

Trinity Presbyterian Church

“What lies before us and what lies behind us are minor issues compared to what lies within us”... Ralph Waldo Emerson

What lies before us as a community of faith is yet to be revealed to us, but we approach the future with anticipation and faith that God will lead us where he wants us to be. What lies behind us is our history...where we came from, what we have done, and the things that have made us who we are today. It is our story that we would like to share with you and through its re-telling, reveal to you what lies within us.

Our story begins ...

Distilling over 60 years of the life and essence of a congregation into a simple narrative is a large undertaking. As its authors, seeking inspiration and guidance, we sought out our most important resource, the long-time members of this church. When we began, we asked them if they would spend a few hours with us to share their stories and memories. To our delight, they responded in large numbers. What ensued was an afternoon of story-telling and re-visited memories among old friends.

The term “Greatest Generation” has often been used to refer to this group of people. While it is accurate to say that we always realized the significance of the label, it was really underscored for us at this gathering. Modest by nature, during the sharing of memories and stories, we came away with a clearer understanding and deeper appreciation for the people who are our foundation.

How does one begin to define “great”? It is not a singular accomplishment but rather decades (over 60 years to be exact) of little things. Doing what was needed when it was needed without expectation of acknowledgement or praise. Whenever and wherever they were needed, the members of this congregation showed up, ready and willing to work together.

What gives a congregation the strength and longevity to endure for over 60 years? It’s because our people understand what it means to be a member of a Church. No matter what is required of them, they show up. When weeds needed to be pulled, they brought their tools, rolled up their sleeves, and came to help with the work parties. When children needed to be educated, they established the Sunday school and volunteered to serve as teachers. When the Church outgrew its old clubhouse building, they contributed of their hard-earned salaries and savings to support the building campaigns. The people of this Church show up when and where they are needed. It’s what we do. Each skilled in a different trade or talent, they willingly share their time and those gifts with which God had blessed them.

When asked how many in the group had served on the Board of Elders or Deacons, virtually every hand went up. They served when asked, not once, but for some many times.

As with any body, it is the backbone that gives it stability, structure, and strength. The backbone of this congregation is its senior members, many of whom helped build this church. While a great number of them are gone now, the memory of them remains. Many, we are happy to say, are still with us - 21 over 90 years of age to be exact. It is here where our history begins.

The establishment of the Church...

The early years were filled in by a by a long-time member who came to the church as a 10 year old boy with his brother and parents. He remembered the first church members meeting in a community center on Memory Lane in Spring Valley in 1952.

Others remembered coming to the Church as visitors and feeling warmly welcomed by the members. They felt that the congregation was very observant of its guests and sought them out to include them in the life and activities of the Church.

One gentleman recalled the early days when, as a young man, he went to the country club up on top of the hill, which would later become our Church home. The surrounding hilly land below the country club was the golf course, which in 1950, was purchased for the development of a residential community called "Brookside", complete with appropriate street names such as Fairway, Foursome, Birdie, and Par Drives. This development was populated primarily by young couples, raising their children in their first homes.

With two feet and a desire to grow, our first pastor and the Charter members went door to door in Brookside inviting their neighbors to join them at church. These early members shared mutual interests including the early phases of their Christian faith.

When the golf course property on the hill came up for sale, the fledgling Church purchased the property, complete with clubhouse - broken windows and all. That old clubhouse became the new Church's first Sanctuary. We finally had a home of our own. It was fixed up, repaired, and maintained by the members the congregation with the help of a live-in custodian and his wife.

The Church provided a place where members could educate their young children in the faith and enjoy activities with the whole family. Friendships formed and grew. From the 1950's to the 1970's the Church enjoyed tremendous growth to over 800 members and 400 children.

Why people joined the Church...

We became a Church because there was a strong desire, and indeed a need for Christian fellowship. As Christians we are not meant to be solitary silos of faith, but rather to be in fellowship with each other. While we can accomplish a great deal as individuals, how much more are those accomplishments magnified when God combines all those talents for his purpose.

