

Dear People of St John's and St Patrick's,

I am grateful and excited to join you in December, and look forward to the time ahead as your shared Rector. My curiosity about how such an arrangement would work, and subsequent conversations about where a collaborative model could lead to more vital thriving ministry has been one of increasing eagerness to take this journey with you.

As congregations in close proximity, there is much you share, and histories that distinguish you and the make-up of your membership. Each congregation has struggled of late with financial constraints and loss of members due to numerous factors. Now, along with a number of congregations across the Diocese and Church, you have determined that it is time for you to share clergy leadership.

I came into the conversation with your search committees asking many questions and challenging the assumption that remaining separate was best when the chance to collaborate could revive energy, define common purpose, and improve effectiveness in responding to the needs of the shared community. We have begun to use the language of 'two distinct congregations, collaborating in ministry' to describe the journey ahead. We have much to discover about the gifts and skills God has brought together, and how those determine our current capacity to refresh ministries that have languished in recent years, or to imagine new ways to be the heart and hands of Christ in the world.

I have asked the search committees and Vestries to be ready to move ahead with a degree of urgency, to build and sustain momentum in order to catch up with what the Holy Spirit is already inviting us to do. We will surely have moments of great joy and success, and some times that will be discouraging or hard to appreciate because they will carry risk and prompt anxiety. Working alongside each other, I trust that because we seek to serve God, that God's will for us will be revealed. And, I trust that we will be upheld in our pursuits, and lifted up when we fall.

The Diocese of Virginia has a handful of other congregational pairings, and there are many others poised to share clergy across the Church. We are in good company as we begin this journey. In addition to our own experience, I hope that we will draw inspiration and wisdom from our peer pairings, and offer our own insights so that others can benefit from what we are learning as we live into this new-to-us form of discipleship.

Know that I am praying daily for you and looking forward to knowing you more fully.

May the weeks ahead be a season of increasing thanksgiving for us all as we honor the lives of those who have passed into eternity, and watch the blaze of autumn fade toward darkness so that we might recognize once more our need for God's guiding light and the hope of Jesus with us.

Yours in Christ,

The Reverend Julie D. Bryant, DMin  
Rector-elect, St John's, Arlington and St. Patrick's, Falls Church

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