

## Trinity-Toccoa Celebrates Partnership with Area School

On Sunday, November 13, 2005, members of Trinity Lutheran Church-Toccoa, GA, officially recognized their partnership with Liberty Elementary School in Toccoa during morning worship.

Trinity's involvement as "A Partner in Education" has encompassed various areas including fundraising for a new school playground. Trinity members have volunteered as adult readers and have worked side-by-side with Liberty administration and faculty to seek ways to have

the congregation assist in the school educational mission.

"As a partner, Trinity invited the staff and faculty of the school to celebrate what God can do through us and to us," elaborated Pastor Roger Schwartz. "Fourteen staff members and their families came to Trinity to worship that day. The teachers and staff were presented with gifts that included a gift card to Wal-mart, a church coffee mug and a cookbook."

The response from the school staff has been "tremendous," continued Schwartz. "They recognized the benefit

of having people praying and supporting their hard task of educating our young people."

According to Schwartz, comments from the staff "were also exciting to receive."

Liberty Elementary Principal Terri Bridges said, "I really enjoyed the service on Sunday. It was great to have a chance to worship with friends, colleagues and family."

Teacher Joetta Ivester wrote, "I appreciate your recognition of the teachers. I truly felt special. The service was also very warm and loving experience. I read the Church cookbook (haven't cooked anything yet) and saw good things to cook. The Wal-mart Gift card was very nice. Thanks again for your thoughtfulness!"

"I wanted you to know just how much I appreciated what you and your members did for our faculty at Liberty Elementary," commented Suzy Bellamy. "Your service was lovely and I felt such a warmth from your congregation. Plus your choir and music were great! Thank you so much for making each of us feel so special."

Some responses noted the teacher's faith as well. "I have often thought of my teaching career as my mission field," said Lori Rose. "I know that there are hurting children that come through the doors of our school every day. My prayer is that the children I am involved with daily will see a reflection of Jesus in me. Thank you for the support you have been to Liberty Elementary. We are truly grateful. Thank you for

the gift and kind words today. Teaching can sometimes feel like a thankless job. A lot of times we teachers only see and hear the harsh words that people say, but today you made us feel appreciated."

Trinity hopes to continue its partnership with Liberty and expand it to include more of the public schools in their community, Schwartz noted. "Already,

faculty snack trays from Trinity have been sent to several other schools along with members ready to thank the teachers for their valuable service to the community," he said.

"As a small congregation in a small town not known for Lutheranism, we are fast becoming known as the church that supports education and teachers in the community." □

### Congregations Ablaze!

## Shepherd's Creek Celebrates Baptisms

*Editor's Note: In his column this month, Rev. Doug Kallesen, Florida-Georgia District Executive for Outreach, shares a report from Pastor Dan Fulmer of Shepherd's Creek Lutheran Church-Bradenton, FL.*

Shepherd's Creek Lutheran Church was blessed with the opportunity to celebrate ten baptisms in a two-month span in late 2005.

Why has the Holy Spirit been so active in this small church of late? Pastor Fulmer noted that the concepts explained by the "Groups Ablaze" (SG)<sup>2</sup> program developed by Missions International for the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod encouraged the congregation "to purposefully focus on relationship building and exposed us to ways we could guide individuals through the various steps of coming to faith in Christ."

Shepherd's Creek members attended a "Groups Ablaze" seminar in August of 2005 and "found that it is a perfect fit with the mission, 'Glorifying God through relationships,' God has called our church to fulfill," Fulmer said. "'Groups Ablaze' is based on the premise that most adults come to faith through a friendship with a Christian.

"At Shepherd's Creek, God made it even clearer for us by providing us with a mission statement that calls us to build relationships with our friends, neighbors, relative and contacts, and in so doing, bring others to Christ through us and what he is doing in our lives," Fulmer continued. He shared a story illustrating "how the willingness to build a relationship bridge, slowly, but deliberately, was successful."

In the fall of 2004, Shepherd Creek's Director of Family Ministry, Marsha Fulmer, was leading a Life Group when a regular attendee's mother became curious about the group her daughter enjoyed attending each week. Marsha met the mother, whose name was Barbara, realizing this was

a chance to begin a friendship. Barbara had been a circus performer prior to a paralyzing trapeze accident at which point she felt God had abandoned her. Marsha met with her, and Barbara listened as Marsha shared God's love, but it didn't appear that she would respond as a result of this meeting.

A few months later Barbara became seriously ill and Pastor Fulmer joined his wife Marsha in ministering to her and her large extended family. The Holy Spirit worked through the Fulmers, and Barbara died peacefully, knowing she was a child of God. The Holy Spirit continued to work through the relationships formed with the family of the deceased, Pastor Fulmer said.

"Family members began attending worship services and the congregation involved them in the Christmas play and a life group. Playgroups were arranged to encourage this family to build relationships with other members of the congregation and they were asked to attend a variety of other church get-togethers," Fulmer noted.

"God worked through a variety of events and the various members of the congregation who established relationships with this family, to bring them into His family," Fulmer continued. "God's way of working through us is sometimes incredibly complex and it may be difficult to trust that He is using us to fulfill His plan."

Two adults and six children from Barbara's family were baptized last October, "and the relationship with this family continued as a wedding in November allowed us to reach out to even more of the family," Fulmer concluded.

