



From Pastor Jessica

“I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him...God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” 1st Corinthians 1: 4-5a, 9

Not long ago one of the interim candidates asked me ‘what is ministry like in Tri-County?’ I immediately responded, with no hesitation whatsoever, ‘Amazing!’ In fact, the response was so quick, so spontaneous, that I just as quickly wondered ‘now, why on earth would that be the word that would come flying out of my mouth?’

We’re a parish that covers 900 square miles, we’ve seen changes in pastoral staff numerous times over the past years, we’ve been challenged by changes in the configuration of our parish, we struggle with find a confirmation structure that meets the needs of a parish that has five different school districts, and we’ve seen the impact of the change in our demographics on our budgeting for the coming year.

And yet, ‘Amazing!’ was the only thing that came to my mind at that moment of truth.

Truth, you say? Yes, because when all is said and done, ‘Amazing!’ is the word that describes ministry within our parish. We are an ecumenical family that has come together to provide ministry in rural North Dakota – a vital and life filling ministry. We have members within our churches that have taken the mantle of the priesthood of all believers – whether it be Sunday School, councils, Sunday morning worship, youth, mission, or that all important behind the scenes action that makes every church viable.

I hear people offer ‘how can we make it happen’ or ‘how can we make it work.’ Although we are a parish of seven churches that share a staff, we are seven churches that continue to become more and more aware of what it means to be in fellowship with one another. During this past Advent and Christmas season, every time a church did something to assist or help me out it benefited the whole parish. When we look at how the churches took up the request to lay lead worship services, change council times and meeting dates, be flexible and understanding – the efforts of all the people from different places benefitted the whole.

December was a challenging month. And yet, we saw leaders from all the churches rise to those challenges. We saw representation from all our churches at the ecumenical meeting held by the synod, a call committee quickly convene for an interview, and in each of the churches lay people who saw needs within their Sunday services and made sure worship was celebrated. And, of course, how the churches worked with Theresa and me on our Christmas Eve services.

This is a parish that wants to see ministry happen and is willing to work in so many ways to make sure it does. It’s a parish with seven different personalities, worship styles, congregational needs; a teaching parish that provides an incredible experience to our seminarians; and each congregation is an individual in her own right. This makes for a richness and breadth that isn’t found everywhere. It is also a parish that in its fellowship as the Body of Christ is truly amazing and a gift to any pastor.

(continued on next page)

(Pastor Jessica's letter continued)

Since I came to Tri-County Ministry four years ago, we've had quite a journey together. I came when all the pastors left, walked with you as you survived and grew out of that, shared with you as interns have come and gone, celebrated with you as we experienced the gift of Cheri and Marli, mourned with you as we said goodbye to them. I've been by your side as we saw the changes come upon us from the loss of two churches, and now as we walk together into our future which has some big unanswered questions.

In light of all that – you need to know – I say, unequivocally, without hesitation, and without any doubt that to do ministry in Tri-County, because of who you are, is...AMAZING!

Staffing update

The ELCA congregations of TCM held special meetings on December 5, and all churches approved the issuance of a new Letter of Call for Pastor Jessica Merchant. The new call will take effect immediately on January 1, so there will be no lapse of her call when Cooperstown Trinity and Mabel officially leave TCM on December 31.

Rev. Jeanne Madsen began serving TCM on December 20 as our interim pastor. She will reside in the parsonage in McVile.

Meet our interim pastor

Godt Nytt År

What a pleasure it will be to be working with you this year! I've had many conversations with Pastor Jessica and just recently I met via phone with many of you good people and instantly felt a common bond with you all. Beyond the laughter and promises of good homemade lefse and the chance to dust off my Norwegian language skills, I gathered from that phone session that we also have deeper stuff in common. We seem to have the same theological frame of mind – I am big on grace, forgiveness and gratitude and I think you are too. I place great emphasis on the example of Jesus and I have the feeling that your hands are God's hands as well. I value tradition, but also innovation and I feel that you do too. We may also agree on this – I believe that sermons should be relatively short, but filled with meaning, practicality and often some humor. I strive to make worship a joyful and meaningful experience when called for and quiet and meaningful at other times.

I think we also agree on this. The church is the "priesthood of all believers." Martin Luther once wrote, *In fact, we are all consecrated priests through Baptism, as St. Peter in 1 Peter 2[:9] says, "You are a royal priesthood and a priestly kingdom," and Revelation [5:10], "Through your blood you have made us into priests and kings."* During this year I will be encouraging all of you to discover your own individual and collective gifts and ministries, and to work together towards God's preferred future for Tri-County Ministry in North Dakota!

