



Trinity Tidings

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Volume 4, Issue 2

February 2012

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Philippians 4:13

As I was sorting through things, I found a copy of the newsletter article I wrote when I first began at Trinity. I am sharing the article with you again because the sentiments I expressed three years ago are still the same sentiments that I feel today. I am excited to see how God will lead us together forward in mission and ministry if we will follow him. I look forward to the continued opportunities to hold you in prayer, to feed you through God’s word and the Holy Sacraments and most of all to serve Christ with you as we go forward with Revitalization 2012.

May the Holy Spirit stir us to follow Christ in service.



On February 22nd, we (Pastor Lesley M. Radius and God’s People at Trinity) gathered to officially and formally begin our time together in God’s mission and ministry. I was asked if I would love, serve and pray for you? Would I nourish you with the Word and Holy Sacraments, lead you by my own example in the use of the means of grace, in faithful service and holy living? I responded, “Yes, with the help of God.”

You, God’s People at Trinity, were asked if you would receive this messenger of Jesus Christ, sent by God to serve God’s people with the Gospel of hope and salvation. You were asked to regard me as a servant of Christ, steward of the mysteries of God.

You were asked to pray for me, help and honor me for my work’s sake and in all things strive to live together in the peace and unity of Christ. You responded, “Yes, with the help of God.”

Of course, we both said “Yes” to Rev. Dr. Kilber’s questions on Sunday, but what were we really being asked and what did we really promise to do?

We promised to hold one another in prayer. We promised to honor and respect one another to build up the Body of Christ. We promised to work together to forward God’s Mission and Ministry in this place, in this community, in this nation and world. Let me say it once again... **we promised to work together to forward God’s Mission and Ministry in this place, in this community, in this nation and the world.**

These are very big promises we made. However, the good news is that we do not keep these promises on our own. We keep these promises through the one who strengthens and keep us, our Lord and Savior.

I look forward to experiencing how God will lead us together forward in mission and ministry in the next years. I look forward to being a part of all of your lives. I look forward to the opportunity to hold you in prayer, to feed you through God’s word and the Holy Sacraments and most of all to serve Christ with you as we remember as we go forward that it is “God’s House and Our Hands.”



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This Month

Youth Valentine Meal:

Please join us for a Youth Group sponsored Valentine's Dinner on Saturday, February 11, 2012 at 6:30 p.m. at the Trinity Lutheran Church basement. The price for tickets are 2 for \$20 or 1 for \$15 (adults only is encouraged). The tickets will be sold by the youth every Sunday before and after church or contact Diane Lewis at 623-0035. All profits go towards the Youth Group who are attending the 2012 ELCA National Youth Gathering in New Orleans. Make it a date night that supports a good cause! We hope to see you all there!



Calling all Youth:

Sunday, Feb 5th after church, come join us as we prepare decorations for the Valentine's Sweetheart Dinner, February 11th.

iPray:

Every Tuesday at United Methodist Campus Center at 4:45 pm. Need a brief pick me up during the week, a reminder that God is in the center of everything in your life? Come join us for a brief worship service of scripture, prayer and communion.

Worship Team:

Meeting on February 9th, 6:30 pm. Come join us plan worship.

Council Meeting:

Tuesday, February 21st at the church

Ash Wednesday:

Ash Wednesday service will be at 6:30, Wednesday February 22nd There will be imposition of ashes, and communion it will be a joint service with St. Michael's at Trinity Church February 22nd Watch for further details about the Ash Wednesday Joint Service.



In Mark 12, a scribe comes to ask Jesus, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answers, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength'" (Mark 12: 28-30). Jesus responds to the scribe's question with words from the Shema, the passage from Deuteronomy 6 that is recited daily by many of the Jewish faith. These words form a covenant between God and God's people and show us a way to respond to this God who so extravagantly loves us through the cross.

The first week of this series sets the stage with the Shema from Deuteronomy and the encounter between Jesus and the scribe in Mark 12. The following weeks center on how we can love the Lord our God with all our hearts, our souls, our minds, and our strength. The readings for the Sundays in Lent, year B, also contain covenants: through Noah, Abraham, the Ten Commandments, Moses, and the new covenant in Christ. If desired, these covenants could be incorporated into the reflection, as a way to link Sunday and midweek worship during the Lenten season.

