

Transitions/ Change

IN THIS ISSUE:
*Clergy Transitions:
Tips for Senior
Wardens*

*Part Time ≠ Less
Than*

*Un puente para el
cambio/A Bridge to
Change*

Navigation Aids

Clergy Transition: Tips for Senior Wardens

BY ANNE RUDACILLE SMITH

In January 2013 I was installed as senior warden at the same annual meeting where our rector announced he was called to another parish. I had known for a few days this was going to happen but I still experienced a few minutes of terror when the announcement made it official. Suddenly, what I thought would be a year of collaboration with our long time rector became a year where much of the responsibility would lay with the vestry and me. Not only would we have to keep things running but also hire an interim rector, launch a search, and prepare the congregation for a new rector. Though it was a challenging year it was also an inspiring one. It deepened my faith and gave me a new appreciation for the giftedness of my congregation.

Here are 7 tips from my experience that helped make it a successful year of senior warden

ministry. Perhaps these will be helpful to you.

- **Take a breath.** There will be moments when things seem overwhelming. Take a breath and remember that God will give you what you need. I had an amazing junior warden and vestry team to help me work through situations as they arose. Find people you trust and let them help you.

Breathing also gives you a second to remember to slow down. At the beginning you will feel like many decisions need to be made at once. They don't. The average period between rectors is 18-24 months. This time is important; it allows a congregation to put some distance between the past and the future. Breathe and let God work in that time.

■ **Communicate and involve.**

Most of the anxiety that arises in transition can be calmed with good communication.

Much of this needs to happen at the very beginning. Our junior warden and I sent a letter to the congregation the day after our rector announced his leaving. The letter explained how the vestry became the “ecclesiastical authority” in the absence of a rector. We gave an approximate time line of the search process and how important the interim period was for getting ready for what we were going to be called to do next as a congregation. The Sunday after our rector left we held a town-hall-style meeting where we again detailed how things would unfold and allowed for a questions and answers period.

We also asked for the congregation’s help. We let them know they were now all on the prayer committee and that we needed them to keep ministries thriving, attendance high, and pledging strong so that we would look great to potential rector candidates. This gave them some work and buy in and they rose to the occasion.

You also need to communicate with your bishop who will want to know how things are developing. I suggest a meeting at

the outset of the transition so you can decide how you wish to work together.

- **Hire a qualified interim rector.** There are actually professional interim rectors who are trained in this important ministry. The interim’s job is broader than serving as a placeholder; they help prepare the way for the next rector. The interim may have to do some “clean up” duty so that the new rector can come into the congregation and focus on the future. The interim may need to address human resource (HR) issues. A congregation may have ministries that are no longer effective and need to be “sun-setted” or policies that need to be rewritten or enforced.

The interim rector can also help prepare the congregation mentally for change. Our interim gave some excellent sermons talking about being prepared for God to do something new.

- **Pick an excellent search committee.** Our vestry hired a search consultant who helped us with this process, as it is the vestry’s responsibility to pick the search team. The first reaction may be to pick based on demographics but we learned that the ideal is to pick on personal skill set. You need good

writers, talented IT persons, and some folks with HR experience if possible. Team members need to come to the process without an agenda and with the ability to work toward consensus. Most importantly you need people who can commit many hours over an 18-24 month period as it is an extremely time consuming endeavor.

- **Mind the staff.** During a transition most of the anxiety lies with the staff. They not only have to take on more responsibility but they are also faced with all of the fears that come with the prospect of getting a new boss. I met frequently with staff members to answer questions and keep them informed. The interim rector took them on retreat where they could discuss issues and dream about the future. Some staff will use this time to evaluate their own careers. In one week we announced the resignation of two associate clergy and our business manger. All of them left for fabulous opportunities but it was stressful for the vestry and the congregation. This brings me to the 6th tip:

- **Communicate (some more).** The vestry knew the congregation would be concerned about three staff members leaving.

The next Sunday I spoke at each service, repeating our message that God was with us and that we had good leadership and a good plan. Things will pop up during the interim and the quicker you are out front with answers the better.

