

Hello and warm greetings to all. Missioner Karen Olson, asked me to address you today. I am The Reverend Lee Grim-deacon serving Holy Trinity Episcopal Church at International Falls-- and speaking from Rainy Lake on the US/Canadian Border.

Holy Trinity was served by resident priests as a Mission from 1904 until the late 50s when we became a Parish. Starting in 2002 we developed a non-stipendiary **total ministry team** that was ordained and commissioned in 2006.

Last convention, Bishop Loya outlined four priorities to help shape our future life together as a diocese and congregations.

First, he called us to focus on daily practices that help us follow Jesus as a whole way of life. He said, “**Discipleship is our core business**”. Growing as a disciple of Christ is a lifelong challenge often beset by distraction, opposition or apathy – or all three.

Jim Hill once wrote, “ **Discipleship** is the process whereby a follower of Christ begins to grow. We learn about ourselves and about Christ. We discover God’s plan for our life and begin to develop the gifts God has given us. The Holy Spirit helps us to discover who we are in Christ, how we are too live, and what God wants us to do and what God wants us to become.”

Bishop Loya declared, “Deeply grounding ourselves in discipleship bears fruit:

- through **Faithful Innovation** via boldly embracing a changing church by joining the Holy Spirit in new ways to proclaim and live out the gospel;
- through **Justice** by joining the Holy Spirit in becoming the beloved community;
- and through **Vitality** by growing faith communities where we are planted of every kind, in every place.”

***Bishop Loya articulated, “The question before us is clear: will we, will each one of us, join what the Holy Spirit is doing among and around us?”***

By asking ourselves four simple questions, we can invoke the Spirit to direct our behavior to enact his four priorities.

- Will you Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength?
- Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
- Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?
- Will God deliver us from the presumption of coming to the Eucharistic for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal?

We can also invoke the Spirit upon hearing words of readings, songs and scripture that focus us on the basics of discipleship such as:

- *Know that Jesus has become our cornerstone,*
- *We ought to lay down our lives for one another.*

**Now** I am going to share some of our **narratives** that reveal how our total ministry parish has responded to the Bishop's priorities.

Five years-- before our full-time rector retired in 2000---then Bishop Jelinek encouraged us to develop a **total ministry parish**. He pressed us to become faithfully innovative. Seven years later in 2002, 35 of our 60-member congregation discerned for membership on an eight-member team.

Elected members stepped up and made discipleship the core of our parish's liturgical business. We studied and prayed four years to be ordained and commissioned. Later, new team members also studied with us and were discerned and ordained.

That move to **faithful innovation led to bold changes** in our church. One stipendiary, seminary trained priest was replaced by non-stipendiary team members. We were released from budgets we could no longer meet. We were no longer mainly inwardly focused on money and buildings. We were mentored by Anglican and Episcopal priests and a Lutheran bishop and pastors. Our liturgy was transformed by a new liturgical working group to manage liturgy and music. Artisans handcrafted new vestments, paraments and innovative art works. We committed to four years of Biblical and theological training. We began preacher training and preaching. We became responsible for conducting all of our worship services and lay ministry training. Our registered nurse team member developed pastoral care and lay Eucharistic visitor training activities. Our newest deacon managed the Sunday school and kid's programs. We began to initiate a greater focus on outreach projects outside of the walls of the church.

Bishop Robert Wright of Atlanta, challenged us at Clergy Conference to foster **this idea**--- "That what unites us in friendship and collaboration is a shared simple belief in compassion, in human dignity, in the intrinsic usefulness of every person to contribute positively for a better and more meaningful world. The problems we face cut across conventional categories; so, must our dialogue, and our friendships."

**Justice and becoming a beloved community** came to the forefront in our thinking, planning and implementation about dismantling social injustice in our church and neighborhood. We strengthened our community dialogue leading us to synergistic problem solving with our neighbors.

Bishop William J. Barber described a **breach** when there is a gap in the nation between what is and how God wants things to be-- in Isaiah 58:12. He said, "Transposed to our time, the breach is when we say 'One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all' with our lips, while we see the rich and the poor living in two very different Americas. We must address the five interlocking injustices of systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, denial of healthcare, the war economy, and the false distorted moral narrative of religious nationalism.

**These breaches** must be repaired to bring about revival."

Starting in 2006 the team and parish **began to experiment** with new outreach and social justice agendas. The Reverend Lynn Naeckel, guided us to partner with five faith communities that rotated midweek ecumenical Advent, Lent and summer services that continue today.

We joined many others in the community to establish the Servants of Shelter in Koochiching County in 2009 because homelessness is big problem in our area. HT has sustained our outreach to help SOS secure two homeless shelters and maintain them.

As the diocese promoted the Millennium Development Goals to eradicate poverty and hunger, our members rallied to conduct a series of community dinners to raise funds. Over a period of 8 years, we raised more than \$20,000 for outreach to enhance the lives of the sick, women, hungry and poor.

