

**Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

**Have you noticed that God never works alone?** God always draws people into a relationship with him and the work is done together. God and Adam. The Lord and Abraham. Then God worked mightily through Moses, David, Elijah. And now the Lord is working through his Son Jesus Christ. But God doesn't want to work alone, and so Jesus begins calling men to follow him. Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." **And then Jesus walked a little farther and** saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. <sup>20</sup> Without delay he called them.

**For me the amazing thing is not only did Jesus call out to these ordinary men, fishermen by trade,** but scripture tells us that these men immediately left their nets and followed Jesus. Jesus, knowing all their shortcomings, all their future failures, still reached out and called Simon, Andrew, James and John into a relationship with himself.

**That's what God does, he makes things right as he calls us into a relationship with Him.** We tell God, but I'm not perfect. And God says, "Don't sweat it—I'll make you perfect through my Son Jesus. Just trust in Him." We tell God that I can't speak or teach about Him, and God says, "I'm giving you my Spirit, so that you will have just the right words at just the right time." We tell God that the task at hand is too big, we can't do it...And God just smiles and says, "Trust me. When I get involved, all things are possible."

**This relationship with God and the priceless gifts of forgiveness, of life,** and of the promise of eternal life—that's what Jesus earned for us on the cross. And the amazing thing about these gifts is that Jesus offers them to us freely.

**With the new president and his inauguration this past week and all the self-examination we as a county are doing, Part of today is a celebration of how God has blessed us here at Trinity with amazing gifts of people and facilities.** You can probably list a dozen ways in which our church and school excels: music ministry, inspiring worship, excellent adult choir, adult Bible classes, a top-notch Lutheran Dayschool with gifted teachers and staff, a marvelous church sanctuary, a growing youth program, competent and caring support staff, strong pastoral care and visitation ministry, times of family fellowship and service.

**And all this is for one purpose—to pass on Jesus from one generation to the next.** Everything at Trinity is to respond to Jesus call to us to "Follow me" and to help others follow Jesus. That's our mission—knowing Christ personally and making Him known. Trinity is here to spread the good news that Jesus died on the cross so that all who believe in him will never perish. Our worship services, our Dayschool, our youth and fellowship events, our Bible Studies all focus around this good news. This is what unites us. This is what brings us all together. That's what we celebrate—we are forgiven and loved by God and called to follow Jesus! And that's why we continue as a church and school—to share this message, to pass on this good news through Jesus Christ to our children and our children's children.

**We have been given a priceless gift, a free gift that the Lord has commanded us to share with others.** It's amazing to think, how over 125 years ago, a number of immigrant families came together in the area and organized as a church to call a pastor and to make sure this gift of faith is passed on from generation to generation—even to us today.

**Today, I want to talk with you about the reality Trinity Lutheran Church and School faces in carrying out the task of sharing the faith in the twenty-first century.** That this priceless gift as we are seeking to share it, we need your help.

**For next year, the calendar year of 2009, our church spending guide (and that's what it is, not a budget—it's a plan for how we will spend to do what God has called us to do!) It's a plan for how we are going to use all the resources God has blessed us, people and financial resources, with to share the priceless good news of Jesus Christ)—our church spending guide expects spending to be at \$484,000.**

**Now I know that \$484,000 sounds like a lot of money. It is!** Trinity is planning on investing these offerings for the spreading of God's priceless gift of faith. This past year, 2008, our spending was greater than our income by almost \$29,000. If any of you can give an extra gift for our general operations, we can sure use it now and through the rest of this year!

**I would like to close my message with some Thank You's and with a challenge.**

**First of all, I want to thank all of our members who are giving to the Lord.** In our church directory, we currently have 358 family units—these family units include parents with young children, high school students, single college students, empty nesters, widows and widowers, blended families, single parents with children—but 358 family units. So far this year, families that have given over \$1000 total eighty-eight.

**Sixteen of those 88 family units have given over \$5000.** Thank you. I don't think we in the church say it often enough—thank you for your gifts. I know that you could have used that money to purchase lots of "stuff," but you have given to the Lord. Thank you.

**I also want to thank the 77 family units that have given offerings that total between on average \$3-20 a week (\$156 and \$1040) last year.** Again, thank you for your gifts and for the sacrifices you have made, the times you have said, no, in order to give your offering to the Lord. Thank you!

**I also want to thank the 124 family units who have given up to \$156 (between \$1-\$3 a week).** Thank you. I know that in some situations, these gifts are truly sacrificial giving, if you are one of these family units—thank you for your gifts to the Lord's service.

**Of our 358 family units, we did not receive any offerings for the 2008 calendar year from 69 families.** Now perhaps, some of you give your offerings in cash and we just don't know the gifts you have given, if you are one of these—thank you.

**I also know that there are individuals and families that may not be able to give as much as they would like,** but they give of their time and talents—they sing in the choir, they mow the grass of our church, they volunteer around the church and school. Thank you for those gifts of your energy and life.

**At the same time, I want to challenge you to step up.** I encourage you to increase what you give to build God's Kingdom. Our congregation will grow as we find ways to move more families to give. Over half of our family units give under three dollars a week. I know we can do better. Prayerfully consider what you will give to the Lord so that this priceless gift of faith may be shared with the next generation of children.

**May the Lord work in you and with you and through you as together we know Christ personally and strive to make Him known to others! Amen.**