



Leadership Transitions in the Episcopal Church in Arkansas

Guidelines for Calling a Rector

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When your congregation ...

is faced with the task of finding a new rector, many questions and concerns arise. It is time for exercising the interdependence that exists between congregations and diocesan leadership, a time for collaboration in a matter central to the health of the individual congregation and the diocese alike.

The bishop is deeply concerned that each congregation find the right leadership for its unique needs. The bishop wants congregations to have the fullest possible support throughout the process of discernment and calling, and has assigned this support task to the canon to the ordinary (canon), who serves as the transitions minister for the Episcopal Church in Arkansas.

The period of transition in a congregation begins the moment the current rector announces he or she is leaving. Undoubtedly this announcement will have an emotional as well as a logistical impact. Ideally, the wardens and departing rector have been in conversation with the bishop and canon prior to a congregation-wide announcement, and many of the questions and concerns that would quickly arise can begin to be answered. When and how will the congregation celebrate the ministry of the departing rector? Will the congregation look for an interim rector? How will the congregation be ministered to during this transition? How long will the process of finding a new rector take? Who will be involved in that process?

The following guidelines offer a structure to this exciting but often unnerving time of transition. The calling process begins only after all good-byes have been said. Then come six broad, sometimes overlapping stages.

Direction Finding/Self Study



The bishop and/or canon meet with the wardens and vestry to review the search process and consider interim ministry options. Decisions will be made as to whether the congregation needs a series of supply priests for services, or if it will appoint an intentional interim rector.

- An intentional interim rector would be an appropriate choice if your congregation has concerns related to:

1. the ending of a long pastorate (more than 10 years);
2. the difficult ending of a pastorate (the previous pastor may have died, been pressured to resign, or been guilty of some malfeasance);
3. the need for staff changes;
4. chronic financial problems or serious financial irregularities;
5. deferred maintenance;
6. clear-cut divisions in the congregation;
7. the desire to explore more extensively the possibilities for significant change (e.g., growth in numbers, a new approach to stewardship) before a new rector is in place;
8. congregational volunteers who hold decision-making positions but have done nothing of significance for some time;
9. significant change in the congregation or its neighborhood, or ministries that are not serving the congregation and the surrounding community.

from Beginning Ministry Together: The Alban Handbook for Clergy Transitions, by Roy Oswald, James Heath, and Ann Heath (Washington D.C.: The Alban Institute, 2003).

After consultation with the canon regarding the search timeline, the wardens and vestry appoint a search committee. Search committee make-up is very sensitive. The committee does the homework necessary to prepare the way for successful transition to the new rector.

- Search Committee Make-Up

- 1. Wardens do not serve on the search committee, so that they are free to supervise its work and carry out their responsibilities.*
- 2. Seven to nine members, none of whom are clergy, staff members, or related to clergy or staff.*
- 3. Membership balance with respect to key factors such as age, race, activities and organizations in the church, length of time active, etc.*
- 4. No two members from the same household or immediate family.*
- 5. About one-third should be members on the vestry whose terms will continue throughout the calling process.*
- 6. All members should be regular worshipers and supporters of the on-going life of the congregation.*
- 7. Each member able to work with the group, keep confidences and get work done on time.*

- The Role of the Vestry and Wardens

The vestry and wardens are the formal leadership of the parish during an interim period. The wardens have special roles, and need the firm support of their vestry colleagues. Together they:

- 1. communicate with the bishop and congregation;*
- 2. work with the canon;*
- 3. appoint and charge a search committee;*
- 4. provide for priestly services by an interim rector or supply clergy;*
- 5. elect a new rector and agree with the rector-elect on the terms of the call.*

With guidance from the canon, the process to develop an Office of Transitions Ministry (OTM) congregational profile and a brochure begins. A congregational survey and analysis, using a resource such as the Church Assessment Tool (CAT) from Holy Cow Consulting, will provide much of the needed information for the profile and brochure. As well as statistical information, such as current worship attendance, and town demographics, the brochure should include the story of the congregation's past, present, and hopes for the future, a description of how the congregation relates to its neighborhood, and a description of the rector the congregation is seeking. Often it would be appropriate for an interim rector to help guide a vestry through this process of congregational self-reflection and visioning prior to the formation of a search committee.