- **Prepare your congregation and leadership** for the reality that transition doesn't end when the new rector arrives. There is at least a year more of transition as the new rector arrives, takes stock, and begins to try new things. This adjustment period takes patience and more prayer but your congregation will be prepared for this because of the groundwork you have laid during your term. The Christian community in Corinth chose to ignore Paul's words, and divisions and conflict continued, as evident in 2 Corinthians and even later in the epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians. We, however, can choose to listen and take seriously the challenge. Yes, perhaps the world *will* know that we are Christians by our love, *but only if we dare to let Paul's words become our own.*

Through all of this I learned what a resilient and devoted congregation we have. I always felt well supported and received much

feedback that they were excited about the future and grateful for the vestry's leadership.

Anne Rudacille Schmidt is a member of the Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration in Dallas, Texas. She currently works as a search consultant, guiding search committee's through the process of calling a new rector. Anne is co-chair of the CEEP Planning Committee and a board member of Forward Movement. She is married to Walter and has 2 teenagers and enjoys running and yoga in her free time.

Try This

Your rector is leaving; your congregation is about to enter a period of transition. Here are some questions a vestry may want to consider:

- How will your responsibilities as a vestry member or warden change while your congregation is without a rector? What new things will you be accountable for? How might you support one another during this period of transition? What can you do to prevent vestry burnout?
- Transition in ordained leader-

ship can produce anxiety in congregations. Suddenly there are many new questions: What will change? Who will replace the departing individual in the short and long term? How long will it take to find a replacement? What kind of changes might the interim and the new rector want to initiate? As the vestry, what approach will you take to minimize anxiety in your congregation.

(Source: Vestry Resource Guide)

Resources

- "Diocesan bishop and the diocesan staff member responsible for transition ministry"
- "Healthy Transitions, Part 1," Sandra Clark Kolb, ECF Vital Practices' Vestry Papers January 2011 <http://www.ecfvp.org/ves-trypapers/healthy-practices/healthy-transitions-part-1/> and "Healthy Transitions, Part 2" <http://www.ecfvp.org/ves-trypapers/healthy-practices/healthy-transitions-part-2-the-role-of-leaders/>

(continued on next page)

- “Leading Through Transition,”
Jan Henderson, ECF Vital
Practices’ Vestry Papers,
January 2015 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/vestry-leadership/leading-through-transition/>
- The Episcopal Church’s Office
for Transition Ministry <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/transition-ministry>
- The Vestry Resource Guide
<http://www.episcopalfoundation.org/programs/ecf-publications/vestry-resource-guide>

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Editor's Letter

Since early 2011, ECF Vital Practices has utilized reader surveys. Your responses guide us as we identify ideas for Vestry Papers themes and articles. Over the past two years we've watched two topics emerge as areas many of you are looking for help in: change and clergy transition.

Our articles this month focus on transitions and change, with resources to help you navigate the changes your congregation may be facing today or in the future. They include:

- Days before being installed as senior warden, Anne Rudacille Smith learned her rector had accepted a call elsewhere. "Clergy Transition: Tips for Senior Wardens" shares strategies Anne and the vestry used to navigate this unanticipated change.
- Across our church congregations wrestle with decisions related to clergy staffing. Recognizing many congregations may associate moving to part time clergy a 'failure.' Cathie Caimano suggests reframing the conversation by asking different questions and

adopting a different mindset in "Part Time ≠ Less Than."

- La transición y el cambio son parte de nuestra vida personal y laboral. En "Un puente para el cambio" Carmen Guerrero comparte su historia de cómo aprendió a ver que Dios la estaba llamando a cambiar mientras respondía a varios llamados al ministerio como misionera, sacerdote, parte del personal diocesano, y como Directora del Centro de Jubileo de la Iglesia Episcopal.

Transition and change is part of our personal as well as our corporate lives. "A Bridge to Change" by Carmen Guerrero shares her story of learning to recognize how God was calling her to change as she responded to various calls to ministry.

