

AMALGAMATE OR DIE!

The History of Divinity-Divine Charity

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March 30, 1983

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library
11831 N. Seminary Drive. 65W
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The History of Divinity-Divine Charity

Because Wisconsin Synod congregations had built churches so close together in the late 1800's and early 1900's, mergers were of vital significance for survival as the years passed. Even in the year 1983 certain WELS congregations still need to amalgamate with each other when one or the other has no growth potential. To illustrate what I am driving at, let's take a look at the city of Milwaukee in the year 1964. A congregation named Divine Charity was in trouble. Members were rapidly moving out of the community. Growth potential was nil. In addition, the large number of WELS congregations in the area aided in the demise of Divine Charity's growth potential. There were 6 Wisconsin Synod churches in a radius of one mile. Jerusalem congregation was 4 blocks east of Divine Charity, Ephrata 4 blocks east of Divine Charity, Ephrata 4 blocks north, Bethesda 11 blocks west, Zebaoth 13 blocks NE and St. Marcus 7 blocks south. Thus, Divine Charity congregation was faced with amalgamation with another congregation or certain death. Her decision was to join forces with Divinity congregation in Whitefish Bay. This paper then will deal specifically with the history and merger of Divinity-Divine Charity congregation located in Whitefish Bay. It will stress that certain churches need to amalgamate for the purpose of strength and survival.

Divinity-Divine Charity congregation was formed on April 19, 1965 by a merger of two existing Wisconsin Synod churches-Divinity Ev. Lutheran Church of Whitefish Bay and the English Evangelical Lutheran congregation of the Divine Charity (Divine Charity Ev. Lutheran Church) located at 1st and Chambers, Milwaukee. Consolidation efforts had

been in the works since November 1963, but final details had not been completed until almost 2 years later. The signers of the consolidation agreement were: Ernest J. von Briesen, Edgar Klemann, Frank Ladwig, Monroe Mund, Edmund Sauer, and Edgar Vollbrecht. On May 16, 1965 the newly formed congregation held its first joint worship service. Pastor Alfred Walther of Divine Charity was called as pastor of the merged congregations. Divinity Church had no permanent pastor at that time. Pastor E.R. Blakewell had died in December of 1964, and Professor Armin Schuetze of the Seminary was serving as vacancy pastor for Divinity at the time of the merger. The Divine Charity property on North 1st Street was sold to St. Phillips congregation in August 1965. St. Phillips was a small negro mission at that time.

New Pastor and Church Council



The Rev. Alfred Walther, 900 E. Henry Clay (center) and the church council of the combined Divinity-Divine Charity Evangelical Lutheran church, 900 E. Henry Clay st., following his installation on Sunday. Council members are, left to right, front, Tom Wehe, 3939 W. Capitol dr.; Adolph Heinze, 4772 N. Woodruff ave.; Edgar Klemann, 8408 W. Brentwood ave.; Charles Mack-

rie, 4308 N. Maryland ave.; Monroe Mund, 4747 N. Sheffield ave.; and Clarence Tucker, 5201 N. Kimbark pl.; second row, Ervin Knopp, 4942 N. Elkhart ave.; William Kramer, 2524 N. Newhall st.; Walter Haese, 5117 N. Elkhart ave.; Edgar Vollbrecht, 4508 N. 37th st.; Frank Ladwig, 4724 N. Sheffield ave.; and Kurt Melzer, 5006 N. Woodburn st. — Herald Photos

Merger Reached by 2 Churches

Divinity Lutheran church, 900 E. Henry Clay st., Whitefish Bay, and Divine Charity Lutheran church, 2976 N. 1st st., have voted to merge and will hold services jointly at the Whitefish Bay church after Easter.

The Rev. Alfred Walther, pastor, said both congregations were relatively small and had decided to pool their strength in the belief that they could operate more efficiently. Divinity church has about 300 members and Divine Charity about 400. Membership is mostly in the northern part of the city and suburbs.

Divinity church has been without a regular pastor since the death of the Rev. E. R. Blakewell Dec. 30, 1964.

The board of trustees of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran synod authorized the purchase of the Divine Charity property for St. Philip's Lutheran church, a mission congregation of predominantly Negro membership.

The beginning of Divinity-Divine Charity congregation traces its roots back to two congregations. (Divinity, Divine Charity) Let's first examine briefly the history of both congregations and finish with a study of the merger and its significance.

