

DE TRINITATE

Newsletter of the Society of the Holy Trinity
Societas Trinitatis Sanctae

From The Senior

To my sisters and brothers in the Society and to all our friends, I send Easter greetings and blessings for Pentecost.

Although I and other officers have sent out various communications over the past few months, it has been a while since our last newsletter so there is much upon which we need to catch up. Clearly this has been a disjointed time for all of us, but things now seem to be turning around and hope is abundant in so many ways in this Easter season during which I am writing. The cancellation of our General Chapter Retreat last year and the corresponding cancellation of so many chapter retreats, were difficult situations for many of our members who have relied upon such gatherings for mutual conversation and consolation and for the spiritual sustenance they provide. But some chapters are now beginning to meet again in person, although some of the retreat centers used by our chapters have not yet reopened so patience is still needed.

Our Leadership Council met in January via zoom and addressed several issues. A budget was approved, part of which was a proposal to lower our dues for one year to \$250. This lower fee recognizes the difficult fiscal situation faced by many of our members and the congregations they serve. It also recognizes that our costs have been lower this past year with lack of travel and expenses for General Chapter.

Which leads me to remind folks who have sent questions to our Secretary that our dues are just that – dues as stated in the Rule for being a subscribing member of the Society (Chapter IX.3). While the dues cover the cost of attendance at General Chapter retreat, they are NOT payment for General Chapter, and one does not reduce the dues if you are not planning on attending that gathering.

One of the items that got pushed back by the lack of chapter retreats was the election of Deans. Some 8 chapters were due to hold elections last year but were unable to do so. With the agreement of Leadership Council, those elections were postponed and almost all deans agreed to extend their terms of office until a regular election was able to take place in chapter meetings. But if we add these elections, to the ones scheduled for this year, it means that we have 15 elections to conduct during 2021 just to stay on track. The Deans are currently organizing those retreats and I will assign individuals to conduct the elections in

each chapter. In those chapters where an election was to have been held last year, that three-year term of office will be back-dated to 2020 so that we might avoid a similarly large number of elections three years from now.

Moving on to our General Chapter retreat for this year, it is our fervent hope that we will be in the clear to go ahead. The dates are 28-30 September. However, there is always the proviso of what conditions the state of Illinois will have at that point on large gatherings AND whether the University of St. Mary is ready to open their doors for larger groups such as the Society. We will continue to work with the retreat center and the University to determine our schedule. Meanwhile, for those who like to plan ahead, I urge caution before booking flights or making other arrangements. We are planning as though the General Chapter will take place, but some situations may be out of our control. A decision will be made over the summer and we will let everyone know as soon as possible.

Part of our planning for this upcoming General Chapter will be the election of a Senior and Bursar per the Rule. Once again, I have asked Pr. Rod Ronneberg STS to conduct the election. Our teaching theologian, carried over from last year, will be Bishop Matthew Riegel STM of the West Virginia/Western Maryland Synod ELCA who will address us on the matter of Ecclesiology. We have also invited Bishop Dan Selbo of the NALC to attend and preach at one of our Vespers services and the same is true for Archbishop Hotes of Lutheran Church International. It will be good to have our own small ecumenical gathering among some of the Lutheran bodies.

And planning further ahead, 2022 will be the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Society and we will celebrate at our General Chapter with a lineup of three speakers on the topic of “Evangelical Catholicism in the Rule of the Society.” Fr. John Baldovin SJ (Boston College) will speak to the genius of Catholicity; Dr. Melanie Ross (Yale) will speak on the genius of evangeli-

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calism and Dr. Kent Bureson (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis) will address us on Lutheranism as an expression of Evangelical Catholicism. A member of STS will respond to each speaker. We are also planning a formal dinner in the refectory with The Rev'd Dr. Richard Johnson STS serving as our dinner speaker on the first 25 years of the Society.

