

"THE HISTROY OF TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH OF SOUTH BAY CITY MICHIGAN."

MARCH 1, 1886 to JANUARY 1, 1982

SENIOR CHURCH HISTORY

PROFESSOR E.C. FREDRICH

APRIL 23, 1982

JAMES N. PROEBER

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library  
11831 N. Seminary Drive. 65W  
Mequon, Wisconsin

"THE HISTORY OF TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH OF SOUTH BAY CITY, MICHIGAN."

On March 1, 1886, twenty members of Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Congregation elected to form a new congregation of the South Side of Bay City. Under the guidance of Pastor John G. Oehlert the congregation was organized. After subsequent meetings, the small nucleus of members made their final decisions and elected to call the daughter congregation "Trinity Lutheran."

In forming the constitution and the by-laws for the congregation these men saw the need to establish a strong confessional foundation. They were:

Henry Heckroth	Ludwig Loeffert	William Discher
Henry Knaack	Gottlieb Riegler	Rudolf Rathke
Carl Schuessler	Carl Wier	Bernhard Timm
Ludwig Meyer	Frank Rohde	Thilo Lange
Ludwig Heck	Bernhard Buthke	Alber Dreyer
Henry Wier	John Meyer	Gustav Jahn
John Adam		Michael Wilt

These men made it very clear they subscribed to all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the only guide for faith and life; and to all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, as a correct presentation and true exposition of the Christian Doctrine, drawn from and in agreement with the Holy Scriptures.

On March 22, 1886, it was resolved to affiliate with the Wisconsin Synod. On October 23, 1898, the congregation was advised by the President of the Wisconsin Synod, P. von Rohr, and the President of the Wisconsin District to join the Michigan District. After consultation with the "mother congregation", Bethel Lutheran, on December 4, 1898, it was resolved to make no change but

to continue in the Wisconsin District. On May 6, 1917, it was finally resolved to obtain membership in the Michigan District of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, now known as the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

There were a number of reasons why the congregation was started, but the chief reason for the establishment of the congregation in South Bay City was convenience. Since there were no street cars or sidewalks in Bay City at that time, it was often very difficult, especially in winter and spring, to travel to the church or school on the North Side of Bay City. Consequently, this became the main reason for organizing a congregation in the southern part of the city. And it became very apparent to especially the older members of the congregation.

When Pastor Oehlert was informed of their intention, he expressed his willingness to meet with the members of the daughter congregation in South Bay City. After the very first meeting it was resolved to establish a congregation in the area, for it was shown South Bay City was a very promising area. As the members pointed out to Pastor Oehlert, there were many German Lutherans who lived in the area, some of whom were church members while others were not.

Every Sunday evening Pastor Oehlert volunteered to conduct services. The congregation was offered the use of a small Episcopal church without charge. After the close of the services, further discussions were held; and after one month, it was resolved to establish the congregation at once. On March 1, 1886, the congregation was organized with twenty charter members, and it was incorporated for thirty years to the year 1916.

The next problem that faced the congregation was the location of a church and school. After a great deal of debate, it was resolved to begin building both a church and a school immediately. You see, the founders of the congre-

gation recognized the importance of the Christian training of the children. Therefore at the very beginning they also established a school to aid the parents in their God-appointed task. Because both the church and school share the same date of founding, their histories are closely related. However, a few facts of interest might be added here which pertain to the operation of the school. The first classes were held in the one-room school on Monday, January 24, 1887, two weeks after the school was dedicated. Mr. F. Bertling served as the first teacher until the congregation could obtain a full-time pastor. Beginning in August, 1916, the congregation had two full-time teachers, and they released the pastor from his teaching duties.

Apparently not all grades were always taught in the school, for the minutes of a meeting on January 8, 1928, speak of adding the eighth grade. And in the year 1941 the Kindergarten was added. Another interesting item in the minutes reads as follows: "The children shall not be instructed in English until they have thoroughly learned the German." (October 2, 1887).

The enrollment in the school varied greatly. In 1911 the school had an enrollment of 80 children. At one time 140 were enrolled. Nonetheless the purpose has always remained the same, and faithful teachers were always present to fulfill the task.

The site of the present school (dedicated August 22, 1948) on Broadway and 32nd Street was first chosen for the building of the church. The Architects, Pratt and Koeppe, were engaged to submit plans for a church and school at an estimated approximate cost of \$3000 to \$4000. When the proposed plan was presented to the congregation it was found acceptable. When all the bids were submitted, a contract to build the church and school was awarded to John Keys, who had submitted the lowest bid.

