

**The State of Holy Trinity Parish
Hillsdale, Michigan
Septuagesima, February 5, 2023**

The Venerable Alan R. Crippen II, Rector

The Lord be with you.

Let us pray:

*Almighty and everlasting God, who by thy Holy Spirit didst preside in the Council of the blessed Apostles, and hast promised, through thy Son Jesus Christ, to be with thy Church to the end of the world; We beseech thee to be with **the congregation of thy parish** here assembled in thy Name and Presence. Save us from all error, ignorance, pride, and prejudice; and of thy great mercy vouchsafe, we beseech thee, so to direct, sanctify, and govern us in our work, by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost, that the comfortable Gospel of Christ may be truly preached, truly received, and truly followed, in all places, to the breaking down the kingdom of sin, Satan, and death; till at length the whole of thy dispersed sheep, being gathered into one fold, shall become partakers of everlasting life; through the merits and death of Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen.** (BCP, p. 36-36)*

*I hope to have been faithful;
I hope to have kept the faith.*

These were the last words of Jackson Kemper, the American Church's first Missionary Bishop who was dispatched to the Michigan Territory on the American Frontier in 1835. By the time of his death in 1870 he had traveled over 300,000 miles — that's more miles traveled than those of the Apostle St. Paul, and he had better roads. In his 35 year episcopate Kemper had consecrated over 200 churches; ordained over 100 deacons and priests, and had confirmed upwards of 10,000 souls. Six dioceses were eventually carved out of his massive missionary district that included: Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and parts of Minnesota.

Upon the occasion of Kemper's consecration on September 25, 1835 at St. Peter's Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Bishop George Washington Doane exhorted him in the final words of the sermon:

Beloved brother, from the work to which the Lord, we trust, has called you, I may keep you back no longer. You are to go out, in the Saviour's name, the first Missionary Bishop of this Church. Going with the office, go in the spirit, of an Apostle! You are to preach the gospel of salvation to a ruined world. You are to bear "the ministry of reconciliation" to sinful men, the enemies of God, and of their own souls, by wicked works. Like the Apostle Paul, preach to them "Christ crucified." Like the Apostle Paul, beseech them in Christ's stead, "be ye reconciled to God." Like the Apostle Paul, remind them that without holiness, no man shall see the Lord; and implore them, "by the mercies of God," that they present their bodies, "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to him, which is their reasonable service."—Fear not, dear brother, though the load be heavy,

and the way be long. He who hath called you, will give you strength to run the noble race which he has set before you; and, if you are but faithful unto death, will crown you with eternal life.... Beloved brother, go! Go, bear, before a ruined world, the Saviour's bleeding Cross. Go, feed, with bread from heaven, the Saviour's hungry Church. Go, thrice beloved, go, and God the Lord go with you!

We have a great Gospel missionary heritage to keep.

(By the way this past year, Holy Trinity Parish received an artifact of Kemper's ministry legacy. Our antique sanctus gong is originally from an oratory chapel at Nashotah House, the Anglican seminary founded by the legendary bishop. It was given to us by our founding rector emeritus. May this sanctus gong remind us of the heritage we have to keep even as it calls us to Eucharistic devotion.)

In continuity with this great heritage, we have a mission to continue. Ours in a missionary diocese. Ours is a missionary church. Ours is a missionary parish to Hillsdale County and beyond. Last week I asked Leonor when it is that a church plant ceases to become a church plant or mission? There are canonical answers to the question. These entail financial viability and independence, sustainability, the emergence of a self-governing vestry and the institution of a rector, etc.

It was not long ago that Holy Trinity Parish was a church plant. Thirty-four years ago a small group of people wanted a faithful Anglican witness of the Gospel in this town and about the College and beyond. It was a modest plant that began with a priest who held the daily office in the small chapel of the Dow Hotel on the College campus. By 1991 our parish church was constructed.

Those among us today who are the founding families of this parish, would you please stand? [Applause] Thank you for your vision, commitment, and faithfulness. You may be seated.

By 2016 the Parish had affiliated with a missionary convocation that is now known as the Anglican Diocese of the Living Word in the Anglican Church of North America. Missions work is in our DNA from Bishop Kemper to Bishop Julian Dobbs. From our founding rector emeritus, Fr. Duane Beauchamp to Fr. Adam Rick, to the present.

I am grateful for and humbled by the excellent foundation laid for the Gospel here in Hillsdale. For 33 years this parish — this church plant was faithfully shepherded by Fr. Beauchamp and Fr. Rick. I feel the weight of continuing their legacy and stewardship of this mission.

Bishop Julian likes to quote the Apostolic missionary St. Paul in regard to his own missionary work: "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each." (1 Corinthians 3:5ff) Our Bishop is wont to remind his clergy that we are just servants. "Servant" is a kinder, gentler word for slave. We are the slaves of Jesus. We are nothing. It is Jesus who is everything. As the Apostle continues, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who

gives the growth.” I can hear our Bishop’s exhortation to the clergy: “You are nothing. I am nothing. We are nothing. The work we do is the Lord’s. God gives the growth.”

God be praised.