We are all more than conscious of the great difficulties which have been raised by this pandemic. Much has been written about the fraying of our cultural fabric during these disjointed times. And we all know what damage it has done to our religious communities and the issues we now face both in our judicatories and our parishes. As clergy we cannot solve all the problems, nor can we make everything right. But, in this Easter season, there is

always the promise of new life and new hope and a resurrection which portends a new creation. It is to that hope and promise that we cling, even in the difficult days ahead of us as we rebuild our social, cultural and religious fabric. It will not be easy but my prayer is that our Society will help support and sustain you in your lives and ministries and that together we will continue that work to which God has called each of us in this ministry of Word and Sacrament.

In our common life and service,

Paddy Rooney
Senior

From The Secretary

Sisters and brothers,

A reminder to you that dues are due on May 30th, Holy Trinity Sunday, in the amount of \$250.00 (reduced for this year). A letter concerning dues and the information form was sent on April 7th to all Deans and should have been distributed to chapter members. If you did not receive this, please contact your Dean. The form can also be downloaded from the website or the Facebook page. Also remember-- if you have your church, ministry site or bill-pay service send a check on your behalf, your name must be somewhere on the check so I know to whom it is to be credited, and the information form must accompany all payments. If you wish to pay your dues online through PayPal, the cost will be \$259.00, to cover the fees associated with using that service. There is a link on the website to our PayPal portal. In this time of continued global pandemic, I understand that finances may be difficult for congregations and individuals. If this is the case for you, please contact your Dean to request a waiver of part of your dues, or if your dues will be late, just let me know.

The General Retreat is currently scheduled for September 28-30, 2021 at University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, IL. We are planning for the General Chapter to take place, but the State of Illinois and/or the University may not be able to allow such things at that time. Our Senior has discussed this elsewhere in this newsletter; please keep an ear out for changes. Registration for the General Retreat will open July 1 and, as usual, members will register through their Deans. If you have special dietary needs or other health considerations, please inform your Dean of those when you register.

If you are not a member, but have been retreating with a chapter, you would register with that Dean. If you are not a member and have not made a connection with a local chapter, we extend you a warm welcome and are glad you'd like to attend the General Retreat! You may register directly with me at the address found on the impressum of this newsletter, after July 1.

The Rev'd Pari Bailey, STS
Secretary

Reflections on the Rule

The Rule that brought together the thinking of the Society's formative years still undergirds everything we do as Lutheran pastors. It serves to keep us immersed in the Trinity's Life, while cutting against the attitude and actions given us at birth. Thus, there is a great deal of work involved when one subscribes to The Rule and exercises it. Such work, though, is driven by the merciful actions of the Lord God.

Reflecting on The Rule from the first General Retreat in 1997 is an encouraging exercise. Even though we are emerging from a rough year that began in March, 2020, the mid 90s were also dealing with chaotic conditions. The twenty-nine pastors who gathered in Morristown, NJ, for that first retreat were from three Lutheran denominational structures. The understanding and practice of the Church's ministry during those years was beginning to spin away from the promises that had been spoken at Baptism and Ordination.

Honestly, that first General Retreat was a gift from the Holy Trinity to this small group of pastors. It exposed us to the Lord's

activity through the rhythm of the five prayer offices. The teaching sessions revolved around a draft of The Rule that had been written by the Society's founders the previous year. There was the refreshing opportunity to confess our sins and receive the Lord's forgiveness. There was a strengthening collegiality among the participants and a growing trust (realities that were minimally evident in our denominations).

The Rule, because it works us into the Life of the Holy Trinity, sparked a healthy rejuvenation among the participating pastors and the parishes they served. The Rule's genius is that it is not an entity to itself, but is continually pointing us to the Scriptures and Sacraments, the holy places from which the Lord God grounds the Church's ministry through his rescuing, sustaining and creative activity. In the first decade or so of the Society's retreats, those who subscribed to The Rule learned much of the Church as well as its ministry. This learning became focused in 2007-2009 when the General Retreats exposed us to Martin Luther's seven Marks of the Church – the Lord's Word (streaming

from the Scriptures); Holy Baptism; the Lord's Supper; Confession and Forgiveness; Prayer (including the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy along with daily Morning and Evening Prayer); Ministry and the Son's Cross.