When the construction of the church and school were well underway, the builder discovered he had underestimated the cost and could not finish the construction at the contract price. When the congregation refused his request for more money, he refused to continue with the work. After releasing Mr. Keys from his contract, the congregation hired other builders in the persons of Kircher, Weber, and Loeser, who were members of Bethel Church. They resumed the work and finished the construction.

Because of the time lost in negotiating the new contract, the church was not finished by Christmas, as the contract specified. Consequently, the dedication ceremonies were postponed to January 9, 1887. In the morning dedication service Pastor August Bendler of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, delivered the sermon. Pastor Heineke of Merritt Township preached in the afternoon; and in an evening service Pastor Bendler delivered an English sermon.

After the congregation had been organized, Pastor Oehlert of Bethel in Bay City, continued to serve for one year. In 1887 the congregation was strong enough to salary their own pastor. After releasing Pastor Oehlert from his responsibilities the congregation called Pastor G. Bergemann. He began his duties on July 1, 1887, and served the congregation for five years. During his pastorage, a parsonage was built in the year 1890.

In 1892 Pastor Bergemann was suddenly stricken with an illness that compelled him to discontinue his services for six months. During this six month period, the Synod sent a Seminary student by the name of F. Bliefernicht to serve the congregation. Pastor Bergemann's illness continued with him after he returned to his position. His condition was such that his physician urgently advised Pastor Bergemann to seek a change of climate for his health's sake. With this advice in mind and an opening in Tomah, Wisconsin, Pastor

Bergemann accepted the call and left Trinity, and Michigan.

On July 25, 1892, a devastating fire broke out and reduced a whole section of South Bay City to ashes. Since many of the main establishments were not rebuilt, the young congregation suffered a severe blow, for many of the members were compelled to establish their residence elsewhere. For this reason the growth of the congregation was very slow and at times at a standstill. But with the help of God the congregation progressed slowly, so that by 1911 it had 78 voting members. After the fire the congregation had a total baptized membership of 141. The reason for this small number was that some members had moved away, while others had died, and still others were released to sister congregations.

After Pastor G. Bergemann left the congregation, Pastor Timothy Sauer succeeded him and served the congregation. During his time of service the finishing touches were added to the church building. Also it should be noted the congregation experienced a slight but steady growth in numbers. After Pastor Sauer served three years, he accepted a call to serve a congregation in Appleton, Wisconsin. Pastor H. Hoffmann became Pastor Sauer's successor. But Pastor Hoffmann was ill when he arrived, and after one year he had to resign because of his health. During his term of office, the church was again the center of attraction. For during his year, the congregation purchased a bell at the cost of \$235. (1896).

Pastor A.C. Hasse followed Pastor Hoffmann and served the congregation for ten years. During this time the school was enlarged by adding another classroom. This was done at the cost of \$1000. Once again it should be noted that the cost of this addition was \$200 more than the original cost of the school. In the year 1906 Pastor Hasse accepted a call to Peshtigo, Wisconsin,

and Pastor C. Lederer was called to succeed him.

In 1911, the secretary, Henry Knaack, recorded the following remark:  
"It is noteworthy that only five of the twenty charter members who subscribed to the constitution of the congregation are still active. Of the other 15, four have moved away, five have died, and six have defected. The five who continued in membership to this day are Henry Knaack, Ludwig Heck, Henry Wier, Carl Wier, and Bernhard Timm."

Another noteworthy remark was found in the same records, it follows:  
"With respect to the condition of the congregation in spiritual matters only good can be said of the congregation. The church and communion attendance leaves little to be desired. And the school has an enrollment of 80 children."

The ensuing years from 1911 through the mid 1950's are relatively quiet years. Little information is available except for membership and pastoral acts. Some of the surviving records mention a few building projects undertaken by the congregation. From some of the members it was learned that Pastor J.F. Zink (1918-1938) was a very strict pastor, and that he had a healthy dislike for the English language. Still he gave in to preaching and teaching in English. This can be seen by the development of the Sunday worship services.

Beginning on March 1, 1886, all worship services were conducted in the German language. An exception was made on the day of the dedication of the church and school when the evening service was held in English. The predominance of the German language at the church very likely accounts for the fact that to this time reference is made to the church by the general public as the "German Lutheran Church."

