

Clerk's Corner

January 2020

This is an unusual Clerks Corner. It will be lengthier than typical to cover the two most recent and very busy quarters!

Pam's Announcement and Farewell

The last six months' focus on transition began when Pam's news was made known to the Clerks and Personnel Committee in the first week of June. With the news, a flurry of activity commenced, ultimately pointing to her announcement in a Called Session Meeting on Thursday, June 13.

Leaders from Trinity and the Presbytery worked closely to ensure the transition process followed Presbyterian polity. And, early communications about those meetings were distributed broadly to reach as many members of the congregation as possible and reduce the inevitable uncertainty that accompanies times like these. As part of this effort, the Trinity website was expanded to include a Pastoral Transitions webpage where frequently asked questions were answered, and communications associated with the process were collected and housed for ongoing reference (www.trinityatlanta.org/pastoral-transition). Also, links to the Pastoral Transitions web page began to be embedded in Trinity publications such as *This Week at Trinity*.

After the worship service marking Pam's last Sunday in the pulpit as Senior Pastor, many of the same leaders who had been helping prepare for transition also led us in a farewell celebration of her time here at Trinity. At the full reception in Williams Hall, members gathered to hear a series of speakers, young and old, who shared both memorable gifts to Pam as well as their fondest recollections of Pam's ministry with us. The traditional Session Resolution was read and, an original song paying tribute to Pam was written by her friend, Doc Schneider, who came forward to sing and play the composition on his guitar accompanied by Norman on the piano. And at the farewell celebration's conclusion, Pam offered her heartfelt gratitude to the congregation for her time as our Senior Pastor

and finished her remarks with a reading of a resolution she had written, one dedicated to Trinity Church.

Staffing and Leadership in the “In-Between” Time

Process and communication and farewell celebrations have been important but, an ongoing and critical key to navigating this part of our time of transition has been staffing. Fortunately for us, Richard has led us well as Acting Senior Pastor and has been ably supported by our staff, the Session, and the Personnel Committee. One of the first material steps made by the Session was the formation of the Interim Pastor Hiring Committee (“IPHC”) during its June and July meetings. Lesley Carroll chaired this committee and was joined by Bert Broadfoot, Steve Karasick, Allen Moseley, Susan Reese, Sarah Shoup, and Juanita Watson. The IPHC embarked upon a nationwide search to find the best candidates for Trinity. And during our summer Session Meetings, as the IPHC was being formed and its work started, Richard thoughtfully reminded us of staffing gaps given Pam’s and Jeremy’s departures. He articulated how these gaps needed to be filled to prepare and deliver the fall programming expected for the 70th anniversary, and he then led us in filling those gaps.

Session approved an amended staffing plan on June 17 covering salaries and responsibilities for the Associate Pastor for Adult Ministries; the Parish Associate for Pastoral Care and Senior Adult Ministries; the Director of Engagement; the Executive Director of Finance and Administration; and, the Acting Senior Pastor.

By the August Session Meeting, some of the additions and changes which had been made with our staff included:

- Betsy Lyles Swetenburg added Commitment and Mission to her list of responsibilities.
- Tom Farmer was moved to a full-time position on the staff as Parish Associate for Pastoral Care and Senior Adult Ministries.

- Jean Lapitan joined our staff as the Middle School Youth Director, a position in the YFM/CFM staffing plan under Andrew Esqueda's leadership.
- Sarah Wikle officially transitioned into the position of Director of Engagement.
- Kevin Lacson moved from part-time Worship Coordinator to full-time status, taking over the administrative responsibilities formerly held by Sarah Wikle.
- Molly Faircloth was given a job title and authority consistent with the breadth of her duties on our behalf.
- And during August, two congregational meetings were held to formalize the changes to pastor terms of call, one to dissolve Pam's relationship with Trinity and one to affirm the change in Richard's terms of call as Acting Senior Pastor.

As reminders that staffing remains an ongoing 'open item,' on December 4, George Stroup, who has served Trinity for four years and had recently turned 75 in August, announced his retirement effective at the end of December. In a letter to the congregation, Richard summed it up best: "We knew George would bring great erudition and wisdom, but his humor and compassion have greatly enriched our life as well. He has taught and preached with great insight and depth, and has been a wise counsel and friend to the senior pastor, staff, and many in the congregation." We wish George the best in his retirement endeavors! ([Read the letter here](#))

And following George's announcement, Amanda Edwards, our part-time Director of Adult Education and Spiritual Formation, accepted a Fellowship in an Atlanta congregation of the United Church of Christ come January. We also wish Amanda the best in her new pursuits.

Looking Ahead to the Interim Period

On December 10, in a Called Session Meeting, the IPHC announced the results of its work to the Session. After much consultation with the Presbytery and a network of Trinity friends, including Joanna Adams, Scott Black Johnston, Richard Dubose, Ted Wardlaw, and others, calls had been made to over 50 prospective candidates. These calls led to seven Zoom interviews and those to three candidates who came to Atlanta to meet with

the committee. The time in Atlanta allowed for focused discussions and dinners over which the candidates shared their vision of the Interim process.

One candidate rose to the top. All members of the committee agreed that Reverend, Doctor Kimberly L. Clayton was the right person to lead us through this interim period. And, when presented to the Session, she received its unanimous approval ([Read the Interim Pastor announcement here](#)).