It is important to note that the roles of the interim rector and the canon, serving as the transitions minister, are two separate, though complementary roles. While the interim rector's job is to maintain parish programs and support the parish search process, it is the canon's job to monitor and direct the search process. An interim rector may not be a candidate in the search process.

- Typical Mandate from a Vestry to a Search Committee

- 1. Develop an OTM profile and a brochure to describe our congregation, the special responsibilities of our next rector, and the particular skills required in our next rector.*
- 2. Screen and evaluate candidates for rector.*
- 3. Keep the congregation informed about the progress of the search committee through the newsletter, announcements in church, etc.*
- 4. Involve the vestry in conversations with final candidates, and work with the vestry to discern who shall be called as rector.*

With the mandate should come a budget to support the work of the committee.

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Accumulating Names

The congregational profile and brochure are used to solicit names of potential candidates from the Office of Transitions Ministry database and from other sources. The congregation is also invited to nominate persons to become candidates. The canon and the chair of the search committee keep all nominations in confidence.

The initial list of candidates is developed from nominees from the congregation's parishioners, nominees from the OTM database, nominees who have expressed interest, nominees from the laity and clergy of the diocese, and nominees from the bishop.

The bishop and canon review the list for possible additions and eliminations and then the canon meets with the search committee to narrow the remaining list and to make preparations for the next step in the search process.

- A Note on Confidentiality

All members of the search committee must adhere to strict standards of confidentiality. Define what it means for the members. What can they tell their spouses? What can they tell church members who ask about the search? Who speaks for the committee? The names of pastors being considered must be kept in confidence. When asking candidates to complete questionnaires or when conducting telephone or face-to-face interviews, state at the outset that confidentiality will be respected. Search committee materials, such as minutes with details about candidates, OTM profiles or resumes, must all be kept confidential while the committee functions, and then properly disposed of when no longer needed. Do your best to protect your church and candidates from rumors. Clarify with the vestry what it needs to know and what your authority and accountability will be for your committee's work.

from The Pastoral Search Journey: A Guide to Finding Your Next Pastor, by John Vohnhof (Washington D.C.: The Alban Institute, 2010).

The Discernment Journey

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The search committee sends an initial letter and a descriptive congregational brochure to each potential candidate. As individuals respond, the search committee reviews their OTM profiles, resumes, personal statements, checks references, and conducts phone interviews. The committee then narrows the list further, and each person considered is informed of his or her status in the process.

The canon will then order formal background checks on the remaining candidates. The background checks will be requested through the bishop's office and paid for by the congregation. A background check can take between four and six weeks.

- A Sample Initial Contact Letter to a Potential Candidate

Dear Mr./Ms. Doe,

Calvary Episcopal Church is beginning a search for a new rector and your name has come to our attention as a possible candidate for the position. We have spent the last two months prayerfully considering our needs and our visions for the future in anticipation of the search process.

If you are interested in entering into a conversation with us about the position of rector of Calvary, we would like to learn more about you and, likewise, want you to learn more about Calvary. As an introduction to our church, we are enclosing an information packet that we hope will give you some sense of the character of our parish.

If you are willing to consider a call to serve as Rector of Calvary Episcopal Church, please send a copy of your resume, references and a short personal ministry statement, and any factors that lead you to believe that Calvary might be a good place for you to pursue your ministry. We would appreciate your reply no later than October 31. Our goal is to have a new rector in place by the beginning of 2010.