The Rule, because it is always embedding us in the Holy Trinity's Life, continues to be a source of renewal for those who are ordained into and practice the Church's ministry. This past year has been extremely rough for everyone, including those who are not part of the Church. Running through the year, however, were the weekly opportunities to take part in the Lord's Eucharist along with intensified biblical preaching. In addition, there was the opportunity to exercise Daily Prayer. Through the psalms and Scriptures appointed for each day we were exposed to the Lord's holy activities. Making our way through this horrific year, we noticed the glaring weaknesses of the world's gods while the incredible strengths of the Lord's Life continued to press in on us.

Such opportunities deepen our understanding of the Lord's ways. One example is the daily use of the Venite from Morning Prayer. The canticle is superb, but are we aware of its full context? The psalm closes off with two verses: "Let us bow down and bend the knee, and kneel before the Lord our Maker. For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand." In the context, the last phrase from the last verse is omitted: "Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!" The psalm's final four verses are reinforcing as the Lord encourages his people to not harden their hearts or to put him to the test

even though they had seen his works. The Lord acknowledges that he detested them for an entire generation; in his wrath he swore they would not enter his rest!

If, in the past year, we were trying to understand how and why things can go so badly, the context of Psalm 95 gives us an explanation. When the gracious and strong Lord calls us to pay close attention to his voice, we are quick to tell him that we will, but then, full of ourselves, we choose to listen to our own voices. What could go wrong? The Rule keeps us immersed in the Trinity's Life. The Rule also reminds us that the Lord's people are, because of our natural desire to be self-absorbed, being called continually to repentance.

The past year has been brutal on the Church's parishes and pastors. We saw the rush to make the Church's life virtual while paying little attention to the reality that its life is incarnational. The world's gods are still running amok, attracting followers with slick veneers that only heighten the poison spreading through its life, trapping all people in its empty life.

While the world's life plays itself out, The Rule reminds us that the only authentic Life is the one grounded in the Holy Trinity. Because it positions us for the Lord's holy places, it deepens our repentance and increases our faithfulness to the ministry given us by him.

Carl A. Voges, STS

Chapter Updates

The **Central Plains Chapter** met in retreat Monday, February 22, at the Christ the King Retreat House/St. Benedict Center in Schuyler, Nebraska. We had our regulars plus a first-time fellow traveler join us. We next meet again in retreat at the same location for a 24 hour retreat starting at 1 pm, Monday, June 7. Please contact chapter dean Jeff Cottingham (pastorjeff@trinitylutherangothenburg.com) for more information.

The **Great Rivers Chapter** is hoping to gather for a face-to-face retreat May 17-18, at our "home" Retreat Center, Toddhall in Columbia, IL, despite the usual tri-chapter retreat being unable to take place. We look forward to praying and fellowshiping together. Please contact chapter dean Dennis Meyer (pastord1949@gmail.com) for further information.

The **Metro New York Chapter** has not been able to meet since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we have maintained contact with each other through social media and other platforms. We are planning for a one-day summer virtual retreat, and hope our retreat center can welcome us for our fall retreat in November. Contact chapter dean Terrence Weber

Brief Lessons

Thank you once again to our brother, The Rev'd Matthew Griggs, STS (Minnesota Chapter) for his work in compiling the brief lessons included in this issue. This set takes us from Pentecost

(tweber1978@aol.com) for information on upcoming events.

