Jeff Cottingham ignored a call to ministry during his teenage years and all through college as he pursued a master's degree in geology.

A couple of years into the real world of geology work, though, the call became persistently loud and relentless.

Cottingham knew he couldn't resist any longer. He entered the seminary in Minnesota and from there a Lutheran minister was born.

Over the past 17 years and three congregations, Cottingham has experienced many good things.

One of them, he said, is coming to Gothenburg.

Trinity Lutheran Church was formed in Gothenburg in May 2010 by diligent residents determined to gather a congregation and get the church up and running.

Cottingham, who had served a church in Paxton, IL,for nearly nine years, said the new Gothenburg church family fit his family.

"We really felt God calling us here," he said.

Cottingham's wife, Denise, said moving to Nebraska wasn't a stretch for her because she has

family here.

Denise is employed by the Veterans Administration as a social worker, driving to Grand Island several times a week.

Their daughter, Whitney, is a kindergartner at Dudley Elementary.

“It’s been a joy to see Whitney really come out of her shell here,” Denise said. “I think maybe she feels more free.”

One of the first big steps for the 5-year-old was learning to ride her bike without training wheels, her parents said.

And the family was immediately welcomed by each member of the church, the church family which numbers 167 members.

“The family unity at Trinity Lutheran Church is very strong,” Cottingham said. “We really see ourselves as a family and we will work to forge ahead as a family.”

Church leaders are in the process of purchasing land for a building and are working through the early phases of the building process.

In the meantime, Cottingham said, the Seventh-day Adventist Church allows Trinity Lutheran to rent its building for worship and Comfort Suites provides office and storage space.

Trinity Lutheran offers Sunday school for adults and children weekly at 8:45 a.m. on Sundays, followed by worship at 10 a.m.

There are also seven different opportunities for Bible study each week.

Cottingham is a history buff and train enthusiast in his spare time.

“Our doors are always open and if anyone is interested, we encourage them to take a look,” he said.

For church information, contact Cottingham at 537-2055.