

August 3, 2026

Trinity Episcopal Church
9325 West Street
Manassas, VA 20110

Dear Discernment Committee & Vestry of Trinity Church:

I am enthusiastically applying to be your next rector.

You proudly claim an identity as a lay-centered parish, and name how it gives rise to a desire for a priest who will serve as a companion on the Way, who leads through collaboration and transparency. I cannot tell you how excited I was to read those words. I have long felt that the defining role of priestly ministry is supporting and empowering the laity in claiming theirs. The *Book of Common Prayer* even describes your ministry as representing Christ, bearing witness to him wherever he may be, and carrying on his work of reconciliation to the world (855). In other words, you are called as lay people to be the Church, and it would be my job as you rector to work together with you to ensure that Trinity can grow into that role as fully and as best as possible.

To better live into that model of ministry myself, I have cultivated extensive experience in both parish and non-parish settings. Before starting seminary, I interned at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in the Diocese of California, including overseeing the Bible study for their Vacation Bible School and acting as chaplain on two youth mission trips to Guatemala and the Yakama Nation in eastern Washington. I also served as a community builder at the St. Mary's Community Center in the Hampden neighborhood of Baltimore for Episcopal Service Corps Maryland during my discernment, and I led the diocesan young adult ministry housed at the center, Spiritually Thirsty.

Through my field education at St. Stephen and St Agnes School during seminary, I assisted as both chaplain and teacher across grade levels. Feeling a need to engage with similar depth in parish ministry, I sought out a placement at Christ Church in Old Town Alexandria for my senior year. My time in that community focused primarily on liturgical leadership, but it also included helping lead children's chapel; guiding that church's relationship with Congregation Beth-El (a local Reform synagogue); and providing the clergy presence for their LGBTQIA+ ministry. In between the two academic years, I undertook my clinical pastoral education at the Hebrew Home of Greater Washington, living more fully into the realities of pastoral care in a context that taught me that much more about what it means to build relationships across traditions and generations.

After being ordained, I was called to serve as Associate Rector at Emmanuel Church in downtown Baltimore, a parish going through significant transitions. The sheer amount of change meant that my role included a much greater breadth of responsibility than would be typical for an assistant or associate, and I was able to share in leadership across most aspects of parish life. During that time, I grew to appreciate the diverse ways that we are formed by our congregations. While I believe that more traditional forms of Christian education like Sunday school or Bible studies are essential, we should also broaden the formational impact

of our liturgies, sermons, and even less obvious aspects of our life together such as fellowship and outreach opportunities. For example, direct action like [“walking in prayer”](#) during a march to support refugees is a phenomenal opportunity to embody our faith and connect parishioners with the concerns of their broader communities. Given the burgeoning Latino populations in Manassas, I wonder how Trinity might be called to live into your histories of welcome and formation through cultivating Spanish ministries or similar forms of engagement.

While a graduate student in philosophy with a concentration on philosophy & religion at the University of South Florida, I was able to design and teach undergraduate classes such as “Introduction to World Religions,” “Biomedical Ethics,” and “Introduction to Philosophy”—the last of which I explored through the philosophy of friendship. The question that I kept coming back to was: “What difference does it make?” That question, coupled with my passion for the holy potential of parish life, is why I decided to step away from academia and return to full-time ministry. I want to share more directly in nurturing that kind of difference. I am currently serving as the Assisting Priest at St. Michael’s Church, once more living into ministry amid change and transition. My primary responsibilities here have been adult education and pastoral care, while also sharing fully in leading worship.

I wholeheartedly believe that my work will continue to be defined by opportunities to teach and to grow. While I was in Tampa, I was the sole paid staff member at St. Chad’s, so I learned what it means to preach every week; to find educational opportunities in liturgy and quiet day meditations; and to support lay leadership in their ongoing community engagement. I think that the ministries that Trinity already undertakes to be a local leader in loving your neighbors are remarkable, and I would hope to begin my time with you by sharing in that work and learning the realities of the food ministry and related programs. I am deeply passionate about radical welcome as central to my own ministry, so it gladdens my heart to that your parish already has a history of inviting parishioners and newcomers alike to recognize their place within the beloved community. What would it mean for us to share in deepening those efforts alongside celebrating and strengthening all of the good work that you are already doing?

I fondly recognize your motto, “be swift to love,” and how it reflects the words of Swiss philosopher Henri-Frédéric Amiel. So much of our call as Christians is about love, is about opening ourselves up as wholly as possible to the joyous and complex relationality of our lives. For years, my primary preaching practice has followed such an ethos, and I almost always preach extemporaneously in order to more fully connect with the congregation. I want to not only preach well, I want to preach well *to you* as Trinity Church. In a similar vein, I want to work with Margaret to ensure the liturgies of the parish offer the opportunities for prayer, praise, reconciliation, and renewal that we all need.

Thank you so much for your consideration, and I pray that our shared discernment signifies the next chapter in a faithful and Spirit-led journey. May we make a difference together.

Yours in Christ,
The Rev. Joseph Wood