.” Coombs was no “tourist,” but took to his work at St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in McClure, Ohio, with enthusiasm.<sup>58</sup> Tragically, Pastor Coombs died in 1995. His wife, Vicky, then left her work as director of a psychiatric hospital, and served as a missionary in southern India for three years. Subsequent to this, she entered seminary and was ordained to serve a parish in Adams Ridge, Ohio.<sup>59</sup>

A second ordination at Holy Trinity occurred in 1988. Edward Sauerwald, a graduate of California Lutheran University,<sup>60</sup> was an intern from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary at Holy Trinity from 1986-7. Following his last year of studies, he was ordained in a service in the sanctuary.

### *Pastor Carl W. Segerhammar*

After February, 1978, during the interim after Pastor Anderson’s tenure as pastor, Segerhammar, by now a retired Bishop, served Holy Trinity for six months. He had graduated from Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas, in 1929, and then Augustana Theological Seminary, Rock Island, Illinois. After graduate work at the University of Southern California School of Religion, he was the “radio voice” of the Pacific Lutheran Hour, and the NBC program, “Voice of the Cathedral.” He was on numerous boards and committees, including the Southern California Council of Churches, the Board of Directors of the Southern California School of Theology of the Methodist Church, Board of Directors of the California Lutheran Hospital, and Chairperson of the Board of Regents of California Lutheran College. In the 1980’s at Holy Trinity, “Seger” became an Assistant Pastor and established a much needed ministry to the older members of the church. He also worked with the “Happy Timers,” arranging activities and excursions.<sup>61</sup>

In 1980-81, Segerhammar served as Interim President of CLC. Ruth, his wife, was involved in the local, state and national church, and from 1974-77 served as Vice President of the national Church Women United, and was



a founding board member and President of the Southern California Interfaith Coalition on Aging.<sup>62</sup> “Seger” and Ruth, were honored by California Lutheran University in 1978 with the *Distinguished Service Award*, and in 1995, the *Christus Award*.<sup>63</sup>

### *Pastor Larry H. T. Johnson*

A poet as well as pastor, Larry H. T. Johnson began at Holy Trinity July 1, 1978, following interim pastor, Segerhammar. He came from serving a parish in Lancaster, California, and the Lutheran Church of the Cross in Berkeley, California, with unique qualifications. After studies at Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, Washington, and Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, he went to Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut. He was licensed in family/marriage and child counseling, talents that he offered to the congregation generously.

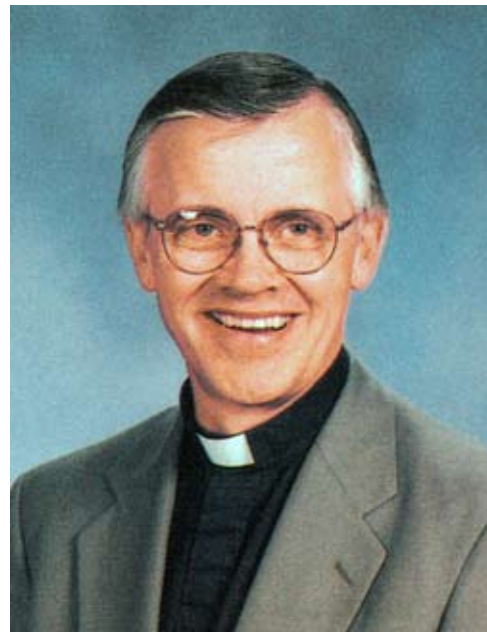
Johnson continued the reputation of Holy Trinity of leading the Synod in benevolence giving. He worked admirably in heading a team including Pastor Rebecca Johnson and Segerhammar. With the advent of the First Gulf War, Johnson sponsored the service of prayer and peace at Holy Trinity along with people from the Conejo Valley Islamic Center and Adat Elohim Synagogue.<sup>64</sup>

In 1986, Johnson was honored by his alma mater, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, California, when he received the “Distinguished Ministry of Parish Pastor Award.”<sup>65</sup> In 1991, Johnson suffered a major heart attack, but recovered sufficiently to serve until 1996, when he resigned on disability. He recalled this trying time with “deep thankfulness for the grace and support from members and pastors as I moved from pulpit to pew.”<sup>66</sup>

Johnson, and his wife, Sally, have remained as active members of the congregation to this day, as have the Rev. Jim and Randi Oines. After a long ministry elsewhere, the Rev. Robert and Joyce Lawson rejoined the church which he founded. Also, when the Rev. Roger Anderson was Assistant to the Bishop and then Bishop, both he and his wife, Beverly, continued to worship at Holy Trinity. The congregation has benefited greatly from the continuing presence of such able leaders throughout its history.

### *Pastor Lillyanne Belusa*

In November, 1970, the LCA ordained the first female pastor, the Rev. Elizabeth Platz. The first woman and associate pastor called to Holy Trinity was the Rev. Lillyanne Belusa, who served from 1979 to 1981. While still in seminary, she married a Lutheran pastor. They made a pact that whoever received a call first, the other would follow the spouse to that church. When she accepted the position at Holy Trinity, the two arrived and he found another post. Lil Belusa was a diabetic, and kept fresh juice in the refrigerator in the Fireside Room in order to take care of herself. She was an impressive role model for others in persevering with an illness.<sup>67</sup>





## THE THIRD DECADE: 1980's

### *Ecumenism*

After more than a century of establishing immigrant church bodies along ethnic lines, Lutherans began to discover that they spoke the same English language, acknowledged the same Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, and cherished the same liturgical traditions. By 1962, four of these bodies, the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church,<sup>68</sup> the American Evangelical Lutheran Church,<sup>69</sup> the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America,<sup>70</sup> and the United Lutheran Church in America,<sup>71</sup> merged to form the Lutheran Church in America (LCA).<sup>72</sup> On January 1, 1988, the LCA joined the American Lutheran Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to become the largest Lutheran church body in America.