Divinity congregation's history can be traced back to the year 1924. It was in the spring of that year that Rev. Karrer, a missionary, was sent to work in Whitefish Bay in the hope of establishing a station for the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The small flock that was fathered around him and the Reverend E. Ph. Ebert, who was appointed a little later, held the first services in the Village Hall. The Village Hall at that time was being used by 3 church bodies. The Catholics had the first service of the day, followed by the Lutherans, and then the Methodists.

God prospered their work in the Whitefish Bay community, and on February 5, 1925, the Pentecostal Ev. Lutheran congregation was founded, Rev. E. Ph. Ebert serving as pastor. The first confirmation class was confirmed on April 5, 1925. It had 9 members. (8 girls and one boy) Ruth McQuilkin (Paulsen) and Vera Gross(Staffeld) are the only present day members of this first confirmation class.

Regular meetings were held at the Village Hall, officers elected, and the congregation began to feel the need of a chapel of their own. The new congregation purchased 2 lots on the south side of Henry Clay Street, about one and one-half blocks west of their present location, and erected an old, temporary portable wooden chapel which had been purchased from Luther Memorial(Shorewood) for \$500.00. The chapel had a seating capacity of 250. Further, it was dedicated on October 11, 1925. The congregation at that time numbered 10 voting members and 45 communicants. In addition, the Sunday school had an enrollment of

55 pupils with 4 teachers, including the pastor. The pastor of Pentecostal was Edmund Ph. Ebert.



Here is a news flash from the Milwaukee Journal on October 9, 1925:
 Pentecostal Evangelical Lutheran
 Opens Lutheran Chapel Sunday.
 Whitefish Bay Congregation to Dedicate New Home.

"Dedication services will be held in the English language. A brief valedictory address will be given by the pastor, The Rev. Edmund Ebert, in the village hall at 9:30 A.M. The chief service at 10:00 A.M. in the chapel will be conducted by the Rev. Adolph Baebenroth, Milwaukee."

Until February 27, 1933 the congregation was assisted by the Mission Board, and on that day they accepted the decision to become an independent congregation.

The chapel was used until May 13, 1940, at which time it was decided to dissolve the congregation. The decision to dissolve was forced by an order from the village to either bring the building up to code or to discontinue use of the building. The cost of the necessary remodeling work ~~was~~ would have been considerable, and the congregation decided that it would be unwise to spend that amount of money on a temporary structure. In search of an alternate solution, the congregation began discussions with Salem congregation on North Cramer Street in Milwaukee.(E.R. Blakewell pastor) and eventually decided to join the Salem congregation and to dispose of the Pentecostal property. Church services continued to be held in Whitefish Bay, however. Pastor Ebert went to another church, but Pastor Blakewell conducted services each week at both Salem in Milwaukee and at the Henry Clay school in the Bay, one block east of the present building. It was one congregation with 2 homes.

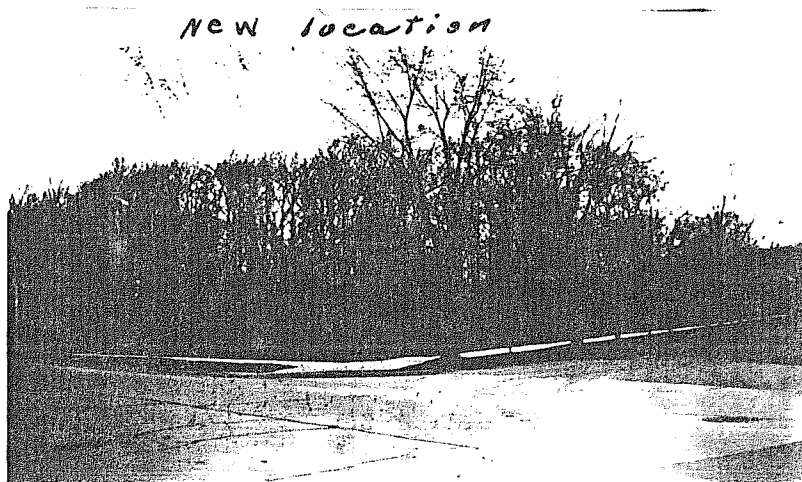


PASTOR, E. BLAKEWELL

Salem Milwaukee



Plans were soon made for a new church building in the Bay. The present church site was purchased and erection of the present building began in 1940.



