

***God's Creature in the City, not a Creature of the City***

It is the purpose of this paper to explore the possibility of leading a congregation through a process that will ultimately result in a more authentic expression of the Christian faith. The resulting changes will, I believe, allow the congregation to be influential in the larger community in such a way as to lead those outside to investigate the love that defining the congregation as, in fact, a body of disciples of Jesus Christ.

The specific setting for this exploration is Trinity Lutheran Church & School in downtown Orlando, of which I am the senior pastor. Trinity sits on the boundary (literally, this boundary passes through our property) between Lake Eola Heights, one of the six residential Historic Districts that surround the high-rise buildings of downtown Orlando, and the east side of the downtown business corridor. A rarity among larger metropolitan cities, downtown Orlando has suffered little from urban blight, and remains a highly desired residential setting. Brick streets lined with an eclectic mix of Florida vernacular houses from the 1880s to the 1960s are the norm to the east and north of the business corridor. The high-rise buildings of downtown include a number of recently built condominium complexes geared toward young urban workers who live, work, and seek entertainment within a walking radius of their homes. These same young people, when establishing their families, often look to the historic homes just a few more blocks from their work. One particular concentration of these historic homes, called Thornton Park, has a significant homosexual population.

Although slowed down along with the rest of the world's economy, the building continues of the amenities necessary for these city-dwellers to no longer find it necessary to venture more than a mile from their residences. The recent addition of a Publix

supermarket in the ground floor of one of the condos, the impending opening of the first movie theaters in downtown in decades, and the completion of all the preliminaries for the construction both of the Arts Center and the new Arena, all point to the possibility that Orlando will soon become a city where automobile ownership becomes unnecessary.

All of this is surrounded by water. Flying into Orlando one is struck with a sense that there's almost more water than land, as Central Florida puts Minnesota's claim of "Ten Thousand Lakes" to shame. Most downtown Orlandoans can choose which lake they would like to walk around for their evening stroll simply by whether they turn right or left out of their front door. While the lakes further out from downtown are often cut off from the walking public by the houses built against them, the inner downtown lakes are generally ringed by sidewalks shaded by substantial live oaks, the cypress trees at the water's edge spread thinly enough that the view of the water is always framed but seldom blocked. An abundance of waterfowl, including some species that once were rare, are making a great living on, near, and above the water. Hawks and bald eagles keep the pigeon population under control. Other than the squirrels, most of the mammalian wildlife is nocturnal and rather shy, but few evening walks fail to include sightings of raccoons, possums, armadillos, and the like. Reptiles and amphibians are abundant, though alligators are absent from the downtown lakes.

Because of the climate, it is far more difficult to keep vegetation at bay than it is to grow beautiful plants. Many species that are known only as houseplants in the rest of the U.S. line the front walkways or are somewhat ordered into landscapes around the residences, public spaces, and businesses. There is never a season without abundant flowers—the "change in seasons" that northerners talk about becomes a progression from

camellias to azaleas to citrus blossoms to tabebuia to plumbago to oleander to crepe myrtle to mums, while the bougainvillea seems to know no season.

The point of this lengthy description of “The City Beautiful” (so named a century ago) is to point out the availability of the beauty of God’s creation, both the beauty that is amazingly wild for an urban setting and the expected urban beauty of well-designed and maintained works of man. Unlike many urban dwellers, Orlandoans have walking access to great natural beauty, and quick driving access to a sunrise or sunset over the ocean, the choice depending on that right or left turn out of the house. If the younger people follow the example of the previous generation (and many of them have grown up this way), Orlando’s one lack, mountains, will be compensated for by a cabin in North Carolina. The only way to avoid the beauty of God’s creation in Orlando is to shut one’s eyes.

In the midst of this sits Trinity Downtown, so called since Pastor Ron Fink urged this designation in the early 1990’s as an expression of an understanding that, more so than many suburban congregations, Trinity’s unique location calls for ministry directed to the downtown community and spreading out from there. This is not to say that Trinity’s membership is heavily concentrated downtown—quite the contrary! Members of Trinity come from all over the metropolitan area, with few real concentrations. Many don’t even have a work connection or a family history in downtown. But there is a recognition that our ministry ought to have a special focus on those who do live and work downtown, if only because we’re geographically closer to these people than any others.

