



Greetings from the staff

God Bless Us, Every One!

Ever thought about what it means to wish someone (or something) God's blessing? It's not a request that God put a stamp of approval on us or our lives; it's asking God to bless us with what *God* knows we need. Now, that's a little scary: putting it all in God's hands, leaving it up to God's judgment. After all, when people were just sure they needed a political and religious leader about 2,000 years ago, God sent a baby instead. And that baby grew up to question and challenge the political and religious beliefs of God's people.

It seems like God often doesn't end up blessing us in the ways we want. But really, aren't you glad about that? If God had send a political and religious leader to the Middle East in the first century, where would it have gotten us in the long run? We would have nothing to celebrate now in the 21st century, and nothing to hope for when this life is done. Thank God we didn't get to decide on that one!

So here's the *best* thing I can think of to wish you in this season, and in the coming year: ***God bless you in every way!*** May God give us all not what we think we want, but what we need.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Cheri

“By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us.”

~Luke 1: 78

We've experienced enough beautiful sunrises and hopeful rays of sun breaking through the storm clouds to understand God's light breaking upon and into our lives. May this tender mercy of the babe in the manger, our hope and salvation, break upon your life and grant you blessings throughout the year.

Shalom, Pastor Jessica

Our culture is tied to our calendars, blackberries, schedules, cell phones, text messages, and e-mails so much that we hardly notice that we are beginning the New Year on our “church calendars.” December celebrates Advent, the anticipation of Christ's birth. This means many different things for all of us. For example, our retail culture starts selling us Christmas just after the Halloween candy is sold out. Many retailers would like us to begin our shopping in early November, and attend all the sale events that are held between then and Christmas.

But our church calendar reminds us that we don't only have traditions, but a history changing event that occurred with Christ's birth. This December, we will be using the gospel of Luke to share Christ's story. May your “church new year” allow you to find time for the reading of Luke, chapter two, and the sharing of this 2,000 plus year-old story of Christ's birth. And may your old and practiced traditions, along with any new traditions of your family, center on Christ.

May you experience a Christ filled Advent and Christmas. And have a Christ centered New Year!

In Christ,
Marli

more staff Christmas greetings —

Greetings!

Advent is a time of preparation. It's a time to prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of a baby in a manger who changed our lives in miraculous ways. It's also a time to open ourselves to the possibilities of what God is calling us to. While it is often tempting to think of Advent as a peaceful time of quiet meditation, our experiences tell us that preparation is not always peaceful or quiet. Often preparation can be hurried and even turbulent, which makes sense considering we seldom have to prepare much for the mundane. I don't need to prepare myself to do laundry or get my mail. Those things are normal and everyday activities. We prepare for things that are new. We prepare for exciting events that are going to be life changing.

Advent is preparing for a life changing event. The in-breaking of God should have a tremendous impact on us. The event of God taking on human flesh should not be just another holiday that we celebrate before moving on to the next activity. Advent should be a time of preparing ourselves for having our worlds broken open in new and awe inspiring ways.

This Advent and Christmas season, may you be filled with the same wonder that filled those gathered in a stable that miraculous night as shepherds gathered around a manger to worship the Christ child, God made flesh.

Intern Trichelle

Our Advent and Christmas Schedule

Christmas Programs:

Sunday, December 6

- ❖ Lutheran Church of McVile at 9:45
- ❖ Trinity of Binford at 10:00

Sunday, December 20

- ❖ Our Savior's of McHenry at 9:45
- ❖ Trinity of Cooperstown at 9:45
- ❖ Faith of Hannaford at 11:15
- ❖ Grace of Grace City at 4:00

Christmas Eve Services:

- * 2:30 at Cooperstown Nursing Home
- * 4:00 at Lutheran Church of McVile
- * 4:00 at Grace of Grace City
- * 4:30 at Mabel of Sutton
- * 4:30 at Trinity of Cooperstown
- * 5:30 at Trinity of Binford
- * 5:30 at Our Savior's of McHenry
- * 10:00 at Faith of Hannaford

Christmas Day Service:

- * 10:00 at Trinity of Cooperstown

Lessons and Carols:

December 27 worship services

Christmas Cantata

“The Mystery and the Majesty”

By Joseph M. Martin

Sunday, December 13th at 7:30 p.m.

