

## **Annual Report of the Interim Rector for 2008**

On February 1, 2008, **I began** my service at Trinity Church following the departure of the Rev. Ben Baldus who had been with the parish for the twenty-seven months after Fr. Greg Brown left for a parish in Petoskey, MI. **For this year, I have been concerned with increasing attendance and resources so that this parish will be appealing to and financially secure for a full-time rector.**

Shortly after I arrived, we entered into the Lenten Season, and had **Wednesday Evenings in Lent**, which began with Evening Prayer in the church, followed by a soup supper, and presentation in the Undercroft. During these Wednesday evenings, I began to get to know parishioners and to learn about the spiritual practices of some parishioners. I also observed who might extend hospitality to visitors of parish events and who would join their friends rather than sit at the tables of new people.

**After Easter**, which was as early as it had been since the church building was consecrated on March 23, 1913, so that I might meet parishioners in smaller groups, I began extending hospitality through **dinner on Thursday evenings**, and leading **Bible Studies** for adults. Since there were no midweek parish groups except for the monthly Episcopal Church Women and the Summer Golf League, I wanted to increase activity in the church building during the week beyond that of the Twelve-Step Groups, which make use of our facilities.

**After Easter, volunteers began working in the church office during the weekday mornings.** I am most grateful to Sally Schlee, Mary Jane White, Betty Jones, Jill Knaggs, Ellyn Weihl, and Marsha Smith for making it possible to have the church open during the day, and for the various duties that they perform in the administration of the parish and communication with parishioners and others. I am especially grateful to Jill Knaggs who works many hours beyond her morning as a volunteer, and who is also our so capable very part-time secretary/administrator!

**After Easter**, I began having parishioners, former parishioners, invisible parishioners, and anyone who was willing to come for **dinner in the undercroft on a Thursday evening** to meet with me in groups of six to ten people. Betty Jones was very skilled in putting the groups together and encouraging so many to come to meet me. Through these dinners, I have come to meet parishioners and those who have become disconnected from the parish for many reasons during the previous decades. This was an act of hospitality and not an opportunity to investigate the past. Those discussions will occur later!

I must acknowledge that **Trinity Parish has no problem whatsoever in creating community through social interaction.** Parishioners are very skilled in cooking and participating in community events which include the parades for which Grand Ledge is known. I have admiration for those who plan, prepare, and sponsor various annual events such as the **Chili Cook-off**, the **Irish Stew Contest**, for which Trinity has been the

winner for years, the **Lamb Roast** at the Andersons' home, the **St. Patrick's Day Parade**, the **Yankee Doodle Days Parade**, the **Santa Claus Parade**, and the **Lugnuts' Baseball** outing. Through these events, parishioners have kept the wider community aware of Trinity, and have fostered community and teamwork among parishioners.

**Christian community** is not only built around the altar on Sunday morning and the dinner table in the Undercroft: Christian community is also built with **Bible study, prayer groups, and pilgrimage**. **Christian education for adults** began **after Easter** with **Bible Studies at 2 pm and 7:30 pm on Wednesdays**. These Bible studies began by using William Barclay's **Daily Study Bibles for the Epistles of Timothy**. **In the summer**, the evening Bible Study turned the **Gospel of John** into a drama. The script, which was prepared in this group by Dr. David Smith, a Grand Ledge medical practitioner, was read by parishioners at a potluck supper on October 16. **Act 1** took 49 minutes, and after the supper, **Act 2** took 38 minutes. Bible Studies are continuing with twenty sessions covering the Old Testament with materials that I am preparing.

While I made inquiries about interest in **short monastic retreats** for men and women at Episcopal monasteries in Michigan and Ohio, these treats have not yet been scheduled. I hope that I may introduce interested parishioners to this type of break for physical, mental, and spiritual refreshment. Some parishioners may spiritually find a home away from home at **The Community of the Transfiguration** in a suburb of Cincinnati, Ohio, and/or **St. Gregory's Abbey** in Three Rivers, Michigan.

