

At the end of last Sunday's 10:30 service,  
while some of us were looking for leftover doughnut holes and hot coffee,  
Stacy Reece was busy taking down the flowers from the Nave  
and dividing them out into 4 smaller arrangements.

Judy Skinner picked up those 4 arrangements and took them  
to folks from HTP who were going through a tough time.

By the way, there are a lot of good ways to serve God at Holy Trinity,  
but if you ever want my vote for Most Valuable Ministry,  
it's going to be serving like Judy does as a lay pastoral captain.



While Judy was driving around DeKalb County Sunday afternoon,  
people from DeKalb County were driving to Holy Trinity,  
bringing carloads of food and toiletries to our parish hall.

PORCH is a ministry started just a few years ago by Hope Baker,  
Barbara Hardin, and, of blessed memory, Dot Moye.

It's turned into a really joyous monthly event.  
People leave food & toiletries on their porch and then  
neighborhood captains bring it all to HTP where a group of folks  
unload their cars and sort out the donations.

When I came in on Monday morning 2 or 3 tables  
and all of the pews on one side of Tisdale Hall were piled full  
of food & toiletries to be given away, most of it through DEAM.

And by the way,

we talk about these donations like they're our leftovers,  
but when you actually look at what's given,  
95% of it is stuff people bought just to give away.



That same Monday morning I was looking over the donations  
our preschool director was in there making sure the donations  
were off to one side so the kids could use Tisdale Hall  
for their gathering space.

I suppose our preschool has gone a little upscale over the last several years.  
We have a few families who receive scholarships  
and we're honored to give them, but most of the families  
our preschool serves are not among the working poor.

It would be easy to see that and not think of our preschool as outreach.  
But here's the thing: FAMILIES may have economic security,  
but ALL children are incredibly fragile.

Every child struggles to develop and grow,  
no matter how much money their families have.

Every child is susceptible to emotional, intellectual, and sensory issues,  
to developmental delays, and good old fashioned homesickness.

It's hard to be little, to try and grow up and use your words  
and understand that your Mama or Daddy really is  
coming back later in the day.

That's why our preschool's mission is for every child  
to feel loved and safe and valued.

All other learning is secondary to that mission.

Those brains are working overtime and no matter how much money  
their parents have, every child needs the love and security  
our preschool gives them.



While those children were running around the first and second floors,  
a group of grown-ups were gathering on the plaza.

Our sack lunch ministry started about 14 years ago  
when your interim rector, Mother Joan,  
wanted the volunteers to have something to give people  
when we couldn't give them the help they needed.

Over the years that ministry has really grown.  
Our office volunteers have come to know and care about  
the regulars who come by,  
and some of our volunteers say the best part of their work  
is giving out those sack lunches.

One parishioner thought it was so important for us to provide this ministry  
that she personally funded it for years.

In addition to her pledge.

Now Christian Foster is taking over the ministry from our parish  
administrators because it has grown so much it was keeping them  
from getting the rest of their work done,  
and Christian is going to be recruiting even more volunteers to help.



Down in the courtyard where we worshipped during Covid,  
still more people gathered at Holy Trinity last week,  
some to serve and others to be served.

Decatur Emergency Assistance Ministries, or DEAM,  
is in some ways THE signature ministry of Holy Trinity.

But what makes it so great is that it's not just us.  
Lots of different people make that ministry go,  
and we provide the place for it to happen.

DEAM gathers food and money from a bunch of different churches  
and provides a central location for people to come & receive groceries  
and help with rent and utilities.

About 30 years ago that central location didn't exist.  
It was an outdoor space with nothing but an overhang.  
Y'all built the office and storage space especially for DEAM  
to welcome people in need.

We still provide that space at no cost, and we still have board members  
and volunteers, and we still make financial donations and about 95%  
of what PORCH gathers goes to DEAM,  
and starting in Advent we're bringing back  
another great practice that went away during Covid.

When y'all come on Sunday remember to bring a food donation for DEAM.  
The little red wagon is coming back for you to put it in  
and when we bring our money offering up to the altar at 10:30  
we'll bring that food donation up as well.



Now, while all those people were in our courtyard, preschool,  
and reception area last week,  
Ellen Gallow, Dawn Diedrich, and Ellen Bishop were  
putting their heads together through a flurry of emails  
to figure out how we were going to help our unhoused  
neighbors when it got down below freezing.

Two winters ago they took the money y'all raised  
and put people in hotels on cold nights.  
Then last winter they helped organize and support  
the freeze shelter that First Methodist had in their gym.

