DE TRINITATE

Newsletter of the Society of the Holy Trinity

Societas Trinitatis Sanctae

From The Senior

WHY DO WE GATHER?

As I was traveling home from our recent General Chapter, I was reflecting on all the members and guests I had seen over those three days and the interactions I had with many. Time and again I heard folks say that they were so glad to be there; that they had missed a couple of retreats but were glad to be back; or that they simply could not imagine their life or ministry without the regularity of such a gathering. And I received a number of notes from members who, for one reason or another, could not attend but who wanted me to know how much they would miss being there and how important it was to them in their lives of faith.

So, given the comments and the sentiments expressed, what is so important about this annual General Chapter and indeed, why do we gather at all? Chapter III of our Rule Gathering for Retreats takes 11 points to address the organization, structure and content of Chapter retreats and then, almost as an afterthought it seems, adds point 12 "The Senior of the ministerium shall gather the whole Society in retreat for no less than 48 hours once a year in a place suitable for prayer, worship and study."

Clearly then, we are called first to have such a retreat since this is a "shall" rubric in the Rule. But I have heard others argue over the years that this is not really a retreat since we are far too rowdy a bunch (meant nicely I assure you) for this to be a time of deep spiritual reflection which often characterizes such a retreat. But then neither are we a conference, although we devote large sections of our time together each year to our teaching theologians, while on the other hand, also spend considerable time in prayer and praise of Almighty God. So, if we are not really retreating and not really attending a conference, what are we doing and why do we gather for such a time each year in General Chapter? I believe that there are a number of important considerations that stem from such a gathering, considerations that are constitutive of our very identity and being as a Society.

And the first of these is simply that we gather! Before our six new subscribers signed the Rule at our recent gathering, I spoke of how it is that we are not joining a group but rather that we sign the Rule and subscribe to it and it is the Rule which forms us and shapes us and, in many ways, gives us our very identity. We are who we are very much because we have attended chapter and General Chapter retreats as called for in our Rule. I am often reminded of the famous quote from Fr. Aidan Kavanagh OSB who said that "We do not go to mass because we are Catholic. We are Catholic because we go to mass." As a liturgical scholar, Fr. Kavanagh knew the power of gathering in liturgy to form and shape identity. And the same thing happens to us in our gatherings. We may truly be neither retreat nor conference but the very act of being together, spending time together in both worship and social time, eating together, sharing together, all support and sustain our very identity as members of this Society. So, with respect to Fr. Kavanagh, I believe that we do not attend General Chapter because we are members who have subscribed to the Rule, but we are members of the Society because we have subscribed to the Rule in General Chapter.

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This forming and shaping is reinforced throughout our gatherings by that process we often call "the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren." General Chapter is that time when we are able to greet our sisters and brothers from across the US and Canada, to share with

them all that has happened in our lives and ministries, to see and hear of how others are doing. There is great power in simply eating and talking together in the refectory or at social time in the evenings. Indeed, one of our members spoke about how we still need to have a formal time set aside in the evenings so that we can gather as a community for such mutual conversation and consolation, even if it is sans alcoholic beverages.

I know that circumstances in our personal lives as well as our ministries sometimes prevent some of our members from attending General Chapter. But our Rule calls for us to attend not only chapter retreats but also General Chapter as part of our ongoing formative process of living into the Rule. And in such gatherings, we find that we are continuing to be formed and shaped by that same Rule, given support and strength to continue our ministries through the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren and hopefully provided with some refreshment and spiritual sustenance through our common life of prayer and worship together.

Why then do we gather? Well first because, both individually and as a body, we are called to do so by our Rule; but secondly we need to be together because it is constitutive of our very identity as members of this Society. So, plan to join us when we next gather in General Chapter 24-26 September 2024. Meanwhile may God continue to bless and guide our Society and strengthen its work for the sake of Holy Mother Church.

In Christ

~ The Rev'd Senior Paddy Rooney, STS

From The Secretary

1. Membership Report
We have 273 subscribed members in 19 chapters in two countries. 9 pastors subscribed to the Rule in 2022. 6 pastors subscribed to the Rule this year: The Rev'd Bruce Dillman (Florida Chapter), The Rev'd Wilmus Rogers "Roger" Randolph III (Susquehanna Chapter), The Rev'd David Genszler (Susquehanna Chapter), The Rev'd Lisa Peterson (Passavant Chapter), The Rev'd John Marschhausen (New England Chapter), and The Rev'd Tony Metze (Carolinas Chapter). 153 members paid their dues in full this year (in 2022, it was 160). Of those 153, 54 are not attending this General Retreat for various reasons. 7 members asked to waive a portion of their dues. 7 members asked to have their 2023 dues waived entirely. 100 subscribed members did not pay any of their dues at all, nor make contact concerning them. I continue to note that 273 is too high a number for our actual membership. Our true membership is closer to 170.
Please remember that dues are each individual's pledge of investment in our common life together. They are paid by members whether or not one attends the General Chapter. Dues don't just cover costs for the General Chapter, they also help cover the cost of seminarians to attend the General Chapter Retreat or local chapter retreats, contribute toward the administrative needs of the Society in terms of the fees for our accountants and investment managers, and even postage.
2. Attendance Report
For the 2023 General Chapter Retreat, there were 124 total attendees, down from 2022's attendance of 149. 106 Members attended (including newly-subscribed). 18 Guests attended, including 3 Seminarians and Vicars from 3 seminaries. 62 people arrived early, either Sunday or Monday nights.
3. Important dates
May 26, 2024 Holy Trinity Sunday: Dues are due
September 24-26, 2024: General Chapter Retreat, Mundelein, IL

