Search Committee Formation.

While there are generally accepted practices throughout the Episcopal Church regarding the process of calling a priest to a vacant parish, different dioceses and different bishops and different circumstances all allow for some variations. The idea is to allow the Holy Spirit to be present during the call process; searches should not hinder such presence.

Consider the points below in choosing a Search Committee.

1. Search Committees design, enable, and recommend according to criteria developed by the bishop and the particular vestry. It is up to the vestry to issue the call and to negotiate final details of the prospective ministry.

2. Insofar as possible, once the Search Committee is formed, the vestry, having given the

Committee the appropriate parameters, needs to refrain from interference in the process

itself (except as may be specified below).

3. Depending on such things as size, relative homogeneity, finances, and spiritual health of a

congregation, the Search Committee might divide itself into Call, Profile, and Transition

subunits; on the other hand, the vestry, in order to broaden the participation of the parish,

might form Profile and Transition groups apart from the Search Committee itself.

4. Ideally, Search Committees should reflect as broad a representation of the membership

of the congregation as possible. This does not mean, however, that Search Committees

should be comprised of "representatives" of various interests groups in the parish. Search

members function on behalf of the entire parish, not particular groups therein.

5. Search Committees, again depending on the size of the congregation, work best in

odd numbers of 7-13.

6. Search Committee members need to understand that the process of calling a new priest

can be time consuming and, in many cases, involve travel.

7. By far, the biggest problems Search Committees face involve confidentiality, trust, failure to

reveal or the temptation to cater to "non negotiables," and "gate keeper" dynamics.

8 For these reasons, I highly...highly...discourage selecting Search members who are related

to members of the vestry, have known preconceptions or demands about the nature of the

next priest, or who presume personal influence over the process by virtue of longevity,

finances, etc.

9. The search should be as transparent as possible, and the "automatic" appointment of

Committee members by virtue of longevity, relationships, or finances compromises the

trust of the members of congregation in the entire process. NOTHING compromises a

new ministry more than the perception by the general congregation that the new priest

has been selected on the basis of some pre conceived agenda or influence.

10. Likewise, hard won experience has taught me time and again that processes involving

different members of the same family being on both vestry and Search Committee(s)

invariably violate confidentiality expectations.

11. The vestry should expect to select one member thereon to serve in an ex officio capacity.

As noted above, while it is not the appropriate for the vestry to enter into the call process

itself, there will arise situations in which the vestry will need to adjust some of the original

boundaries, and the ex officio vestry member should assume that responsibility. ( The

establishment/modification of the search budget or the adaptation of the timeline for the

call are examples of such decisions.)

12 Search Committee members should be prepared for the possibility that the vestry may

reject their final recommendations. Do not take it personally.

13. Search Committee selections should not be made on the premise that it will somehow

obligate anyone to greater participation or financial commitment to the parish. (Dr. So and

So has just joined the parish. Let's put her on the Search Committee to get her more

active in the church).

14. Search Committee members should be selected with an eye towards temperament.

Ideally, a call is issued based upon a consensus arrived at via prayer and openness to

the Holy Spirit, not because someone has insisted on his/her way.

15. Invariably there will be members of any given parish who will object to interviewing

candidates based on gender, race, or sexual orientation. While the parish is free to call a

priest it chooses, the diocese will make no such exclusions in the names submitted and

no such persons should be on the Search Committee.