A familiar memory shared by many of our long-time members was the manner in which they first became acquainted with the Church and their reasons for joining. Many were

introduced to the Church through friends or neighbors who were members. They came because they were invited. Frequently, this introduction came in the form of an invitation to join in one of the fellowship groups – a relaxed and comfortable way to get to know people. Many said that they were looking for a place in which to enjoy the company of others in a wholesome environment. As many of the early members were young families, they came to the Church looking for an environment in which to educate their children in the Christian faith. In these early years they developed friendships, then a deeper sense of family, and finally a lasting bond of love for and commitment to each other that grew and strengthened over the ensuing years and continues still today.

The two initial fellowship groups were the Clippers (young couples with young children) and the Square Riggers (middle-age couples with older children). Over the years, other age-related mariner groups came and went as the demographics and interests of the congregation's members changed. Throughout the life of the Church, it has been the Clippers fellowship that has been the main mariner group from the beginning to the present, with many of the original members still active today. Over the years, friends invited friends and family to join them at Church and children invited friends from the neighborhood to attend Sunday school with them.

The Church grows and prospers...

Eventually we outgrew our old “clubhouse” Church building and embarked upon building a new Sanctuary. The members set aside money from their paychecks every week to support the building campaign and fundraising events were held to raise money. Everyone participated in their own way. Each one of the stained glass circles in the Narthex was purchased by a member of the Church. Memorial donations provided Bibles and hymnals for the pews and a light behind the cross. Little by little, in 1961, the Sanctuary was complete. People recalled a bus full of members singing carols at Christmas and Easter services so full, that there had to be folding chairs set up in the aisles to accommodate everyone.

We soon outgrew our Sunday school rooms and built a new Christian Education building to serve the needs of our members and the surrounding community. Noticing that the Christian Education buildings were empty during the week, one of the Elders brought to the Session the recommendation that these rooms could be put to good use as a pre-school. Ten years later a school for kindergarten through 8th grade was established. The pre-school has been in continuous operation for the past 40 years and the elementary/middle school for the past 30 years. These programs benefitted from the numerous public school teachers in the congregation who sat on the school board and helped direct its growth and development. As guests came to the Church and eventually became members, they were asked where their interests laid. There were a number of teachers who were quickly recruited as Sunday school teachers, some of whom still serve in that capacity today. Through its outreach, the Christian school remains today an active and essential part of our Church growth.

The Church reaches out...

A strong foundation having been established, the Church extended its reach to others in the community. The Vacation Bible School was an educational outreach program that began in the early years and continues still today, educating children for over 60+ years.

In the 1990's, the Logos program was initiated to encourage the members' grandchildren and others to come and participate in the life of the church. The children's program, now called the Kid's Kingdom continues to educate, guide, and provide fellowship with and for young children.

At times, our outreach has extended far beyond our borders. One long-time member recalled the times that our Church opened its doors to the refugees of war. Trinity volunteered to house many of the Vietnamese and Cambodian refugee families. They lived in our buildings and used the kitchen for their meal preparation. A church member, who was one of the primary supporters of the integration of these families from war-torn countries, was once a refugee himself. Our Church helped to bring him and his young family over from Indonesia and they remained faithful members for many years. During the refugees time here, the women of the Church helped by teaching them English and how to use American dining utensils.

Another member also recalled the missional work of the Clippers fellowship group over the years, such as the assistance they provided to the Parker Indians of Parker, Arizona by helping them to install an irrigation system.

Trinity Church has also been a long-time supporter of the Military in San Diego through Military Outreach Ministries. Initially started by the Presbytery, this faith-based organization is the only such organization in this area whose mission is to provide much needed essentials for young enlisted personnel at no cost to them to help defray the high cost of living while stationed here in San Diego.