- What resources are available to congregations navigating a significant transition? "Navigation Aids" by Randy Ferebee invites readers to consider three pathways for building relationships to support using readily available resources.

- The feelings of grief and loss that may accompany a clergy transition may also heighten levels of anxiety and stress. In "Expectations Matter: Choose Faith," Dorothy "d'Rue" Hazel advocates for working through these feelings, offering strategies to help leaders focus on the new opportunities, the new life that awaits.
- For some congregations, transition means giving up the familiar structure of full-time clergy as well as their understanding of the way authority and tasks are distributed. Susan Elliott's "From Challenge to Opportunity" shares the wisdom and experience of congregational and diocesan leaders who have made this change.
- When should a congregation begin to think about planning for a clergy transition? Susan Tamborini Czolgosz's "Transition Planning" provides a framework for shifting thinking about a clergy transition, recasting it as a natural part of our common life with a process that flows from – rather than interrupts – our living into all that God is calling us to be.

- With our final article we shift our focus to the practical: How might we equip ourselves to best respond to the changes we face? Perhaps, as Br. James Koester, SSJE, models in “Where is the Invitation Here?” we need to engage in listening, to ask ourselves “to what is this challenge inviting them – me – us?”

We encourage you to think about how the ideas presented in this and every issue can provide an impetus for evaluating and reflecting on what you could learn from the experiences of others. To help in your discernment, we offer a list of resources related to the topic at the end of each article. If you have a resource you’d like to share, please email me at editor@episcopalfoundation.org with the link or add it to the site using the Your Turn feature. (<http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/>)

If you are interested in Spanish language content, please visit our searchable index for our Spanish content here. (<http://www.ecfvp.org/topics/es/>)

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Faithfully,

Nancy

Nancy Davidge

PS: To make it easier to find the resources offered through *ECF Vital Practices*, please consider adding a link to ECF Vital Practices to your website. Here’s how: Using your websites ‘add a link’ tool, insert our full URL – <http://www.ecfvp.org/>.

PPS: Do you live in an area with limited Internet access? If you have a smart phone, consider browsing ECF Vital Practices from your mobile device.

Part Time ≠ Less Than

BY CATHERINE A. CAIMANO

The senior warden was blunt with me on the phone. 'We loved having you here on Sunday morning,' he said. 'And I am not the sort of person who believes in waiting around for things. We are looking for a new vicar in the fall and I just want to know how committed you are to this 'free range' thing and if I can persuade you to apply for the position.' I laughed, both in gratitude for his compliment and to buy myself a little time in answering. 'The short answer is thank you, but I am not interested,' I answered. 'The long answer is a little more complicated.'

Since the beginning of 2016 I have been a 'free range' priest, meaning that I do not serve a single congregation or institution. I am an Episcopal priest in good standing, and mostly I coach, consult and teach, inside and outside of the church and the denomination. I write and edit, work on some long-term projects, and I am available for supply and short-term pastoral back up for congregations. Part of the reason I made this transition was because of the type of transitions I was seeing in congregations, particularly small ones.

Many churches can no longer afford a full-time priest with benefits, or they struggle so much to afford one that they barely have energy for other ministry. And yet it can feel depressing to go to part-time clergy: Are we declining? Will we close? These questions can haunt. And yet, as I have seen both clergy and congregations grappling with this question, I also think the larger questions come up: What do we pay a priest for? What do we really need a priest to do? The answers usually boil down to liturgy and sacraments, spiritual guidance and formation, and pastoral presence. The rest of what a priest is usually paid for - administration, teaching, outreach, engagement in the community, even preaching - can and sometimes should be done by deacons or lay people.

When considered this way, the transition for congregations comes about when they stop thinking of themselves as a small non-profit with a priest as CEO, and start thinking of themselves as a religious community of disciples who are each engaged in ministry, some of which they pay a priest for. The analogy I always

think of is athletes with a coach - most of the work is being done by the athletes, and they pay a coach to help them get better and learn new things. It is possible to think of a congregation as a group of spiritual 'athletes', growing in their relationship with Jesus, with the priest as their coach.

