

Parish transitions IN THE DIOCESE OF RHODE ISLAND

The time of transition begins when a settled rector/vicar leaves a parish or mission and lasts until the Celebration of New Ministry of his/her successor. The first part of the transition process is focused on the church, defining and affirming the church's history, current mission, vision and goals for the next three years. The process of gathering and assessing this data should engage as many in the congregation as possible so that parishioners have a stake in the process and its outcome.

The product of the first part of the process is a written profile of the congregation which will be used to introduce prospective candidates to the mission, ministries and future plans of the congregation. The profile generally contains the following: history of the church, current mission, ministries, statistics, facilities, budget and financial data, vision, and plans for the future. From this prospective of past, present and future, the leadership of the parish or mission will identify the skills and gifts necessary for a new clergy leader to assist the congregation as they move forward into their vision.

When the profile is in its final stages, the leadership gathers to complete the national church's search request form which is used to access the Church Deployment Office computer system. The skills and experiences identified will be matched to those of clergy whose professional profiles are in the CDO computer system and to initially screen candidates from all sources. The Deployment Officer will speak with each interested candidate's Deployment Officer to ascertain that the priest has no impediments to being a candidate. All candidates whatever the source should go through this initial screening by the Deployment Officer before being pursued by a congregation.

Once the candidates' information has been received, the search committee reviews the data and decides who to pursue further. The search committee will decide what methods to use to begin the dialogue with the candidates. Committees usually begin with sending the written church profile and other information about congregational life that might be of interest asking in return that candidates provide resumes and other information about themselves. Often committees will arrange telephone interviews as a way of getting to know the candidates. In addition, candidates will be asked to provide references and committee members will contact them to learn about the candidate's skills and gifts from those who have experienced it first hand.

Each step of the process is designed to deepen the relationship of the candidates and the committee and give both more information upon which to make a decision. Once the finalists are identified, the Deployment Officer will initiate a formal background screening paid for by the parish. The Bishop will also call the finalists' bishops to receive each bishop's recommendation. Finalist candidates are always invited to visit the church to see the facilities and meet for in-depth interviews with the search committee. The Bishop and the Deployment Officer will meet with the finalists at the time they visit the church for face-to-face interviews. We also recommend that representatives of the search committee visit the finalist(s) in his/her home parish setting whenever possible. At that time, final references can be checked in person.

After final interviews, the Search Committee decides which candidate to recommend to the Vestry or Bishop's Committee and receives permission from that priest to place his/her name before the Vestry/Bishop's Committee. At a joint meeting, the Search Committee shares information about the candidate with the Vestry/Bishop's Committee who then assume responsibility for the rest of the process. The Warden will contact the chosen candidate and invite him/her for a visit with the Vestry/Bishop's Committee at which time a Letter of Agreement will be negotiated for submission to the Diocese. The Bishop must be notified of the name of finalist candidate and be given the opportunity to approve. Once a Vestry has formally called the priest, a letter is sent to the Bishop announcing the election according to Canon. In the case of a mission parish, the Bishop appoints the Vicar and may take a greater role in the selection process.