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Returning to Work

How does someone 'return to work' exactly?

The short answer: *very, very carefully.*

The good news is, your amazing church council, the "Return to Work Committee", and I have been working together to devise a supportive and healthy return to work for me. Once some of the insurance details are finalized, the hope is I will return to actively being your pastor on Friday, September 26th (the day after my short-term disability ends). It will be so good to finally share community with you all once more. I have certainly missed you!

That said, it will be not just a rather good idea for me to take things slowly. It's going to be pretty vital and required. Traumatic brain injuries (TBI) require a long healing journey. Add to that, they often leave injuries highly individualized to each person who suffers them. Some impacts are fairly common for a lot of people, and other impacts look different to each person. The reality for every person with a TBI: *time*.

My temptation to do all the things all the time will be strong. I miss being a pastor! I miss my calling. I MISS MY LIFE! But, as my supportive family doctor is teaching me, doing too much too soon will inevitably cause what's known as a "brain crash". Doing too much too soon won't just cause exhaustion, but will drain any brain chemical balances that are struggling to come back to normal; it will aggravate the damaged relationship between my sympathetic and parasympathetic

nervous systems, and suddenly my mental health will take a dive because I'll be depressed and anxious over being unable to get out of bed; and whatever pool of energy was building within me will be on drought season for a time. These breakdowns are known as a "brain crash" for those of us with TBIs.

The good news around such a state is that they don't last forever. A crash doesn't mean my injuries are suddenly getting worse. It just means I need to take better care of myself by listening to my body. My mind and heart might be tempting me to return to ALL of my life. And that's okay! After a near-death accident, every single one of us aches to get back to the life we once had! This is normal and totally understandable. But my mind and my heart need to listen to my body first and foremost.

My GP has been very kind and clear in sharing this lesson with me. Your current church council chair, Deena, has also been protective and compassionate in saying very similar words. Even the former pastor of Trinity, Pastor Ingrid, has made sure to remind me: *listen to your body*. God is ensuring that this precious message of care is being shared with me from all over the world.

To that end, my return will start at part time (likely fifty percent). The Return-to-Work committee is helping establish some safe working situations so that my sensory condition is supported rather than overloaded (lamps in my office so I don't need to rely on fluorescent lighting, for example).

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Our amazing pianist/organist Cherie Larson knows that, as much as I had wanted to sing with the choir this year, I can't sing right now. Why? My singing voice bounces around like thunder inside my skull. It is so LOUD to me right now that it is painful. I have been to a church service once since being on leave and I had to sing the hymns and songs in a tiny whisper. That was the only way I could participate without causing pain. (I have an audiology appointment with a fantastic ears/nose/throat specialist on September 22, so hopefully I'll start getting some more focused support for my ears!).

So no choir participation...yet. I just need to give the brain inflammation more time to go down. There will be little set ups and decisions like these that will help me transition back into work. When I visit with you all after church services, I will likely stay in the sanctuary space because the echo chamber that the Atrium becomes causes a lot of hearing overwhelm. I will be

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sure to communicate such things with you all so we can share in this journey together.

My return to full time work then will be largely determined on how my body heals. I will remain in constant contact with my medical care team, and the professionals will continue to assess my progress. Once my body begins to tell me and the team that I could begin to add more work hours into my life, I can share with you a return to full time date. For now, I will start the return slowly and carefully.

For you, this means continuing to offer me patience. Since I will have only part time hours to start, I am happy to schedule a visit with you. However, that visit might be scheduled for a week or two down the road. Everyone is going to want to catch up with me somehow. So bear with me as I try to reconnect while using a more limited schedule.

It has been a very hard season these past few months. But I keep returning to one of my favourite characters from the stories of Jesus: and that's Mary Magdalene. She was a woman wrongly silenced and painted incorrectly for being a sexual priestess or prostitute of some sort. Yet she is the one who first

witnesses the resurrection of new life. She is the one who suffers both the trauma of watching her friend (and possibly lover) suffer and die; and she is thrust into good news and hope. She must have been overwhelmed for a long, long time. Yet she was the one who kept going. She loved her friends, family, and community so much that all that grief and love, that trauma and hope – all of these strange, opposing forces, dwelling honestly within her, compelled her with strength and depth far past what the disciples could understand.