Trinity is 90 years old this year, founded to serve Midwestern German Lutherans who came to Orlando when it was at the center of Florida’s citrus industry (sadly, there is only one working orange grove in all of Orange County today). Especially before Disney

World came (that's 20 miles south of downtown) Orlando was essentially just a regional hub for business. Even today the main thrust of downtown is the regional presences of banks, insurance, and other financial institutions, plus the big hospitals of the two regional health care systems. Trinity was founded as Florida was growing explosively during the boom years after World War I, and outgrew its first building within about 14 months. The current sanctuary was built in 1926, and is the only sizeable downtown church still meeting in a building of anything like that vintage, and one of only two architecturally interesting sanctuaries in downtown. The congregation grew quickly in the 1920's, suffered losses during the Florida Bust and subsequently the Great Depression, then began to grow stronger during World War II. Immediately after the war Trinity's founding pastor died at an early age. His replacement, who served 1947-1964, led explosive growth, and Trinity reached its largest membership, 1469, in 1961. The school began in 1953, the Child Development Center in 1983, and Trinity continues to serve the community in part by educating nearly 300 children from age 6 weeks to 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

Because the sanctuary seats only 350 (400 with chairs everywhere) Trinity has had two worship services since at least the 1950's. In the 1980's a Saturday night service was added, and during the 1990's a service was added between the two Sunday morning services, during the education hour. These four services have developed into four congregations in many ways, not only in terms of the members not knowing people from the other services, but with truly different "personalities" to each service, profileable, if you will.

Trinity has a paid staff of over 70, and a strong core of lay leaders. A 1970's vintage leadership structure has directed the vast majority of the energy of the congregation into institutional survival for a decade or more, but the commitment Trinity made to a process called "Transforming Congregations Network" (TCN) this fall calls for a new structure to be in place July 1 that will free up tremendous energy for the actual work of proclaiming the Gospel effectively in our community. The leadership of Trinity is, for the most part, expecting great things out of all the changes TCN calls for, but most especially the emphasis on focusing our efforts outside, to the local community, rather than inside the institution.

This, then, is the setting: a uniquely beautiful downtown, populated with young, hard-working people, served by a mature congregation that seeks to discover how best to touch lives that are, in most respects, very different than those lived by the members (but very much the same in an important way, as seen below). It is the thesis of this paper that Trinity—pastors, workers, and members—has not been living its corporate life in such a way that we have offered a recognizably distinctive alternative to the lives these young people are already living. That is to say, when one of these city dwellers comes into contact with Trinity in any way, there is little that would cause him or her to say, "Wow, look at that! How could I have a life like that?" Further, it is the thesis of this paper that by changing our operating structure to give more potential leisure time to every participant, by defining "leisure" properly through sermons, classes, and written communications, by lifting up real beauty in the arts in our worship and our life together, and by encouraging each to make lifestyle changes that will give them true leisure,

Trinity might actually change, in our homes and in our corporate life, into a family that attracts and serves the individuals whose condos, so to speak, look out onto our campus.

Consequently, this paper will be organized into three sections. The first will attempt to describe the similarities between the undesirable characteristics of the lives of Orlando's young urbanites and of Trinity, corporately and individually. The second will address these undesirable characteristics as symptomatic of lives that do not properly appreciate the beauty of God's creation, and consequently know no rest or leisure. The third will outline a plan of action aimed at bringing about the changes at Trinity that will present to Orlando a congregation of people who value God's creation and their own creatureliness. These changes, though they cannot be made for the sake of giving a better witness and bringing new members to Trinity (they must be made because they are the right things to do!), are likely to in fact result in making more disciples, and so this section will include plans for bringing this new life into contact with our mission field.

