

# DE TRINITATE

Newsletter of the Society of the Holy Trinity

*Societas Trinitatis Sanctae*

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## From the Senior

At the general retreat in September many members of the Society asked me about my health. Since my bout with colon cancer five years ago, many members have been praying for me. I want to thank the members once again for their prayers and support. The fact that I was elected senior just after the surgery and before beginning chemotherapy surely sets a precedent that health issues are not necessarily a disqualification for holding office in our Society.

As of August 2011, I survived five years since cancer was first discovered in my body. Tests and exams in October confirmed that I am cancer-free. Five years is considered a statistical bench mark of survivability. In fact, I feel healthier now than I did in the years before cancer, and that is due largely to my wife's ministrations. Over the years Mary has developed an interest not just in nutrition but in the relationship between food and mood. She has studied the impact of what we eat on attitude and behavior. She has seen to it that we eat a healthy diet with a lot of locally produced fruits and vegetables. But she has also encouraged me to exercise regularly. And that leads to the next subject, about which I have been concerned for some time.

I have the impression that many of the clergy don't take good care of their bodies. Clergy lead sedentary lives and don't often get enough exercise to compensate for that. I got into yoga almost accidentally in an older-adult exercise group at the YMCA, but the practice has helped me to be more mindful of my body. Since yoga has a base in Hinduism (later developed in Buddhism), I have also done some study of yoga traditions. As a result of these studies, I have developed an interest in comparing Tantra yoga to Pope John Paul II's theology of the body.

Tantra isn't all about sex. It is a form of yoga that takes the body seriously as the means through which we apprehend ultimate Reality. Actually, the Hatha yoga practiced by most people is based on Tantra; many other yoga traditions have a gnostic character that seeks to transcend physical reality to attain spiritual reality. Tantra seeks spiritual reality through the functions of the body, including sex. I won't here get into the Hindu mythology on which tantric sexual initiation is based (the sexual union of the god Shiva with the goddess Shakti, which yogis regard as the union of Consciousness and Energy). But I would note that the late pope's theology of the body also connected human sexuality with the divine mystery. He taught that the body, in the full truth of its masculinity and femininity, proclaims the divine mystery in the world. "The body, and it alone," said John Paul II, "is capable of making visible what is invisible, the spiritual and divine. It

was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the invisible mystery hidden in God from time immemorial, and thus to be a sign of it" (Address of February 20, 1980).

There is not space to unpack all this here, so let me simply remind us of what we all know from the Bible. The body is God's good creation. All the fullness of God has inhabited a body ever since the Word was made flesh in Jesus the Christ. In Holy Baptism our bodies become the temples of the Holy Spirit, who will raise our mortal bodies to new and eternal life in the resurrection of the dead. The body is pretty important in Christian theology.

One of the greatest threats facing the Church today is a "spiritualism" in which people disembodied their call to holiness. Spirituality is not seen as having anything to do with bodily existence or sexual morality. But living a spiritual life never means eschewing our bodies. Authentic spirituality is always an embodied spirituality. It will give attention to matters of food and sex (marriage), as well as fasting and abstinence (celibacy). This is the very "logic" of Christianity. God communicates his life to us in and through the body; in and through the Word made flesh. The spirit that denies this "incarnational reality" is that of the anti-Christ (see 1 John 4:2-3).

As we study papal teaching, John Paul II's theology of the body offers great insights based on Scripture and tradition. But we also need to develop a mindfulness about our own bodies. As pastors, our bodies need to be in shape so that we are able to care for others through the varied ministrations of Word and Sacrament. If we are to be fit for ministry, we need to be fit! This isn't in the *Rule* of the Society, but it would not be wrong to include the care of the body as a personal spiritual discipline. Discipline is what asceticism (*ascesis*) is all about.

Frank C. Senn, STS, Senior

## Report of the Secretary

The Society of the Holy Trinity met in general retreat September 27 to September 29, 2011, at the Conference Center of the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, Ill. In attendance were 191 members and friends of the Society from across the United States and Canada.

Four deans, elected by their chapters during the past year, were installed: Andrew W. Jagow, STS, dean of the Chesapeake-Potomac Chapter; Peter J. O. Kruse, STS, dean of the Southern Ohio Chapter; Robert P. McGurn, STS, dean of the New England Chapter; and Michael G. Tavella, STS, dean of the Delaware River Chapter. Nine pastors subscribed to the *Rule* of the Society:



Installation of deans by Senior Frank C. Senn, right, at the fourteenth general retreat of the Society of the Holy Trinity, September 27–29, 2011. Deans, from left to right: Andrew W. Jagow, STS; Peter J. O. Kruse, STS; Robert P. McGurn, STS; Michael G. Tavella, STS. Photo courtesy of Steven P. Tibbetts, STS.