From here, then, each congregation, no matter its size, could figure out how much of a priest's time they really need. Some places will need full-time priestly presence, some half or quarter, and some could contract out separately for Sunday services, for pastoral care, for formation. It's possible in this way for even a very small congregation to have the services of different priests with different gifts or specialties.

And this is where I come in. As I told the senior warden, I was not interested in a vicar position. But I was interested in doing what I had been doing - Sunday liturgy as I was able, pastoral care if they had need, and being 'extra hands' during their transition and even and even when they got a new vicar, if that was needed and

asked for. In this way, I serve many congregations, individuals, and a few dioceses, a little or a lot, depending on what they need. I am a certain kind of coach, and there are others, some of whom are interested in serving part-time in congregations, some full-time. I think that all together, we are changing the whole way the church works, which is a very exciting transition.

This is how I am learning that congregations don't have to see part-time priestly service as a less-than situation. They can see it as both the flexibility they need to be who they are, the chance to grow into their own roles as disciples, and a way to live into the future of the church.

Catherine A. Caimano is a free-range priest. (<http://frcathie.org/free-range/>) Previously she served as canon for regional ministry for the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina and as rector at St. John's Episcopal Church in Wichita, Kansas, and associate rector at St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Durham, N.C. For more from Catherine, follow her on her blog (<http://frcathie.org/free-range-priest-blog/>)

Try This

How does your congregation

deal with change? *Who Moved My Cheese* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Who_Moved_My_Cheese%3F) by Spencer Johnson is a story that reflects common behaviors when it comes to change. With your vestry, watch *Who Moved My Cheese* (the movie) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDNhEYpBPbY>) and reflect on your responses to change: Can you read the handwriting on the wall? How would you rate your ability to anticipate change? How well do you adapt to change? Do you see change as an adventure or a threat? How prepared do you feel for things continuing to change?

Resources

■ *Born of Water, Born of Spirit: Supporting the Ministry of the Baptized in Small Congregations* by Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook & Fredrica Harris Thompsett, Alban; 2010. This book shares the findings of a study of small churches and the ways in which they used the gifts of all the members of the congregation to create vital communities, with or without the benefit of regular clergy presence. <http://www.amazon.com/Born-Water-Spirit-Supporting-Congregations-ebook/dp/B00JNLQWY0>

■ Father Cathie free range priest

website <http://frcathie.org/free-range/> and blog <http://frcathie.org/free-range-priest-blog/>

- "Pooling Resources," Nancy Davidge, ECF Vital Practices' Vestry Papers, July 2014 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestry-papers/leading-change/pooling-resources/>
- "Preparing for Lay Only Leadership," Heather Barta, ECF Vital Practices' Vestry Papers, May 2015 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/facing-leadership-challenges/preparing-for-lay-only-leadership/>
- "Shared Leadership," Beckett Stokes, ECF Vital Practices' Vestry Papers, July 2014 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestry-papers/leading-change/shared-leadership/>
- "Who Moved My Cheese" Andrei Stoleriu's video adaptation of Spencer Johnson's book. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDNhEYpBPbY>

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Un puente para el cambio

POR CARMEN B. GUERRERO

Hay momentos en que siento que toda mi vida ha sido una de transición y cambio. A veces los cambios fueron voluntarios, otros se debieron a circunstancias externas. Acepto que las transiciones son simplemente una parte de estar en este planeta. Ya sea si leemos, escuchamos o vemos las noticias, esa información nos presenta una imagen del mundo en el que vivimos que puede ser sobrecogedora. ¿Cómo podemos responder a lo que oímos, a lo que vemos, a lo que experimentamos en un mundo que parece estar cambiando más rápidamente que lo que podemos absorber?

Como personas de fe, enfrentar estas realidades nos debería dejar saber que lo que tenemos ante nosotros es un reto bastante grande para la Iglesia y para nuestro entendimiento de quién es Dios en este mundo, así como en qué y cómo está trabajando Dios en medio de estas realidades.

