



Trinity Team

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God's Gift of Absence

In our worlds, absence has become a hallmark of distress. We struggle with feeling abandoned and neglected when the people we love the most don't show up or can't show up; we celebrate absence in pools of relief when someone who has caused us harm is finally gone; and we grieve changes in our lives when suddenly we aren't dwelling in spaces that were once our most precious homes. For so many reasons, absence is feared, loathed, and held at arms' length.

Such distress is very human. In who we are as social creatures, it is very normal to struggle with absence in these ways. That said, they are not the only expressions of absence in our worlds. Absence, when practiced safely and well, can actually serve to nurture greater connection and love even when all seems lost.

In the spiritual care sector, clergy and chaplains of all faith traditions are taught how to embody both the ministry of presence and the ministry of absence. The ministry of presence is the service we are most familiar with: the pastor shows up, the pastor offers care and compassion, the pastor prays, the pastor offers the sacraments, the pastor remains physically present along with whoever is needing this type of support.

However, the pastor is not the only person needing to share expressions of love, grace, and support. Family, friends, neighbours, medical teams, and other faces of community all need time and space with people

needing love and care. When a clergy person is over-relied upon, it can create a power dynamic that actually snips those ties other than the single one between the pastor and the person. It is a good and healthy thing for a pastor to be fully present in the moment, but then to also read the room and become aware of both other supports (or where other supports aren't readily available, thus requiring a care team to be created). It helps community to thrive. It helps pastors learn to step away.

To practice absence.

In doing so, even people who are hurting can slowly rediscover the many faces and forms of God's love in the world. The spiderweb of community love is strengthened, healed, and given new life. When a caregiver of any kind is able to embrace the web of love rather than trying to be the single presence in a person's life, new life is given nutrients to thrive.

In the same way, it does feel at times that God has also stepped out of the room. We live through times of deep depression, anger, distress, abandonment, confusion, apathy, hopelessness, frustration, and all sorts of dark nights of the soul where it seems like God is gone. Nowhere to be found. Just gone.

It's at this point I would offer a words of encouragement: God has never left entirely. Rather, God is embodied in ways we haven't recognized yet. We have become so overly attached and reliant on the faces and forms of the God we know (or believe we know), that when those divine



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experiences vanish, we believe God to have vanished altogether too.

Not so.

God is simply stepping out of the rooms we're in so that we can learn to recognize God's love and compassion and presence in ways we can't even imagine yet. It can feel like we're being abandoned, neglected, or sent down terrible rabbit holes of grief. But in such moments, absence actually serves to awaken our awareness within us. To look around, to explore, to dare to be curious, to ask questions, and to reach out towards the hand beside us. Absence, when dancing with presence, is a fierce, powerful, and even awe-inspiring face of love.

It can hurt, though. Especially when the absence of God collides with absence of family or friends. We tend to meld all of it into the same pot of despair or apathy. Just like an overdose of presence can cause damage, absence can also cause damage when it is seen only through a singular lens. But our invitation here is...truly...to **fall**.

To allow ourselves to fall down those rabbit holes of fear and confusion. To allow the familiar faces of God to step away. To allow the brokenness to rise up, even when it seems like that brokenness has suddenly become our only human defini-

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Bishop's Message



March , 2026

Dear family of God,

Why do we exist? (part 2) Recent events in Minneapolis have provided affirmation of Christian vocation in times of crisis. We are called to always be ready to stand up against unjust practices and to proclaim God's love-- sometimes even at great personal risk.

January 23, clergy of multiple denominations gathered in Minneapolis to embody resistance to the presence of ICE officers. The Rt Rev. A. Robert Hirschfeld, Presbyterian Bishop of New Hampshire, advised his clergy to get their affairs in order and have their wills written. Why? Because when we stand up against malevolent forces in the world, things happen.

As we approach the season of Lent, we are reminded that faith calls for personal sacrifice. We willingly give of our finances, our abilities and our time. As Jesus did, we seek to live our lives not for our own sake, but for the benefit of all. When one has more than others, it is shared. When someone needs extra care, we give it. We tithe a portion, recognizing that all we have has been graciously provided by God. These practices are what make our neighbourhoods safer, more equitable and able to thrive as the gaps between us close.