- Jay E. Denne, Iowa-Nebraska Chapter
- Stephanie Kristin Frey, Minnesota Chapter
- Nathan D. Hooks, Carolinas Chapter
- Joseph W. Hughes, Great Rivers Chapter
- E. Gordon Ross, Susquehanna Chapter
- Jonathan A. Schnibben, Susquehanna Chapter
- Kevin Schueller, Wisconsin Chapter
- John Thompson, Florida Chapter
- Claude L. Villemaire, Guadalupe Chapter

When pastors subscribe to the *Rule*, they make the following vow: “Before God and my fellow pastors gathered here, and for the sake of the vows I spoke when I was ordained to the Holy Ministry, I, (name), hereby subscribe to the *Rule* of the Society of the Holy Trinity, asking the help of God and seeking the support of the Society.”

Copies of the *Rule* are available on the Internet at [www.societyholytrinity.org](http://www.societyholytrinity.org) or you may request a hard copy from the Rev. John E. Priest, 17 High Street, Delhi, NY 13753.

The next general retreat of the Society will be at the same location in Mundelein, Ill., September 25–27, 2012.

John E. Priest, STS, Secretary

## Report of the Bursar

The following report from the bursar of the Society is for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2010, and ending June 30, 2011.

BALANCE FORWARD, 7/01/10:	\$98,971.23
Deposits:	\$84,965.07
Interest:	176.36
TOTAL DEPOSITS	\$85,141.43
<b>DISBURSEMENTS</b>	
Administration:	\$ 1,768.40
Fund raising:	0.00
General & council retreats:	44,320.30
Newsletter:	3,650.00
Chapter visitation:	1,430.55
Travel equalization:	17,760.78



Rev. Dr. William G. Rusch, adjunct professor at Yale Divinity School, formerly ecumenical officer of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), speaks at the Society general retreat. Photo courtesy of Steven P. Tibbetts, STS.

Sem. support:	0.00
<b>TOTAL DISBURSEMENTS</b>	<b>(\$68,930.03)</b>
<b>GENERAL ACCOUNT BALANCE</b>	<b>\$103,182.63</b>
Mark A. Hoffman, STS, Bursar	

## The Seminarian Support Fund

The Seminarian Support Fund of the Society of the Holy Trinity exists to offer support to seminarians who are viewed as favorably inclined toward the work of the Society. Such support includes invitations to attend chapter and general chapter retreats, prayer for their formation, mentoring where possible, and financial support when available. Through the generosity of some members and others, we have, over the past few years, been able to distribute some funds to seminarians and this year we were very pleased to once again offer such financial support.

The process for providing financial support to seminarians is done through the deans, who nominate students. A small committee reviews the applications and makes the awards. This year the Society was able to provide support to seven seminarians who had been nominated by six different deans.

These seminarians represent a broad cross-section of synodical affiliation and geographic spread. Two of the students are from Canada, both members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC). Of the remaining five students in the United States, two are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), two are of the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), and one is of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). Each student received \$1,500.

In addition, we were able to support one student studying at the seminary in Ethiopia with a gift of \$1,000. This is the first time that we have supported a student abroad, but the committee and leadership believe that it is good for us to share our gifts with others, especially since there is no quid pro quo that those students receiving funds must join the Society at some future date.

We are grateful to those congregations and individuals that have supported this Seminarian Fund. We look forward to continuing such support into the future.

Paddy Rooney, STS, Chair  
Seminarian Support Fund

## The Investment Committee

The ongoing volatility of the financial markets has clearly made this a difficult time for investments, including those in our own Endowment Fund, and it has, to put it mildly, been something of a roller coaster ride. However, our funds have continued to hold their own, even amid such volatility, thanks in part to an investment strategy that limits us to some very sound and solid investments and has an aversion for anything that is risky.

At the end of the third quarter of 2011, our total Endowment Fund stood at \$168,303.74. Since the fund was invested, we have managed to make a return of 2.41 percent, which, while it is nowhere near what we would hope it to be, is really not bad.

