

TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH 175th Anniversary + Faithful Journey

Invitation to Thanksgiving: Faithful and Unrestrained



This article was written for the October, 2009, edition of the EASTERN SYNOD LUTHERAN. Trinity, New Hamburg, has a long history of innovation for ministry and of sharing its leadership, ideas and resources with the wider church.

Almost 25 years ago, Trinity designed its first software to manage family and individual information in a computer program called Paraclete. Paraclete was widely used by area congregations and served us well for a decade. Fifteen years ago, Trinity pioneered the use of the PAR —the Pre-Authorized Remittance— program which is now used by thousands of congregations, Lutheran and otherwise, across Canada. Over the years, many congregational worship resources have been birthed at Trinity and have served the worshipping community in every corner of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and beyond! Trinity's PLAN FOR WELL-BEING has found a life in our synod and in many congregations across the ELCIC. Now, Trinity is seeking to foster the greater well-being of the church through our model collaboration with ELFEC, the Evangelical Lutheran Foundation of Eastern Canada.

In the following piece, Trinity families are invited to rejoice in a fascinating episode in our own congregational history and, thereby, to consider the possibility of including Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in our own personal estate planning.

Dear Synod friends,

Grace and peace to you.

When I was called to Trinity Lutheran Church, New Hamburg, twenty-five years ago, I was invited by a senior couple in the parish to visit Henrietta (wife of the late Charles) Zilliax in a nursing home in Waterloo. I understood that she'd formerly belonged to our congregation, had moved to Waterloo, but that I might look her up nonetheless.

So in my early years, and with the permission of her pastor, I regularly included Henrietta in my rounds. I visited her faithfully, as invited, into her second century of life. She was a fascinating woman, a person of considerable grace —elegant, interesting and unfailingly welcoming. At length, she died, and so was triggered an astonishing series of events.

Henrietta Zilliax had been a life tenant on the estate of Theodore Henry Peine. I had known that much as part of some regular reporting at Council. What it meant was that, so long as she lived, the estate of her late brother, Ted Peine, would afford her an annual income to help take care of her. Moreover, it meant that, when she died, Ted's estate would be disbursed to the various residuary beneficiaries named in his will. Toronto's Sick Kids was named. The Salvation Army was named. So was Trinity Lutheran Church.

Ted, who had been a lawyer in our community, and active in the life and ministry of our congregation, had remembered us in his will. “Remembered” is probably the wrong word. It was not an afterthought as the word “remembered” conveys. Ted Peine was as deliberate about his will and the church as he was devoted to his sister and her well-being. Ted understood the first-fruits principle of good stewardship. Anyway, it had taken a while for the provision in his will to come into play, as he had died in 1973, while Henrietta lived another 20 years. It was now 1993. As a result of Ted’s thoughtful stewardship, Trinity was to receive about \$50,000 from his estate. That was a lot of money by any standard. The story doesn’t end there, however.

Unbeknownst to the congregation, Henrietta Zilliax had also named Trinity in her will, together with Waterloo Lutheran Seminary and Sick Kids in Toronto. Trinity’s share would be in excess of \$300,000. People were flabbergasted. Very, very happy... but flabbergasted. The congregation, at the thoughtful and careful direction of Council, was very wise about what it chose to do next. In fact, it elected to do two things.



First, we paid-off our outstanding debt, a mortgage on the recent construction of our “Access Project”, a small wing featuring an elevator, wheel-chair-accessible washrooms, and a new outer narthex for our Sunday morning coffee hour on the upper level and some much-needed Sunday School and day-care space on the lower. The mortgage was a modest sum, as church mortgages go, because so much of the project had been undertaken using the “sweat equity” of Trinity’s members: setting the foundation, fetching wheelbarrow loads of gravel, running wires and plumbing, painting, decorating, furnishing. It all probably wouldn’t be allowed today given safety concerns and all that. In any event, the new construction, our fourth in a hundred years, had been a labour of love in every sense. And now, the legacy of Ted Peine and that of his sister, Henrietta Zilliax, would serve to honour “all who’d turned their hand to any useful task”, as the old prayer has it. Our new space would be paid-off.

The second thing we did was to use the rest of Ted and Henrietta’s bequests to establish an endowment fund with which to extend the ministry of our congregation beyond our own immediate needs and concerns. We decided we wouldn’t use the money to pay the salaries or to heat or light the place. Instead, we would do things we would not likely have done otherwise. We’d try to be about the work of being *in mission for others* as our current national and synodical emphasis has it. So we established the Trinity Endowment Fund.

Year after year, people have added to the fund either through bequests or through memorial donations. Mostly, the latter. The Trinity Endowment Fund is where memorial contributions—the kind that typically come via the local funeral home, twenty dollars here, thirty dollars there—are placed if there are no stipulations otherwise. It’s the default option for memorial donations to our congregation.

