



SEEKING AND SERVING CHRIST IN ALL PERSONS

May 8, 2018

Dear friends,

Below you will find an important announcement from our curate, Shea Gilliland. Please read it carefully, as he shares a significant decision he and Summer have made.

Dear Transfiguration Family,

It is with an extremely heavy heart that I write to inform you that I have notified Bishop Sumner of my resignation from ministry in the Episcopal Church.

From the moment I arrived at this parish, I have been overwhelmed by the amount of love that you have poured out on me and my family, accepting us as your own from the start. Because you have made me feel like family, I believe you are owed all of the honesty that members of a family are due. The reason for my resignation from Transfiguration, and from ministry in the Episcopal Church, is that Summer and I intend to convert to Roman Catholicism. This is a decision that we have come to after three long years of wrestling with a growing sense of God's asking us to become Catholic. What started as a nagging whisper during my first year of seminary has grown steadily into a loud voice that I am no longer able to ignore; my conscience weighs so heavily now with the conviction that the Lord is asking me to become Catholic, that I believe it is no longer possible for me to practice my ministry with integrity.

Many tears have been shed in our household over the last ten months as we have, like Jacob in the desert, wrestled with God over this question. I have fought this conviction and tried to ignore the Lord's voice time and again, but cannot continue to suppress my conscience.

My biggest fear is that my conversion will be interpreted as a judgment upon my experience in the Episcopal Church, and of my time here at Transfiguration. I hope that I can impress upon you how far this is from the truth, and how much of a blessing and honor it has been to me to be able to serve with and learn from you, my sisters and brothers. Though it is undeniable that theological differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church exist, we do not see our conversion to Catholicism as a "No" to Anglicanism, but as a simple "Yes" to something that we believe God is asking us to do.

I find it difficult to express how thankful I am for my time as an Anglican. I am thankful to the Episcopal Church for introducing this suburban Southern Baptist to the sacraments, to the beauty of the liturgy, and to the deep spirituality of the Prayer Book. I am thankful to Transfiguration, in particular, for teaching me to live out my Baptismal Covenant in radical ways, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, and to walk every day in the joy of the Lord that is so blatantly manifest in this place. I count my experience at Transfiguration as deeply formative and abundant in blessing, and will undoubtedly continue to be shaped by the wellspring of love, welcome, and spiritual depth that I have encountered in the people of this parish.

I am also deeply thankful to the staff and clergy here, who have been nothing but supportive and caring to our family. Each one of the staff and clergy embodies, in their own unique way, the beauty and mission of Transfiguration. Father Casey, in particular, has been an extremely understanding, patient, formative, and supportive pastor to me. What a blessing it has been to have a caring mentor and model priest as a boss! I know that a Rector's ideal Curate is probably not one who is at all times harboring such existential confusion, yet Father Casey's compassionate leadership and truly Christ-like patience and guidance have gone beyond all expectations, and I thank God for him, for his prayers for me, and for his abundant love for Christ and the Church.

Each Sunday, at the Prayers of the People, we pray "For all who fear God and believe in you, Lord Christ, that our divisions may cease, and that all may be one as you and the Father are one." This prayer—the prayer shared by Our Lord in John's Gospel—has been a daily ghost, haunting my mind and heart for the last three years. As I prepare to leave one Christian body for another, our divisions as Christians are made all the more painful to me because of the goodness that I have been shown by all of you. It will be my continued prayer that soon we all might be reconciled under the banner of Christ's love. Come, Lord Jesus.

Thank you, Transfiguration family, for your love. It is a love that is shared.

*Sincerely,
Shea Gilliland*

I want to comment on Shea's announcement and try to provide a little information that may be helpful to us as we move forward.

First, the decision is effective immediately. When a person resigns her or his orders to become a member of another church, the impact is right away, in contrast to when a person transitions from one job to another within the Episcopal Church (e.g. Mother Erin's departure last month). This means Shea's last day will be Friday, and he will not be with us this coming weekend to say

goodbye. This isn't because he did anything wrong, but because he has resigned his orders and is no longer a deacon, nor a curate.

Second, I want to affirm that he and Summer have been truly patient and deliberate in discerning this decision. This was not a decision made in haste, but over several years they felt a growing sense that they are called to Roman Catholicism. When someone makes a decision to leave the fellowship of your church, it can easily feel like a personal rejection, or a rebuke of who and what you are, but I've come to understand that for Shea and Summer, this is much more about moving toward something to which they feel called, than rejecting Transfiguration, the Episcopal Church, or Anglicanism. So, I believe Shea when he says this is not the result of anything he experienced during his time at Transfiguration, and I hope you will, too.

Third, I believe in the Church Catholic ("catholic," as in universal), so I believe that even when people choose to leave our communion for another, we remain firmly connected to them in the Body of Christ. While other churches may not share our understanding of the equality of all Christians, it is a fundamental belief for me. So, while I am saddened by the departure of Shea and Summer, I am consoled by the knowledge that we remain firmly bound together in Christ.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the mystery of the Holy Spirit. Every time I think I've got her figured out, I am surprised by something that seems utterly unpredictable. As a priest, I am often called upon to help discern God's will, something I do with fear and trembling, because we must be extremely cautious when seeking to know the mind of the Almighty. Yet I do believe that God's will is enacted in our world, and that it can be known through prayer and communal discernment. One of the hallmarks of God's will is that enacting it will be costly. God does not often call us to comfort and safety, but to risk our lives for the sake of serving the kingdom and loving others as Christ loves us. Having chosen to sacrifice much by this decision, I hope and pray that Shea and Summer will feel affirmed in years to come that they have truly been obedient to God.

I trust you will join me in praying for the Gillilands this week, as they embark on a major transition. If you would like to write Shea, you may send mail to 1208 Peak Street, Denton, Texas, 76201. I will be available in the Library this coming Sunday from 10:15 to 11:00, and also available after all services, if you would like to ask questions or simply share your thoughts about this decision.

Grace and peace be with you all.

The Rev. R. Casey Shobe
Rector