

THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESES OF EASTERN & WESTERN MICHIGAN

TRANSITION MINISTRY:

SEARCH OVERVIEW FOR VESTRIES

Concurrently during all phases

1. The Transitions Officer receives inquiries from priests looking for new positions.
2. Vestry and Search/Discernment Committee maintains confidentiality of names of priests under consideration.
3. Vestry and Search/Discernment Committee communicate and share with the congregation progress of the search process as it unfolds.
4. Transitions Officer and Bishop survey the landscape of the wider church in order to recruit priests possessing gifts which align with values, culture, and the needs of the congregations in the Diocese.
5. Transitions Officer discusses candidates with the Bishop for “Diocesan fit” and congregational options.
6. Transitions Officer discusses congregations in search with counterparts in other dioceses at regular intervals (more targeted activity during Phase III).

Phase I: Pre-Search

1. Priest departs.
2. Vestry prepares search budget and selects Search/Discernment Committee. Specifics about the Search/Discernment Committee can be found later in this document.

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3. Vestry shares search process with the congregation.
 - a. Vestry develops a demographic profile for the Collaborative Canon, including the compensation package for the next Rector.

Phase II: Profile Development

1. Search/Discernment Committee meets with the Collaborative Canon to receive detailed information about responsibilities.
2. Search/Discernment Committee develops three profiles: The Congregational Profile which compiles information about who a congregation is at this moment and who God is calling them to be in the next season of ministry, the Episcopal Church narrative for the Office of Transition Ministry (OTM) website run by the Episcopal Church and a third profile for a smaller group of Transitions Officers called the Transitions Ministry Conference.
3. Search/Discernment Committee receives feedback from the Collaborative Canon and the Vestry on the profile. Once it has been approved, the profile is shared with the congregation.

Phase III: Candidate Collection

1. Names are received from various sources and initial background checks are completed by the Transitions Officer and Bishop.
2. Search/Discernment Committee receives Interview Phase Training from the Collaborative Canon.
3. Fully vetted candidates' names and paperwork are forwarded to the Search/Discernment Committee for consideration.

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Phase IV: Interviews

1. Search/Discernment committee conducts interviews of candidates, and selects finalist
 - a. Background checks begin (may take several weeks)
2. Search/Discernment committee presents finalist to Vestry.
3. Vestry interviews finalist.
4. The Canon meets with Vestry to review steps of the next Phase.

Phase V: Election and Call

1. Vestry takes a formal vote to call the finalist (now known as “Rector/Priest-in-Charge elect”).
2. Senior Warden informs the Bishop and the Canon of the election; receives permission from the Bishop to extend a call.
 - a. Canon prepares the draft Letter of Agreement based on compensation package determined in Phase I.
3. Senior Warden issues the call to the Rector-elect.
4. Rector-elect accepts the call.
5. Vestry and Rector-elect negotiate the final details of the Letter of Agreement.
6. Vestry coordinates with the Canon and the Rector-elect to identify when the announcement can be made. This needs to be on the same Sunday as it is announced in the Rector-elect’s current congregation.
7. The Sr. Warden and Rector-elect provide letters to be emailed and sent via USPS announcing the call which are sent out immediately after the announcement is made in church.
8. The Canon communicates with the Canon for Evangelism and Networking to update the website and announce the call in the Feast online once the congregational announcements have been made.

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TRANSITION MINISTRY:

SEARCH / DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE SELECTION

A Search/Discernment Committee is normally between 7 – 12 persons. Gear the size of the committee to the size of the church. One or two vestry members should be appointed to serve on the committee in order to act as a liaison and information link between the two bodies. **The main work of the Search/Discernment Committee is active listening.** As much as is practicable, the composition of the Search/Discernment Committee should reflect the congregation's diversity, including people of different ages, race, gender, length of membership, and liturgical/musical preferences. **This group needs to be equipped for the responsibility of assessing the knowledge, ability and skills of the candidates in light of the identity of the congregation, of which they are representative.**

Each member of the Search Committee must be able to represent the broad interests of the congregation at large. Thus, individuals who may be specifically focused on a single issue, activity, or otherwise are usually not good choices. Openly disaffected persons are generally not helpful to a Search/Discernment Committee. **It is not appropriate for staff or other clergy to serve on the Search/Discernment Committee.** Generally, the Sr. Warden should not serve on the Search/Discernment Committee because all of his or her energies should be devoted to keeping the church going during the transition period. No two people from the same household or immediate family should be on the Search/Discernment Committee. Please note, this is not the time to recruit all those in the congregation with corporate human resource experience to become members of the Search/Discernment Committee. Search/Discernment Committee members will receive candidate names and learn appropriate interview skills. **They are primarily**

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asked to be a part of a discernment and calling process which is a shared spiritual journey, not a secular hiring process.

The Vestry should attempt to select people with open hearts and minds who will be sensitive to the culture and dreams of the congregation as a whole.