Week of Lent 1: Hear, O Israel

The encounter between Jesus and the scribe still resonates today. How would we have responded to the scribe's question? Does the covenant with God truly form the bedrock of our own lives?

Link to Lent 1: In Genesis 9, God establishes a covenant with Noah and all of creation after the flood.

The *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6 reflects this fundamental covenant between God and God's people.

Crosswalk:

Saturday evening gathering at Trinity. We begin at 5:30 and the topics are invigorating. Please take the opportunity to see what it is all about!!



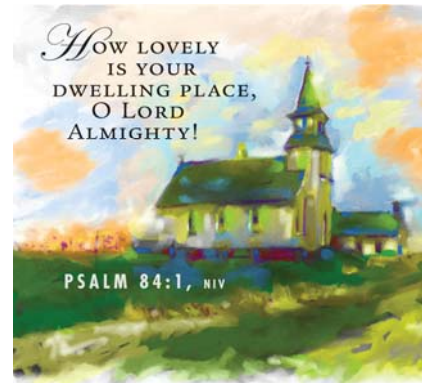
Want to know more about Revitalization 2012..ask a council member.

- ✦ What are you passionate about?
- ✦ How would you like to use your passion connected to Revitalization 2012?
- ✦ Want to start a Bible Study?
- ✦ Want a book study group?
- ✦ Want more music in church?



Share your ideas with a council member. Our Council for 2012 is: Natalie McCall (President) Dan Wells (Vice-President), Betty Meis (Secretary), Shirley McDonald (Treasurer) Tim Folkerts, Francis Hawpe (Task force Team Leader of Revitalization 2012), Earl Krause (Earl is starting a Senior Men’s Group...interested in joining...let Earl know).

Watch for information coming... Bible group Getting to know You



The Senior Men’s Group has kicked off...
 Group leaders have volunteered and possible topics of discussion have been brainstormed. Interest is now needed from any who have not been contacted. If you would like to participate in their discussion and meet with others, watch for details in the bulletin for the next meeting date.

- | | |
|----|--|
| 01 | Paul Mai, Rory Fossum, Nolan Meier |
| 02 | Mike Briney |
| 03 | Larry Hackerott |
| 05 | Krista Connelly |
| 06 | Warren Hall, Jill Wells |
| 07 | Trey Potter |
| 08 | Betty Dietz |
| 09 | Emma Lou Borell |
| 10 | Katlin Loberg |
| 13 | Jerree Fross |
| 15 | Anny Pfannenstiel, Terry Meier |
| 16 | Linda Wolfe |
| 17 | Damion McVey |
| 19 | Dustin Fross |
| 20 | Todd Stramel |
| 21 | Wally Guyot |
| 22 | Francis Hawpe, Lisa Ree |
| 24 | Matt Guffey |
| 25 | Logan Braun |
| 27 | Allan Worley, Melanie Folkerts, Logan Nelson |
| 28 | Laura Bryant, Nick Rose |



- | | |
|----|-------------------------|
| 06 | Mitzi & Earl Krause |
| 10 | Cindy & Allan Worley |
| 14 | Amber & Brandon Johnson |

February Team Sign-Up

Job/Activity	2/5/12	2/12/12	2/19/12	2/26/12
Worship Assistant	Cheryl and Anna	Tim Northup	Melanie Folkerts	Tim Folkerts
Usher -1	Jim Stramel	Dan Wells	Jim Stramel	Jean Binder
Usher -2	Alice Stramel	Haley Wells	Alice Stramel	Dean Stramel
Usher -3	Kay Prediger	Kay Prediger	John Binder	Janet Stramel
Usher-4	Janet Hays			
Communion Asst.	Julie Grauerholz	Julie Grauerholz	John Binder	Kay Prediger
Acolyte	Dan Wells	Kay Prediger		
Crucifer	Haley Wells			
Fellowship	Binder Family	Stramel Family	Ron Nelson	
Children's Message	JoAnn Jordan Amy Jordan	Jean Binder Stephen Binder	Noalee Augustine	Denise Parr Molly Barnett

DON'T FORGET TO SEE RANDY OR SARA SCHOENTHALER TO PURCHASE YOUR DILLON'S COUPONS AND HELP SUPPORT THE YOUTH OF TRINITY!!