The English language was first employed in the services in the month of April, 1917, for on the first day of that month it was resolved to conduct one English service per month in the evening. This was changed in January of 1922, when it was decided to conduct an English service on the second Sunday of the month in the morning. As the English language gained favor, two English services were held per month, beginning July, 1926.

On April 3, 1932, "double-headers" were introduced in a limited measure when it was resolved to conduct a German and English service on all church festivals and on the fifth Sunday of the month. A change was made in January, 1935, when the two services on the fifth Sunday were discontinued and the languages were alternated: an English service was held on the odd numbered Sundays and a German service on the even numbered Sundays. A year later, in April of 1936, it was resolved to hold double services every Sunday.

In July, 1950, it was resolved to hold two English services every Sunday. However, on the first Sunday of the month the first service was to be conducted in the German language. Three months later all German Lenten services were discontinued. So the German language yielded to the English more and more until on October 13, 1958, it was decided to discontinue the German services altogether, beginning on January 1, 1959.

In the year 1957 the congregation saw the need for a new church. After considerable discussion concerning the relocation of the church, it was resolved to acquire other property for a new church and parsonage. On November 23, 1961, construction began with the "Ground-breaking ceremonies." On April 29, 1962 the cornerstone was laid. Finally, almost a year to the day, dedication rites for the new church were conducted after a farewell service for the old church. Pastor Emil E. Kassischke officiated at the morning service and spoke



the dedicatory rites. In an afternoon service Pastor Herbert Buch of Saginaw preached the sermon.

Once again we can see Mr. Henry Knaack's description of the congregation holding true--the spiritual condition of the congregation left little to be desired. In nine and one half years the congregation eliminated the debt of the new complex. Also it was during this time the congregation experienced its greatest growth in baptized and communicant membership.

During this period of growth and blessing, there also grew some dissension. Because of the sensitive nature of this matter few people were willing to offer information. All that could be gained from various source was that there was a problem between the Pastor and the principle. This problem spilt the congregation into two camps--those who were sympathetic to the pastor and those who were sympathetic to the principle. The end result of this confrontation was the principle was asked to resign by the Elders and the Pastor. Unfortunately,,the hard feelings did not end here. Later, because of the problems the school became a seperate entity from the congregation. It still retained the name Trinity Lutheran School, but it existed by means of its own budget, its own envelopes, it own board and trustees, and checking account. This unfortunate situation existed until 1976 with the arrival of a new pastor.

When one familiarizes himself with Trinity Lutheran Congregation, one can hardly forget their eigth pastor, Emil E. Kassischke. It was under his faithful service the congregation experienced some of its greatest blessings. During his 35 years of service the congregation built a new school, a new parsonage, a new teacherage, and a new church complex. The congregation also grew to 1080 souls, the highest membership ever recorded. Unfortunately, his later career was marred by hard feelings and bitter disappointments. Nonetheless, when he retired from the congregation and from the active ministry, there was

great love and respect shown for the man by the whole congregation.

In 1976 Pastor Karl M. Plocher was called to serve the congregation. His years at Trinity have seen a decline in membership, but a growth in spiritual life. Also under his guidance a genuine interest has been shown again in the school. Other changes, and in many cases improvements, have been enacted in the administration of the congregation. To accomodate changing times the constitution was changed to open greater branches of service to the members. But, even with the changes in the constitution and the by-laws, there was no change made in the original confessional stand to which the twenty charter members first subscribed.

