

# Guidelines for the Search Process

## Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis

### May 2019

#### **Introduction**

The process for calling a new rector is one of mutual discernment that is engaged by the vestry, the search committee, and the candidates, in partnership with the bishop. This important time must be carried out prayerfully and with great care. It will require a major commitment of both time and resources. Proceeding with haste can lead to painful results for everyone involved. It is far better for everyone involved to take the time and energy necessary at the beginning of this relationship than to spend it at its end by dissolving a pastoral relationship with a priest whose own gifts and abilities are not well-matched to the particular gifts and challenges of a congregation. We understand that there is pressure and urgency for the search committee to find a new priest for your parish. Do not let that anxiety drive this process.

The time needed for a search process depends on a number of variables. These include the 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 rector to the arrival of a new rector is approximately 18 months.

The interim period and search process work best when the roles and responsibilities of the vestry, interim priest, bishop, and search committee are understood and clearly communicated to the parish. The whole church should take part in both aspects: working through the developmental tasks of the interim period, sharing stories and experiences that contribute to the data which will comprise the parish profile. The vestry and search committee will best support healthy parish functioning through this time by communicating openly and regularly about process while maintaining strict confidentiality about candidates.

On behalf of Bishop Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows, the Rev Sean Cox, Associate for Transitions and Congregational Development (317-926-5454x204 or [cox@indydio.org](mailto:cox@indydio.org)) is the lead staff member for transitions. Fr. Cox work with clergy and congregations throughout the process, from training leaders to facilitating conversations 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.

The guidelines that follow are the steps in the process of seeking a new rector in the Diocese of Indianapolis.

## Process Outline

### Planning

- Saying goodbye well to your departing rector is a crucial step for everyone involved. Give thanks for the ministry that you have shared and grieve the loss that this departure brings. How well you say goodbye will inform how well you are able to greet your next rector when that person arrives.
- Make appropriately meaningful plans to welcome your interim priest. A trained interim can help tremendously in the time between rectors. Please be aware that there is a shortage of interim priests right now. If your parish seeks an interim priest, we will do all we can to find someone who is well-equipped to lead your congregation through this period – and your vestry will have the chance to weigh in on the decision. But also know that the variety of choices will be limited.
- The vestry must establish a budget that covers the cost of:
  - Communications
  - Visits to and from perspective clergy
  - Developing the parish profile
  - Relocating the new rector
- The vestry must determine the compensation package it will offer to the new rector. The Associate for Transitions and Congregational Development will assist with this.
  - It is diocesan policy that any full-time parochial priest must be paid at least the minimum annual clergy compensation.
  - The parish must have the resources to support a priest at this level for at least three years.
- The vestry forms the search committee. The search committee is a sub-committee of the vestry. They are charged and empowered by the vestry to facilitate and manage the work of the search, freeing the vestry to focus on ongoing leadership and development of the parish during the interim period. In forming the search committee, the vestry will:
  - Select a chair or co-chairs: a person or two people widely known and trusted in the congregation
  - Create applications/nominations with information about necessary skills and characteristics of search committee members
  - Develop a process to review applications
  - Open applications to the entire parish for one month
  - The Associate for Transitions can meet with the vestry to help guide the selection process
  - The search committee should consist of 9-12 people. Two members of the search committee may also be members of the vestry. The chair(s) should not be members of the vestry.
  - The search committee chair(s) and wardens will determine who will communicate with the parish about the search process, and how, and how frequently

Primary tasks of the search committee:

1. Conduct a self-study by gathering data from as many members of the congregation as possible
2. Use the information from the self-study to clarify the unique gifts and challenges of your parish, and the particular skills and abilities in a new rector that will best fit the needs of your parish
3. Create a parish profile that faithfully reflects the data you have gathered
4. Develop necessary information and responses for the Office of Transition Ministry profile (church-wide database shared by churches searching for new clergy and clergy searching for new church leadership calls)
5. From the materials your church receives, discern the candidates whose skills and abilities best fit the needs of your parish
6. Interview candidates
7. Present the candidate you believe to be the best fit to the vestry

