

At opening of meeting:

First, I would like to thank the Discernment Committee and Vestry for entrusting me with this position. I'm about six weeks into my time here at Grace and Holy Trinity and I enjoy the work and most importantly, have enjoyed getting to know you. I'm going to continue making phone calls until I've reached everyone in the parish.

I also want to thank the staff. Pulling off our first online-only Annual Meeting was quite the task. The staff along with the wardens, have done a great job working for today's success while meeting all the legal and canonical requirements. No easy task!

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At the Rector's Remarks:

Many years ago, I woke up in the middle of the night to discover that a minor tropical storm had strengthened into a full-blown hurricane. I looked out my front window to see our 80-year-old mighty live oak tree rocking back and forth like Gumby. I thought the tree was going to be pulled apart, but come morning, it only had lost some minor limbs.

I later learned that live oak trees live such long periods of time precisely because they bend in high winds. Years ago, an experiment in one of the desert bio-domes successfully planted trees. But as the trees grew, they just fell right over. They discovered that a tree must experience high wind to build up any strength, otherwise it is as limp as a wet noodle.

I've always felt that this pandemic was an opportunity for churches to strengthen what they did well and discern new opportunities God was placing before them. To let this difficult time strengthen them like a mighty oak.

In the area of worship, we have some good news. The Diocese just issued new guidelines for in-person worship. Working with a team of parishioners, we will revise our return to in-person worship plans. In the meantime, we will begin live streaming from the church at 10am on Sundays beginning with Palm Sunday. Once we begin in-person worship, we will continue to live-stream the main service so we can share a sense of togetherness, even if your health or the health of your family means you need to avoid in-person activities for a longer period of time.

79% of you reported in our most recent congregational survey that you felt less connected to one another. I think that's only natural in a place where you love seeing each other and sharing breakfast and coffee with one another on a typical Sunday.

I look forward to working with the Vestry to find ways for us to gather safely, likely in small groups of 10 or less, outside, with physical distancing. With the science leading us, we will find ways to safely bring us together.

When the Vestry interviewed me, I was asked what my vision for Grace and Holy Trinity was. I shared that the vision was something we needed to discern together. But part of the discernment process, I believe, involves the obvious. And it is obvious that Grace and Holy Trinity can and should be a larger congregation. God didn't give this church so many human, physical, and financial resources to not make a greater impact on the world.

After six weeks, I would like to add to my answer. My hope for this church is that we live more fully into our name: Grace & Holy Trinity.

Grace. Through grace, St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that they should Be reconcilers to Christ. A place of grace is a place of reconciliation, where all are invited, welcomed, and connected to God's love.

God is not a solitary being, but rather lives in community: three in one. Fundamental to the Holy Trinity is a holy community. The good news is a great community already exists here. So let's focus on intentionally expanding this community to everyone in the congregation and then out into the world.

And I know that all this talk about growth has some of you wondering: aren't many churches seeing a decline in attendance? Yes, they are. But frankly, I've never let that be an excuse. My experience at growing Episcopal churches is that people are hungry for an authentic, grace-

filled community that enriches their lives and helps them connect better with God and their fellow human beings.

WE can be the people God wants us to be by focusing on our spiritual life together through pray, worship, and study. By being marked by God's Grace and the Holy Trinity.