“The children and people of Haiti are bright lights that God has allowed us to encourage for a season of their lives.”

John McHoul

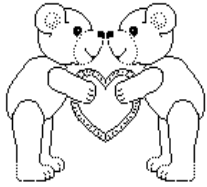
We have beautiful, one-of-a-kind, hand-crafted bags for sale in the narthex. Each bag is hand-made by a woman in Haiti. These women are working hard to build their lives with education

and job skill training. 30% of the proceeds from bags and other materials sold go directly to the women and their families. To learn more about Haitian Creations, visit www.haitiancreations.com. These purses/bags are created by women in the sewing program (which is part of the Women's Program) of Heartline Ministries. Endeavoring to be the hands of Christ in Haiti. Heartline Ministries operates several programs in Haiti to help improve people's lives, including a maternity center, the Port au Prince Fellowship, and more. For more information on any of these ministries, please visit <http://heartlineministries.org>.



YO (Youth Only)

High School students will be meeting at Trinity for fun, food and fellowship on Feb 1st, 8th and 15th. It starts at 6:30 pm. Come join the conversation about topics such as stereotypes, bullying, gender discrimination and what is on your mind. It's your Youth Group. Come be a part of it!



Valentines Word Search

ARROW	I N H N F R F I D
CANDY	J V A R R O W L U
CUPID	L C U P I D I C I
FRIEND	O R O S E S P A H
HEART	V A L E N T I N E
LACE	E X A G D F N D A
LOVE	W D C F K E K Y R
PINK	F R E D S W E E T
RED	I Y Z Q T L C M L
ROSES	
SWEET	
VALENTINE	



FOLLOW GOD'S EXAMPLE

In a letter to the church in Colossae, the apostle Paul wrote about the importance of forgiveness.

•••• DIRECTIONS ••••

To complete Colossians 3:13 (NIV), use the smaller words to fill in the larger words.

gain as or ear van an for give
gave her on it one other he an a

B _____ w _____ h each
ot _____ d _____ give
_____ e an _____ if _____ y
of you h _____ grie _____ ce
a _____ st some _____ .
For _____ as t _____ L _____ d
for _____ you.”

COLOSSIANS 3:13, NIV

Answers: "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."
Colossians 3:13, NIV

Container Gardening with Children!

We have been contacted by Brenda Weese, a Nurse Practitioner developing a project for her doctoral course work. She has asked us to participate in a "gardening with children" project. This project will focus on a method to improve fruit and vegetable consumption of school-aged children. Our Children's Message team has agreed to be a part of this project and are awaiting instruction. If you would like to participate, or for more information, please contact Brenda Weese (785-650-7933 or bweese@slu.edu).

Bearing Our Burdens--Healthy Faith Gives Voice to Pain, Fear and Loss

by, Dr. Paul Mullen

When Nancy's husband was diagnosed with leukemia, their lives were devastated. Multiple, accumulating demands spawned a nearly unbearable burden. Her religious faith and upbringing, as important as they were, left her ill prepared to deal with the onslaught.

The emotional pain of seeing her husband suffer was compounded by fears of the unknown. Anger brewed at the threats to their security and the utter lack of control. Untold stress resulted from trying to maintain the household while navigating a complex medical system. Lurking in the sea of sadness was anger at her husband for leaving her to cope alone.

Nancy, an active member in her church, turned to her faith to cope with the assault on her spirit. She and the church prayed fervently for her husband to be healed. When church members visited Nancy and her husband in the hospital, they marveled at how she seemed buoyed by her faith. With a calm demeanor and apparent sense of control, she was the picture of grace under fire.

Nancy's husband became progressively worse. He was moved to an ICU unit and put on a ventilator. When the physicians said his prognosis was grim, Nancy and her church continued to pray for a miracle. A week later, she was asked to consider removing the life support and allowing him to die. Standing by his bedside, Nancy collapsed in a seizure.

I visited with her several times in her own hospital room. She began to pour out her heart, sharing closely guarded thoughts and feelings. "I'd prayed so hard for my husband to be well, but it seemed like the harder I prayed, the sicker he got. I was confused and afraid.

