

Reflection for the Congregation on My Retirement
(The Rev. Canon) Laura Thomas Howell, Obl.S.B.
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Wow! The Archdeacon's homily sounded more like a eulogy! And like many eulogies, I'm not sure that I recognize the person he's talking about... but he was right about one thing—the sequence hymn. Worship Committee wouldn't let us sing all five verses of “We Three Kings,” for fear that I'd lose control and start singing about the rubber cigar. It could happen, you know! Actually, you DO know!

This is one of those days in the life of every parish—probably in the life of every person—when we don't know if we should be sad or glad. I suppose many of us are feeling both—tears of sorrow out of one eye, tears of joy from the other. Any parent who has put a child on the school bus for the first time, knows what I'm talking about. It's like moving out of a house that you have loved for years, into your new house and trusting you'll love that one, also.

Trinity has had a long tradition of starting successful programs and spinning them off for other people to work with. You then go on to invent new programs. I'm thinking of things like Victory House, Northeast Ministries and the Emergency Shelter. There had to have been mixed feelings as you said goodbye to the old efforts and turned your faces to the new.

Trinity has done the same with people, too. Fr. Nick Knisely is now Bishop Nick. Mo. Hillary, raised up from this parish, is now the Rev. Dr. Hillary and is rector of a large main-line parish. She's also the author of a couple of books.

And you have done it for me, too, providing fertile ground for spiritual experiments to grow—like the diocesan Benedictine spirituality groups, which have members from a number of parishes and denominations. The prayerbead and charity craft groups which Gaby and I worked on now have over a hundred members and have grown far beyond what we dreamed.

Trinity has always been ready to reach beyond the boundaries of the parish and assist the community—not just the immediate local community with efforts like Soup Kitchen—but also by sharing people and clergy with other parishes around the diocese. In a very real way, that is part of what we are celebrating today. You are sending me off to assist St. Margaret's in Emmaus and St. Barnabas in Kutztown, two small parishes which are in need of clergy. The spiritual formation and experience which I gained working with you will now be shared with yet more people in your name.

You have to know that I will miss seeing you all, week in and week out, visiting you when you are ill, and celebrating your happy times. I'll miss our wonderful liturgies and beautiful music, and our splendid fellowship meals. But I'm excited about the adventures which lie before me. And I am excited to see what new adventures the Trinity community will undertake. It is time for me to focus on writing and sharing the wisdom I have learned from you. And it is time for you to explore new ideas and new ways of being.

To paraphrase Jesus' comments: We must be about our Father's business.

I will always be grateful to you for the welcome and open doors that brought me—and so many other people—in. St. Benedict said, "Greet everyone as Christ." I certainly have seen you strive to do that, and hope you will grow ever more proficient.

I have no question that you will be in good hands, with the Trinity clergy and staff providing continuity and with Mo. Donna Larson as interim. I hope that you will greet her with as much warmth and enthusiasm as you did me. And that eventually, you will work closely with and fully support your new rector.

The diocesan community is a small one, so we will all be able to keep tabs on each other's comings and goings. I was going to say, "I'll be watching you," but you might think of the song from Sting instead of what I mean. And don't forget that I will never turn down an invitation to coffee. Or pierogi and borshch at Black Forest Deli.

You will be in my prayer as we all work together to follow Jesus and carry out our job description: to care for those in need, feed the hungry, visit the sick and bring the Light of Christ into the world.
Amen!