### **1. How Trinity and young Orlando are alike**

A defining characteristic of American culture, indeed, of Western culture, for more than a century, is what Josef Pieper<sup>1</sup> calls "total labour" or "total work." (20-21) Pieper quotes Max Weber's maxim, "one does not work to live; one lives to work," in pointing out that "We even find some difficulty in grasping that it reverses the order of things and stands them on their head." (20) Pieper's essay was originally written in 1947, and in looking at the first decade of the twenty-first century, it appears that things have only gotten worse, especially in the United States. Our lives are consumed by our work, so much so that our time off from work is spent either trying to catch up on what we've had to neglect of our personal needs in order to put all our energy into our "paying jobs,"

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<sup>1</sup> Pieper, Josef, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*" (The New American Library, 1963)

or trying to entertain ourselves enough to be able to stand going back to work. Pieper talks about our time off as simply being “breaks,” like a coffee break or a lunch break, because the purpose of these breaks is for the sake of the work, not for the sake of the human being (43). We don’t rest, we don’t have leisure, we don’t “recreate,” we just stop long enough to recover enough energy so that we can work some more. This has created a culture in which we have lost the ability to *be*, because we’re so busy *doing*. We don’t know how to rest, like a cranky, overtired child.

Some do recognize that this culture of total work is harmful to them, but they can’t find a way out. Curtis White<sup>2</sup> uses the movie “Office Space” (24-29) to put before us the picture of young people working in a stereotypical urban office, introducing it with this telling quotation:

Recently, I was talking to one of my students, a young African-American woman, who said to me, “I am poor. I have to work in order to go to school. But my job is with a debt collection agency. In order to live, I find myself doing the opposite of what I believe in. I must threaten poor people, old people, sick people, disabled people. I hate my job but I’m dependent on it.” Then she looked up at me slyly. “Have you ever seen the movie *Office Space*?” (24)

White goes on to describe how his students all love *Office Space* because it tells them, “In order to live you will be asked to do what is no good, what is absurd, trivial, demeaning, and soul killing.” “They find the movie funny, but their laughter is nervous.” (24) His contention is that what we have created in our culture is “jobs” that suck the life out of people, jobs from which we receive the money that supports our chosen lifestyle but that kill us spiritually. The idea that students love this film nervously indicates what may be a more universal truth about workers in America today—many are selling

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<sup>2</sup> White, Curtis, *The Spirit of Disobedience* (PoliPoint Press, 2007)

themselves for daily bread just as certainly as one might have sold oneself into legal slavery in the ancient world.

If indeed this is true for many of the young office workers living and working in downtown Orlando, then what I see as I walk or drive to and from my home and church is as unhappy as it looks. The after-work behavior of these young people lived out on the streets of Orlando, even seen from a passing car, appears to have a quality of desperation. The clothing worn by the young women, the upscale tattoo parlor, the alcohol-induced laughter on the patios of the restaurants and bars, the marquees of the downtown music venues, the flyers blowing in the streets advertising concerts and “events,” all seem to point to a desperate desire to entertain oneself into forgetting what one is doing all day long. The hours kept by these young people, “partying” far into the night, seems to say that they don’t want to go “home,” even though they “live” in very nice spaces. Even the patios that face the lakes provide only a scenic backdrop for meals and drinks.

But does Trinity have an alternative to offer? I fear not. The lives of Trinity’s members seem to be just as strongly devoted to work, even when these members are married and have children. On any day, slightly over half the children in our school are in “extended care,” waiting for mom or dad (or grandma!) to pick them up after work. Of course, all of the younger children in the Child Development Center are, by definition, there all day as both parents are working. Then, in the evenings, those members who are active in the leadership of the congregation have far too many meetings that prevent quality time with their families at home. In talking with the members it’s obvious that they work long, hard hours, spend too much time numbing their minds through TV or other “entertainment,” and feel permanently stressed out.

As pastor of Trinity I can also speak for the staff. Teachers are stressed and overwhelmed, and support staff likewise. I can use myself as a prime example. I decided one week to log all my time, and without any funerals (though with one wedding) my work week exceeded seventy hours, of which, on close examination, neither I, my leaders, nor my TCN coach could identify any work that could or should have been done by someone other than the senior pastor. In other words, the fact that I'm currently lacking an assistant pastor didn't make any difference, and if I do receive one this summer, it won't address the problem of overscheduling.

