

# TRINITY CHIMES

NEWSLETTER OF THE TRINITY REFORMED CHURCH

JUNE 2011

## Heaven on Earth

*Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*  
- 1 Peter 2:5

What's your view of heaven and what's the meaning that it provides in your life? This might seem like an esoteric kind of question but it's also entirely practical and extremely relevant, especially as Trinity Reformed and our wider culture experiences a time of significant change and challenges. What we think about heaven matters, because it impinges upon what we believe and do as the church and how we live out our faith.

If we look in the bible, we get some perspective of what heaven is like, often repeated, and it connotes heaven as the place where God exists and so, beautiful in its simplicity, heaven is viewed as God's house! The Psalmist puts it splendidly domestically, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long." (Psalm 23) The law and the prophets expand on the concept of heaven as God's house viewing the temple as an extension of God's domicile on earth. Isaiah, in his vision gets a glimpse of the place, "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple." (Isaiah 6:1)

During Jesus' lifetime, the people of God would go to the temple in Jerusalem—to the house of the Lord—where they would worship and bring sacrifices. The concept of heaven as God's house was so thoroughly ensconced in people's minds and attitudes that Jesus himself used it

while preparing his disciples, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? (John 14:2) But then Jesus adds this little tweak to the commonly received idea of heaven, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that *where I am, there you may be also*" (14:3, emphasis added.)

Following Christ's resurrection and ascension the Book of Acts chronicles the story of the early church. There, in the beginning of Christianity we see the church gathered together in the Temple, "Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." (Acts 2:46-47) To this early early church, this was great! It was as if they'd "arrived" almost! It was like, heaven on earth, to worship and commune with the Lord in God's house. Absolutely amazing!

But then, all that changed. Through tremendous challenges, persecution, and even death, the church was expelled from Jerusalem and scattered across the Mediterranean and Near East region. Christianity became ever more divergent from the Judaism in which it arose and Christ followers could no longer go back to the Temple. Thus, to be a Christian was no longer associated with a particular place or building, rather, Christianity was associated with faith and a way of life. It is to this kind of church that the Apostle Peter gives encouragement, "like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house..." Carrying on in the tradition of heaven extending to earth and the temple as God's house, the New Testament writers exhort the people of God, that is the

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Our vision is  
to help  
people find  
New Life in  
Jesus Christ!

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Church, to embody God as they themselves live out there faith as, if you will, mini-temples. And following Christ's promise to "be with us always" and to send "the advocate" that is the Holy Spirit, we are mystically united to God so that where he is, there we may be also. It is a mystery of the faith, but it is also the call to discipleship that every Christian is an instrument and vessel of heaven.

Over the next two centuries the early church would become settled down, and in some ways a little stagnant at times. We would start to focus on heaven as someplace entirely other than we one day go to (certainly in part, true, but) to the detriment of embodying it in our lives and practices. The church would too quickly begin to identify itself as a place (building) or institution (organization, club) instead of the very temple of God, living stones, and holy priesthood.

But as I began, we live in changing and challenging times. If heaven matters, to us and to the world, then maybe the times we are living in gives us an opportunity. If we are—if only in part—little temples for God, well then, the possibilities seem almost limitless, even eternal!

Grace & Peace,

Pastor Tom

### Stewardship and Finance Committee Report

<u>Expenditures for Month of</u>	<u>April 2011</u>
Personnel Expenses	\$5184.00
Utilities	\$1405.00
Ministry/Supplies	\$1250.00
Maintenance	\$ 33.00
Spiritual Life/Outreach/Advertising	\$ 84.00
Other Disbursements	\$ 790.00
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$8746.00</b>
<u>Receipts for Month of</u>	<u>April 2011</u>
Weekly Envelopes	\$5449.00
Weekly Plate	\$ 200.00
Benevolences	\$ 434.00
Memorial Fund	\$ 75.00
Special Offerings	\$3649.00 *
Other Receipts	\$ 565.00
<b>Total Receipts</b>	<b>\$10,372.00</b>

\*Lenten Seasonal Envelopes



### Imagine

- ...a child hearing about God's love for the first time.
- ...kids worshipping in powerful ways
- ...children praying for each other.
- ...adults and teens modeling Jesus' love to children.
- ...the kids in our church sharing gifts of love with children who are hurting.
- ...children serving each other.