In March of 1941 the cornerstone was laid, and the building was completed and put into service a few months later. At this time the congregation was still part of Salem of Milwaukee, but on June 30, 1944, incorporation papers were filled to form a separate Salem Ev. Lutheran Church of Whitefish Bay. The certificate of incorporation was signed by Henry Dropp, Walter Haese, Walther Schwantes, Bernard Kaiser and Erich Kopeschka. On December 20th of the same year (1944), a resolution was filed to change the name of the congregation from Salem to Divinity, and a call was extended to Pastor Blakewell to serve the congregation as a full-time pastor. A rented parsonage was provided initially. The present parsonage was built in about 1945.

SALEM EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH

(Two Church Homes)

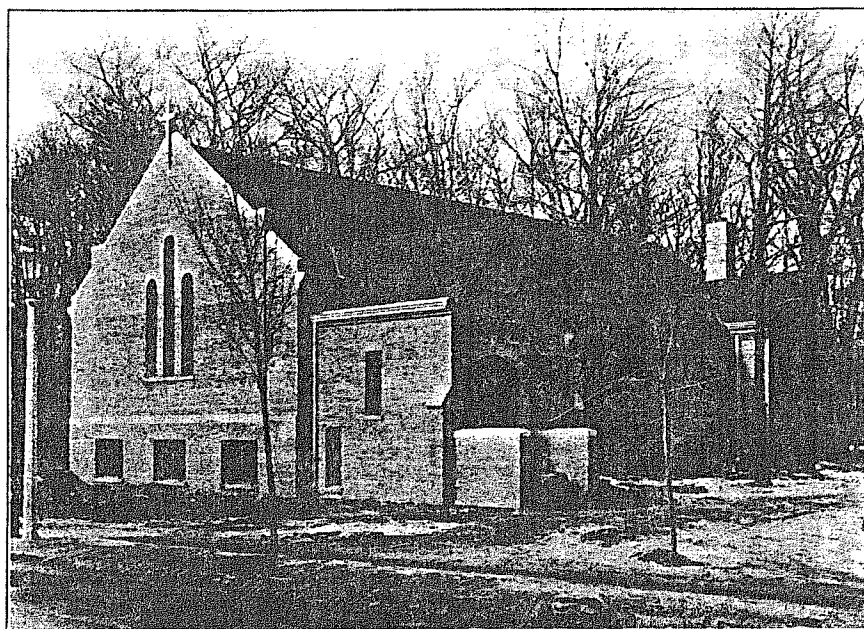
2400 N. CRAMER ST.
Milwaukee, Wis.

900 E. HENRY CLAY ST.
Whitefish Bay, Wis.

Synodical Conference - Wisconsin Synod

DEDICATION OF Whitefish Bay Chapel

OUR WHITEFISH BAY HOME
900 E. Henry Clay St.



"This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes"

SUNDAY, MARCH 2, 1941

E. R. BLAKEWELL, Pastor

1916 E. Thomas Ave.

Milwaukee, Wis.

Telephone La. 2288

During the 1950's, increasing attendance made it necessary to hold two services, and extra chairs had to be set up regularly. It was eventually decided to expand the church building. Construction started in 1957 and was completed in 1958. During the construction period services and Sunday School were held at the Whitefish Bay Woman's Club at 600 East Henry Clay. The church building was extended to the north to its present dimensions and a complete new and larger entrance was built. New windows were installed as well as new lighting and heating systems. The architect for renovation work was T. Bischoff, a member of the congregation.

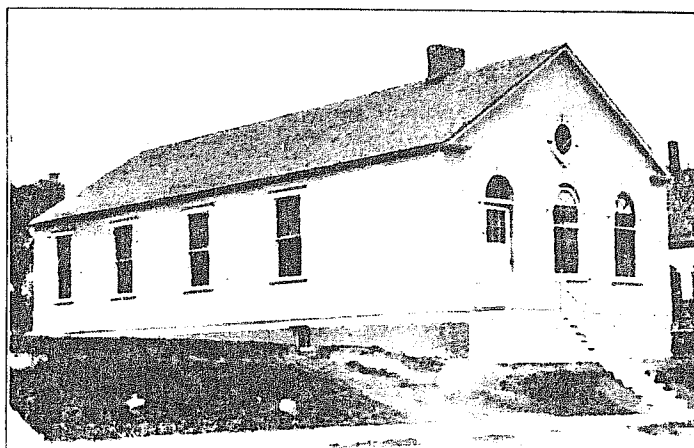
The added room of the expanded building eventually proved to be more than adequate for Divinity's needs, and the possibility of a merger with another congregation became a possibility. Amalgamation was sought then by Divinity congregation in order to strengthen itself further.