McVile Lutheran Church

Directed by Linda Loe, accompanied by Verna Lindvall

This is the mystery: “Things that no eye has seen, or ear heard, or mind imagined, are the things God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Cor. 2:7,9)

...and all the people were astonished at the majesty of God. (Luke 9:43)

Staff changes to begin in January 2010

In order to come near to balancing the budget in 2010, some changes to the Tri-County Ministry pastoral staff will be taking place as of January 1. Pastor Jessica and Pastor Marli will continue full-time; Pastor Cheri will be moving to half-time.

This change makes it necessary to alter some of the pastors' responsibilities. Parish-wide responsibilities for the pastors will remain the same: Pastor Jessica will continue to relate to the Lay Disciples; Pastor Marli will continue to head up Seminary on the Prairie; and Pastor Cheri will continue to supervise our intern, Trichelle.

What will change will be congregational responsibilities. Primary pastors for the various congregations — that is, the pastor you will turn to for visitation, funerals, baptisms and weddings, session or council meetings, etc. — will change (or in some cases, will not change) in these ways:

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| Pastor Jessica: | Trinity, Cooperstown
Faith, Hannaford
Mabel, Sutton |
| Pastor Marli: | Lutheran Church of McVille
Trinity, Binford
Our Savior's, McHenry
Grace, Grace City |
| Pastor Cheri: | First Presbyterian
Our Savior's, Kloten |

These changes also make it necessary to alter some of the congregations' responsibilities. The amount of work parish-wide has not changed—only the amount of available staff time has changed. The pastors carry out leadership in particular areas of church life; but the ministry of this parish and its congregations is accomplished by the hands and lives and voices of the members. With *all* of us working together in the same direction, shouldering some part of the work load, we can be faithful to the work to which God is calling us.

May we receive—and use!—the blessings of God as we move ahead.

All nine TCM congregations will hold their annual meetings in January. The meetings will be held following worship services on Sunday mornings. Please check the January calendar for dates.

New Young Adult Group

In the coming months, we will be exploring the development of a young adult group. The format for this group has not yet been decided, but the hope is to be in conversation over the coming weeks and months to determine interest and possible opportunities, ranging from Bible study to an on-line discussion.

In order to explore the possibilities further, Intern Trichelle will be contacting people who could possibly be involved in this group. She is asking for your help in one of a few ways.

If you think you might be interested in participating in this group, please contact Intern Trichelle at (701) 797-3463 or by e-mail at tkirchenwitz001@luthersem.edu. If you have ideas of what you would like to do as a group, please feel free to share them.

Also, if you know someone who might be interested in this group, either have them contact her, or you can give her their contact information and she would be happy to talk with them as well.

Watch for more information in the coming months!

Seminary on the Prairie January 30-31, 2010

Topic: "Preach? Me? Up front?"
Co-sponsored by Tri-County Ministry and the EaND Synod as a Continuing Education event for Lay Disciples of the Prairie / GIFTS / Clergy

Participants at Seminary on the Prairie will be preaching in TCM on January 31.



Coming up at Red Willow Bible Camp

Lutefisk and Meatball Dinner

Red Willow Bible Camp

Sunday, December 6

11:00 — 3:00

Tickets are available for advance purchase until December 1, and will not be sold at the door.

Please call 676-2681 for your reservations.

Paw'tastic Dog Sledding

Saturdays-January 23, February 6 & 13

10:00 — 5:00

Led by Helen Corlew

For more information and registration, contact Helen at 701.345.8854 or go to her website:

www.prairieisledogtrekking.com

Many thanks

On Saturday, November 14, the Tri-County Ministry confirmation students and Pastors Marli & Cheri took a trip to Grand Forks to work at the Northlands Rescue Mission. They took along a huge amount of donations from members of TCM. Thank you to all you donated! Donations included coats and jackets, shoes and boots, shirts and sweaters; bikes, phone cards, and cash.

A special thank you to those who helped with the driving — Mitch Trostad, Cheryl Ellefson, Renae Utke, Becky Goetz, and Connie Eslinger — as well as to the other adults who participated in this mission project — Darla Fliflet, Larry, Susan Motter, and Bonnie Skaufel.

A word about our Intern's work . .

Trichelle Kirchenwitz, our intern, has made a strong start here at Tri-County and we are glad to have her here among us! God has given her many gifts and qualities that are important for ministry as a pastor, and we pray that these will develop and grow during her year with us.

Especially when an intern comes to us as a mature and gifted person, we have to keep reminding ourselves that SHE IS A STUDENT, not a pastor. This is especially true when, in the recent past, the parish's situation made it necessary for some interns to function more as pastors than as students. But let us remember: this year is not about what *we* need or want from her — it is about *her* needs and what *she* wants from this experience at Tri-County Ministry.