Meanwhile, because of the TCN process, I've become far more aware of my responsibilities to my unchurched neighbors, leading me to examine the witness I bear to them by what they see of my life. What they see is a series of trips out to the car, late as usual, with no time to say more than Hi as I leave for another day of work or evening meeting, and trips back in from the car, either to grab a far too short supper before heading back out, or coming home so late that the neighbors are in for the night, probably in bed. When we do talk briefly there's the strong recognition on their part that my life is overscheduled. I've lived in this house for six years now, and I know that I have done nothing to lead my neighbors to think, "What's different about the Moore's, and how could I get some of that in my life?" They might think, "What's wrong with the Moore's, that they are unable to spend a little time on that wide front porch, or weed those flowers, or chat with us as we watch our children play in the yard?" If I'm the example of a Christian life among my neighbors, who would want to be a Christian? And, if this is the life Christ died and rose to give me, does he really love me? What about his promise, "I will give you rest?"

I believe this scenario is being lived out all over Orlando, at least in the neighborhoods of our active leaders. By the grace of God, it's also a scenario being aggressively addressed by the TCN process, especially through the coaching I'm receiving and through the restructuring of our operations. It's becoming obvious to me (and the readings for this class have been incredibly helpful to me in this) that, first, this needs to change, and, second, there is a better life not only available to me and Trinity members, but a life that can be preached, taught, and believed.

It is my contention here, then, that, despite the apparent differences between the average Trinity member and the average young office worker in the downtown Orlando condos, there is this startling similarity—people caught up in a culture of total work, trapped in unsustainable schedules, unable to receive the benefits of being God's creatures in a place of great beauty.

### **What's really wrong?**

Why do these young downtown Orlando urbanites and the members of Trinity have lives so overscheduled and wearing on the soul? The consistent argument of the readings for this course points to a failure to observe and appreciate the beauty of creation and one's proper place within that creation. Though the books come from radically different viewpoints, they converge on the necessity of humans living within creation as created beings (or, in the case of the atheist Edwards, as people who have been given the gift of life—Edwards unable or unwilling to name the Giver, but valuing the idea of being gifted!). A brief tour of these readings will give the flavor of this argument.

We'll start our tour with James Edwards<sup>3</sup>, an atheist, who feels that all religion, including Christianity, has been completely explained away by philosophy over the centuries. While it's not necessary to explore all of his book *The Plain Sense of Things*, the main argument is that, even though a respectable thinking person must know that any set of values he chooses to live by are just his choice, without any claim of absolute truth, we are forced to make that choice and live by it. He desires the sense of order and purpose that people have found in religion over the years, even for those who have no religion, because a life lived in radical atheism, rejecting all values, meaning, and purpose, isn't worth living. Listen to him for a moment:

On some philosophers religion hardly registers; on others (I am one of them) it sits like a stone. It's a bit like having an abusive parent, I suppose. Our lives depend upon getting free of its clutches, but down the road we end up scratching around for something to take its place. . . . What would it be like to be religious without fudging our best thoughts . . . when we can't really believe any of that glorious stuff—creation ex nihilo, virgin birth, bodily resurrection—we used to believe? (195)

That's the question he sets out to answer in his book. For Edwards, an appreciation for beauty and a sense that one has received life as a gift are at the heart of this religiosity he desires. He especially values Henry David Thoreau as a person who properly appreciated the world, who rebelled against the standards of his day and really got to know the beauty of nature. Finally, Edwards writes, "What should it mean *for us* to be religious? I have answered [the question] thus: to dwell poetically on the earth as a mortal. . . . This is *our* life: Should we not live it as simply and sincerely and joyfully as we can?" (239)

We'll continue our tour with Curtis White, noted above as the author of *The Spirit of Disobedience*. White is also a fan of Thoreau, both because of Thoreau's appreciation

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<sup>3</sup> Edwards, James, *The Plain Sense of Things*,

of nature and because Thoreau already a century and a half ago saw what work (as performed by Americans even then) did to humans. White quotes Thoreau's *Walden*<sup>4</sup>:

I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools, for these are more easily acquired than got rid of . . . Why should they begin digging their graves as soon as they are born? . . . But men labor under a mistake. The better part of the man is soon plowed into the soil for compost. . . . Men have become the tools of their tools. (108)

Following Thoreau's lead, White writes:

