

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Tri-County Ministry finds itself sharing in an experience not unlike our Hebrew ancestors setting out for the promised land. God is leading us as we embark toward a new future and, with confidence in God, we set off on the journey with not all the questions answered, only knowing that the Holy Spirit moves with us, sustaining and encouraging us on the way.

As many of you know, Trinity Lutheran of Cooperstown has voted to leave Tri-County Ministry, most likely before the end of 2010; and Mabel Lutheran is discerning where God is calling them as a church. A new configuration of TCM will bring certain challenges as well as possibilities for the ministry and mission of our parish. We have experienced a change in staff before, and we have seen how the Holy Spirit works to provide for the Body of Christ. And so we have assurance that the Spirit continues to provide and create things anew. And like our ancient ancestors, we have found ourselves facing many challenges on this journey as a parish. With the work of God through the Holy Spirit we are brought through and into that new place.

During our last period of transition we heard the wisdom of listening to the words, "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10) Now we hear the command of Jesus to our hearts, "Peace! Be still." (Mark 4: 39) "Believe in God, believe also in me." (John 14: 1)

Prayer: Eternal God, you call us to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Your Servants in Christ,

The Staff of Tri-County Ministry

April 28, 2010

From Trinity Lutheran Church of Cooperstown

To All Tri County members

As many of you may now know, on April 25, the Trinity Lutheran Church of Cooperstown congregation voted to leave Tri County Ministry. With ninety percent of the voters electing to withdraw from Tri County Ministry, we feel we must serve our congregations' mission in God's work on our own. This was a difficult decision and one which could only have been made with God's help. During the evaluations we ask ourselves, "What is God calling us to do?" This path seems to be where we are being led.

Trinity Lutheran Church of Cooperstown's decision does not reflect any negativity towards Tri County Ministry. We want to thank our brothers and sisters at Tri County Ministry for their thoughts and prayers during this decision. We have also greatly valued the partnership we have shared with you throughout the years. We truly hope that Tri County Ministry will thrive in the future.

May God bless all at Tri County Ministry.

The Trinity Lutheran Church of Cooperstown Congregation

TO: Tri-County Ministry Members
FROM: Tri-County Ministry Council

Your council wants you to know that we have been discussing the future of our parish this year. We have set up a task force that has the following responsibilities:

- Define ramifications of one or two churches leaving TCM
- Define needs of the parish
- Define budget possibilities
- Define possible reconfigurations

To that end, the task force has met with a Synod representative and asked questions of pastors who lead multiple-church parishes. Keith Zeh, END Synod Director for Evangelical Mission told the task force that you "cannot wring your hands and roll up your sleeves at the same time!" Your Council has done very little hand-wringing, but plenty of sleeves have been rolled up! Bishop Rindy has also met with our task force and executive committee. We expect to hear some great ideas for the future of TCM from the task force. We do expect that the future of Tri-County Ministry will rely heavily on the talents of our members. We pray that God will lead each of us to use the talents He has given us to further the mission of TCM.

Please feel free to ask questions of any of the members of the task force: Gilbert Black, Bob Delfs, Connie Eslinger, Rita Jungels, or Rob Loe; and any of your council members. We plan to keep you informed as best we can.

Things you should know (compiled from discussions at the TCM Council meeting and the congregations' informational time)

MEMBER CONGREGATIONS

When and why is Trinity leaving Tri-County Ministry? At the April 28 TCM Council meeting, the Trinity representatives stated that the congregation wishes to have something in place before this fall, so they are considering leaving TCM in August or September. They have no plans to leave the ELCA. Ultimately, they wish to do ministry on their own without having to share a pastor with other churches. They have no disagreements with the other congregations of TCM.

What about Sutton? Mabel of Sutton is in a different process than Trinity of Cooperstown. The Mabel congregation is working to discern their relationship with the ELCA. They have taken no formal votes about staying with or leaving the ELCA.

Are any other congregations looking at joining us or leaving us? The remaining congregations are committed to staying with the parish and working together. At this time, there has not been any discussion about other congregations who may want to join TCM.

STAFFING

What happens to our current Tri-County Ministry staff? Our staff will change. The immediate change will be that our three pastors' calls will be terminated. This termination is a new requirement in the ELCA Constitution, which states that when a congregation ends its relationship with a parish, all calls are terminated. However, Bishop Bill Rindy has stated that when the calls are terminated, he will immediately appoint all our pastors to be interim pastors of Tri-County Ministry. Then, when a definite plan is in place for our staff, a new Letter of Call can be issued to any pastor who remains with our parish.

There is not a timeline in place for the departure of any staff members. That depends totally on the call process which any of them may enter.

What will our future staff look like? Our entire pastor staff will not leave when Cooperstown leaves. But, the entire staff will not be able to stay either. Our TCM task force will be looking at all the possibilities for staffing. We could have an interim pastor for a while. Or we could have a lay pastor. The synod and the presbytery will work with us until we come up with a permanent plan.

We can't say at this time what our future staff will look like, because there are many factors involved. The TCM task force will look at our current membership numbers and our budget expectations before making any recommendations.