Ecumenism was advancing not only between Lutheran church bodies in the 1960's through 1980's. Roman Catholic leaders had met in Rome from 1962-65 in a gathering called Vatican Council II, and in the late 1970's, the revolutionary shift in ecumenism resulting from this Council brought Lutherans into dialogue with the Roman Catholic churches and a joint celebration of the Augsburg Confession, the formal statement of Lutheran beliefs, written 450 years earlier in 1530. The Catholic theologians pointed to the document as holding much that they shared with Lutherans. In June, 1980, a "Consensus Statement of Hope" derived from the dialogues was read by a Jesuit priest and a Lutheran minister during a Catholic-Lutheran prayer service at St. Vibiana Cathedral in Los Angeles which included the remarkable words:

*We recognize each other as members of the one Body of Christ through the one sacrament of baptism. We rejoice to hear each community affirm the presence of Christ in the Eucharist to nourish his people through the reception of his body and blood. We value the liturgical tradition which enriches each of our churches.*<sup>73</sup>

While noting the "pain of separation at the Eucharist," the joint authors stated that "we long for the day when we can be joined at the table of the Lord." Three Lutheran Church Missouri Synod parishes also took part in the dialogues and prayer service, the Rev. Richard Z. Meyer, a Vice President of the LCMS Southern California District representing the Rev. Arnold Kuntz, the District President.<sup>74</sup>

Throughout this time, Holy Trinity was on the "cutting edge" of Lutheran/Catholic relations by entering into a series of dialogues with the members of the Thousand Oaks Catholic Church, St. Paschal Baylon. Those from Holy Trinity and St. Paschal Baylon who had engaged in the conversations were present at St. Vibiana's that evening, and will never forget the joy and thrill of that service in which Lutherans and Catholics affirmed so strongly their agreement in the Gospel and Christ.<sup>75</sup>

Muslims living in the Conejo were without a place to hold their prayers, and had been meeting in homes. Pastor Johnson was asked if they could use one of the rooms of the church. In a spirit of hospitality and ecumenism, he went to the Church Council and proposed that the Fellowship Hall, largely unused during the week, be offered to the Islamic community for their use. His proposal was accepted, and for a while the Muslim community enjoyed the use of the room until they were able to

build the Islamic Center of the Conejo Valley in Newbury Park, now the largest mosque in Ventura County.<sup>76</sup> The center not only provides religious and community services to the local Muslim community, but works in the greater Conejo Valley to increase interfaith understanding and cooperation.<sup>77</sup>

### *A New Worship Center*

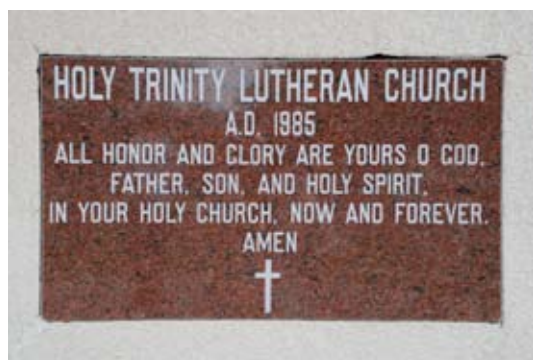


It was also during the era of Pastor Johnson that the new church worship center was constructed. Considerable discussion was held prior to developing the plans for the new building. The mission of Holy Trinity was carefully analyzed, with the result that the congregation decided that the Gospel would be better served by building only a modest structure, thus freeing monies for ministry to the community and the world.

After three years of planning, a new nave and adjacent office building was constructed for \$750,000. The architect, Irwin and Associates of Huntington Beach, and the contractor, John C. Lipham of Thousand Oaks, who was a member of Holy Trinity, involved members of the congregation in the project.

Pastor Johnson joined the more than one hundred workers to lay the 5,000 ceramic tiles on the floor.<sup>78</sup> Scott Youngren oversaw the installation of an up-to-date sound system. A dinner party was held in the unfinished sanctuary for an organ fund, and with its success, an Abbott & Sieker pipe organ was purchased and transported from the La Cañada residence of Norman and Silke Saupee, and installed under the direction of David Dixon, a former pipe organ technician at Schlicker Organ Builders, Buffalo, New York, on the southeast wall of the nave.





A time-capsule was placed within the cornerstone of the new building on September 29, 1985. The dedication service on Palm Sunday, April 13, 1986, involved former Pastors Lawson, Anderson, and Belusa, along with Segerhammar, Assistant Pastor, and Johnson, pastor of the congregation. Organist Virginia Walters inaugurated the eleven-rank Abbott & Sieker pipe organ<sup>79</sup> at the service, and Elmer Ramsey, Professor of Music at CLU, composed a “Holy Trinity Dedication Cantata” for choir, brass and organ, conducted by former choral director, Zimmerman.

Also, for the event, Johnson wrote a hymn, “We Sing to the Holy Trinity,” sung by the congregation. The forty-voice choir was conducted by the director, Jim Wilber.<sup>80</sup> Paul Straud, organist at Angelica Lutheran Church in Los Angeles and long a friend of Bishop Segerhammar, was invited to give the dedicatory concert on the organ June 15, 1986.<sup>81</sup> The first memorial service in the new nave, sadly, was that of a member of Holy Trinity, Phemie Johnson, the mother of Pastor Johnson.<sup>82</sup>

The three hundred fifty-seat edifice featured a four hundred-square-foot, stained glass window, “God the Creator,” designed by Mark Gulsrud, a graduate of CLU, who now lives in Gig Harbor, Washington.<sup>83</sup> Rising thirty-four feet behind the altar, the colors of the glass capture the moment recorded in Genesis 1:1-10, where the heavens are separated from the dry land. Spheres and suns burst forth from above, and shafts of light extend out and down to the immense, bountiful, brown globe of the earth below. At the bottom, the rays turn into streams of living waters. In front of this cosmic drama is a wall shaped to resemble the wings of the Holy Spirit descending to embrace the Cross below it. Thus, the three Persons of the Holy Trinity merge into an awe-inspiring unity.