Thoreau's analysis of what it is that compels men to work is no less acute: money and the ruin of human time. It is the money-form, as Marx called it, that has captured and distorted a more human notion of time. Time, for *Homo economicus*, is not the river I fish in. It is for exchange. We trade our time for money. Our houses themselves become, in time, mere potential for exchange, or accumulated "equity," as our bankers tell us. The true cost of a thing, Thoreau shrewdly observes, . . . is "the amount of what I call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run." (108)

White argues that things have only gotten demonstrably worse since Thoreau's time, and our whole culture, especially the youngest workers, is trapped in this exchanging of life for money, and then money for "things we buy [that] are not only not necessities but hindrances." (109) His solution is what he refers to in the title as "disobedience," a refusal to accept life on these terms. His final advice is "Misbehave. Make something beautiful. Try to win . . . For me, it is simply the expression of a loyalty to life in a context that in myriad ways tempts us to be disloyal to life." (161)

Wendell Berry<sup>5</sup>, a novelist/poet/University of Kentucky English professor/farmer, writes convincingly of the need to reconnect with the soil in the essays assigned for this class. Like Edwards and White, he is keenly aware of the dreariness of so much of

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<sup>4</sup> Thoreau, Henry David, *Walden*, New York:Signet Classics, 1960, pages 8-9..

<sup>5</sup> Berry, Wendell, *The Art of the Commonplace*, Shoemaker and Hoard, 2002.

today's work, and the attitudes of workers who feel trapped into doing what they don't like or believe in at a pace they can't stand. Without arguing that everyone should be a farmer (though reading him might make you want to be!), he speaks of real work, of vocation, in connection with the earth, as opposed to "jobs" that are so derivative that one despairs of ever figuring out how they're connected to something useful, or beautiful, or fun. Berry writes about the economy we work in:

The ideal of competition always implies, and in fact requires, that any community must be divided into a class of winners and a class of losers. . . . Every transaction is *meant* to involve a winner and a loser. . . .the destruction of life is a part of the daily business of economic competition as now practiced. If one person is willing to take another's property or accept another's ruin as a normal result of economic enterprise, then he is willing to destroy that other person's life as it is and as it desires to be. That this person's biological existence has been spared seems merely incidental; it was spared because it was not worth anything. (209)

But Berry knows there is a different kind of economy, one in which a person does useful work in good company toward accomplishing something worthwhile:

Ultimately, in the argument about work and how it should be done, one has only one's pleasure to offer. It is possible, as I have learned again and again, to be in one's place, in such company, wild or domestic, and with such pleasure, that one cannot think of another place that one would prefer to be—or another place at all. One does not miss or regret the past, or fear or long for the future. Being there is simply all, and is enough. Such times give one the chief standard and the chief reason for one's work. (218)

In another essay (219-235), Berry describes two different kinds of "economies." He speaks of "a good human economy" as needing to be in touch with and subordinate to "the Great Economy," which Christians recognize as what the Bible calls "The Kingdom of God." He uses the term "Great Economy" in deference to those who are not of Western background, who might not be able otherwise to connect with the term "Kingdom of God," but that is what he's really describing. If you want to have a good

human economy, it needs to “fit harmoniously within and must correspond to the Great Economy; in certain important ways, it must be an analogue of the Great Economy.” He gives five principles in this regard:

- “[The Great Economy] includes everything; in it, the fall of every sparrow is a significant event. We are in it whether we know it or not and whether we wish to be or not.
- Everything is joined to everything else in it.
- Humans cannot know everything in it or the whole pattern of it.
- There are severe penalties for violating the order of this economy.
- We cannot see the end of it. (220-223)

Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or atheist, these principles are becoming more and more visible to everyone as we look at the effects on our earth and on local economies as humans have tried to ignore some or all of these principles. Berry is not a simple “tree hugger,” but he does rather simply put forward the undeniable truth that we can foul the nest called planet Earth until it will be unfit for humans to inhabit—and we’ve been doing a lot of foul things!