Creo que nuestra reacción a la transición y al cambio está intrínsecamente conectada a quienes somos. He descubierto que toda la gente tiene lo que llamo un “preentendimiento” de

los cambios que nos presentan. A veces esto se conoce como el “equipaje” que traemos a todas las situaciones; yo prefiero llamarlo “preentendimiento”.

Reconocer nuestros “preentendimientos”

Nuestro “preentendimiento” está moldeado por los efectos de nuestra historia personal, nuestros sesgos o prejuicios, nuestra cultura, por todos los sistemas sociales en los que funcionamos y especialmente por el idioma que hablamos, porque el idioma es el principal portador de los efectos de la historia y la cultura en nuestro momento actual de experimentar vida.

Sin embargo, rara vez estamos conscientes de estos “preentendimientos”, y sólo lo hacemos cuando no logramos entender algo muy “otro” que reta nuestro sentido de realidad, como una transición o un cambio inesperados. Para mí, un ejemplo temprano de esto ocurrió cuando estaba sirviendo como misionera en Honduras en la década de los 1980, cuando Centroamérica estaba en medio de una gran agitación

política. Supuse que porque soy latina no habría ningún cambio en Latinoamérica que no podría manejar. Estaba TOTALMENTE EQUIVOCADA. Como estadounidense, crecí creyendo que tengo derechos inviolables. En Honduras me encontré pronunciándome por mis derechos con un rifle apuntándome.

En el seminario aprendí prácticas litúrgicas apropiadas empleando el *Libro de Oración Común*. Jamás imaginé la transición que tendría que realizar al trabajar con gente que no sabía leer ni escribir. Cursos en Teología Espiritual nos enseñan mucho sobre los patriarcas y las matriarcas de nuestra fe, pero ¿cómo explica uno una fe encontrada en gente analfabeta que describe su fe en términos de San Juan de la Cruz y de Santa Teresa de Ávila cuando jamás oyeron de él o ella? (<http://ocd-centroamerica.org/espiritualidad.html>)

Todos estos “preentendimientos” contribuyeron a un profundo sentido de humildad que a veces era difícil de aceptar, pero que era

necesario en el rol de sacerdote en esas circunstancias. Aprendí a ser liderada por la gente, así como a ser una líder para ellos y ellas. También tomé conciencia de mi arrogancia espiritual.

El autoaprendizaje nunca cesa

Regresé a la Diócesis Episcopal del Oeste de Texas pensando que ahora estaba en casa y que todo sería como había imaginado el ministerio en la Iglesia Episcopal en Estados Unidos. Otra vez estuve TOTALMENTE EQUIVOCADA.

La iglesita misionera en la que iba a servir había sido descrita como “una polvorienta iglesia abandonada en el centro de heroína de la ciudad”. El techo goteaba; las aulas de la escuela dominical estaban llenas hasta el cielorraso de viejos bancos y sillas polvorientos; y en mi primer domingo como rectora sólo vinieron seis personas.

Una mañana llegué a la Iglesia y vi que había cerca de 200 personas haciendo fila. Arrogantemente supuse que era porque habían oído que había una nueva sacerdote. Otra vez estuve TOTALMENTE EQUIVOCADA. Estaban esperando al Sr. Hernández, que tenía un ministerio de distribuir una caja de toronjas rojas a todos las per-

sonas que vinieran los miércoles por la mañana.

Esta fue una de esas veces en que experimentamos un sentido de distancia y lejanía de nuestra propia realidad. Estoy convencida de que es eso lo que hace que la comprensión sea tanto posible como necesaria. Requiere que dejemos nuestro mundo de lado -- en la mayor medida posible -- y permitir que la otredad aflore por sí sola. Esto puede ser difícil, especialmente cuando está relacionado con el cambio.

