

# Introduction to the Search Process

Episcopal Diocese of Michigan



*Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21*

## The Nature of Transitions: A Guide for Vestries

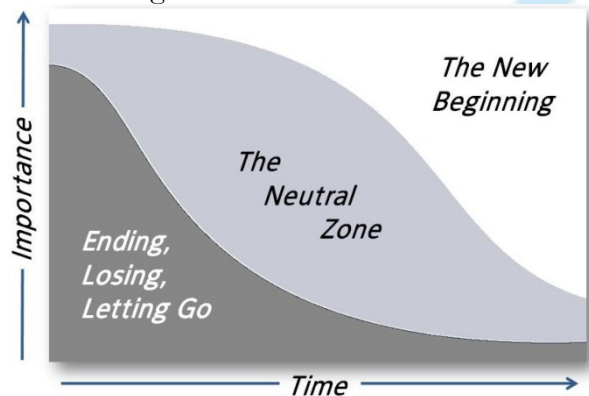
After a priest announces they are leaving, the vestry is being asked to lead during a time of transition. One reason we ask vestries to appoint a search committee, is so the vestry can focus on guiding the church through this time in intentional, faithful, and healthy ways.

*Change is situational i.e. the leaving or retiring of a priest.*

*Transition is the psychological process of accepting and working with change*

*Vestry leadership during this time is about helping people move through the transition smoothly.*

William Bridges Transition Model



People are at different phases at different times and so transition happens:

- Unevenly
- Concurrently
- At a person's own pace

### Ending, Losing, Letting Go

Endings occur when people are first presented with change and can be a time marked by resistance and emotional upheaval. If you don't acknowledge the emotions that people are going through, you'll likely encounter resistance throughout the entire transition process even when a new priest arrives.

How vestry's can help guide people through this phase:

- Accept people's resistance and Acknowledge losses openly
- Understand their emotions and work through signs of grieving
- Listen Empathically and treat the past with respect
- Communicate openly about what's going to happen
  - Communicate More than you think and explain the process in fine details
  - Be open about the challenges of this time and what people can do to help

### The Neutral Zone

This is a bridge between the old and the new. While it can be a time of anxiety, under good leadership it can also be a time of creativity, renewal, spiritual abundance, and innovation.

How vestry's can guide people through this phase:

- Model living with ambiguity and willingness to try new things
- Creativity is Key, let the creativity flow
- Set concise short-term goals and celebrate when they are accomplished to keep spirits up
- Consistency, Truthfulness, Communication, Clarity

### The New Beginning

When a new priest arrives is a time of acceptance and energy, change being embraced, and building of new skills. It's also a time when you may see a renewed commitment to your community of faith and its mission. The vestry's leadership is key to the ability for your new priest to be successful. We invite vestries to continue to develop their leadership skills as they advise the new priest and lead their community of faith.

## Search for a New Priest: The Big Picture

Getting Started (Vestry or Bishop's Committee/Wardens)	Self-Assessment and Written Materials (Search Committee)	Search & Discernment (Search Committee)	Issuing a Call & Welcoming a New Priest (Vestry/Wardens)
<p>Plan Farewell with outgoing priest</p> <p>Schedule supply and pastoral care coverage if you have another priest as assistant or curate they will operate as priest-in-charge (wardens)</p> <p>Appoint a Search Committee</p> <p>Commission Search Committee</p> <p>Website Updates</p> <p><i>End Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>A good farewell</i></li> <li>• <i>Empower Search Committee to do its work</i></li> <li>• <i>Vestry work with interim, priest-in-charge or supply priests and lead the church</i></li> </ul>	<p>Church Assessment Tool (CAT) Survey (<i>ASA must be over 50 people</i>)</p> <p>Small Group Self-Study</p> <p>Complete Written materials (Profile, OTM form): Documents must be approved by vestry and bishop's staff, before posting the position.</p> <p><i>*The Vestry works to complete the financial piece of the OTM</i></p> <p>Update Website</p> <p>Post Position (bishop's staff does this, minimum 8 weeks)</p> <p><i>End Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Clarity about congregation's history, mission, vision, future goals</i></li> <li>• <i>Written materials that clearly express who you are as a congregation and what you seek in your next rector/vicar</i></li> </ul>	<p>Interview Candidates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review written materials</li> <li>• Zoom interviews</li> <li>• In-Person Interviews (including meeting with Bishop and Transition Officer)</li> <li>• Vestry meets candidates but does not interview</li> </ul> <p>Discern Finalist</p> <p>Recommend ONE name to the vestry</p> <p><i>End Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Discernment of Finalist to present to vestry</i></li> </ul> <p><i>(Do not notify other finalists until call is issued and LOA is signed by candidate and wardens)</i></p>	<p>Vestry accepts recommendation from Search Committee</p> <p>Notify the Bishop's Office request her final approval to issue the call (wardens)</p> <p>Negotiate Letter of Agreement (Wardens)</p> <p>Celebrate the work of the Search Committee vestry, and parish!!</p> <p>Welcome new Priest</p> <p>Mutual Ministry Review at 1 year mark.</p> <p><i>End Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Successful, life-giving partnership between a new priest and the congregation</i></li> </ul>