To summarize, Berry sees a huge majority of the people of the earth living in a way that cannot be sustained—and that few would want to sustain! These people are watching their environment degrade, they are unhappy in their work, and their pleasures are wispy, pale things that last but a moment, and a pitiful moment at that. He urges a different approach to life, one that understands that “there is no such thing as a post-agricultural society—unless we learn to live without eating, drinking, or breathing. (8)

Norman Wirzba<sup>6</sup>, who edited the Berry essays we read, connects many of Berry’s insights up with the concept of “Living the Sabbath.” He argues that we have focused on a weekly day of rest as the main import of the Commandment God gave Israel, and have

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<sup>6</sup> Wirzba, Norman, *Living the Sabbath*, Brazos Press, 2006.

missed the context and the attitude, the connection between the Commandment and God's Sabbath rest on the seventh day of Creation. He reads Psalm 92 to say that

a positive vision of the Sabbath . . . takes us far beyond all notions of Sabbath observance as a mere reprieve from six days of frantic exertion. . . If the Psalmist is right, then the test of whether we have genuinely practiced the Sabbath will come in the middle of our working week. (22-3)

So what is at stake in Sabbath observance is not simply that we manage to pause and refuel enough to continue on in our frantic and sometimes destructive ways. . . Sabbath practice . . . is a sort of training ground for the life of eternity. (23-4)

From rabbinic writings Wirzba contends that creation was not complete in the first six days, that the creation of the seventh day was "*menuha*, the rest, tranquility, serenity, and peace of God. . . . things being as they should be . . . not simply a cessation from activity but rather the lifting up and celebration of everything." (33) Based on this, he explores the concept of taking delight in creation as central to every day, and brought together in the celebration of the Sabbath, when we praise God for his creation, turn loose of all our ideas of being in control, and glory in being creatures blessed with gifts.

Wirzba sees the connection of Sabbath with Sunday as coming through the person and work of Jesus Christ. He quotes James Alison: "It is not as though creation were a different act, something which happened alongside the salvation worked by Jesus, but rather that the salvation which Jesus was working was, at the same time, the fulfillment of creation."<sup>7</sup> Drawing on the concept of Sunday as the eighth day, Wirzba says, "What distinguishes Sunday from the Sabbath is that the path to this rest is through the cross of Christ. (50)

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<sup>7</sup> James Allison, *Raising Abel: The Recovery of the Eschatological Imagination*, (New York: Crossroad, 1996) p. 55

So Wirzba urges delight; “the experience of delight is what the Sabbath is all about. . . .To take delight is finally to relish the goodness and beauty of God’s work and to see in each other the trace of God. . . .Delight is always delight in another.” (52-3)

Throughout his chapter on delight, Wirzba accents the community of such delight, that in it one is never alone, but rather growing in one’s appreciation for others. “Ask yourself, *Do I really have a clear grasp of what people do for me, go through for me, and contribute to me?*” (60)

Writing of “The Decline of Delight,” (Chapter Five), Wirzba points out, in words reminiscent of such works as Neal Postman’s *Amusing Ourselves to Death*,

Today’s entertainment industry is the clearest indicator that we are growing incapable of experiencing genuine delight. This sounds counterintuitive, because while we are in the throes of our entertainment we generally think we are having a good time. The attraction of many forms of entertainment, however, is that they give us release or an escape from life, whereas the experience of delight follows from a deeper immersion in and affirmation of it. . . . Rather than knowing the deep joy of relationships that are healthy, strong, and amply celebrated, and the happiness that follows from contributing to goals that are worthy and ennobling, we have settled for being amused. (64)

Because getting ahead requires all our energy and time, humanizing emotions—those feeling that most define us as social, embodied creatures made in the image of God, “pleasure in small profitless things, joy, wonder, ecstasy”—must simply be sacrificed. . . .the journey takes a heavy personal toll; unremitting work, postponement of intermediary pleasures, neglect of family and friendships, stress-induced illness, and loss of a sense of home. (66)

One would think that with this flurry of frantic activity there would be no time for boredom. But this is because we misunderstand the true nature of it. Boredom is not the same as having too much time on our hands. . . .We find the world boring because we don’t see very clearly why it is valuable and good or how and why we practically and beneficially belong to it. (66)

Wirzba goes on to propose a pattern of living that takes delight in God’s creation, that finds and does useful work, that relates to people in a loving, giving way, and that

understands that one is a beloved creature in a community of friends. Such a life, he is sure, comes only inside the communion of saints, though not every church setting furnishes it. There can be no such pattern of life without the redeeming work of Christ on the cross and resurrected from the empty tomb.

