

# Frequently Asked Questions for the Transition and Interim Time

## 1. What is a search committee?

The search committee is charged by the vestry to work with a search consultant to develop a parish profile, including how the parish sees its future and goals for the parish. The search committee advertises for and screens candidates, interviews candidates, and recommends candidates (usually three) to the vestry to serve as the next rector.

## 2. Who serves on the search committee?

Active, pledging members, regular in attendance make good candidates for a search committee. Search committees reflect the demographics and nature of the parish. They are diversified by age, gender, areas of parish life and ministries. Search committee members must be supportive of the ministries of the entire parish, rather than represent a special interest group. It is not appropriate for wardens to serve on the search committee, but it is a good idea to have vestry representation on the committee, usually two people to serve as liaisons.

## 3. What are the vestry's responsibilities during transition?

The wardens and vestry are responsible for day-to-day parish life and administration. The vestry contracts with a consultant, the interim rector, and the new rector. The vestry also chooses the search committee, and charges the search committee with its tasks.

## 4. How is an exit interview used?

An exit interview with a departing rector (or interim rector) is conducted by a consultant or the diocesan transition minister (formerly called deployment officer). The insights gained from this interview are helpful to the bishop and the vestry in considering the ministry of the parish, its life, its strengths and challenges.

## 5. Why have an interim rector, and what does an interim rector do?

The bishop's office will provide the vestry with the name of an interim rector. A letter of agreement will be written and signed by the vestry and the interim rector. It is important to welcome the interim rector in a special way.

The interim rector provides the leadership necessary to maintain stability during the period of transition. A key task is to help the congregation complete its disengagement from previous chapters in its life as it begins the self-study related to the search process. Specific tasks are decided with the vestry and may include helping the parish come to terms with its history and relationships with previous clergy; discovering the congregation's special identity, what God is calling it to be in the future; dealing with shifts in leadership roles that naturally evolve in times of transition, allowing new leaders to come to the fore constructively; renewing relationships with the diocese, so that each may be a more effective

resource and support to the other; and building commitment to the leadership of the new rector in order to be prepared to move into the future with openness to new possibilities.

#### **6. Why do interims take so long?**

During the interim period the bishop assumes the role of rector and the wardens and vestry are responsible on a day-to-day basis. Lay leadership is very important during this time. The interim time allows a healthy transition and effective ministry while a congregation seeks a new priest. The interim period offers a congregation the time to look at themselves during a self study; to separate from the leadership of the departing rector; to strengthen and inform lay leadership; to clarify mission and direction; to find a priest to lead the congregation in that mission and direction.

The temptation at this stage is to want to rush through the interim. This is unwise for several reasons. The tasks that need to be accomplished during the interim period, which must be completed by part-time volunteers, take time. The need for self examination and reflection requires time in order to be insightful and beneficial. When a vestry tries to hurry the interim period, the result is often the call of a rector who is either a clone of the previous rector or a 180-degree opposite. Realistically, it is difficult to attract competent interim rectors for time periods of less than one year.

#### **7. How do we say “good-bye” to the previous rector?**

Encourage the rector to take time and make the effort to achieve a sense of closure with parishioners. Plan a celebration of ministry event. Provide an opportunity and/or space for parishioners to express their feelings over the departure of the rector. How the goodbye is handled will impact how both the parish and the rector will move forward in their lives. Good leave-taking is beneficial to the spiritual and emotional health of the congregation and the departing rector.

#### **8. What is a transition committee?**

The transition committee is appointed by the vestry to serve as a committee of welcome, to introduce the new rector and his or her family to the community, to help in relocation, and to assist in the beginning of the new ministry throughout the new rector’s first year. This committee might also plan for an appropriate goodbye to the departing interim rector.

#### **9. How do we welcome a new rector?**

Plan a welcoming event. Plan “get acquainted” sessions for the rector and members of the parish. Work together to plan a Celebration of New Ministry. The bishop will be in contact with the new rector to schedule this service. Welcome the new rector into the life of congregation. Provide a support group for the new rector during the first year(s). Plan for a mutual ministry review after the first six months which will review goals stated in the parish profile. Engage outside resources as necessary for a successful entry.