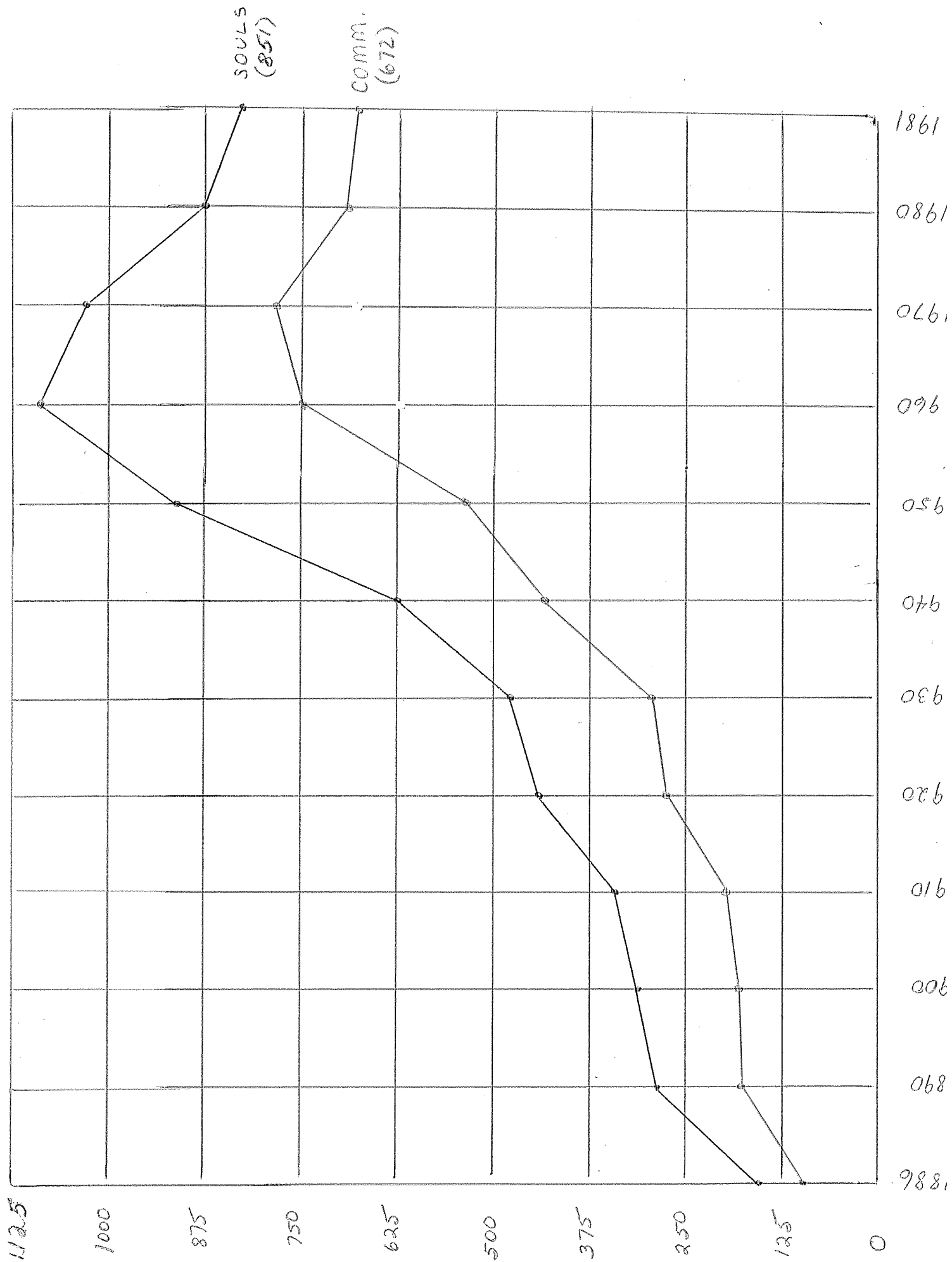
Finally one picture is worth a thousand words. Concluding this paper will be graphs and charts showing the growth over the past 90 plus years. Also included will be a list of the pastors who have served the congregation, and a list of noteworthy historical events in the congregation. And when all is said and done, one thing can be said concerning this congregation--God has greatly blessed Trinity Lutheran Congregation of South Bay City, Michigan.

1886	-----	MARCH 1, 1886	ORGANIZATION OF CONGREGATION
	-----	JANUARY 9, 1887	DEDICATION OF CHURCH AND SCHOOL
1890	-----	APRIL 13, 1890	DEDICATION OF PARSONAGE
1900			
	-----	JULY 20, 1906	SCHOOL ENLARGED
1910	-----	MARCH 1, 1911	25th ANNIVERSARY
	-----	APRIL, 1917	FIRST ENGLISH SUNDAY SERVICE
1920			
1930			
	-----	MARCH 1, 1936	50th ANNIVERSARY
1940			
	-----	AUGUST 22, 1948	DEDICATION OF NEW SCHOOL
1950			
1960	-----	JANUARY 1, 1959	LAST GERMAN SUNDAY SERVICE
	-----	FEBRUARY 21, 1960	NEW PARSONAGE DEDICATED
	-----	MARCH 1, 1961	75th ANNIVERSARY
	-----	NOVEMBER 11, 1962	DEDICATION OF NEW CHURCH, LAST SERVICE IN OLD CHURCH
1970			
	-----	MARCH 19, 1972	CHURCH MORGAGE BURNING
	-----	JULY, 1974	DEDICATION OF NEW TEACHERAGE
1980			
1986	-----	MARCH 1, 1986	100th ANNIVERSARY