The altar, pulpit, processional cross, altar desk, and monumental wall Cross, were designed by Professor of Art at California Lutheran College, Gerald Slattum, a member of Holy Trinity.<sup>84</sup> Recalling the name and symbol of the city in which the church resides, carved oak leaves appear frequently in the oak wood furniture. The Cross consists of a frame in which various pieces of darkly stained wood are placed seemingly at random. At the extremities of the top and crossbars are large oak leaves. In the words of Anne Lieberknecht, “The odd pieces of wood signify the fragmentation and imperfections of our lives, while the oak leaves at the ends of the arms of the Cross signify the hands of Christ which holds us together in love.”<sup>85</sup>



The six-foot Processional Cross also contains oak leaves at the ends of the two limbs and top. When it is raised and carried through the congregation, tiny ceramic bells hanging from strings produce a cheery sound as they knock against the wood handle. The bells were purchased by Slattum in Santiago, Chile, in August, 1987, and added as a reminder of the joy of salvation through the Cross. According to Slattum, since there were twelve bells, one of which was chipped, the sounding bells represent the Apostles, the twelfth, voiceless one represents Judas.<sup>86</sup>



The base of the baptismal font, also designed by Slattum, is crowded with images of faces visible only upon close inspection. The font had a heartbreaking origin. On the same day that Betty Jean and Jerry Slattum's second eldest son, Sven, died tragically in an automobile accident, an otherwise healthy fruit tree fell in the backyard of their home. Slattum thought that, somehow, this had been providential. As he contemplated the trunk of the large tree, he decided that it would be dedicated to the church. He cut a segment and carved the faces of people into the wood, some of whom resembled his children and son, Sven. He found a large shell which he fit into a hollow at the top of the column, transforming it into the baptismal font of Holy Trinity.<sup>87</sup> Thus, out of tragedy came something beautiful and significant for the church.<sup>88</sup>

In the mid-1980's, Ann and Jim Lieberknecht noticed a vacant area between the new sanctuary and the office building. It already held a bench donated by Dick Howard, the husband of the first Secretary of Holy Trinity, Kay (they also donated the carpet and Venetian blinds in the Fireside Room). Jim planted three crepe myrtle trees and some plants. When the plants became a bit "scruffy," Jim and Lloyd Johnson, the father of Pastor Johnson, came and planted others. At that moment, Pastor Johnson was passing by and suggested that two rose trees be planted there, and then it could be called the "Bishops' Garden," in honor of the two church leaders from the congregation.<sup>89</sup> A plaque identifies the site:

### ROSES FOR OUR BISHOPS

The roses are planted in honor  
of our two Holy Trinity members.

BISHOP J. ROGER ANDERSON  
30th Anniversary of Ordination 1991

BISHOP CARL W. SEGERHAMMAR  
60th Anniversary of ordination 1992







### *Ministries*

From 1981 to 1985, Kathryn Swanson, was the Parish Assistant. As part of the staff of Holy Trinity in evangelism and lay ministry, her duties were to expand adult education, support the workforce of the church, recruit and coordinate volunteers in the parish ministries, coordinate the outreach to worship visitors,

and to involve new members in the congregational life.<sup>90</sup> She also enlisted members of the church to construct banners for Synod meetings, one of which still hangs in the east wall of the Fellowship Hall.

Much attention was given to the younger members of Holy Trinity as well. Each week the youth gather during the Sunday Church School, with the Junior High class meeting separately from the Senior High. The Senior High Youth Group met each Sunday evening in “The Hut,” now dedicated solely to the youth. The Junior High class also met weekly for Confirmation instruction. In later years, the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month, the Senior High met for worship in the Sanctuary “to give the Youth an opportunity to worship God in a more contemplative setting which will help them grow closer in their relationship with God.” During the service, the candles are lit, acoustic music is played, and there is a devotional talk. The Eucharist is celebrated on the fourth Wednesdays.<sup>91</sup>

Throughout the years, beginning in 1977 with Cindy Cooper, Holy Trinity has had over thirty part-time Youth Directors, many of whom were CLU students. In 1983, Steve Dwyer, a Religion Major at California Lutheran College, became the first full-time Youth Director. His proximity to the church allowed him to be close to its youth and their activities. The duties of Youth Director were split into high school and junior high, but merged in a way when the Senior High Youth Director, Ron Voss, and Junior High Youth Director, Sue Dwyer, were married in 1987.

Eight of these Youth Directors later studied for the ministry and were ordained, and now serve in parishes across the United States. In addition, eight other members of Holy Trinity have been ordained to serve in the Lutheran Church. Pastor Johnson noted that “Holy Trinity has had 29 pastors over these fifty years as members of the congregation....including 14 who were/are CLU faculty or administration.”<sup>92</sup>



## Radio Ministry

Beginning in 1983, Zimmerman (and later Jim Wilbur, Howard Sonstegard,<sup>93</sup> and Marshall Bowen) directed the choir of the weekly “Adventures In Faith” radio broadcast in cooperation with the other Lutheran churches in the Conejo Valley. Inspired and coordinated by Pastor Segerhammar, it involved not only ELCA congregations but also the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod congregations. Esther Bierma brought together the readers and speakers who provided the spoken word in which one of the congregations’ pastors would tape a meditation for each program. The choir was composed of members of these Lutheran congregations, and met weekly at Holy Trinity to record. Scott Youngren, the producer, and Tom Welch, the announcer, were both members of Holy Trinity. It was broadcast every Sunday morning for ten years, a long run for such a program.<sup>94</sup>

## Ministry to the Homeless

In 1987, in response to a substantial need to care for the homeless scattered throughout the region, the congregation began a new ministry. According to Pastor Johnson:

*Holy Trinity hosted a Town Hall meeting inviting church and community leaders to address the issue of better serving the homeless. As a result, with the help of Lutheran Social Services, and the commitment of 14 churches, synagogues and dozens of volunteers, the Conejo Valley Winter Shelter program was begun.*

Holy Trinity entered into agreement with these other congregations in the region, that different houses of worship would open shelters during the winter months, and provide bedding and a safe place to escape the cold and wet nights. During the rest of the year, an evening meal would be provided but not a place to sleep. The homeless gather in a selected spot in downtown Thousand Oaks to be bussed to the designated sites each evening.

In the twentieth year of the program, 2008-9, seven hundred fifty-one dinners were provided, and two hundred ninety-four overnight guests had been accommodated from December through March.<sup>95</sup> The profile of the homeless served goes against the usual preconceptions in that 70% have earned a high school diploma or higher, 43% have physical disabilities, and 22% have been victims of sexual abuse.<sup>96</sup> With this ministry, Holy Trinity remained a leader in the Conejo Valley in fulfilling its Christian obligation to serve all peoples and conditions.