By contrast, we see that Divine Charity congregation needed a merger for another reason besides strengthening itself. Divine Charity congregation needed to merge for survival's sake. Its growth potential had come to a standstill.

Divine Charity congregation owes its existence under God's guidance to Rev. William Dallmann who opened the Divine Charity mission in 1912. At that time services were held in the auditorium at Jerusalem School. In the spring of 1913, Rev. Dallmann, turned the mission over to the Wisconsin Synod. For a short time period thereafter, Rev. Woyahn and several Seminary students served the mission with preaching and a Sunday School.

In the fall of the year 1913, the Rev. Carl Dornfeld took over as the first resident minister. He died in June of 1914 shortly after he had taken up the reigns of leadership. The congregation was quite disheartened by his sudden death.

But sadness was turned to joy in 1915 when the Mission Board bought the Presbyterian chapel on North Pierce, near Burleigh Street, and called the Rev. Hy. Diehl as pastor of the shepherdless flock.



DIVINE CHARITY — 1915

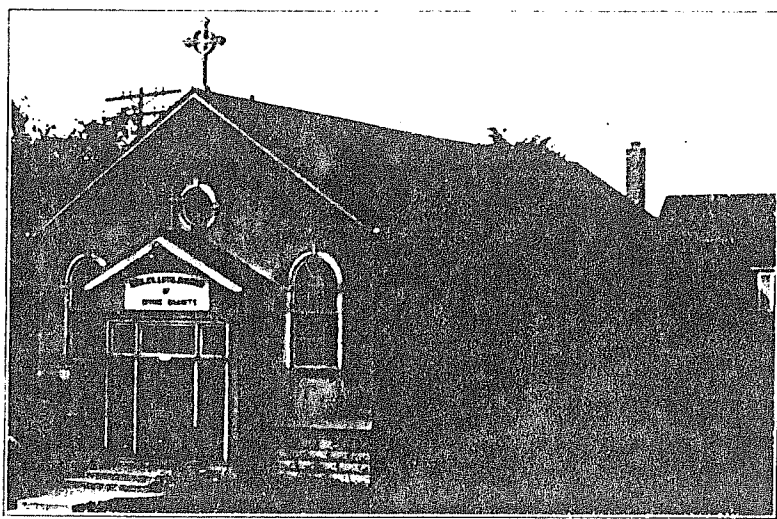
N. Pierce and E. Burleigh
Original church

Under Pastor Diehl's guidance the work flourished. In a meeting held October 10, 1915, organization was attained with 6 members. (J. Roepke, F. Eggers, S. Carlson, H. Bartelt, C. Engel and G. Phelps) The name adopted for the congregation was the "The English Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of the Divine Charity." On August 3, 1919, the congregation granted Pastor Diehl a peaceful dismissal to Lake Geneva. Pastor J.

Ruege was called as the new pastor. He was installed on November 28, 1919.

Pastor Ruege was a regular workhorse. He was responsible for producing the congregation's first monthly paper called "Chimes of Divine Charity". Further, he was responsible for encouraging and organizing the moving and enlarging of the old church.

Lack of space for the Sunday school and a belief that their location was not in the best interests of the congregation's growth caused the members to look for a more suitable site. In 1920 the Ladies Aid purchased 3 lots on the corner of North 1st and East Chambers streets. At a mass meeting held November 2, 1921, it was decided to move and enlarge the chapel. Ground was broken on the new site March 17, 1922. The cost of the remodeled and moved old church to the new location was \$9,268.04. The first service in this remodeled church took place in January of 1923. Actual dedication services were on Feb. 4, 1923. This newly remodeled church had a seating capacity of