I share all this to put our annual meeting in the context of calling and mission, God’s great faithfulness, and our stewardship of Christ’s gospel work. We assemble here this afternoon to do the business of the parish. Let us do this business with a *forward in faith* view to mission, but also looking back to earlier days with gratitude and humility.

What has God done recently in our midst?

We began last year with the ordination of a deacon of the church by the Rt. Rev. William Love. Assembled in this very nave on January 1, 2022, the Rev. Steven Wedgeworth was ordained as a deacon to begin pastoral work in a church plant — Christ Church in South Bend, Indiana. One year later, Steven is now a presbyter and has been instituted as that parish’s rector. God be praised. Furthermore, in this parish we have three men who have taken the initial steps for the process of discerning a call to holy orders in the church.

The day after Rev. Wedgeworth’s ordination, on January 2nd, Bishop Love instituted Holy Trinity Parish’s third rector in its 33 year history — the first to be on a full-time stipendiary. It was an important milestone — a step and stretch of faith for the Parish making last year’s operational budget the largest in its history.

Over the course of last year we witnessed five baptisms: two infants, two children, and one adult convert to Christian faith. As of today, there are four other newborn babies in the queue to be baptized and hopefully, that right soon.

Last year we hosted the rite of confirmation in the Christian Faith for 17 souls. Three were confirmed by Bishop Love on two separate occasions: January 2 and April 9. The 14 others, including five youth, were confirmed by Bishop Dobbs on November 6.

Three new members joined our flock by letter of transfer from other Anglican churches in the Province as well as an Episcopal parish.

In 2022 the Parish church hosted the formation of four new families in wedding nuptials.

We were also saddened and grieved to lose two of our number to death: The body and soul of Ruth Hill (d. 02/10/2022), a founding member of our Parish, was committed to God in the Parish church on February 19. The body and soul of vestryman Dr. E. Allen Knight (d. 12/04/2022) was committed to God at The Arbor Church in Spring Arbor on December 17. Both Ruth and Allen enriched the life of the parish and they are fondly remembered and deeply missed. We grieve their deaths, but not without hope and certainty of their future resurrection in Christ.

With regard to ministry programs, additional worship services were added to the parish's schedule. Beginning in Lent of last year, regular services of Morning and Evening Prayer as well as noonday Holy Communion are held on Wednesdays.

In the summer months we formalized "Holy Trinity Summer Suppers" following Evening Prayer on Thursdays. An extension of hospitality ministry, the pot luck summer suppers fostered fellowship and an onboarding experience for newcomers to the Parish.

Beginning on the American Prayer Book's Feast of Independence Day, Coffee Hour was implemented following the 10:30 am service as the mainstay of hospitality ministry. The summer and fall seasonal weather allowed use of the beautiful setting of Kent's Place pavilion to host parishioners and visitors in fostering fellowship and facilitating a welcoming experience for newcomers to the parish.

In mid-September the parish instituted a Sunday School for our children and youth at the 9:30 am hour as well as a concurrent adult education forum. Under the capable leadership of Bethany Runyon, our parish children and youth are being formed in the Faith. Dr. Adam Carrington is providing capable direction and teaching of adult education. A multi-year curriculum of instruction in the Anglican way of faith and life is being developed.

Paired with the launch of Sunday School, Bethany has also led the ideation, formation, and development of Children's Chapel for young ones. Executed simultaneously with the sermon in the 10:30 am service, our little ones are provided a chapel experience in the undercroft with an age appropriate Bible lesson themed to the liturgical calendar. Relieved of child supervision for a few minutes, parents can concentrate attention on the sermon in the nave. Children rejoin their families in time for Holy Communion.

Under the leadership of Carol Bieganek, a parish wide women's ministry was ideated and organized last fall. With mission and scope of ministry defined, the nascent women's ministry has taken ownership of hospitality ministry, including Coffee Hour and other special events. Both in-reach and outreach service efforts like meal trains continue. Other service opportunities have been prototyped by Arena Shelley including Neighborhood Christmas Caroling with the delivery of holiday baked goods, as well as a Holy Innocents work day at Helping Hands, the local crisis pregnancy center. And last week marked the official launch of this burgeoning ministry. So, expect more things this year.

Our Altar Guild and Servers ministries have helped in so many thankless ways in making our worship beautiful, reverent, and meaningful. So let me say thank you to Leah Novak and Dr. Miles Smith IV and their teams for their faithfulness last year.

The music ministry, though faced with significant challenges, has not faltered. The retirement of our long-serving organist, Steven Flick, and the indefinite sabbatical (May I call it that?) of the talented Casey Gregg, have presented leadership opportunities for others to stand in the gaps. Gianna Green and Kimberly More have risen to the task, and working together they are providing continuity to our music ministry in this interim season as search for an organist/choir director continues.

Parish operations have advanced with the organizational and administrative talent of Wendy Coykendall. Behind the scenes, she has a way of making order out of chaos. Last year parish communications vehicles like the service booklets and *Holy Trinity News* have been developed and expanded to more efficiently and effectively relay information relative to our common life. Additional work to improve parish record keeping including the services register, membership management, giving stewardship and gift receipting, and accounting operations is ongoing. Toward this end, a new church management online software system has been procured.