During **the last week of May**, ten people took a **pilgrimage to the Province of Quebec, Canada**. We drove to Toronto after Sunday services on Memorial Day Weekend where we stayed at the **Convent of the Anglican Sisters of St. John the Divine**. After breakfast on Memorial Day, we continued to Montreal where we stayed at **McGill University**. Daily Offices were said even when we were in the vehicles at noontime. That evening, after dinner at various Montreal restaurants, we went to **Place des Arts** to hear the *OSM (Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal)* perform the Piano Concerto No. 4 of Ludwig van Beethoven and Shostokovich's Symphony No. 7, the 'Leningrad'. On Tuesday of that week, we went to **St. Joseph's Oratory**, one of the world's great pilgrimage sites and the Roman Catholic Church's third largest basilica, where I celebrated Mass for our group in the community chapel. After a tour of the buildings and museum, lunch, and a **carillon recital** by one of our group, **Julia Walton**, the men went ninety miles southeast of Montreal to the Benedictine **L'Abbaye du St. Benoît du Lac**, which is derived from **L'Abbaye de Solesmes** in France, and the women went to the **L'Abbaye de Ste. Marthe de Deux Montagnes**, similarly derived, and located thirty miles to the west of Montreal. On Thursday, at supper time, we reassembled thirty miles south of Montreal at an inn on the Richelieu River, **L'Auberge Handfield**, which is renowned for its cuisine. After dinner in a separate dining room, we enjoyed rooms with balconies overhanging the river. The following morning, after another great served meal, we left for Montreal where we again checked in at **McGill**. That evening, after dinner at various places, most of us returned to **Place des Arts** for **Les Grand Ballets Canadiens**, while some went to the **House of Jazz**, museums, or rested. On Saturday, we began the long drive to Grand Ledge with stops at famous Canadian establishments such as the

**Swiss Chalet** chicken restaurant chain and **Canadian Tire**, which has much, much more than tires! The ride home seemed so short. The group had bonded, and was refreshed in many ways.

The **summer** was busy. The **Summer Golf League** met on Mondays, **Bible Study** continued on Wednesdays, and some Thursdays there were **dinners with the Interim Rector**. On July 20, the annual **Mass on the Grass** and picnic was relocated to the church because of rain. The last week in July, I took my annual monastic retreat at **The Community of St. John the Evangelist** in Cambridge, MA, where I have been a member of the **Fellowship of St. John** for lay persons and clergy for over a decade.

In **August, the focus was on younger people**. A very successful **Vacation Bible School** was held during the first week from Monday to Friday. Each morning, children, parents, and others ate a full hot breakfast prepared by a total of two women and thirteen men with anywhere from five to eight present on any given day. The program was executed under Yvonne Fleener and Rhonda Barber, with Taylor Dart, Inger Lanese, Beth Bedaine, and others contributing their skills with children. Thirty-one children participated and forty-one volunteers made this week possible. Emily Rodeck, Elizabeth Rodeck, Brittany Barber, and other youths were very important to the success of **Vacation Bible School**.

During the first week of August the **Diocesan Youth Camp** was also happening. Brandon Salisbury participated in it and the Fleeners went to assist at the end of that week. The following week was the **Diocesan Junior Camp** at which the Fleeners provided leadership, and in which many of our children participated.

During the third week of August, I was the Music Director of the **Adullam Choral Camp in Canada** in which four parishioners participated. This eight-day camp includes regular Christian camping activities, a program for children eight and under (so that their parents are available to sing), a junior choir for ages nine to twelve, an intermediate choir for high school and college aged persons, and the Adullam Chorale for adults. Two concerts are presented, one on Thursday evening at the camp, which is twenty-five miles from Port Huron, MI, and one in Chatham, ON, which is fifty miles from Detroit.

In **September**, I met with the parents of younger children to review our **Sunday School program**. We determined to do several things: one Sunday per month, there would be breakfast at 9 am followed by the lesson for children based on the lectionary lessons for that Sunday and taught by me; other Sundays, parents would sign up to teach the children during the 10 am service before they join the 10 am service at the offertory; the curriculum would be downloaded from the national website of The Episcopal Church and copied for all of the parents so that they can use either the outline for 'older' or 'younger children', as appropriate, and so that Christian formation would continue as a responsibility of the parents, even if they were absent on a given Sunday; the Sunday School time in December would be dedicated to rehearsals for the **Christmas Pageant** under Beth Bedaine, Inger Lanese, and Taylor Dart. All of these things have happened

and will continue to be reviewed. Sunday School papers were provided by Amy Krycinski from an Episcopal Christian educator in New Haven, CT. Coloring books published by the national church have been purchased for use by children ages 4 to 7 to learn about what we do in Sunday services. Relationships in this size of parish are such that all of the parents and children know each other and care for each other. This is a very a good situation in which to grow in faith!

**Outreach**, both locally and globally, is being addressed and supported by the parish. **In June**, a former parishioner, the Rev. Dcn. Cindy Nowitski, preached, and at coffee hour, she was joined by another former parishioner, Jenny Julius, in a presentation about the **Diocesan Katrina Cleanup Mission Trips**. **In November**, a **World Outreach Dinner** raised \$2,500 (instead of the hoped for \$1,500) to put a roof on a new church in a country of Southeast Asia with a government that is hostile to Christianity. God is faithful, and just before the dinner, Trinity received news of a \$15,000 grant for a new heating system. At the end of December, God inspired some non-parishioner to anonymously contribute \$10,000 to our parish. We were willing to give \$2,500 even though we are in a deficit budget situation and we received \$25,000. This is part of God's economy, which many tithing Christians have observed: **a tithe is ten percent, we receive 100% and we return 10%**. **In January of 2009**, Jonathon Lowe, a twenty-six year old missionary to Bolivia, who is from Grand Ledge and working with **New Tribes Missions**, preached and gave a power-point presentation at coffee hour. Jonathan and his wife came home for the birth of their third child, a son, Jonathan Samuel. **Locally**, we have gathered food for the **Grand Ledge Food Bank** and provided assistance to individuals and families who are in distress due to the economic crisis and underemployment.

