

## PASTOR'S PEN

---

Dear Friends of Christ,

My whole life was put into perspective and I stopped and realized what really mattered to me. It was Oct 31, Halloween, Reformation Day, and my office computer crashed. I signed in but it loaded a factory-direct version of Windows, with none of my stuff on it. My e-mail, my internet, my address book, my sermons, my reports, my confirmation lessons, my Free Cell win percentage: all of it was gone. Life came to a halt.

Thank God for Alex Madonna and his swift response to Diane Churchman's frantic phone messages! Everything was back online within hours.

Some might read this and think of how technology rules our lives. For me, though, this was a classic example of how we have to know who we are before we can know where we are going. My computer still sort of worked. It could process text and access the web. It couldn't go anywhere, though. I could not find any old files. I could not resume any assignments I'd begun. I could not communicate with anyone. These files defined who the computer was. My computer had lost its identity.

What Alex did (whether or not that's how he'd describe it) was get the computer to remember who it was. He reminded it of its passwords, server names, file locations and all that. It regained its identity, and now that it knew who it was it could do what it had been designed to do. Likewise, when we Christians know who we are we can do what we are called to do.

This Advent, Christmas and Epiphany cycle we will be reminded once again just who we are—people of the God who connects to us through Christ—and we'll be tempted once again to forget it.

If ever there was proof of sin in this world it is that all of our best church festivals can be turned into celebrations that have little or nothing to do with faith. Advent is all about preparing for the coming of the Lord, getting ready for our divine houseguest. The frenzy of preparation can become *the point* for us, so that we don't notice when God arrives. At Christmas we receive the present of God made flesh, conquering sin and death as a vulnerable little baby. We'll be tempted to forget that Christ is our connection to God, kind of like our e-mail server, if you will. We'll try other server names instead. We'll type in "holiday parties" or "presents" or "decorations" instead of "Christ". The former things are part of our glorification of God; they can compete for our attention, though, and cause us to lose sight of the God we glorify. By the time Epiphany rolls around most of us are partied out and don't even notice.

We are people connected to God through Christ. We wear a baptismal cross on our foreheads. We are part of the family Children-of-God. This Christmas, as at every Christmas, we celebrate the incarnation of God. God is not distant. God is not ignoring us. God is made flesh around us daily, whenever a brother or sister in Christ speaks or enacts the good news of God's love. God is in our midst, listening to our prayers, guiding us in our ways, and loving us recklessly. God's reckless love is the *only* reason for our Christmas gift of Christ.

Our faith might not get any simpler than that, Friends of Christ. God gives us God for Christmas. We didn't work for it. We didn't earn it. We just get it. When we remember that we might just act that way toward others, and when we do that we'll be doing what God calls us to do. We just need to remember who we are.

We'll be tempted to boot up without Christ, to try using other e-mail servers, to forget our identity as Children-of-God and recipients of the first and only true Christmas present. This Advent and Christmas we'll be reminded for whom it is that we prepare. We'll be reminded of who it is that we receive. The Word will be spoken and will become flesh in our midst, restoring our identity just as Alex restored the identity of my humble office computer. May the Word made flesh motivate us to works of faith, labors of love, and gifts given wholly out of grace, for these are the things which identify us.

In + Christ,

The Rev. Timothy A. Leitzke  
Assistant Pastor

## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

### Homegrown Helpers

We all have different ways of serving others. In the Bible, 1 Peter 4:10 says: "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." How do you serve or help others in need at Holy Trinity? What gifts do you use?

People who enjoy speaking can share the gift of reading. During worship, the scriptures and prayers are spoken. The library staff reads books to the Sunday School children and encourages them to take out books.

Do you have the gift of writing or of packing boxes? Our service men and women and college students receive a care package from Holy Trinity. Through Operation Christmas Child, a child who would not expect a Christmas present will receive a shoebox filled with necessities, toys and a note from children who care. Maybe you could be the person who sends Valentine's Day or Birthday cards to people who have no family, just because you care.

The gift of talking and listening! Yes, talking and listening are gifts. Do you enjoy making phone calls? Milestone Ministries at Holy Trinity desires people who are willing to call parents and tell them about special events in their children's lives. These phone calls can be made from home during the day or evening. You can also call people you haven't seen at Church in a while and let them know that they are missed.

The office help gift looks like assembling the Lamplighter or worship book, stuffing and unstuffing bulletins, folding letters and stuffing envelopes.

The gift of hospitality! Make a pot of coffee or baked goods for others on

Sunday morning. Invite the parents who are waiting outside for their Sunday School children to have a cup of coffee and conversation. Make a dinner for those in need or lonely. The Breakfast Club helps the Ronald McDonald house. Do you have this gift of hospitality?