The **Northern Illinois Chapter** gathered in retreat April 26th, St Mark, Evangelist, at St Timothy Lutheran Church, Hermosa, Chicago. Pr. Keith Forni, STS, led discussion on "Parish as Place: Revisiting a formative document for neighborhood ministry." Pr. Frank Senn, STS, preached. Pr. Rodney Juell, STS, presided at Holy Eucharist.

During the pandemic, the **Upstate New York Chapter** has been able to meet three times, using hotels, as our retreat center has been shut down. Gathering together in person was possible because we are a micro chapter with an average attendance of 4 individuals. The support was essential. This summer we anticipate an August gathering on the dean's boat for a day long cruise on the Great Lakes.

The **Wisconsin Chapter** met in person at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Denmark, WI, May 3-4. Pr. Andrew Zoerb, STS, was elected dean. The chapter expressed thanks to Pr. Tim Duesenberg, STS, for his long and faithful service as dean. The senior served as teaching theologian and conducted the election and installation.

through Christ the King. If you need additional copies or an electronic format, the document is posted at both our website and Facebook page.

From The Vicar

In the fall of 1996, twenty pastors signed a statement in recognition that the Lutheran churches were losing their moorings. A year later, twenty-nine pastors met for the first General Retreat and signed The Rule of the Society of the Holy Trinity. The Preamble states, "Ordained to the Ministry of the Word and the sacraments in Christ's Church and called to such an office in Lutheran churches, and so committed to work toward the confessional and spiritual renewal of the Lutheran churches, we form together a ministerium to be known as the Society of the Holy Trinity."

From that point on, members have sought to hold one another accountable to their ordination vows. Faithfully living what we believe is the stewardship of life. It is using everything at our disposal for the sake of the Gospel. "The law of what is prayed is what is believed is the law of what is lived."

Over the years of life which God gives us, we seek to make wise decisions about how and where we live and do ministry. We are blessed by the people we meet and the colleagues with whom we work. We are influenced by them. In return, we seek to encourage and support them. One blessing of our Society is the collegiality we have with one another. A comment I hear from nearly everyone is, "I don't know where I'd be without the Society of the Holy Trinity." It is a blessing that we are here for one another. This is one reason why our members so long for the return of regularly scheduled retreats, both in Chapters and in General Retreat.

What about stewardship after our death? The way that we dispose of our assets at life's end can be a witness to our faith as well. For example, some put a statement of faith at the beginning of their Will. "You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever." Some put the Nunc Dimittis at the conclusion of it. "Lord, now you let your servant depart in peace." Have you considered including the STS as one of the recipients of your assets? Recently a member of the Society bequeathed a generous gift to the STS from the estate. We are very thankful for being remembered.

As our endowment grows, we are able to use the income generated for the work of the Society. We are able to invite seminarians to the General Retreat at no cost to them. We are able to help defray some of the dues from members who are not able to pay the full amount. We will be able to keep dues within reach of pastors and congregations. Here is an example. A gift of \$10,000 from an estate earning 4% per year (a conservative return) would generate \$400, enough to cover the dues for one year.

Pastors in the Society are committed to the Church and each other. We are blessed by the saints who have gone before. We are blessed by those around us. Estate planning is one way to be a blessing to future pastors.

In Our Common Life and Service,

Rev'd Jim Lehmann
Vicar

In Memoriam

With firm faith in the hope and promise of the resurrection, we remember our sister, The Rev'd Dr. Cathi Braasch, STS, and our brother, The Rev'd Dr. John Schmelling, STS. Pastor Braasch was a member of the Central Plains Chapter, and died September 10, 2020. Pastor Schmelling was a member of the Great Rivers Chapter and died March 26, 2021. Rest eternal grant them, O Lord, and may light perpetual shine upon them.

De Trinitate prints notice of members who have recently entered the Church Triumphant. If you are aware of a Society member's death, please contact our Secretary, Pari Bailey, at revsbailey@redred.com with name, date of death, and chapter affiliation.

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News and Reflection from the Society of the Holy Trinity

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