

VESTRY PAPERS

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CHURCH FOUNDATION
empowering congregations

To inspire, affirm and inform Episcopal leaders in their work

Vestry #101: Encouraging hearts & souls

by Jim Lemler

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord..."

We sing about it. We hear about it, and we pray about it...the firm foundation on which our faith rests. It is the foundation of faith and of Jesus Christ himself. It is the foundation for the whole Christian community and particularly for its leadership. However, at this moment there is some significant seismic activity. Things are shaking and quaking in a time of accelerated cultural and ecclesial change. We worry about cracks in our foundations as we face new economic and institutional challenges.

The vestry is in the midst of all this. Vestry leaders are responsible for building on the foundation and for stability of the life and health of the congregation they lead. These leaders must be grounded themselves, solidly connected to and resting on the foundation of faith. Their souls need to be rooted in the Gospel and its faith, hope, and love so that together they may create a Christian community of hope, not fear, and unity, not discord. Where are we to find strength? How are our hearts and souls encouraged? What can we do?

Here are ten practices and dispositions that can help vestry leaders today:

- **Be in touch with your caring for the congregation and its mission.** The reason you are serving as a vestry leader is because you care for the community of faith and its particular purpose and call. Connect with that caring and use it as a resource for your decisions and work. Engage the values and beliefs that are the foundation for your congregation's mission and keep a perpetual eye to that mission.
- **Know your congregation's heritage and history.** Congregational history is a powerful grounding for present decision making. You will learn about decisions and leadership that inform the life and mission of your congregation today. There have been tough times and decisions before. Recall those leaders and moments. Learn from them, and use that learning in the present moment.
- **"Pray without ceasing."** Prayer connects us to God and strengthens our hearts and souls for leadership. The individual practice of prayer is important on a daily

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*This Issue: Vestry #101
Circulation 24,500*

The Episcopal Church Foundation celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2009. From its inception, the Foundation has worked to empower the mission and ministry of congregations across the country. In that spirit, this issue of Vestry Papers explores the basic ministry of vestries — What works? What doesn't? What are some foundational truths for vestries? What are the most important tasks? How best to stay centered spiritually?

*Inside:
"Top Ten!" resources
for vestries*





Vestry #101: Encouraging hearts & souls

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basis for vestry members, and the communal practice of prayer is necessary too. Each vestry gathering and meeting needs to be grounded in an experience of prayer that is more than passing and perfunctory. Prayer can also infuse the special and occasional gathering of the vestry in retreats and other such settings.

- **Name the good.** The growing use of the group process called Appreciative Inquiry is strengthening vestries. Even if not used in a formal sense, its spirit is essential for vestry members to appreciate and name the good that is happening within the congregation. Vestries that plan and make decisions based on strengths rather than weaknesses move the congregation further along in its mission.
- **“Be wise as serpents, and innocent as doves.”** Vestries have to make hard decisions, especially in these times of change and challenge. Use the gifts and best expertise that you have. Don’t shrink from a disciplined approach to making

It will grow in strength through “en-couraged” leadership.

- **Hold fast to your hope.** Vestries are responsible for the vision and future of their congregations. In a time of stress and change, it is possible to lose hope and stay stuck in the present moment and challenge. It is essential to congregational vitality and to the spirit of the leadership to dream some dreams, to develop a hopeful vision for the congregation, and to do the work of establishing a plan and strategy for making that vision a reality.
- **Practice forgiveness and reconciliation.** Conflict and dissonance are all around us in our world today and in the life of the Church. Vestry leaders cannot avoid or deny disagreement and conflict in their congregation. Rather, their charge is to be realistic and work through meaningful negotiation of disagreements. Vestry members need to discover forgiveness in their own souls and model reconciliation for their congregation.

For the second time, *Vestry Papers* has won the top award — General Excellence — for newsletters from the *Episcopal Communicators*. Presented at Camp Allen, Texas in March, 2009, the citation is given for exceptionally high standards in religious journalism.