Can we keep the Intern Program? Intern Trichelle Kirchenwitz will remain with Tri-County Ministry through August 31, 2010, the end of her internship year. She is currently living in the parsonage owned by Cooperstown Trinity, and she will remain there through the summer, unless Trinity's situation changes.

TCM will not participate in the intern program for the year 2010-2011. A seminary would not send an intern into a parish in transition such as ours currently is. And also, since we would not be able to guarantee that we would have a pastor to supervise an intern for the entire year, we would not qualify for an intern. Former Bishop Rick Foss, who is now in charge of sending out interns from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, feels that TCM is a good place for an intern, and is confident that we will be back in the intern program in the future.

MINISTRY AND PROGRAMMING

Will our worship schedule change? Our TCM task force is talking about the various ways we could do our worship schedule. They are also consulting with pastors in other multi-church parishes for some new ideas.

How about confirmation classes & youth events? No discussion has taken place yet on the confirmation program for the coming year. This past school year, Trinity of Cooperstown had their own confirmation program, with an instructor from their congregation. The confirmation students from the remaining churches met together and were instructed by the TCM pastors and intern. Our youth leader, Darla Fliflet, will continue her work with the youth of our parish.

And our connection with Red Willow Bible Camp? The camp will continue to be a vital part of our ministry: a place where we can send our youth, where we can worship together, where we can do mission projects. Nothing will change as far as RWBC goes.

FINANCES

What is our current budget? The TCM total budget for 2010 is just under \$261,000. Of that amount, approximately \$133,270 is budgeted for pastors' salaries and benefits. If Mabel and Cooper Trinity were both to leave TCM, the budget would decrease almost exactly by the amount budgeted for 1.5 pastors of our current 2.5 pastors.

At the beginning of 2010, TCM had an active confirmed membership number of 892. Of that total, 294 was the membership at Cooperstown Trinity; 37 was the membership at Mabel. (The two churches together made up 37% of the TCM population on 1.1.10.)

Will Trinity and Mabel be obligated to fulfill their budgeted payments to TCM? In October 2009, both congregations pledged to stay with Tri-County Ministry through 2010, and the 2010 budget was approved with those promises in mind. Mabel continues in their plan to meet their 2010 budget commitment, whether or not they are actually with the parish through this year. To date, Cooperstown Trinity has not re-committed.

The TCM Council has worked hard to be good stewards of our finances. They have foreseen the decline in numbers of all our congregations, and have in fact budgeted in the past for a surplus to help meet this decline. This budgeted surplus, plus the extreme care taken in managing the parish funds, gives us at this time approximately a two month cushion. This cushion will rapidly disappear if Trinity and/or Mabel do not honor their promise to meet their 2010 budget obligation.

Tri-County Ministry
Box 226
Binford, ND 58416

Phone 676-2761
trinitybinford@mlgc.com

www.tricountyministry.org

Pastor Jessica Merchant 769-2231
(cell) 218-230-4479
uncas16@hotmail.com

Pastor Cheri Danielson 676-2762
(cell) 789-8016
cheridanielson@dflytech.com

Pastor Marli Danielson 676-2762
(cell) 789-8006
marli_danielson@dflytech.com

Intern Trichelle Kirchenwitz 797-3463
(cell) 701-799-6607
tkirchenwitz001@luthersem.edu

TCM Parish Administrator
Theresa Fiebiger 676-2761
trinitybinford@mlgc.com

Youth Leader
Darla Fliflet 797-2149
flifletfive@invisimax.com

Faith of Hannaford 769-2387
faithl@ictc.com

First Presbyterian of Cooperstown
797-3112
bthomas@invisimax.com

Grace of Grace City 674-3112
kmac@daktel.com

Mabel of Sutton 769-2396
bstokka@yahoo.com

McVile Lutheran Church 322-4952
mcvilleparish@gondtc.com

Our Savior's, Kloten 322-4952
mcvilleparish@gondtc.com

Our Savior's of McHenry 785-2117
trinitybinford@mlgc.com

Trinity of Binford 676-2761
trinitybinford@mlgc.com

Trinity of Cooperstown 797-3611
trinityofcooperstown@mlgc.com

IMPORTANT NEWS ABOUT OUR PARISH

This special mailing is coming to you to help you understand the changes that are coming to Tri-County Ministry. If, after reading through it, you find yourself with questions, please don't hesitate to call a TCM Council representative or any member of the staff. No question should go unasked!

Your Tri-County Ministry Council Representatives

- ◆ Mabel of Sutton: Sherri Johnson & Jim Dramstad
- ◆ Grace of Grace City: Kathy McCracken & Jo Black
- ◆ Our Savior's of McHenry: Missy Erickson & Iris Brandt
- ◆ Trinity of Binford: Cheryl Rickford & John Leininger
- ◆ Lutheran Church of McVile: Jim Monsebroten & Brian Dinger
- ◆ Our Savior's of Kloten: Dale Nelson & Harlan Sigdahl
- ◆ First Presbyterian of Cooperstown: Laverne Larson & Paul Motter
- ◆ Faith of Hannaford: Connie Eslinger & Darla Fliflet