

Trinity, Fredonia

What are some significant moments in the history of your church that have shaped its identity today?

As we live daily with an understanding that God's Kingdom is about the here and the now, we also make plans for the future and honor those persons who came before us in the history of our parish. Trinity Church was founded in August 1822 and called its first rector the following year. After many years of hard work, land was obtained on Barker Commons in the Village of Fredonia for a permanent home. Designed by John Jones, a brick Gothic Revival style building was constructed and completed in 1836 at a cost of four thousand dollars, which included a donation from Trinity Church, New York City.



What makes your church unique in the region and the diocese?

Trinity was received into The Episcopal Church in October 1822, making it the fourth parish to be organized in what was to become the Diocese of Western New York. Trinity is also the oldest Episcopal congregation in Chautauqua County. During the 1850's, natural gas lights were installed in the building, making Trinity the first church in the diocese – and probably in the nation – to use them.

What are the most vibrant ministries or strengths of your parish today?

We are blessed to continue the long musical tradition at Trinity, which includes an organ and choir to enrich our worship services. We also provide a venue for concerts and recitals. We are thankful for the various avenues available so persons may contribute to our parish life, including as a worship service participant, altar guild, prayer shawl ministry, or a parish event. We enjoy our coffee hours and potlucks gatherings!

The women's group is an essential ministry. This group coordinates various events, such as rummage sales to raise money for outreach and the Epiphany Tea which hosts speakers to relate information about mission. Like other congregations in our region, a tea luncheon is hosted at the Episcopal cottage by the women's group each summer at Chautauqua Institution. We are pleased with The College Kitchen project that enables us to be present at community events. And we are enriched by the Christian Education presented at the parish, both Adult and Godly Play, and especially the Lenten program and suppers. We also welcome the use of our building by groups of the greater community, such as the Fredonia Knitting Group.

Describe a moment in your community's life when you felt the presence of the Holy Spirit moving among you. What made that moment possible?

We know that the presence of God is always with us in relationship, including those high and low moments of our common life together. The stained-glass windows in the nave of the church are a beloved aspect of our worship space. Depicting twenty

scenes of the life of Jesus, the story of these windows also teaches us a lesson about the life of a congregation. To the delight of the congregation, these windows were installed in March 1925. But only two months later, a disastrous fire occurred that destroyed not only these windows, but also the entire interior of the building, the organ, bell, and tower. Only the stone baptismal font and a marble sculpture of



an angel survived the fire. Almost immediately, plans were made for the rebuilding of the church. Yet, the structure was not just rebuilt as it was before. Many features of the building's interior and tower were redesigned for the future and a new chapter in Trinity's history. New stained-glass windows were installed in 1926.

In 2018, while preparing for the twenty-first century, the congregation was blessed to fulfill a capital campaign for a full restoration of all the stained-glass windows in the church. The memory of the fire decades ago was ever present in our minds. It was a reminder of a previous congregation who, with hard work and dedication, made a plan from the ashes to rebuild. As stewards of what has been given to us, we continue with our own dedication and work to carry onward for future congregations. Above all else, the story of the fire of 1925 recalls for us what many congregations learn from such an event: It is the people who make up the Body of Christ, the Church, and not its buildings!

How does your church engage with the local neighborhood, the civic life of your community, or diocesan and/or Episcopal Church-wide initiatives?

Many persons of our parish family are involved in the business and civic life of our community, including various social and education institutions. These associations allow us to engage with many parts of the community, especially when there is a request for assistance to fulfill a need. Some of these include our support of local food pantries, Chautauqua Rural Ministries and its Friendly Kitchen and Garment Gallery, the Fredonia Fire Department drive, village clean-up opportunities, and our relationship with SUNY-Fredonia.

What are the hopes and dreams of your congregation for its next chapter?

As we move forward in hope: May we increase in the knowledge and the love of God, be ever thankful for those who support our parish and its mission, and continue to welcome all who seek to discover that expression of love and purpose that God has for each one of us.