## **Introduction to the Search Process**

### **Getting Started**

The process for calling a new rector/vicar is one of mutual discernment that is engaged by the vestry/bishop's committee, the search committee, and the candidates in partnership with the Bishop and her staff. This important time must be carried out prayerfully and with great care. It will require a commitment of time, energy and resources. We understand that there is pressure and urgency for the search committee to find a new priest for your community of faith. Do not let anxiety drive this process, but rather trust that God is at work.

#### Time Needed

The time needed for a search process depends on several variables including:

- Frequency of vestry and search committee meetings
- The commitment and willingness of members to work independently in small groups
- The overall health of the parish: Including matters that may require conflict resolution or other healing processes
- Time for gathering data and then to develop a parish profile
- Delays for holiday seasons, etc.

While all of this can vary widely, the average time from the departure of a priest to the arrival of a new priest is approximately 12-18 months.

#### Best Practices

##### **Clear Roles and Responsibilities**

*The interim period and search process work best when the roles and responsibilities of the vestry, interim priest, search committee, and bishop are understood and clearly committed to the parish.*

##### **Whole Church Involvement**

*The whole church should take part in working through the tasks of the interim period, sharing stories and experiences that contribute to the data which will comprise the parish profile.*

##### **Frequent, Open and Transparent Communication**

*The vestry and search committee will support healthy parish functioning through this time by communicating openly and regularly about process while maintaining strict confidentiality about candidates.*

On behalf of Bishop Bonnie Perry, transition ministers are **The Rev. Ellen Ekevag (630-258-8882) [eekevag@edomi.org](mailto:eekevag@edomi.org)** and **The Rev Susie Shaefer (847-475-1448) [sshaefer@edomi.org](mailto:sshaefer@edomi.org)**. Ellen and Susie will work with clergy and congregation through the process, from training leaders to facilitate conversation to recruiting and vetting great candidates. Clarity about this process is essential in order to ensure that it works most effectively for the vestry, search committee, parishioners, candidates and bishop's staff.

## Vestry/Bishop Committee's Tasks Once a Priest Announces Departure

1. Closure with Departing Priest
  - Planning a good good-bye
  - Dealing with own grief so that you can lead the congregation through theirs
  - Review leave taking guide
2. Immediate Pastoral Concerns
  - Worship: (Wardens find supply priests) <https://www.edomi.org/worship-prayer/supplyclergy/>
  - Pastoral Care (emergency coverage until Interim/Transitional Priest-in-Charge/or Long Term Supply is arranged)
3. Arrange for Interim, Transition Priest-in-Charge, On-going Supply Clergy or Training of Worship Leaders
  - The transition officer will help you think through options
  - Wardens negotiate Letter of Agreement with Interim/Transitional-Priest-in-Charge

## Vestry/Bishop Committee's Tasks Once a Priest Departs

4. Appoint Search Committee 5-7 people (occurs after the rector leaves and ideally after an interim of transitional priest-in-charge arrives)
  - Vestry appoints Search Committee Chairs: A person or two people widely known and trusted in the congregation.
  - May invite nominations from congregation but vestry decides Search Committee personnel.
    - i. Might include a current or former warden, vestry member, people held in high regard, balance newer/long-time members, younger/older  
*(do not need someone from every demographic or every committee, but a diversity of people so everyone feels they have a representative is helpful.)*
    - ii. Want people who can work collaboratively, meet others well, communicate clearly, follow through with tasks
    - iii. Staff/clergy do not serve on the Search Committee
    - iv. It is recommended to have at least 1-2 people from the Vestry serve on the Search Committee (not a warden)
    - v. Commission the Search Committee during a Sunday Service
5. Continue leading as a vestry
  - Keep doing what you do and let the Search Committee do its work
  - Tasks of interim time include: Coming to terms with history, explore identity and direction, make leadership/operational changes, renew linkages, and commit to new leadership and direction.