### *Pastor Rebecca Johnson Aardahl*

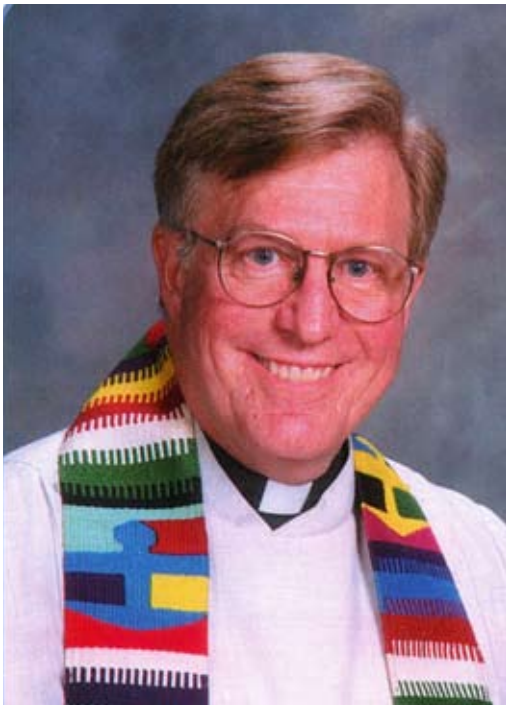
Pastor Rebecca Johnson Aardahl served from 1989 until 1996. She worked with two other clergy members, Pastors Johnson and Segerhammar. There were some seventeen ELCA clergy and families who were members of the church at that time. Rather than being intimidated by the throng of pastors at Holy Trinity, she thrived on the “collegiality, friendship and fun” she found in the congregation.<sup>97</sup> Pastor Rebecca recalls warmly the professionalism of Kay Howard, secretary to the church:

*But I still regret the summer afternoon when I was proofreading the Sunday bulletin for Kay. I was so tempted to leave the transposed letters as typed. But my burst of laughter gave it all away. Kay's printout reported a 'dead clam' rather than a 'dead calm' which followed Jesus' stilling of the storm in Mark 4. Don't I wish that I had left that typo alone! But, for the sake of the Gospel and for the sake of embarrassment, I confessed to Kay what I found. All was made well for Sunday's bulletin.<sup>98</sup>*



## THE FOURTH DECADE: 1990's

### *Pastor James A. Oines*



Pastor James A. Oines became Pastor at Holy Trinity in 1995. He recalled a number of projects that set apart the congregation as a caring, concerned parish, such as a community garden in the vacant land just north of the church, “so that both adults and children could renew intimacy with the earth.” He also began a relationship with Park Oaks School across Avenida de Los Arboles from the church, and initiated a volunteer tutor program for its students. At Thanksgiving and Christmas, the church gathered food baskets that were distributed to needy residents of Thousand Oaks. There was also an effort to build an awareness of the immigrant worker population in the city, and to serve their needs. Oines helped organize the board of the Ventura County Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (VC CLUE), and in order to “build solidarity with the global community,” and began the serving of “Fair Trade” coffee at all church functions to support small family farmers in Tanzania and East Africa. Also, an annual hand-arts sale during the Christmas season contin-

ues to benefit artists around the world.<sup>99</sup>

Oines was noted for his “big basket” containing items used for children’s sermons, but at times things would not go exactly as planned. One Sunday, he filled the basket with helium balloons. When he distributed them to the children, they were so surprised and delighted that they let go of the strings attached to them, and the colorful spheres floated up beyond their reach. The multihued balloons remained on the ceiling of the nave for weeks until they lost their buoyancy and drifted down.<sup>100</sup>

Another time, the children’s basket was filled with paper airplanes. It was only moments before the multi-colored planes were doing summersaults in the air above the members of the congregation. For Oines, it was an “unexpected surprise to see children and even adults let go of their inhibitions as they sailed the colorful planes through the open air of the large space above our heads.”<sup>101</sup>

After Johnson, Oines was the second pastor of Holy Trinity who suffered from a debilitating experience. With a massive stroke and lengthy hospitalization, Oines worked hard with a trainer for his rehabilitation. There was hope for a while that he could return to his ministry, but the extent of his disability was too great, and he resigned in 2002.<sup>102</sup> The Rev. Ron Kragthorpe, a member of the congregation, took up the task of visiting the shut-ins and hospitals beginning during Oines’ illness, and continued until 2007.<sup>103</sup> Oines’ wife, Randy, was interested in handcrafts of the world, and helped her husband take up watercolor painting, which significantly enabled him to make a comeback. Some remember his impressive art display mounted throughout the couple’s home and back yard as evidence of his healing.<sup>104</sup>

### *Pastor Janet Hansted Meadors*

The Rev. Janet L. Hansted Meadors was called to become Associate Pastor at Holy Trinity in the fall of 1997 and arrived in 1998 to work alongside Pastor Oines. She worked with Children’s Ministries to create a Village Sunday School model and new approaches to Confirmation and First Communion classes.<sup>105</sup> Active in ecumenical affairs in the Conejo, she is a member of the Conejo Valley Ecumenical Ministerial Association which meets monthly to discuss common issues. Just three days after the disaster of 9/11 in New York, she shared the pulpit with other Christians, Jews and Muslims at Temple Adat Elohim in Thousand Oaks to speak to the overflowing assembly from the Conejo. The service ended with singing “America the Beautiful.”<sup>106</sup>



Early in her ministry, Hansted Meadors ran a marathon to raise over \$5,000 for poverty in Africa, and later joined Holy Trinity member, Stacey Wise, representing the Southwest California

Synod region on a trip to Tanzania, East Africa under a Lutheran World Relief program. When Pastor Oines had his stroke, Hansted Meadors was joined temporarily by Pastors George Johnson and Bishop Emeritus Paul Egertson until the arrival of the Rev. Frank Nausin.<sup>107</sup> However, later during her ministry at the church, she also suffered from a disabling disease, and took a year-long leave of absence. In addition, she had several other absences for illness as well as two pregnancies. She has managed to raise her family and serve congregation of Holy Trinity as well.

