

Trinity Episcopal Church  
Fishkill, NY 12524  
Minutes of Virtual Vestry Meeting August 27, 2020

GoToMeeting was activated for the virtual Vestry Meeting. At 7:02 Garrett Mettler called the meeting to order and offered an opening prayer.

The following were together online, Garrett Mettler, Wardens Terry Badura and Jan Humbert, Vestry members Cliff Chapin, Connie Smith, Nancy Drennan, Tom Quackenbush, Nancy Bitteker, and Vestry secretary Dave Bishop. Not attending treasurer Bryan Swarthout, Vestry members Joe Bird and Jay Anderson.

**Discussion of Decision Needed regarding opening worship at Trinity Church**

Garrett thanked Jan and Terry summarized that the summer services did not work despite the best efforts of those involved. Garrett considers the outdoor services at Trinity are not a good continuing option. He offered other options such as open worship in the Sanctuary, live streaming, recording the service or a combination of these options.

Cliff felt the virtual services are good, but if the choice is to have open worship service inside, he would be inside. Nancy Drennan related she is not ready to return to inside services yet, and needs to be offered virtually if we go inside. Garrett explains that open means people can come to church and join in the service. Connie supported moving into the church but would not attend unless she is serving in some capacity. She still prefers virtual live stream or recorded services. Garrett notes these positions are in line with the survey results to date. Terry noted that her core care group can not return to open worship in the Sanctuary and noted they missed the online services and the virtual coffee hour. She is leaning more toward staying out of church. Tom noted that the recent data shows a 0.7% increase in positive test results, so New York is keeping the spread down. He understands the feelings and, in his opinion, we should be prepared to go back into church, which would give us the opportunity to record or livestream the services. He also felt that the virtual coffee hour is a big connection point for members of Trinity.

Garrett noted he would like members to consider the decision in terms of choice for the whole congregation. Jan noted that her position at the last Vestry meeting may have been impacted by the conversation at the meeting, and that after leaving the meeting her opinion, upon reflection, was now to not have open services in the church. She mentioned that her core care group expressed a need for online service and felt the virtual coffee hour was a missing piece. Jan mentioned attending the virtual town hall for Dutchess hosted by Marc Molinaro where the data was indicated that Dutchess has 4,298 confirmed cases and 175 deaths due to COVID-19. Jan prefers to wait until October to open and to see how our local schools are doing. Tom asked what the downside is to conducting open services in the Sanctuary. He discussed space ventilation and noted that an online worship component was an absolute need in his opinion. Cliff offered an opinion that the downside is the large effort needed to have the service versus the small amount of people attending. He recalled an incident at one of our outdoor services and noted that with all the protocols and things to remember that affect safety, it is easy to make a mistake that could increase the risk.

Garrett noted that the August 30 service is going to be the last outside service at Trinity. Services will be inside. The questions remain: Shall we take the libertarian approach whereby individuals can make their own decision about whether to not to attend an open service? Or shall we take the paternalistic approach whereby we as a Vestry take on the responsibility as leaders and we offer a higher level of protection

against infection (not allowing individuals to take the risk) by not offering an open service? Let's consider the consequences. Some individuals will be upset if church is not open. If it is open we cannot control and protect individuals from every single possibility that may occur. The question arises, what if there's an incident? What is our responsibility as A Vestry leader? Tom related that we have to do what we can and ask ourselves if we are comfortable with that or not. Connie noted things are opening more and more. This leads to more movement of people and we can not anticipate what can happen related to the pandemic based on this opening and increased movement. She feels it better to wait another month or two. Nancy Drennan relayed two concerns. The first being in two months we will know more about the outcome of efforts to control the pandemic and secondly the care of people we are trying to help as Garrett is not at Trinity every Sunday.

Garrett relayed he believes we need to resume lay led and priest led services and has a concern with the number of people available to conduct open services. Dave asked if there are different serving requirements for a recorded or livestream service vs. an open Eucharist or Morning Prayer service. Garrett noted that he felt the reduced number of servers is not the best expression of the Episcopal Liturgy. Terry noted that even if we are back in church with open services it is not going to be the same experience. Garrett reinforced that there will be no congregational singing indoors. His biggest reservation of having people attend open services is that he would need to establish the criteria for having open worship and when to stop it if pandemic conditions indicate we need to change. His research indicates the evidence is incomplete, but hospital level MERV-13 type air filtration is not possible at Trinity. He knows other churches are opening and indicates an acceptable risk level is a big factor in their reopening. Garrett discussed the fact that air concentration of possible contaminants builds up over time in an enclosed space. We could use fans in windows or purchase ultraviolet devices that could help purify the air. Jan asked about the effectiveness of recirculated air of air conditioners and the need for better systems of air exchanges. Tom noted that a typical HVAC system completes 2 to 5 air exchanges in an hour. A question was asked if there is any feedback from other churches related to what they are doing for air circulation. Garrett had no feedback from other churches related to that question yet. He noted the ratio of people to space at Trinity is extremely low and therefore safer. He noted that New York State has restricted the number of people attending to 33% of the seating capacity. Terry asked if we will survey to find out how many people are going to attend open services. Garrett said no based on previous numbers at Trinity. We will keep COVID-19 tracing attendance sheets.