Just a little about myself. I grew up in a small town in southern Minnesota and graduated from St. Olaf College in Northfield. I then attended Luther Seminary in St. Paul where I earned my M.Div. I have served congregations in Nebraska, Alaska and Minnesota. I also work with Church Innovations, a non-profit consulting/training/teaching group which is dedicated to innovating and renewing the church. A few years back I began work at Luther Seminary on my Ph.D. in Pastoral Care and I expect that I'll finish one of these fine days. I have two wonderful daughters, Carrie and Aimee and two absolutely adorable granddaughters, Alex and Kaitlyn.

Again, I am so looking forward to spending this year with you all!

På gjensyn inne kirken
Pastor Jeanne

Men in Ministry retreat in February

Take a look at your congregation this weekend and count how many men are at worship in comparison to how many women. If your congregation is like most ELCA congregations, women outnumber men by nearly 2 to 1. This is of great concern, not only for men. Congregations with a higher percentage of men actively engaged also tend to have stronger worship attendance and stronger stewardship, family and children's ministries.

The vision of Lutheran Men in Mission is for every man to have a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ through an effective ministry with men in every congregation. Therefore, the Lutheran Men in Mission Team of the Eastern ND and Northwestern MN Synods is sponsoring a retreat —

Building Men and Men's Ministry for Christ

**Red Willow Bible Camp
February 4-6, 2011**

The registration fee of \$150 per man will cover two nights' lodging, six meals and take home resources. The retreat will be led by our synod Lutheran Men in Mission Team: Bishop Bill Rindy and the ELCA's Lutheran Men in Mission Executive Director, Doug Haugen. Men will learn what is happening with men and their relationship with the church and how to build the congregation's ministry with men around discipleship. Those attending will go home with a concrete plan to be more effective in ministry with men in their congregation and community.

Registration deadline is January 21. For more registration information, on contact Denny Goetz at RWBC.

676-2681 or dgoetz@mlgc.com

Worship notes

You'll notice a change in the configuration of our worship schedule starting in January.

Our worshippers have a strong desire to have ordained preachers in the pulpits. In order to make that happen with two ordained pastors serving seven congregations, TCM has been discussing mid-week services. Some of these services would be on Wednesdays, others would be on Saturdays, depending on the wishes of each congregation.

In each church on December 19, there was discussion of the preferences regarding midweek services. Lutheran Church of McVille offered to have all their January worship services on Wednesday evenings.

Please pay special attention to your monthly calendar to see when your worship service is each week. For the month of January, the annual meeting scheduling affects our Sunday schedule, and a couple of other non-Sunday services have been scheduled also.



As we try out different plans for our weekly worship, your feedback would be greatly appreciated.

Report from Ecumenical Gathering in Finley

Numerous parishes were represented at the meeting in Finley on December 8th; included were people from the ELCA, United Church of Christ, PC(USA), and the United Methodist Church. Tri-County had attendees from all our churches.

Much information was shared as each person present offered information about his/her church and parish. Feedback from our reps ranged from appreciating the ecumenical relationships that have been established within our churches and that it was informative.

Presently Tri-County Ministry will not be moving forward with any conversations with the other parishes. All our members expressed that they were glad to have a chance to meet their brothers and sisters in Christ who are in this geographical area and who are walking a journey similar to ours.

Tri-County Ministry Council highlights — December 15

The abbreviated meeting was conducted by conference call, due to the weather.

A letter from Mabel of Sutton to TCM was read by Jim Dramstad, regarding their separation from the ELCA.

Council approved the payment of \$500 to Trinity of Cooperstown as a portion of the deductible on their insurance claim.

Interim Pastor Jeanne Madsen will begin serving TCM on December 20. Pastor Jessica has accepted her new Letter of Call.

A folding machine will be purchased for the TCM office.

Council was informed of the town hall meeting being held in Binford on January 30 and of upcoming changes in RWBC staffing.

Council reps were asked to discuss worship schedule configurations with their congregations, so that midweek services may be scheduled. Annual meeting dates were also to be discussed.

Next meeting is February 9, 2011.

Annual Meetings in TCM

Our Savior's of McHenry
Sunday, January 16

Our Savior's of Kloten
Sunday, January 16

Faith of Hannaford
Sunday, January 16

Trinity of Binford
Sunday, January 23

First Presbyterian of Cooperstown
Sunday, January 23

Grace of Grace City
Sunday, February 6

Lutheran Church of McVile
To be announced

December 14, 2010

Dear Tri-County Ministry Members:

Mabel Lutheran Church of Sutton took its' second vote December 5, 2010 to disaffiliate with the ELCA effective December 31, 2010. Twenty members were present. The vote was 19 for the resolution and 1 against.

Mabel Lutheran Church's decision to leave the ELCA in no way reflects negatively on Tri-County Ministry. We value the partnership we have had with all Tri-County Ministry members through the years and are certain you will continue to thrive.