We will journey through this season together, dear friends. Whatever happens and however life plays out, we will share this together; we will deepen love and understanding, hope and imagination. Together.

Oh, by the way, if anyone is wondering: DARK chocolate. It's always the dark chocolate (thanks in advance). ;)

And with that small moment of humour, I will bid farewell for now and a "I will see you very soon, dear friends."

Amen.

Bishop's Message



September 2025 Message for Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear church,

Just a few days ago I returned, tired, from the CLAY Gathering in Saskatoon, where youth from across Canada, from both Lutheran and Anglican congregations, gathered for play and worship.

I say, "tired," because it's a challenge to keep up with the energy and passion of our young people! They were up early and still at play until midnight each day. The CLAY Planning Team did an excellent job of coordinating a wide diversity of activities and faith-filled worship.

More important than being kept busy – our young people are keenly interested in faith. They ask great questions and are yearning for their place in our ministries. Quite honestly, we simply get in the way too often. Sometimes "youth" are the last thing on a budget or on a council's agenda. With the decline in our churches - and the noticeable absence of young people in many cases – we need to prioritize young people. It's time for our communities to work intentionally to support ministry of camps, universities and youth/young adults in our churches; it's time to ex-

periment with varied worship in style and day or time.

At the National Convention this summer in Winnipeg, young adult delegates put forward a motion to form their own council across Canada. This work has already begun. I will be proposing the same idea to our own Synod Council in October. The idea is to be intentional about affirmation and inclusion in this new way that we might all be encouraged.

What could you do differently? Try a good old Google search for ideas! It's ok for young people to experiment, make mistakes and learn along the way. Young people also have excellent skills and ideas on their own – we just need to ask them – and then let them try, even if it's not perfect. I challenge you to make space for them. Councils and worship committees, quilting groups and property committees.

I challenge you to start your September in a new way with open eyes and hearts. I believe in you – that you love these young hearts and want to see them flourish. September blessings in these acts of faith!

Keep singing,

Bishop Irish

What's Next

Pastor Sigmar Reichel

Before answering what will happen from now on my wife, Gertrud, and I should comment on our years at Trinity Church.

First of all, we want to thank God for giving us the opportunity to live and work with this congregation for more than four years. It was a time of fulfillment and making new friends. The spirit of fraternity reigned throughout. We want to thank each member welcoming us with so much love, and accepting us with our weaknesses and challenges.

We are grateful for the support of the worship preparation team, as well as the Church Council, which has not had an easy work this past year, and has had difficult decision-making situations.

In December 2024, I informed the board of my decision to retire in October 2025, a decision I confirmed during the General Assembly at the end of February this year. However, due to the tragic accident with our senior pastor, which made her unable to serve the congregation for a while, I took on some services in English until an interim Pastor was found. And in order to relieve the council of further concerns, I decided to extend my time of activities with the German congregation until June 2026, taking over however, only 25% of the activities.

Now **What's Next?** Again, before commenting on anything, I want to express the same faith as the psalmist, when he says: **I put my life into your hands. I know that you will save me, Lord, because you are a God that I can trust.** (*Psalm 31:5*) God has truly guided and accompanied us throughout these years, we believe that he will give us the best. Now, on our personal side, we would like to continue with the idea we had when I first retired in 2019 and Covid prevented us from doing so, to get to know more about the beautiful country that welcomed us so well. Spending more time with our family, especially since our grandchildren are now at an age where we can do a lot together, was also a big priority. One grandson, for example, is constantly inviting me to go fishing. Some of the grandkids invite us to play games with them, or to build some small pieces of furniture that they have envisioned, but don't know exactly how to use the tools and how to put everything together. Two of the grandkids enjoy cooking and baking with Oma Gertrud.

We are very sure that we will have many new experiences and time to spend with our grandchildren. We are looking forward to spend more time with them, enjoying their company also on the holydays, so that they know that Opa and Oma are always available for them.

Next year in June I am going to celebrate my 50th

graduation anniversary from the Theological Faculty in Sao Leopoldo, Brazil. When I look back to these 50 years after my studies, I realize that my wife and I received so many blessings! Some of them were really unexpected and only later, when we thought about

some of the happenings, we realized that God was always on our side helping, guiding and comforting us! Even coming to Canada and serving as a



pastor in a different country, with a new language, new challenges, that was not an easy task! It was not an easy decision to leave our extended family and friends behind, even our house and belongings!