Desirable characteristics for all Search/Discernment Committee members are:

- **They must be involved in the church** as a community of faith, regular in their attendance at worship, givers of record who are actively involved in the programmatic life of the congregation.
- **They must be good listeners.** Regardless of whether they agree or not, the members of the Search/Discernment Committee must be able to listen accurately and respectfully to a broad range of opinions expressed by all sorts and conditions of people.
- **They must be able to maintain confidentiality.** This is absolutely essential to the success of the search effort, and to the reputation of both the congregation and the candidates. Those who cannot resist the temptation to share a secret, or prove that they are “in the know” should simply not be on the Search/Discernment Committee.
- **They must be team players, have significant emotional maturity, and be able and willing to work productively with, and in the presence of, significant anxiety, tension, and potentially overt conflict.** Search work requires a willingness to “speak the truth in love,” to ask “difficult” questions, and to confront deeply held assumptions.

Regular and faithful attendance at Search/Discernment Committee meetings and an ability to travel are also essential. A good rule of thumb is to plan for one evening each week for approximately six months. Some teams will work faster than this, some will need more time; there will be

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periods where the team may not meet for several weeks, there will be times when the team will meet several times in the course of a week. Thus, “seasonal members” or those whose employment requires extensive travel or uncertain time commitments would not generally be considered effective members. Travel for candidate visits is an important part of search work.

Some Search/Discernment Committees have chosen to have a smaller core group that meets throughout the process, inviting participation of specific individuals to be a part of specific elements in the process. For instance, those who have attended the College for Congregational Development might be invited into the data gathering phase of profile development. Those with intuitive gifts might be invited to be a part of the interviewing team. There is both advantage and challenge to this method. Bringing someone on board part way through the process will necessitate bringing them up to speed on where the search process is at that moment in time. It also ensures greater participation and decreases the possibility of burnout.

One essential member for the Search/Discernment Committee is the chaplain. When forming the committee, the Vestry needs to include someone with spiritual gifts that will allow them to lead the committee and the congregation in a season of prayer through the discernment process. If the Vestry has chosen to have a smaller core group, inviting other participation through the process, the chaplain remains as a part of the core group. This person opens and closes every meeting with prayer, invites the congregation to pray throughout the search process, and can stop a meeting to invite silence and prayer. The chair can also invite the chaplain to offer prayer in the midst of any meeting.

Once the Search/Discernment Committee has been selected by the Vestry, they are introduced to the congregation and commissioned during worship. A form for that commissioning can be found below.

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TRANSITION MINISTRY: SEARCH / DISCERNMENT TEAM COMMISSIONING

This liturgy takes place following the sermon at the Eucharist or before the Intercessions and Thanksgivings at a Morning Prayer service.

THE EXAMINATION

The congregation being seated, the celebrant stands in full view of the people. The Wardens, Vestry, and Search/Discernment Committee members stand facing the celebrant. The celebrant says these words:

Siblings in Christ Jesus, we are 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 to a special ministry to which they are called.

The celebrant asks the Wardens and Vestry:

The candidates for members of the Search/Discernment Committee will now be presented.

Vestry: **We present to you these persons:** *(insert names of candidates)*
who have been appointed by the Vestry to serve as the
Search/Discernment Committee for *(insert name of the*
congregation and city).

Celebrant: Are these persons you are to present prepared by a
commitment to Christ as Lord, by regular attendance at
worship, by daily devotion in prayer, and by the knowledge of
the duties they are asked to perform as members of the

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Search/Discernment Committee, to exercise their ministry to the honor of God, and the well-being of God's church?

Vestry: I believe they are.

The celebrant then says these words:

You have each been called to the particular ministry of the Search/Discernment Committee in this congregation. Will you, as long as you are engaged in this service, perform it with diligence and in a posture of prayer and discernment?

Candidates: I will.

Celebrant: Will you honor the views of each person on the committee and in the congregation, and prayerfully listen for the voice of Christ in each person?

Candidates: I will.

Celebrant: Will you speak the truth in love, both in the congregation and in the Search/Discernment Committee and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit throughout this process?

Candidates: I will.

Celebrant: Will you hold fast to confidentiality during the time of discernment, and honor those clergy who offer themselves to be considered?

Candidates: I will.

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Celebrant: Will you faithfully and reverently exercise the duties of your ministry to the honor of God, and the benefit of all members of this congregation?

Candidates: I will.

Celebrant: Will you serve diligently with your Bishop and his staff honoring the process set forth by the diocese for the calling of a new priest?

Candidates: I will.

The Celebrant addresses the congregation:

Celebrant: Will you uphold these persons in their service?

Congregation: We will.

THE COMMISSIONING

Celebrant: Let us pray.

Blessed are you gracious God, our creator and redeemer. In every age you call people to ministry in your name. Look graciously on your Church, and so guide the minds and hearts of those who shall call a priest for this parish, that they may discern a faithful pastor and so build up your Church, that we may faithfully serve you and show your love in all the world. Blessed are you, O God, now and forever.

All: Amen.

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The Celebrant Commissions the members of the Search/Discernment Committee using these words:

Celebrant: In the name of God and the people of *(name and city of parish)*, I commission each of you to serve as the Search/Discernment Committee. May God uphold and guide you in this ministry.