Glenn Johnson, STS, remains committed to raising further funds for the Endowment, and anything you can do to assist him in that matter would be greatly appreciated. While we have not yet achieved the level of investment we need to begin drawing revenue from the Endowment Fund, we hope that in the long term this fund will help serve the work of the Society into God's future.

Paddy Rooney, STS, Chair  
Investment Committee

## Chapter News

### FLORIDA CHAPTER

Dean, Lawrence R. Recla, larryrecla@comcast.net

Dr. Carl Braaten was our teaching theologian at the Florida Chapter November retreat, where we were joined by the Metro New York Chapter of the Society. Thirty-nine pastors were in attendance from Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Arizona. Additional attendees included deacons and laity. The ecumenical officer of the Diocese of Orlando joined us for much of the retreat.

Our March 5–6, 2012, retreat will discuss “Romancing Orthodoxy: Liturgical Memoirs” by Frank Senn, STS, Senior.

See <http://stsfloida.blogspot.com/> for more information.

### GREAT RIVERS CHAPTER

Dean, Timothy D. Hubert, prt2000@yahoo.com

Eight members and three guests gathered at the Toddhall Retreat and Conference Center, Columbia, Ill., for a twenty-four hour retreat on October 24–25. Steven Tibbetts, STS, was our chaplain, and Jeffray Greene, STS, led our discussion of the first 12 of the 85 Canons of the Holy Apostles from *The Rudder*. Ken Tegmeier, STS, led our continuing discussion of *Lumen Gentium*.

Our next retreat will be January 23–24, 2012, at Toddhall.

### GUADALUPE RIVER CHAPTER

Dean, Ralph W. Reitmeyer, rwreit@aol.com

The Guadalupe River Chapter (Texas) met November 14–15 at the Cedarbrake Retreat Center in Belton, Tex. Evan

McClanahan, STS, served as our chaplain for this retreat and Claude Villemaire, STS, brought a word of proclamation at our celebration of the Lord's Supper. Our teaching theologian was David Wendel, STS, who gave instruction on “Recovering a Parish Practice of Private Confession.”

### INDIANA CHAPTER

Dean, Jeff. S. Zell, jeff.zell@yahoo.com

The Indiana Chapter met on November 11 for a day retreat at a retreat center in South Bend, Ind. We discussed the encyclical letter *God Is Love* by Benedict XVI. If interested in coming to a future retreat of the Indiana Chapter, please contact Jeff Zell at the e-mail address above.

### METRO NEW YORK CHAPTER

Dean, Rodney Eberhardt, srpastorstlukes@verizon.net

The Metro New York Chapter of the Society met November 14–15 with the Florida Chapter for a presentation by Dr. Carl Braaten on the ecumenical imperative of the church and the current relationship of the various churches to each other in the midst of the ecclesial crises that face the Lutheran church.

February 6–7, 2012, the winter retreat of the chapter will be held at St. Ignatius Retreat Center in Manhasset, N.Y., with a presentation by a member of the chapter still to be determined.

### SANGRE DE CRISTO CHAPTER

Dean, David M. Wendel, pr-wendel@saintlukes-cs.org

The next retreat of the Sangre de Cristo Chapter will be an early Advent gathering, together with the California Chapter, November 28–29, at the Franciscan Retreat Center in Scottsdale, Ariz. Dr. Carl Braaten will be our teaching theologian and will give a presentation based on his upcoming book on Lutheranism in an ecumenical age. Also in attendance will be our Vicar, Carl Voges. The retreat center is about 20 minutes from the Phoenix airport, and David Poedel will provide transport to and from the center. Contact the dean, David Wendel, if you would like to attend.

Dean David Wendel gave a presentation at the November retreat of the Guadalupe River Chapter. He has also prepared a booklet “Liturgical Practice and Custom Within the Society of the Holy Trinity,” which will be available on the STS Web site. The encouragement for such a booklet grew out of discussion at the 2011 Leadership Retreat, as a way of informing members and guests regarding liturgical customs and actions at STS retreats.

### WISCONSIN CHAPTER

Dean, Mark W. Knappe, solideogloria1@mac.com

The Wisconsin Chapter gathered in retreat at St. Norbert's Abbey on November 7–8. Tim Duesenberg, STS, led us in the prayer offices and the Holy Eucharist with Mark Knappe, STS, serving as preacher. Our “teaching theologian” was in the form of a movie on the Nicene Creed, made and produced by some of the folks at *First Things*. We were honored to receive a chapter visit from Eugen Lehrke, STS, who chaired the election of Mark Knappe as dean.