"I thought I was supposed to be a tower of strength, a witness of faith for my family and church family. I thought if I believed God without doubting, and kept my faith from wavering, that He would answer my prayers. When the church members came by, I knew it made them nervous if I wasn't doing well. So I pretended that everything was all right.

"But underneath, I sometimes wondered if my prayers were doing any good. I secretly wondered where God was and whether He cared. I felt angry and disappointed with God. Mostly, I felt ashamed

for feeling that way. But the harder I tried to push the feelings away, the stronger they got. I think that's maybe why I had the seizure."

With spiritual support focused on empathy, honesty and compassion, Nancy gradually felt permission to embrace her authentic feelings. She fully experienced the depth of pain and sorrow. Over time, the intensity of her anticipatory grief subsided. When her husband died a few weeks later, she went through a process of normal, healthy grief. She emerged with a stronger and more resilient faith, with a deeper connection to Christ than she had ever experienced before.

Nancy and her church had done the best they could to cope with the harsh realities of pain, suffering and loss. Like all of us, they just needed some help along the way.

In the face of overwhelming anxiety, our religious coping efforts often take an unconscious turn toward emotional denial, suppression or repression of our honest feelings. What is adaptive in the immediate aftermath of tragedy can become maladaptive if it lingers. What appears to be a healthy faith, holding our fears and pain at bay, can work against us in unhealthy ways – physically, emotionally and spiritually. The anxieties of church members who want to offer support can add to the dilemma.

How people handle emotional pain in the face of the harsh realities of life is central to healthy adaptation. When our faith reinforces denial and suppression, the physical, emotional and spiritual outcomes are usually negative. Prosperity theologies, with an emphasis on positive thinking, can heighten the denial.

Candace Pert, a neuroscientist and expert in mind-body medicine, observed that while positive thinking may be helpful, it becomes harmful when the truth of how you honestly feel is avoided. "Undigested emotions" create stress in the body and increase vulnerability to disease.^[1] David Spiegel, a Stanford psychiatrist, wrote, "Adapting well to a situation does not require that a person maintain an upbeat or rigidly positive attitude. Ventilation of negative emotion ... helps patients acknowledge, bear,



Bearing Our Burdens (Cont'd)

and put into perspective their distress.”^[ii]

Lamentations expresses a similar theme from a faith perspective. Israel was torn apart at the seams following the destruction of the Temple and the Babylonian exile. The author arranged many of the poetic verses into acrostics, where each line began with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The intent was to express the full range of emotions in the nation’s suffering and grief – from crushed hopes and anguish to renewed faith and hope as Israel remembered God’s mercy and power.

James Hollis wrote, “Life is a series of gains, but it is also a series of losses; failures to grieve loss and disappointment openly, honestly, will rise again, as unbidden ghosts from their untimely burial, through depression ... or captivation by the mindless distractions of our time. Failure to incorporate loss into our lives means we have not yet accepted the full package life brings to us. Everything given is also lost... Jung challenges us: ‘Real liberation comes not from glossing over or repressing painful states of feeling, but only from experiencing them to the full.’”^[iii]

I remember a mother and father’s great courage in experiencing loss to the fullest when their young child was killed in an accident. Active church members, they had turned to God immediately after the accident in effort to bring order to the chaos. Initially, they were sustained by faith and the support of their church family.

However, within months they came undone in a season of “spiritual disorientation.” They cried out to

their pastor, “Why did God let this happen? Why would God want to hurt us like this? Where is God? Does He care? Is He even there? Are we losing our faith?” Walter Brueggemann^[iv] and Logan Jones^[v] wrote well of the importance of embracing, rather than denying these questions.

The pastor managed his own anxiety well enough to listen without denying the pain of life’s most poignant questions. After a time of silence, he said, “I’m so very sorry.... You’re not losing your faith at all Grief has times of peace and tremendous pain on the way to healing – a time when you’ll remember with more joy and less pain. But not right now. God completely, fully understands – like He did with David, Elijah, Jeremiah, and Jesus on the Cross.”

Some time later the parents experienced a “new orientation,” in their spiritual lives, as God began transforming the darkness into hope. They were able to say, “We have a much clearer sense of God’s presence in our lives. Our faith is deeper than before the accident. We’d give anything to have our child back, but with God’s help, we’re making the best of life that we can.”