El miércoles siguiente hice café e invité a todos las personas a que vinieran a esperar el camión de las toronjas. Les pregunté cómo sabían sobre esta iglesia, cuánto tiempo habían vivido en el barrio y su experiencia en participar en esta iglesia. Me enteré que esta iglesita había desempeñado un papel muy importante en sus vidas: sus hijos e hijas habían sido bautizados y bautizadas ahí, habían enterrado gente mediante esta iglesia, se habían casado, etc. Ese tiempo de café y conversación, de esperar juntos y juntas, resultó ser una oportunidad para que la gente compartiera su conexión con esta pequeña iglesia de barrio. Experimenté el principio de una resurrección.

La clave para traer esta iglesita de vuelta a la vida era que yo

estuviera abierta al cambio y dispuesta a adaptarme a lo que estaba expresando la comunidad como una necesidad de contar con un lugar de adoración en un barrio cambiante y problemático. **Salir de nuestras zonas de confort**

Cuatro años después, había otro cambio en el horizonte. Me ofrecieron un trabajo en la Diócesis Episcopal de Los Ángeles como coordinadora diocesana de un ministerio multicultural. El rol involucraba trabajar con iglesias urbanas tales como feligresías históricas negras, feligresías asiáticas (chinas, japonesas, vietnamitas, filipinas, coreanas) y feligresías latinas. Después de que lo rechacé, me volvieron a ofrecer el puesto; empecé a pensar si tal vez esa podría ser una llamada de Dios y que estaba rehusando escuchar. Acepté el cargo, nuevamente en una vía de “transición y cambio”.

Cuando me mudé a Los Ángeles descubrí rápidamente la necesidad de deshacerme de la idea de que otras voces hablan con mis mismos significados. (Un aprendizaje importante para toda la gente). Necesitaba empezar a “sospechar”, por así decirlo, del hecho de que “no sé exactamente lo que puede ser una realidad específica para cada persona”.

Tal vez dicho de otra manera:

“¡Nuevamente tenía que dejar de lado mi arrogancia!”

Esta historia de mi trabajo inicial con el sacerdocio asiático sirve de ejemplo. Tuvimos una reunión, estábamos de acuerdo (o por lo menos esa era mi sensación) y después pidieron un descanso y todos fueron al baño. Debido a que todos eran hombres yo quedé excluida. A la media hora regresaron y me presentaron un plan para seguir adelante desde su punto de vista.

Trabajar con este grupo de sacerdotes asiáticos me cambió la vida. Estaba persuadida de que sin “escuchar desde el horizonte del otro” no puede haber conversación. Siempre había sospechado que la verdadera conversación ocurre cuando yo nunca seré la misma a causa de tu presencia y que tú nunca serás el mismo o la misma porque has estado en mi presencia. Es en ese momento que empezamos a pensar que tal vez “el caso puede ser algo diferente”. Tal vez el significado que le damos a la vida no es el mismo para toda la gente del mundo. Tal vez hay otra manera de experimentar a Dios y la mano de Dios en el mundo de la cual todavía no estamos conscientes.

Las transiciones continúan...

Desde Los Ángeles pasé a un cargo en el Centro de la Iglesia Episcopal en Nueva York, seguido por un retiro y un traslado a la Diócesis de Arizona. A los pocos meses empecé a trabajar en esa diócesis. Como canónica de un ministerio multicultural, trabajé con la comunidad sudanesa, empleando todo lo que había aprendido anteriormente. Juntos abrimos una feligresía sudanesa en Fénix; establecimos un programa de becas para ayudar a las personas de esa comunidad a asistir a la universidad y empezamos a ofrecerles retiros de liderazgo.

Posteriormente iniciamos una feligresía en español en la Catedral, La Trinidad Community. En la actualidad soy párroca en una feligresía hispanohablante que comparte espacio con la feligresía en la Iglesia Episcopal Santa María, en el oeste de Fénix. Nos reuníamos en Santa María por aproximadamente un año y después la iglesia se incendió. Tal vez era señal de que era hora de jubilación temprana. Sin embargo, las personas de esta misión siguieron asistiendo a la iglesia, aunque nos estábamos reuniendo debajo de un árbol. La Iglesia empezó a crecer. La Iglesia se reconstruyó, nos mudamos a un nuevo espacio y en la actualidad tenemos una

miembresía de 350.

