

The Call Process in the Diocese of Atlanta

INTRODUCTION

A priest's work is an extension of the bishop's own pastoral ministry. When a priest is installed as rector of a parish, he/she is entrusted by the bishop with certain symbols of leadership and pastoral care. The rector and vestry are entrusted with the care of the parish as pastoral system and as institution.

When a rector resigns, administrative authority moves to the vestry, and the responsibility for the pastoral care of the parish returns to the bishop until the bishop installs a new rector.

The search for a new rector is part of the pastoral office of the bishop. In fact, the leadership extended to the parish during the time of its search is one of the most basic services of the diocese, because the provision of pastoral care and leadership are so important to the business of the church.

During the time a search is conducted, vestry and bishop are to be pastoral partners until the vestry calls and the bishop installs a new rector to be the bishop's representative in the particular parish.

The benefits of the search time can be most fully realized if this time is seen as an opportunity for self-examination and renewal. To claim fully the benefits, it must be possible to reach out to find the most appropriate person to become rector, not the most visible person.

NORMS

Persons considered should never be limited to those who have already determined to leave their present cures. It is best to encourage the development of a vision that aims at proactive recruitment and not reactive screening of applicants. Any source of names is legitimate.

The Vestry and Search/Nominating Committee must commit to working toward an outcome that is marked by consensus among the several members. This involves commitment through prayer and mutual sharing of honest views and reflections throughout the process, and must not be put off until the last few weeks of the discernment.

The Nominating process is one of discernment, not politics, and this work cannot properly be done unless strict confidentiality is maintained. Confidentiality protects the integrity of the faithful discernment of both priest and parish. The vestry must respect this, and adhere to it as the nominees come to them for consideration, as well.

Courtesy between priest and parish who are seeking God's will includes timely replies, and honesty in responses.

A. INITIAL STEPS

1. Upon the resignation of the rector, the Bishop meets with the vestry and assists them in securing the services of a consultant and an interim rector and supply clergy, as well as in selecting and appointing a nominating committee and naming its chair. The Bishop's Deployment Officer is the primary support and contact person for the parish. The consultant

and interim are extensions of the bishop's pastoral office as well. A member or two of the vestry may serve on the nominating committee.

The consultant, interim rector, senior warden, and chair of the nominating committee should plan to meet together regularly during the course of the call process. The consultant is to report to the vestry and to the Bishop's designated staff person at regular intervals. The consultant may be utilized for other consultative assistance within the parish at the request of the vestry. The interim Rector has a work agreement specifying, if possible goals to be mutually identified during the process.

2. The diocesan office, including the consultant, can assist the vestry in determining an appropriate search budget.
3. When these persons are in place, the Deployment Officer meets with the vestry, the nominating committee, the interim, and the consultant to go over the role of each party, as well as the steps in the search process.
4. The consultant will conduct an exit interview with the departing rector, the content of which will be made available to the vestry.
5. Per Resolution R03-1, passed by delegates of 2003 Council, members of the Nominating committee as well as members of the vestry are required to complete Antiracism Dialogue training. This training must be completed before the committee begins to accept names of prospective candidates. The Senior Warden contacts the Bishop's office for information regarding the scheduling of this training.
6. An annual audit of parish finances is required by Canon of the Episcopal Church (I.7.1.f) and policy of the diocese. An audit is especially appropriate in the transition of leadership. It is the responsibility of the vestry to have an audit completed and to have the audit and any letter to parish management issued by the auditor and the vestry's response to such letter on file with the diocesan finance office before a call can be extended to a new rector/vicar.
7. The vestry, in consultation with the Bishop, may use an abbreviated search process. Determination of the appropriateness of this will take into consideration length of tenure of last rector/vicar, and any other pressing needs of the parish. An abbreviated process is not a convenience for time's sake, but for shortening or eliminating some, but certainly not all, of the steps outlined below. The Bishop determines these limitations.

B. THE VESTRY'S CHARGE TO THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

1. The nominating committee will prepare a parish profile and will submit a copy first to the Bishop and then to the vestry for approval before it is printed.
2. The nominating committee will keep the vestry and parish informed at all stages of the process.
3. The nominating committee ordinarily will submit the names of three candidates to the vestry for final consideration, any one of whom the committee could support as rector. After accepting the charge, nominating committee members should be commissioned at the main Sunday service.

C. NOMINATING COMMITTEE TASKS in chronological order

- _____ 1. Develop open and direct communication with one another.
- _____ 2. Agree on norms for making decisions and maintaining confidentiality.
- _____ 3. Establish a file for names received, write letters acknowledging receipt.
- _____ 4. Develop a profile of the parish. The profile should include but is not limited to:
 - a. history of the parish (a time line can be helpful.)
 - b. demographics of the parish
 - c. demographics of the community
 - d. financial history for three years
 - e. understanding of mission and ministry of the parish
 - f. Christian education
 - g. worship
 - h. outreach
 - i. stewardship
 - j. pastoral care/parish life
 - k. future directions/opportunities
 - l. rector profile
 - m. diocesan profile

The parochial report and prior self-study materials can be helpful and should be utilized, but the profile should contain information and ideas currently collected from parishioners. The consultant can help the nominating committee design a process that will be most useful in providing both an accurate description--including candid presentation of parish issues and limitations--and lively parish dialogue.

It is important to remember that candor on the part of the parish encourages candor on the part of clergy candidates as well. The consultant will assist in organizing parish meetings; developing questionnaires, if used; constructing the narrative profile; and reviewing the final draft before it is presented to the Bishop and to the vestry for approval.