## Searching

- The vestry provides members of the search committee with an invitation to serve, and with dates for a half-day retreat and three church-wide “Holy Conversations,” all of which are necessary for search committee members to commit to. The retreat will build awareness of the process and clarity about roles and will set the foundation for data-gathering that is necessary to develop the parish profile.
- The search committee and vestry attend a half-day retreat facilitated by the associate for transitions and congregational development
- The search committee is charged by the vestry and wardens and blessed for its work at the principal Eucharist on a Sunday morning following the half-day retreat
- The search committee, in communication with the vestry, arranges for a series of church-wide Holy Conversations which help the congregation reflect on its values, reconcile its history, and envision its future
- From the information gathered at Holy Conversations, the search committee (or a subgroup of the search committee) creates responses for the OTM database and develops a parish profile. These must both be approved by Bishop Jennifer before they can be circulated.
- The church receives names of potential rectors in a variety of ways. Bishop’s staff will do initial screening to determine eligibility to serve, which means that all inquiries for consideration in this discernment must come through the diocesan office.
- Names are submitted to the associate for transitions and congregational development for consideration in the search process. The associate will provide guidance to the search committee in establishing protocols for considering names. From this list, together with substantial information about each candidate, the search committee determines which candidates to invite to continue in the discernment process. The search committee will gather information and conduct interviews of each candidate, which may include some combination of the following:
  - Additional essay responses particular to the congregation
  - Phone or Skype or Zoom interviews with a small group of the search committee
  - Phone or Skype or Zoom interviews with the entire search committee
- Discernment continues until the point that 3-5 solid candidates remain. Search committee members may visit candidates’ congregations to meet each candidate in person, meet references, watch the candidate preach and/or preside at worship. (While this is a helpful way to assess how priests authentically function within their own context, it may not be financially feasible for every congregation. The search committee and vestry should determine if this option is the best use of time and resources.)
- After further discernment and evaluation, the list is reduced to generally 2-3 finalists. These are the people whom the search committee believes all have the capacity – the skills and the abilities – to lead the congregation well. From this, the search committee will seek to discern who they believe is the best fit to serve as their next rector.
- The finalist list is referred to the associate for transitions for a bishop-to-bishop reference check, and a background check which includes investigations of: credit report, sexual misconduct, motor vehicle violations, and criminal offenses.

- Finalists and their spouses (if applicable) are invited to visit the parish, one at a time. These finalist interviews include:
  - Hospitality time with both the search committee and the vestry
  - A tour of the community
  - Information on schools and real estate
  - A final and thorough interview with the search committee
  - In-depth and transparent review of parish finances
  - One-on-one meeting with the bishop

## Choosing

- Following the finalist interviews, the search committee arranges the candidates in order of preference, submitting the name of the person they believe to be the best fit for the congregation to the vestry.
- Presumably, the vestry accepts this nomination from the search committee and votes to extend a call to the candidate.
- The vestry notifies the bishop of the election and asks her approval of the call.
- Upon receiving the bishop's approval, the senior warden issues a call to the rector-elect.
- Upon acceptance of the call, the associate for transitions will work with the senior warden and vestry to complete a letter of agreement with the rector-elect.
- Bishop Jennifer approves the LOA, and she will be the first person to sign the document. Both canons to the ordinary also review and sign the LOA.
- **Only after the candidate has formally accepted the call and signed the LOA, in coordination with the new rector-to-be announcing her/his departure to his/her current parish, should the vestry and search committee share this good news.**
- A welcoming committee (which may be the search committee or another group formed for this task) helps the new rector with his/her transition to the parish.

#### Four C's of the Search Process:

1. **Covenant:** The vestry and search committee are entrusted with the holy work of finding their congregation's next pastor, priest, and teacher. This is a process of mutual discernment: the search committee's consideration of a priest, and a priest's consideration of a parish. The process must be steeped in prayer from beginning to end.
2. **Communication:** It is normal for the parish to experience anxiety during the interim period. This anxiety can be significantly 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 wardens and search committee chair(s) to maintain frequent and clear communications with one another and with the associate for transitions and congregational development throughout the search.
3. **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 both the candidates and to the parish.
4. **Consensus:** When the time comes for the search committee to recommend a name to the vestry, we invite the group to seek consensus. This does not require 100% agreement. However, if there is deep division, we ask that the search committee invite the associate for transitions or the canon to the ordinary to join you in conversation to seek clarity about how to move forward faithfully for the good of the church.