

**The State of the Parish Address**  
**Holy Trinity — Hillsdale, Michigan**  
**Sexagesima, February 4, 2024**  
**The Venerable Alan R. Crippen II, Rector**

The Lord be with you.  
[And with thy spirit.]  
Let us pray:

*Almighty and everliving God, source of all wisdom and understanding, be present with those who take counsel in the Parish Annual Meeting for the renewal and mission of thy Church. Teach us in all things first to seek thy honor and glory. Guide us to perceive what is right, and grant us both the courage to pursue it and the grace to accomplish it; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*  
**Amen.**

*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.

We have a great Gospel missionary heritage to keep.

I shared something of Bishop Kemper's story last year. His faithful life is commemorated May 24 on the liturgical calendar of the Anglican Church of North America. As it happens to be, this year our Diocesan Synod and Missions Conference will be in convention on his feast day. I think that is most appropriate for a missionary diocese like ours.

In continuity with this great missionary heritage, we have a mission to continue. Ours is a missionary church. Ours is a missionary diocese. Ours is a missionary parish to Hillsdale County and beyond.

Thirty-five years ago Holy Trinity Parish began as a church plant. In 1989 a small group of people wanted a faithful Anglican witness of the Gospel in this town. Our beginnings started with a faithful priest who held the daily office in the small chapel of the Dow Hotel on the College campus. By 1991 the Parish church was constructed. Today we sit in its nave to remember the past as we plan for the future. 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?

I am most pleased to report that in 2023 the parish initiated discernment processes for two men sensing a calling to holy orders. Dr. Adam Carrington and Mr. Isaac Waffle have been prayed for, directed in relevant readings, vetted by multiple interviews, and observed in the exercise of their spiritual gifts. Both men have been highly recommended to the Bishop by the Vestry for postulancy. Dr. Carrington has been awarded postulancy and is anticipating ordination to the diaconate on Saturday, May 25, 2024 at Diocesan Synod in Souderton, Pennsylvania. His ordination, God-willing, appropriately follows the day after Bishop Kemper's Feast Day. Mr. Waffle's postulancy is pending the Bishop's approval and is expected within a few weeks.

Over the course of last year we witnessed eleven baptisms: eight infants and three adult converts to Christian faith. As of today, there is a new baby and an adult in the queue to be baptized early next month.

Last year we hosted the rite of confirmation or reception in the Christian Faith for 11 souls. All were confirmed or received by Bishop Dobbs on September 10, 2024.

Six new members joined our flock by letter of transfer from other Anglican churches in the Province as well as a Reformed church.

In 2023 the Parish hosted the formation of three new families in wedding nuptials. One of these weddings was at Christ Chapel.

We were also saddened and grieved to lose one of our number to death: The body and soul of Melanie Shearman (d. 07/28/2023), was commended to God in the Parish church on August 12, 2023. Melanie enriched the life of the parish and is fondly remembered and deeply missed. We grieve her death, but not without hope and certainty of her future resurrection in Christ. Six new solid brass candlestick holders for the reredos and two solid brass vases for the Holy Table have been donated in her memory. As of this report, they are on order and will be received soon.

With regard to ministry programs and worship services, in addition to Sunday worship regular services of Morning and Evening Prayer as well as noonday Holy Communion are held on Wednesdays.

Last summer, "Holy Trinity Summer Suppers" following Evening Prayer on Wednesdays continued to prove successful as a fellowship and outreach ministry. The potluck suppers fostered community and a welcoming onboarding experience for newcomers to the Parish.

Coffee Hour, which was implemented in the summer of 2022, has become a virtual institution on Sundays after worship. It continues to foster fellowship and serve as an effective platform for

welcoming visitors and newcomers. In seasonable weather, the beautiful setting of Kent's Place pavilion has been fully utilized by the congregation.

Sunday School for our children and youth at the 9:30 am hour completed its third semester of effective operation. Chaplain (LTC) Ralph Bieganek, US Army (Ret) succeeded Bethany Runyon to direct Christian education for children and youth. Dr. Adam Carrington continues to provide capable direction and teaching in the adult education forum. The multi-year curriculum of instruction in the Anglican way of faith and life has to date involved successive courses on the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, *First Book of Homilies*, and John Jewel's *Apology of the Church of England*. These classic texts are formularies of Anglicanism.

Children's Chapel also completed a year and one-half of operation. 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 their attention on the sermon in the nave. Children rejoin their families in time for Holy Communion. Consistent volunteer staffing of this program remains a challenge.

