DE TRINITATE

Newsletter of the Society of the Holy Trinity

Societas Trinitatis Sanctae

From The Senior

Looking Back and Looking Forward

If you were with us at the recent General Chapter retreat in Mundelein, perhaps you shared a little of the same emotions I did, as the car drove slowly around the side of the lake to exit the gates of St. Mary's for the last time. Over the course of some 20 years, St. Mary of the Lake became something of a home for us in the Society, a familiar place, etched inside our hearts. Over the years we have walked its paths and that warren of hallways. We have broken bread with sisters and brothers in that refectory where that lovely crucifix hangs – an indelible image in my mind. And we have invaded that bookstore (even in the old days when it was in the basement of the building down below) year after year to get what it is that we just "have to have!"

There have been special moments associated with our time there – founding anniversaries celebrated, changes of leadership, so many who signed the Rule on that altar, some of the best and the brightest of theological thinkers in our generation sharing their thoughts with us. And who can forget that special evening when, on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we sang Vespers together with the Seminary community and then shared a meal together. From that event some lasting relationships were formed – in my case with the Vice Rector Fr. Bama who spoke to us that night and who remained my friend even as he passed into the Church Triumphant.

For those who are newer to our Society, you may not be aware that, in the beginning, our General Chapter retreats were a little different. While our founding retreat took place at Loyola House in Morristown NJ, we quickly moved the General Chapter to Bon Secours retreat center in Maryland alternating every other year with the Divine Word Institute at Techny in Chicago. That alternating patten remained for a few years until the decision was made to move to Mundelein and make that our regular site. So it is that St. Mary of the Lake become our home, in some ways our "motherhouse" for nearly 20 years.

So as I drove out those gates for the last time, it was with a pang of regret and sorrow. Yes some things have been difficult there the past few years…the structure and organization, the increased costs and those lawnmowers that always seemed to be timed to mow right outside the chapel during one of our services. But it was home and that place I looked forward to returning to each and every fall and I will miss it.

But, as Alfred Lord Tennyson says, "the old order changeth yielding place to new, lest one good custom should corrupt the world." So we move on, looking forward our new "home" at St. Meinrad. It will be different and it may take a year or two to forge new practices, establish new familiarities and just find our way around. Some things I am looking forward to include the wonderful organ in the chapel, the chapel itself, having the dinning room much closer (one floor down from the chapel), having a "common room" where we can all socialize together in the evenings and even having a lecture space that it much closer. And joy of joys - the bookstore is in the same building we are using and they have a range of gifts including vestments for sale as well as books. Temptation it is! And in case you haven't purchased one already, there are also caskets for sale since that is one of the monks' major work areas.

As Alfred Lord Tennyson says, "the old order changeth yielding place to new, lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

But it will be different, and it is going to take a little to get used to. I like what our Vicar had to say at our Annual meeting and that is "breathe" and I would add, breathe again. Not everything is going to be perfect first time around. The staff there will have to get used to us and we to them. But if there is an issue, take a deep breath and let one of the officers or deans know and we will seek to fix it. In September of 2026 the Leadership Council will review in depth just where we stand and how things went and what changes/improvements, we need to make. Let's work together to make this a great, out-of-the-gate effort and truly seek to make this our new home.

See you in St. Meinrad.

In Christ

The Rev'd Paddy Rooney, STS Senior.

From The Secretary

Dear friends,

The General Chapter Retreat in September welcomed 112 members, guests, and presenters. Five pastors subscribed to the Rule: Rev. Aaron Dawson (Great Rivers Chapter), Rev. Craig Wheaton (California Chapter), Rev. Megan Shaffer (Susquehanna Chapter), Rev. Ben Black Sr. (Indiana Chapter), Rev. Ted Carnahan (Iowa Chapter). Welcome, new brothers and sister!

This was our final year at University of St. Mary of the Lake, which has been our home for over 20 years. This was also our final year for the General Chapter to be held in September.