Vestries that plan and make decisions based on strengths rather than weaknesses move the congregation further along on its mission

decisions, setting priorities, and assigning resources. And, at the same time, do this with charity, innocence, and compassion.

- **Believe that God is in charge.** Too often we suffer from what can be called “functional” or “practical” atheism. We are suspicious of God’s effectiveness and feel that we have to make everything happen ourselves. That’s simply not true. God is in charge, and we will be stronger and make better decisions when we root our work in God and perceive God’s presence and purpose in us and around us.
- **Have “miles and miles of heart.”** To have heart is literally to be “en-cour-aged” (“coeur” is the word for “heart” in French). Vestry leadership takes a lot of heart, that is, the courage to lead. Individuals and the community of leadership itself need to take heart and act with conviction. This inevitably means taking some risk and doing some new things. A community will wither if its leaders are “dis-couraged.”

- **Keep connected with the people you serve and lead.** Leadership shrivels in isolation. Have regular and consistent conversation with your congregation and people in the wider community too. You will learn a great deal and be connected to their hopes and perspectives relating to the congregation. And...you will hear some marvelous stories of personal faith that encourage your faith too.

The hearts and souls of vestry leaders can be strengthened and nourished in these ways. These are dispositions, practices, and means that help us to lead faithfully and effectively, building on a foundation of faith and of Jesus Christ. How very firm and solid it is.

The former dean of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, the Rev. James Lemler is priest-in-charge at Christ Church, Greenwich, Connecticut.

Clergy Wellness: The role of vestries

by Gay C. Jennings

In 2006, a major study of the state of wellness of Episcopal clergy was conducted by CREDO Institute. Through that research, key facts emerged:

- Episcopal clergy experience a very high level of meaningfulness in their work, with an average score of 6.5 on a 7-point scale. Some 99 percent respond with a 5 or higher.
- The only major lifestyle factor for which clergy are at greater risk than the larger population is stress, posing an emotional health risk for 72.9 percent of the clergy sample (16.7 percent higher for males and 13.3 percent higher for females than the Mayo Clinic benchmark for each gender).
- Depression is the medical condition for which clergy exceed the benchmark population by the highest percentage difference (12.4 percent) and is reported more often by females (27 percent) than males (15 percent).
- 92 percent of clergy experience high levels of religious well-being, 90 percent experience high levels of existential well-being, and 79 percent report high levels of career-vocation satisfaction.
- Episcopal clergy generally have very high levels of all kinds of self-efficacy (an attitude of confidence that one is capable of successfully accomplishing various sorts of tasks). An average of 86 percent of clergy scored in the high range of

financial, physical, vocational, spiritual, and support self-efficacy (the lowest rated was financial self-efficacy and the highest rated was physical self-efficacy).

In short, we are presented with a picture of clergy with higher than average levels of stress and depression yet who love their work and demonstrate a very high level of vocational satisfaction and self-efficacy.

For clergy to serve as spiritual leaders of congregations — to be “wholesome examples” to the People of God — their own wellness must be cared for and cultivated. While clergy are ultimately responsible for their own health and well-being, vestries have an important role in encouraging and supporting clergy who serve in their midst.

Here are some questions a vestry could profitably ask:

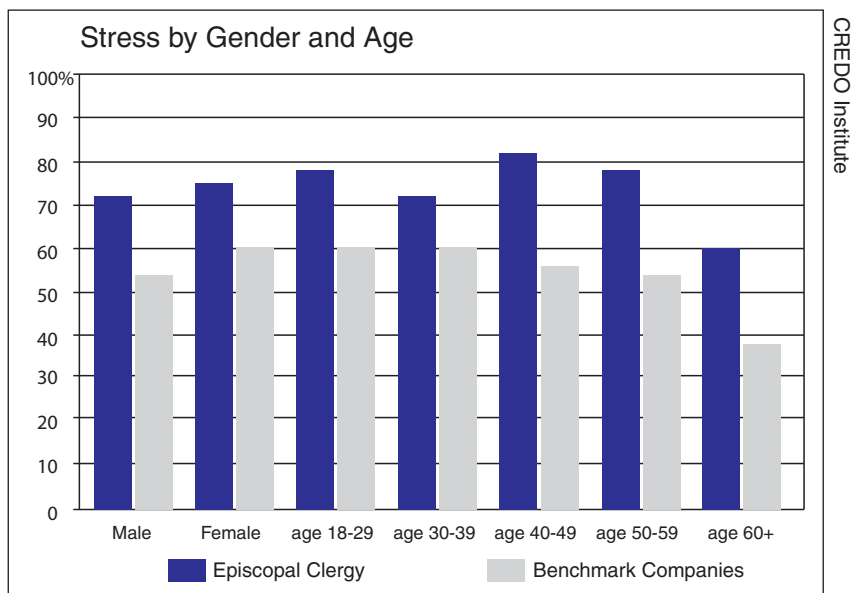
- Do vestry and rector engage in annual mutual ministry review? Mutual ministry review means just that — a mutual review of the ministry shared by the rector, vestry and congregation. Mutual ministry reviews most beneficially are intentional, regularly scheduled, aligned with the mission and goals of the congregation, include a third-party facilitator, and not used as a means to address conflict.
- When was the Letter of Agreement with your rector last reviewed? The Letter of Agreement is a covenant between the

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Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul.

III John 1:2



Episcopal clergy experience higher levels of stress than others the same age.



Clergy Wellness: The role of vestries

Sabbatical renewal time is an important part of clergy health and wholeness. Many dioceses recommend four months of leave for every five to seven years worked. Your priest may have come from a parish where not enough time was accrued to earn a sabbatical, or may never have had one. Be a hero. Explore sabbatical possibilities for your clergy.

vestry and rector. Every cleric in a compensated position should have such a letter, reviewed annually, and amended as needed.

- Review the compensation and benefits paid to the rector and other clergy. Is the compensation and benefit package comparable to clergy in similar positions serving in similar size congregations? Is an annual cost-of-living increase offered? Have there been merit increases when appropriate? While tempting during difficult financial times, budgets should not be balanced on the backs of clergy.
- If any clergy live in church-owned housing, make sure it is an attractive place to live. Complete needed repairs, update painting and carpeting as necessary, check the landscaping, replace old major appliances.
- Encourage clergy to go on annual retreats to be spiritually uplifted and refreshed. Jesus went to quiet places to pray, and so should your clergy. Vestries may rightfully expect their clergy to be persons of prayer, attentive to their spiritual growth and development.
- If the clergy are not taking regular days off and never seem to take all their vacation time, the vestry should be concerned. Everyone needs time away for renewal and relaxation. Burnout is a disease of the overcommitted and overextended.
- Does the vestry understand that clergy are called to both a diocese and a congregation? Clergy don't transfer their membership to a congregation – letters of transfer are sent from one bishop to another. It is a gift when vestries understand and appreciate that clergy are called