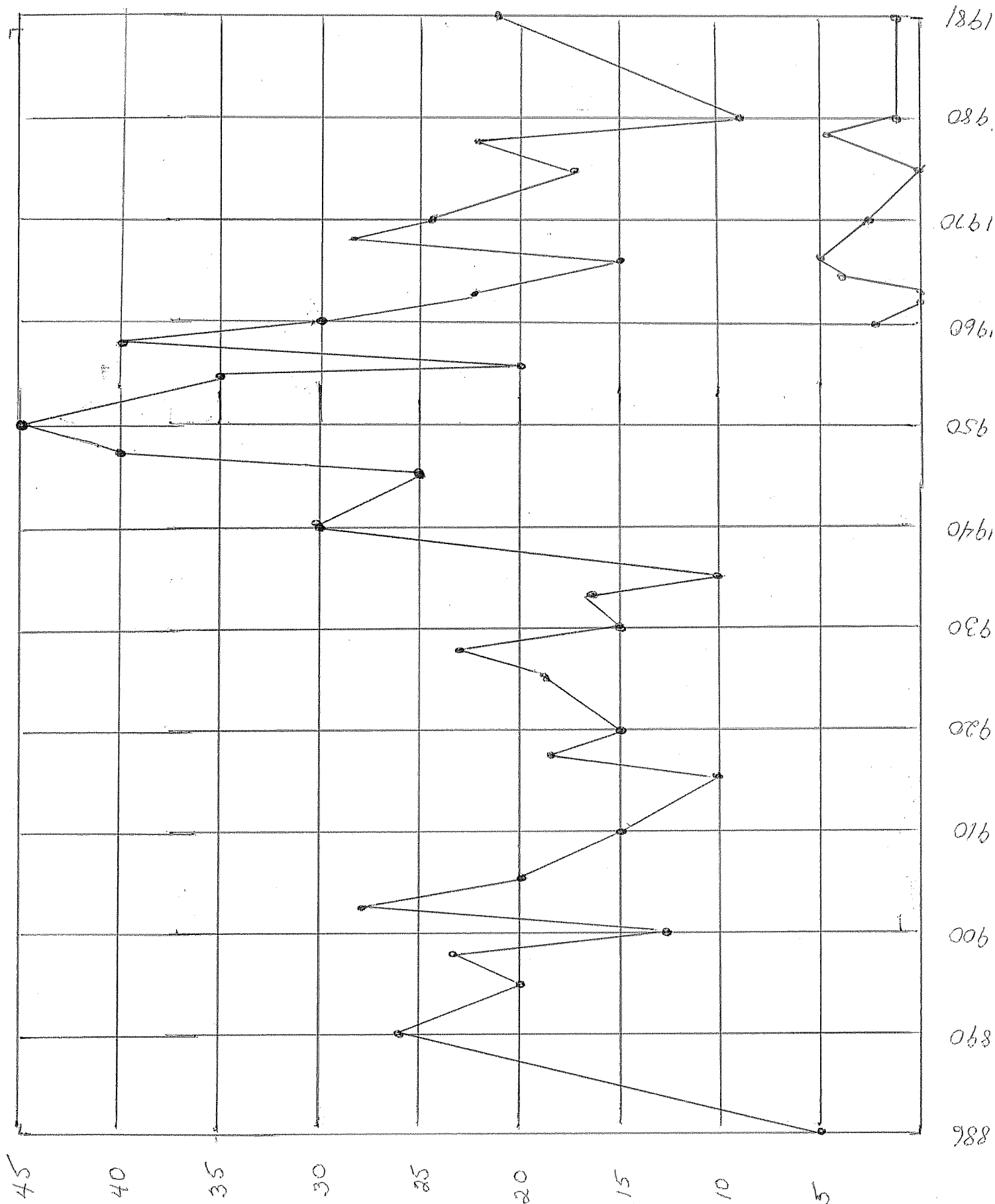
PASTORS OF TRINITY

1886	1886 - 1887	J.G. OEHLERT
1890	1887 - 1892	G.E. BERGEMANN
	1892 - 1895	TIMOTHY SAUER
1900	1895 - 1896	H. HOFFMANN
	1897 - 1906	A.C. HAASE
1910	1907 - 1914	C.F. LEDERER
	1914 - 1918	HANS EGGERT
1920		
1930		
	1918 - 1938	JOHN F. ZINK
1940		
1950		
1960		
1970		
	1938 - 1976	EMIL E. KASISCHKE
1980		
1981	1976-	KARL M. PLOCHER