In 2026, we will be at our new home: St. Meinrad's Archabbey in St. Meinrad, Indiana (closest airport: Louisville) and the dates are June 16-18. In 2027, the dates are July 13-15. The officers are working on standardizing the month of the retreat, so people can make future plans more easily. St. Meinrad's is a teaching abbey, so we had to fit into their schedule for these first couple of years. Several people asked me, and the answer is yes: you will be able to arrive the Monday before the retreat, as many prefer to do.

Because of the move of the General Chapter to the summer, the dues system and the dates you've been used to have been overhauled. Dues will now be due on Transfiguration Sunday. In 2026, that's February 15. Your dean will send you a notice about them the end of November, and the form will also be on the website. It is vital that you pay attention to that and send dues in as soon as possible. If your congregation is paying them, please get the information and new due date to your treasurers right away.

In mid-March, your dean will send you the information on registering for the General Chapter. If you have not received this information and contact from your dean by March 25 (Annunciation), please get hold of him or her right away. We will not have extra time to track down people and wayward emails this year. Registration for the 2026 Chapter Retreat will open April 1 (during Holy Week) and close May 31. June 5 will be the deadline for cancellations. This will be an adjustment for us, but I am confident that if people follow directions and send things promptly, we'll make the transition will minimal pain.

In Christ,

The Rev'd Pari R. Bailey, STS

Secretary

Seminarian Scholarships

As reported at our recent General Chapter, our Society is providing 14 seminarians with scholarship resources. These seminarians come from 3 different ecclesial bodies – ELCA, NALC and AALC and are studying at 6 different seminaries or houses of study. The total of our scholarships will amount to $34,000 for 2025.

We remain grateful to those have contributed toward this fund and urge others in our body to consider doing the same. With such gifts, we will be able to continue assisting seminarians into the future. And while we are clear that there is no quid pro quo, that one who receives a scholarship should join our Society, it was good to see that at the General Chapter meeting, there were eight of our members present who had received a scholarship over the years and for that we are grateful and thankful to God.

Speaking Carefully of the Holy Spirit

I am grateful to our Senior for starting a conversation about consensus in the Society in the last issue of the De Trinitate. In a fractured culture that seems to thrive on division and competition, the practice of consensus is a witness to another way—a way of mutual listening, humility, and seeking unity—virtues undoubtedly reflecting the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Still, I find myself uneasy with the way we sometimes speak of the Spirit's role in our decision-making, particularly during elections conducted by ecclesiastical ballot. I have often heard language like, "We can see the Spirit is leading us in this direction," as successive ballots begin to reveal a trend. I believe this is being said with reverence and good intentions, but I want to suggest that such language risks saying more than we can responsibly claim.

We must be clear: The Holy Spirit is not the sum of our collective intentions, not even our most prayerful and scripturally grounded ones. To simply equate the Spirit's movement with the direction of our ballots (or, for that matter, any decisions made by societies or church bodies) distorts what the catholic church teaches about the Spirit's work and how it relates to our responsible actions as human beings.

As our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters are quick to remind themselves, even the conclave that elects a pope does not claim to discern the Spirit's choice directly. In a 1997 interview, Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) was asked whether the Holy Spirit chooses the pope. His answer was refreshingly honest: "I would not say so, in the sense that the Holy Spirit picks out the Pope. … I would say that the Spirit does not exactly take control of the affair, but rather, like a good educator, leaves us much space, much freedom, without entirely abandoning us."

I agree with the late bishop of Rome. The Holy Spirit does not override our will, nor guarantee our success. The Spirit accompanies us—sometimes through our mistakes, often through our learning, and always through the Word that calls us back to Christ. The Scriptures and the catholic tradition are consistent on this point: the Holy Spirit is given and promised in the proc-

lamation of Christ crucified and risen, in the sacraments, in the forgiveness of sins, and in the community gathered around that Word. There the Spirit's work is sure and trustworthy.

Beyond that—whether in institutional decisions, consensus processes, or elections—we may pray for the Spirit's guidance, but we dare not speak with the same certainty.