As we prepare for the work of the interim, we should mindfully consider the October 15 College of Elders gathering where Richard introduced into our conversation, a framework of critical questions that will likely be addressed during the interim period. Among those questions he introduced were:

- Change - How is the world around us changing? How do we adapt to those changes? What does faithful (and unfaithful) adaptation look like? What is our theology of change? How do we think about it, process it, and react to it?
- Values - What are our core values? How do we prioritize and adjudicate between values when they come into conflict?
- Culture - How do we maintain unity amid diversity? How do we re-engage those who have left Trinity? How do we hold each other accountable for unkind or unhelpful behavior? What role does gender play at Trinity? How are female pastors treated differently than male pastors?
- Organization - What are our expectations of a senior pastor? Are we organized and staffed to support our core values?

In conjunction with this framework and questions, Richard suggested five practices in which we should all engage as we prepare for and enter into the interim period:

- Faithful discernment (we need to think and discern - not rush to the next thing until we know what it is and how best to get there)
- Respectful relationships (hold each other accountable while we assume the best from one another)

- Truthful dialogue (speak honestly to one another but always in love and respect)
- Hopeful patience (this is all a process, and we must not rush it)
- Intentional celebration (many ways to celebrate our life together now and throughout the process)

Among those topics raised within Richard's interim framework was a considerable housekeeping matter, a review of our rolls. Tom Farmer is leading us in this review. Tom has identified approximately 500 names who by neither attendance nor financial support for the last four years or more, are perceived to be engaged. These members are being contacted by phone and/or by letter to determine whether they should be categorized as Active, Inactive, or Deleted from the rolls. During an interim period, it becomes not only acceptable but essential to review and clean the rolls as it provides the next senior pastor with a more accurate representation of the congregation as they begin leadership. What's more, to support the administrative costs of our Presbytery, synod, and General Assembly, our churches pay a "per capita" amount each year. Trinity is presently contributing around \$10,000 annually for members who are no longer active/contributing. But most importantly, through this work, we are provided a reason to reconnect with disengaged members on the current happenings at the church and remind them that they are wanted and welcomed and with that, perhaps bring them back to active status. The results of this work so far were presented in the November 18 Session Meeting. There were three motions passed, naming 43 persons to be deleted from our rolls. Two additional motions were also passed to move approximately 335 names to inactive status, with over 300 of those members in the category of 'no response received' in our attempts to contact them. The status may be changed as we learn more, and so, the work continues.

Church Funding Needs and Means

Despite our focus on interim work, the church must still operate its facilities and make payroll to continue its good work. Commitment Co-Chairs Susan Foxworth Hamilton and John Shepard have been working diligently with Betsy on the 2020 Commitment Campaign under the theme "Give Generously." There have been numerous gatherings

around this year's campaign, including the well-attended Congregational Brunch Kick-Off on November 3. Fundraising pace is ahead of last year's results. And in what may be a Trinity first, Susan's rousing call to pledge from the Lectern at the 11:00 Worship Service was met with great applause! As is typical with Trinity commitment campaigns, more work remains, but we certainly anticipate more good news to come! If you have not yet made your commitment for 2020, you may do that on our website using the "Give" tab! (www.trinityatlanta.org/give).

While the work of commitment continues in its typical rhythm (even in the atypical rhythm of the interim period), the timing of another fundraising effort has required re-evaluation. As summer approached, the Capital Campaign had been planned to kick off at the same time as the Commitment Campaign in the fall. Co-Chairs Jim Blitch and Margaret Reiser discussed the campaign with Session in June. They shared that Coxé Curry (our fundraising consultants) recommended that we proceed with a smaller campaign - to exercise the church's long-dormant "capital fundraising muscle" and, in that effort, raise money for some much needed upcoming capital expenditures. But, Coxé Curry predicated the decision to move forward on the successful completion of the 2020 Commitment Campaign and the affirmation by the interim pastor that such a campaign could successfully pair with the interim process.

Although the Capital Campaign effort has been postponed, other capital gifts have continued to find their way to the church. The Session heard presentations from Trinity Trustees led by Chair, Charlie Moseley, Mickey Benn, and Tom Jones. The trustees received approval for the guidelines governing the administration of the Rosemary Kittrell Lectureship Fund. This Fund was established by Rosemary through her very generous gift to the church. She gave so that Trinity might, over many years, use this to attract high profile theologians and other religious scholars to enlighten and educate our members and the community at large. Tom was very pleased to announce that the Fund's first guest-speaker has been named. Renowned author, journalist and National Humanities Medal recipient, Krista Tippett, will be speaking at Trinity on November 12, 2020.

The 'Everyday Good Work' of Trinity Continues

Amid these changes and this news and, throughout the past two quarters, the 'everyday good work' of the church has continued. Our Pastors have led us with inspired preaching, including the sermons in the wonderfully considered series: "Remembering Church" this fall and in our Advent series: "What Can't Wait." Norman and the choir have astonished us with beautiful and uplifting music, including this year's annual Fall Music Festival, which featured Haydn's *Creation*; the Madrigal Feast celebrating the Christmas season; and the lovely array of musical offerings in our four Christmas Eve services. Our staff and lay leaders have educated and nurtured us all, young and old, with thought-provoking and informative church school programming. Mission has continued to provide financial and volunteer support to our partners serving the needs of our community and the world. And as in the many years past, individual members and staff, committees and small groups continue to gather and meet and support one another and God's work in the world through Trinity.

One faithful member had suggested in one of our summer Session Meetings that we join with them each morning at 7:00 am in spirit to pray for the church and pray for one another, as we continue along this transition path together. I invite you as well. Even if you can't join at 7:00, add your voice as you feel called. And as we together prayerfully consider the many gifts that come to us through Trinity, I believe we will find we have much to be thankful for...and so much to look forward to.

Let us be joined in that spirit as we journey onward together in the exciting work of this amazing church!