Please pray for us as we strive to be a light in our community. May God bless all members of Tri-County Ministry.

Mabel Lutheran Church Congregation
Sutton, ND

Some upcoming youth events

Rock & Worship Road Show
February 17

Grand Forks

Ski trip dates to be announced

Elementary to Fort Ransom

Jr/Sr. high to Walhalla

Youth and parents, start thinking about the 2012 ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans. We are going to start organizing this soon, so that fund raising may get underway.

News from our Northlands Rescue Mission trip

It was a cold day, but it didn't keep the spirit down of eighteen young people and six adults in their work at the Northlands Rescue Mission. They were able to work in the store that's available to the residents at the Mission and wrap presents for the upcoming Christmas party. Currently there are over one hundred men at the Mission; the number of women is in the teens. A special thanks goes out to Darla Fliflet as the intrepid bus driver. Thanks to all who donated items or money for the Mission. And a big holler goes out to all the young people and adults who made this day happen!

Here are some comments from the participants:

- ◇ "Today's trip was a good way to help people less fortunate than us. I enjoyed it!"
- ◇ "How sad there are so many homeless people, but how good that there are places like Northland for them to go. I will definitely be supporting this mission."
- ◇ "I thought it was fun, surrounded by friends helping out for a good cause."
- ◇ "I learned that there are more boys [men] than girls [women] homeless."
- ◇ "Even if you're down on your luck there is still hope for a new start."
- ◇ "It was very interesting, and it made me feel good about myself."
- ◇ "I learned a lot. It was also nice to reach out to the people who are in need."
- ◇ "It was a fun, interesting experience. It amazed me that there was only 14 females."
- ◇ "Even if you're homeless you can get back up on your feet."
- ◇ "I thought that it was a lot of fun."
- ◇ "I really liked to do this, I liked working in the store; but I do wish I would have wrapped gifts a little while."
- ◇ "It was enjoyable."
- ◇ "I think the mission shelter is an awesome place because it helps so many people daily just to get back on their feet. Also, that so many people donate so much is just great!"
- ◇ "I was glad I helped in the store and sorted clothes. I am glad they have a place to call home."
- ◇ "It was really fun helping."
- ◇ "It is a good feeling to be part of the solution and not the problem."
- ◇ "I wish I could do more to help. It's good to serve others as Jesus asks us to do so."
- ◇ "I thought that it was good for us to do that for the less fortunate people."
- ◇ "They get a lot of donations but you still have to give more. I liked helping. There are a lot of clothes to be hung up [in the store]."
- ◇ "My day was good, I liked hanging with friends and working at the store."

Lutheran / Presbyterian Q & A

A wonderful part of Tri-County Ministry is that we are an ecumenical parish. Our fellowship of Presbyterians and Lutherans is a witness that the Body of Christ is greater than our individual denominations. In the effort for us to know who we are better and to get to know each other better there will be a series of questions and answers regarding our two denominations. These questions and answers come from Martin Marty's *Lutheran Questions, Lutheran Answers: Exploring Christian Faith* and Donald McKim's *Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers: Exploring Christian Faith*. The answers given are a distillation of the full answers found in the books.

In *Presbyterian Questions*, Donald McKim highlights three themes for the basic message of the Bible:

- ◆ God created the world good.
- ◆ Humans messed up the good creation.
- ◆ God came in Jesus Christ to set things right.

In *Lutheran Questions*, Martin Marty relates these themes for the basic message of the Bible:

- ◆ God is the main character, but this God interacts with humans.
- ◆ God who interacts with humans does so out of love.
- ◆ In the created order, things are not as they out to be.
- ◆ God, being a God of love, cannot abandon the created world or us humans in it.
- ◆ The agent of the “righting” of tings to what they out to be is God, now in Jesus Christ.
- ◆ In Jesus Christ we participate in the new creation.
- ◆ Through the Holy Spirit God intends and effects community in which we praise God and serve others.
- ◆ The earth and the history we know are not the last word.

What are the thoughts of our Tri-County Ministry Confirmation students? This year's class has both Presbyterian and Lutheran youth participating; when asked this question about the basic message of the Bible they responded with words including: God, Jesus, love, forgiveness, stories, and people. It would appear that our young people reflect in their own words the above themes about the Bible.

(compiled by Pastor Jessica)

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Town Hall

Sunday, January 30

3:00

Trinity in Binford

- Discussion on the ELCA proposed social statement on genetics
- Questions will be answered by Per Anderson from Luther Seminary, a chairman of the task force that authored the statement. A representative from the synod office will also be in attendance.
- The statement may be found on the ELCA website. www.elca.org
- This town hall is open to all, including congregations outside of TCM.