



Transition Process Overview

Guidelines for a Successful Transition

The Diocese of Virginia takes seriously the challenges and joys inherent in transition. Whether the incumbent rector, vicar or priest-in-charge is retiring or taking another call, this “in-between time” can be an opportunity for accepting the loss of a beloved shepherd, for healing old wounds, for discovering how the church and its surrounding community has changed since the last call, and for imagining how God is calling the church to be the Body of Christ now and in the future. There will be anxiety about this future, but, approached faithfully, there may also be great discovery and growth.

Guidelines for Transition

Each church is unique, so each search is unique. However, there are certain principles that guide us during transition.

- It is important to have a “good goodbye” with the incumbent priest.
 - For more on healthy exits, see the [Policy on Resigning Priests](#).
- If there are old wounds, work is necessary to move toward identification and healing.
- If there are process or systems issues that need attention – and every church has some – work is necessary to identify and modify them.
- Much of this discovery results from self-study based on three questions:
 - Who have we been?
 - Who are we now?
 - Who is God calling us to be?
- Churches should seek a new priest whose gifts and graces complement the strengths of the congregation so they can become that vision of what God is calling them to be.

The Transition Process

The Normative Transition Process

- The transition ministry office meets with the vestry as soon as the priest’s departure is announced to discuss the road ahead, the vestry’s role, and decisions to be made.
- The vestry calls an interim priest.
- A search committee is constituted and commissioned.
- The search committee studies the parish, with input from the congregation.
- For the search committee to publish a vestry- and Bishop-approved [Community Ministry Portfolio](#), which provides an overview of the church and its vision.
- The search committee guides the church to improve its website, which will include relevant and up-to-date information on the church and the search process, for the benefit of both potential candidates and potential parishioners.
- The search committee receives names and selects a finalist after the office of transition ministry vets the candidates.
- The vestry votes on the finalist and, if affirmed, the vestry extends a call.
- If the call is accepted, the vestry and the candidate negotiate a [letter of agreement](#).
- The candidate, the senior warden and the Bishop sign the letter of agreement.
- A mutual ministry review is conducted after the new priest has served for a year.

Search Tools

Tools that are used to complete this work, particularly in the self-study period, vary widely. Each vestry and search committee are encouraged to work with the office of transition ministry in constructing a plan of action for their search process, either with or without an outside consultant.

Non-Standard Processes

In 2017, the Bishop has suspended non-standard processes while the transition ministry office studies their effectiveness in calling clergy. [Click here](#) for the letter from Bishop Johnston and Mary Thorpe.

Under Review: Non-Standard Processes (Suspended in 2017)

If a vestry wishes to consider an alternative process, such as beginning a search prior to the incumbent's departure, the Vestry must present its plan and reasoning behind that plan to Bishop Johnston for his consideration. He will make a decision in consultation with the canon to the ordinary and the director of transition ministry.

- There will not be a non-standard process if the departure of the incumbent is due to misconduct or serious conflict, or if the incumbent's tenure has ended due to death or to a serious physical or emotional disability.*
- The calling of a new priest after an incumbent completes a particularly long tenure usually requires a standard process, but in rare cases an exception may be made. Again, it is the vestry's responsibility to make the case and it is the Bishop's prerogative, in conversation with the church, to define the nature of the process.*

In all cases, it is the intent of the Bishop and his staff to make the process as efficient as it is Spirit-led, as thoughtful as it is well-organized, and as exciting as it is diligent. We offer our presence, guidance and prayers to all churches as they look forward with hope.



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