



June 28, 2024

Dear friends:

It is with a mix of gratitude, excitement, and sadness that I write to share with you that our Associate Rector, Father Derek, has been called to be the next Rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Plant City, Florida. Father Derek's last Sunday with us will be July 21, 2024, ensuring that he and his family have time to get moved and settled before his sons begin school. His first Sunday at St. Peter's will be Sunday, August 18, 2024.

St. Peter's has been in Father Derek's sights since before he was ordained a priest, as this parish is close to his family's home and heart. In a sense, this is a return home for the Larsons, where Barret and Alaster can grow up near grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles. The parish itself is a wonderful fit for Father Derek as it emphasizes community engagement, spiritual growth, family ministry, and strong liturgical life.

Father Derek has served Good Shepherd for the past three years in profound ways. Called directly from seminary, he found in Good Shepherd a place to learn and grow within a loving parish and school. When Bishop Scharf was elected bishop (to the same diocese in which St. Peter's resides), Father Derek stepped up to assume crucial leadership roles typically held by a rector, providing excellent care, leadership, and guidance during the year-and-a-half transition process.

Since I arrived in December, Father Derek and I have worked closely on every aspect of parish and school life. He has been an invaluable colleague and friend, especially during the first months of my rectorship, joining me in undertaking some of the foundational work that will serve us for years to come. I wish that we could keep him at Good Shepherd for years to come, but the Holy Spirit has inspired timing beyond our comprehension.

I hope you will take a moment in these next few weeks to thank Father Derek and LauraAnn for all the ways they have touched this community. We offer them our prayers and love as they prepare for Father Derek's next call, trusting that God has guided and equipped him. He is ready to be a rector, and the good people of St. Peter's will be blessed for years to come.

As for us, I have drafted a job posting that will be published in the next couple of weeks. Good Shepherd is a growing parish and school that requires the support of two clergy persons. I intend to fill the Associate / Assistant Rector position with the priest who is the best fit for our community. Please keep this discernment in your prayers as well. I am grateful for your ongoing support and patience.

Good Shepherd remains a strong, healthy, and vibrant community of faith. The greater Church is grateful to you for fostering the growth and development of such a fine priest in Father Derek, who will continue to serve Christ in his Church.

Peace,

The Rev. Dr. Sanford H. Groff, Jr., Rector