The gift of visiting our homebound! These are people from our congregation who cannot come to church for many reasons. Several times during the year, Holy Trinity makes crafts and takes baked goods to our homebound friends.

Sometimes a child's gift can make a difference in a person's life. When Morgan Harkness visited her elderly neighbor who lived next door, she noticed how lonely and alone this senior citizen was. Except for an occasional visit from her minister or the meter reader, the only visitor this elderly lady had was Morgan. She began bringing this neighbor hot meals, visited on holidays and eventually visited a few times a week. In Morgan's mind, no person should be neglected, especially during the holidays!

Morgan wanted to do more to help the lonely and the old. When she had the opportunity to visit elderly people who were confined to their homes during Halloween, Morgan jumped at the chance. Pastor Mary provided Morgan's parents with a list of area senior residents to visit. Morgan and her friends dressed up in costumes and brought Halloween treats and cheer to each home. These fine young ladies (Kristiane, Bridia, Madison H., Madison Brown, Kate Hannah, and Emily) have been visiting the seniors for the past three years. Each year Morgan is trying to volunteer at least twice for those less fortunate than herself.

Morgan also has an interest in helping those who are hungry and is volunteering her time helping at the

Monmouth Food Bank. She wants to continue to volunteer her time to help others with all her friends. Morgan is in the sixth grade Sunday school class at Holy Trinity. This year her younger sister Madison joined in too.

There are many other different gifts. Can you think of some? Psalm 100:2 says "Serve the Lord with gladness." We serve with a grateful heart, giving our time to serve others. The next time you serve God, why not ask someone to help you who never served before?

~~ *Servant in Christ, Karen Astrom*

Oh, (Advent) Christmas Tree!

Advent marks the beginning of a new church year and our preparation for the coming of the Messiah. However, our busy schedules before Christmas make it too easy to forget to ready our hearts and minds for Christ's coming.

On Sunday, the 26<sup>th</sup> of November, 28 families gathered and prepared themselves for Advent by participating in our Annual Family Advent Craft. They took time out of their busy schedules to decorate foam Christmas trees with glitter, ribbon and sequins. I cannot express how joyous it was seeing parents and children working together in the spirit of Christ creating beautifully decorated trees.

As each family departed from Fellowship Hall, they received a bag of ornaments with which to decorate their trees each day of Advent until Christmas. Although this is a little gesture, it reminds us to keep our hearts and minds in the spirit of giving and helps us lead our children in the ways of Christ.

I would like to thank all who helped set up and clean up in order to make this day possible, and to especially thank the families that

participated. If it was not for each of you being willing to teach God's lesson this day would not have taken place.

Thank you for all you do and for keeping Christ in your hearts and minds. God bless everyone! ~~ Deb Chesney

Good Morning Good Friday is  
April 7, 2007

You probably think I'm crazy because you haven't even had your Christmas dinner yet, but...it takes A LOT of people to pull off this wonderful event, and I'm already having nightmares about it! Our first organizational meeting will be sometime in January (watch your weekly bulletins). Some of the jobs we will need help with are:

- Publicity
- Dough makers
- Cookie bakers
- Shut-in coordinators
- Station helpers
- Sign-up list coordinator
- Name tag organizer
- Craft organizers
- Clean-up

If you even THINK you might be interested in doing anything to help, please contact Joy Blazak at 892-9735 or [Joyjoywrl57@msn.com](mailto:Joyjoywrl57@msn.com).

Library

Our Sunday School library contains over 60 books about Christmas, including beautifully illustrated editions of the Nativity story and the gospels of Matthew and Luke; legends of St. Nicholas (the first "Santa Claus"), the fourth wise man, the Christmas rose and the candy cane; the origins of such carols as "Away in a Manger" and "Silent Night"; Christmas poems; Chris Van Allsburg's popular *The Polar Express*; as well as contemporary stories that convey the true meaning of Christmas. Please take a breather during the hustle

and bustle of the holiday season to read aloud to a child in your life (or to yourself) and become lost in wonder at God's grace.

## WORSHIP AND MUSIC

Deck the Pews!

Thanks to everyone who has donated an Evangelical Lutheran Worship hymnal!

To date the total is 220! Since the publisher's offer was Buy Five, Get One Free, our grand total is 264!

Our goal is to have 300 hymnals and orders are still coming in ☺.

Peace and Love to All!

~~ In Christ's Love,  
The Worship & Music Committee

## EVANGELISM AND STEWARDSHIP

Our November College Care Package mail out was a huge success! A record 35 boxes were mailed to our college students, lovingly packed with donated food items and homemade goodies. The support for this important outreach program to our youth was overwhelming! Many thanks to our church family for its support.

