Annual Report – Associate Pastor

Grace and Peace in Christ.

I begin a report, as we begin our Sunday meetings; with Confession.
I have not loved God with my whole heart, and not loved my neighbors as myself. In the course of a year (365 days), I have surely thought things I shouldn't have, said things I shouldn't have, and mainly, though having been fairly busy praying, preaching, meeting, teaching, (etc.) do always fall short, and come up repenting. All sins are not the hot sins with people obsessed with gossip magazines or soap operas, and one of my favorites; "Desperate Housewives". Some sins are the cool sins. Maybe 'cool' is not the right word. Sins of acidea, which is the loss of passion. Like a candle burning low. Like the seed in the parable of the sower in which the plant is choked out. Burn out.

This past year many have read *The Purpose Driven Live,* which at it's premise declares 'it's not about us', but about God (who is revealed in Jesus). Yet, if it's not true with me, how can I expect it in others. This is what gnaws in my soul: a sense that the religion I profess is too much about me, and about you, and about the material world, and less about Jesus Christ. In that the church is challenged to it's creed, it's core, and it's cross. The questions raised are: Why are we here? and, 'What is our purpose?'. The next questions are: 'Are we committed to the purpose/mission?' and 'How?'. Finally we evaluate: 'Is it about us, or about God?'.

Funny, after 27 years, I just wondered this: am I to report to God, or to the congregation?

I say thanks to God for grace that sustains me in the weariness and dryness of this society, and age. Grace that leads us, back, like the prodigal son, to the love of God our Father. It would help us, too, to remember the church is a home for sinners. Membership is based on our confession of that. Let us love one another as those Jesus came to save, 'not with silver or gold, but with his precious blood'.

Thanks for the good staff that offers support. Thanks for the Dream Team, and the Confirmation leaders that can re-kindle my fire. Thanks for the Drama Group that excites my passion. And thanks for regular prayers that carry me back on Sundays to preach and administer the sacraments (receiving them too), and empowers me in hospital visits, calling, and teaching about grace on W.O.L.F. Night, and your kind spirit that instructs me in my praying. Thanks to your inspired and inspiring stories that unite and connect in faith. Thanks for your willing pledges and your bell ringing that warms my heart. Thanks for a family that unconditionally loves me. Thanks for your greetings after worship. God is amazing.

2004 has been a year of prayer thanks to Pastor Ted's leadership, with times, and space set aside (prayer room). In 2005 we will look to grow in prayer, as we will explore ways to pray, and give ourselves fully to God. We pray not only for the faith and life of Our Saviour's as we seek to live out a new mission statement, revive the committees, and reach out to a needy community, and war-torn, hungry world. Beyond that, our (yours and mine and Jesus') ELCA faces decisions that beg all our prayers. So much prayer for God's will to be done, and his kingdom to come. Forgiveness, as we forgive!

Where might we be without the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ?

We sing a hymn of praise, and go in peace to serve the Savior of the world.

Pastor Jeff Martinson