

New Arrangement for Fr. Garrett's Leadership at Trinity Proposed

Fr. Garrett has served with us since September of 2015, first as our interim priest, then as priest in charge, on a part-time basis. When signing his letters of agreement with us he has let the Vestry know that he needed to remain open to exploring opportunities that would allow him to return to full-time ministry. An opportunity to do this has come that would allow him to remain at Trinity but take on leadership of a second church – St. James in North Salem – also on a part-time basis.

The Vestry was informed about this development at its February 20th meeting and immediately began gathering information and considering the implications. Vestry members and Fr. Garrett decided that it was best to share this news on the first Sunday after Easter in order to not distract from all that goes into preparing for and celebrating our most important time of the year.

The purpose of this letter is to share what it would mean for Trinity if we were to amend our agreement with Fr. Garrett as our priest-in-charge so that he could become priest-in-charge of St. James as well.

What would stay the same and what would change?

Because his responsibilities at St. James would also be part-time, there would be virtually no change in the way Fr. Garrett serves the ministry needs of our church during the week. His current schedule of two weekdays and availability for urgent pastoral care as needed would remain the same.

His presence for Sunday worship services is where the biggest change would take place. In order to serve both congregations equitably Fr. Garrett would alternate Sundays between Trinity and St. James. On the Sundays he was away from Trinity we would hold Morning Prayer. As an occasional alternative we could schedule a supply priest to be with us to celebrate Eucharist.

There is already precedent for this in our Diocese. St. Luke's Church in Somers has a half time priest who is not serving two congregations. Their agreement in the beginning was that half-time doesn't just mean limited weekdays but also half of all Sundays with the priest. They have adjusted to a schedule of Morning Prayer with trained lay leaders every other Sunday.

What about major holy days like Christmas, Holy Week and Easter?

Naturally every church would like to celebrate these occasions with its own priest and just as naturally no priest can be in two places at the same time. Achieving a good and fair balance that offers each congregation equitable access to the priest's leadership as well as solid alternatives when he is away would require careful attention to each congregation's traditions, the requirements of each occasion, and an agreed upon general set of guidelines.

There would need to be a good working relationship between the leadership of Trinity and St. James in order to come up with a fair schedule. There is also room for creativity in proposing alternatives to the existing times of services.

Working through a schedule for the major services that was acceptable to both churches would be a requirement for entering into this shared model.

When would this happen?

Only after there has been adequate time for the all of the members of both churches to digest this news, ask questions and share concerns, and have all of those questions and concerns responded to. The Vestries of both churches would also need to meet to work out scheduling and all of the details that needed to be in the two letters of agreement with Fr. Garrett to ensure that each congregation's needs would be provided for. At this time, on April 8th, there is no target date for this new arrangement to begin. If the Vestry agreed to enter into a new letter of agreement with Fr. Garrett it would not be before the first Sunday in June.

How you can share your thoughts about this news

The most important next step is for you to prayerfully consider this news and gather your questions and concerns. On Sunday, April 15th, following both the 8 and 10 a.m. services we have planned listening and response gatherings with members of the Vestry and Fr. Garrett for discussion about this news. In addition to answering questions, Vestry members will also be able to share ideas about what adjustments we could make to live into a new model of ministry positively.

The larger church continues to experience substantial shifts in the way that our culture views and sees value in religious belief and involvement. Trinity is far from alone in facing the necessity of questioning previous models of ministry and thinking creatively about how to offer meaningful worship, fellowship, formation and service opportunities into the future. In the midst of this challenge the Vestry has unanimously expressed its support of Fr. Garrett to be able to pursue his calling as a priest full-time, with the accompanying income, so that he can better provide for himself and his family. Please come and take part in one of the discussion sessions after worship on the 15th so that your input can contribute to our planning for our future.