

DIOCESAN POLICIES FOR THE PASTORAL SEARCH PROCESS *(revised July, 2020)*

I. Notification of the Ecclesiastical Authority

The initial responsibility of the Wardens of any parish whose rectorship has become vacant for any reason is to provide written notification of the vacancy to the Bishop in jurisdiction.

II. Organization of Search Committee

The Parish Council, in consultation with the Bishop, is to organize a Search Committee, whose membership should represent a broad cross-section of the congregation. The Search Committee may include some number of vestry members, but should not be composed exclusively of vestrymen.

III. Parish Evaluation

The first function of the Search Committee will be to oversee the process of a parish self-study. This process will involve the development, distribution, review and analysis of a Parish Evaluation Survey to be completed by every member of the congregation. The purpose of this self-study is to help to identify areas of both strength and weakness in the life and ministry of the parish; to analyze its needs; to ascertain the mind of the people with regard to all significant aspects of parish life; to work toward the establishment of clear priorities and goals for the future of the church's ministry; and to begin to develop a profile of the congregation and its needs, as a means of forming a profile of the man needed to fill the pastoral vacancy. The tabulated survey results will be an important component in enabling the Search Committee to determine the level of experience, as well as the strengths, assets, and gifts which are necessary in the man to be chosen to carry on the pastoral ministry of the congregation.

IV Functions in Transition: A Summary of the Search Process

A. Turning the Apparent Negative into a Positive

From the standpoint of a congregation in transition, the negative aspect of things will obviously be the recent loss of a pastor. The *positive gains* to come out of the situation should be:

I The pastoral vacancy can provide much-needed opportunity for *Reflection, Evaluation, Focus and Redirection*.

a). The tabulated results of the parish self-study need to be carefully analyzed and appropriate conclusions drawn. *Specifically: in what ways has this study enabled the parish to identify the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of its particular ministry?* (It is important to avoid the assumption that everyone already *knows* what the parish's strengths and weaknesses are, or that the congregation already clearly understands and agrees upon what ought to be their goals and priorities for the future. Vestries and congregations are often surprised by the results of this evaluation process!)

What, then, do the survey conclusions tell the Search Committee about the appropriate gifts, abilities and strengths necessary in our next rector? That finding will lead to the next major necessity for an effective pastoral search process, namely:

b.) The parish needs to have a clearly defined, well articulated, widely owned *Mission*

Statement. Is this in place? If so, does it need refinement? If not, when will it be in place? (If necessary, a special committee needs to be organized in order to frame the Mission Statement, with a specific target date set for its completion.)

This priority is absolutely necessary for the good of the parish, as well as for the next pastor. ***Where does this parish want to be in the next five years? In the next ten? The next twenty years?*** - The church needs to have clear goals set for itself. A parish without a clearly focused, sharply defined, well articulated statement of its mission and purpose will inevitably drift instead of moving decisively forward and growing. The parish also owes this much to the incoming pastor who will be expected to guide it toward that future. (Any pastoral candidate worth considering will expect such a well-defined, widely owned statement of mission to be in place, and may well decline to consider the pulpit vacancy if it is not.)

2. A further positive outcome to the pastoral vacancy and search process can be a heightened level of *Commitment* and a deepened level of *Involvement* on the part of a wider segment of the congregation in every aspect of parish ministry.

The absence of the rector will be noted particularly in the things which he used to care for himself (which others may have, perhaps, taken for granted or not even noticed) which will now have to be taken up by others. Reaction to the pastoral "vacuum" by some congregations (and vestries) is often panic, followed by an ill-advised haste to fill the vacancy as soon as possible. The pastoral interim should rather be seen as an opportunity for constructive cultivation of leadership and service by all the members of the Body of Christ.

3. The pastoral vacancy can provide opportunity for *Growth in Spirituality*: St. Paul's testimony was, "*When I am weak, then I am strong.*" The paramount activity of this transition period should be fervent prayer: organized, focused, disciplined, and regular -- for the parish, the wardens and vestry, the Search Committee, the church staff, the potential candidates, the Bishop and Standing Committee.

B. Understanding the Transition Process: *The Search Committee as Pastoral Nominating Committee.*

1. Specific Responsibilities and Functions of the Search Committee

a.) Acceptance of a position on the pastoral Search Committee must begin with an acknowledgment of *the demands of the task*, and unqualified acceptance of *the priority of the commitment*. Search Committee membership, if discharged conscientiously, is an energy-intensive, time-consuming process. Search Committees that have functioned most effectively have often met *weekly*. And, as the search process unfolds, there is significant work to be done between meetings. Committee members should be aware of the demands of this important responsibility, and commit unreservedly to its requirements at the outset. Those unable or unwilling to assume this level of commitment should conscientiously decline to serve.