As I am sure you have noticed, it has become all too common in many church circles that confident declarations about the Spirit's work are casually expressed as a matter of fact, e.g. when a worship service is perceived to be particularly inspiring, we hear that one can "feel the Spirit". Are we so sure about that? Or when decisions in church governance go in a way we agree with, we exclaim, "The Spirit is moving!" How do we know that exactly? Since Christ warned severely against blaspheming the Spirit, we ought to be cautious in how we speak of him.

One might also ask: Which "spirit" exactly is being felt or observed? Are we sure it is the one called "Holy"? Party spirit (Gal. 5:20), team spirit, fighting spirit, school spirit, "The Spirit of '76," the "Spirit of Vatican II," Zeitgeist, Weltgeist (Hegel), Volksgeist (Herder, Savigny) all refer to certain pneumata that are discerned through collective human experience, a kind of mass intuition often involving very profound and moving experiences — but that does not make these spirits holy! In the Smalcald Articles (III, VIII, 3–13), Luther warned of Schwärmerei and saw it swarm about wherever the "Spirit" was appealed to without reference to Christ or his Gospel.

It is noteworthy that Scripture nowhere portrays the Holy Spirit as directly responsible for the voting or decision-making procedure of the church in the manner that has become common among us. When the Spirit's agency is mentioned in connection with communal decisions, it is always in the mode of guidance through the Word, prayerful discernment, or divine initiative — but never as a sanctioning of human procedural outcomes.

Nota bene: Matthias is chosen by lot, not by consensus. The seven deacons are appointed by the community as people "full of the Spirit and wisdom," indeed, but no claim is made that the Spirit did the choosing. At Antioch, the Holy Spirit acted directly and clearly in choosing Barnabas and Saul—not through a vote or communal consensus, but through divine command and speech. And even when the apostles at the Council of Jerusalem conclude that "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit" to include Gentiles (Acts 15:28), this is preceded by "much debate" (v. 7) and study of the Scriptures about a doctrinal issue. The Spirit is invoked as speaking through the Scriptures, not as causing the decision or driving the consensus through a communal dynamic. Where the Holy Spirit is clearly said to be acting in this passage, however, is as having "testified to" (8) Gentiles about the Gospel and "cleansing their hearts by faith" (9), giving them conviction that they "will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus" (11).

The Holy Spirit's work is to point us to Christ, to bring his benefits to us, and to create faith where there was none. The Spirit is not an impersonal force pushing our votes toward a conclusion, nor a collective intuition. The Spirit is the living God who convicts, comforts, and renews us through the Gospel.

As a Society, let us therefore foster a more chaste way of speaking of the third Person of the Holy Trinity. We could start in the language we use at our elections. Instead of saying, "We can see the Spirit leading us in this direction," we might say, "We have prayed, deliberated, and voted. We entrust this decision to God's mercy and pray that the Holy Spirit will work through it for Christ's sake." That way of speaking acknowledges our responsibility without presuming divine endorsement. It leaves room for repentance if we have erred, and it entrusts the outcome to the same grace that governs our preaching and our sacraments.

Perhaps the best we can say is this: when Christ is proclaimed, when forgiveness is received, when love and patience are practiced even amid disagreement—then we may indeed rejoice that the Spirit is moving. But as for our ballots, let us pray, act, and then rest in the mercy of God, who alone knows the heart of every voter and the needs of his Church.

I offer these reflections not as pedantry or needless nitpicking, but as a plea for theological care and precision in our common life.

Offered to my brothers and sisters in our Society in the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Rev'd Robin Lütjohann, STS

General Chapter Retreat 2026

As we look forward to our General Chapter Retreat in 2026, we have selected a theme of "Confession and Forgiveness" for reflection by our teaching theologians. This emphasis was selected because of its importance in our Lutheran tradition and its equal importance in the life of our Society. As you may be aware, the Augsburg Confession keeps the sacrament of confession and is concerned that the practice does not fall into disuse. In turn, the Rule of our Society is clear that the practice has fallen into disuse. Therefore, the Rule devotes a whole chapter to this practice and we live that out by providing opportunities for confession at all our chapter and General chapter retreats. Yet even among us, the practice faces its own challenges. Year by year we have seen a smaller number of our members utilizing the opportunity for confession and absolution, hence the decision to reemphasize this issue once again.