Part of the assignment that the seminary gives interns is to come up with learning goals. Trichelle has written out her goals, and some of the work that she takes on while she is here will be aimed at helping her to meet those goals. Her work and activities are assigned and approved through Pastor Cheri (her supervisor) and the rest of the staff, and are aimed at giving her the fullest possible experience and education. And the staff is committed to seeing that her experiences come through *all* of the TCM congregations, as well as from the parish itself.

So if you approach Trichelle with thoughts in mind of work or activities you would like for her to be involved in, don't be surprised if she tells you she needs to talk to Pastor Cheri and/or the staff before she gives you an answer.

Intern Evaluation

A valuable part of the internship program is feedback from members of each congregation. Your feedback helps me to understand how I can improve and what things I am doing well from your perspectives. Because there is limited time on Sunday mornings to discuss your feedback, I am trying to provide other opportunities to gather comments. I will be leaving copies of sermon evaluation forms as well as blank pieces of paper at each church. Please feel free to write down anything you feel will be helpful, particularly with regard to preaching and/or worship leadership. There will be an envelope in each congregation to leave these comments and they will be collected regularly. I am also open to comments in person and you can always call or send an e-mail as well.

~Intern Trichelle

The following was submitted to the Tri-County Ministry Council following a special meeting they held on October 28.

Report as submitted by Rev. Steve Minnema:

The Council of the Tri-County Parish met on October 28, 2009 at 7pm in Binford to discuss issues related to the future of the parish. The meeting was precipitated by word that two of the nine participating congregations were contemplating departing from the larger parish. A need was felt to get people together to talk through the implications of this and try to come to some understanding as to how these decisions would be handled. The pastors sent a letter expressing their belief that it would be better if they were not present for the discussion and their confidence that the council, supported by the denominational personnel present, would be able to come to an appropriate resolution.

The ELCA was represented by the Reverends Keith Zeh and Terry Brandt from the Eastern North Dakota Synod office while the PC(USA) was represented by Stephen Minnema of the Presbytery of the Northern Plains.

We began by agreeing that some kind of process was required so that the decisions needing to be made could be made with a minimum of disruption for the parish as a whole and for its paid staff. We also heard from every council member about his or her hopes for the process. Many expressed the hope that the parish could continue as it is but all expressed the hope that whatever happens might be guided by the Holy Spirit and in accord with the faith that is so important to everyone and to each congregation. We were especially pleased that both congregations that are contemplating a departure indicated that they would honor their financial commitments through 2010 and notify the council if they are planning to depart before October 1. (But the Trinity Church of Cooperstown people indicated that they understood that an even earlier notice would be most helpful to the remainder of the parish.)

In light of the above, it was felt that we had some time to think deeply about the future of the individual congregations and the parish as a whole. What is God calling us to do as congregations and together? What is our mission? Keith Zeh suggested that he could provide a process by which congregations could address these questions in a way that might renew excitement both for local ministry and the parish.

It was thus agreed that any congregations wanting to have a representative from the Synod Office to hold a forum on the church wide decision should contact Terry Brandt as soon as possible so that such conversations might happen before the process Reverend Zeh is envisioning might be put in place. It was further agreed that an expanded council meeting would be held on February 3, involving this year's and next year's council members and other local leaders from congregations. At that time, Keith Zeh will describe the process he is offering to facilitate and answer questions about it. Those congregations that choose to participate will do so sometime between February and June. The hope is that with the renewed energy and vision that can emerge from this process at the congregational level the parish as a whole can begin to see why and how it might work together to support the ministries of the participating churches.

One final note worth mentioning was the stress on transparency requested of all council members and congregations. We are all encouraged by the wonderful history of positive working relationships in the parish and believe that that can continue if everyone communicates clearly and openly about what is happening.

The evening concluded with a communion service celebrating our oneness in Christ.

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October, and November.



*The pastors and intern of Tri-County Ministry
invite you to a*

Holiday Open House

at the Binford parsonage

Friday, December 18
2:00 pm – 7:00 pm

Both children and adults are welcome;
come and enjoy some relaxed time together.

If possible, please park in the Trinity parking lot
and use the closest (south) door to the house.

*Those preferring fewer steps, please use the garage
entrance. (park in the driveway)*

**Come on in and
make yourselves at home!**