While not wanting to steal the thunder of the wardens, I am also pleased to report that our vestry has this past year addressed many significant items of deferred maintenance, capital improvements, and beautification of the parish church and its grounds. Our property remains beautiful, inviting, welcoming, safe, and accommodating to all who come seeking Jesus here.

Financially, the Parish has had a banner year with gift revenue \$99K above budget. Total giving is 80% above giving in FY2021.

So what is ahead? Gospel work. Mission work. Everything that we are planning must be done ultimately to serve the mission of reaching the lost and making disciples. In many ways I still think of our Parish as a church plant, albeit a church plant in its 34th year. When do we cease being a church plant? I think it's when we become a planting church — a sending church. In the next 34 years can you envision Anglican churches in the county seats surrounding Hillsdale County. And if not, why not? Shouldn't we carry on that missionary zeal of Bishop Kemper? Why not plant an Anglican church in Coldwater, in Marshall, in Jackson, in Adrian, and even in Angola, Indiana? What steps are necessary for us to become a sending church? A few more. What do we need to do this year to move us closer toward that goal?

1. We need to be planning to accommodate our recent growth and as well as making contingency plans for more. We need larger and expanded facilities. It is obvious that we have outgrown our space for worship, education, fellowship, and service. This year the vestry will continue to grapple with options for a pathway forward. The end product of this year's planning, God-willing, will be a master development plan in professional consultation with civil engineering and architecture firms, for implementation in the next 5-10 years.
2. In the meantime, we need to retrofit our existing facility to better accommodate our immediate growth. Specifically, the undercroft is in need of total rehabilitation and renovation. The undercroft has a couple thousand square feet that is 32 years well-worn and tired, needing more than a facelift. It needs a resurrection to new life. Such a renovation should be smart and economizing of limited space and designed for multiple purposes and users including, various ministries like Coffee Hour, children's Sunday School and Chapel, adult Bible and book studies, youth meetings, infant and toddler care, as well as material storage, etc. The space should be designed with both an elegance and functionality that is in continuity with the nave and sanctuary above and with integrity to Anglican aesthetics. Our undercroft ought to be a beautiful place where our parishioners want to gather and not to avoid. It should be inviting, welcoming, relaxing, and a frankly a "cool place to hang out" on Sundays after services and during the week as well.

3. In the nave of the church, our growth has created auditory difficulty for many and especially so for our senior members. Upon his episcopal visit last April, Bishop Love advised us that we need a public address system. I agree. Now is the time and opportunity to design and install a public address system that is integrated with a hearing loop technology as well as improved online audio-visual streaming technology. Our readers and speakers need amplification. If “faith comes by hearing,” then amplification merits our attention. I am pleased to report that a pledge of monies designated to address this need has recently been made, and the search for a vender and integrated sound system is underway.
4. This year it is also time to advance our accounting and receipting operations to a higher level of professional proficiency and efficiency. As our revenue, budgets, and expenses grow, so must our competence and confidence in financial management, reporting, and controls. The recent addition of new church management software and its capabilities for integration with accounting and gift receipting functions, coupled with the retention a contracted accounting firm, will move us to a new and appropriate level of funds management.
5. Matters of governance also merit attention this year. Holy Trinity’s constitution and bylaws should be reviewed for appropriate compliance, updating, and revision. A cursory look at our bylaws reveals that they were written for a small church, and various provisions contained in them made sense for those early days of parish ministry. Since then, things have changed that need updating. For example, our bylaws established three standing committees that no longer exist and have not existed for I don’t know how long. Additionally, our bylaws require an independent financial audit every year. There hasn’t been a financial audit in the recent memory of the vestry. Yes, we need financial accountability with sound controls, regular audits, and/or reviews, or compilations. We want these measures of financial controls and accountability. I am intimately knowledgeable of a parish where these matters were neglected and eventually the rector was indicted on charges of financial malfeasance and misappropriation of funds. In the end, it worked out ok, but the indictments and multiple forensic audits need not have happened, if financial controls had been taken seriously. What measures do we need? An annual audit is probably overkill for our current size and is expensive. The Diocese requires an audit of its own accounting and financials every three years alternating with a review and compilation. That’s probably a good target and place to start for us. My larger point is: We need a review of our bylaws to update and amend, and include reasonable and prudent instruments and measures of government in place. I would like the vestry to appoint an ad hoc Constitution and Bylaws Committee from among members of the congregation to review and recommend changes to this body by next year’s annual meeting.

To accomplish these organizational goals in the current fiscal year will make us better in planning for and anticipating the future, better in stewardship of our physical plant and material resources, better in ministry execution, and better in self-government.

Let us take inspiration from Bishop Kemper’s vision, faithful life of service, and his legacy. By God’s grace may we make progress in the goals I have outlined, so that those who come after us will say,

*They were faithful;
They kept the faith.*

Until then, let us be about the work that God has given us to do — to love and serve Christ as faithful witness of Christ our Lord.

In the name of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. ***Amen.***