## THE FIFTH DECADE: 2000's

### *Ministries*

Through the years, the congregation supported a number of opportunities for its members to participate in the life of the church. These have included Koinonia, Lutheran Singles, Young Adults, the Church Choir, the Hand Bell Choir, the Aisle Cruisers for ages seven through twelve, Softball teams, "Soupsuppers," Habitat for Humanity, Lutheran World Relief, MANNA, the Ventura County Foodbank, and others.



In the teaching ministries of the congregation, Ruthanne Dudik led the Sunday Church School for over twenty years, with Amy Johnson Shafer and Michelle Goetsch directing the program since 2008/9. Rose Egertson, Director of Children's Ministries, directed the Sunday Church School for several years during the vacancy of the volunteer position.<sup>108</sup> Confirmation classes and activities have been coordinated by Dixie Hanson since 1976. Along with Miriam Nakayama, Hanson has assisted with the Sunday Church School. Nakayama has also organized the New Member Recognition program. One of the longest terms of service in the Sunday Church School is IlaJean Kragthorpe, who taught for thirty-five years.<sup>109</sup>



An unusual ministry at Holy Trinity has been the Parish Nurse, in which a registered nurse with experience in clinical nursing serves the church in a variety of ways. The national Parish Nurse/Minister of Health program began in the 1960's to promote and advise individuals and congregations about wellness and health resources. The nurse does not give hands-on nursing or invasive procedures, or dispense medications, but rather counsels and advises members on healthy lifestyles, health-related concerns, and leads them in activities to maintain physical, mental and spiritual health. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Rose Egertson served in that position, conducting adult education programs, morning exercise programs, taking blood pressure, and Blood Mobile drives.<sup>110</sup>



The Lutheran Church Women have been particularly active in the congregation, and several of the circles have special interests. The Dorcas Circle was prodigious in making quilts for charity. Recently, this circle began to create baby blankets for Baptism. (Also presented for many years are Baptismal banners with the names embroidered. These have been made by individuals beginning with Robyn Hess, and now Esther Robinson.)<sup>111</sup> The blankets and banners are presented to the family during the rite. Yet another women's group was established by Anna Esmay and Anne Lieberknecht, whose purpose was to call upon the residents in the convalescent home, called the Convalarium, next door to the west of the church. They did the hair and nails, wrote letters, and served as companions for the bedridden patients.<sup>112</sup> The Thea Circle concentrates upon reading and discussing books on women and theology.<sup>113</sup>

The Men's Group, directed by Clarence Single, meets for breakfast on the second Saturday of each month, sharing camaraderie and hearing speakers talk on various topics. The "Happy Timers," a ministry for persons over fifty-five years of age, features activities and trips, led by Marcella Sharp. The "Early Birds" meet on the first and third Thursdays of each month at 6:45 a.m. in a local restaurant for breakfast and fellowship. It is sponsored by the "Women of the ELCA" (WELCA) headed by Lucy Ballard.<sup>114</sup> To nurture its members, the "Telecare Ministry" of Holy Trinity reached out by telephone when spiritual or communal needs arise.<sup>115</sup>

In addition, many other church and community groups make use of the facilities of Holy Trinity. Al-Anon (which offers support for friends and families of problem drinkers), Narcotics Anonymous (which provides information and assistance for addicts and non-addicts), Children of Alcoholic Parents (ADA), the Music Teachers Association (MTAC) meet throughout the year, as does the Conejo Players to rehearse its performances.



Scouting (for boys between 10 and 18 years old) has been a great success at Holy Trinity from the first year of its organization,<sup>116</sup> with members of the congregation providing consistent leadership to the Troop. Many of these have received the movement's recognition, such as the "Silver Beaver" award (the highest honor to an adult leader from the Council level), the "District Award of Merit" (the highest recognition from the District level), and the awards from the Lutheran churches, the "Lamb

Award" for ten years of exceptional service to the youth of Lutheran congregations (including Scouts). The latter award was given to Patrick Dove (for service to a congregation in the San Fernando Valley, but who was Committee Chair at Holy Trinity for years), and Holy Trinity members Jim Esmay and Bill Hurley. The "Servant of Youth" award is similar to the "Lamb Award," but is given for five years of exceptional service. Larry Tuck received the honor for service to Holy Trinity's youth, and Howard Kern (a member of Ascension Lutheran), for service to the youth of Holy Trinity.<sup>117</sup> In the nearly fifty years of Scout Troop 761, some one hundred sixteen boys have been awarded the rank of Eagle Scout.<sup>118</sup> Also meeting regularly at the church is the Venture Crew, a division of the Boy Scouts of America for both young men and women (14 to 20 years of age), providing experiences to help them mature and become responsible as well as caring adults.<sup>119</sup>



### *For God and country*

Receiving the Pro Deo Et Patria emblem at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church are, left to right, Jon Esmay, 13, of Boy Scout Troop 761; Keith Rettig, 13, of Troop 761, and Eagle Scout Eric West, 17, of Troop 716. The emblem is given by the church in recognition of a Boy Scout's understanding of the teachings of the church, his faithfulness at worship and his record of service to his church, community and fellow man. (News-Chronicle Photo by Bob Chamberlin.)



## *The Garden Cross*

In the center of the quadrangle formed by the nave, the office and classroom buildings and Honey Tree, stands a tall Cross. It was erected by Jim Lieberknecht and Lloyd Johnson within a brick-framed planter, dedicated to the memory of Johnson's wife, Phemie. Several years thereafter, Johnson himself died, and the cross was rededicated in memory of the couple. A memorial fund was established for the upkeep and repainting of the Cross. The inscription at the foot of the Cross reads:



LIFT HIGH THE CROSS, THE LOVE OF CHRIST PROCLAIM.

This Cross and the Sanctuary Tower Cross

Are Dedicated in Loving Memory of

Phemie J. Johnson (1900-1986)

and

Lloyd V. Johnson (1905-2000)

By Larry & Sally Johnson, Family and friends.

