

## **PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH HISTORY**

Peace Lutheran Church traces its roots to the 1950's, with the establishment of its two original congregations. BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH began as a Missouri Synod mission in early 1952 along with its sister mission in Alamogordo. Bethlehem was officially received into the Colorado District in 1954 reporting, a year later, 58 baptized members. The congregation met in rented quarters at the old Branigan Memorial Library (downtown mall) and a Lion's Park building until the dedication on December 11, 1955 of the southwest portion of the present facility, constructed at a cost of \$28,000. Missouri Ave. was still an unpaved, dirt road at the time. Through a feature article in the Las Cruces Sun News, Bethlehem LC became known as "the Church of the Cross in the City of Crosses". We used to have a very large cross on the brick front of the original sanctuary (now the Bethlehem room). The present sanctuary, offices and classrooms were constructed in early 1968.

Five years after the establishment of Bethlehem, the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA) started the development of their mission in Las Cruces, also meeting at Branigan Library. HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH was chartered with 61 adults and 28 children in May of 1960. Land was purchased on S. Solano and on November 11, 1961, workers began unloading a boxcar of pre-fabricated components for construction of the church building.

As the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod moved towards a more ultraconservative church policy and strict insistence upon biblical inerrancy, many of its congregations broke from the Synod and joined to form the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC), declaring a more open attitude on numerous controversial issues and a more cooperative relationship with other Christian organizations. As this process evolved at Bethlehem in the mid 70's, closer relationships were developed between the Bethlehem and Holy Trinity congregations. In November of 1977, the two Churches voted to federate as BETHLEHEMHOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, with each maintaining its own name and synodical affiliation, operating under the auspices of a single board composed of members from both churches — the first such Lutheran congregation of its kind.

Meanwhile, Holy Trinity sold its land and building on Solano to the Unitarian Church. On December 11, 1977, members of Holy Trinity LC bade farewell to their church building and, carrying with them their banners and communion vessels, processed the 8 blocks down Solano and up Missouri to join Bethlehem members for the first joint worship service. The congregations alternated use of their respective hymnals until the Lutheran Book of Worship (green book) became available and used for the first time a year later.

The congregations continued their separate synodical affiliations with a hyphenated name to symbolize the federation until the merger of three (3) synodical bodies into the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) on January 3, 1988. To symbolize their union and hope for the future, the congregation chose the new name of PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH.

Community outreach became more purposeful with the "Welcome Baby" program (training and support for 1st time parents) being just one example. With completion of the new narthex, fellowship hall and kitchen addition in 1995 the Church

became the temporary (6 yrs) home of Jardin de Los Ninos, a non-profit daycare and pre-school facility for homeless and near-homeless children. The congregation became very involved with the children as well as moving out into the community supporting and volunteering at the soup kitchen, the battered women's shelter, Habitat for Humanity, Hospice and other community agencies Social Justice advocacy at the State level became another important part of the Church's ministry.

The Border Servant Corps, founded in 1999, is another of the Church's outreach ministries. Volunteers living for a year in an intentional Christian community in Las Cruces or El Paso work as full time staff members for various social service agencies. The BSC is a part of the numerous other Lutheran servant corps across the country.

2003 saw another first at PEACE. An Episcopal Priest, Jeanne Lutz, was called (1/2 time) as the Associate Pastor to assist Pastor Loy with pastoral calls, preaching and teaching. While "Called to Common Mission" resulted in the mixing of traditions and pulpits, this is the first Lutheran congregation in the Rocky Mountain Synod to have both Lutheran and Episcopal clergy serving together.

The evolution of PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH has brought a diversity of ethnic and geographical origins, historical and theological roots, and music and worship practices, yet it has become one people of God through its unity in Christ and its commitment to serve the community in love.

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