



CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
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January 8, 2018

Dear Members of Christ Church,

It's time. As 2018 unfolds it's time for me to retire from active parish ministry. More importantly, it's time to acknowledge that Christ Church is more than ready to seek a priest to share the vibrant spirit and ministries that make Christ Church Christ Church.

It's time to put in place a succession plan that listens carefully to God and one another. I have met with the Vestry and begun the final phase of my work with this announcement and plan that guides Christ Church, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to find a priest who will continue to love you as I love you. And, perhaps more importantly, a priest who will be loved by you as I know that I am loved by you.

This plan begins with accepting the reality that my time with you was bound not so much by a three-to-five-year window, but by your response to recovering your great sense of community and your energy in accepting the challenge to become once again what Bishop Stokes calls "a jewel of the diocese." Bishop Stokes will be with us on Sunday, January 21st to celebrate and preach at 10:00 am. After Coffee Hour, he will meet with the Vestry and myself to review our plan that will, with God's help, find the right priest for Bishop Stokes to appoint as Priest-in-Charge. The goal is to have that gifted person in place on December 1, 2018: just in time for the new church year that begins the next day with the First Sunday of Advent.

The plan calls for Cindy McCormack, who soon steps down as Senior Warden, to serve as the chair of a Succession Committee. Rather than use the term "search" or "discernment," succession reminds us of all the good work shared over the last three years. There is no need for interim time. Christ Church is ready to embrace the challenge to find the priest God has prepared to love, laugh, and serve with you. I foresee a long and enriching relationship for Christ Church, Middletown and our surrounding communities, and the Diocese of New Jersey. The Vestry will issue a charge to the Succession Committee by our Annual Meeting on January 28th. The Vestry is also responsible for selecting the members of this committee. Please feel free to let me or Cindy know of your willingness to serve. The goal here is to bring together a representative group of parishioners that I train in the art of discernment and the practice of search. While I will do all I can to ensure a great pool of candidates, I will not be party to the actual selection process. This is the work of the Succession Committee, our Bishop, and the Vestry, all in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Be prepared to come to *Listening in Lent* meetings. You will be invited to express your thoughts on parish strengths and new priest strengths using a process that pinpoints qualities in the categories *required*, *expected*, and *delighted*. Be prepared to pray deeply and often for those involved directly in the work that will bring forth your next Priest-in-Charge. After a period affirming that the right person was called, the Vestry will have the pleasure of electing this gifted and loving leader to serve as your Rector.

I am a Professional Transition Specialist. My call has always been to prepare Christ Church for what will unfold during the next twelve months. My surprise is the joy I found in you letting me be me as we have accomplished much, with God's help, over the past three years. October is the time when retirement becomes practical as Edna Marie and I find our finances (Church Pension, Medicare, Social Security, etc.) meet the requirements of age. We expect to return to New Bern North Carolina and will be delighted to be near our daughter Melinda, grandson Cole, my mother Dorothy, and my brother Jeff and his family.

Thank you for the privilege of being your priest. You have allowed me to participate in your sacred story. This is a story I will enjoy sharing as I write and teach about the art of transitional leadership within the freedom of retirement. We have lived my expression, "May the blessing of God find you when you least expect it and need it most." It's time to be ready for the blessing bound up in the words "The best is yet to come!" Christ Church is more than ready to share the best that is to come with one very fortunate priest.

It's time for the work to continue that reveals the best is yet to come!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Bill".

The Rev. Dr. William Carl Thomas
Priest-in-Charge