This summer, let's transform our church into a lush bamboo forest, overflowing with wild, wacky, mischievous pandas. Be a part of Vacation Bible School at Trinity during July 25 – 29. It's our goal to reach 100 kids with this program. That's 100 kids who will grow in their relationship with God!

We're praying this awesome VBS program will touch children's hearts and lives with God's love. Help kids in our community discover that

- God made you.
- God listens to you.
- God watches over you.
- God loves you, no matter what.
- God gives good gifts.

As we plan and prepare for PandaMania, our team would cherish your prayers. Pray that God would give us wisdom in planning. Pray for the right staff members to join our team. And pray that God would begin working in the hearts of the children who will come to PandaMania!

If you are interested in being part of VBS as a volunteer or know of someone who would like to be a participant, please contact Liz Burzynski at 718-821-2700 Tuesday–Thursday from 8:30 – 12:30. It promises to be a WILD time !!!!

### New Members

We would like to welcome Joanna Pan and Thomas Goodman who joined Trinity Reformed Church on May 1. Joanna was baptized by Pastor Tom before joining and Tom made reaffirmation of faith. Welcome!

## **May Second Sunday Symposium: The Forcible Dissolution of the Danube Swabian Community in Sekitsch**

### ***Church Members of Danube Swabian Heritage Bear Witness to Acts of Courage in the Face of Deprivation and Persecution***

At the tender age of thirteen, Justine Wittine ate the forbidden fruit. It was not an apple, though—just a mulberry that she had picked from a tree in her hometown of Sekitsch. Since she was forced to harvest fruit against her will, she figured that one little berry would go unnoticed. But a woman passed her on horseback and asked her if she had eaten any of the mulberries. Justine replied, “No,” but the color of her mouth gave her away. For this “crime,” she was consigned to a cellar dungeon for several days. And this was just one of many injustices to which Justine was subjected as the Second World War was drawing to a close.

Why would eating a single mulberry involve such disastrous repercussions? Justine, Elisabeth Roth, and other members of our Trinity Reformed Church family survived the forcible dissolution of a community of ethnic Germans called Danube Swabians (*Donauschwabern*) that had been in existence since 1786. Justine and Elisabeth shared harrowing accounts of persecution and suffering, but also inspiring tales of courage and perseverance, during a very moving Second Sunday Symposium held on May 15<sup>th</sup>.

To exact retribution against the local community of ethnic Germans for the crimes perpetrated by Hitler’s forces during the war, Tito’s Yugoslav Partisans subjected Danube Swabians to forced labor in internment camps—Justine was held in no fewer than six of them—expropriation of their property, and the splitting up of families. Indeed, the town of Sekitsch itself was converted into an internment camp in January 1945.

To compound the indignity of being compelled to leave her home, Justine had to give up her only pair of shoes to a Partisan who had taken a liking to them. For the next three years, her only “shoes” were wooden boards that a sympathetic man had made for her. As Justine wryly remarked, she was way ahead of her time when it came to the wooden platform footwear trend. Not having shoes could have terrible consequences: when inmates were forced to march between internment camps, those who fell behind were often shot, hit with poles, and kicked into a ditch. Among the indignities that Elisabeth had to endure at the camp in which she was held were “beds” of straw and food mixed with smithereens of glass.

While being forced to work in Tito’s gardens in the city of Belgrade, Justine found herself face-to-face with Tito himself one day. She had been coached to tell him that she was only thirteen years old and that she should not be forced to work so hard. But when faced with the prospect of having to interact with the man who was responsible for the suffering of everyone who was near and dear to her, Justine could do nothing but turn her back to him and run away.

Not all of the local Serbian population was hostile, however. Justine befriended a Serbian woman who sympathized with her plight and snuck her food through the camp fence. The woman said that she would start digging a hole just outside the fence, and encouraged Justine to do the same from the inside so that she might someday be able to regain her freedom.

Justine and her mother managed to escape from their camp, and hid in a nearby cornfield for three days in the hope that their captors would stop looking for them. They failed in their initial attempt to cross the border, but with money obtained from supporters in the United States, they eventually made their way to Bavaria, from whence they emigrated to the United States. But they did not embark upon this arduous journey on their own—they brought along with them a starving boy whom they had rescued from an internment camp, and looked after him until he could be reunited with his mother.

