

REPORT ON STANDING COMMITTEE VISIT
TO TRINITY, KIRKSVILLE

David H. Benson

Trinity, Kirksville, is at a time in their history of good feeling and optimism. They have been through some years that were very difficult, and most especially the two and a half years of no resident priest which ended a year and a half ago when Steve Hayward came as vicar. And yet, even those two and a half years can be seen as the foundation of the new positive direction. For in those years they drew together and worked hard to keep the church alive. A new sense of community began in those years, was severely tested, and now is growing in strength. Their enthusiasm for a young vicar and his wife, who are seen as part of their community, is now offering a focus for their life together. "We are together here in a new sense of mutual identity. We recognize each other on the street." Along with this sense of being together is the feeling of having moved beyond mere survival. The congregation is growing, attendance at church and activities continue to increase and the recent successful capitol funds drive has given them the good feeling that "we are taking care of our own building." They are enjoying doing things together and remembered with pleasure a progressive dinner, well attended, and using for themselves the talents of "some of the best cooks in town." A "Show and Tell" evening in the parish allowed a number of people to share their hobbies and interests, and included the children as active contributors to their life together. More than thirty had made reservations to go off to a Parish Conference at a Y.M.C.A. Camp the end of October. One other strength they find is the responsibility the members took for the mission while it was vacant and which Steve Hayward has not taken away from them.

The proclamation of the Gospel in Trinity obviously takes many forms, but one strain of that Gospel carries through in both memory of their history and in their present life together. That strain is the proclamation that people are accepted and valued where they are and that many different people with varying gifts and commitments have been offered and welcomed to a place in the community. In their memory is the fact that when the Unitarian Fellowship of Kirksville discontinued all its remaining members came to Trinity and were accepted into its fellowship. Ten years later the one remaining member of that group could say "I can now say all of the Nicene Creed." Other memories include the organist who began a boy's choir and was allowed to organize a "solemn high mass" on Easter with trumpets and bells. More current comments relating to the Gospel of acceptance are stated reputation, reported proudly, that Trinity is a congregation of "eccentrics". There is the husband who is a "dinner Episcopalian" (his involvement is in attending the social functions) who has not been either pressured or excluded. There is

the Jewish husband who is welcomed into the fellowship in whatever way is appropriate to him. There is the self-named skeptical neo-pagan who feels he can live with integrity at Trinity and has served as Senior Warden. And there is the very new member who felt there should be flowers on the altar and has begged, borrowed and threatened to steal flowers each Sunday this season, and has persuaded the congregation that you don't have to have flowers on both sides of the altar---symmetry isn't everything.

The people of Trinity look at service to the community as beginning with their responsibility to serve the students at the two large institutions of higher education. They are proud of the fact that they have second generation students in this fellowship, and they seek to reach out especially to Episcopalian students on the campuses. They also have some pride in the fact that the first Nursery School in town was founded and is functioning at Trinity. Trinity was the church which offered a place of meeting and worship for a small Jewish student group. And not by any means last or least, the community dinners, cooked by Trinity's "best" cooks draw many from the community to benefit internally as Trinity benefits financially.