## From the Vicar

Those three September days in Mundelein, Ill., were once again invigorating and strengthening. Having been drawn into the Holy Trinity's Life at Baptism, we recognize that the Lord's Life, making its way to us through the Scriptures and Sacraments, is not only the engine of this most recent retreat, but also the prior ones. It is the Trinity's Life that undergirds those who serve in these retreats, and that Life visibly utilizes the intelligence, abilities, and energies of the servers so that all those taking part are stirred and strengthened as they carry out the ministry of the Church.

Such retreats are gifts from the Lord God to us who serve in the Lutheran tradition. While the exercise of the church's ministry appears quiet and soft, we know that is hardly the case. The moments of preaching the Gospel clearly and carrying the Sacraments of Baptism, Forgiveness, and Supper fully to the Lord's people are often marred by assertive and stubborn selves (a condition affecting the baptized as well as the ordained!). Thus, it is more accurate to recognize that the church's ministry is continually running up against the attractive, yet jagged, edges of the world's life.

This reality points us back to a distinctive insight of the Lutheran tradition, namely, that the Lord's Word pushes into our lives from the holy places with its constant activity of breaking down the world's life and restoring the Life from Baptism. The Word is the only reality that can crack the grip that the self has on us (a grip initiated at birth). When that Word is being ignored or blunted or re-worked (actions generated and sustained by the unholy trio of sin, Satan, and death), the self re-emerges and overwhelms us with its unrelenting chaos.

Back in the 1960s there was a wise professor from a seminary in Springfield, Ill., who observed that one of the strengths of the Book of Concord is its awareness of the human condition. That condition has not changed since 1580. That condition will not change until eternity emerges completely. That condition still provides the context for the church's ministry and keeps us focused on the only reality that can rescue us from it.

The incarnation and proclamation of the Son's rescue through crucifixion and resurrection is always needed. Consider the parish spiraling into oblivion because a pastor is highly self-absorbed! Or the parish community making its life more difficult because the leadership does not want to confront the Word—it just wants more members and more contributions! Or the church structure obsessing on its impact and effectiveness in this world; it is willing to try almost anything to demonstrate how much it cares to people who really don't care what the structure is doing!

Thankfully, the Lord's Spirit steadily pulls us into the Son's dying and rising, and, through the Society's retreats, reminds us of our rescue through the Cross and renews us for the exercise of the church's ministry. The Spirit snaps us back from weak interpretations of the biblical passages that can lie under our preaching and teaching. The Spirit re-works a parish's liturgies so they are not about the parish, but are about the Lord who brought them into being. The Spirit freshens doctrinal statements that are being ignored or that have been frozen.

Later this month the Lord's people will see the current church year close down and a new one get underway. The

Sundays will reflect the Lord's activity as the End-of-Time pulls closer, but they will also reflect the beginning of such activity as Old Testament promises give way to New Testament realities. Advent's first Sunday will sketch out some terrifying realities into which the Word plunges, alerting us to be aware of how the Lord pushes his Life into this world.

Can we imagine the uneasiness if a month or two would go by and there would be no light from the moon? Or the strain of dealing with individuals who are ready to explode? Can we imagine the deep fear if the earth quaked for minutes rather than seconds? Or the lack of trust that runs through our work places? Can we imagine the dread if the sun disappeared for weeks under skies that had no clouds in them? Or the legalisms the world brings to its accomplishments? Can we imagine the uneasiness if the stars would keep falling out of the sky in torrents compared to what happens in the early dawns of August? Or the ways in which people commit to the gods of their making? The Lord's Word is THE reality that can pierce such terrifying realities, freeing those who are trapped in them, steadying those who are walking through them and immersing all of them in the mysterious calm of the Cross.

The Society of the Holy Trinity emerged in part because the church's ministry in our Lutheran structures became unfocused and misguided. The Society exists now within the Lutheran tradition for the church's ministry. May the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit keep us keenly aware of the human condition, the self that attracts and then destroys. May the Holy Trinity keep us keenly aware of the rescue given this world's people through the Son's dying and rising. May the Life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit keep boring in as their parish communities become more and more imbedded in the holy places of the Scriptures and Sacraments.

Carl A. Voges, STS, Vicar

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#### *News and reflection from the Society of the Holy Trinity*

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