Under the leadership of Carol Bieganek, women's ministry goes from strength to strength. Ministries of hospitality, fellowship, service, mercy, and outreach have expanded. This critical ministry on-boards and organizes women (and men) for serving in the Parish and beyond.

Our Altar Guild and Servers' ministries have helped in making our worship beautiful, reverent, and meaningful. Leah Novak and Dr. Sam Negus and their respective teams have served our worship well. Of special mention is the formalized training of our servers which can lead to diocesan licensure. Additionally, Dr. Negus has founded and leads a new children and youth acolyte ministry. Beginning last fall, these young people now regularly grace our worship as crucifers and torchbearers in red cassocks and white surplices. It's a wonderful new ministry of service for our young people that blesses God and us. The special donation of cassocks, surplices, and torches in memory of Ruth Hill is most gratefully acknowledged.

Dr. Derek Stauff joined Holy Trinity last summer as Director of Music and Organist. In his new tenure he has enhanced the Parish music ministry with capable leadership, professionalism, and musical skills. Our worship is beautiful and in my experience, exceeds much larger parishes in its musical quality of excellence. Dr. Stauff has effectively led and motivated the choir and has adroitly sustained musical ministry throughout Christmastide when challenged by the seasonal absence of college student choristers. He recruited "irregulars" — choir reservists — to active duty to provide music ministry at our annual Lessons & Carols and Christmas Day services and throughout Christmastide and Epiphany. Wednesday night choir practices have been established as a working model for parish culture.

The Parish Tech Ministry has been enhanced by the installation of a new public address system that was given to the Parish by an anonymous donor family. While bugs continue to be worked out as volunteer technicians learn the system, many of our senior members have commented on improved ability to hear better during worship services. The system has been integrated with the internet streaming service to improve broadcast quality as well.

Parish operations continue to advance with the organizational and administrative talent of Wendy Coykendall. Her production of the service booklets makes access to Prayer Book worship user-friendly and also forms the anchor of parish communication in the weekly publication of its “Notices”. Her editorial management of the weekly *Holy Trinity News* email provides the Parish’s primary means of internal communications. It’s content, scope, and subscriptions continue to expand. This year Mrs. Coykendall also spearheaded the launch and operationalization of *Breeze* — an online church management software. Gains continue in parish record keeping including the Parish and services registers, membership management, accounting operations, giving stewardship, and gift receipting. Timothy Green joined the team as Treasurer and bookkeeper. His accounting expertise has taken the Parish accounting operations to the next level of professionalization. He has implemented improved financial controls and provided the vestry with regular monthly reports, statements of profit & loss and financial position. A professional appraisal of the Parish’s real estate assets was accomplished last spring that provides a baseline for valuation.

I am also pleased to report that our vestry has this past year addressed many significant items related to safety, security, and surveillance improvements, beautification of the parish church and its grounds, and surface water management. The storage shed rebuild looks amazing. Our property remains beautiful, inviting, welcoming, safe, and accommodating to all who come seeking Jesus here.

Additionally, the vestry has continued to grapple with “the pew problem” which is the limitation of worship and program space for our growing congregation. For three years and more the vestry has considered various solutions including: (1) adjusting worship times to add a third worship service; (2) physical expansion of the existing parish church; (3) purchase of a site with an existing facility; (4) building of a new church on the current site or another purchased site; (5) sharing worship and ministry space with another congregation in a larger facility; or (6) a church property swap for a larger building with another congregation who might benefit from having a smaller facility.

With regard to these various scenarios, advice and consultation has been obtained from at least three different architects, a commercial building contractor, a religious real estate brokerage firm, a local real estate investor, and other knowledgeable parties. In sum, the vestry has weighed various options and determined that for the time being a third service could be added, either on Sunday morning or Saturday evening to increase worship and program space capacity without a major capital expenditure or disruption. It is also the assessment of the vestry that the Parish

needs at least ten more tithing families on the membership roles to make a major \$1.5M+ capital campaign feasible for the congregation.

In the interim, the vestry is committed to rehabilitate, renovate, and reconfigure existing space in the undercroft for better and more efficient utilization.

On Friday, December 1, the vestry executed a contract with Foulke Construction of Hillsdale, Michigan to renovate the church undercroft's 2,021 square feet of space. Work is expected to begin on Monday, February 26, 2024.

The concept for the undercroft is a multi-purpose great room that allows more flexibility for multi-use programming. The project has been nearly two years in planning, design, and feasibility study. The new design elements have incorporated input from all ministry head users.