The package of human experience brings pain, fear and loss to all of us along the way. As we entrust to God our authentic voices, giving expression to the whole range of human emotion, God can transform the ashes of despair into renewed hope. Spiritual wholeness emerges in the context of courageous, honest, healthy faith.

^[i] “The Research of Candace Pert, Ph.D. Your Body is your Subconscious Mind. Mind-Body Medicine becomes the Science of Psychoneuroimmunology.” *Healing Cancer: the Latest Research in Mind-Body Medicine* 14 June 2010 <www.healingcancer.info/ebook/candace-pert>.

^[ii] “Healing Words: Emotional Expression and Disease Outcome,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 14 April 1999, Vol. 281, No. 14, p.1328 - 1329.

^[iii] James Hollis, *What Matters Most*. New York: Penguin Group, 2009.

^[iv] Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984.

^[v] Logan Jones, “The Psalms of Lament and the Transformation of Sorrow,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* Spring-Summer 2007, Vol. 61, Nos. 1-2.

*Rev. Paul Mullen, Ph.D., is director of Church and Community Relations
at Wake Forest Baptist Health, in Winston-Salem, NC.*

THE CARPENTER

Once upon a time, two brothers who lived on adjoining farms fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift in 40 years of farming side-by-side, sharing machinery and trading labor and goods as needed without a hitch.

Then the long collaboration fell apart. It began with a small misunderstanding and it grew into a major difference and finally, it exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence.

One morning there was a knock on John's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox. "I 'm looking for a few days' work," he said. "Perhaps you would have a few small jobs here and there I could help with? Could I help you?"

"Yes," said the older brother. "I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my neighbor. In fact, it's my younger brother! Last week there was a meadow between us. He recently took his bulldozer to the river levee and now there is a creek between us.

Well, he may have done this to spite me, but I'll do him one better. See that pile of lumber by the barn? I want you to build me a

fence an 8-foot fence -- so I won't need to see his place or his face anymore."

The carpenter said, "I think I understand the situation. Show me thenails and the post-hole digger and I'll be able to do a job that pleases you."

The older brother had to go to town, so he helped the carpenter get the materials ready and then he was off for the day. The carpenter worked hard all that day -- measuring, sawing and nailing. About sunset when the farmer returned, the carpenter had just finished his job. The farmer's eyes opened wide, his jaw dropped. There was no fence there at all.

It was a bridge .. A bridge that stretched from one side of the creek to the other! A fine piece of work, handrails and all! And the neighbor, his younger brother, was coming toward them, his and outstretched..

"You are quite a fellow to build this bridge after all I've said and done."

The two brothers stood at each end of the bridge, and then they met in the middle, taking each other's hand. They turned to see the carpenter hoist his

toolbox onto his shoulder.

"No, wait! Stay a few days. I've a lot of other projects for you," said the older brother. "I'd love to stay on," the carpenter said, "but I have many more bridges to build."

Remember This...

God won't ask what kind of car you drove, but He'll ask how many people you helped get where they needed to go.

God won't ask the square footage of your house, but He'll ask how many people you welcomed into your home.

God won't ask about the clothes you had in your closet, but He'll ask how many you helped to clothe.

God won't ask how many friends you had, but He'll ask how many people to whom you were a friend.

God won't ask in what neighborhood you lived, but He'll ask how you treated your neighbors.

God won't ask about the color of your skin, but He'll ask about the content of your character.

God won't ask why it took you so long to seek Salvation, but He'll lovingly take you to your mansion in Heaven.

The Cancer Council of Ellis County would like to thank Trinity Lutheran Church and Thrivent Financial for the donation of \$2,498. With your support we can continue to carry out our mission of helping individuals and families dealing with cancer.





Honest Options for a Declining Faith Community

by, Dr. Les Robinson, Jr.

Organized religion in America is in a slump. Numbers of regular attenders are down across all denominations and many congregations are struggling with dwindling attendance and shrinking finances. The verdict is still out on whether the declining numbers are here to stay. What is clear is that faith communities should be aware of national trends and willing to ask hard questions about their own health and longevity.