This year they're working a wonderful city employee named Greg White  
to see if we can help Decatur provide some additional  
warming centers on those long, cold nights.



And while THOSE emails were flying back and forth,  
I was texting Ed Buckley, inviting him to next week's vestry meeting,  
to tell about the clean water project in Haiti he's raising money for.

Food for the Poor asked Ed to raise money for a clean water system  
for an orphanage in Haiti, but he came back with a counter-offer:  
let's give clean water to the whole community.

He's already raised \$40,000 and I think the vestry is going to find  
that voting to give Water-Life-Hope the last \$10,000 they need  
will be the easiest vote they take all year.



A few other things happened last week:

On Sunday morning the Gift of God Eritrean Church  
was worshipping in our Chapel,  
just like they've been doing for the last decade.

On Tuesday Tisdale Hall was an election site,  
and on Wednesday the Nave and the parking lot were packed  
when Little Shop of Stories held a book reading here.

Strange sounds were coming from the first floor  
of the Comer Center last week, but that was just Emily Damrel,  
who worships here at 10:30, teaching her music class there.

Sometimes when I hear those sounds I'll look out my office window  
and not only see people getting instruments out of their cars  
but also see some parents with their kids playing in our playground.

On Saturday Nicotine Anonymous held its weekly meeting in the Comer Ctr.  
and a man named Charles Hutton was giving a piano recital  
in the Nave for his students.



And finally, a word about your senior warden.

Last week Cindy Stein was in the checkout line at Kroger  
with a buggy full of groceries, when the woman behind her,  
who was clearly not living her best life,  
starting griping at Cindy for not having reusable grocery bags.

Cindy didn't have the energy to tell that woman that she DID have reusable bags but forgot them in her car,  
because Cindy was rushing to buy this food so that she could cook meals for like 3 different ministries,  
AND that she was trying to get it all done quickly because she was also on call to be the birthing partner of a young woman at Casa Alterna named Adri,  
and Cindy had promised Adri if she went into labor this weekend, Cindy would be there with her.

And of course, Adri did go into labor this weekend.

And Cindy, despite not speaking Spanish,  
rushed right over to be there with her, and got to support her as beautiful little Mariani arrived in the world at 3:30 Saturday morning. (Whew)



Jesus told a story about 3 people who were given certain resources.

The first two took those resources and went out into the world,  
and took risks, and used them to make a difference.  
And because they had been both wise and bold  
they were given more responsibilities and more resources.

The third person was afraid. Afraid of his master and afraid of the world,  
because he believed them both to be harsh and merciless.

He hid the resources away until he could give them back untouched.

And because he saw his master and the world in such a way,  
the fearful man's vision was fulfilled:  
he was cast away into the same darkness he'd always imagined  
was out there waiting for him.



I've told a lot of Holy Trinity stories this morning,  
but we are not special. We are not unique.

You could tell a similar story about Church of the Epiphany,  
or First Baptist, or All Souls Chapel, or Decatur Presbyterian,  
or First Christian, or St. Thomas More, or First Methodist,  
or just about any church you could think of.

A lot of our members have lived at Philips Tower,  
which was built by the Presbyterians,  
and at Claremont Oaks, which was built by First Baptist.

You could walk down to Threshold Ministries and see  
a master class in Christian hospitality and service,  
or you could volunteer at Hagar's House w/ Decatur Cooperative Ministries,  
or help people transition into stable housing  
w/ A Home for Everyone in DeKalb,  
or help break the cycles of domestic abuse  
with the Women's Resource Center.

We are not special. We are not unique. This is what Christians do.



There are a thousand reasons to look at the world and despair.  
To use the resources you've been given to cut yourself off  
from a harsh and evil world,  
to take a position of disgust and fear towards all of it.

Jesus invites us to a different way.



Jesus invites us to take whatever we have been given  
and to use it in the world. To take risks.

To engage with the world and make a witness to God's goodness  
by helping anybody we can.



Cast away the works of darkness, St. Paul says,  
the works of indifference and cynicism and separatism...  
and put on the breastplate of faith,  
faith that YOU can make a difference in someone's life.

Put on the breastplate of love, he says,  
love for the people who are hurting & need someone to be with them.

Let that faith and love be God's protection for your tender heart,  
so that it would not fall into cynicism and despair.

Encourage one another, Paul says, and build each other up,  
as indeed you are already doing.

Amen.