We appreciate your thoughtful consideration of our invitation to explore this exciting possibility with us. We know that the presence of the Holy Spirit will guide our committee and the candidates to the right decisions. We are committed to frequent communication with all candidates about the progress of our search process. Please know that you are in our prayers and keep us in yours.

*Sincerely,
Jane Smith
Search Committee Chair*

- A Sample Letter to a Candidate Informing Them That They Have Been Removed From the Process

Dear Mr./Ms. Doe,

I am writing to acknowledge the receipt of your professional materials addressed to the Calvary Episcopal Church Rector Search Committee, and to thank you for your prompt provision of the same.

On behalf of the Committee I want to express appreciation for your thoughtful interest in the position of Rector for our parish. In keeping with the merits of your letter and materials conveyed, the committee carefully considered them both with regard to Calvary's current situation and vision for the future.

Knowing well that the relationship of rector and parish is one in which all concerned must be able to grow and flourish, and to develop respective gifts and graces, the committee has concluded that, at this point in time, Calvary may not be the context in which you might best pursue your goals for ministry. We are, and remain, deeply grateful to you for your expression of interest in our parish, and will continue to remember you in prayer with every good wish for your ministry as the Holy Spirit guides you, and us, in a process of discernment.

*Sincerely,
Jane Smith
Search Committee Chair*

Field Visits to Candidates

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The search committee is divided into teams and begins to set up visitation schedules with the candidates in their cures. Prior to any visitation a session with the canon will be devoted to understanding the visitation process.

After all visitations have been made, the teams will report back to the whole committee and the candidate list is narrowed.

- The Interview

The interview provides an opportunity for direct conversation between the full search committee and the candidate being considered. This may be face to face, by telephone, or via the Web. A face-to-face interview is always the first choice but may not be practical. Telephone interviews are best done with a speakerphone, so that everyone can hear both sides of the conversation. If you do not have access to a telephone with a speakerphone unit, one can be purchased for about thirty dollars. Consider taping the calls, with the permission of the candidate, so that the committee can listen to calls when the process is further along.

The web is a great alternative, even better than a speakerphone, because it allows video. Skype (www.skype.com) is a free, web-based software application you download and use to make free calls over the internet. If each party has access to a computer camera, Skype transmits both voice and video, which means that your search committee and the candidate being interviewed can hear and see each other in real time. The search committee and candidate each sit facing a webcam-equipped computer. You can search the Web for other, similar services. Be sure to make a test call before the day of the interview. If you expect the candidate to see the full committee, you will have to check camera angles and coverage distances for your computer's camera.

The search committee chair should call the candidate and arrange an interview at a time convenient for all parties. Let the candidate know how much time to block out for the interview and what time you will

call. If the candidate is married, invite his or her spouse to join in a portion of the conversation. When scheduling two calls on the same evening, allow time to review the first interview before moving to the second.

The entire search committee should be present for all interviews. When scheduling interviews in different parts of the country, pay attention to time-zone differences. Allow at least forty-five minutes for the call. All committee members should review copies of the candidate's profile and pastoral questionnaire beforehand.

Before the call is made, each committee member should think of questions that he or she would like to ask. Rather than asking open-ended questions about hypothetical situations, ask how the candidate has handled ministries and issues in the past. Past behaviors are the best indicator of future behaviors. Develop a single list of questions so that each candidate is asked about the same topics. Depending on each candidate's profile and answers to his or her questionnaire, you might have several additional personal questions for each candidate. Decide who will start the call, make introductions, and ask the first questions. Watch your time closely. One person should be in charge of the conversation. Let each committee member ask at least two questions. A list of potential questions is included below, followed by some possible questions from the candidate that the committee should be prepared to answer. Develop more questions based on the candidate's profile and pastoral questionnaire, your church structure, and your strengths and weaknesses:

- What is your passion?*
- Tell us about your spiritual walk.*
- Tell us about your call to ministry.*
- How do you achieve personal growth in your ministry?*
- How have you challenged your congregation?*
- What style of worship do you enjoy?*
- What expectations of your vestry have you had?*
- What situations frustrate you the most?*
- How have you handled disagreements?*
- Describe your greatest strengths and abilities.*
- What are your greatest weaknesses?*

- *How do you handle leadership training?*
- *When facing a problem, what questions do you naturally ask?*
- *How would you describe your leadership style?*
- *Explain your style of counseling.*
- *How will you know God's will in this matter?*

In preparing for the interview, remember that you will be asked questions also. Below are several possible questions candidates may ask.

