

# Open Arms: A Vision for Holy Trinity

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

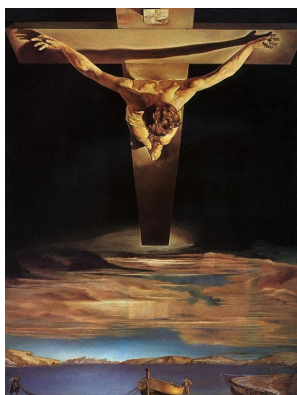
## The Open Arms of Jesus

The crucified one, the prodigal son's return, the resurrected Jesus embracing all: One can't help notice the very open arms of Jesus on the cross. It is really the posture for his whole ministry. It is a posture that communicates, welcome, love, acceptance and vulnerability. It is also the posture those who follow Jesus must emulate.

On Pentecost Sunday, I preached a sermon about embracing this vision; about what challenges we face and actions we need to take to act on that vision, entitled "Driven by the Spirit: The Future of Our Congregation." (You can listen with the play bar below)

The "gist" of what I shared is this:

- Today folks see the church as a place that specializes in the folded arms of judgment. That posture has dismissed, disaffected and disgusted too many people. Whether it is positions on social issues of all kinds that are held up as "litmus tests" for faith or just old-fashioned finger-pointing, the church has alienated



all kinds of people rather than preaching the gospel of grace and forgiveness.

- Folded arms and furrowed brows characterize a kind of "Christianity" that has claimed center stage in our culture, defining all people who follow Jesus as intolerant and judgmental. That posture has closed off ministry to the needy while folks argue over far less important matters. That posture has painted Christ with a brush that covers up the love and grace at the core of the gospel.
- We live in a community where as many as 35,000 people have no relationship to the church

– and the community is growing.

- The opportunity to reach out to that many unconnected people has led to the addition of lots of new congregations. These newer entries into the community have shinier new buildings, can avoid long-standing traditions and attract many. Congregations like ours that have been around awhile contend with more worn facilities and habits that have outlived usefulness.
- People "shop" for congregations like they shop for cars and groceries. That means congregations either have to offer the latest thing OR be very clear and compelling about mission and our reason for being.

So, after four plus years of discerning the values that guide our actions, the beliefs that keep us grounded it is time to embrace a vision of who we are and what we must be as the people of God called "Holy Trinity."

*"Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks, compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.  
Christ has no body now but yours."*

Teresa of Avila  
(1515 -1582)

## What Kind of Congregation Shall We Be?

### THINGS ARE NOT THE SAME

Fifty years ago – even 20 years ago – asking “What kind of congregation shall we be?” referred to denominational affiliation. The answer was: “We shall be Lutheran- or Presbyterian, or some other such tradition.” The only decision people made was, “What flavor Christian are we?” Honestly, most congregations were just different versions of vanilla – not much difference from one place to the next, other than the Lutherans liked lutefisk and stuff like that. The world was homogeneous, so the church was homogeneous. Today, when we ask “What kind of congregation shall we be?” it is a much more complicated process to come up with an answer. Today there are limitless ways of being a Christian congregation; limitless varieties in being Lutheran or Methodist. The question is, “What kind of congregation shall ***THIS*** congregation be?”

Over the last four years we have worked hard, sometimes tediously, to define identity. We spent long



discussions about the **values** that define our actions as a community. We spent more time defining the **core beliefs** we hold that make us Christian in this particular place and time. We have studied our needs and challenges. We have surveyed the population and the way other churches are being church around us. The time has come to define how we answer the question of identity.

### WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

We have learned that there are many, maybe most, congregations who have struggled to answer the question about identity and given up. They hope that by staying the same, keeping the doors open, they will endure the changes, which they believe will fade. We don't think that is realistic.

We have discerned that there are churches around us that want to define themselves by saying who is welcome and who is not welcome. We don't think that describes us. In fact, we have discerned that in our community we need to ask who will welcome the folks who don't always fit?

We have discerned that there are lots of options for people to find worship and programming that reflects the popular culture around us. Many places specialize in worship that is “new and innovative.” We



have come to ask “Who welcomes the people who seek worship in an ancient key, in ways that honor ancient traditions and embrace a relevant message of good news at the same time?”

It seems like there are lots of places who have tuned their message to reach those who are already looking for Jesus, but what congregations try hard to reach the hard to reach, like those who are 20-30; like the less affluent; like the folks who are hungry for food and spiritual connections? Who has open arms for the people Jesus loves – no matter who those people might be?

