

Prayer in the Calling Process

by

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Introduction

This period of search for a new rector can be a time of new and creative activity in the liturgical and devotional life of the parish that can enrich the church for long after the search process is over.

The search process is an opportunity to:

- explore the faith
- examine the corporate life
 - ...lift up what is good
 - ...confess what is harmful
 - ...give thanks for supports:
 - story of the continuing life of the People of God:
 - The biblical record
 - God for us, us for each other:
 - The community of the church

This guide—and guide is all it intends to be—offers you resources, suggestions, possibilities, for that journey.

Resources

- Prayers from *The Book of Common Prayer*
- The Catechism
- CDO's suggested Bible Study at the end
- The Eucharistic liturgies, especially:
 - The Propers
 - The Eucharist Prayers
- The established liturgical life of the parish

Special Notes for Search Committees

This suggested guide can be supportive of the more specific tasks in which you are engaged. The prayers and study of the parish can be moving with you, and you, as a member of study groups, can be bringing the whole heritage of the faith to your short-term, specialized call. Here is a suggested timetable:

Unit 1: Termination – work to be done before the Search Committee is appointed.

Unit 2: Analyzing the parish – Search Committee appointed, finding its direction. Unit 2 continues through self-study process and the development of the profile.

Unit 3: Reflection on the call to be the people of God: the biblical story –part of self-study, provides biblical and theological framework for it, reminds us that we have a framework for our life together that is not just of our making.

Unit 4: Characteristics and duties of a priest as we understand it—Search Committee is ready for the search.

Units 5 and 6: What’s in it for me? What’s in it for all of us? Background for decision-making and negotiation.

Unit 7: Putting it all together: what are the implications for the new life that will be ours? Installation and startup.

It is recommended that a Eucharist precede the meeting when a final decision is to be made.

Suggested Units

Each unit can take any amount of time the parish needs. Each member of the parish will be involved in the working out of the units. Organizational structures, like the vestry and various committees of the parish, can use a part of each meeting time to think and pray about the issues, and all parish families can, at meal times or other family gatherings, pray and study together in terms of the focus for the week. Adult education classes, Episcopal Church Women, and Episcopal youth groups can use the units as guides for their study during the period of the search. Copies could be made available to the entire parish, and the attention of interim or supply clergy called to the units.

UNIT 1

Issues of closure

Good termination affirms what has been worthwhile and healthy, names what has been hurtful and diminishing; offers thanksgiving for what has been constructive and asks forgiveness for what has been destructive; and enables everyone to move on.

“O God of unchangeable power and light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things are made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.” (BCP, p.528)

“Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favor, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally, by the mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen” (BCP, p. 832)

Some questions to be considered:

What are our/my areas of pain or grief about our new situation?

How can I/we best deal with them to appropriate the new possibilities that are ours?

UNIT 2

Analyzing the parish

Engage as a parish in a consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of the parish, its gifts and its needs, its place in the purposes of God.

“Gracious Father, we pray for thy holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth, with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ thy Son our Saviour. Amen.” (BCP, p. 816)

Some questions to be considered:

What is the peculiar mission of our parish?

What do we need to accomplish that mission?

What difference would it make to us, to our community, the world, if we no longer existed?

UNIT 3

Reflection on the call to be the people of God: the biblical story

“We give thanks to you, O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us in creation, in the calling of Israel to be your people, in your Word spoken through the prophets; and above all in the Word made flesh, Jesus, your Son. For in these last days you sent him to be incarnate from the Virgin Mary, to be the Saviour and Redeemer of the world. In him you have delivered us from evil and made us worthy to stand before you. In him you have brought us out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life.” (BCP, p. 368)

“Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.” (BCP, p. 236)

A note on Bible study: Episcopalians have a rich feast of Bible study offered to them at each Eucharist. The time of a search for a new rector is an excellent time to explore this treasure, and therefore this guide directs you to the Propers for Bible study. The Bible addresses our concerns. It

does not give us specific answers to our questions. A faithful study of Propers, week after week, Old Testament lesson, Epistle and Gospel, will address our concerns as the biblical record has addressed the concerns of the people of God before us.

Read the Bible passages listed in *Forward Day by Day*.

Some questions to be considered:

How do I see myself/ this parish as a part of the people of God?

How does our mission statement relate to the call to be the people of God?

UNIT 4

Characteristics and duties of a priest as we understand it:

“Almighty God, giver of every good gift: look graciously on your Church, and so guide the minds of those who shall choose a rector for this parish, that we may receive a faithful pastor, who will care for your people and equip us for our ministries; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” (BCP, p. 818)

Study *The Service for the Ordination of a Priest* (BCP, p.525ff)

Some questions to be considered:

What do you see as the characteristics of the ideal priest?

What is your reason for each identification?

How would you prioritize your characteristics?

What could you do without?

What couldn't you do without?

How does your listing fit with others?

How are you prepared to deal with non-fits?

How will we as a parish deal with them?

UNIT 5

What's in it for me?

Direct confrontation with the Christ event:

“O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.” (BCP, p. 223)

“Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.” (BCP, p.223)

Study the prayers for Holy Eucharists.

Some questions to be considered:

How is the good news of our salvation reflected differently in the different Eucharist prayers?

What do I listen for most closely?

What do I hardly hear at all?

UNIT 6

What's in it for all of us?

“Almighty Father, whose blessed Son before his passion prayed for his disciples that they might be one, as you and he are one: Grant that your Church, being bound together in love and obedience to you, may be united in one body by the one Spirit, that the world may believe in him whom you have sent, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.” (BCP, p.255)

Give attention to *An Outline of the Faith* (BCP, p. 843ff), especially *The Church*, p. 854, and *Ministry*, p.856.

Some questions to be considered:

How is our mission, our call, becoming clearer?

What new answers do we want to give to old questions?

UNIT 7

Putting it all together:

What are the implications for the new life that will be ours?

“O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light riseth up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what thou wouldst have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, that in thy light we may see light, and in thy straight path may not stumble, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” (BCP, p. 832)

Free-form prayers of thanksgiving for:

- New rector
- Search committee
- Vestry
- Candidate
- Interim clergy
- Parish family

Some questions to be considered:

Where are we now?

What new visions do we have?

What old stuff have we sloughed off?

BIBLE STUDY

You might find the following texts helpful for Bible Studies with your vestry, search committee or other interest groups in the church.

<i>The Call of Moses</i>	Exodus 3:1 - 4:20
<i>The Call of Samuel</i>	1 Samuel 3:1 – 4:1a
<i>The Anointing of David</i>	1 Samuel 16:1 – 13
<i>Isaiah’s Temple Vision</i>	Isaiah 6:1 – 13
<i>The Annunciation</i>	Luke 1:26 – 56
<i>The Call of Matthias</i>	Acts 1:12 - -26
<i>“Having Gifts that Differ”</i>	Romans 12:1 – 21
<i>“There is one Body...”</i>	Ephesians 4:1 - 16