The Rev'd Pari R. Bailey, STS, Secretary

In Memoriam

Over the past year we have had a number of deaths in our membership including two who were founders of our Society. While we live in the assurance that these faithful servants of Christ will rest with Him until the great day of resurrection, certain losses among us hold special significance in our common life within this Society and one of them is the recent death of Fr. Phillip Max Johnson who served not only as a founding member of the Society but also as its first Senior. Phillip's role in the founding, the drafting of our Rule and his subsequent pastoral leadership of the Society in those early years, laid the foundation for our very identity today. In recognition of Phillip's unique position, I asked Dr. Frank Senn STS, who served as our second Senior, to write a remembrance of Fr. Phillip since he knew him so well. May we all remember the faithful and life long service that Fr. Phillip gave to Christ and His Holy Church and may we offer prayers for his family in this time of grief.

The Rev'd Senior Paddy Rooney, STS

In Remembrance of Phillip Max Johnson

I first met Phillip Max Johnson when I attended a meeting at Loyola House in Morristown, NJ after the Call to Faithfulness Conferences at St. Olaf College. The main concern was how a confessional witness could be made to the Church. Phillip was part of a group from the northern New Jersey/Metropolitan New York area that had been meeting in retreat at Loyola House for several years. After concluding that we could not take back the denominations, and considering that we already had pastors from the ELCiC and LCMS meeting at Morristown as well as the ELCA, the consensus was to form a pastoral society that would support and renew pastors in living out their ordination vows.

While Phillip was an important contributor to these deliberations and the drafting of The Rule of the Society of the Holy Trinity, it was as the first Senior of the Society that he made a lasting imprint on the Society. This inter-Lutheran ministerium would be a pastoral oratory that met in retreats for prayer and study and mutual conversation and consolation.

Phillip was insistent that the retreats were a refuge from the affairs of the denominations. We were not to bring the politics of our denominations to retreats. We recognized that there were theological divisions between and within the Lutheran denominations. We could not resolve those divisions in the Society. We would be guided by The Rule of the Society.

In retreats, Phillip modeled a calm presence who eschewed idle chatter. We were to be silent upon entering and exiting the worship space. I believe it was Phillip who came up with the idea of one chaplain for each retreat to provide consistency of style and usage. We were to learn to follow the leader in worship and not try to lead from the pew, especially in prayers and singing.

Phillip modeled a way for the senior not to be elected to another term. He had been elected senior in 1997 and 2000. In 2003, before balloting commenced, Philip announced that he had discerned that the Society should elect a new senior. This did not preclude members from voting for him, but most followed his discernment.

Whether Phillip gave this advice because he was already thinking about becoming a Roman Catholic priest, I do not know. When the process of his translation into the Roman Communion was set, he wrote to me as senior to inform me, prefaced by "This may not come as a surprise to you." In fact, it was a surprise because Phillip had had no prior conversation with me about it. I have to think that it was a personal decision Phillip made with deep prayer and the Holy Spirit's guidance. I suspect he was an outstanding Catholic priest who never lost his Lutheran instincts. I also believe that he left an indelible mark on the life of the Society of the Holy Trinity. May the Lord receive him as a good and faithful servant of Christ.

The Rev'd Frank C. Senn, STS

Chapter Updates

Carolinas Chapter

The Carolinas Chapter Advent Retreat will be held on 4-5 December 2023 at the Catholic Conference Center in Hickory NC. The Rev'd Steve Sax, STS, Dean

Central Plains Chapter

The Central Plains Chapter will meet in Retreat December 4-5 at the Christ the King Retreat Center in Schuyler Nebraska. Election of a new Dean will also be held.

The Rev'd Jeff Cottingham, STS, Dean

Chesapeake-Potomac Chapter

The Chesapeake-Potomac Chapter will meet for its Advent Retreat, December 4-5, 2023, at the Claggett Conference Center in Adamstown, Maryland. For more information, you can contact via email: revrod.ronneberg@gmail.com.

The Rev'd Rod Ronneberg, STS, Dean

Great Rivers Chapter

The Great Rivers Chapter will meet in retreat at Toddhall Retreat Center in Columbia, IL. We will gather November 27-29, 2023. The Rev'd Dr. Ken Tegtmeier, STS, Dean

Metro New York Chapter

The Metropolitan NY Chapter held it's first post-Covid retreat at the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception in Lloyd Harbor, L.I., NY on May 15th and 16. Our next scheduled retreat is in November.