“What kind of congregation shall ***THIS*** congregation be?”

### WHAT GOD NEEDS US TO BE HERE AND NOW

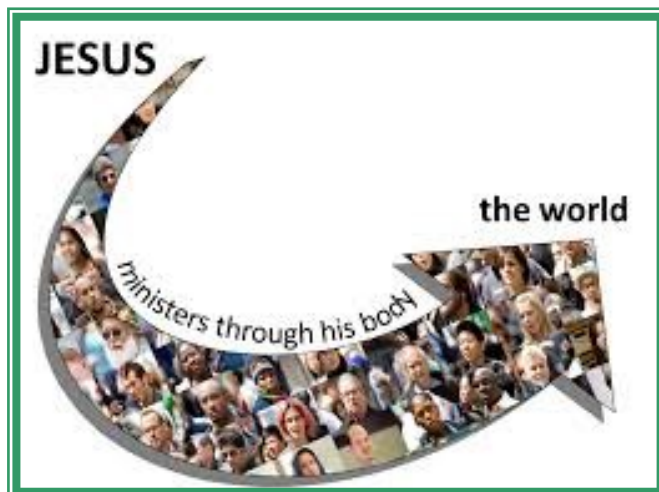
We believe that the Des Moines metro area, and specifically Ankeny, don't need another cookie cutter attempt to give people what they want in the spiritual marketplace. Nor does Ankeny need another congregation committed to preserving its past; to institutional "survival" that ultimately leads to death. Looking at our values, beliefs and our unique identity as the people of God, we propose that Ankeny needs:

- A congregation that **proclaims a message of God's love and grace** revealed in Christ and his people in a way that *seriously* welcomes those who have been unwelcome for a host of reasons; loves those who are hard to love; embraces those who have been beat up by the church's judgmental words; ministers to those who have been, for whatever reason, dismissed disenfranchised, disaffected by, and become disgusted with the church because they did not find good news. A congregation that honors the ancient traditions of the church while it presents them in ever new ways, to an ever-changing community;



- A congregation where people can find not just the latest spiritual fads, but find a **path to spiritual growth and maturity that touches their broken places**, offers meaning and hope for every day, and roots people in a faith that is both ancient and future.

- A congregation that becomes known as **THE place that doesn't just care about the hungry, but makes a difference in their lives**, locally, national and globally and offers those in need the opportunity to be welcomed and grow in faith and the ability to live each day;
- A congregation **that passes on the faith to a new generation in a way that makes a difference** in the lives of the participants and the whole world;
- A congregation that **cares more about growing disciples** than about growth in membership numbers;
- A congregation that **equips people to live and serve in the congregation and the world** according to their gifts and skills instead of the congregation's demands;
- A congregation that **embodies** the open arms of Christ on the cross in all it says and does.



To become this kind of congregation, we face many challenges. We will need to do more than survive to thrive as a missionary outpost for the reign of God. We need to embrace our gifts and God-given identity to then provide a place that offers its own unique contribution to this community.





## Making the Vision a Reality

To become the congregation described, we face many challenges. We will need to do more than survive if we are to thrive as a missionary outpost for the reign of God. Each and all of us will need to become part of what God is doing among us. If we are to be a place that welcomes, we need a space that welcomes. If we are to be a place that worships in with roots in the ancient traditions and has an eye to the future, we need to space that allows us to do so. If we are to reach out to the world and be the place that feeds the hungry, we need space that works for our mission not against it.

### OUR PRIORITIES

Over the next three years, we will need to make these things a priority. We must:

**R**efuse to be defined by what others congregations do or don't do; Refuse to be defined by our memories of the past (no matter how fond); refuse to be defined by our fear of risk, failure, being wrong, or any other source of anxiety. Instead we must claim our identity and mission as defined by our values and beliefs and be the people God has called Holy Trinity to be.



**S**top fretting over perceived scarcity in giving, in volunteers, in leaders, in faith. Stop saying "will there be enough?" and believing there will not be. Instead, we must live into the abundance of a God who promises to provide what we need - including the time, the money and the leaders to move us forward. We have to get re-acquainted and reconnected to the God who made us, redeemed us and sanctifies us with the power of the Spirit through renewed worship, study and prayer that seeks transformation.