## Tasks during the Search Process

### Tasks of the Search Committee

- Self-Assessment
  - Organize Church Assessment Tool Survey (ASA<50)
  - Conduct Small Group Meetings
- Written Materials
  - Prepare the OTM (Office of Transitional Ministry Form)
  - Work on website updates with vestry
  - Write Parish Profile
- Search and Discernment
  - Using Profile and Written Material prepare interview questions
  - Interview candidates (Must keep confidentiality about names of candidates)
    - Review their written material
    - Phone, zoom, skype interviews
    - In-person interviews (At your church)
  - Discern and recommend One Person to be the new priest to the vestry
- At all times communicate and keep people informed without violating confidentiality

### Tasks of Vestry

- Appoint Search Committee
- Commission Search Committee
- Approve the written documents: Parish Profile, OTM Portfolio, Website
- Provide financial information to the Transition Officer
- Approve a financial package for the next clergy leader
- When candidates come to visit church meet the candidates in a social situation
- Call the Next Priest

### Tasks of Transition Minister

- Coach/advise and meet regularly with Search Committee
- Interpret “Conversations Survey” to parish leadership
- Approve (with Bishop) Parish Profile and OTM
- Recruit and Vet applicants
- Other tasks as requested or needed



## Search Committee Roles and Tasks

### **Chair(s)**

Oversee work of the committee  
Delegate tasks and ensure tasks are completed  
Maintain needed correspondence with applicants during interview stages  
Liaison to transition officer on the bishop's staff  
Ensure communication with vestry  
Oversee communication with the larger church

### **Secretary**

Takes minutes of each meeting and emails them to committee members  
Maintains minutes archive  
Emails reminders to committee

### **Chaplain**

Begins and ends each meeting with a prayer, bible study, or poem  
Keeps Search Committee focused on process as a sacred journey (not just a job search)  
Hold process in prayer throughout search timeline

### **Church Assessment Tool (CAT) Survey Organizer**

Works directly with Holy Cow Consulting  
Signs Congregation up for the CAT/contact person for CAT  
Organizes opportunities to take CAT  
Organizes and oversees communication to the congregation

### **Small Group Organizer**

Organize Small Group opportunities  
Ensures the Search Committee completes its own Small Group Work  
Organizes/oversees communication to congregation  
Leads Search Process of condensing notes to major themes/ideas for the profile

### **Profile Drafter(s)**

Drafts document that is sent to the transition officer, after revisions and bishop approval is posted on the website.

### **OTM Drafter(s)**

Drafts OTM – Search Committee might divide the 12 Essays  
Incorporate revisions/recommendations of Bishop/diocesan staff and vestry

### **Website Updates- coordinates with Vestry**

Ensures website is updated to incorporate information that used to be in a parish profile, and has omitted outdated into

### **Interview Organizers (often done by chairs)**

Lead review of written materials provided by candidates  
Zoom, Skype, Phone Interviews: Organize, set up, and communicate with applicants  
On-site visit: Coordinate schedule The Rev. Ellen Ekevag, transition officer to ensure thorough planning of on-site visit including time with the bishop, leading service for search committee and vestry, and a social event for search committee and vestry to interact with candidate.

*Throughout process, communication with congregation and vestry is essential, as is maintaining confidentiality for candidates.*

## **What to Focus on during Search and Interim Process for Vestries and Bishop's Committees**

(adapted from *12 Keys of an Effective Church* from Kennon Callahan)

- 1. Engage and Strengthen the Mission of the church**  
*What is the mission that your church does that heals a hurt in the world or creates a concrete hope in the world. Vestry to continue to sustain and even build on that that mission.*
- 2. Systematized pastoral visiting by lay and clergy.**  
*Who is it in your church that has the gifts for pastoral care. Vibrant churches have lay people who offer pastoral care, and even begin to meet with the unchurched, newcomers, and check in with people during the interim.*
- 3. Dynamic Worship that is corporately planned**  
*There could be a time where you are without clergy or more Sundays when no supply is available. This is the time to raise up lay worship leaders, preachers, and gather those who care about liturgy to take part and to plan liturgies.*
- 4. Support Significant Relational Groups where people can make connections.**  
*This is tough to do in COVID, but when we can to continue to gatherings, picnics, coffee hour, and encourage small groups to stay connected.*
- 5. Relational leadership should be your highest priority.**  
*There is a temptation to just "get the work done." During the interim period it's more important than ever that leaders remain transparent and relational. I recommend that vestries divide up member list and check in with members via phone or in person once a month.*
- 6. Transparency and Communication**  
*Now more than ever- communicate, communicate, communicate. A vestry can create regular townhall meetings, a communication schedule, and tell the congregation about what you are doing and talking about. This is a time to set small winnable goals, to try new things and gather to celebrate what the church is doing.*
- 7. Work on Visibility**  
*Update and beautify your website. It is the place that visitors go first, and it will be place that your clergy candidates will visit. Doesn't need to be fancy but authenticity and simplicity are key. Also look at your landscaping, and interior. Is this a warm and welcoming space? Are things organized? What does the rector's/vicar's office look like? When you invite clergy candidates you want your church and other spaces to be organized, clean and neat.*
- 8. Financial Resources**  
*Clergy look for churches that have clear, transparent financial reporting and resources. They look for churches whose lay leaders take responsibility for money, buildings and grounds, and outside groups and contractors.*