b.) From the beginning of the process, there must be *clear assignment of responsibilities and equitable distribution of the load*. (For example: Who will record the proceedings of the committee? Who will conduct correspondence? How will review of resumes be handled? Who will conduct interviews? -- etc.) In anticipation of these functions, the Search Committee should: a) Develop an initial letter which will be sent to prospective candidates. (What will it say about the church? About the

search process? What will it ask of the potential candidate? -- e.g., If the person is interested in being considered, should he submit a resume with his initial reply? What else should be submitted at that time?) b) Develop a questionnaire that will be sent to candidates who submit an initial affirmative reply. c) Decide on the means by which the committee will communicate with references. d) Determine how the committee will hear the candidate preach and conduct public worship. (How many sermon tapes should be submitted for committee review? How will they be duplicated so that committee members can listen to them? **Will** a sub-committee eventually visit his current local church?)

NOTE - there should be NO thought of parading potential candidates through the pulpit of the parish on Sunday mornings! The "beauty-pageant" method of pulpit candidacy is totally inappropriate, completely inadequate, and blatantly superficial as a means of pastoral selection. Moreover, it is a sure and certain procedure for polarizing the congregation and creating lasting injuries. The Search Committee, not the congregation, is to do the job of candidate selection and analysis. Typically, the Search Committee will review applicants and narrow them to one man whom they would like to invite to the parish to be their official candidate. Upon securing the Vestry's approval for the resources to cover the candidate's (and possibly his wife's/family's) travel expenses, the invitation is extended and coordinated by the chair of the Search Committee for the man to come for an official visit to the parish as candidate. On this visit, the candidate would be interviewed further by the Search Committee and the Vestry, as well as introduced in some appropriate manner to the congregation. Quite often the candidate is asked to preach, conduct worship, teach a Sunday School class, be available for the congregation to become acquainted with him, and so forth. After this time of further introduction and discernment, the Search Committee would then meet to make their final determination as to whether or not to recommend the candidate to the Vestry as its selection. The Vestry would then make its final decision based upon the Search Committee's recommendation. If the candidate ends up not being recommended, he would be notified. The Search Committee would then proceed to the selection of another candidate. After a candidate has been affirmatively selected and voted upon by the Search Committee and called by the Vestry, he is notified to determine his acceptance of the call. If he accepts, the Vestry would then introduce/announce to the congregation its selection and acceptance of the rector.

c.) Following upon the tabulation of the parish self-study and the adoption of a clear statement of mission, *the Search Committee will develop a preliminary list of potential candidates in consultation with the Bishop*, utilizing the digested results of the congregational self-study and the materials of the parish Mission Statement. *The parish should see itself in partnership with the Diocese in the search process.* If clergy currently serving other parishes are to be considered as possible candidates, that will have a potential impact on those parishes, and on the Diocese as a whole. The Bishop and Standing Committee, having the responsibility for oversight of clergy and parishes, may be in a position to provide information and counsel concerning men and their record of pastoral service not readily available from other sources. In particular, it must be noted that, should the Search Committee have interest in pursuing the possible candidacy of any clergyman outside the Reformed Episcopal Church, the consultation and participation of the bishop and Standing Committee should be sought immediately. *It is not possible for a local congregation to call a minister, and have him installed as rector, unless he can qualify according to the canonical requirements for clergy in the Reformed Episcopal Church, including the sustaining of an examination. It can be exceedingly injurious, both to the parish and to a minister and his family to cultivate and nurture a relationship which, ultimately, cannot be finalized because the candidate is not someone whom the Bishop and Standing Committee can approve. Cooperative participation from the outset helps to avoid the possibility of difficulty and injury later on.*

Candidates should be identified on the basis of objective criteria, not subjective considerations. **Above all, the search** process is not a popularity contest. Candidates are not to be chosen because some people know them; or because certain people like them; or because they have made a good personal or public impression. Search Committee members should read and study the biblical qualifications set down in I St. Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9; and the like. These criteria, together with a man's demonstrated gifts and qualifications as evidenced in his previous pastoral service, the materials assembled in the process carried on by the Search Committee, and the counsel provided by the Bishop and Standing Committee, should be the factors used to identify candidates, and ultimately to nominate a rector.

d.) In the exercise of all of these functions, *the Search Committee should maintain the utmost confidentiality*, both within the local congregation, and also in their contacts with potential candidates, references, and the like. Significant injuries are likely to result if confidentiality and discretion are not strictly maintained. Men and their ministries can be compromised; false and unfulfillable expectations can be raised; and significant injuries done by "leaks" of information from a Search Committee while its efforts are still in process.

e.) Having proceeded thus far, the Search Committee will now be engaged in conducting interviews; reviewing resumes, references and sermon tapes; discussing the ongoing process openly and candidly with one another; and in working toward the eventual outcome of voting on one optimum candidate to present to the vestry for the issuance of a call. It is the vestry which is canonically empowered to issue a pastoral call. (Title IV, Canon IX, Section 2) Therefore, the Search Committee will function as a Pastoral Nominating Committee, to present their chosen candidate to the vestry. The vestry must issue the call.

