



*Diocese of the*

**MID-ATLANTIC**

Anglican Church in North America

## **Guidelines for the Vestry and its Search Committee**

May, 2023

1. Pray! Spend considerable amounts of time praying together. Pray for the Lord's direction. Pray for the candidates. Pray for the parish. Use your intercessors, while maintaining confidentiality. Call the church to pray and include prayer for the process in the Sunday morning Prayers of the People.
2. Surrender your own agenda. You are seeking God's person, not your personal favorite. You are not representing a constituency (young families or seniors or those who go to the early service, etc.). You bring your experience and perspective, but you are seeking to unite on God's choice.

### **For the Vestry:**

3. Ensure good communications with the church. Update the congregation about your work and ensure that the Search Committee updates the congregation regularly throughout the process. Do not share names or identifying information outside the Search Committee or Vestry. But do share about process, timetable, etc.
4. Form a Search Committee and appoint its chair. In some small churches, the Vestry may choose to serve as the Search Committee, but in most cases a separate Search Committee will be named. In a small church, it should have perhaps six members, two of whom are on the Vestry. In a large church, it may have as many as 8-10, two of whom are on the Vestry. This is one of the most important groups your Vestry will ever appoint. Choose trustworthy, spiritually mature and discerning leaders. Don't put someone on the Search Committee just to "get them involved." Make sure that those you appoint understand they are to seek God's person, not their own. (See #2, above.) They are serving the whole church in seeking the Lord's will and direction. It is not appropriate for clergy to serve on the Search Committee.
5. Provide appropriate funding for the Search Committee's work. This may include travel costs to visit finalists and travel costs of finalists to visit the church.

### **For the Search Committee:**

6. Hold the initial Committee meeting, usually without the full Vestry. One wonderful to bond and grow together as a Committee is for one member of the Committee to share his or her testimony of coming to Christ/growing in Christ at the start of each meeting.

7. At the initial meeting, review these Diocesan guidelines. Set a regular day, time and place to meet. Assume that meetings will be held weekly, though there may be weeks when no meeting is needed. Identify members for key committee roles, such as: liaison with Vestry (the chair or one of the Vestry members); liaison with intercessors; secretary to keep minutes of actions taken (not opinions expressed); corresponding secretary responsible to receive information from candidates and distribute it to committee members; a communications person responsible to ensure updates are published in the church newsletter; etc. Set up a confidential email account for the committee to use in corresponding with candidates (either through your church's server, or a free account such as XYZchurchsearch@gmail.com). Ensure that all committee members have private email accounts not shared by spouses or employers; have committee members open an account if needed.

8. Communicate on a regular basis appropriate information to the Vestry and to the church at large. Do not reveal any names under consideration except to the Bishop or his representative. Do share where you are in the process (receiving names, for example, or narrowing the list or selecting a small group of finalists) and your rough timetable (don't promise an end date; timetables often change as the process unfolds).

9. Recruit a small team of confidential intercessors for the search process. They should not be given names of any candidates, but would normally be given more specific information about the process and issues facing the committee than would be told to the congregation at large.

10. At the end of each meeting of the search committee, decide what information should be shared with the Vestry, the congregation at large, and the committee's team of intercessors. Committee members honor confidentiality by sharing only what has been agreed to be shared with the appropriate people. No additional sharing with spouses.

11. Develop a simple profile of the church and of the priest you are seeking. If the church has a vision which you believe still guides the church and is embraced by the congregation, express that. If not, do not seek to "get" a new vision at this time. Instead, say that the church is looking to its new rector to guide you in seeking God's vision for the church in this new season. Since the Vestry will need to approve the Profile, some churches have a joint meeting of the Search Committee and Vestry to brainstorm content for the Profile. Then have one Committee member write an initial draft to be circulated for comment. When it has been perfected, it should be approved by the Vestry before it is posted or distributed. Please share it also with Bishop Warner for his review and comment.

12. Transparency with candidates is your great ally. Don't feel you have to share everything about your church with the candidates up front and in writing, but, by the final interview, be sure you have been completely honest about such things as financial challenges, challenges you're facing in terms of growth and reaching next generations, and any crises or painful situations that you've faced in recent years. The person God is calling will find the problems to be a challenge, not a turn-off; hide the problems and the very person you need will think, "they don't need me."

13. Seek names widely. Go to the job listings on the DOMA and ACNA websites and fill out the information to list your position. Write directly to key leaders who know your church and invite them to send you names directly. Bishop Warner may have one or more names to suggest.

14. Over-communicate with your candidates. Keep them informed regularly as to where you are in your process and what they can expect to hear from you. Going through a search can be a very stressful and unsettling time for a priest and family. If the priest hears nothing from a search committee for an extended time, it can be difficult for him. If a step in the process turns out to take longer than expected, just let the candidates know. Some committees find it helpful to appoint a liaison with each candidate; others choose to have a corresponding secretary whose job it is to stay in regular touch.

15. Gather information from these candidates in stages. Go step by step; get to know the candidates more and more as you go, and let them get to know you better as you go, as well.