- *Why are you interested in me as a candidate?*
- *What role do you expect my family to play in your church?*
- *What concerns need to be addressed in the congregation and the community?*
- *What significant events and people have shaped your church?*
- *What is your vision for your congregation?*

It is important to know what you cannot ask. These include questions about age, physical characteristics, disabilities or chronic illnesses, and national origin. You may already have this information in the candidate's profile, but only if he or she has voluntarily added it. The candidate may mention it in an interview, but federal laws govern what cannot be asked of any candidate. Your supervisor or judicatory can help with interview legalities.

Allow time for the candidate to ask any final questions. Before ending the call, let him or her know what happens next and when you will make contact. Committee members should take notes during and after the call, recording enough information about the call to be able to reflect on the interview later when the field is being narrowed. Each member should note significant impressions.

Sometimes, after the initial interview, the committee will decide to do another round of interviews. Generally, the final two or three candidates are invited for a second interview. The prayer is that out of these finalists, one or two will be selected to come for a visit and a possible call.

from The Pastoral Search Journey: A Guide to Finding Your Next Pastor, by John Vohnof (Washington D.C.: The Alban Institute, 2010).

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Local Interviews/Decision Making

The remaining candidates from among those interviewed in the field visits are then invited to visit the congregation. During these visits, the candidates will meet with the search committee, vestry, and members of the staff. The purpose of these visits is primarily for the candidates to interview “you.” Remember that this process is mutual. Your congregation’s next rector will not be “hired,” but “called.” The canon will spend a session on the mechanics of the visitations.

If logistically possible, the bishop will interview the final candidates at this time. Prior to any call being made in the Episcopal Church in Arkansas, the bishop must have a face-to-face conversation with the candidate.

The search committee will then make its recommendation to the vestry. The vestry elects a rector and notifies the bishop. The bishop then gives the warden permission to issue the call.

- Ending the Search Process

The search committee will spend many hours on behalf of the congregation, and it is important, when its job is complete, to acknowledge its job formally. The committee might be recognized during worship, and should be publicly thanked by the congregation. It is helpful for committee members to get together in some sort of exit activity in which they reflect on the work they have done and their own participation in it. They should also bring together and destroy the personal information they have about all candidates and the search process. In addition, the committee should have a celebratory event, possibly a dinner with the new rector, and give thanks for the opportunity for service to the congregation, the ties they have made with one another, and the work that God has helped them through.

from Beginning Ministry Together: The Alban Handbook for Clergy Transitions, by Roy Oswald, James Heath, and Ann Heath (Washington D.C.: The Alban Institute, 2003).

Clarifying Terms of the Call



The wardens and canon work with the rector-elect to define the terms of the call leading to a letter of agreement (a standard template of a LOA is available from the bishop's office), which is reviewed and acknowledged by the bishop. Then the public announcement is made, and a celebration of new ministry is planned.

- Additional Resources

Personalized guidance for the search process comes from the bishop and canon, however, there are other current resources available that you are encouraged to use.

Holy Cow Consulting: <http://www.holycowconsulting.com/cat/cat>

*Roy M. Oswald, James M. Heath, Ann W. Heath. **Beginning Ministry Together: The Alban Handbook for Clergy Transitions** (Washington D.C.: The Alban Institute, 2003).*

*Molly Dale Smith, Editor. **Transitional Ministry: A Time of Opportunity** (New York, NY: Church Publishing, 2009).*

*John Vonhof. **The Pastoral Search Journey: A Guide to Finding Your Next Pastor** (Washington D.C.: The Alban Institute, 2010).*

*Charles R. Wilson. **Search: A Manual for those Called to Guide the Parish Through a Process Leading to the Election of a Rector** (Arvada, Colorado: Jethro Publishing, 1993).*

- Before Everything Else ...

