

October 7, 2024

Dear Trinitarians,

At key moments in my life, I have personally witnessed God's commitment to abundance. I hope you have too. One such moment was my experience of a call to this parish. I felt God's generosity in providing clarity about where to look and what to be looking for, which helped me focus on just a few parishes rather than overextending myself in my search. That gift of discernment also helped me decide to come here when I was still a finalist at another parish. I could see the incredible abundance to be found by embracing a sense of mission and having the opportunity to offer and receive God's life-transforming love in this particular place, with you.

What I have discovered since is that God has proven faithful at surprising me, leading me into experiences here that have far exceeded what I had been able to dream alone. **I hope that Trinity is a place where you are discovering God's generosity to us in the midst of events and forces that could persuade us to live with high levels of fear and anxiety.**

A major theme of scripture is God's desire and perseverance in being generous with humanity. We see this in the creation, the Exodus narrative, the prophecies given to those in exile, and the incarnation, death, and resurrection – the outpouring of God's love on our behalf. We see this in the words of Jeremiah: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Scripture also reveals a human tendency to mistrust the extent of God's promised abundance and to make contingency plans. But **when we trust God's abundance, we are able to risk new ventures.** Faith is less about belief statements and more about courage and tenacity, a willingness to wrestle with God, and seek the blessings only God can offer in the face of our questions and doubts.

One of the things that drew me to Trinity was the way in which Trinity had answered a call to **"risk something big for something good."** In 2021, after intentional discernment, you said yes to a call to invest at a whole new level in children's and youth ministry. You chose to invite one another into a bold and faithful generosity that would create funding for a full-time role focused on nurturing this ministry even when many churches were worried about budgets and the cost of staffing. Here are some things we are seeing now as a result of that risk:

- *On the Sunday of the Backpack Blessing, when the congregation was invited to share personal words of gratitude, there were immediate voices that arose from the children's rug. These voices are present because they have been welcomed and nurtured at Trinity. They know they belong, and they are ready to share their gifts with all of us.*
- *On Wednesday nights, the youth group community has grown from 2 or 3 students who barely knew each other to a family of friends widening beyond 10-15 each time we gather.*
- *Since the pilgrimage in the summer of 2023, high school youth have shown increased engagement with our faith tradition and worshiping community, even being able to connect with Episcopal churches near their universities after they graduate.*

- *We have just launched a monthly “Messy Church” hands-on worship experience crafted to fully include all ages and to extend hospitality to the neighborhood. Pray for us as we risk experimenting to grow something new.*

You launched that investment in response to a call. Continued support for these ministries and the church that sustains them will mean we are able to expand the spiritual journeys of young people and the communities they belong to in a way that brings God's love closer to all of us. This may require courage and tenacity as we continue to trust in God's offered abundance.

In that spirit, I'd like to share our expense budget for the current year (2024) and how that compares to pledge income. In the pie chart on the next page, you can see that our largest annual expenses are salaries and benefits. This is followed by administrative costs chiefly related to maintaining our building and grounds. The ministry slice of the pie includes \$67k for our diocesan apportionment. This budget represents required costs and very conservative spending in just about every area.

**We purposely started this year with a deficit budget because of a strong commitment to keep extraordinary staff and to move forward in our discerned call.** We felt we could draw, for one year, on a small operating cushion to help fill the gap between revenue and expenses seeking God's participation in revitalization and growth. The second chart shows sources of revenue, including pledges with which we started 2024 but also new pledges we have received throughout the year. The 2025 expense budget will not be significantly greater; that said we do have increases to the cost of benefits, we'd like to provide more support toward children and youth, and because we are managing our facilities without a dedicated sexton, we need to contract for services such as occasional cleaning and HVAC maintenance.

**We do hope to significantly grow our pledge income and have set a pledge goal of \$550,000.** We are turning a corner, evidenced by growth in membership, some returning members, additional pledges, and impromptu generous gifts – not all of which are yet reflected here. In 2025 we will be developing an even stronger lay community and empowering our staff to blossom in their positions. And that takes money.

With close to 150 households and a parish culture in which the bulk of our members make pledges, our goal is reachable. As a result, we will not just meet existing needs but respond to increased opportunities to expand our mission within our community and beyond. We must choose to respond with courage and tenacity, with gratitude and generosity. God has been blessing us throughout this year, and there are further blessings that God will offer in the face of our questions and doubts.

**How can we all lean in with trust and respond with generous hearts, anticipating the abundance God provides to those God so deeply loves?**

With affection,

*Charissa J. Bradstreet +*