Find ways to show gratitude to the clergy who have joined their lives to yours

- Does the vestry provide reasonable health insurance including family coverage? Does that health insurance policy include dental, vision, and mental health coverage?
 - Is there provision for annual continuing education and a sabbatical at regular intervals? If the rector is not engaging annually in continuing education, both rector and congregation suffer. The vestry should insist upon two weeks of continuing education per year with an annual allowance of at least \$750. Study and reflection will renew your rector and the congregation will benefit. All clergy on staff should engage in continuing education.
 - If there are no provisions in the Letter of Agreement for a sabbatical, amend the agreement. Begin now to plan for the related costs (full compensation and benefits for the rector, supply clergy, sabbatical allowance for a trip or educational program that is part of the sabbatical) by starting a sabbatical fund that can be funded in the annual budget. Long-time assistants should also be eligible.
 - to participate in diocesan ministries. If the clergy are not involved or overly involved in diocesan activities, it would be appropriate to explore the reasons why.
 - If there is conflict with the rector, do something constructive about it. Bad news does not improve with age. Get help. Make use of the bishop and diocesan resources. Do everything you can to effect reconciliation.
 - Find ways to show gratitude to the clergy who have joined their lives to yours.
- Vestries might ask “wellness for what purpose?” Especially during turbulent times, the Church needs strengthened and empowered laity and clergy, working together for the cause of Christ. Healthy, strong clergy are better equipped to share ministry with lay leaders to further God's mission in the world and to serve as bold and confident witnesses to the Risen Lord.

The Rev. Gay C. Jennings is the Associate Director for CREDO. Sponsored by the Church Pension Group, CREDO works to ensure the continued growth and vitality of God's people by promoting the welfare and leadership of the clergy and congregations of the Episcopal Church.

Commissioning new parish leaders

by Linda Grenz

The newly elected and appointed leaders gather at the front of the altar.

Senior warden: On behalf of the congregation of _____, I present:

_____ for junior warden

_____ for clerk of the vestry

_____ for diocesan representative, etc.

Celebrant: Have these leaders been elected by the congregation or appointed by the vestry in accordance with the bylaws of our congregation?

Senior warden: They have.

Celebrant: (to the new leaders): Do you commit yourselves to carry out the responsibilities of the office to which you have been appointed?

Leaders: I do.

Celebrant: Do you reaffirm your commitment to follow Christ and to serve this congregation in his name?

Leaders: I do.

Celebrant: (to the congregation): Will you do all in your power to support these leaders with your prayers, your honest yet gracious communication with them, and your willingness to help them carry out Christ's ministry in this church?

Congregation: We will.

Celebrant: In the name of this congregation I commission you for this work, and pledge you our prayers, encouragement, and support. May the Holy Spirit guide and strengthen you, that in this, and in all things, you may do God's will in the service of the kingdom of Christ.

Amen.

Let us pray. Almighty God, look with favor upon these persons who have now reaffirmed their commitment to follow Christ and to serve in his name. Give them courage, patience, and vision; and strengthen us all in our Christian vocation of witness to the world, and of service to others; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rev. Linda Grenz is the publisher, CEO and founder of LeaderResources.



*"I believe in Christianity
as I believe that the sun
has risen: not only
because I see it, but
because by it I see
everything else."*

CS Lewis (1898-1963)





Top 10 Resources

by Bronwyn Clark Skov

"It is not as a boy that I believe in Christ and confess him. My hosanna has come forth from the crucible of doubts."

*Fyodor Dostoevsky
(1821-1881)*

1 The Bible

Helping to lead a congregation comes from the heart, mind and spirit, so read the Bible to stay centered in your faith. Go to study groups if possible. A standard choice is the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Revised Standard Version). *The Life Application Bible* provides good study tips. For a new slant, try *The Message Remix* by Eugene Peterson.



2 The Book of Common Prayer

It's time to have your own Prayer Book, if you don't already. Be linked to those Episcopalians and Anglicans who've gone before you, back to the first Prayer Book in 1558. Read the Psalms. Say Morning Prayer. Try the Compline service with family members. The numbered prayers in the back are fantastic when you are at a loss for words.

