



St. Brendan's Episcopal Church, Franklin Park  
2365, McAleer Road  
Sewickley, PA 15143

March 17, 2021

Dear Fellow Brendanites,

As many of you have already learned, Fr. Regis has made the decision to retire as our priest-in-charge as of December 31. He had initially considered stepping down sometime in August, but the addition of a few months will both enable us to complete a robust discernment process to determine who to call as his successor and allow sufficient time for saying goodbye to him and to Ken as the transition takes place.

I am writing today to provide brief answers to some questions you may have regarding what this means for St. Brendan's. You will have more questions in the weeks to come, I am sure, but it will be helpful for us all if we have a shared general understanding at the outset about what lies ahead. In this letter, I draw on conversations I have had with Bishop McConnell and with Canon Kim Karashin, the member of his staff who works with parishes negotiating transitions like ours. I have also learned a lot from a book that Canon Karashin recommended: *On the Emmaus Road: A Guide for Transitions in Ordained Leadership* by Mary Brennan Thorpe.

In the Preface to her book, Rev. Thorpe writes of such transitions, **“What’s the goal? Here’s what it is not: hiring a priest. [...] You’re seeking God’s will for your parish in the next chapter of its story and discerning what spiritual leader will help you write that chapter.”** In the coming months, we will be working together—each of us in her or his or their own way—to hear and heed the urgings of the Holy Spirit. If this seems to you a little scary, you’re right. We don’t know where the Spirit may lead us, who we may meet along the road, how the process itself may affect us individually and collectively. **But we do trust that God will accompany us on our journey and that the path we follow will bring us to the destination He already has in mind for us.**

**In the Episcopal Church, the responsibility and privilege of calling a priest resides with the Vestry.** The Vestry can—and usually does—delegate some of the work to others, but the decision is still theirs to make. Naturally, the Bishop must also approve their recommendation, but the surest way for the parish to ensure that this step is straightforward is for the Vestry to keep him informed throughout the process.\* Canon Karashin will be serving as our point of contact—indeed, she already met with the Vestry at its meeting on March 8.

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\* Rather unusually, it is quite likely that *three* “bishops” will be involved at some stage in our transition process: initially Bishop McConnell, then the Standing Committee which acts for the diocese if there is a gap between the departure of one bishop and the arrival of the next, and finally the bishop whom the diocese will elect this summer.

**The transition process has two major phases, each of which involves discernment.** Our first task will be to develop a deep and clear understanding of St. Brendan's—its history, to be sure, but more importantly its current identity and the directions in which we believe we are being called. Every member of our parish has a role to play in guaranteeing that this discernment is rich and robust, so you can expect to be prompted to contribute in some way to that conversation. That initial round of discernment then serves as the foundation for a second, in which we consider those individuals who have expressed an interest in serving as our spiritual leader and listen for the Spirit's guidance in determining whom we should call.

I don't want to get “down in the weeds” in this letter. But it is important for us all to understand at the outset that, **at this stage in its history, St. Brendan's is not in a position to call a “rector.”** As Fr. Regis explained recently in The Little Log, a rector is a full-time priest whose Letter of Agreement has no set end-date. St. Brendan's cannot afford a full-time salary and is still financially dependent on the Diocese for financial support. We will therefore be seeking to call a “priest-in-charge” who will work on a roughly half-time basis and whose appointment will run only for a limited term (probably three years). This will inevitably limit the pool of candidates we can expect to attract; they will probably already live within commuting distance and may have other ministries or lay careers.

**You will be glad to hear that the Vestry has already begun its work, by learning more about the transition process and by reflecting on who might best lead us as we begin our discernment process.** I hope to be able to update you on our progress in just a few weeks. Now and throughout the first phase, communication will be key to ensuring that we move forward smoothly and effectively, so we will be using all available means to stay in contact with you (snail mail letters like this one, The Little Log, our Web site, social media, and announcements at the appropriate point in our liturgies). Later in the year, by contrast, we will all need to exercise more patience, as the need to respect candidate confidentiality limits the flow of information.

I began this letter by conceding that it would probably raise as many questions as it answered. Please feel free to direct your questions to me at [austover@gmail.com](mailto:austover@gmail.com) or 508-688-9554. Fr. Regis will continue to serve us as our spiritual leader in the coming months (with all his usual energy and enthusiasm, I have no doubt!). But as Rev. Thorpe writes in her book, the current priest “[does] not have a role in the selection of [his or her successor.]” It would simply be unfair to Fr. Regis to seek to involve him in the mechanics of the transition.

Thank you for your patience in reading this lengthy letter. We certainly have a busy year ahead of us: reopening for in-person worship (God willing!), electing a bishop, *and* transitioning to a new priest-in-charge makes for “a very full plate.” I ask your prayers for Fr. Regis, for the Vestry and for all who will be playing roles in this transition.

Yours in Christ,

*Tim Austin*

Timothy R. Austin