The Trinity Endowment Fund has grown over the years and generated a steady stream of income. While the capital has been preserved (and has increased), every year we’ve spent the interest income—some ten to eighteen thousand dollars—to send kids to camp; to support our local counselling centre; to give our youth the opportunity to work in a Halifax mission; to craft and fill faith chests for the newly-baptized; to supply new worship books for our seminary or a mission congregation; and more. Much more.

Until this year, at the direction of our Endowment Fund Committee, our investments were in conservative, interest-bearing GIC’s provided by a local bank. Each year, over the course of a five

year period, a certificate would come due and be reinvested together with the previous year's contributions, at prevailing interest rates, for another five-year term. It was a great way to insure that the fund would always yield a modest income and never be subject to the extremes of market volatility. We'd never make a lot of money but we'd never lose anything either.

Some years ago, David Buehlow, a member of our Endowment Fund Committee, approached the Synod with an idea. Could Trinity not place its investments with those of the Synod and thereby benefit from the Synod's greater investment pool and access to financial expertise? At the time, Dave, an accountant, was doing volunteer work in the area of finance in the Synod office.

Well, it's taken some time to sort out the legalities and formalities, including the process of incorporation and obtaining charitable status, but this summer, Trinity Church will turn over its Endowment Fund assets to ELFEC — the newly-created Evangelical Lutheran Foundation of Eastern Canada. Jeff Pym, our Synod's point person for stewardship and resource development, has been enormously helpful in assisting us to consider our options.

Beginning this August, our endowment funds will benefit —I'm writing in mid July— from the professional management of the larger pool of Eastern Synod investments. The small management fee we're charged is offset by a reasonable expectation of an increased average rate of return. We can expect to do better with our pooled resources than we could on our own! Next year, all else being equal, we hope to send more kids to camp; or offer our local counselling centre a larger grant; or do something really interesting and life-changing with our young adults —like send them to explore a mission setting in the Dominican Republic. It's in the works!



Many years ago, Ted Peine believed that his love for his home congregation ought not to die with him. Apparently, his sister felt the same way. Ted took care of his family obligations and, with the remainder of his estate, he accomplished much. Henrietta, for her part, had been setting aside a portion of the life-tenancy benefits she'd been receiving from her brother's estate for some twenty years. Together, Henrietta and Ted brought new life to kids at the Toronto Hospital for Sick Children; supported the good, on-the-ground work of the Salvation Army; helped to insure the ongoing training of pastors at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary; and assisted the congregation in which they were born and raised, and to which they were so devoted, to extend our ministry far and wide. As a parish pastor, I am grateful for their terrific witness and for their faithful and unrestrained stewardship, unrestrained and faithful even in death.

Beginning next year, we'll be able to stretch their legacy a little further. Both Ted and Henrietta were great stewards of what God had entrusted to their care. With ELFEC's help, we hope to be equally good stewards of what the Peine family, and many since, have entrusted to *our* care.

Some weeks ago, Jeff Pym came out to Trinity and offered our Endowment Fund Committee an excellent presentation on ELFEC. We were convinced that both our congregation and our Synod would benefit from our working together. So I invite you to consider the following questions:

Is your congregation in possession of endowment or like funds? If so, might your congregation benefit from pooling its assets with those of sister congregations and the Synod itself? You might give Jeff a shout. He offers a great presentation, clearly knows what he's talking about, and does really fine work.

Oh, and one more thing: Have you included your congregation in your will?

In a few weeks' time, Trinity will begin to celebrate its 175th anniversary. Jacob Seyler was born on November 21, 1834, 175 years ago. He was baptized on December 17 the same year. So began Trinity's faithful journey, a journey which embraced Ted and Henrietta Peine together with their forebears and their kin.

Because of their generosity, even at the end of life, and because of that of countless others who, through bequests and innumerable memorial contributions, have expressed their love for their church, Trinity has been able to extend its ministry far and wide, over and over again, for the last decade and a half. Only now, we'll get to express our vision for ministry a little bit more boldly.



Thanks be to God and to God's grateful people.

Happy Thanksgiving.

All blessings.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "André". The signature is stylized and fluid.

André Lavergne,
with Anne Anderson,
pastor in the community of Trinity Church, New Hamburg.

PS. Two things...

First, I *have* included Trinity Lutheran Church in my will. While I do not have the means of Ted or Henrietta, I do believe that my contribution can make a difference. Yours can too.

Second, this letter reflects the theme of a conversation I had more than thirty years ago with my seminary placement supervisor. He emphasized the importance of thoughtful and considered stewardship for the life of the Church and the further importance of encouraging one another in that direction. I am grateful to Vern Cronmiller for his wisdom and teaching.