

## Church of the Ascension

Rector's notes from leadership meeting of Monday, August 2, 2021, 9:15 a.m.

Topics: Ongoing pandemic reckoning and planning, and Bishop-elect Clark

The following persons took part in a one-hour Zoom conversation that began at 9:15 Monday morning: Br. Nathanael Rahm, David White, Benjamin Rivera, Gary Alexander, MB Hwang, Jim Lo Bello, Roberta Dawson.

I began by sharing this illustration as a means of seeing the tension between the recent trajectory of 're-opening' and planning for fall, on the one hand, and more recent epidemiological concerns and new guidance from the CDC, State of Illinois and Diocese of Chicago.



### Summary of responses:

- **Re-Masking.** Those on the call expressed support for the decision to re-mask in church.
- **Registration for Mass.** We agreed that registration should continue, that the registration system should be revisited and, if necessary revised, and that ushers should be reminded of the importance of and mechanisms for registration.
- **Communications:**
  - **General 'messaging'** - Continue to strike a balance/avoid extremes of communication — either undue alarm or undue disregard for appropriate concerns. Encourage vaccination.
  - **Be specific/educate/inform** - Communicate/reinforce current standards and expectations (such as no close or direct contact during the Peace).
  - **Remain responsive and flexible** - Keep in view that guidance may/will change as new information becomes available and is interpreted parochially.
  - **Consider a questionnaire.** (See also the related comment under 'Sunday mass schedule,' below.)
  - **Wednesday 'AA' meeting.** Rector and/or parish administrator to open a line of communication about guidance. We assume AA groups are also getting some central guidance ...
- **Looking ahead to fall.**
  - **Programs/personalities/resources of interest?** I mentioned the opportunity made possible by Vestry funds for guest speakers/preachers, programs, etc. to engage the congregation in the coming year. No one had specific ideas.
  - **Sunday mass schedule.** We all seem to realize that the Sunday mass schedule for fall and going forward should be (re)considered. A leading thought concerned re-introducing a said mass, probably Rite I. It would a) add another option on Sunday morning, b) be easy to offer (insofar as it may be done with one priest and one lay minister) and c) likely be attractive to those wanting a shorter, simpler mass. Questions arose about service times in the event of two masses (rather than one or three), and a number of those present felt a questionnaire may be of value.
- **Bishop-Elect Clark** and her ongoing health challenge was our final topic of consideration. Most of us on the call had viewed the related video shared by the diocese on Wednesday, July 28. All are aware of the uncertainties and concerns involved. All wish more exact information was available.

*See the next page for notes from a Tuesday, August 3, meeting with the same interests (but different responses).*

## Church of the Ascension

Rector's notes from leadership meeting of Tuesday, August 3, 2021, 4:00 p.m.

Topics: Assisting Bishop Knudsen; Ascension's ministry and mission in the year ahead.

*The following persons took part in a one-hour Zoom conversation that began at 4:00 p.m. Tuesday afternoon: Senior Warden Cheryl Peterson, Junior Warden Kenneth Kelling, Father Gary Lawler, Deacon Meghan Murphy-Gill, Vestry member Samuel Sommers, Vestry member Enrique Vilaseco, Beth Hall.*

As on Monday I began by sharing this illustration. (See the notes from the Monday meeting. Prior to the Tuesday meeting, I had circulated responses from the Monday meeting. The Tuesday meeting ended up covering almost all new territory, mainly focusing on Ascension's mission and ministry for the year ahead.



### Summary of responses:

- **Bishop-Elect Clark/Assisting Bishop Knudsen.** Hours prior to this call the Diocese of Chicago announced that the Rt. Rev. Chilton Knudsen will serve as Assisting Bishop as Bishop-elect Paula Clark's medical condition and readiness for episcopal ministry continues to be monitored. Conversation was naturally focused on the significance, roles and tenure of an 'assisting bishop' and on Bishop Knudsen herself.

- **The year ahead!** The entire balance of our conversation was about the mission and ministry of Ascension in the year ahead. Thoughts and questions were sincere, energetic, hopeful and wide-ranging. Topics included:

- **Neighborhood connections, outreach and mission.** How can we move beyond talking about better connections and more outreach and take actions that reflect that Gospel mandate and numerous parochial conversations in the past several years? Specific suggestions included:

- Connection/collaboration with outreach efforts at LaSalle Street Church.
- Following up on overtures from St. Chrysostom's, via Fr. Sam Portaro, to build inter-parish relationships and share in building neighborhood relationships and outreach ministries.
- Finding an opportunity with Chicago's longtime Northside Ecumenical Night Ministry.
- Leveraging Ascension's highly visible music mission and ministry for other programs that will reach new neighbors or other constituencies.
- Including Spanish language in our liturgies.
- How can we leverage our significant recent investment in technology for purposes of outreach, evangelism and reaching/welcoming newcomers?

- **Society of Mary.** A number of those on the call take part in the Society of Mary. We reviewed the encouraging interest in SOM that preceded the pandemic and agreed that the momentum had since stalled. Suggestions for more intentionally sustaining and growing SOM in the coming year include:

- Occasional, perhaps monthly, fellowship, perhaps after a Wednesday evening mass.
- Connections with other SOM wards or Episcopalians with a devotion to Mary but no ward their own parishes and/or diocesan/regional connections with other SOM Wards.
- Opportunities naturally lent by the Church calendar/Ordo Kalendar, such as the Nativity of Mary, September 8; Our Lady of Walsingham, September 24; Our Lady of Victory, October 7.

- **Adult Education/Spiritual Formation.** We noted that the *form* of our offerings must be considered alongside of the substance, relevance and interest. We specifically (though only briefly) discussed: • a weekly Zoom fellowship connection to replace the lost virtual coffee hour that had been enjoyed by many; • a suggestion by Fr. Bob Petite that intensive quarterly programs might be a better draw than ongoing weekly programs; • questions of 'hybrid' participation — both in-person and live streamed.

- **Technology.** We briefly explored two shared general perceptions with regard to technology: 1) We made a significant investment in high-quality technology that can benefit our mission and ministry; and 2) We need a long-term vision for a mix of paid and volunteer personnel to optimize it.