We share this story in hopes that it will inspire you to look into the "Groups Ablaze" seminars and begin building relationships with an increasingly wider circle. Surely, if God has chosen to use Shepherd's Creek, a small mission church, to fulfill His plan, imagine what He could do in a larger church with many more potential contacts. □



**BEAR MOUNTAIN COMES TO HOPE** — Members of Hope Lutheran Church-Plant City, FL, are "rejoicing and giving thanks to God" for the overwhelming response to the annual "Teddy Bear Sunday" coordinated by the Human Care Ministry Team. The 170 bears collected this year will be sent to children at Lutheran churches affected by last year's Hurricane Katrina. "Teddy Bear Sunday has become an annual tradition for the people of Hope to reach out and share the smile of God's tremendous love with others who are hurting in many and different ways," noted Cindy Petersen of the Human Care Ministry Team. "This is just one of many ways Hope members show the love of God burning brightly within them." In past years Hope bears have been sent to such recipients as members of the congregation serving in Iraq and Afghanistan; children in post September 11, 2001, New York; Plant City Fire Department; and Hospice. Pictured enjoying the multitude of bears following the service are Hope members (left to right) Lana Hartmann; Scarlett Gambala and Holly Drapp. □

## CAPSULES

by Rev. Gerhard Michael Jr.  
President, Florida-Georgia District

### Calling Congregations

#### Pastor

Augusta GA ..... Our Redeemer  
Brooksville FL ..... Christ  
Cape Coral FL ..... Trinity  
Cartersville GA ..... Savior of All  
Clewiston FL ..... Faith  
Cumming GA ..... Living Faith  
Fort Lauderdale ..... Trinity  
Hialeah FL ..... St. Andrew's  
LaBelle FL ..... Christ the King  
Miramar FL ..... Miramar  
North Miami FL ..... Holy Cross  
North Palm Beach FL ..... Faith  
Pompano Beach FL ..... Hope  
Savannah GA ..... Trinity  
Stockbridge GA ..... Lord of Life  
Tallahassee FL ..... Epiphany

#### Senior Pastor

St. Petersburg FL ..... Grace  
St. Petersburg FL ..... Our Savior

#### Associate Pastor

Brandon FL ..... Immanuel  
Winter Haven FL ..... Grace

#### Associate/Assistant Pastor

Delray Beach FL ..... Trinity

#### Assistant Pastor

Eustis FL ..... Faith  
Lutz FL ..... Holy Trinity

#### Mission Developer

North Dade County  
(Miami Shores FL) ..... Redeemer

#### Principal/Administrator

Brandon FL ..... Immanuel  
Davie FL ..... Gloria Dei  
Naples FL Christ Community L.S.  
Ocala FL ..... St. John  
Orlando FL ..... Prince of Peace  
Orlando FL ..... Trinity

St. Petersburg FL ..... Grace  
Sarasota FL ..... Good Shepherd  
Stuart FL ..... Redeemer  
Tampa ..... Holy Trinity

#### DCE/DCO

Kennesaw GA ..... Living Hope  
Marietta GA ..... Faith  
Orlando FL ..... Trinity  
Savannah GA ..... Trinity  
St. Petersburg, FL ..... Grace  
Winter Haven, FL ..... Grace

#### Calls Extended

Trinity-Cape Coral FL, extended a call to Rev. Steven M. Hufford, Peace-Lombard IL, as pastor.  
Immanuel-Brandon FL, extended a call to Rev. Mark L. Bersche, Zion-Alva OK, as Family Life and Youth Pastor.  
Hope-Bradenton FL, extended a call to Rev. Andrew Toopes, Christ Memorial-Malvern PA, as associate pastor.  
Lord of Life-Stockbridge GA, extended a call to Rev. James Rocky, Zion-Fort Myers FL, as pastor.  
Gloria Dei-Davie FL, extended a call to Mr. Gene Ladendorf, St. John's-Glendale WI.  
Trinity-Delray Beach FL, extended a call to Mr. Jeff Wallace, Christ-Stevensville MI as teacher.  
Holy Trinity-Tampa FL, extended a call to Ms. Aimee C. Brown, Concordia-Hyattsville MD, as teacher.  
St. Paul-Peachtree City GA, extended a call to Mrs. Rebecca Smith, Lutheran High School-St. Louis MO, as teacher.  
Immanuel-Brandon FL, extended a call to Mr. Paul M. Angell, Elm Grove WI, as principal.

### Calls Received

Rev. Larry Tieman, Rivercliff-Atlanta GA, received a call from Immanuel-Crystal Lake IL, as Sr. Pastor.

### Calls Accepted

Rev. Andrew Toopes, Christ Memorial-Malvern PA, accepted the call from Hope-Bradenton FL.  
Rev. Thomas Beaverson, Rapid City SD, accepted the call from First-Inverness FL.  
Ms. Aimee C. Brown, Concordia-Hyattsville MD, accepted the call from Holy Trinity-Tampa FL.  
Mrs. Rebecca Smith, Lutheran High School-St. Louis MO, accepted the call from St. Paul-Peachtree City GA.

### Calls Declined

Rev. Mark L. Bersche, Zion-Alva OK, declined the call from Immanuel-Brandon FL.

### Transferred to Other Districts

Mr. Daniel P. Schwerin to Michigan

### Transferred from Other Districts

Mr. Erich F. Abraham from Michigan  
Mrs. Paula E. Abraham from Michigan

### Emeritus

Rev. Pat F. A. O'Brien, Clearwater FL.