DE TRINITATE

Newsletter of the Society of the Holy Trinity

Societas Trinitatis Sanctae

From The Senior

Seeking Consensus Amid a Divisive Culture

At its last gathering in February, the Leadership Council spent some considerable time discussing the issue of consensus, how we live it and operate by it, and what it means for our life together as those who have subscribed to the Rule of our Society and, even more particularly, in regard to how we operate under a consensus model when it comes to elections.

The Leadership Council was deeply concerned about the difficulties which arose from our last election process, not necessarily for the number of ballots since we have had that happen before, but rather because some of our body did not seem to understand the process of consensus and how it was to be exercised within our life together. Hence the agreement that we need to make a concerted effort to educate our body about this important understanding of consensus that has been a mark of our identity since the beginning of the Society.

We can acknowledge that consensus is not practiced to almost any degree within our society today. Riven by the divisions that exist among us – political, economic and social to name a few – the very concept of consensus seems almost alien to us. Even within the life of the Church there are divisions within congregations and within the broader judicatories to which we belong. And these latter bodies accentuate such divisions by the manner in which they often make their decisions and even in their election processes.

While such elections are often called "ecclesiastical ballots" they are actually far from that but have now become the norm under which they operate.

But those who subscribe to our Rule, find themselves operating under a completely different model whereby consensus is our guiding principle. This consensus model is used both as our chief means of addressing an issue or seeking a solution, as well as that which our Rule calls "a pure ecclesiastical ballot" for the election of both Senior and for the Dean in each chapter. While it is nowhere mentioned in our Rule or the Founding Statement, the use of consensus was intentional on the part of the founding members, so that our practices would be understood as different from the model found in most of our judicatories. But, in turn, that meant defining that we worked under the model of consensus. And to do so in the early days of our Society, we were blessed by Pr. Ron Bagnall STS who not only presided over the election of our first Senior but in a number of subsequent elections as well. And Pr. Bagnall would often begin by speaking about consensus and what it truly meant, particularly for those of us about to vote for leadership.

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And what was it that Pr. Bagnall sought to impress upon us about consensus? Well, to summarize the general principles it was something along the lines of the following:

1. That consensus meant agreement but not unanimity – that is that while there may be general agreement about which way the issue under consideration or the balloting was going, some may still not agree and that was okay.

2. That this agreement is arrived by most of those concerned and that there was a desire to move forward in this matter.

3. That there was group solidarity in both sentiment and in belief, that indeed in this instance, that the Holy Spirit was indeed showing us the way.

4. And what of those who still did not agree? That was to be understood and accepted by the larger group. But in turn, those who still disagreed, seeing the way the Spirit was moving, would then be willing to put aside their reservations and either refrain from voting or vote with the larger group.

5. But again, the emphasis was always upon the fact that consensus does not imply unanimity. Indeed, consensus is understood to allow for dissenting opinions, which means that not everyone has to agree completely, but rather that such dissent is, in the end, put aside for the sake of unity within the body.

And what happens if we are unable to achieve consensus? Well, there are different outcomes depending on the matter being addressed. In a Leadership Council meeting held some years ago, a certain issue was presented for consideration and perhaps implementation. However, it was clear from the discussion that we were not able to achieve consensus on the matter and so it was put aside. The issue could be brought up at a future date or just left in abeyance. Either way there was no vote and hence no supposed winners or losers.

If we come to the matter of an election, however, we have a different set of circumstances. Recently, at a chapter election for a dean, we had four consecutive ballots, each with exactly the same results. Yet given the overwhelming choice for one individual in each ballot, I asked the members to discern where the Spirit seemed to be leading us and how achieving consensus might be possible. After further prayer and Scripture, the election was concluded. Consensus was achieved because the one who was voting differently listened to the will of the Spirit and, while they may have had reservations, even nagging doubts, was willing to listen and put such concerns aside for the sake of the unity of the body.

Clearly however, one of the issues which confronts us with this consensus model is that it was easier to achieve consensus when we were a small group of 26 or so gathered in NJ to found the Society and it is a lot harder to achieve consensus when we are a body of 120 or more voting members gathered in General Chapter for the election of a Senior. This has raised questions about whether we might adopt a different model for our elections at General Chapter. After all, as we all recently saw in Rome, the Conclave only requires a 75% approval to elect the Holy Father while our consensus model calls for 100%.

In response, it is important to remember that our Rule cannot be changed. And while our Rule does not address the issue of consensus, it does speak to our "pure ecclesiastical ballot" and how such balloting is to be done – with Scripture reading, hymnody and prayer. Therefor our process for elections in the future will not change. But before our next election in 2027, Leadership will continue to look at how, given our size, how we might make those named for consideration, identifiable for those who may not know them. There would still be no speeches or politicking because we are not "running" for an office but rather seeking discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to elect someone to lead us. But it might help to put a face with a name.

This matter of consensus is not easy to address or live by especially since it is the antithesis of having to live amid such a divisive culture. But it remains a critical part of our very identity as members of this Society.