The scope of the renovation project includes demolition of the existing office, removal of the drop ceiling, installation of new lighting, new windows, the build-out of new closets and a mothers' room, as well as the rehabilitation of restrooms with elegant fixtures, subway tile, and privacy stalls with doors. The design of the entire project has incorporated the highest standards for child protection and safety.

The construction project has a cost cap of \$156K, and its funding has been previously raised. The project's scope, however, is limited to essentials and does not include, for example, a new prep kitchen with appliances, nor a floor treatment, nor other finishing touches of cosmetic beautification. These finishing touches can be added later with additional funding for contract work or done with cost savings by handy volunteer parishioners who are skilled in the building arts and crafts.

Financially, the Parish has had another banner year with gift revenue totaling \$298,091 and very near last's contributions. All in all, revenue exceeded what was forecast by \$55,091.

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. I said this last year. I'm saying it again this year. In many ways I still think of our Parish as a church plant, albeit a church plant in its 35th year. When do we cease being a church plant? I think it's when we become a planting church — a sending church. What steps are necessary for us to become a sending church? Growth. A few more people. Another postulant or two. What do we need to do this year to move us closer toward that goal?

1. We need to improve our existing facilities not only to serve our current ministry needs, but to serve our outreach goals. Some have said that our worship space is the most beautiful in Hillsdale. No one has said that about our undercroft space. It's time for rehabilitation and beautification of the undercroft. Is there any reason our undercroft shouldn't be the most beautiful meeting space in Hillsdale? Image a space and place so cool, that you actually want

to spend time there, not just for Coffee Hour on Sundays, but for mid-week Bible studies, an Anglican book club, “Theology on Tap” rap sessions, Men’s breakfast and bible study, Women’s Lunch Bunch, a local artist’s exhibition, etc. What if our undercroft could be made the coolest meeting space in the city? What if it could be leveraged to serve outreach goals — to bring friends and neighbors for mid-week programming like this and anything else we can creatively image to reach out to others? I think this is what we ought to be aiming for. How can we beautify and leverage the space God has given us to reach others? The construction scheduled to begin on Monday, February 26, is, I pray, only a first step, or perhaps I should say in this Super Bowl season, a first down to what can become a touch down. I would like us to do more to the undercroft to make it a happening place for such kinds of ministry meetings. We already have the design plans and renderings that envision it so. Can we do more? Can we do better? We are well on our way with a prudential and fiscally responsible first phase. But please let’s not stop there. Let’s imagine what more we can do and most importantly, why.

2. We need to learn how to live in exile. The scheduled rehabilitation of the undercroft will displace us for two or three months. Without restrooms and program space for children’s education, we need to find temporary worship and ministry space. We are currently in discussion with the First United Methodist Church about sharing their space for worship and ministry during our self-imposed exile. They are very generous in wanting to help us. In solidarity with the ancient people of Israel, we too will find ourselves removed from our Temple, yet only temporarily. What would exile look like? For a few weeks, including Holy Week, we would be worshipping in the nave and chancel of First United Methodist Church. They are seriously considering allowing us to use their space in the late morning on Sundays, so that we may have our own Anglican Prayer Book service in their church. And their church is well-appointed for us to do so. It has a central aisle, split chancel, pipe organ, and seating for 250 people. It’s so kind of them. Our experience would be our Anglican worship in a different, yet accommodating space, and at a different time. A blessing of such an exile is that we would all fit in their nave, so we wouldn’t need multiple services or have to set up folding chairs. And our children would have Sunday School classrooms. Our Adult Forum Learners would have their own seminar room. So, exile could be pretty comfortable, but hopefully not too comfortable.
3. We need to foster a culture of service. As the Parish grows, we need to break the 20-80 rule. You know what that is. It’s a law that 20% of the congregation do 80% of the work. Sadly, it reflects most congregations. We don’t want it to reflect ours. We must cultivate a spirit of service that includes a consciousness of the gifting of the Holy Spirit. It is the teaching that God distributes gifts to each of us to serve all of us. What that means is that in practice everyone of us has a gift to use for the edification and encouragement of all. The service rule ought to be 100-100: That every member serve the body with his or her gift. There are plenty of jobs to do, and as we grow, more tasks are presenting. With apologies to the late President John F. Kennedy, I say: “Ask not what your Parish can do for you, but ask what you can do for your Parish.” That’s a question, we’ll be happy to answer.

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 facilities and material resources, and better in ministry expansion and execution to touch the lives of others with the love of Jesus, the Christ.

Let us continue to 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, as faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ our Lord.

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