The Garden Cross is maintained by a group from the Property Committee, who also cultivate four other rose gardens to beautify the grounds of the church.<sup>120</sup>



## *The Peace Pole*

In response to the destruction of the World Trade Center Towers in New York City on September 11, 2001, Holy Trinity pondered its role as a congregation in the world. It came to a decision that it was the duty of the world-wide church, the congregations and their members to foster peace, not war. It lay emphasis upon inviting the changing community around it, peoples of all cultures and languages, to participate in its pursuit of peace. A pole was erected within a circle of decorative bricks upon which are attached plaques in various languages. The English text, “May Peace Prevail On Earth,” is repeated in various languages such as Norwegian, “Må det vaere fred på jorden,” Vietnamese, Arabic, Chinese, and Hebrew. As the members of the congregation meet for worship and then depart into the world, the Peace Pole reminds them of their mission as peacemakers.



## *Pastor Frank Nausin*

Pastor Frank Nausin arrived to serve at Holy Trinity in 2002. By coincidence, it had been in the office of Pastor Roger Anderson at Holy Trinity where Nausin had made the decision to enter the seminary, and now he had returned. The congregation, while vibrant, was “unsure of itself, having gone through a period of time where two senior pastors had gone through serious health issues and had to go on disability.” Much had been “placed on hold” during those years. But, with the steady leadership of Nausin, the congregation gained stability and a sense of courage to move into the future.<sup>121</sup> According to Nausin, “Holy Trinity has a bright future, rooted in its past, yet hopeful of many more positive things in reaching out to the community of Thousand Oaks and beyond.”<sup>122</sup>



Nausin loves to jog daily, and it is not surprising that his monthly article in Holy Trinity’s Tempo, is called, “Thoughts While Running.” Ruminating on various topics from the festivals of the church, the role of volunteers in the congregation, to the seasons, he encouraged members to recall the benefits of a summer:

*But don't forget it all comes from the Lord, and it is a gift. Don't forget to worship, to praise the one who gives us such life. We will be here every Sunday. When you are here our worship is fuller and it is a definite way to build the body of Christ. See you in church.*<sup>123</sup>

## *The Church Library*

In 2004, the Library of Holy Trinity was renovated when Jack Holmgren designed and built new shelves, and the Property Committee painted the walls. The collection began in the early years of the congregation when the members of the church realized a need for it. Up to that time, a Book Mobile furnished reading materials for the citizens of the Conejo. It was probably established at the instigation of Lydia Norberg. Later, Doris Cooper created the Children's Library, and Joey Nelson, Marilyn Gemberling, Esther Arney, Margaret Zachary and others, piled books on a little red cart to pull to the Sunday School classrooms for the children to select what they wanted. When new buildings were built in 1986, Arlot Dahl and Norma Odell organized and catalogued the books with the Dewey Decimal System. Dahl continued her work until her death in her nineties.<sup>124</sup>

The latest renovation was made after several years of neglect, and with new furniture and a computer, the books were reorganized according to subjects. This was thought to be more suitable for a small, working library. The committee of Diane Seal, Sandy Holmgren, and Pat Sladek, under the leadership of Elda Soderquist, Chair, have made the Church Library an attractive, useful and popular feature of the ministry of Holy Trinity.<sup>125</sup>

## *Helping With Hurricane Katrina Recovery*

When the congregation's teens left for the July 22-26, 2009, Lutheran Youth Gathering in New Orleans after months of fundraising, little did they realize what they were to experience. The ELCA assembly had as its theme, "Jesus, Justice, Jazz," drawn from the setting in the city still recovering from Hurricane Katrina. Among Holy Trinity's representatives was Logan Anderson, who recalled his astonishment in seeing the vast dome filled with Lutherans. At first, one did not see individuals, but masses of color as each group wore different colored t-shirts.<sup>126</sup> Emma Lammawin remembered her surprise how friendly everyone was.<sup>127</sup>

The youth had been alerted that they would be working on a service project to help the survivors. Some thirty-six thousand attendees put on their work clothes and spread throughout the ruined city, and were thrilled to serve as the "hands of God" in clearing rubble, rebuilding homes, painting schools, and restoring wetlands.<sup>128</sup> Hayden Wise related how Holy Trinity's youth were assigned to clean up a huge park that had been abandoned since the hurricane. They joined other groups and worked hard, and after hours of toil had huge piles of weeds. The city of New Orleans was so impressed with their work that they pledged money to maintain the park in the future.<sup>129</sup> The youth at the assembly logged more than two hundred fifty thousand hours of community service.

Most of all, according to Lammawin, their faith was strengthened.<sup>130</sup> The inspirational speeches, Bishop Hanson's sermon (and the "wave" he produced by having the audience raise their lighted cell phones in the darkened room row-by-row all the way back to the balconies), the great fun and the spiritual intensity, were thrilling. Said Wise, he could feel the presence of God there in that vast assembly of Lutheran youth.<sup>131</sup>



### *A Sister Church*

Acknowledging that the congregation is part of the global Lutheran church, Holy Trinity established a relationship with Espiritu del Gozo (“Spirit of Joy”) in El Salvador. Through a collection of loose change in a large, glass jar each Sunday, monies are sent to this sister Lutheran church to support its ministries. Holy Trinity financed erecting the modest church building, and delegations from Holy Trinity have been sent to El Salvador to assist in various ways. In August, 2009, Eric Warren, who has spearheaded the work, visited the Espiritu del Gozo Church, and brought back a report on the life of members and an appeal for funds to construct bell tower to call people to worship from around this rural area.<sup>131</sup> Within a month, the monies had been gathered, and by Christmas, 2009, Espiritu del Gozo had a tower and bell to ring out the Good News.<sup>133</sup>





## *Worship*

The Church Choir has maintained a strong tradition to sustain the worship of Holy Trinity at the highest level. Many of the original volunteer members have remained dedicated to their mission in the choir through many years. Recent conductors, Jim Wilbur, Wyant Morton, and George Swanson, have provided anthems of great power and beauty in the praise of God.<sup>134</sup>



The addition of a “Praise Band” to the Contemporary Service each Sunday has brought a lively form of worship for attendees of the “middle” service. Begun in 2005 under the leadership of Marlene Roselli, Chairperson of the Music Committee, and Lindsey Riddle, who coordinated the music from 2006 to 2009, with

Katie Bode, the informal worship music leader, and Lynn Youngren, who has been key in organizing the group of volunteers, they have obtained excellent musicians, especially pianist Hunter Buchanan, who started when he was thirteen years old, bass Stephan Youngren, Dale Ewing on the drums, and guitars Fred Lindberg, Chris Marasco and Paul Benz. Robin Slattum selected and led the first volunteer ensemble. With vocalists Slattum and Darin Erickson, the service really “rocks out,” according to Virginia Walters.<sup>135</sup> Fred Lindberg, along with Chris and Julie Marasco, have been responsible in organizing the annual “Music 4 Meals” concert of 1940’s and 50’s pieces in the church’s courtyard as a benefit for Lutheran Social Services and MANNA. The audiences bring blankets and lawn chairs to sit and listen to the music, and donate bags of canned goods and monies for the charities.