Before your first approach to the candidates, allow Bishop Warner to review list. He will eliminate any whom he knows to be inappropriate.

First approach to the candidates:

- Ask, “May we consider you? Would you be willing to participate in our process, joining us in praying to discern the Lord’s will?” Do not ask if they want to apply, etc. They may be very happy where they are and are not looking for a new position.
- Ask for resume, spiritual autobiography, and links to sermons online.

Review this material and make any cuts to the list. If you are not in consensus about dropping a candidate from further consideration, leave the priest on for the next round. If any are eliminated, promptly notify them that they are no longer being considered.

Beware of the “myth of the composite,” thinking that you can call someone who has this priest’s preaching gift, that priest’s pastoral sensitivity, this priest’s evangelistic effectiveness, that priest’s theological depth, etc. Don’t fall into the trap of believing you can find a priest who is strong where the previous rector was strong, and strong where the previous rector was weaker.

Second approach:

- Ask for answers to a few written questions (but just a few; save others for phone and face to face interviews). Don’t make assumptions, even about personal faith in Christ and biblical orthodoxy. Somewhere in the process, ask about important topics (“Do you tithe?” “What is your view of, or how have you addressed in your ministry: abortion/homosexuality/authority of Scripture/women’s ordination/gifts of the Spirit/divorce and remarriage/styles of liturgy and music, etc.?”)

Don’t ask:

- “Why do you want to be our rector?” The candidate may not want the position at all at this point, but is simply open to a possible call from the Lord.
- “What is your vision for our church?” It’s not to be the priest’s vision or yours, but God’s.

- “What would you do if/when/about....?” Instead ask, “What have you done in this sort of situation?” Past performance is the best indicator of future behavior.

Review this material and make further cuts to the list. Whenever candidates are eliminated, promptly notify them that they are no longer being considered.

Third approach:

- Conduct a Skype interview (or telephone if Skype is not feasible).

Inform Bishop Warner of the final 3-5 candidates. He will make a reference call to the candidates’ bishops and share any concerns with the Search Committee. If there are serious concerns, he may ask the Search Committee to drop a candidate from further consideration.

Optional additional approach:

- Go visit a small number of semi-finalists. If you do this, send a team, ideally of 3, not all men or women, of differing temperaments, etc. However, this is usually only valuable if those being considered are full-time in a parish. Since you can listen to sermons on line, visiting a parish that is not the priest’s place of ministry accomplishes little.

Fourth approach

- For 2-3 finalists, invite the priest and spouse to visit for face to face interview:
  - perhaps staying for two nights;
  - formal interview with the Search Committee on one evening; dinner and social time with the Search Committee and Vestry on the other evening;
  - be shown around the community (not house hunting) during the day;
  - stay in hotel or home according to candidate’s preference (a hotel allows for priest and spouse to have privacy to discuss what they are experiencing);
  - meet with Bishop Warner if the candidate is a priest of another diocese.
- Do not have the priest preach and celebrate for (or even meet) the congregation at large. Anglican church governance entrusts the decision on the call to the Vestry (and its appointed Search Committee). You can have the finalists preach and celebrate privately for the Search Committee and/or Vestry, if you wish. But if you expose them to the whole congregation, you may divide the congregation. In addition, the congregation will only have that one experience on which to judge, while the Search Committee will have a full range of information and references and answers to questions upon which to make a judgment.
- Check references thoroughly; have uniform questions you ask all references; ask the reference if there are other people with whom you should talk.
- Initiate a background check (Heather Adams in the DOMA office will help arrange this) as soon as feasible.

16. Search Committee decision. When the Search Committee has reached its decision on whom to recommend, the Chair notifies Bishop Warner. The entire Search Committee then meets with the Vestry and presents one name to the Vestry to be called as Rector. A detailed oral presentation of the candidate is given, along with written materials, links to sermons, etc. Vestry members are given the opportunity to ask questions of the Search Committee.

**For the Vestry:**

17. The Vestry may wish to interview the final candidate (and spouse), even if this requires an additional visit by the candidate. This could be done via Skype, particularly if the Vestry previously met the candidate.

18. Final selection by the Vestry.

- When the Vestry has made a decision, the Wardens contact Bishop Warner for his approval.
- The priest is then notified and given sufficient time to pray before having to accept the call.
- The Vestry (rather than the Search Committee) has the responsibility to negotiate the letter of agreement with the priest (based on the diocesan model Letter of Agreement), including date to start. This negotiation is often done by the Senior Warden and Treasurer, but can be handled by others if the Vestry so determines.
- Plan the announcement to congregation (be mindful of the need to notify the priest's present church simultaneously).
- Appoint a transition committee to help the priest make the move, settle in, be a point of contact for all forms of help.
- If the outgoing Rector or Interim Rector (if there be one) has not yet stepped down, he or she gives up spiritual authority as Rector (or Interim Rector).
- The Bishop will pray with the priest privately to give spiritual authority as Rector before the new Rector's first Sunday. A formal service at which the Bishop will institute the priest as Rector (sometimes called a "Celebration of New Ministry") needs to be scheduled, usually held 4-6 weeks after the new rector arrives.