Food insecurity was a major issue in our area of high unemployment and child poverty. We led in establishing and promoting Ruby's Pantry in July 2015 and donated \$1,500 dollars to start it. Ruby's Pantry is a Christ centered organization that partners with regional food manufacturers, distributors and producers to gather their surplus and overages and turning them into support for families and communities. Ruby's guests here, have donated over \$30,000 in the past six years by bestowing two dollars to a local Benevolence Fund monthly. Those funds have been given to 30 non-profit organizations in the area.

Carl Brown, a local nightclub owner who attended our ordination service came to us in Fall 2006 and said, "I want to sponsor a community Christmas Day Dinner at my business to share the spirit of Christmas. Will you get your team and local churches together to sponsor it." Some churches were suspicious and didn't think they wanted to sponsor a Christmas dinner at a nightclub where people drink, smoke and dance. But what Carl had in mind was to raise money for the local food shelf managed by the Falls Hunger Coalition.

The team, community and churches took Carl's challenge. Three hundred people participated in 2006, from 2007-2019-- >8,000 and 900 in 2020. As a result, over \$50,000 has been raised for the coalition. All dinner food was donated by local businesses and citizens. Businesses, industry and citizens donated money to the coalition in the name of the Christmas Day Dinner. People lonely, alone, homebound, and wanting to be a part of a beloved community, experienced Christmas-- eating, serving and rejoicing together with hundreds of others. Thank you, Carl for your bequest and may you rest in peace!

Backus Junior High School opened 84 years ago and closed in 2002. Thanks to some really dedicated citizens the massive three story, 1937 Art Deco building was not demolished, but transitioned into the Backus Community Center --a new home to community services, arts and cultural programs and youth activities. We supported the efforts of many to save Backus. We also donated \$1,900 to help establish their Community Café to address food insecurity. The twice-weekly "Community Café" served 16,900 free, hot, nutritious meals to children and adults in 2020; and a free Summer Food Service Program served over 9,000 lunches to children in 2020. Our volunteers serve food, cleanup after meals and donate to the café annually.

Our priest, The Reverend Dr. Samantha Crossley started an “Ashes to Go” event on Ash Wednesdays. She and her deacons distribute ashes at community places to willing takers and those who drove-up during the pandemic, while she stood curbside outside the church.

As the team became responsible for discretionary funds, honoraria from their professional services were combined with those canonically received from plate offerings and gifts to the fund. Discretionary outreach donations significantly increased.

We joined with community organizations to host environmental education programs. Fourteen years ago, we began worshiping three times outside in summer at Voyageurs National Park. Team members worked to establish a community garden. Sunday schoolers developed environmental learning projects.

A parish youth placed a poster on the church entry door stating, “This Church is an Inclusive Church which does not discriminate, on any level, on grounds of economic power, gender, mental health, physical ability, race or sexuality.”

***Pride Lives Here*** and ***Hate Has No Home Here*** signs were posted on the lawn. Parish members participate in the Borderland Pride activities, celebrating LGBTQ diversity in our International community. We believe in Church which welcomes and serves all people in the name of Jesus Christ (***and what part of all don't we understand?***).

Adapting to declining numbers and Covid-19 restrictions, we began using new models of gathering to **grow our vitality**. Ten months in June before the pandemic hit, we averaged 20-25 attendees per service. We initiated a virtual worship program on Facebook. Then the pandemic hit, our Canadian members and professional musicians became isolated by border closings and the church closed. But our technologically savvy members and their professional friends modified our Facebook program to include them. Our wonderful talented youth became integrally involved in service prayers, music and managing the computer equipment. Our services are also rebroadcast on local KCC-TV from the Backus Community Center. We began reaching new worshipers not attending our in-church services. Facebook views averaged 136 per service in 2020. Our outreach to others has significantly grown.

We have now reopened our building to worship together again. We will continue our virtual ministry too. Revitalizing team ministry with new members as our **originals** age and retire is one of our major challenges in a small congregation with less members able to step into total ministry.

Our priest, Dr. Crossley said last Ash Wednesday, “Our society, our culture, our secular world tells us that we need to be busy. We need to buy things, to earn money, to protect our own, to secure our legacy, to save up, to power up, to build the walls, to maximize pleasure.” Our secular world tells us, “Almsgiving and prayer and fasting, there’s all the time in the world for that.”

But she also said, “That we are dust, we are the stuff of creation and we are God’s children. She said part of her daily connection with God is to pray the Anglican rosary. An Anglican nun wrote the prayer **physician Sam** prays daily before each work day begins.

“As the movement of my hands and the posture of my body and the palpable physicality of the beads help anchor my meager concentration and my flawed contemplation,

May I take the time to feel your presence today.

May I take the time to hear your voice today.

May I take the time to see your face today.

May I take the time to walk in your path today.

May I take the time to speak your name today.

May I take the time to share your love today.

May I take the time to rest in your grace today.

Jesus, be my guide.”

“The ultimate question Bishop Loya asked us is clear: will we, will each one of us, join what the Holy Spirit is doing among and around us?” Be abundantly thankful and seek the joy in all things! AMEN!