**R**enew our 50-year-old worship space so that it does not defeat our open arms vision before we get started. The space itself needs to welcome newcomers; it needs to retain its beauty, but look and work like a 21st century place for worship; the sanctuary "competes" with brand new spaces offered by others and . This includes a worship space that will:

- + Focus us on the three most important parts of our identity - Word, baptism and Holy Communion. That can't happen with a hidden font and multiple places for presenting the Word. We need a font that can be seen and accessed always. We need one pulpit that speaks to the one Word proclaimed.

- + Allow space for musicians (like the praise band, bell choir, and others) to lead worship instead of forcing existing space to work in ways for which it was never designed. The balcony works for some things, but the space up front needs to allow for greater use.

- + Allow leaders to see the content projected on the screen and hear what people say and sing so they don't have to guess and be more effective worship leaders. Right now, leaders can't see or hear and that diminishes our worship.

- + Allow flexibility for large groups to sing, perform, present in the sanctuary without working around rails, lecterns, and other impediments, since we have no alternative space available. A commitment to the choral traditions of our faith means inviting choirs. Music means groups.

- + Through great generosity, we have already been able to allow people to see bulletins, handouts and each

other in a warm inviting space with new lights. We can accomplish the rest!

**R**evitalize our building to reflect open arms of welcome. Our building cannot hinder our commitment to welcome and feed; to worship and transform. We need to repair and remodel facilities so that we provide:

- + Bathrooms on the first floor that are big enough for handicapped people;
- + Bathrooms that don't smell and appear 50 years old.
- + Narthex (lobby) space that says "Welcome" before we utter a word.
- + A roof that does not leak water on the organ and furniture and force worshipers to sit in puddles.
- + Long deferred maintenance items so that it does not appear we are going out of business or can't afford to be open. This includes parking lot sealing, other roof repairs, to mention a couple of items.
- + A kitchen with a stove(s) that does what we need it to do, refrigeration that makes sense, and a dishwasher that is not broken all the time so that we can actually feed the hungry.

**A**ugment our space - we don't have enough room. We need to rent space in the SW part of the community, (where little or no churches are building anything),

*that can house ministry and facilitate growth of hunger ministries, worship venue, adult education, learning for kids or whatever is possible based on the space we find.*

**D**evelop the most aggressive, progressive hunger ministry in the Des Moines area; a ministry that partners with existing agencies and organizations while it expands to meet unmet needs of children, homeless, and underserved people who God loves.

**G**ive - especially financial support - to establish a working mission trust fund that makes grants every year instead of earning a little interest and strengthens our partnerships that feed the hungry, send missionaries, teach seminarians and plant new congregations.

**R**educe our debt while we teach that debt is an effective tool for mission and not to be feared.



## OUR ACTION

To do this, **we will need to raise \$1.2 million over three years** expended as follows:

1. **10% (\$120K) given to our mission partners** (LSI, Mosaic, SE Iowa Synod, World Hunger Appeal) to be a tithe to the Lord - to feed the hungry, support the disabled, help our global partners.
2. **5% (\$60K) to our own Mission Trust Fund** so we can begin to disburse grants, as described in our bylaws, to spread the love of Christ
3. **30% (\$360K) to complete the short-term facilities plan** goals in the sanctuary, kitchen, narthex, bathrooms and other key areas;
4. **33% (\$400K) to provide 2-3 years rent and the development cost** for a space to house ministry at another location to augment space and expand presence in the community.
5. **22% (\$264K) to reduce debt OR** invest in above areas as seems financially prudent.

God is calling us to take up the challenge of a new day, a new era, a new vision in Ankeny, Iowa. With this plan we can embark on the beginning of a blessed journey of faith from wilderness to promised land; from chaos to creation; from death to resurrection. Who is on board? You?



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## Holy Trinity Lutheran Church — Our Vision for the Future

### CORE BELIEFS

God is love that binds together everyone and everything.

God's love is guaranteed for all through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God's love is not earned, but is a free gift to broken people.

God's love is poured out when God's people gather around Word, water, and wine & bread.

God's love is shared abundantly when God's people are the hands, feet and open arms of Jesus.

God's love transforms us to be the people God created us to be.

### CORE VALUES

*Authentic Worship*

*Radical Hospitality*

*Intentional Compassion*

*Extravagant Generosity*

*Spiritual Transformation*

*Fearless Witness*