In the fifty years of Holy Trinity’s worship life, the congregation has been blessed with many very able organists, beginning with Sally Magnusen, and including Carl Swanson, Beverly Mersing, Ilene Judd and Virginia Walters. After many years of use, the two-manual, Abbott & Sieker pipe organ needed repairs and augmentation. A group of Holy Trinity members, Roger Stephenson, Adrian Popa, Frank Schaible and Bob Ritterbush, led by Scott Youngren, worked with Timothy Patterson, an organ builder, in planning and installing a new, computer controlled console with three manuals. The old pipes were cleaned and remounted, and a number of simulated computer stops were added to give the organ increased flexibility and beauty, especially in playing the Romantic Period music. These simulators amplify the recorded sound of real pipes rather than imitate the sound electronically.<sup>136</sup> Thus, the congregation fulfills its primary purpose, the worship and praise of God.





## THE NEXT HALF-CENTURY

As Holy Trinity looks back on its first half-century, indeed it has satisfied the hopes of those Lutherans in the sparsely populated Conejo Valley who met in the home of Pastor Robert Lawson that evening on September 24, 1959, to worship God and to establish a congregation. When the church became a reality and seventy-two adults and seventy-four children were enrolled as charter members on April 3, 1960, they were led in the prayer that requested God to hear their petitions, and that whosoever sought God's blessings in this church would have their desires "wholly fulfilled."<sup>137</sup> The "Amens" to this prayer have rung now through fifty years, and, God willing, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church will "Lift high the Cross, the Love of Christ proclaim" for many, many more decades.

The Rev. Ernst F. Tonsing, Ph.D.  
Thousand Oaks, California  
October 25, 2009



## NOTES

1. The Synod was composed of 1,250 congregations in the United States and Canada, and missionaries in Japan, Formosa, India, and Africa. With a membership of more than 70,000,000, the Lutheran Churches comprised the largest Protestant Church in the world in 1959. In the United States, the Lutheran Church was the third largest Protestant Church with more than 6,000,000 members. "To Introduce and Invite You," Augustana Lutheran Church (1959).
2. Joyce and Robert Lawson, letter, August 9, 2009.
3. Ernst F. Tonsing, "Chronology of CLC-CLU," 2008.
4. Lawson, August 9, 2009.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. The new parsonage was located east of Moorpark Road, and north of Columbia Road. Robert Lawson, "To Introduce and Invite You" (1959).
8. "Holy Trinity Lutheran Fellowship Meetings," Conejo News (?) (September, 1959).
9. "New Communion Rail," Conejo News (February 4, 1960).
10. Lawson, August 9, 2009.
11. "Augustana Announces," Invitation (April 3, 1960).
12. Lawson, August 9, 2009.
13. "Brief Historical Notes 1959-94," Holy Trinity Lutheran Church.
14. Lawson, August 9, 2009.
15. Ibid.
16. Robert Lawson, "Holy Trinity Lutheran," Conejo News (September 22, 1960).
17. Joyce Lawson, "Real Old Country" (December, 1960).
18. Robert Lawson, "Couple's Club," Conejo News (November 10, 1960).
19. Pastor Robert Lawson, "Holy Trinity Lutheran Church," Conejo News (?) (February, 1960).
20. Ibid.
21. Robert Lawson, "Holy Trinity Lutheran," Conejo News (January 14, 1960).
22. "Cub Scout Pack Tomorrow Night," Conejo News (May, 1960).
23. Robert Lawson, in Monte James, "Forming Two New Scout Troops," Conejo News (February 10, 1960).
24. Robert Lawson, "Holy Trinity Lutheran," Conejo News (July 14, 1960).
25. Joyce Lawson (December, 1960).
26. Lawson, August 9, 2009.
27. "Holy Trinity Lutheran, Conejo News (May 26, 1960).
28. "Architect Chosen," Conejo News (November 25, 1960).
29. "New Chapel-Education Unit," Thousand Oaks Journal (February 1, 1961).
30. The Augustana Board of American Missions furnished a loan of \$93,000 (\$38,000 property and \$55,000 for the building and furnishings) for the construction. "The Service of Dedication," bulletin (October 15, 1961), p. 8.
31. The contractor was C. Irwin Johnson and Associates. "The Service of Dedication," p. 8.
32. Ibid., p. 7.
33. "Church News," Thousand Oaks Journal (October 18, 1961).
34. Johnson, interview, October 4, 2009. The oak Cross conforms to the so-called "Golden Ratio" of 1.618 to 1, a geometric arrangement that was used by the ancient Greek philosopher, Pythagoras (ca. 560-480 B.C.) to describe the proportions of the elements of the human body. Especially employed during the Renaissance, it was judged as the most aesthetically pleasing. Most Crosses correspond with those proportions. The larger cross now adorns the east wall of the Fellowship Room.
35. Anne Lieberknecht, interview, September 4, 2009.
36. Ibid.
37. Leonard Smith, interview, September 15, 2009.
38. Jim Esmay, CLU Professor of Business and Economics, "Mud," in, Ernst F. Tonsing, ed., *I Remember CLC/CLU...* (California Lutheran University, September, 2009).
39. Carl Swanson, interview, August 3, 2009.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Joyce Lawson, letter, August 9, 2009.
43. "Order for the Installation of the Reverend J. Roger Anderson as Assistant to the President Pacific Southwest Synod," bulletin (February 26, 1978).