2. The Vestry in Relation to the Search Committee

a.) Early on in the process the Search Committee should obtain from the vestry clear parameters of a salary and benefits package for the new rector, together with any necessary information regarding housing / rectory provision, etc. The Search Committee cannot proceed intelligently without this information,

b.) A liaison person should be designated to maintain communication with the vestry throughout the process, *without breaching confidences*. (Also: the congregation needs to know that the Search Committee is active, and that the process is moving forward, *without knowing the details*.)

c.) The Search Committee should inform the vestry of the necessary expenses of its operation, and ascertain whether or not there are specific fiscal limitations. (What kind of "budget" will there be for travel and related expenses, for committee members, and for potential candidates and their families? What will be the arrangements for hospitality -- accommodations and meals, etc. -- for men coming to be interviewed? Is the Search Committee at liberty to consider candidates from a great distance where airfare and accommodations may involve significant expense?) -- These subjects should be broached and considered *early in the process* so that everyone is of the same understanding and there are no surprises.

C. The Wisdom of an Interim Rector

1. Many denominations *mandate* that an Interim Rector must serve for a period of time before a new, permanent replacement can be called to fill the pastoral vacancy. The period of time for an

Interim Rector to serve can vary; but generally speaking, the longer the outgoing rector's tenure was, the longer the Interim Rectorship should be. One good rule of thumb is to plan that an Interim Rector will serve at least one month for each year of the outgoing rector's tenure (i.e., if the rector served for twelve years, there should be at least a twelve-month interim before a permanent replacement is called). Our current operating policy in the Diocese calls for an Interim Rector to serve before the pastoral vacancy can be permanently filled. In particular, when the previous pastoral tenure has been lengthy; when the outgoing rector has had a commanding presence; there *must* be a transitional figure. Both the wisdom, and the necessity for this, can be clearly seen in relation to the following:

a.) *The well-being of the local church.* A parish pastor is the spiritual father to his people. When he leaves the church, and is gone from the scene, there is a bereavement which is very real. It is as foolhardy for a parish that has lost its pastor to immediately pursue a new pastoral relationship as it would be for a recently widowed person to plunge immediately into a new romance. To think otherwise is radically to misunderstand human nature. To proceed otherwise is a proven recipe for disaster.

b.) *The well-being of the next pastor.* In the history of this Denomination, as it is known to current memory, there has never been a situation where a church has called a full-time replacement rector immediately following a long-tenured pastorate where there has not been tremendous upheaval, disturbance and injury. Frequently there has been lasting loss to the church, and often permanent injury to the man.

The Bishop and Standing Committee are charged with the pastoral oversight and care of both the parishes and the clergy of the Diocese. The faithful exercise of that stewardship, for the wellbeing of parishes and ministers alike, precludes the possibility that the Bishop and Standing Committee can approve any process of immediately proceeding to engage a permanent pastoral replacement without there being a pastoral interim. It is both unfair and irresponsible to risk the possibility of making casualties, either of churches, or of ministers and their families.

It should be noted further that the presence of additional clergy as members of the pastoral staff does not materially alter the necessity for an Interim Rector -- particularly if those persons are to be considered as potential candidates. *Any clergyman who occupies the position of "Interim Rector" can only be considered as a candidate, if it has been judged by the Bishop that such consideration is in the best Interest of the parish.*

D. The Availability of the Bishop in this Process

Because of the responsibility entrusted to the Bishop for pastoral care and oversight of your parish, like all the parishes of the Diocese -- and particularly in time of pastoral vacancy when the Bishop is charged to fulfill the canonical responsibility of Rector (Title III, Canon VIII, Section 8); and in his capacity as "pastor of pastors" to all the clergy; the Bishop is committed to close involvement with each parish in the transition process. In that regard he will:

1. Maintain continuing contact with the chairperson of the Search Committee, and will be available to meet with the full committee membership, or with any sub-committee, as frequently as is deemed advisable or necessary.

2. Offer continuing availability to the Wardens, Parish Council, and Vestry throughout the process, in order to supply whatever needs, direction and support may be required. (Note: Although it is

the Bishop's prerogative, canonically, to attend and chair all meetings of the vestry when the parish rectorship is vacant, in most cases Episcopal involvement to that degree is neither necessary nor feasible. The Bishop will be available to support, assist, and counsel as fully as is needed or desired.)

3. Covenant with you to maintain deep and prayerful interest in this vital process of calling the man of God's choosing to the rectorship of your parish. You are important to us as brothers and sisters in Christ, as fellow Reformed Episcopalians, and as partners in the life, ministry and mission of the entire church. As we work together, it should be with the confidence that God will direct and enable us, through a mutual process, which will lead to a bright, strong, productive future in the ongoing life of this parish, and in all of the work which we share together in the Kingdom of Christ.