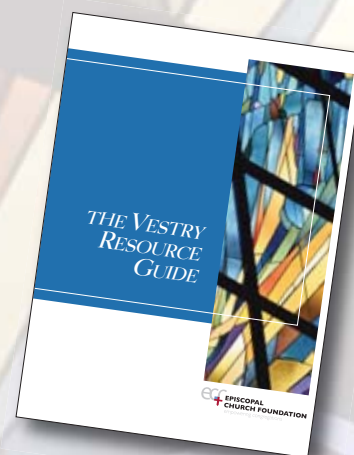
3 Vestry Papers

The winner of some thirty awards from the Episcopal Communicators and the Associated Church Press, *Vestry Papers* is a must for Episcopal leaders, both lay and ordained. Published every other month, *Vestry Papers* shares reflections from vestry members, wardens, clergy, authors and theologians. One subscription is fifteen copies, enough for your entire vestry and more. Order from the Episcopal Church Foundation at 1-800-697-2858.



4 The Vestry Resource Guide

This newly revised classic helps newly elected vestry and bishop's committee members learn the responsibilities and expectation of serving as a leader in the church. Published by the Episcopal Church Foundation, the guide alone, or the guide with a vestry packet, is available from Forward Movement Publications. www.forwardmovement.org



5 Human Resource Practices for Lay Employees in Episcopal Churches: A Resource from the Church Insurance Company

This is a gold mine of information for those who need help with employment policies and procedures. It includes practical information on employment law, the hiring process, human resources policies and sample forms that may be tailored for your use. Church Publishing Incorporated, 800-242-1918 or go to www.churchpublishing.org

for Vestry Members



6 2009 Tax Guide for Episcopal Ministers and Churches

Church Pension Group. Published by the Church Pension Fund, 800-223-6602. Tax and financial questions? Call Matthew K. Chew, 877-305-1414 or the Rev. Canon William Geisler, CPA, 877-305-1415.

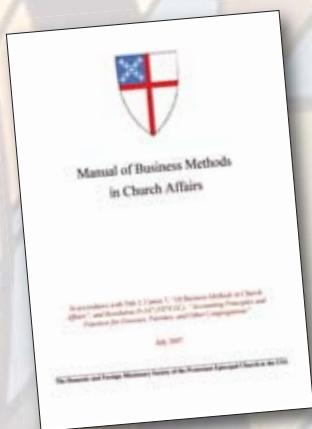
7 How to Hit the Ground Running: A Quick Start Guide for Congregations with New Leadership

In a convenient and practical step-by-step workbook format, this resource takes the new pastor, warden, or other leadership body from one month prior to the new leader's arrival through the first eighteen months of a new ministry. www.churchpublishing.org



"Work as hard as you can, save as much as you can, give away as much as you can."

John Wesley (1703-1791)



8 Manual of Business Methods in Church Affairs

Produced by the Episcopal Church covering all areas of accounting and internal controls for churches. www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/MANUAL.PDF

9 Diocesan Safe Church Guidelines

Contact your diocesan office for the latest in safe church policies. Insurance coverage often depends upon following specific procedures and training, so don't delay. Excellent training is available using the entire *Safeguarding God's People* series from the Church Pension Group; new materials are also available, including *The Prevention of Adult Sexual Misconduct* and *The Prevention of Harassment of Church Workers*.

10 Constitution and Canons

Each diocese, in accordance with the Episcopal Church, has its own set of canons, which will help answer procedural questions as well as increase understanding about policy, organization, and governance. This publication, updated whenever diocesan conventions enact changes to the canons, is available from your diocesan office.

The Canon Missioner for Leadership Development in the Diocese of Minnesota, Bronwyn Clark Skov is known for her Vestry #101 workshops, both in the cities of Minnesota and in the far reaches of the diocese.



ECF's Mission

To strengthen the leadership and financial capabilities of Episcopal congregations, dioceses and related organizations to pursue their mission and ministry.



