

## "It Works!"

- ❖ It works! Trinity Ecumenical Parish works because it is grounded in Scripture. Never forget that the idea for this Parish originated with a group of faithful people gathered together for Bible study. They did not always agree on how to interpret or apply the Scripture they were studying, but they did agree that the Word of God was and is vital and essential for people of faith. Trinity Ecumenical Parish still seeks to be grounded in God's Word. We do our best to teach it and preach it and study it and live it. We do not always agree on how to interpret it or apply it, but we do agree that it is vital and essential and life-giving for people of faith.
- ❖ It works! Trinity Ecumenical Parish works because it is centered in worship. Never forget that the second thing that the founding group did over twenty years ago was to begin worshiping together, even before there was a Covenant Agreement. They came together weekly around Word and Sacrament, acknowledging that the Holy and Mighty God who is the Creator and Redeemer and Sustainer of the universe belongs at the center of our lives. And with all of its many and diverse programs, groups, and ministries Trinity Ecumenical Parish is still centered in worship and acknowledges every Sunday morning that we need to be shaped and formed and transformed again and again by Word and Sacrament.
- ❖ It works! Trinity Ecumenical Parish works because it has been open to the leading and the power of God's Holy Spirit. Never forget that there was no grand master plan for an ecumenical parish nor was there an organizing pastor with a plan to create such a church. There was a group of faithful people to whom God through the Holy Spirit gave a dream and a vision of what could be, with God's help. And the power of that dream and the power of that vision and the power of God's presence propelled those people of faith and gave them the courage to boldly declare, "This is what God is calling us to be and to do." And to this day there is no grand master plan for Trinity Ecumenical Parish. But there is the Master's Plan, if you will. And TEP is a community of faith that has the ability and the patience to take the time and to prayerfully ask, "What are the challenges and

opportunities that God is placing before us? What is God calling us to be and to do?"

- ❖ It works! Trinity Ecumenical Parish works because from the very beginning ministry and mission were claimed as more important and more powerful than church polity and church politics. From its inception Trinity Ecumenical Parish has been guided by a core vision that says that the things we have in common are so important and so powerful that we must not allow our differences to divide us. And even though the world around us thrives on finding "wedge issues" and using them to drive people apart, TEP continues to thrive on seeing each and every person as a person for whom Jesus Christ died, and as a person in whom the image of God is alive and a person with whom we can find common ground in Jesus Christ.
- ❖ It works! Trinity Ecumenical Parish works because it has taken seriously the calling to be the Body of Christ, recognizing that Jesus Christ is its head and celebrating that God through the Holy Spirit has entrusted different gifts to each and every one of us, while never losing sight of the fact that all of us and all of our gifts ultimately exist for only one reason -- building up the body of Christ and ushering in the Kingdom of God. Trinity Ecumenical Parish seeks each and every day to be a community of faith where each and every person and each and every gift is valued, and where all of us are empowered and enabled to answer God's unique call to love and to serve in the name of Jesus Christ.
- ❖ It works! Trinity Ecumenical Parish works because from the very start it has focused on serving -- serving Jesus Christ, serving our community, and serving the world. One of the very first things that happened after the signing of the Covenant Agreement twenty years ago was the formation of a Service Committee that began to ask, "What are the needs of the Smith Mountain Lake community? What are the needs that God is calling us to address? How can we serve our neighbors?" Out of that conversation came what we now know as Lake Christian Ministries and then our Ministry of Service Team and a commitment to tithe 5% of our income each year to local mission and ministry. TEP also developed an emphasis on personal mission and ministry and the involvement of every parishioner in community projects and programs. Some year ago I ran into a community leader

who does not attend TEP and he told me, "Everywhere I go, in every organization in this community, I run into your people." To myself I thought, "Gee, I sure hope you don't think that's a bad thing!" I often hear from our new members that one of the things that attracted them to Trinity Ecumenical Parish is that we are one of the most community-minded churches they've ever seen; and I hear regularly from parishioners who are concerned that we are still not doing enough to address issues in the community.

- ❖ It works! Trinity Ecumenical Parish works because it has always realized that relationships are important, especially our relationship with God and our relationships with one another. TEP has sought to be a place where people feel welcomed and included and there has always been a high value placed on fellowship. Trinity Ecumenical Parish strives to be a place where new residents will feel at home and where new members have the opportunity to become established members quickly and easily. It's not as easy as it sounds and we don't always meet that goal, but TEP continues to seek to be a welcoming and inclusive Christian community where everyone is valued and appreciated.
- ❖ It can continue to work if we continue to remain grounded in the fact that there is only "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all" [Ephesians 4:5,6] and if we continue "bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." [Ephesians 4:2,3]
- ❖ It can continue to work if we continue to stay centered on God's promise that He "will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." [Act 2:17]
- ❖ It can continue to work if we continue to focus on "equipping the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God." [Ephesians 4:12,13]
- ❖ It can continue to work if we remember always that we are to be "speaking the truth in love, growing up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is

working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love." [Ephesians 4:15,16]

- ❖ It can continue to work if we continue to be faithful in asking, "Lord, what is it that you are calling us to be and to do here in this place?" and if we prayerfully wait for God's answer and boldly follow the leading of God's powerful and life-giving Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Come, Holy Spirit, Come.
- ❖ Let us pray. By the fire of your Spirit, O God, forge us into one community of faith, many and different people, together in Christ's powerful and loving embrace. Set our hearts aflame with a love for the truth and the desire to do your will, that our witness to Christ may burn brightly in lives of joyful discipleship. Keep us faithful in your service until Christ comes in final victory and we shall feast with all your saints in the joy of your eternal realm. Through Christ, all glory and honor are yours, almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit in the holy church, now and forever. Amen.