

TRINITY CHURCH SUTTER CREEK NOTES FROM OCTOBER 31 RETREAT

BEFORE THE RETREAT: I talked to vestry members and other leaders personally and participated in a hybrid Eucharistic service. Meg Verardi, the Senior Warden, and I worked together to create a four hour program that would incorporate my earlier observations with exercises that could help them determine the capacity of leadership. From this it might be possible to create new administrative, liturgical, and pastoral structures that would both feed the leadership (and the congregation) spiritually while fitting into the time commitments available.

Discoveries: This group is creative, spiritually mature, well developed in Christian faith. They give generously of themselves but are feeling slowed down by age and physical issues. Since being without clerical leadership, they have maintained the church building and programming even in the midst of Covid. They have been addressing tasks at hand, dividing up duties rather than organizing based on their unique gifts.

AT THE RETREAT: On one issue—whether attrition was ever due to conflict with a priest—the group had differing impressions. Otherwise, they were in general agreement about the congregation and its ministries over the past several years. The small group evaluations of the church's ministry using the baptismal promises also revealed a good deal of agreement. Participants fully engaged in reflecting on their own ministries using a Venn diagram exercise, which in turn prepared them for honest sharing of answers about their leadership interests and time commitment for the church. A zoom poll was used to narrow down the suggestions I had taken from everyone I spoke with before the retreat. It was decided to have another retreat or workshop in February to discuss/train for small group participation and leadership and time-saving changes in vestry meetings and other administrative tasks.

TO DO IMMEDIATELY: Plan Advent/Christmas/Feast of Epiphany, including publicizing the season to all members, and schedule planning session for season of Epiphany. One member (Carol H.?) should look at manual of business practices in the church, available on the diocesan website, and make a list of any points where practices need to be adjusted for compliance. Another should make sure congregational charter and by-laws are readily available in case any vestry decisions involve changing the bylaws. Every participant should hold on to the notes they took about their spiritual lives during the Venn diagram exercise.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Continue with a 2x per month supply clergy-led HEII hybrid service; MP11 will be home-based online and led by trained laity. Recruit new liturgical leadership to replace

team members who can no longer serve on Sundays. (Current team probably best able to do this.) Do coordinated planning of liturgies one season at a time to allow for variety without adding too much work for leaders. (Amanda and Noreen indicated they enjoyed liturgical planning.)

Begin imagining a small, in person, midweek service where hosts blessed at Sunday services could be distributed as part of the service. There's lots of room for creativity with this. (Martha and David, Carol H., Nancy, Amanda and Laurie Jo would take pleasure in this.) How this service would differ/compete with vespers should be considered.

Parish communications could be regularized and coordinated to include all members regardless of tech capacity at home. Using the liturgical seasons as a basis instead of months would help cut down on time and be a way to emphasize our tradition. Newsletters, personal calls and notes, Christmas and Easter outreach to those unable to get out, parishioners' inclusion in the prayers of the people, all can be done in a formatted way and broken into smaller ministries for individual members to take on. (Meg is actually looking forward to working on this.)

Prayer ministry should be publicized so members know how to ask for intercessions and share thanksgivings on both a confidential and a congregational basis. Consider training interested folks to write their own prayers of the people. (Coordinating prayer list(s) and scheduling meetings strictly for prayers might already be happening but Dianne and Steve both said prayer ministry was a source of inspiration for them.)

Assign vestry members (two is enough) to explore the prioritized ideas from the retreat, including sharing of the building space, coordinating with others to do service ministries such as a community garden, and exploring ongoing relationship with a specific priest(s) for supply work.

There is enough interest and commitment to weekly spiritual growth groups that it seems two small groups could be started. One could be very disciplined in terms of time and structure, and one might be less formal, allowing for more free discussion and sharing. Both would include a weekly commitment, sharing of personal spiritual lives and work, some grounding in scripture, and prayers for each other throughout the week.

Schedule another retreat for February before the end of December.

Submitted by Rev. Margaret Fisher, retreat facilitator