So our tour of these four authors (plus our earlier look at Josef Pieper's work) brings to us a picture of what might be the problem, and what might be the solution to the malaise afflicting young Orlandoans and, to some extent, the members of Trinity. With our noses to the grindstone and our shoulders to the wheel, we are uncomfortable and unhappy. Not being lead dog, the view never changes. Lacking the time and energy to truly delight in being creatures of God in a beautiful setting, we waste what could be true leisure time and proper rest time in "amusing ourselves to death." At this point it's time to propose a radical change, and discover how it might happen and Trinity and spread to the young people of Orlando.

### **Action**

As mentioned above, the purpose of this last section is to propose a plan of action for Trinity, Orlando. The plan is motivated by the recognition that Trinity needs to change both corporately and inside each home to allow and encourage our members to live the kind of life God had in his heart for us when he created us with so many gifts, set us in such a beautiful world, and gave his beloved Son to bring us back to intimacy with himself. Secondly, the plan visualizes renewed members of Trinity carrying out into the community, and especially to downtown Orlando's younger population, a vision of a life worth living.

The first step would have to be the raising of an awareness of how far short we fall of the kind of life we ought to live. In fact, the very first step will be the sharing of this paper with congregational leaders, probably accompanied by something like a book club study of Wirzba's *Living the Sabbath* and perhaps additional sharing of Marva Dawn's excellent *Living the Sabbath Wholly*. In this way I would hope to achieve some kind of critical mass of Trinity leaders looking for "a more excellent way."

Alongside this effort we have started this week (January 11, 2009) a small group study from the *Groups Ablaze* curriculum called *Motivated for Mission*. Approximately 200 members in about 20 groups are committed to this six week study that seeks to lift up a vision of sharing the Gospel with others, picturing a life worth living as a requirement for giving a winsome witness to others. I believe this study will be another great awareness-raiser.

In addition, I will be writing my February newsletter article as a short report on my experiences in this class, encouraging a fresh look at our harried lives and proposing that we work together to make significant changes in the way we approach our work, our play, and our life together in the church.

A second step will require a greater understanding of our community, which we are already working diligently toward. On January 24<sup>th</sup>, as the conclusion of that day's regular Voters' Meeting, Trinity members will be given a quick lunch, handed a small card with three questions on it, and sent out into downtown Orlando to find a resident and ask them if they've heard of Trinity, what they think are the main concerns that need addressing in our community, and what they would be looking for in a church if they were looking. This is part of a larger study of the community, with about 8 task forces

zeroing in on different components of the community, all to be brought back to the Vision Task Force in order to prepare the Vision that will lead to this year's Strategic Plan. While we will certainly be hearing things that we can't predict, I do believe that we'll receive some answers that will match up with what's written here, and that will help us get a better picture of the people who live and work closest to Trinity. (Note: there is no desire here to limit the mission of Trinity to just those who live and work downtown. We will be urging a conception of "neighborhood" that includes four elements. One, our close-in neighborhood, downtown Orlando—people who could walk to Trinity, essentially. Two, the neighborhoods defined as being the blocks around each member's home, the people that could, if they looked, see the lives we live at home. Three, the neighborhood of LCMS congregations, roughly our circuit, that ought to be concerned with strategically looking at greater Orlando and seeking to make sure that we are planting congregations and planning ministries that don't miss our own backyard. Four, the neighborhood of Christian congregations close-in to downtown who need to work together, especially in feeding the hungry and ministering the poor on our doorsteps.)

A third step (these are not necessarily happening in some chronological order, and all will be overlapping) will involve a plan of preaching that will recognize in the pericopes opportunities to call attention to the beauty of God's creation and the joy of being ourselves his beloved creatures. While it's fairly natural to speak of these things, it's likely that I've missed many opportunities to do so over the years, and so one question that will become a part of my sermon preparation will be, "What of beauty is connected to this text? How can I bring this to the foreground in the course of the sermon and encourage the hearers to value it?"

