

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PASTOR**  
**Trinity Congregation, Shanghai, China**  
**June 10, 2018**

**W**e were in our tenth year as a congregation, when our founding pastor, the Rev. Elyn MacInnis returned with her husband Peter, also one of our pastors, to their home in the United States. They'd lived in China some 30 years.

Our first service without them was August 13, 2017.

My goals were simple: Establish continuity and ensure the future of this congregation for the glory of God.

So, we began in August with new leadership, including the Rev. John Willison. I had begun the new church year in August of 2016, so it was not unusual for the congregation to see me leading the service in August of 2017. This time, however, I not only opened the new year, but kept on. Elyn was not coming back. It's now Timothy. The congregation, I believe, accepted this and were very helpful and supportive. I can't say enough about the way they pitched in — as though this was their church, their ministry — which of course it was and is.

The interest level is high. The energy level is high. And although we lost a ton of people through repatriation or new assignments last spring, our attendance held and there was very little slippage, and perhaps at times even some gainage.

There was a downside: My new role meant that *I was now obligated to attend Board meetings.*

It was a cross I had to bear.

But Board chair, Judy Kim, ran a tight agenda. We were able to have a social time before the meeting was called to order, and only once did the meeting go past 8:30 p.m., and that was our last meeting of the year in May and it only went overtime because we hadn't finished with the sushi, brie, crackers, cheeses and Prosecco.

**We have been blessed:**

- With scores of people have volunteered in some way to help with various duties
- With musicians, Sara Preus and Ignatius Banda who have been amazing!
- With others who contributed musically: Meg Ideker, Tim Geisler, James Stovall, the Trinity Singers, the Men's Chorus from Concordia International School Shanghai, John Leonard, Rob Chapman, David Allen and others
- With a chapel in which to worship
- With a congregation who has given liberally not only to support our Sunday worship and Sunday school, but needy organizations in China
- With a Board chair and Stephen Minister, Judy Kim, who has served so ably as our Liturgist for our worship services, and who has provided leadership as the head of the Board for this past year. She's been indispensable and a joy to be in ministry with
- For an associate like Pastor John who has been a true friend and colleague and has shared with us his unique gifts, bring passion and compassion through his preaching and interaction with all of us.

Of course, the congregation probably noticed a few things that were new.

- Acolytes began to process during the first hymn to light the candles. I followed.
- Children found "Busy Bee" bags when they arrived with their parents that had crayons, pencils, stickers, coloring pages, note paper and clippy things to snap on and make things with, and more.

- Banners hanging on the wall behind the altar for different Sundays of the year, adding so much to the spirit of the service. These were designed by Joan Lueth, our artist in residence, and made locally. Thank you Joan!
- Worship Guides are now printed on A3 paper which eliminates need for inserting Communion liturgies
- Announcements were moved to within the service itself—that was a change

Yet, even with the changes, there was a sense that some things had not changed: our core values and mission, our desire to search for the will of God, our need to experience the sacred in dedicated time to worship God. Our hearts were still thirsty for God, and in our worship together, we enjoyed the experience of collectively being in the presence of God.

## **SERVICES**

We had many special services.

- Stewardship Emphasis in the fall
- Reformation Sunday, in which Dr. Jonathan Borden, Pastor John and myself portrayed Pope Leo XIII, Martin Luther and Johann Eck in a skit designed to highlight the emphases of the Reformation 500 years after Luther posted his “95 Theses” on the door of the castle church at Wittenberg.
- Combined Christmas Eve service led by Pastor Rick and myself and held in Main Sanctuary
- First Sunday of March was Scout Sunday
- Combined Maundy Thursday service led by Pastor Rick and myself and held in Trinity Chapel
- Tenth Anniversary Sunday
- Teacher Appreciation Sunday in which we honored and thanked our teachers on first Sunday of May. I think should become a tradition.
- Graduation Sunday, in which we honored our graduates on the Second Sunday of May, Mother’s Day. I think this should also be a Trinity tradition.
- Mother’s Day, all the women of the church received flowers.
- Pentecost Sunday
- Confirmation Sunday in which nine confirmands were confirmed on Pentecost Sunday
- Farewell Sunday, in which we said goodbye to those leaving for home or another assignment
- Volunteer Appreciation Sunday, on our last Sunday of this church year 2017-2018

## **WEBSITE and WEEKLY UPDATE**

I put a fair amount of time into getting the website organized as an online “go-to” place for information. The site is updated frequently, so that visitors who drop in will know quickly what’s going for the upcoming Sunday, and when. I want to continue to work on this, and would welcome the help of someone who could perhaps help in rebuilding the site completely.

I also began the practice of sending out a “Weekly Update” to the congregation. This usually came out on Wednesdays. The idea for this was Meg Ideker’s practice of sending out notices about the kind of help needed for the upcoming Sunday. I thought this was a great approach, and simply enlarged on her idea.

## WISH LIST

- Techy person to rebuild website
- Strategy for increasing interaction
- Bible study

## NEXT YEAR

Next year I hope we will have two more board members. I am also excited about another change for the coming year. We will no longer cancel services during the holiday break, except for one: the Sunday following Christmas.

I am eager to continue to strategize ways to increasing interaction in the congregation, that is, finding ways for us to know each other better—so as to better share our joys and sorrows, and strengthen each other in the Lord.

I look forward to working with the new Senior Minister of Abundant Grace, John Willison, our own “Pastor John.” You can expect him to be preaching about once a month, but we will miss his presence on the other Sundays on the month. Thank you for everything you contributed, Pastor John. You were and are a blessing to us!

## IN CONCLUSION ...

“The Spirit of the Lord has been in this place.” I love our worship. I love the candles. I love the organ music. I love the liturgy. I love the congregational singing. I love our weekly observance of Holy Communion. I love the children sitting on my lap when I have a story for them. I love the flowers on the high altar and the Joan Lueth banners on the wall. I love this congregation. I even love Pastor John.

And we owe so much to John Ideker, our Treasurer, who watches over our giving and finances. It’s a huge task and responsibility to shepherd our offerings, to make reports, deposits, payments and so on. Huge. We are blessed to have someone with his background in business, and his willingness to serve.

I apologize if I’ve omitted someone I should openly acknowledge. Forgive me. As soon as I hit “send,” I will think of someone else. But before I close, two more people:

Our Board chair and S. Minister, Judy Kim. She’s been a rock star! So faithful, so calming, so wise, and so helpful. Having her support and her leadership and her ministry on Sunday mornings as Lturgist has been huge! Bless you, Judy!

And I love my wife, Jeanie, who’s been a HUGE support and fan, restocking the Busy Bee bags, carrying stuff to church, taking minutes for the Board, critiquing sermon ideas, and more. And every Sunday, she is there with me an hour before the service, pitching in where help is needed and doing so with a joyful spirit. Huge help. Every Sunday. You can’t imagine. It’s been a joy to be doing this ministry together.

It’s been my joy to be your pastor. I look forward to another wonderful year worshipping and glorifying God together as we “sojourn in a strange land.”

I remain your humble servant,  
In Christ’s service,



Rev. Timothy F. Merrill