Some Statistics to Get Started

FACT (Faith Communities Today) disseminates the results of research generated by representatives of more than 25 faith groups in the United States. The most recent report compares data collected in 2005 with information collected in 2010. According to this research,

40 percent of the reporting congregations had a decline of two percent or more in average adult worship attendance during this five-year period, with 31 percent of the reporting congregations experiencing more than a ten percent decline. Consequently, there is a growing number of downsizing congregations. More than one in four American congregations had fewer than 50 in worship in 2010, and just under half had fewer than 100. Overall, median weekend worship attendance of the typical congregation dropped from 130 to 108 (17 percent) during the last decade.

The picture is somewhat more jaded when reviewing only Oldline Protestant congregations. Fifty percent of those faith communities experienced two percent or more decline, with 33 percent of the reporting congregations experiencing more than a ten percent decline. In fact, in this five-year period, the median Oldline Protestant congregation saw their average worship attendance move from 179 to 73 – a 41 percent decline!

Further FACT research indicates that while American congregations were doing a lot of the right things during the last decade (2000-2010), they were fighting against strong headwinds.

A Steep Drop in Financial Health. Every year from 2000-2005, an additional four percent of participating congregations indicated a decline in financial health; every year from 2006-2010 an additional nine percent of the reporting congregations reported such a decline; in the 2010 FACT survey, 80 percent of all American congregations reported that their finances had been negatively impacted by the recession, and it affected nearly every kind of congregation equally: large and small, north, south, east and west, financially healthy or struggling before the recession.

Continuing High Levels of Conflict. Almost two of every three congregations in 2010 experienced conflict. In a third of the congregations the conflict was serious enough that members left or withheld contributions, or a staff member left.

Aging Memberships. Thirty percent of faith community members are over age 60, and when you add in the over 50 crowd, that number grows to 46 percent.

Growing “Nones.” Those folks who are not members of a faith community are the fastest growing religious segment of the American population and number more than any American denomination except Roman Catholic. Therefore, it certainly is no surprise that analyses of recent trends in individual religiosity in the United States are concluding that traditional forms of religious belief and practice (including worship attendance) are beginning to erode across the board.

What is surprising in the FACT data is that the vanishing presence in the pews is not only true of Oldline Protestant congregations whose numerical decline has been documented for the last fifty years. It is also true for the typical white evangelical congregation and typical racial/ethnic congregation.

Of course numbers are not the ultimate gauge of the health of a church, whether it is attendance, membership, financial gifts, and/or programs and mission opportunities. Yet generally speaking, when faith communities experience a decline in average worship attendance, a decline in the other areas is usually not far behind.

Five Warning Signs

Thom S. Rainer, president and CEO of Lifeway Christian Resources, suggests there are five common warning signs to which congregations should pay attention in order to detect potential decline:

1. *The church has few outwardly focused ministries.* Most of the budget dollars are spent on the desires and comforts of the members. The ministry staff spends most of its time taking care of members, with little time to reach out and minister to the community.
2. *The dropout rate is increasing.* Members are leaving for other faith communities in the area, or they are leaving the local church completely.
3. *Congregations are experiencing conflict over issues of budgets and building.* When the membership becomes focused on how the facilities and money can meet their personal preferences, congregational health is clearly on the wane.

Honest Options. . . Continued

Referring again to the FACT research, the following chart indicates how the average faith community spends its money:

Budget Category	Percent of Dollars
Staff salaries and benefits	45%
Facilities	20%
Program support	10%
Missions and benevolence	10%
All other	5%

Obviously, with 65 percent of the budget dollars allocated to fixed expenses, there is not a lot of room for innovative missional emphasis.

4. *Corporate prayer is minimized.* If the church makes prayer a low priority, it makes God a low priority.

5. *The pastor has become a chaplain.* Members view pastors as their personal chaplains, expecting them to be on call for their needs and preferences. When they do not make a visit at the expected time or do not show up for the Bible class fellowship, criticism abounds. In some cases, pastors have even lost their jobs because they were not always present for the members.

According to Rainer, if these five patterns become normative, few churches can recover. In fact, the great majority of these congregations do not recover.

So What Can Faith Communities Do When Faced With Decline?

Unfortunately, most faith communities do not get into a declining mode overnight, so their patterns of behavior have become normative. Consequently, it is going to be a difficult process, with no easy, quick or automatic solutions. Like turning a large ship around in a small harbor, it takes a focused emphasis, the captain (translated: pastor and lay leaders) must see urgency and want to do it, it will require dedication and patience because it is a slow and tedious process, and it will require a tug boat (outside assistance).

