

So You're in Transition

What to do when you're between clergy

Some norms for our time together:

- We will begin and end on time, and with prayer
- Use the chat for questions unless verbal feedback is asked for
- We work from the assumption that our clergy *and* our congregations are all trying our best
- Please keep clergy, congregations, Bishop, and Diocesan leadership in your prayers

What is the canonical role of the Vestry/Bishop's Committee?

- “agents and legal representatives of the Parish in all manners concerning its corporate property and the relations of the Parish to its clergy”
- Produce and approve a budget, make financial decisions on behalf of congregation, approve expenditures that are not included within the budget.
- Approve candidates for holy Orders
- Manage congregational relationships with Clergy (specifically Rector/Vicar/Dean/PIC)

What is the canonical role of the Rector/Vicar?

- Worship, to include music
- “spiritual jurisdiction of the parish”
- Use of property and space
- Option to preside over Vestry meetings
- The hiring and firing of staff, including other clergy

What does that mean when we don't have a priest?

- The Senior Warden becomes the primary leader/communicator/decider for the congregation
- The Bishop's Office is here to help you through the steps from sending your clergyperson well, to finding supply/interim/priest-in-charge, all the way to calling your next permanent Rector or Vicar
- It's okay to feel anxious. Or excited. Or numb. All the feelings are okay AND transition is an opportunity for a congregation to grow closer to God and each other

Transition Role of Departing Clergy

As congregation's priest leaves, their job is to say goodbye in ways that help the congregation

- 1) Celebrate mutual ministry
- 2) Develop healthy relationships with priests
- 3) Prepare administratively for the transition

It's normal for departing priests to become more reluctant to engage in long-term planning. Congregational leaders should begin taking a bigger role in that long-term planning and vision work.

Transition Role of Interim Clergy

Carry out sacramental and pastoral duties of a congregation but may not be called as the settled or permanent priest.

- Some interim clergy have special training in the work of grief and loss or trauma.
- Functions as chaplain or companion to the congregation while Transition Consultants work directly with folks on the process.
- If an interim priest is unsure about how to draw a particular boundary in a congregation, they may call the Canon to the Ordinary for advice.

Transition Role of a “Priest-in-Charge”

Priests-in-Charge have the canonical authority of a Rector in a Parish or Vicar in a Mission. Unlike an interim, a priest-in-charge may be called as the Vicar or Rector. PiCs in the Diocese of Olympia typically agree to a two-year period of Mutual Ministry including:

- First 6 months: Priest and People orient to mutual ministry together
- Month 5/6: Work with Transition Consultant on Congregation-Wide Mutual Ministry Agreement Goal setting
- Month 6-18: Congregation works with PiC to carry out Mutual Ministry Goals
- Month 18-24: Congregation and PiC work with Transition Consultant to develop discernment process for calling a Vicar/Rector or seeking a new Vicar/Rector

Transition Role of a Newly Called Priest

- When you have called a priest and signed the Letter of Agreement, you will work with the Diocese to announce the happy news.
- The new priest may need time to prepare or move. When ministry begins, the congregation can and should plan fellowship and trust-building events
- The priest will spend a lot of their time:
 - Getting to know people in the congregation
 - Learning what prayers, songs and patterns of worship feel “normal” to the congregation
 - Learning what people and groups do what ministries.

Transition Role of the Warden

At all Parish meetings, the Rector (or if there is none, a Warden) shall preside, unless the Rector delegates this responsibility to a Warden. The Clerk of the Vestry shall act as Clerk of the Meeting.

Diocese of Olympia, Constitution and Canons, Canon 9, Section 1.c.
See also Missions Canon 11, Section 3.d.

- During a period without a Rector/Vicar/Priest-in-Charge, the Canons give the Wardens authority that is typically exercised by the Priest
- When a call is extended, the Warden contacts the Canon to the Ordinary and typically negotiates with the Priest on behalf of the Vestry with the assistance of the Bishop's Office.

Transition Role of the Treasurer

During the Transition, church Treasurers carry out their normal duties executing payments as directed by the Vestry or Bishop's Committee.

- Treasurers assist the Vestry or Bishop's Committee in developing a budget for the search.
- Treasurers help the Profile Team by gathering information about the financial health of the congregation.
- The Treasurer is also one of the folks who signs the Letter of Agreement with Priests, in part to affirm that the congregation is willing and able to pay the negotiated compensation on behalf of the Vestry or Bishop's Committee.

Transition Role of Vestry/BC Members

- To steward the resources of the congregation and ensures that the church continues to carry out its mission.
- To charge the profile and search committees with the work they are called to do
- To review the recommendation made by the search committee and either decline or accept the candidate put forth and call them as Rector/Vicar
- To negotiate with the newly called candidate in good faith, working with the Bishop's office on a Letter of Agreement
- To facilitate and support the transition of the newly called priest into ministry

Transition Role

Members of the Congregation

- Keep loving Jesus, each other, your community
- To participate in self study and listening work, often carried out by the profile committee
- To pray for your elected leadership
- To pray for your clergyperson who is departing
- To pray for the priest that God is calling to your place, even now
- To continue to pledge, attend, participate, and be transformed in and by the life of your congregation

Timeline: overview

Departure:

Rector/Vicar announces departure

Choice is made re: Interim/PIC/Long Term Supply

Vestry/BC & Treasurer begin work on profile & call committee and transition budget

Form Profile Committee: work begins

Profile completed and posted

Form Call Committee: work begins

Call Committee presents candidate

New Call:

LOA signed and announcement coordinated between candidate/congregation/Bishop's Office

New call begins

Some exceptions

- Priest-in-Charge (self study, interim look differently)
- Seeking part time vs. full time clergy
- When a church is financially unstable
- When the circumstances surrounding clergy departure are unusual (death, misconduct, something else)

What is a Profile Committee?

- Profile Committees gather the story of God's work in the congregation so that it can be shared with prospective clergy leaders.
- The Vestry or Bishop's Committee will recruit and charge a Profile Committee to gather information about the ministry, gifts and offerings present in the congregation.
- Self Study & Drafting Profile: This period of "self-study" is meant to clarify the ministry that the congregation wants to share with a new priest leader. When the self-study is complete, the Profile Committee drafts a document to communicate the story of the Congregation.
- The Profile Committee receives approval from the Bishop's Office, shares the profile with the congregation and gives it to the Vestry for use in the Search Process.

Extending a Call

- When the search committee presents a final candidate to the Vestry/BC, it is the job of the Vestry/BC to decide whether or not to extend a call
- If a call is extended, then the Vestry negotiates the Letter of Agreement, which includes agreements for salary, housing, vacation and continuing ed time, sabbatical expectations, health care coverage and more.
- **It is vital that no public announcement regarding a potential call is made until the Letter of Agreement is signed by all parties: the candidate, the Warden on behalf of the Vestry/BC, and the Bishop.**
- The Bishop's office will help to coordinate the announcement of a new call

Key Take-aways

- Transitions do not stop the work or mission of a congregation, and are opportunities for development, growth, and spiritual transformation
- The Bishop's Office is here to support congregations in transition each step of the process
- It is normal to feel anxiety about this process, but it is important to take it a step at a time, and to trust that God is not elsewhere and there are learnings and benefits to transitioning between clergy.