



*A Brief History of
the Evangelical Lutheran Church
of the Holy Spirit*

By Stephen R. Herr

This is the story of a modern-day congregation which traces its history back to the early 1800s. However, its most recent life has shown that worshipping in a school and a farmhouse has not prevented the Christian spirit from showing itself in this church. The members of Holy Spirit Lutheran Church have come from humble beginnings. This is a tribute to their hard work and dedication!¹

Origins of the Church

In 1825 the Evangelical Trinity Lutheran Congregation of Rohrerstown was formed by the Rev. John J. Strine. They held their worship services in a small public school building. Five years later the young congregation decid-

United Church of Christ) in forming a union church, a common arrangement in the nineteenth century. Services alternated each week, one week Lutheran, the following week Reformed. By April 1901 both congregations decided to go their own ways. The Lutheran congregation agreed to sell all rights, real property, and interest to the German Reformed congregation for \$1,500. After the Reformed congregation built the present church building the old union church building located to the rear of Salem U.C.C. between Wood Street and Marietta Avenue was razed.

A lot along the south side of Marietta Avenue east of the Rohrerstown Road was purchased by the Lutheran congregation and a church was erected. From 1907 until December 1912 the Reverend Lawrence Miller (1873-1949) served as pastor of Trinity of Rohrerstown and Concordia Lutheran Church at Chestnut Hill near Ironville. The congregation at Chestnut Hill also had been founded by the Rev. Mr. Strine as early as 1859. After the Rev. Mr. Miller accepted a call to serve a large parish in rural Berks County the Rohrerstown congregation faced numerous periods without the services of a regular pastor.² In July 1931 the Rohrerstown church was joined to the Ascension Lutheran Church in Lancaster to receive the joint attention of the Rev. R. Frank Herr. This association ended in 1943 when Ascension obtained a full-time pastor.³ Meanwhile the congregation at Rohrerstown was not growing in numbers nor were its older members able to travel to more active Lutheran churches.

Founding of Holy Spirit Lutheran Church

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit, L.C.A., began as a mission congregation of the United Lutheran Church in America. A Steering Committee met to organize this congregation in West Lancaster in October, 1958. On November 16, 1958, ninety-four persons gathered for the first worship service which was held at Hambright Elementary School on the Millersville Road just south of the Columbia Pike. The first communion service was held on December 1, 1958.⁴

Most of the members of Trinity Lutheran Church in Rohrerstown began attending the new mission congregation, some walking to services, others being driven to services by the pastor.⁵ Among the young congregation's 87 charter members were 16 members from the Rohrerstown church. In 1959 the Rohrerstown church was closed, and parish responsibilities were assumed by Holy Spirit congregation. The Rohrerstown church building was sold and converted into apartments.

The following year was a very vital time for these people. They spent a lot of time organizing their new church. The congregation met to adopt a name: Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit. A constitution was prepared and council members were elected. An official call was extended

to the Rev. Harold Sandy to led the congregation. The Rev. Mr. Sandy served from 1959 until 1964. On Friday evenings the members would go to the school to prepare the schoolroom for the Sunday service.⁶ The altar, made of plywood and decorated with a lamb on the front, was built by Harry Lueders. Today this altar is a treasured possession of the church. After the service was ended the congregation had to put the church items away and prepare the schoolroom for its normal use the next day.⁷

Holy Spirit Builds a Church

By June 1, 1961, the congregation had outgrown its worship facilities at Hambright Elementary School. They purchased a building site at 3131 Columbia Avenue which included two properties on Urban Drive. This site consisting of four acres was purchased for \$35,000. On June 24, 1962, the first worship service at the new address was held in the Parish House which was an old farmhouse. The congregation was seated in the living room. The choir sat in the kitchen and the organ was in the reception room. The same altar that was used at Hambright Elementary School was used here. On Saturday night members would come down and set up for Sunday Services.⁸ Through hard work and sound evangelism, the Holy Spirit Church outgrew these facilities also. On December 22, 1963, a ground breaking for the first unit of three planned units was held. This was a Chapel which was planned to seat approximately 180 people. Furnishing of the Chapel, landscaping, parking lot, and the renovation of Parish House cost approximately \$91,000. Finally on June 21, 1964 the cornerstone was laid. On October 18, 1964 the dedication of the new Chapel was held. It was conducted by the Rev. Dwight L. Putnam, President of Central Pennsylvania Synod L.C.A. This was quite a satisfying day for those seven members who started in a schoolroom! Pastor Sandy preached only one sermon in the new church. On September 16, 1964, the congregation sadly accepted his resignation. From 1965 to 1973, Rev. Allan Ruby and Rev. Kent Krause served Holy Spirit. For the next seven years Holy Spirit continued to grow under the leadership of Rev. Richard F. Michael. Sister Melody Sell came to Holy Spirit on May 21, 1978. She served the congregation in the field of Christian Education and youth work.

Educational Building

As Holy Spirit continued to grow, the second unit was planned. On June 25, 1978, the dedication of the newly built Educational Building was held. It consists of a kitchen, fellowship hall, offices, and many Sunday School rooms. April 1980 brought the resignation of Pastor Richard Michael.⁹

Once again Holy Spirit is renewing its spirit and ministry under the direction of Pastor Donald Green, who assumed his duties May 3, 1981.

Throughout Holy Spirit's history, the tradition of Trinity, Rohrerstown has remained and, in the historian's words, "is a cordial and appreciable relationship between Pastor and people."¹⁰

Pastors of Holy Spirit

1959 - 1964 — Rev. Harold Sandy

1965 - 1970 — Rev. S. Alan Ruby

1971 - 1973 — Rev. Kent Krause

1973 - 1980 — Rev. Richard Michael

1981 - — Rev. Donald Green

Vice Pastors

October 1964 - February 1965 — Rev. Dr. Raymond Schindler

August 1970 - February 1971 — Rev. Gerald Krum

April 1973 - September 1973 — Rev. Gerald Krum

September 1980 - May 1981 — Rev. Eugene K. Strebler

Notes

¹Dedication Program, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit, October 18, 1964.

²Milton Blatt, *Salem Belleman's Union Church: It's Life and It's Ministers*, Mohrsville, Pa., 1983; *Concordia Evangelical Lutheran Church, Dedication and Diamond Jubilee Services, 1860-1935*, Chestnut Hill, Pa., 1935.

³Luther Killian, *History of Ascension Lutheran Church, 1907-1985*, Lancaster, Pa., 1985.

⁴Olivia Will, personal interview, October 18, 1981.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶John Ernst, personal interview, March 25, 1981.

⁷Olivia Will, *op. cit.*

⁸John Ernst, *op. cit.*

⁹Dedication Program, June 25, 1978.

¹⁰*The Lancaster Conference, Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania*, 1942 edition (Lebanon, Pa.), p. 256.

About The Contributor

Stephen R. Herr wrote this brief history of his church when he was a member of the Buchanan Chapter of Student Historians in April 1981. Mr. Herr presently is a student at Gettysburg College. The editor recognizes the essay is extremely brief and unsophisticated, but it represents an excellent example of how junior and senior high school students, properly motivated by parents and teachers, can demonstrate their skills in analytical thinking and historiography. Stephen is the son of Mr. and Mrs. P. Robert Herr.