Recognizing that importance, therefore, it is my hope that this will be only the first of a series of reflections written by others in Leadership on this issue of consensus. Chapter deans have also been asked to address the matter when they meet in retreat. As a result, we hope that there will be a better understanding of this important principle in the life of our Society which we hope will, in turn, facilitate not only a smoother election process in 2027 but a stronger life together under the power of the triune God Father, + Son and Holy Spirit.

In Christ

The Rev'd Paddy Rooney, STS Senior

Chapter Election Results

Over the past few weeks, several chapters have held elections for Dean and we wanted to share the results.

Upstate New York chapter: The Rev'd Phil Roushey STS (replacing The Rev'd Dan Hoffman, STS)

Metro New York chapter: The Rev'd Richard Hill, STS (replacing The Rev'd John Fleischmann, STS)

California chapter: The Rev'd Timothy Eichler, STS (replacing the Rev'd John Christianson, STS)

Rocky Mountain chapter: The Rev'd Brad Everett, STS

Iowa chapter: The Rev'd Gary Hatcher, STS

There is only one remaining chapter which must hold an election this year and that is the Minnesota chapter and they will be gathering in retreat in August.

Our Society is much indebted to those who have served and those who will now serve as Dean in their chapters, using their gifts and graces to support and sustain our work.

Thanks be to God.

The Rev'd Paddy Rooney, STS Senior

From The Secretary

Dear friends, Please remember to send your annual dues, in the amount of $330.00. The dues were due on Holy Trinity Sunday (June 15).

The General Chapter Retreat will take place September 23-25 at the University of St. Mary of the Lake Conference Center in Mundelein, IL. Again this year, we will not have access to Joseph and Mary House, so I will try my best to accommodate requests for single rooms in the Main Lodge. This is the final year for us at Mundelein; next year we will be at our new home, St. Meinrad's Archabbey in Indiana.

At this writing, Deans should have been in contact with their chapter members and friends with directions on how to register for the retreat—that information was sent to the Deans on June 1. If you have not heard from your Dean, please contact him or her to make sure you are on their mailing list.

Those who are not members nor affiliated with any chapter will be able to register with me after July 7. The deadline for registration this year is August 29, and cancellations must be received before September 5th. Last-minute additions are always welcome.

The Rev'd Pari R. Bailey, STS Secretary

From The Vicar

Pastoral ministry is an art form. It involves people who know their need. Some need forgiveness; some need direction; some need comfort; some need encouragement; some need purpose; some need hope. These categories are not mutually exclusive, nor are they consistent over time. This is true for individuals. When we add the congregation or the church-body as an entity with their own set of needs, it becomes bewildering. As an art form we don't always know what colors or brushes to use.

As those who understand the centrality of prayer in the life of the Church, we fall back on the Liturgy for personal and corporate worship and devotion. We don't have to make it up on the fly. We use what has been handed down through the ages. In short summary, we "do the red and say the black." The rubrics give the outline and the text gives the content. That is a huge help. Is that the end of it? Well, yes and no.

We try to maintain a balance between perfect liturgy and practical liturgy. The pitfall of demanding perfection in liturgical worship is that not all congregations have the same talents, resources, or facilities. Not all congregations or pastors have what is needed to do things "by the book". We might simply do things by rote. The pitfall of practical liturgy is giving people what they want, or what they think they want. Different people want different things without giving much thought or consideration to the long term implications. We might simply do things by vote. Neither are satisfying.

Consider the analogy of driving a car on the road. Theoretically, everyone has studied and passed a test on the rules of the road. They have received on the job training as a student driver. What could go wrong? Well, many things could. Conditions vary from place to place and from season to season. A person can demand that they have the right of way and end up in an accident. Or, a person can freelance and wave you on, even when it is their turn through the intersection.

As pastors leading worship, we balance being perfect and being practical. When leading a congregation, one must maintain the tension between what is perfect and what is practical. We must be neither dictatorial in perfection nor permissive in practical. Developing the art form requires time, wisdom, and the insights of fellow travelers. The life of faith alongside other believers can be challenging. But it is also immensely rewarding.

The Rev'd Jim Lehmann, STS

Vicar

In Memoriam

Comforted with the promise of the resurrection, we are nevertheless saddened to report the deaths of two of our members over the past few months. A brief obituary follows for each of our brothers who have fallen asleep in the Lord.

The **Rev'd Dr. David Nathaniel Mielke, STS** (1945-2025) was a member of the Carolinas Chapter. David's first career was as a professor at Appalachian State University (ASU). In 1986 he was ordained after completing Second Career Certificate at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg. While serving his entire career as a pastor in many congregations in North Carolina, he continued to teach at ASU until 1997, and then as an adjunct professor at community colleges until 2015.

The **Rev'd Dr. C. Lynn Bailey, STS** (1944-2025) had been a member of the California Chapter before his retiring to North Carolina. He was ordained in 1984, serving parishes in North Carolina, South Carolina, and California. Lynn's first love and career was music, having attained a Master of Sacred Music degree in 1970. During his years of ministry he also became an Oblate of the Benedictine Order.

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