The chief benefit of the profile lies not in the recruitment of a new rector. The engagement of members with each other and with God's intention for their future is even more important than the profile it produces.

The goals and dreams described in the self-study should be conveyed to the parish immediately so that implementation of them can begin. A parish that continues to work on its life and mission is an attractive one to clergy who are considering serving there.

- _____ 5. Provide the draft narrative profile first to the Bishop and then to the vestry for suggestions and approval.
- _____ 6. Print the approved narrative profile, providing sufficient copies for each parish family, the deployment office (5 copies), candidates, and interested visitors to the parish.

- _____ 7. Complete the Parish/Institution Search Request form for the Church Deployment Office in New York with the assistance of the consultant. Submit this form to the vestry for approval. (This is a document different from the narrative parish profile, but its' completion is informed by the latter.)
- _____ 8. Initiate a Church Deployment Office search request by asking the Bishop's staff person to sign and send the profile form to the Church Deployment Office.
- _____ 9. Receive from the Bishop's office the list of candidates to be considered. These candidates and those who have indicated interest or been nominated from any other source, after initial screening by the committee, should be sent a copy of the profile from the nominating committee, with the seven diocesan questions for written response. These responses will provide a basis for the committee's screening.
- _____ 10. Develop with the assistance of the consultant a process for further evaluation of the candidates. This will include interviewing by telephone; reviewing of printed materials, including the Church Deployment Office profiles; checking of references; listening to or watching sermon tapes; etc. Deadlines should be established and honored (for example, receiving names). Candidates should be considered in an even and orderly way throughout the process.
- _____ 11. **Forward all names of candidates to be considered to the Bishop's staff person for preliminary screening.**
- _____ 12. Notify immediately candidates no longer being considered, giving them appropriate reasons why. Advise the Bishop's Office when names are removed from the active list.
- _____ 13. Visit the candidates in their own parish environments. Arrangements should be made for a personal interview, to hear the candidate preach and celebrate the Eucharist, as well as some social time. (Note: this item and #14 may be reversed.)
- _____ 14. Invite the remaining candidates (and spouses, when applicable) to the parish for interviews with the entire nominating committee. This time should include a personal interview, a tour of the environment of the parish, and social time. Candidates should not be asked to "audition" with a sermon, conduct a worship service, or stay in the homes of parishioners. Candidates should be informed of the financial package and appropriate work and benefit considerations at this point.
- _____ 15. The names of candidates are to be given to the Bishop for in-depth screening with diocesan contacts and others at this stage.
- _____ 16. Also at this stage, make an appointment for an interview with the Bishop for any candidates from outside the diocese, including those who may be living here, but who are canonically resident elsewhere.
- _____ 17. Provide the Bishop with the candidate's file for review before this interview. Include the Church Deployment Office profile, responses to the seven diocesan questions, and a resume. The files of all finalists will be retained by the Bishop.
- _____ 18. **The Bishop will initiate a thorough background check on final candidates before any names are sent on to the vestry. The background check will be performed by the Oxford Document Company, a professional organization specializing in this area. There is a**

charge of \$130 for each background check, unless the candidate has had a recent one completed by Oxford Documents, in this case, the charge is \$30. The parish will be responsible for payment of all background checks performed.

- _____ 19. Guided by the consultant the Nominating Committee comes to consensus on three candidates to be passed to the Vestry for consideration. It is important for the consultant to be present at the time this decision is made. It is crucial that this decision be made by consensus.
- _____ 20. The presentation to the Vestry from Nominating Committee must be equanimity, and the consultant, who now begins work with the vestry, should be present.
- _____ 21. The Nominating Committee is now discharged, and remaining confidential notes are destroyed. Evaluation of the process with the consultant takes place. The committee is formally thanked and decommissioned at a main Sunday service.

D. ISSUING A CALL

- 1. The final candidates (and spouses) are invited for interviews by the vestry. The consultant is to assist the vestry in all steps in the call process.
- 2. Canonically, all clerical positions for parishes are filled by the Bishop.
- 3. The senior warden notifies the Bishop as soon as the vestry decides to whom to extend the call. The Bishop calls the candidate.
- 4. A **letter of agreement** includes, but is not limited to, the following components based on Diocese of Atlanta standards:
 - a. stipend / housing allowance
 - b. insurance package
 - c. moving expenses
 - d. time for vacation and days off
 - e. time/money allocated for continuing education
 - f. sabbatical time--after how many years, length of time, salary during, etc.
- 5. The Bishop reviews the letter and consents to it by his signature on the agreement.
- 6. The search is not complete until the new rector has accepted the call. Once the call has been formalized and accepted, the parish is notified.

E. STARTUP OF THE NEW PASTORATE

- 1. The work of the interim is to be concluded and proper thanks extended before the arrival of the new rector. The interim should no longer be present in the parish.
- 2. The new rector, the interim, and the consultant meet shortly after the rector's arrival. The bishop, a member of his staff, or the senior warden might set up this meeting, the purpose of which is to pass on any information that might be useful to the rector and to offer support. This meeting is part of the consultant's and interim's contracts with the parish.

3. Soon after the arrival of the rector, the consultant meets with her/him and the vestry to reflect on the search process and to clarify mutual expectations for their future working relationship. A day-long meeting or a weekend retreat should be considered.
4. The consultant's contract with the parish continues for twelve months after the call for the purpose of aiding transition and mitigating problems. Meetings at intervals of three to six months should be considered. A day-long meeting with the rector and vestry at the one-year mark would be normative. If parish leadership chooses to work with a different consultant during this period, they are free to do so.