Focused Emphasis. Since the decline has occurred over several years, perhaps even decades, some habits have been formed that will have to be broken. Leaders may well have held onto the wrong programs, traditions and even staff, simply creating further entrenchment. Very likely some excess baggage will have to be shed as the congregation first becomes clear about their core values, and then focuses on a clear and vibrant mission and vision to guide the pathway.

It also is important to note that most church growth happens relationally. We are created as relational beings. People are more likely to stay connected to the faith community if they have developed meaningful friendships and relationships with others in the fellowship. This often means that the people must commit to breaking cliques and finding a connection to new people. This includes finding ways to once again interact with the surrounding neighborhood and culture.

Urgency. In his seminal work entitled, *Leading Change*, John Kotter suggests there are eight vital stages to successful change. The first of these is “a sense of urgency.” Until leadership - both the pastoral and lay leaders - recognize and agree that something must be done NOW, the decline will continue. Only after the leaders recognize that something has to happen in order for the future to be different than the past, will they be ready to lead the congregation to work on core values, mission and vision statements, and a strategic direction/plan.

Dedication and Patience. Change does not happen overnight. As much as I would like to lose a few pounds by tomorrow morning, it simply is not going to happen. The only way I can accomplish that task is with dedication and patience. Likewise, a faith community must dedicate themselves to a new future and then be patient as they work to make it open up. There must be a balancing of risk as members willingly take chances, try new things, and accept that everything will not work. Otherwise, the focus will be on maintaining the status quo – and they already know the outcome of hanging on to the past. Leaders will do well to find consistent words of hope and optimism as they lead the members through these changes.

Another Possibility: There is a more radical option. Turning to the words of Ecclesiastes 3, we are reminded that there is a right time for everything. Verse 2 says, “a right time for birth and another for death.” As much as most folks might want to live forever (on earth), we know that we must die in order to make room for new birth. Perhaps it is time for us to accept that nothing is permanent; that in order for new life to come into the community, some need to phase out; that it is okay for a congregation to acknowledge that God has used them in a powerful way to spread the gospel message; that now it is time to pass the mantle to others.

Continued on page 11

Honest Options. . . Continued

In human life, we emphasize end of life decisions. While we are seeing an increase in the centenary population, the truth is that the average human life expectancy in the U.S. is 78. Rather than ignore or deny the inevitable, people are encouraged to have wills, medical directives and pre-arranged funeral services. In other words, we encourage death with dignity.

When all faith communities in America are considered, the median year of founding is 1947, making them 64 years old. For the Oldline Protestant category that median year of founding is 1889, making them 122 years old. It seems that another legitimate option then, is for a congregation to accept that eventually they will die; that they will not disappoint God by admitting that they can no longer sustain their ministry; rather, they will accept that God continues to find new ways to keep the gospel voice alive, viable and powerful.

Maybe all faith communities should consider what death with dignity would look like for their congregation, and keep a medical directive on file so that when that time comes they will know what to do. While the purpose of this article is not to be prescriptive, some possibilities could be to sell the property and use the proceeds to support other growing and viable ministries. Or deed the property to another group that has the critical mass, energy and financial resources to develop a new ministry in the immediate community. Or the congregation might consider merging with other close-by faith communities that are struggling with the same issues.

A Final Thought: According to the American Research Project, once churches enter their fifth decade of life (40+ years old), on average they consistently decline, while congregations formed since 1990 are experiencing a growth rate of 3.5 percent to 7.4 percent. Could it be that congregations have the same kind of growth, vitality and life expectancies as human beings? Could it be that when our work is finished, it is time for us to step aside so that others may flourish?

Regardless of where we end up in the conversation, however, we can be absolutely certain that God is in control, not humankind. May God's will be done!

For guidance and assistance during the challenging time of change and decline, contact the Center for Congregational Health® at (336) 716-9722 or congreg@wakehealth.edu.

Resources:

www.Faithcommunitiestoday.org

Thom S. Rainer. *Five Warning Signs of Declining Church Health*

www.TheAmericanChurch.org

Kotter, John P. (1996). *Leading Change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Publishing

Les Robinson is vice president of the Center for Congregational Health®

Help make Trinity Tidings your newsletter!