We commend the focus of prayer and Bible study during the time of the calling process. The following are appropriate for the vestry, the search committee, and the whole congregation:

For the Church

Gracious Father, we pray for thy holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ thy Son our Savior. Amen.

For the Ordained

Almighty God, the giver of all good gifts, in your divine providence you have appointed various orders in your Church: Give your grace, we humbly pray, to all who are called to any office and ministry for your people; and so fill them with the truth of your doctrine and clothe them with holiness of life, that they may faithfully serve before you, to the glory of your great Name and for the benefit of your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

For Guidance

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light rises up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in your light we may see light, and in your straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sharing Leadership

Numbers 11:16-17, 24-25a

Discernment & the Variety of Gifts

Romans 12:1-18

Sources of Recommendation & Qualification

2 Corinthians 3:1-9

Jesus' Prayer for the Church

John 17:15-21

- Ten Common Mistakes Search Committees Make

- 1. Making a decision based on first impressions. Take time to review a candidate's profile and materials thoroughly, and compare these with the selection and evaluation criteria.*
- 2. Failing to conduct a complete and honest evaluation of your church to identify its strengths and weaknesses.*
- 3. Choosing a rector who is the exact opposite of, or exactly like, your former rector.*
- 4. Failing to look at the candidate's previous ministry terms for length, church size, and specialized programs started under his or her watch.*
- 5. Choosing a rector that the committee thinks the congregation members want rather than the one the church needs.*
- 6. Selecting a rector who may have a hard time adapting to the culture of your church, community, and locality. This anticipated difficulty may relate to church size, specialized ministries, rural or suburban context, big-city or small-town setting, or cross-cultural and ethnicity issues.*
- 7. Failing to hold the search team accountable to its own ground rules - especially confidentiality.*
- 8. Not holding all candidates to the same submission requirements. All candidates must submit the same materials (profile form, pastoral history, sermons, and so forth).*
- 9. Allowing the board or certain members or groups in the church to "push" the process in a direction different from the one the committee might take otherwise.*
- 10. Succumbing to pressure from committee members, the vestry, or members of the congregation to speed up the process.*

from The Pastoral Search Journey: A Guide to Finding Your Next Pastor, by John Vohnhof (Washington D.C.: The Alban Institute, 2010).

Timeline Checklist

Guidelines for Calling a Rector

1 Direction Finding/Self Study

- Initial meeting with bishop and/or transitions minister, interim ministry needs are determined, and transition timeline is set.

- Search committee may be appointed.
- Congregational survey and analysis begin.
- Congregational profile and brochure are created.

2 Accumulating Names

- Congregation is asked for nominees.
- Initial list of candidates is formed.
- Bishop and transitions minister review list of candidates.
- Transitions minister and search committee narrow list.

3 Discernment Journey

- Initial letters are sent to prospective candidates.
- As candidates respond, references are checked and phone interviews are conducted.
- The list is narrowed and formal background checks are ordered.

4 Field Visits to Candidates

- Transitions minister and search committee meet to review field visit process.
- Teams are created and visits are made.
- Teams regroup and evaluate candidates visited.

5 Local Interviews/Decision Making

- Transitions minister and search committee meet to discuss the remaining candidates' visits to the congregation.
- The candidates visit.
- The bishop interviews the candidates in person.
- The search committee makes its recommendation to the vestry.
- The bishop gives permission for the warden to issue a call.

6 Clarifying Terms of the Call

- A letter of agreement is drafted and agreed upon by bishop, wardens, and rector-elect.