And, if you are interested in some resources in preparation for our retreat, consider some of these published works:

1. For I Have Sinned. The Rise and Fall of Catholic Confession in America by James O'Toole 2025 Harvard Press. I found this to be a fascinating social history of the practice of confession. It is an easy but instructive read and would strongly recommend it.

2. Confession. Catholics, Repentance and Forgiveness in America by Patrick W. Carey 2018 Oxford University Press. This is more of a theological work, going back to the Council of Trent but still an instructive guide which I also enjoyed.

3. Be Renewed. A Guide to the Sacrament of Reconciliation by Fr. Paul Turner 2023 Liturgical Press. This much briefer paperback work concentrates on the practice of the sacrament and

the changes it has undergone since Vatican Council II. Fr. Turner is pastor of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Kansas City and Director of the Office of Divine Worship for the Diocese of Kansas City. He is a member of the North American Academy of Liturgists and the author of some 15 published books. He will serve as one of our teaching theologians at the General Chapter retreat.

Apart from Fr. Turner, we will also have The Rev'd Dr. Andrew Weisner STS as an additional presenter. Exact presentations will be worked out in the near future.

We look forward to seeing you in St. Meinrad.

From The Vicar

First, some statistics from our local school. Thirty years ago, there were 12 core sports with 17 total teams: Basketball (boys/girls) Varsity and JV; Football (Varsity and JV); Baseball (Varsity and JV); Softball; Soccer (boys/girls); Cross Country; Track; Golf (boys); Tennis (boys/girls); Volleyball (girls); Wrestling; and Cheerleading. Now there are 14 core sports, Lacrosse and Rugby added, with a total of 50 teams for 7th to 12th grades! Don't forget other extracurricular activities such as band and chorus. Now let's add the proliferation of club sports which exist, but do not run through the schools. Club sports usually include travel, often to other states. Of course these teams, clubs, and activities also have expectations on the parents and grandparents to support, to provide transportation for practices, and to attend events.

To be clear, I am not ranting on sports, schools, or the students who participate in them. I am simply using these statistics as a barometer for a larger issue. In 1985, Neil Postman published a book, Amusing Ourselves to Death which looked at what happens when everything becomes subject to the demands of entertainment. Forty years later, we see the results of those demands. Our lives are so filled with commitments and activities, whether as participants or spectators, that there is no room for anything else. People are exhausted. I like to think that is the reason why people doze off during my sermons, and not because of my content or delivery.

Within our congregations, how often have we heard, "I would like to come to a Bible study, but I am too busy to add one more thing to my calendar"? Within the Society of the Holy Trinity, how often have we heard or said, "I am too busy to come to a retreat"? The Brotherhood Prayer Book has a section on preparing for confession. The "Confession Mirror" asks a series of probing questions on each of the Ten Commandments. Here are a few. "Have I neglected the reading of the Bible thinking that hearing it on Sunday is enough? Do I let other daily activities take precedence over praying and meditation upon God's Word? Has the hearing and reading of God's Word become boring and meaningless to me? Does my attendance to the Divine Service suffer because of my other weekend activities?" These questions begin to convict me. How about you?

Our Lord shows a better way, one that gives life. "When [Jesus] went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. . . . And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray." (Mark 6:34, 46) This is a word of grace. This is a time of fulfillment. Our Lord understands the pressures of ministry. He invites us to come away to spend time with him. When we are exhausted, when we think there is no time for one more thing, that is precisely the opportunity and necessity to get away, to pray, to be refreshed. When we are nourished by Word and Sacrament, ministry once again has joy.

The Rev'd Jim Lehmann, STS

Vicar

From the Editor

This is the third and final issue of De Trinitate for this year. Accordingly you will find the Brief Lessons for the first half of Year A, our next liturgical year, included in this issue, since there will not be a fourth issue at the end of the current liturgical year.

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