

# CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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September 24, 2009

Dear Fellow Christ Church Parishioner:

On Tuesday evening September 22, 2009, the Vestry of Christ Church held its regularly scheduled meeting, and I am delighted to report that at that meeting the Vestry voted unanimously to call The Reverend Paul Nelson Walker to serve as the 12<sup>th</sup> Rector of Christ Church. And I am even more delighted to report that Paul has enthusiastically accepted that call. My purpose in this letter is to share with you the process that led to Tuesday evening's vote.

As most of you are aware, Paul Walker was tapped by Bishop Shannon Johnston to serve as Priest-in-Charge of Christ Church in the spring of 2008 following the resignation of The Reverend Jeffrey Fishwick. That decision by Bishop Johnston was well received by a vast majority of the members of Christ Church. At that point, we had an accumulation of 10 years to witness Paul's maturation as a priest, pastor and friend. This time was briefly interrupted for three years by his service at the Cathedral Church of the Advent in Birmingham. The wisdom of the Bishop's decision has been borne out over the past 18 months. Paul's appointment as Priest-in-Charge was for a 24 month period after which the Vestry could decide whether it wished to call Paul as Rector.

Simultaneously with the appointment of Paul as Priest-in-Charge, the Vestry was counseled by the Diocese of Virginia as to the appropriate steps leading to the selection of a new Rector. A critical piece of that process would be the preparation of a Parish Profile by a sacrificially dedicated Profile Committee so ably chaired by Bob Garland. On September 15, 2009, the Christ Church Profile was presented to the Vestry in a joint meeting with the Profile Committee, and the Parish Profile was released to the majority of the Christ Church community via the internet on Wednesday, September 16, followed by an announcement in church and the availability of paper copies for those who needed them on Sunday, September 20, 2009.

The Parish Profile made one thing abundantly clear to your Vestry. Over and over again, as I read through the confidential written comments of those who took the survey, I was struck by the overwhelming desire of our members to have Paul Walker as the Rector of Christ Church. The Profile thus proved to be just another – but necessary – affirmation of what we had known for some time. Paul Walker was and is the man to lead Christ Church.

Indeed, to borrow from my predecessor Harry Bowen's imagery, the Parish Profile was just one brick in the foundational case for calling Paul Walker as Christ Church's Rector. The challenges that he faced when he took over as Priest-in-Charge and the fruitfulness of his ministry while meeting those challenges offered ample indications to us that God's plan for Christ Church included Paul Walker as its Rector.

Without going into excruciating detail I would like to mention several noteworthy points relating to the way forward for Christ Church under Paul's aegis.

1. As a congregation we are the beneficiaries of truly anointed preaching by both Paul and David Johnson;
2. Sunday attendance averages well over 500 – near the top in the Episcopal Church nationally;
3. Pledges have doubled, and we are on generally sound financial footing, which is extraordinary in these difficult economic times;
4. Our student parishioners are now incorporated into all services, not just the 5 PM Sunday Anglican College Ministry service;
5. Sunday School volunteerism has increased significantly with the institution of a more inclusive and user-friendly curriculum;
6. The morale is high among the Church staff; and
7. The Fellows program continues to attract talented and committed young people exploring God's call to ministry.

Sensing that the 24 month "waiting" period prescribed by Bishop Johnston served little purpose in the wake of all of the positive developments since April 2008, Bishop Johnston was consulted regarding the suitability of abbreviating that period. The Bishop encouraged the Vestry leadership to develop the case for calling Paul early and suggested that the Vestry consider formally seeking his permission to call Paul as Rector as soon as we were satisfied that the Parish Profile had been received and reviewed.

At the August Vestry meeting I was authorized by the Vestry to seek the Bishop's permission to abbreviate the 24 month waiting period and call Paul as Rector at our discretion. In a letter to Bishop Johnston dated August 31, 2009, I made the case on the Vestry's behalf for an "early" call. Bishop Johnston responded on September 15, 2009, with a formal letter granting the Christ Church Vestry permission to call Paul Walker as Rector.

The foregoing brings the process "full circle" and back to the blessed news that I shared with you at the outset. On Thursday evening (time tba) October 8, 2009, The Right Reverend Shannon Johnston, Bishop of the Diocese of Virginia, will be at Christ Church for the Celebration of a New Ministry. Please mark your calendar and plan to be a part of this joyous milestone in the history of Charlottesville's oldest community of faith.

In Christ,



William J. Gordon  
Senior Warden