Garrett discussed another metric to be addressed. He noted that when the pandemic started, leaders recommended social distancing and not gathering among other things, and we followed those recommendations. Now that same leadership is providing guidance on gathering again, but we at Trinity are concerned about gathering again. Data being used is 5% increase in positive testing results and 10 new cases per 100,000 people. We could tell the congregation why we are not gathering based on using this same data. Garrett poses the question of having open services to the Vestry members and asks for their opinion.

Tom asked if we would still be using a supply priest. Garrett said yes. Nancy Drennan asked what St. James is doing. Garrett explained that they have a different timeline for moving indoors, as their outdoor services are in a location less affected by noise and noted they have not made any decision yet. Nancy Drennan asked if a livestream from St. James could be shared thus saving the need for additional supply priests at Trinity. Connie noted that for her, the online services were a positive experience. She noted that the metric seems to be based on good science, but she would most likely continue with online services. Garrett noted he has contacted two other churches and will ask them about their space and how they determined their acceptable level of risk when they respond. Nancy Drennan asked if we have the ability

now to livestream at Trinity. Garrett explained that we have that ability now due to moving our server and adding a range extender in the church building. Jan noted she enjoyed the communion service Garrett had provided before with appointments. A discussion of opening spaces for access by the public followed. Jan reminded members of the offer she and Marilyn made to come and open Trinity and clean up after visits, if people want to access the Sanctuary. Garrett noted that he and Dave have also been offering this service to drop-ins.

Garrett brings the members back to the question at hand for this meeting. A decision on behalf of other people should be made. Does Trinity open our worship services to whom ever wants to come, or if we can not reconcile the risk, we would need to leave services closed to attendance outside of those needed for livestream or recording the service. What is our standard? Do we let people decide or as leaders control the safety? Garrett noted leaders need to be able to give the criteria as to when we will open and if we stay closed. He stated only three of nineteen responses from our survey noted they would be attending if services open at Trinity again. If Trinity lets people attend the leaders already have the data from the metric of the percent increase in positive test and the number of new cases per one hundred thousand people. Tom asked if we say no to open services, what will be the trigger point? He noted Vestry members should set this trigger point. Terry noted she felt the open service would not be the same as before the pandemic started and did not feel it was right for servers to be asked to support open worship services. Garrett noted that servers are being asked to take part in the service and should not feel uncomfortable if declining to serve. He will explain this as clearly as possible to our current servers. Terry asked what servers will be needed for open service. A discussion followed outlining the need for a lector, a greeter, alms counter, altar guild and Eucharistic Minister. Garrett noted that if a lector or EM was not available, the service could still be conducted. Jan asked if there would be two services. The consensus was to support one and that service would be at 10 a.m. on Sunday. Dave noted we will need to change our reprint license to a streaming license for use of music on One License. Garrett noted his approval for that change. Connie noted the need for additional help with sanitizing other than relying solely on the Altar Guild.

A discussion regarding our organist being willing to be inside followed. Garrett will follow up with Pamela Wood and resolve any conflicts. Nancy Drennan asked Garrett if he was comfortable returning to open worship services. Garrett explained he was comfortable and provided his reasoning.

A discussion on the indicators to be used in making the decision regarding Trinity open worship followed. Garrett calls the question to the Vestry members. One member is against, one member is undecided, and five members are in favor. Garrett thanked Jan for her revelation regarding her changing opinion at the beginning of the meeting and noted it was especially important. Garrett noted how he was feeling less anxious now about air quality, social distancing, and congregational singing, the three factors he considered important relative to open worship services.

A discussion about the possibility of needing to change the decision just made followed. It included watching the results of schools opening, results at local colleges and the possibility of a vaccine being developed. Jan noted the importance of clarity in communication when notifying the congregation. She suggested we redo the survey in October to get feedback from members of the congregation. Nancy Drennan stressed it was important to let people know of any changes. Garrett asked Jan for her feedback on Morning Prayer and she said that she had enjoyed the opportunity for leadership but considering the low attendance she said this is a good time for change. The Vestry decided that on those Morning Prayer Sundays we could again be offered the St. James' livestream service.

Garrett informed the Vestry that he will be conducting the open worship service at Trinity on September 6<sup>th</sup>. He provided a detailed explanation of his plan to inform the congregation, including the fact that the Vestry had painstakingly considered the safety of the congregation as their highest priority, making the protocols for open worship inside very clear, providing no illusion that the Sanctuary worship services would be totally risk free, deciding in the September Vestry meeting what triggers could change the decision just made and that changes could occur at very short notice related to this decision.

Connie asked about the starting the virtual coffee hour and Garrett explained he would need a host not attending to be able to start it each week. He reinforced the fact that he would offer communion by appointment and noted that his schedule would dictate whether he could provide it during evening hours or during the day, when he was at Trinity. Garrett thanked the Vestry members for their goodwill and willingness to navigate through the difficult challenges faced by Trinity.

The meeting adjourned at 9:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Dave Bishop