The energy of our youth has often been channeled into active participation in mission work as a means to further their Christian education. Work parties and work tours were common activities for the youth. From this early education in Christian service sprung a number of "home-grown" missionaries still actively serving full-time in the mission field today.

While it is the senior members of this Church who are the backbone that supports us, and the youth who provide the energy and enthusiasm that encourages us as we look toward the future, it is the women of the Church who hold us all together as a family. These ladies quietly go about their work of preparing meals, creating fellowship opportunities, learning from and teaching each other through Bible study groups, ministering to the needs of the congregation, and providing support for individual missionaries and missional activities around the world.

Presbyterian Women have been a long standing and vital part of the fellowship and supporters of the mission work of Trinity Church. They collect everything from old eye

glasses and cancelled stamps to clothing to donate to groups such as to PUM (Presbyterian Urban Ministries – formerly the Crisis Center).

The tradition of our Fall Festival started out as a rummage sale. Discovering that the women desired more opportunities for fellowship, the ladies created the Fall Festival. This annual event provides, not only a source of money for the various mission projects the women and the church support, but also provides a source of outreach to the community.

Trinity was (and is) blessed to have among its members, a number of people of many talents. Members with musical talent formed the choir and other musical groups. Those with construction experience helped to build the Church buildings and maintain them. Writers wrote scripts for plays and the women sewed costumes for them. Some members with a talent for gardening helped to keep up the grounds. Others took an active part in fostering relationships between Trinity and other mission groups such as Rancho Sordo Mundo, a deaf school for children in Baja California.

Yet, not all of our mission work has been through large organizations. Frequently, it is one individual with an idea who had the talent to mobilize others around a need. Such was one member who encouraged other women in the Church to gather up bags of old clothes which she would take down to the Navy base where they would be put aboard the ships and transported to countries, such as the Philippines, where the need was great. Books and Bibles were sent to missionaries around the world, via our “Navy couriers” as they made port during their cruises.

One person - one idea - spirit-driven.

Compassion for our neighbors in our local community is expressed through the continual maintenance of our Deacon’s cupboard, which supplies food at no cost to anyone who needs help.

Even today, one person’s vision of helping the homeless, created a ministry for the whole congregation to collect and distribute needed essentials of clothing, hygiene products, and food to the homeless in the downtown areas of our own city. This same group of devoted individuals have extend the hand of friendship and companionship to the elderly of our community on a regular monthly basis by visiting with and providing fellowship to those in a local nursing home.

Keeping the faith...

In the life of any Church, there are bound to be times of disagreement, and ours was no exception. A long-time member of the Church, closely involved in its administration for more than 30 years, recalled many phases in the life of the Church. Times were remembered when the denomination first started venturing into political and other controversial issues of the time, many of which still persist today. Over the years, many attempts were made to bring the theology of the Church (via the General Assembly) in step with the culture of the day; but the amendments were continually voted down in favor of more traditional views of Biblical teachings. Another member

recalled a comment made during that time period stating that “we only have to win once”. Unfortunately, the “winning once” finally arrived in 2015 with the passage of the General Assembly’s most recent amendments.

During times of liberal leadership in our own Church, the congregation was and continued to be more conservative. This caused a rift in the congregation and resulted in the departure of many people who chose to affiliate with another denomination whose teachings more closely aligned with their own long-held beliefs.

During the early 1970’s the Charismatic movement took place. Again, there were differences of opinion within the congregation resulting in the departure of some. But interestingly, many returned to their source and Bible study classes were filled to overflowing.

Following this period of unrest, we enjoyed 20 years of calm and stability. Over the years we have been faithful to our Presbyterian heritage and core beliefs. Whenever we have faced challenges, whether they were physical, such as during the time when our sanctuary burned and we had to rebuild, or theological, we have always returned to our source for guidance and support to see us through the difficult times.

A turning point...