Some members of the Breakfast Club baked brownies and cookies. Other members brought in homemade and storebought items. Heartfelt thanks to Evelyn Shibla, Pat and Chuck Augustine, Jeff and Denise Clayton, Barbara Barrella, Meta and Lee Querns, Sue Kmetz, Linda and Dennis Dodds, Robert and Chris Olsen, Jim Baxendale, Cindy Markus, Michelle Thorp, Candace Birkenhauer, Sheila Wall, Laurie Cummins, Sue Turi and Gretchen Boodey for donations and/or their help with the packing. And a special "thank you" to Danielle Stanley for designing and creating the College Care

Package poster that was hung in Fellowship Hall.

We will send our next mail out in the spring. Watch for announcements so you can participate, either in the way of donations or by adding your child to our list.

Remember to check the Evangelism bulletin board and read the e-mail responses from our college youth! While you're there, take a look at our college map and locate where our students attend school.

We continue to pray for our youth's safety, well-being and success, and pray that they are reminded of the comfort that comes from the light of God which shines in their lives daily.

If you have any questions or requests, please send an e-mail to [zpt123@aol.com](mailto:zpt123@aol.com). Thank you!

W. E. L. C. A.

There's a lot to look forward to in 2007! Here's a preview:

February: Watch for Blanket Sundays. (Blankets will be collected and distributed to people all over the world.)

March or April: Luncheons where Chaplain Mark Farnham will teach us about a labyrinth and where you can sign up to visit an outdoor labyrinth in Neptune.

Elisabeth Circle will meet Jan. 8 at 9:30 a.m.

Louise Circle will meet the same day at 7:30 p.m. at the church. Members are asked to bring items for the 180 Women's Shelter.

### Comfort and Joy

Please continue to make blankets at home during the winter months for Project Linus! You may drop them off in the church office or call

Dottie Meredith (732) 899-9321 for more information.

### Children of God

During the month of November and in early December, Holy Trinity welcomed these children into the Body of Christ through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism: Gregory Kenneth Desserich and Rylee Simone Rotsma on 11/05; Justin Ryan Lopes on 12/03.

Connor Patrick Urig and Ethan Riley Urig will be baptized Sunday, Dec. 10.

### DATES TO REMEMBER

(or, better yet, to mark on your calendar!)

Advent 4 & Christmas Weekend Worship  
(All services include Holy Communion)

#### Saturday, Dec. 23

5 p.m. Advent 4

#### Sunday, Dec. 24

10 a.m. Advent 4

4 p. m. Christmas Eve Service  
for

children and families

(with

sign language

interpreter),

followed by blessing of  
outdoor crèche

6 p. m. Christmas Eve Service  
of Lessons and Carols

9 p.m. Festival Liturgy of  
Christmas Eve with  
Adult Choir &  
Candlelighting

11 p.m. Festival Liturgy of  
Christmas

Eve with Special Music

&

Candlelighting

#### Monday, Dec. 25

10 a.m. Christmas Day

### MAIL BAG

To The Council & Entire Family of the  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church,

Thank you!

Pastor John Guidao-oab

Otari, Namibia

Dear Holy Trinity,

Thank you so much for the care package you recently sent up. It was such an awesome surprise to see that everyone was thinking of me and to see all the new treats I had received. As soon as I opened everything up, my roommate spied the Ritz crackers and peanut butter (his daily breakfast) and started to bargain with me for a healthy sharing of the snacks. Everything was so nice and tasty and I was so pleased to hear from my church family. Thanks again!

Love, Kyle Clayton

Dear Holy Trinity Family,

Thank you for remembering me during my exam period with your generous gifts of food and beverage. I know a lot of time and effort went into the preparation and sending of this package. Thanks to all who were involved.

Thankfully, Eric McLaughlin

To the Trinity Blanketeers:

Thank you for your amazing and wonderful blanket donation. Project Linus New Jersey is blessed to have such talented and generous volunteers. The 81 blankets you donated are beautiful!

W. Jones

Volunteer Recognition Committee

Dear Holy Trinity:

Good day! I just wanted to express my gratitude for the coat drive that was held on the last Saturday of October, 2006. Usually, I'm a giver; however, my circumstances over the years have been teaching me how to receive. I have very limited income but need so many things. I appreciated the quality and care of the items to choose from. I was surprised to find more than coats which were available as well. I was fortunate to find a down winter coat in my favorite color! I found jackets, sweaters, and a patchwork blanket. I even found a few Ts and a crisp, white blanket for a new roommate who was unable to come. My pastor used to say, "People can be nice but they don't have to be nice to you." I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the warmth and love that was bestowed unto me that day. Your coat drive was an answer to my prayers, saving me money I don't have. May the Lord continue to bless your outreach ministry as well as those who benefit from your service.

Yours in Christ,  
Barbara A. Richardson

(Many Thanks to Shelli Ritchie, who spearheaded the coat drive?)

###