Deadline for the March newsletter is
February 20th.

ALL committees are encouraged to submit a report
or pictures for publishing in the newsletter.

Submissions can be e-mailed to deniseparr@hotmail.com

Published for Trinity members and reported by Trinity members.

Comments and suggestions are always welcome.

Please report any errors in this newsletter to the office

so that corrections may be made to the appropriate records.

Trinity Tidings

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God's House...Our Hands

We're on the WEB!
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*The Nominating Committee is pleased
to announce the 2011 Audit Committee
as Mike Briney and Noalee Augustine.*

Upcoming Events. . .

- Boy Scout Sunday, Feb. 5
- Valentine's Day, Feb. 14
- Transfiguration of our Lord, Feb. 19
- President's Day, Feb. 20
- Ash Wednesday, Feb. 22

Transfiguration
OF THE LORD

Ash
Wednesday

Pack Well

During Lent, as we focus on Christ's journey to the cross, let's also examine the journey of our lives. The first task when leaving on any adventure is packing. What have you placed in your bag? Are you weighed down with temptations, self-doubt, money worries, relationship troubles? Have you overlooked any important items? Maybe your bag feels too empty for the challenges ahead. Remember to pack mercy, grace and forgiveness.

Thanks to Easter, we know that our journey in Christ continues, even when the road becomes difficult. So as you prepare for Lent, carry with you the hope made possible by Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf.

—Based on the "Journey to Hope" sermon series, www.rethinkchurch.org/lent



Christian Faith Followers

The map at the web site below gives you the percentage of Christians and all other faiths in each state. . .see the different religions by state and elsewhere by holding the cursor over a state.

<http://www.usatoday.com/news/graphics/pew-religion-08/flash.htm>



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
29 8:30am - Pastor @ St. 10:15am - Worship 10:30am - Children's 11am - Fellowship 3pm - Girl Scouts	30 5pm - Meeting	31 5:30pm - Options 5:30pm - TOPS	1 6:30pm - YO @ First 7pm - Choir Practice	2 7pm - Solid Sound Quartet 7:30pm - Al-Anon 7:30pm - Barbershoppers	3	4 5:30pm - CROSSWALK @
5 10:15am - Worship 10:30am - Children's 11am - Fellowship	6 5pm - Meeting	7 9:30am - Pastor Lesley @ 5:30pm - Options 5:30pm - TOPS	8 9am - ECMA Meeting 9:30am - Bible Study Group 6:30pm - YO @ First 7pm - Choir Practice	9 6:30pm - Worship Meeting 7pm - Solid Sound Quartet 7:30pm - Al-Anon 7:30pm - Barbershoppers	10	11 5:30pm - CROSSWALK @
12 9:15am - Choir Practice 10:15am - Worship 10:30am - Children's 11am - Fellowship 3pm - Girl Scouts	13 5pm - Meeting	14 4:45pm - iPray @ UMCC 5:30pm - Options 5:30pm - TOPS 6pm - Mutual Ministry	15 9:30am - Project Group 6:30pm - YO @ First	16 7pm - Solid Sound Quartet 7:30pm - Al-Anon 7:30pm - Barbershoppers	17	18 5:30pm - CROSSWALK @
19 9:15am - Choir Practice 10:15am - Worship 10:30am - Children's 11am - Fellowship	20 5pm - Meeting 7pm - Gemini Juniors 4-H	21 4:45pm - iPray @ UMCC 5:30pm - Options 5:30pm - TOPS 7pm - Church Council 7pm - Good Sam	22 6:30pm - YO @ First	23 7pm - Solid Sound Quartet 7:30pm - Al-Anon 7:30pm - Barbershoppers	24	25 5:30pm - CROSSWALK @
26 10:15am - Worship 10:30am - Children's 11am - Fellowship 3pm - Girl Scouts	27 5pm - Meeting	28 4:45pm - iPray @ UMCC 5:30pm - Options 5:30pm - TOPS	29 6:30pm - YO @ First	1 7pm - Solid Sound Quartet 7:30pm - Al-Anon 7:30pm - Barbershoppers	2	3 5:30pm - CROSSWALK @