

Why Confidentiality in a Rector Search Is Imperative

Over the past few years, Trinity has dedicated itself to becoming more transparent in its workings and decision-making processes. Parish Updates are now a regular part of our life. The Vestry makes itself available for Vestry Chats from time-to-time each program year, and Vestry members are always available to hear your questions, ideas, and feedback. At times of controversy, as in the aftermath of the purchase of the rectory on Chestnut Street, we have held open Parish Conversations to air concerns, to move towards greater understanding of one another, and to foster healing.

As we set out on the search for Trinity's twenty-first Rector, the entire parish was invited to apply to serve on the Profile or Search Committee. Each Committee member was carefully chosen to ensure a wide-range of backgrounds and experiences reflecting the diverse perspectives of our parish community.

The Profile Committee did a splendid job of urging all parishioners to speak up about who Trinity is, who the parish might become, and what sort of leadership might best guide Trinity into its next chapter of ministry. A survey was made available to the entire parish, and 395 of you took the survey. Circles of Hope, small group discussions led by Profile Committee members, met on 23 occasions, and more than 200 parishioners participated in them to speak out about what most matters to them in the life of this parish.

The Search Committee has now spoken to the parish three times—at a Parish Update in February, at the Annual Meeting, and at the Parish Update on June 3—about their process and the progress of the search for your next Rector. And yet, details about the search—including demographics (gender, geography, racial/cultural backgrounds, etc.) about the pool of applicants—are never shared in rector searches by any Episcopal parish. Even Trinity's clergy and staff are not privy to such details about the work of the Search Committee.

Given Trinity's drive towards openness and transparency, one might ask: why is there a need for such confidentiality about the details of the Search?

First and foremost, confidentiality is vital to any candidate who applies to Trinity's Search. Anyone who applies feels free to join a search because they know they can rely on their application not becoming public. Most candidates have positions in ministry that would be undermined if word leaked out that they were restless and were exploring leaving their present place of work. The Episcopal Church is a small church, so unlike the candidate pool in a typical job search, our potential candidates are members of a small, interconnected community. Any breaching of the confidentiality of our Search Process and applicant pool has the potential to be shared broadly.

An example might be helpful. Let's say the Search Committee revealed that among its pool of promising applicants were 3 women and 2 people of color. Because of the smallness of the Episcopal world, it would not be hard for people to begin figuring out who those folks might be, and that would vitiate the confidentiality of those applicants. They might even withdraw from the

Search if it became known to them that we had leaked—or worse, purposely shared—such information about our candidate pool.

Second, it is important to remember that the Episcopal Church's call process is significantly different from that of congregational churches. Parishioners as a body do not vet candidates or vote on who to call. Instead, in our governance structure, the Vestry appoints a Search Committee to oversee the Search Process on behalf of the Vestry and parish, and to bring to the Vestry 1 or 2 finalists. These finalists must have the approval of the Bishop as well before the Vestry can issue a call. Confidentiality about the pool of candidates helps to preserve this unique aspect of how Episcopal parishes call a Rector.

Finally, and most importantly, trust is central to the vitality and success of the Search Process. It is essential that applicants' be able to trust the integrity and confidentiality of our Search. It is crucial that the parish trust that the Search Committee is approaching their work with prayer and diligence, with open hearts and minds, grounded in knowledge of the parish's hopes and aspirations and with a deep commitment to listening for the Holy Spirit. It is key that we trust together in God the Holy Spirit, that Her guidance and energy undergirds all that we are doing. And finally, our vitality as a community depends on our placing ongoing trust in one another as brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ, so that together we can remain open and hope-filled as the search for Trinity's 21st Rector continues.

It is perfectly natural for anxieties to arise among us as the time draws closer to the call of the next Rector. If you find that you are becoming anxious, I invite you to take those anxieties into prayer, offering them to God, and asking the Holy Spirit to calm your fears and reassure you of Her vital Presence: in your own heart, in the work of the Search Committee, and in the entire life of Trinity Church. Please know that you will have good company as you pray. I can promise you that I myself am taking my deepest hopes and my occasional anxieties into prayer day-by-day, as the work of the Search Committee continues. As I do that, I am reassured—to use the words of Blessed Julian of Norwich—that all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.

Faithfully,

The Rev. William Rich

Interim Rector