## Four C's of the Search Process

**Covenant:** the vestry and search committee are entrusted with the holy work of finding their congregation's next pastor, priest, and teacher. This process must be steeped in prayer from beginning to end. By appointing a Search Committee the Vestry can be freed to focus on leading the church through the transition. It is the responsibility of both the Vestry and the Search Committee to steep this process in prayer from beginning to end.

**Communication:** Anxiety on the part of the congregation can be reduced if the vestry and search committee communicate the search timeline and process in a transparent and dependable way. Additionally, it is crucial for the warden and search committee chair(s) to maintain frequent and clear communications with one another and with the transition minister throughout the search. The chair of the Search Committee should take responsibility for ensuring that every candidate always knows what is happening in the process, and when the next step will take place.

**Confidentiality:** The search committee must maintain strict confidence about the names of candidates being considered in the search, even with spouses and partners. To do otherwise is to risk great hurt to the candidate, your church, and other churches.

**Consensus:** When the time comes for the search committee to recommend a name to the vestry, we invite the group to seek consensus and we have tools to guide this process. This does not require 100% agreement. However, if there is deep division, we ask that the search committee invite transition minister to join you in a conversation to seek clarity about how to move forward faithfully for the good of the church.

## One More Word about Confidentiality...

From the moment the Committee receives an application, **it assumes the duty of safeguarding the applicant's confidentiality.** Committee members may not share any details at all about applicants: obviously not names, but also not details about age, gender, geographic location, make of car, whether it's a dog or a cat person, or anything else no matter how inconsequential.

In a world of Google searches, it takes only one or two data points for a diligent searcher to figure out who a candidate is. Think of it this way: it's good that members of the congregation are curious, and since they're curious, it's natural that they should try to find out all that they can. *It's the Committee's job to see to it that they don't succeed even a tiny little bit.*

This means more than not blabbing. It also means being careful about emails—every Committee member should use a private email address that no one else shares. It means being vigilant about papers and where they are left; and about conversations and whether they can be overheard. The reason for all this seriousness is the profound harm that can come even from innocent mistakes. Breaches of confidentiality, even unintentional ones, have derailed search processes, divided congregations, and betrayed candidates. Remember, only one of your candidates will be chosen.

The duty of confidentiality extends beyond the search. Once the new priest is called and accepts the call, that person's name is obviously public. But their materials are not: they get to introduce themselves to the congregation as they choose, and committee members should not tell their stories for them. Even more importantly, the identities and materials of those *not* called should never be shared, ever, until the end of time. To ensure against inadvertent disclosure, materials of all candidates other than the one called should be carefully deleted or destroyed at the end of the process.

COMMISSIONING OF THE SEARCH COMMITTEE

*Members of the Search Committee and the Wardens come forward. The Worship Leader addresses the congregation*  
Sisters and Brothers in Christ Jesus, we are all baptized by the one Spirit into one Body, and given gifts for a variety of ministries for the common good. Our purpose is to commission these persons in the Name of God and of this congregation as members of the Search Committee.

*Wardens* I present to you these persons to be commissioned as members of the Search Committee of \_\_\_\_\_ Episcopal Church.

*The Worship Leader asks the wardens(s)*  
Are these persons prepared by a commitment to Christ as Lord, by regular attendance at worship, and by the knowledge of their duties, to exercise their ministry to the honor of God, and the well-being of his Church?

*Wardens* I believe they are.

*The Worship Leader addresses the candidates*  
You have been called to serve this congregation as members of the Search Committee. Will you, as long as you are engaged in this work, perform it with diligence?

*SC Candidates* We will.

*The Worship Leader*  
Will you faithfully and reverently execute the duties of this ministry to the honor of God, and the benefit of the members of this congregation?

*SC Candidates* We will.

*The Worship Leader addresses the congregation*  
Will all of you do all in your power to support these people in their service?

*Congregation* **We will.**

*The Worship Leader* Let us pray. *(Silence)*  
O Eternal God, the foundation of all wisdom and the source of all inspiration: Enlighten with your grace the Search Committee of this congregation; and so rule their minds, open their hearts, and guide their deliberations, that in their work they may seek your glory and promote the mission of your Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*Worship Leader* In the Name of God, I commission you as members of the Rector Search Committee of \_\_\_\_\_ Church.