Alongside this will be many opportunities to call attention to the beauty of the arts at Trinity. We already have an excellent music program, with much to celebrate there. Trinity is also blessed with a very well-maintained 1926 English Gothic sanctuary by a very reputable architect. Our stained glass is above average. Trinity has only one peer in the area in terms of architecture and appointments, namely, St. Luke's Episcopal Cathedral three blocks away, though the Antiochean Orthodox St. George's has recently added a classical mosaic to its front, and is somewhat interesting as a building. Trinity is also blessed with artists of all kinds, including retired Disney execs who believe that we can make Trinity a center of the arts, performing and otherwise, in downtown, and who have already made some strides in that direction. There is much to celebrate in the arts at Trinity.

Even in such a setting, assuming that the preaching, the music, and the visual arts all combine at their best, it is still necessary that Trinity grow in its understanding of worship itself. Wirzba is right when he says, "If we understood worship properly, we would quickly come to crave it as the high point of our life. For worship is the time when we most directly celebrate life's most profound meaning as a gift from God" (155).

A fourth step, again running concurrently with the others, is the reorganization of Trinity mentioned earlier. By reducing the number of meetings that happen simply because there's a Board and it's supposed to meet; by setting apart a Board of Directors who are charged with keeping their eye on the big picture; by freeing paid staff up to provide better leadership; and by lifting up the spiritual leadership of the congregation to allow them to really lead, I believe this reorganization will help in two main ways. First, by reducing internal inefficiencies, less energy will be wasted on just keeping the

institution running, and less time will be taken away from living a “Sabbath life.”

Second, the mission and vision of the congregation will become clearer and more readily accessible to the members, providing stronger motivation to think about, pray about, and do something about reaching their neighbors with the Gospel.

A fifth step involves the work of our soon-to-be assistant pastor, currently a fourth-year Seminarian. As Trinity has visualized his vocation among us, he will not be involved in the “business as usual” of the congregation. We even joke that he won’t have an office on the campus, but will carry out all his work in the condos, restaurants, offices, and public spaces of downtown Orlando. This young man has already a rich history, from vicarage and previously, of “outside the box” ministry, meeting people where they gather to just talk, to organize activities they enjoy, and to move this toward Bible Study and worship. The idea is to let him mentor our members in how they can effectively share their faith in these ways. This is a young man who has a well-developed sense of what Josef Pieper means when he says “leisure.”

A sixth step will be a concerted effort to coordinate an attack on the culture of total work from a number of angles. Along with preaching, classes, and articles in our newsletter, I hope to use tools like Facebook, blogs, and our website to put in front of the members of Trinity a steady stream of encouragements to withdraw from the false rest of entertainment in order to really learn to have leisure to appreciate the beauty of God’s creation as his beloved creature. Obviously this will include research on my part, and hopefully done by others as well, to discover ways that others have broken the bad habits of overwork and amusement, of killing time and boredom.

A seventh step will involve our school and Child Development Center. Working with the teachers to make sure that they are in fact learning how to live the kind of life we've been describing here, we can model that life and try to work with the children while they're under our tutelage to value true leisure. Coordinating schedules of sports and other school events will help our families have more time to enjoy each other, and very specifically educating the parents in what we're trying to accomplish should win some converts to a better life even from non-members of Trinity.

Finally, and this will obviously take significant time, I believe Trinity will have developed a culture that will begin to make an impact on our neighborhoods. I want to be clear here that I'm proposing that this culture will not just be generally about enjoying beauty, but very specifically about the joy of being loved by God through Jesus Christ, rescued from eternal death and from our current culture of death, reconciled to the Father, and now beginning to enjoy his creation in the way he intended when he created us. While that will include many pleasures that don't seem to have a direct connection to the proclamation of the Christian faith (watching mama swans lead their new babies through the waters of Lake Eola, stopping to admire the carpet of yellow petals surrounding a tabebuia tree in February, listening to a first grader who's excited to finally be reading, etc.), there is a way to understand how all these delights come from our Father and were intended to turn our thoughts to him.

Such a culture, simply by being lived in downtown Orlando, will have some impact. When we add a purposeful intention to carry that culture to our neighbors, to include spending time with them as part of the leisure we're driving at, I believe Trinity can carry out the Great Commission as Christ intended when he gave it.