**I am thankful to the Wardens and Vestry** for their diligence in fiscal and administrative matters. There have been more changes this year than the usual rotations off of the vestry. For varying reasons, Luis Briones, Anthony Gatewood, and Sandy Kallen did not continue with their responsibilities. I thank them for their time and effort and wish them Godspeed. I also thank Brent Bedaine and Brandon Salisbury for their terms of office which are now completed. We are blessed to have added the wisdom and experience of Yvonne Fleener, Bev Seling, and Judy Viles. We look forward to continuing with our very strong group of dedicated leaders and including those who have been nominated to join the new vestry. I especially extend my heartfelt thanks to **Sallee Anderson, Senior Warden, and John Lanese, the Junior Warden for Buildings and Grounds, and Judy Viles, our Treasurer**.

**Numbers are an important indicator of our situation**. I watch **Average Sunday Attendance numbers, parish income, and parish expenditures** as signs the vitality of our ministries at Trinity Church. Attendance is tracked service by service with reference to same services in the previous several years. **Average Sunday Attendance** is now second only to the fourth and last year of the only full-time rector in the past twenty-two years (other than this year), Greg Brown. **Parish income was 25% over the budgeted income. Expenditures were lower than budgeted. Pledges for the coming**

year are up by about 10%. These figures are encouraging but we are still faced with a deficit budget.

The Vestry is committed to growth individually and corporately. We have been reading the **Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make** of Lee Finzel. We have used William Barclay's **Daily Study Bibles for 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and James**. We are reading **Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church Is Transforming the Faith**, a study of vigorous mainline churches of many denominations by scholar **Diana Butler Bass**. This work is being read in conjunction with a workshop sponsored by **Western Theological Seminary** in Holland, Michigan, that is titled **A Process of Transformation for All the Saints: Reality and Hope for Smaller Membership Churches**, which is running from November until the end of May. This multi-denominational program, which is supported by our diocese, will have a local focus meeting on Saturday March 14 in Lansing and a plenary session with author Diana Butler Bass on Saturday May 30 in Grand Rapids. Any parishioner who is interested in attending and joining our conversations about the parish's future in the twenty-first century should speak me. Along the same line, I will take some of my continuing education time and support to participate in the **Pastor's Week at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary** in Elkhart, IN, which is titled "**Imagining a New Old Church**", and at which **Diana Butler Bass** will also be the featured clinician. I will also participate in a Leadership Clinic titled "**Transitions: The Congregation as Ecology of Care: Extreme Situations in the Congregation.**"

In this internet age, **websites** are more and more important for developing organizations. Yvonne Fleener is working with Dan Rodeck, our webmaster, to expand the usefulness of our website for both parishioners and seekers. Our stories, pictures, sermons, activities, educational opportunities, and calendars should be made available in this way in the near future.

This year I have learned that **pastoral care** is often expected for persons who do not attend this parish but have had a connection with the parish or parishioners. I thank Fr. Bob Walton for his participation in **Pastoral Care** to persons who are homebound or in hospital. I also thank Mary Jane White and others for their diligence in these matters. We continue to be available for those who are in difficulty in the wider community.

I participate in diocesan and local clergy groups. The **Grand Ledge Clergy Association** meets monthly. The Diocesan **Interim Clergy Group** meets monthly. The **Eastern Deanery Clergy Group** meets monthly. I also serve on the boards of camping and mission groups so that the greater Christian community may be supported in continuing Christ's work, the work that has been given to us of reconciling the world to God.

**Finally**, on January 4, 2009, we wished **Alayna Young, our parish musician**, congratulations and goodbye after twenty-two months with Trinity Church, and as she left us to become the organist of Plymouth Congregational Church, Lansing, where she will play a large, Casavant organ, which is ten times the size of our instrument. We wish

her well as she completes her graduate study at Western Michigan University and as her career in music develops. For the present time, I am directing the **Parish Choir** and the **Junior Choir**, which had been restarted in September. Marion Stolz is again our primary **organist** with the assistance of former organist Cindy Buchweitz who also accompanies the Junior Choir, and me.

**Thanks to God** who has called us to ministry in Grand Ledge. **Thanks to God** who is energizing us and providing for us as we do the many ministries to which we are called. **Thanks to all of you** for your faithfulness, good humor, and joy in the Lord.

**The adventure of faith continues!!**

Peace,  
Nixon+