

Call to Public Discourse  
October 10, 2011

Introduction

Trinity Lutheran Church calls the Lancaster County community to a public conversation on the suicide deaths of three inmates at the Lancaster County Prison in a six month period, March to September, 2011.

The Three Deaths

On March 22<sup>nd</sup> John Kruger, age 50, died from traumatic head injuries caused from jumping from the upper level of the Lancaster County Prison. He had been arrested and was facing assault charges. On July 21<sup>st</sup> Matthew McNamara, age 45, jumped from the upper level of a cellblock at the Lancaster County Prison and died three days later of traumatic head injuries. He had been arrested with multiple charges including homicide by vehicle. On September 28<sup>th</sup> Ronald Snyder, age 26, committed suicide by hanging in his cell. He had been arrested and was facing rape charges. All three of these men were in pre-trial detention. None was serving a sentence.

Condolences

Trinity Lutheran Church deeply regrets the deaths of these three men and extends condolences first, to the victims, families and friends of the people these three men had allegedly violated or killed. Words of consolation are extended, second, to the prison staff, especially those who witnessed or were first on the scene at the times of these deaths. Words of consolation are also extended to the families, children, and friends of these three men.

Resolution

- We at Trinity Lutheran Church value the life of all citizens including those who are incarcerated;
- We, as Christians, are called to speak on behalf of the safety of all citizens, including those who are incarcerated, to be safe from harm not only from others but also from self-harm;
- We recognize three individuals were not safe from deadly self-harm at Lancaster County Prison from March to September, 2011; and
- We recognize the limitations of a political system to change culture, including the culture of a jail;

Therefore, we call the Lancaster County community to public conversation about the loss of life by suicide while incarcerated at the Lancaster County Prison.

Recommendations for Public Conversation

- First, we urge one-on-one conversations with our neighbors, co-workers and friends;
- Second, conversations in high schools and colleges as part of classes in sociology, history, psychology and government, asking students, teachers, and professors to send a written summary of their conversations to the County Commissioners and a copy to Trinity Lutheran Church for a compilation;

- Third, conversations in the legal profession, asking questions such as--what happens to our criminal justice system when a suspect commits suicide prior to a conviction? Is justice served? Is there a conclusion for the victims or families of the victims? Is there the presumption that the one who took his own life is guilty, without the benefit of a trial?
- And, fourth, conversation in our communities of faith and graduate programs relating to the value of human life, ethics and religion.
- Finally, we call the Lancaster County community to a public forum at Trinity Lutheran Church, at a date to be determined to discuss the results of these conversations.

TAM/SCP, 10-10-11

Approved by Vestry on October 10, 2011