Thank you to Our Summer Musicians

This summer, as for the last 23 years, Cherie Larson our organist organized volunteers to beautify our summer services with their music.

We want to thank the following for their contribution this summer:

- Aaron Addorisio: Director, Trinity summer choir
- Elliot and Theodore Bentum, violin
- Anne Campbell, Soprano
- Janet Dougan, Cello
- Bonnie Gregory, violin
- Clara Knoefel, Piano
- Shauna Krismer, Piano and handbell director
- Cherie Larson, Violin and piano
- Ramona LeDressay, Violin
- Maggie Melax, soprano
- Gerald, Giovanni, Felicia Simanjuntak: piano
- Callum Stoik, trombone
- Trinity Ringers
- Chloe Zhu, Viola



Reflections on a Summer at Trinity

I am grateful for my experience volunteering at the Trinity Lutheran Church. I know when I was younger, I loved attending services during holidays, such as Christmas or Easter; so it was an environment I was very comfortable working in. I checked the mail, helped edit both the online newsletter sent out every

Friday and its physical counterpart, and organized many files. My favorite part was conversing with new people I hadn't met before, and I loved the scenic walks I took on my



way to the church and back. I love summer vacation, but it doesn't feel right spending it all at home, so I was happy to hear that my help would be appreciated at the church.

Right now, I'm in my last year of high school at Harry Ainlay, which means many assignments, projects, and scholarships to apply for. Currently, I'm the president of my school's Model UN club, which consumes a significant portion of my time, alongside volunteering at my local library, serving as a Youth Water Council member dedicated to maintaining the health of our North Saskatchewan River, and holding other roles.

In my spare time, I enjoy sketching by hand while listening to a large variety of music (except country!), doing crossword puzzles, or going down a history rabbit hole.

Regarding the future, I'd love to pursue a degree in Political Science/Economics, or anything to do with public policy. I'm not sure whether I'll stay here in Edmonton or move east – only time will tell! However, I hope to maintain connections with my French and German, as well as visit Romania after a seven-year hiatus.

Ilinca Tomuța

What's next? Council Chair Update

As we transition from summer to the beginning of fall, the start of school, and the onset of fall activities, September always feels like the beginning of a new year. Trinity's kick off to this new year just took place with our joint service and potluck on September 14. As always, this was a great opportunity to catch up with each other and find out how the summer went as well as giving us an opportunity to share food with our neighbours. Many thanks to all who volunteered their time to make this event possible!

In keeping with a "new year" theme, there are some other changes happening this fall. Council has been delighted to have Pastor Prema Samuel join us at Trinity on an interim basis, helping to cover Pastor Erin's leave of absence. We are grateful to be able to work with her for the next few months, and also deeply grateful for Pastor Erin's ongoing recovery and her anticipated part time beginning of a gradual return to work. As we plan to welcome Pastor Erin back, I want to acknowledge the Personnel Committee and Mutual Ministry Committee for assisting with the work to put in place supports and accommodations that she will need as her healing continues. What an astonishing gift to be able to be doing this planning mere months after such a serious injury – thanks be to God! As details are confirmed about the dates and times of this return, we will keep you all informed.

Finally, we have another change approaching this fall as we anticipate Pastor Sigmar's reduction from half time to quarter time starting in November. We are grateful for all that he and Gertrud have given to Trinity and thankful that we will be able to continue to work with them until June of next year. Pastor Sigmar will continue to preside over one German service per month and Pastor Andrea Wilhelm will provide supply preaching for a second German service every month beginning in November. We also are grateful to have Pastor Sigmar working with Agnes Melax on transitioning the leadership of the German Seniors Group to her over the next eight months. We will continue to work with the congregation on longer term planning for what German ministry at Trinity might look like going forward in the future.

On the theme of "What's Next", I also wanted to provide an update on the strategic planning process we discussed at our AGM in February. In the spring, we requested several quotes from consultants to support this planning, and had chosen a consultant to work with on putting together an approach for this work. With Pastor Erin's leave of absence however, we paused our discussions. We plan to move forward with next steps once we reach a period of greater stability, and we will share additional information then.

As always, thank you to all at Trinity for being part of this community of faith and for the many ways that you give of yourselves to each other and to the neighbours around us.