In times like today we are not only asked but are truly being tested to trust in this biblical call. Strategies that undermine universal healthcare or education, politics that hoard resources for one province or country, policies that undermine people because they are different--these are not reflective of Jesus' love for all. Let's enter into Lent intentionally this year.

Let's be mindful of the many who are suffering and in danger, those whose lives are complicated just because of the colour of their skin or where they were born. Let's genuinely seek to learn about those who are different. Let's be generous, active in justice, and let's tell others about Jesus. Let's go to church, rekindle fellowship, pray and sing! Bake cookies for the school in your neighbourhood. Turn off the tv and invite the neighbours for coffee. Use our imaginations and see where the Holy Spirit sparks a new thing!

In gratitude as we minister together,

Bishop Trish

Bishop Trish

THE GLOW WITHIN

Listen to Jesus' call
Be still and hear his teachings
Transforming the heart forever

Cast away any apprehension
Venture on a journey up the mountain
Fear not but come
Enter into the depth of Love

Others have gone before us
And wished only to remain
To behold the Holy One

As a candle steadily burns
And gradually melts
To form an inner chamber
There rests a gentle glow

The flame of life flickers
And paths are taken
In faith, in hope, in love we strive
With Jesus' unfailing presence

Time is fleeting
The journey is not yet over
Let the glow within shine
A time to love, a time to serve
Come...

Beverly Kavanaugh

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tion. When we allow the absence of God to flow through us, we are actually gifting ourselves with a greater spiderweb of love and compassion. A spiderweb sparkling with dew droplets on an early spring morning. A spiderweb stronger than what is seen, even in the windstorms. A spiderweb that offers beauty to the world, even in the most abandoned of spaces.

I leave you with words from Barbara Brown Taylor, "When everything you count on for protection has failed, the Divine Presence does not fail. The hands are still there – not promising to rescue, not promising to intervene – promising only to hold you no matter how far you fall. Ironically, those who try hardest not to fall learn this later than those who topple more easily." (Barbara Brown Taylor, *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith*).

God is present in absence, dear friends. It is a shocking and difficult thing to encounter, but it is true. And it is a truth filled with love. Amen.

Called into Worship

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

Upcoming Worship Opportunities

Regular Worship - Sundays:

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

Special Services:

- Sunday, March 29th: Palm Sunday
 - 9:30 AM - German Service
 - 11:00 AM - English Service
- Good Friday, April 3rd:
 - 10:00 AM - German Service
 - 5:00 PM - Communion and an observance of the Maundy Thursday dinner with a soup and bread dinner
 - 6:00 PM - Moving into the sanctuary for a Good Friday service with stations for silent reflection
- Easter Sunday - April 5th:



Mark your Calendars:

May 31 - Trinity Sunday Ecumenical Service @ Edmonton Moravian Church (Details TBA)

June 14 - Farewell & Godspeed
+ Retirement Celebration Luncheon for Pr. Sigmar (Details TBA)

When God Seems Absent

Pastor Sigmar Reichel

The meaning of our Christian holidays is, that we think about our Christian belief. Therefore, for Christmas, we are not just to tell some fantastic stories about Santa Claus, but, that God became man through his son Jesus Christ, who wants to be always with us. In the same way, on Easter, we are not to tell only funny stories about Easter bunnies painting their eggs in the woods, but, that Jesus rose from the dead, so that we get eternal life too. On Pentecost we are to be reminded that God wants to give us his good and Holy Spirit, who fills us with confidence, hope, and love. Our Christian holidays are based on events that really happened! And they are to happen today again! Our faith needs always to be renewed and strengthened. This is the meaning of our Christian Holidays! And also, to show gratitude for God's presence among us.

For this reason, this Easter celebration is meant to be a strengthening of our faith! Good Friday and Easter announce the central message of our Christian belief: Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross; Jesus Christ has been resurrected from the dead. Good Friday and Easter remind us to ask ourselves: "How about my faith? How is it going? What does Jesus' death and resurrection mean for me?"

On Easter Sunday according to the Gospel, we have two women going to the grave: Mary from Magdala and the other Mary. In the text of Matthew 28 is written that there was suddenly a great earthquake. And during this earthquake both of the women met somebody who told them: "Don't be afraid! Don't be scared!"