The Rev'd Dr. John G. Fleischmann, STS, Dean

Minnesota Chapter

The Minnesota Chapter continues to pray for the health and healing of our sister and chapter member The Rev'd Pari Bailey, STS, following her recent surgery, and also for her husband The Rev'd Trevor Bailey, STS, as together they deal with all the complications of major medical procedures on their lives and ministries.

The next chapter retreat is scheduled for December 11-12 at Christ the King Retreat Center in Buffalo, MN.

The Rev'd Erma Wolf, STS, Dean

Northern Illinois Chapter

Our All Saints Retreat will be held Nov 6-7, 2023 Portiuncula Center for Prayer, Frankfort IL. Register by Oct. 18th with the Dean.

The Rev'd Keith Forni, STS, Dean

From The Vicar

The tulip bulbs we had ordered arrived. We decided to plant them in a bed along our sidewalk. Discovering how hard the soil was, we decided it needed to be amended with peat and fertilizer. The project took much longer with more labor than anticipated. We decided to dig a trench to replace everything with compost, bulb fertilizer, and rich soil. We found yellow clay, rocks, and roots. Our two year old granddaughter wanted to help, so we gave her a garden trowel and she helped to sort out stones. We didn't expect a lot from her, but she had a hand in the project. Next spring we find out how successful we were.

From The Rule: "CHAPTER II. A LIFE OF OBEDIENCE TO JESUS We will challenge and encourage one another to live in obedience to Jesus, desiring to be examples to the faithful and to adorn with holy living the Ministry entrusted to us." Why would we need such a chapter? Shouldn't it be obvious? Since pastors are called to lead congregations, shouldn't this be second nature? Perhaps. However, life is filled with the hard soil of self-will, rocky paths of heartbreaking experiences, and deeply rooted weakness to temptation. These are the very things that effect all humanity. Hence the need to "challenge and encourage one another."

There is the key. Sometimes we make it much too difficult. The genius of the Rule is its honesty. Sometimes we think we are doing so well that we don't need help. Sometimes we think we are the only ones with difficulties and don't want to admit that we need help. When we sign the Rule, we seek the help of the Society. When someone else signs, we say, "Amen", offering ourselves to their aid.

The Rule guides our Society, our parish ministry, our daily lives. But none of us keep it completely. We are living into the Rule. We are growing and developing. We are doing so together. Whatever you call it – being a mentor, helping to disciple, guiding, formation – we call on one another to help build a rich seed bed for faith and life to grow in obedience to Jesus. This is a lifetime endeavor. As long as we are in the Church Militant, we will need to give and receive help. Sometimes we are doing the hard lifting of digging through clay. Sometimes we have a garden trowel, simply sorting out rocks.

We look forward to a springtime when flowers will bloom. It is all in God's good time. Until then, we continue to do the simple things in faith. To whom will you reach out, seeking help? To whom will you offer yourself to bring aid?

The Rev'd Jim Lehmann, STS

Vicar

2024 Liturgical Calendars

A 2024 STS Liturgical Calendar is now available. It is a provisional replacement for the month- by-month Lutheran edition ordinarily published by the STS through the Ashby Co. (delayed for '24 due to their staffing issues).

The Old Testament Trinity icon, a full year-at-a-glance calendar, with highlighted liturgical & important STS dates are on the cover. Select Festivals & Commemorations are on the reverse. Suggested donation: $2.00 per copy. All proceeds will go to the Society's general fund. Checks please to "Society of the Holy Trinity." Order your calendars through The Rev'd Keith Forni, STS. They will be shipped by mail.

Email: keithlforni@gmail.com or call 815 600 3030

1316 Plainfield Rd Joliet IL 60435-4026

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Editor: The Rev'd Jeff Cottingham, STS
Editorial office: c/o Trinity Lutheran Church, 2102 Ave. G, Gothenburg Nebraska, 69138 - email: PastorJeff@trinitylutherangothenburg.com
To be placed on the De Trinitate *mailing list or to report a change of address, please contact the Secretary, below.*
Senior: The Rev'd Patrick Rooney, STS 11300 Saddleview Court, Raleigh, NC 27613 / 717-870-1154 / pastorrooney@gmail.com
Vicar: The Rev'd Jim Lehmann, STS 5823 E. 1800 North Road, Fithian, IL, 61844 / 217-417-4156 / jtl611@hotmail.com
Secretary: The Rev'd Pari Bailey, STS P.O. Box 116, Belview, MN 56214 / 507-938-3285 / revsbailey@redred.com
Bursar: The Rev'd Jay Denne, STS 4612 Grant St., Sioux City, IA 51108 / 712-898-1678 / revjaydenne@gmail.com
Society Website: www.societyholytrinity.org