Why have we collectively made the decision to seek affiliation with another denomination at this particular time? We have tried our best to maintain the faith and work within the current structure, which we have felt for some time, has been moving away from the basic essentials of our faith. By its involvement in so many extraneous issues of the day, we feel that the actions of the PCUSA over time have diluted the one-time strength and clear direction of the denomination. At some point, a congregation realizes that the issues are systemic and beyond their ability to effect a change. A focus, once strong, now felt to be fractured in too many directions to provide us with the support we seek.

As this narrative has described the life of this congregation, it has hopefully communicated clearly that we are a congregation of conviction, commitment, and resilience. We have experience difficult times before, but have always kept our eyes focused on the basic tenets of our faith and have moved forward. God has entrusted to each of us an intellect with which to interpret the Bible and his purpose for our lives, and a conscience with which to discern how best to achieve that purpose.

We are now, and have been for some time, in a period of discernment about following our collective conscience or remaining in an organization with which we have fundamental differences. Ours is a mature congregation, both in age and longevity, comprised of loyal believers who lead by experience and temper differences of opinion and disagreements with the wisdom of maturity.

We are seeking to affiliate with the ECO denomination (A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians) because, after considering other alternatives, we feel that this organization will be the best fit for us moving forward.

Their philosophy, that the purpose of the governing body of a church is to support its individual congregations and encourage them to join with each other for mutual support and growth, is a concept that is in alignment with our own beliefs. We have a strong desire to return to the absolute foundational truths of the Presbyterian faith and to return to the basic and essential teachings of Christianity in its purest form – free of external and conflicting influences. We want to be part of a benevolent organization that respects the autonomy and contributions of its individual member congregations, and that exists for the purpose of providing them with support.

We are in agreement with the position held by ECO that both genders are equally qualified to participate in the governance and work of the Church. The statement of basic tenets of the Presbyterian faith provided by ECO re-establishes the framework of beliefs that we all acknowledged when we were accepted into membership or received ordination. This clear definition of what we believe as a denomination, allows us to enthusiastically invite others to join us, without the burden of explanation of the on-going differences among various factions within the PCUSA. We believe that there is much that we can do to further our mission here on Earth. We feel that our work can be enhanced and multiplied in an atmosphere of mutual respect and support. We believe that with the fellowship of other, like-minded congregations and a supportive denomination working together with us, we will reach our common, spirit-directed goals. We will thrive.

Parallel paths...

We would like thank all of the members of our congregation who met with us to share their memories and through them to knit together the fabric of our church history. This narrative is not the voice of a few individuals, but rather the voice of the congregation speaking to the Presbytery. Why have we sustained this church for 60 years - because this congregation is built on faith in God and loving relationships for each other. As in any organization, there have been times of disagreement, but we worked through them. There have been periods of ebb & flow in the life of the Church, but we have never lost our focus on the basic essentials of our faith which sustained us. Even now, we do not take our request for separation lightly, but have prayerfully searched our collective conscience to discern if this is what we felt God was leading us to do. We feel that this is the right time and path for us. This is the change we need to make in order for us to flourish, unbridled by what we feel are the constraints of the PCUSA and the hierarchical structure of its governing body.

In closing, we would like to thank the members of our presbytery task force team who have reached out to us in many ways, getting to know us and providing us with valuable guidance throughout this process, always in an atmosphere of Christian love and support. We wish our brothers & sisters in Christ, God's speed as they fulfill the mission that God has placed before them, and we elicit their blessing and good wishes as we continue along that path that we feel He has set before us.

While we may travel along separate paths for a time, with God's guidance, we trust that they will be parallel paths, with each of us reaching the destination He has determined for us.

We would like to leave you with these words that were shared with this congregation many years ago by one of our interim pastors. He concluded every sermon with this benediction.

"We go nowhere in this world by accident.

Wherever we go, whatever we do, the Lord is with us.

He has put us there for his purpose, to do His will.

Therefore, go in peace."