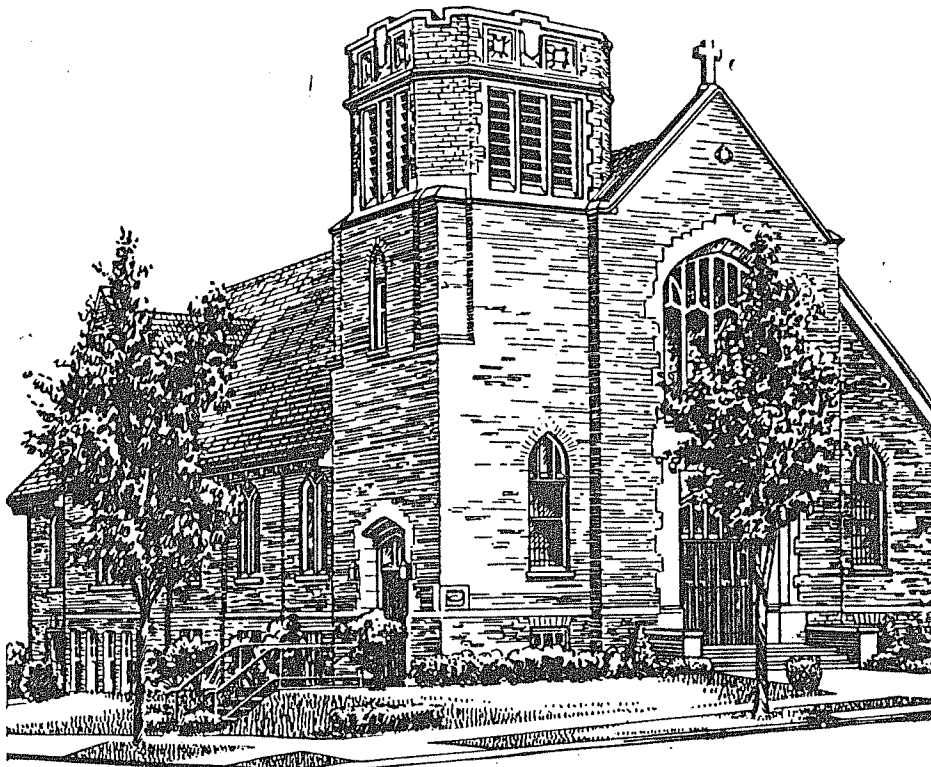


DIVINE CHARITY — 1922
N. 1st and W. Chambers

275 and basement rooms for the Sunday school and for church gatherings.

Shortly before the dedication of this remodeled and enlarged church Pastor Ruege took a call to the local Lutheran high school. Pastor *John G.* Jeske was called to fill the vacancy. His installation and the dedication of the remodeled building fell on the same day. (Feb. 4, 1923)

As the congregation grew in size, it became evident that it would need a larger building to take care of its present and future growth. Thus, the old church was dismantled, and excavating of the new church began on July 6, 1931. Dedication of this new church occurred on January 24, 1932.



NEW CHURCH .
DIVINE CHARITY — 1933

N. 1st and W. Chambers
St. Philip's 1903

Pastor Jeske continued his work at Divine Charity until 1959 at which time he retired. Pastor Alfred Walther was then called to fill the vacancy. Pastor Walther served Divine Charity until 1965 when the congregation merged with Divinity congregation of Whitefish Bay.

For several years before the merger, Divine Charity congregation had been suffering a growing membership loss. Most of its membership was migrating to the northern part of the city and suburbs. In addition, as was mentioned in the introduction, there were 5 other Wisconsin Synod churches in the immediate area.

Therefore Rev. Alfred Walther believed that his congregation needed to pool its strength with another congregation in order to operate more efficiently. Since Divinity congregation was interested in strengthening itself as well, a merger was worked out. Pastor Walther was called as pastor of Divinity-Divine Charity congregation of Whitefish Bay. His predecessor at Divinity, Rev. Blakewell, had passed away in December of 1964.

The year 1983 finds Divinity-Divine Charity congregation in a similar situation as it faced many years beforehand. This writer believes that DDC congregation will again one day amalgamate with another congregation in the Milwaukee area. Divinity-Divine Charity's location is heavily populated with Jewish, Catholic backgrounds. There are no immediate canvassing prospects in sight. Further, there is no room for expansion. Expensive homes hem in the small church. There is no potential for a Christian day school. Thus, parents with small children often take their children to other WELS churches with Christian day schools. Finally, the congregation's membership is heavily dominated

by the elderly. Amalgamate or die may again be the plight of this congregation. Whatever happens to this congregation we know "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

A Thank-you is to be given to the following:

Bibliography:

1. Frank Ladwig- information on the congregations past history
2. Vera Gross- Pictures saved from newspapers over the years
3. Pastor Walther- access allowed so I could go through the churches records at Divinity-Divine Charity.