44. "Brief Historical Notes 1959-94," Holy Trinity Lutheran Church.
45. J. Roger Anderson, letter, July 9, 2009.
46. Anne Lieberknecht, interview, September 4, 2009.
47. "Holy Trinity appoints new organist," News-Chronicle (October, 1971).
48. Carl Swanson, August 3, 2009.
49. Alyce Schuldt, "Honey Tree Preschool Beginnings" (July 9, 2009).
50. "Education building added to Holy Trinity grounds," News-Chronicle, Thousand Oaks, California (September 28, 1973).
51. Schuldt.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid. Alyce Schuldt was chosen as "Senior of the Year" in the Conejo Valley for her outstanding work as a volunteer at the Camarillo Healthcare District and at the Goebel Senior Adult Center on Janss Road, Thousand Oaks. She also organized a monthly lunch program for homebound seniors, and served as a docent at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. "I have a real soft spot in my heart for seniors. They've given us so much over the years and now they need us," she said. "T.O. celebrates 'Senior of Year,'" The Thousand Oaks Acorn (June 16, 2005).
57. Paula Smith, "First ordination held," News-Chronicle (June 14, 1974).
58. Ibid.
59. "History of St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church," Adams Ridge, Defiance County, Ohio, online (August 12, 2009).
60. California Lutheran College became California Lutheran University on January 1, 1986.
61. Jim Lieberknecht, September 15, 2009.
62. Nancy Mayerson, "Inspired by Faith, Powered by Love: Carl and Ruth Segerhammar," CLU Magazine (Spring, 1996).
63. "Reformation Festival Rally to Hear Dr. Segerhammar," Pasadena, California, Independent (October 24, 1964).
64. Larry H. T. Johnson, letter, July, 2009.
65. Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, California (1986).
66. Johnson, note, September 8, 2009.
67. Sharon Smith, interview, August 16, 2009.
68. A predominantly Swedish-American Lutheran church established in 1860.
69. A Danish-American denomination, formed in 1872.
70. Called the Suomi Synod, begun in 1890.
71. Established in 1918 by the merger of three German-American churches, the General Synod, whose roots went back to the Pennsylvania Ministerium founded in 1820, the General Council, founded in 1869, and the United Synod of the South, which grew out of the conflict of the American Civil War in 1863.
72. The cooperation of Lutheran church bodies produced the Service Book and Hymnal (1958), commonly known as "The Red Book." The participating churches were the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, the American Lutheran Church, the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (Suomi Synod), the Lutheran Free Church, and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the United Lutheran Church in America.
73. "Consensus Statement of Hope," in John Dart, "Catholics, Lutherans Pray Together," Los Angeles Times (June, 1980).
74. John Dart, "Catholics, Lutherans Pray Together," Los Angeles Times (June, 1980).
75. Johnson, September 8, 2009. The author was present for that service as well.
77. Islamic Center of Conejo Valley, [www.iccv.org](http://www.iccv.org) (September 11, 2009). The center is located at 2700 Borchard Road, Newbury Park, California.
78. "Holy Trinity Dedicates sanctuary during special service," News Chronicle (April 11, 1986).
79. Pete Sieker and Douglas E. Bush, "Abbott & Sieker," Encyclopedia of Keyboard Instruments: The Organ, ed. by Douglas E. Bush and Richard Kassel (New York, New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 1-2. The company operated in Los Angeles, California, from 1961 to 1994.
80. "Holy Trinity Dedicates sanctuary during special service."
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Mark Gulsrud also created windows in Thousand Oaks for the California Lutheran University Preus-Brandt Forum and Chapel, as well as Ascension Lutheran Church.
84. "Holy Trinity Dedicates sanctuary during special service."

85. Anne Lieberknecht, September 4, 2009.
86. Slattum, interview, September 6, 2009.
87. The shell is the *Tridacna gigas*, a bivalve mollusk which lived on the shallow reefs of the South Pacific and Indian Oceans.
88. Slattum, September 6, 2009.
89. Jim Lieberknecht, September 4, 2009.
90. Ibid.
91. "Youth Ministry," in, "Welcome!" Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (2009).
92. Johnson, September 8, 2009.
93. Jim Lieberknecht, September 16, 2009.
94. Johnson, September 8, 2009.
95. Ibid.
96. Thousand Oaks Acorn (July 10, 2008).
97. Rebecca Johnson Aardahl, letter, July 21, 2009.
98. Ibid.
99. James A. Oines, note, July 14, 2009.
100. Ibid.
101. Ibid.
102. Sharon Smith, August 16, 2009.
103. Virginia Walters, note (October 26, 2009).
104. Sharon Smith, August 16, 2009.
105. Janet L. Hansted Meadors, note, September 16, 2009.
106. "Service unites Christians, Jews, Muslims" *The Thousand Oaks Acorn* (October 11, 2001).
107. Ibid.
108. Rhondi Ewing, note (October 26, 2009).
109. Virginia Walters, note (October 26, 2009).
110. "Parish Nurse Leadership at Holy Trinity," brochure (September, 2009).
111. Johnson, September 11, 2009.
112. Anne Lieberknecht, September 4, 2009.
113. "Ministry Groups," "Welcome!" Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (2009).
115. "Ministry Groups," *ibid*.
116. See above for the founding of the troops.
117. Bill Hurley, letter, September 10, 2009.
118. Boy Scout plaques in Fellowship Hall, September 16, 2009.
119. "Venturing," Boy Scouts of America (<http://www.scouting.org/sitecore/content/Home/Venturing.aspx>) (September 11, 2009).
120. Jim Lieberknecht, September 16, 2009.
121. Frank Nausin, note, July 13, 2009.
123. Ibid.
124. Frank Nausin, "Thoughts while running," *Tempo* (June, 2009), p. 1.
125. Elda Soderquist, notes, September 17, 2009. Norma Odell, interview, October 7, 2009.
126. Ibid.
127. Logan Anderson, interview (October 25, 2009).
128. Emma Lammawin, interview (October 25, 2009).
129. "Lutheran teens still helping with Katrina recovery," *Thousand Oaks Acorn* (August 27, 2009), 28.
130. Hayden Wise, interview (October 25, 2009).
131. Lammawin, interview (October 25, 2009).
132. Wise, interview (October 25, 2009).
133. Bulletin, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (August 30, 2009).
134. Announcement at services (September 13, 2009).
135. Virginia Walters, interview, September 13, 2009.
136. Ibid.
137. "Augustana Announces," Invitation (April 3, 1960).

Special thanks to Paul Booth for the interior and exterior shots of the church.