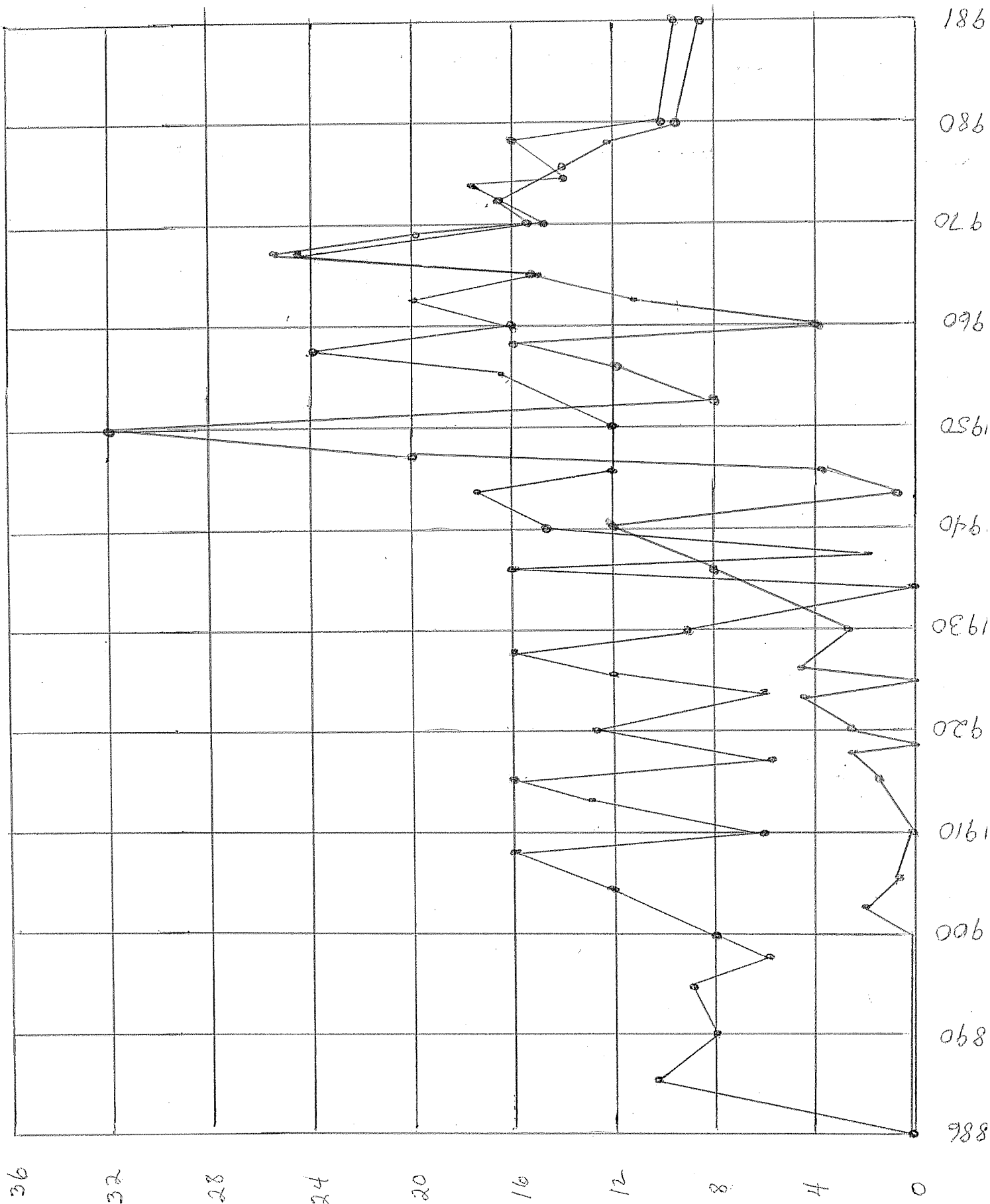
SOULS + COMMUNICANTS



BAPTISMS



CONFIRMATIONS



CHILDREN  
(1141)  
(TOTAL)  
ADULTS  
(431)  
(TOTAL)

186  
086  
076  
096  
086  
096  
076  
1930  
026  
020  
1910  
006  
098  
988

36  
32  
28  
24  
20  
16  
12  
8  
4  
0

MARRIAGES + BURIALS

BURIALS  
(626)  
(TOTAL)

MARRIAGES  
(705)  
(TOTAL)