Deena Hinshaw

Finding Grace in the Midst of Recovery

By Pastor Erin

It was a beautiful, sunny day, and I was on my way to visit a couple from Trinity. I had even stopped to pick up cookies for them. While crossing the street - in a marked crosswalk, with the lights flashing - I was struck by a car.

I don't remember the accident or much of the next week as I lay in the hospital and doctors worked to understand the extent of my injuries. The list was sobering: two skull fractures, three brain contusions, one brain bleed, a broken ankle, and scrapes all over my body. In those early days, no one knew how serious things would be. After many tests, my neurologist shared hopeful news: with time, I should make a full recovery.

Those first weeks were not easy. I was extremely dizzy and nauseous because the accident had shifted the crystals in my inner ears. The physiotherapists had to flip me back and forth repeatedly to move them back into place. On top of that, I developed pneumonia during my hospital stay.

Eventually, I transferred to the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital, where I began the hard work of healing. At first, I was in a wheelchair, then progressed to a walker, and finally a cane. I worked hard because my goal was to leave the hospital and continue my recovery at my parents' home. My mom, a retired nurse, knew exactly how to care for me. From there, we drove back and forth to Glenrose for therapy sessions. Progress was slow but steady. Three months after the accident, my physiotherapist said I had achieved the kind of progress they would normally expect at six to nine months. My doctor called my healing an "unexplained miracle."

Even so, recovery is ongoing. Traumatic Brain Injury takes time. I still have no sense of smell or taste. The pressure in my ears remains, especially on the left, where my hearing feels muffled, like sound coming through a thick blanket. My energy fades quickly, so I'm learning to pace myself. And I'm still waiting for the all-clear to drive again.

Returning to Ministry

What does this mean for church life? At the end of September, I will return to work half-time. I am eager to be back, but my doctor has made it clear: I must listen to my body and not do too much too soon. My priority is to keep healing strong.

Here's what that will look like:

- I will work mostly from home, with limited time in the church office.
- I'll need rides to and from church on Sundays and for other commitments.
- My office will have softer lighting and an ergonomic chair.
- I will sit more than before and use a handheld microphone during worship.
- After the service, I will visit in the sanctuary instead of the atrium (it's quieter).
- Evening meetings are a challenge, so I will schedule rest carefully on those days.

How You Can Help

- If you want to be sure I hear you, stand on my right side.
- Please be mindful of illness around me, as my immune system is weak right now.
- I limit screen time, especially later in the day. If it's urgent, call instead of texting.
- Pastoral visits will often happen by phone or video for now, and I've arranged a private space for those conversations.

Reflections from the Journey

This experience has given me much to think about. Here are a few of the truths that have grounded me:

- The human body is incredible - complex, resilient, and sometimes mysterious. (For example, why did falling backward take away my sense of smell?)
- The brain works hard to heal itself, and so much of that is beyond our control.
- Sometimes it's your turn to receive love and care. That can be hard for a pastor, but it is holy work too.
- God doesn't always stop the hard things from happening. Instead, God shows up - holding space for all the feelings that come with something sudden and unfair. Anger, grief, gratitude, and hope can all live side by side.
- God loves this body of mine - when it is strong, when it is fragile, and every stage in between. I'm learning to love it, too.
- I am beloved by God in every chapter of my story. And so are you.

Thank you for your prayers, your patience, and your care as I continue to heal. I am so grateful to be on this journey with you.

Called into Worship

Come, praise the Lord - Psalm 134:1-2

Upcoming Worship Opportunities

Regular Worship:

- English Service: 11 AM
- German Worship: 9:30 AM on the second and fourth Sundays every month

Special Services:

- Sunday October 12 -- Thanksgiving Sunday,
 - 9:30 AM German service
 - 11:00 AM English Service with Holy Communion
- Sunday November 23 - Christ the King Sunday & Remembrance of Loved Ones,
 - 9:30 AM German service with Holy Communion
 - 11:00 AM English Service with Holy Communion

Other Special Events/Dates:

- Sunday, October 5 -- Cemetery Service, 1:00pm
- Sunday, October 26 -- Mulhurst Annual Meeting @ Mulhurst Camp, 1:30pm
- Sunday, October 26 -- Citywide Choir Event @ Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, 7:00pm

Other Fellowship/Worship Opportunities:

- German Seniors Group - first Tuesday every month (note change to first Tuesday - next meeting October 5) - 1 PM
- German Choir - rehearsals Tuesdays at 1 PM
- English Choir - rehearsals Wednesdays at 7:30 PM
- After Service Faith Discussion - Every third Sunday - 12:20 - 2:00 PM (Social room)

Welcome Pastor Prema

Pastor Prema Samuel has joined Trinity as our Interim Pastor for the next few months as a support during Pastor Erin's time of healing. Pastor Prema started with us at the end of August and will be working at 75% of full-time for now. She will help to plan and will preside over English worship services and will support other congregational needs, such as TLW's Bible study, confirmation classes, and pastoral counselling as needed. Pastor Prema has graciously agreed to stay on with a reduced FTE over the next few months to supplement Pastor Erin as she manages her gradual return to full time work.



Pastor Prema leading worship



Fall Kickoff Picnic (more pictures on page 8)

Refugee Sponsorship

Together Our Churches Have the Opportunity to Make a Difference

Background

In 2019, Trinity Lutheran Church, working with Glory Lutheran, Holy Spirit Lutheran, Holy Trinity Anglican and family already living in Edmonton, submitted a request through CLWR to sponsor the Salloum-Alasass Family, a Christian family from Syria. After 4 years, Alaa, Nada and son Ghassan arrived in Edmonton to be reunited with family here. They have now settled into life in Edmonton, welcomed another son into their family, are self-sufficient and maintain a close relationship with the sponsorship committee.

Appeal for Support

Our Inter-Church committee has received a further request for urgent help from the Salloum-Alasass family to sponsor their 3 sisters, single women from Syria, Katia, Reem and Hala. With the recent government takeover, the safety of these young women is threatened. The women have fled Syria and are currently in Lebanon awaiting refugee sponsorship. \$15,000 is required for the sponsorship of each woman, money collected will be held in trust by CLWR until they arrive.



Katia Alasass

Katia, 24, is a sister to Nada. She was living with her parents in Syria and attending university. Katia was forced to leave Syria in February 2025, along with her sister Reem, after the fall of the Assad regime. She was targeted for being a single Christian woman. Katia was also the victim of an attempted kidnapping. She was approached and grabbed by a suspect on a motorbike but managed to pull away from him. She and her sister fled the country two days after this incident. Katia and her sister are now living together in Lebanon and unable to work legally. They cannot remain in Lebanon as there is no asylum program to apply for and cannot return safely to Syria. Katia's hope is to reunite and live with family in Canada.



Reem Alasass 27

Reem, 27, is a sister to Nada. She was living in Syria and completed a 2-year teacher preparation program. She was forced to leave Syria in February 2025, along with her sister. Like Katia, Reem was targeted for being a single woman and for her Christian faith. A kidnapping attempt of her sister was the last straw in making the decision to flee. Reem and Katia are living together and seek undocumented work to survive. They receive some money from family in Canada.



Hala Salloum 37

Hala, 37, is a sister of Alaa. She was living in Syria by herself. She was forced to leave her country in March 2025 after the takeover by opposition forces. Her area became dangerous and Hala lived in fear that she would be targeted. Hala worked as a grade 1 teacher for 11 years and recently was only able to go from home to work and back, and after 5:00 p.m. she could not leave her house. Hala is now in Lebanon, living with Katia and Reem. Hala prays to be reunited with her brother Alaa and family and dreams of being a teacher in Canada.

How to Help:

- Make a donation at Trinity, using a special Refugee Sponsorship envelope (in the Atrium), using your regular envelope or donate directly through your bank using interac e-transfer (donation@trinity-lutheran.ab.ca)
- **CLEARLY MARK your donation for the Trinity Refugee Fund**, your donation will be included on your annual giving record and tax receipt.
- Any questions can be forwarded to contact person Rosanne Thede at rosanne.thede@gmail.com.
- Total amount will be sent to CLWR to hold in trust.
- Pray for this sponsorship effort and for the three women we hope to bring to safety – Katia, Reem and Hala.

Fall Kickoff Picnic (September 14)



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The Team is intended to serve the members of Trinity Lutheran Church as a comprehensive communications tool. The editors welcome your comments or questions. Please submit all Team articles, information, comments or questions to: Trinity Office

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