

## **Divine Shepherd Lutheran Church History and Heritage**

From our beginning as a congregation in 1973, Divine Shepherd's purpose has been to carry out Christ's Great Commission to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded." Our Savior charged us to take action – **go, make disciples, baptize, teach**. With our Father's blessing and the Holy Spirit's guiding hand, we have humbly strived to do so. Who we are is summed up in our Vision and our Mission: "Become Disciples to Make Disciples" and "Your Care is Our Concern . . . Sharing the Heart of the Shepherd."

In 1996, with this Vision and Mission in mind, Divine Shepherd set about developing a bold ten-year mission strategy. Part of this strategy included developing a master facilities plan for ensuring our mission would not be held back by our facilities. The plan identified the need for the addition of a Family Life Center, an atrium, additional administrative facilities, and, most importantly, substantial new educational space and a new sanctuary. Projected space requirements were based on the assumption that our membership growth would mirror the increase in population of the Millard community of West Omaha. The plan identified the need for the work to be completed in three separate phases over a ten-year time horizon.

### **Hearts on Fire (1997 to 2002)**

Later that year, the congregation, after a number of meetings and a lot of time in prayer, boldly voted to undertake the construction of the Family Life Center, the atrium and a small portion of the needed educational space. With a capital campaign theme of "Hearts on Fire," the pledge commitments far exceeded what could be expected from a congregation of our size. Even so, the commitments represented only about 60 percent of the project costs, yet we moved boldly forward. At the end of three years, we conducted a follow-on campaign, asking our members to extend the gifts they had been making for an additional two years. The successful completion of this second phase of Hearts on Fire allowed us to pay the debt associated with the first phase of the master facilities plan.

### **Share the Vision (2003 to 2006)**

God richly blessed our efforts. Many souls were added to our Lord's Kingdom and to our Divine Shepherd family. We were reaching out to the community as never before. By focusing on our Vision and our Mission, we were truly sharing the Heart of the Shepherd. By 2002, we were again bursting at the seams and were using space in the Family Life Center for our Sunday School and weekday school needs. We had to make arrangements with Millard South High School to use some of their classrooms for our educational needs. We were even holding some classes in storage areas!

So in 2003, we voted to move forward with our boldest plan yet - to complete both remaining phases of the master facilities plan - with one change. After careful study, our architects determined that the cost of renovating and expanding our sanctuary would exceed the cost of building a new one, and so we decided to move forward with building a new sanctuary.

Together with substantial new educational space, the total cost of the project came to nearly \$6 million. Our capital campaign – “Share the Vision” – moved forward in late 2003 and into 2004. Our campaign consultant told us that the most we could hope to raise in a fund drive would be 2.5 times the amount of our annual operating budget, then at approximately \$800,000. While this would have resulted in total commitments of \$2 million, our commitments exceeded \$3 million. Once again we rejoiced in God’s rich blessings and how the Holy Spirit was working among us. We moved ahead, recognizing at the time that a second capital campaign would be necessary to repay the balance of the outstanding debt, just as a second campaign had been necessary with the first phase of the master plan.

### **Forward in Mission (2007 to present)**

We continue to be richly blessed. Our membership has grown by over 75 percent over the past 10 years. We worship in four different services every weekend. We have had the opportunity to sponsor several external mission projects, including the Russian Ministry Projects and the Hispanic Mission Project. The opportunities to dedicate our time, talent, and treasures to our Lord have been plentiful. We celebrate our past, praise God for his abundant gifts, and give thanks for our members’ love for the Lord and His Great Commission.

From “Hearts on Fire” to “Share the Vision,” our challenge now is to continue to move boldly “Forward in Mission,” and complete the work that we began back in 1996. We have just completed a follow-on capital campaign that received commitments from 275 families for over \$2.2 million over the next three years. Our challenge is to plan our ministry together for the future and to pray for God’s peace and to have faith that He will provide, just as he has in the past.

We want to reach even more children to help parents nurture them in the love of Christ. We want to reach even more youth so that they have a community of Christian friends to turn to during this time of transition in their lives. We want to reach even more adults of every age as they seek to know Christ in a very real way and to make a difference in our community through their relationship with Him. We want to continue to “become disciples to make disciples.”

While Divine Shepherd is just one small part of the body of Christ working to carry out our Savior’s command, we are a unique part, placed by God at this time and place to “Share the Heart of the Shepherd.” As we move “Forward in Mission” together, we prayerfully remember the last part of His Great Commission – “. . . and lo, I am with you always, even to the very end of the age.”