Serbia has only begun to acknowledge its responsibility for this horrific historical episode, which resulted in the death of 60,500 Danube Swabians. Despite having been forced to endure irreparable hardship, however, the spirits of Justine and her family were unbroken. Justine was reunited with her father, who had lost the use of his hand while forced to work in a mine in the Soviet Union. Ironically, after having triumphed over so much adversity, Justine was afraid that the troop ship that conveyed her family to the United States would sink during the long journey across the Atlantic Ocean. Her father reassured her by saying, “Don’t worry! The ship isn’t ours!” It was with this indomitable will not only to survive, but to thrive, that Justine and her fellow Danube Swabians embarked upon new lives in which they would no longer have to worry about being punished simply for eating a piece of fruit.

For more information about the demise of Sekitsch, please visit the following websites:

<http://www.molidorf.com/ForgottenGenocide.htm>  
(information regarding “The Forgotten Genocide,” a documentary made by St. Louis-based filmmaker Ann Morrison)

<http://sekitsch.de>  
(in German, with some material translated into English)

<http://www.donauschwabern-usa.org>  
(for information about the community of people of Danube Swabian heritage in the United States today)

## Spring Cake Sale

The Ladies Aid/Frauenverein held its spring cake sale with sale table event on May 6. The cake table netted \$ 463.10 and the sale table produced \$ 387.75.

Many thanks to all who helped make this event a great success.

## ‘Mold,’ ‘Mildew,’ ‘Leprosy’ - - It’s All Bad

The mold in the back room in the church basement is finally being attacked, and hopefully it will go away. The room has served as a meeting room, a closet room, a nursery, and the pre-K room during VBS. The mold was hard for anyone to take for long, and it made some people downright sick.

It was becoming increasingly clear that something had to be done. I even had a pair of chapters in the Bible to back up mold removal – Leviticus 13 and 14. This is the section that keeps repeating “Unclean!” – which is echoed in the New Testament (see Luke 5) concerning leprosy. Leviticus 13 and 14 do tackle leprosy, a disfiguring, horrible human disease. Some translations use “mold” and “mildew” to describe the disease when it affects buildings, but the New Revised Standard, the translation we use each week and is in the pew racks, consistently uses forms of the word “leprosy.”

We’re not used to anyone hollering “Unclean!” anymore, and, although the back room was saying that in its own way for quite a while, the hope is it will be healed.

Lenny Schiefer, Vice President of the Consistory

## Summer Schedule

This will be the last issue of the *Trinity Chimes* until September. During the summer our Sunday church schedule will remain the same with worship services at 10:00 a.m. followed by a coffee/iced tea fellowship.

Our church secretary Liz Burzynski will not be working during the summer and Pastor is not always in the office during the regular work week. Please leave a message on the answering machine if you need any assistance and someone will get back to you as soon as possible.

Our “PandaMania – Where God is Wild about You!” Vacation Bible School will be held from July 25 to 29, 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. and should be a fun time for everyone.

Remember that God doesn’t take a vacation during the summer. Plan on worshipping with us.

## Couples and Friends Club

The Couples and Friends Club will have a picnic, weather permitting, on June 18 at Westbury Gardens.

## Qualitäts-Ferien

Es ist so schön, mal gar nichts tun, nur ruhn;  
Es ist so schön, die Wolken sehen fliegen, und liegen;  
Es ist so schön, mal unter hohen Bäumen zu träumen;  
Schön, unter grünen Tannen sanft schaukeln und entspannen.



## Quality Vacation Time

How pleasant it is to do nothing, but rest;  
To lie watching clouds sail by;  
To dream beneath high leafy tress;  
To relax in a hammock between two tall trees.

## Work Day

On Saturday May 14, we had a Work/Clean Up Day at Trinity. The sanctuary got a good dusting and the kitchen was cleaned. Several people also started scraping the outside fence which will eventually be repainted. When we have heavy rains, water leaks into the basement store room at the front of the church and as a result mold built up behind the closets. The mold was cleaned up (maybe you smelled bleach recently when you were at church) and we are now in the process of removing some of the closets so the leak can be addressed, but that is a project that will take more than one work day.

We want to thank everyone who helped out and will be helping out as these projects continue. If you would like more information or would like to lend a hand, please speak with Bob Bambach, our property chairman.

## Worship Schedule for June

June 5, 12, 19, 26 — Worship Service 10:00 a.m.

- \* Communion will be celebrated on June 5
- \* Prayer Meeting each Sunday at 9:00 am
- \* Junior Church each Sunday at 10:00 am