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Reader's Corner

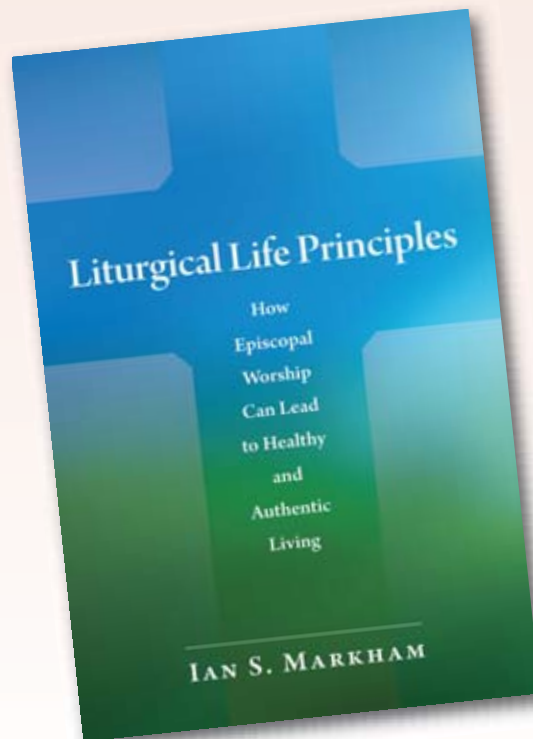
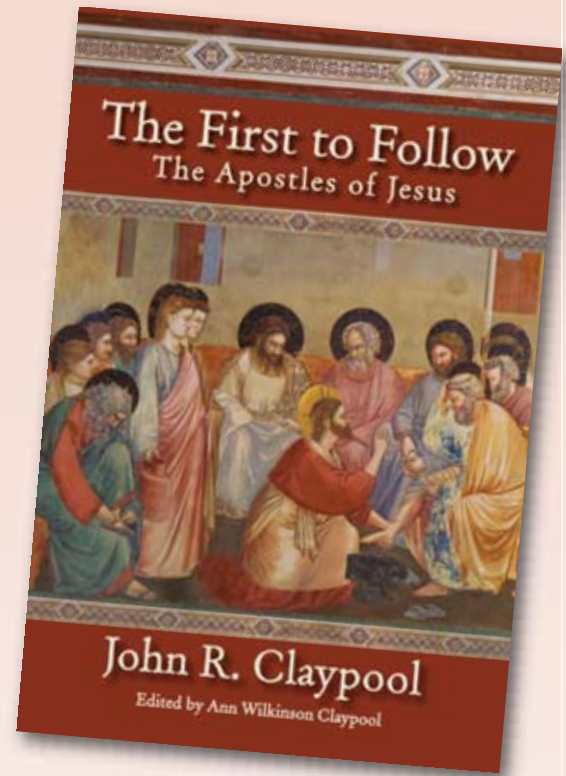
The First to Follow: The Apostles of Jesus

by John R. Claypool

As Episcopal churches have vestries, Jesus also had a vestry of sorts: his twelve disciples. In this compelling book, author John Claypool welcomes readers into Jesus' inner circle by drawing out each individual personality. Certainly more is known about Simon Peter than Thaddeus, for example, but Claypool shares all there is to know and does a remarkable job.

His main point: Christians do not have to be perfect to serve; what matters is faith and passion. "I hope to show that the same Jesus, who taught and blessed those first disciples, still has the power and desire to teach and bless every one of us," the author writes. Readers will find that Claypool succeeds in this goal. Claypool also authored eleven other books, including *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*, his moving personal journal following the death of his young daughter.

Church Publishing
www.churchpublishing.org



Liturgical Life Principles: How Episcopal Worship Can Lead to Healthy and Authentic Living

by Ian S. Markham

"My claim will strike some readers as bizarre," writes Ian Markham. "Is it really possible that these uncomfortable pews in drafty churches — where people all read from a script — and it isn't obvious when to stand or sit — could be a resource for healthy living?"

Exploring worship as an essential resource to authentic and grace-filled living, this book leads readers through the service of Holy Communion and other avenues of Episcopal worship. Particularly noteworthy is the chapter: "An Instructed Eucharist: For a Congregation to Understand What is Going On." Markham is the dean and president of Virginia Theological Seminary.

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