We can not be encouraged by ourselves. Somebody has to speak to us, has to say it! We need like-minded people who can tell us: "Don't be afraid! Don't be scared!" We need the faith community, the faith communion!

An angel is the bearer of the Easter message! "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here! He has risen!" The two women believe the heavenly messenger. And in doing so, they meet the resurrected Jesus Christ himself! Even today we meet the resurrected Jesus when our faith and our hopes arise. We feel that there is more than just our visible reality.

A priest was once visiting a sick person in his house. He noticed that there was an empty chair next to the sick person's bed. The priest asked why this chair was there. The sick person answered: "I invited Jesus to sit on this chair just before you came in. During many years I have had problems to pray. I didn't know how to pray, until one of my friends told me, that the prayer is like a talk to Jesus. He recommended I put an empty chair next to me, and imagine that Jesus was seated there. He told me to talk to Jesus, and to listen to his words. And since then, I have no more problems when I pray!"

Some days later, the daughter of this sick person came to visit the priest and told him, that her father passed away. She said: "I left him alone for just a couple of hours. He seemed to be fine and in peace. But when I went back to

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Council Update

Council Update - Deena Hinshaw

There are a few items of note from church council since the last Trinity Team edition. First of all, Trinity’s Annual General Meeting took place on February 22. All reports were accepted with gratitude, the budget was passed, and a special acknowledgment was made of Norm Ritter’s service as the Property Committee chair for 25 years, as he passed that role over to Manfred Jurgeleit. Two new church council members were elected - Shannon Lawrence and Erika Ewen. This brings our council to eight members, also including Anita Witzke, Sabrina Sperber, Wil Tonowski, Jon Machinski, Wauneita Ross-Garrett, and Deena Hinshaw. Council also elected the executive for this year – Council chair will be Deena Hinshaw, Vice-chair will be Wauneita Ross-Garrett, Secretary will be Anita Witzke, and Treasurer will be Jon Machinski. There was some discussion about forward planning, including the Council establishing a temporary task force to look at operational sustainability. Anyone wishing to join that task force can email councilchair@trinity-lutheran.ab.ca for more information. We also discussed work underway to identify what Trinity’s needs are for a time-limited part-time position during Pastor Erin’s recovery.

Developments since the AGM include meeting with German-speaking members of the congregation to discuss possible options for supporting German ministry after Pastor Sigmar's retirement in June. The consensus from congregation members was that it is important to keep the twice-monthly 9:30 am service time, and if German-speaking supply preachers are not available, lay-led German services can be an alternative. For the whole congregation, we continue to work on seeking temporary part-time help to support Pastor Erin and the congregation through Pastor Erin's gradual return to work. We are moving forward with strategic planning for the church with a meeting scheduled for April of church council and committee and auxiliary ministry representatives.

As always, thank you to all members of Trinity for your ongoing contributions to our community.

Introducing Our New Council Members

Shannon Lawrence:

I am a Counselling Therapist and former health care aide. I recently discovered a family connection to Trinity through my grandmother's parents (Maria and Anton Bablitz) and great great grandparents (Friederich und Anna Lange) who had immigrated from Germany in the early 1900s. I live nearby in Hazelde-



an with three cats and a little garden to keep me aligned in His service.

Sabrina Sperber:

Just reintroducing myself. I’m Sabrina Sperber, and it has been a true pleasure to be part of Trinity in recent years. My faith journey began when I was baptized as an infant Feb of 1971 many years ago, I was confirmed at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. Since joining Trinity, I’ve enjoyed getting involved in youth events, the baseball activities over 30 years ago and now serving as a member of council. Being part of the council has given me a deeper appreciation for all that goes on behind the scenes, and I’m grateful for the opportunity to contribute in my own way.



Erika Ewen:

I have been a member of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church for about 60 years. At first I only went to the German Service and then to both Services. I have lived in Edmonton most of my life. I also lived in West Germany and Toronto, Ontario. About 15 years ago, I was homeless for about two years. I feel closer to God when I am at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church.



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his room, he was already dead. And I noticed something very strange: his head was not lying on the cushion on his bed, his head was on the chair, next to his bed.”

For this man God was not absent! Don’t be afraid! I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen as He said. (Matthew 28, 5-6)

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