Estar abierto(a) al cambio

Cómo y por qué ocurren cambios y transiciones en nuestras vidas sigue siendo un misterio. Lo que sí sé es que son parte de la vida. La manera en que respondemos a ellos está enraizada profundamente en lo que somos cultural, social y especialmente espiritualmente. Aprender a manejar las transiciones se reduce a reconocer que todos los cambios realmente son una oportunidad para avanzar y no una traba que nos hace parar.

Hace años leí un librito sobre formar puentes y llegué a la conclusión de que podría aprender algo sobre estar abierta al cambio si aplicara alguno de sus principios, que les ofrezco a continuación:

- Sé libre y flotante, pero firmemente basado(a) en una relación con Dios
- Acepta el hecho de que siempre habrá vientos fuertes que presentarán desafíos

- Recuerda que un buen puente debe aceptar que lo pisen y que le pasen vehículos por encima: los puentes son para eso
- Mantén un equilibrio: ejercita discernimiento al tomar decisiones y compara realidades contrastantes.

Carmen Guerrero, sacerdote episcopal, es pastora en la Iglesia Episcopal Santa María de Fénix, Arizona. Graduada de Sewanee, su ministerio ha incluido ser misionera en Honduras, sacerdote parroquial en las diócesis del Oeste Texas y Arizona, parte del personal diocesano en Los Ángeles y en Arizona, y Directora del Centro de Jubileo para la Iglesia Episcopal con sede en Nueva York.

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A Bridge to Change

CARMEN B. GUERRERO

There are times when I have a sense of my whole life being one of transition and change. Sometimes the changes are my choice; others are due external circumstances. I accept that transitions are simply a part of being on this earth. Whether we read, listen, or watch the news, this information presents us with a picture of the world in which we live that can sometimes be overwhelming. How are we to respond to what we hear, what we see, and what we experience in a world that seems to be changing faster than we can absorb?

As persons of faith, coming face to face with these realities ought to let us know that what we have before us is quite a challenge for the church and our understanding of who God is in this world as well as what and how God is at work in the midst of these realities.

I believe our response to transition and change is intrinsically connected to who we are. I have discovered that we all have what I call a “pre-understanding” of any change with which we are presented. Sometimes this is called the “baggage” we bring into any situation; I prefer to call it “pre-

understanding.”

Recognizing Our Own “Pre-Understandings”

Our “pre-understanding” is shaped by the effects of our personal history, our biases, our culture, all the social systems in which we function, and especially by the language we speak, because language is the chief carrier of the effects of history and culture into our present moment of experiencing life.

However, we are seldom aware of these “pre-understandings” until we get caught short trying to understand something very “other” that challenges our sense of reality such as any unexpected transition or change. For me an early example of this came while serving as a missionary in Honduras in the 1980s, a time when Central America was in turmoil politically. I assumed that because I am Latina, there would be no change in Latin America I could not handle. WRONG. As an American I grew up believing that I have rights and they are not to be violated. In Honduras, I found myself standing up for my rights with a rifle pointed at me.

In my seminary education, I learned proper liturgical practices using the *Book of Common Prayer*. I never imagined the transition I would have to make when working with people who could not read or write. Courses in Spiritual Theology can teach us so much about the patriarchs and matriarchs of our faith, but how does one explain a faith found in illiterate people who describe their faith in the terms used by John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila when they have never heard of them? (<http://ocd-centroamerica.org/EN/spirituality.html>)

All these “pre-understandings” contributed to a deep sense of humility that was sometimes hard to accept, but was needed in the role of priest in those circumstances. I learned to be led by the people as well as being a leader for them. I also became aware of my spiritual arrogance.

Self Learning Never Stops

I returned to the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas thinking I was now home and all would be as I had

imagined ministry in the Episcopal Church in the United States. WRONG.

The little mission church I would serve had been described as a “dusty abandoned church located in the heroin center of the city.” The roof leaked; the Sunday school rooms were filled to the ceiling with old and dusty desks and chairs; and on my first Sunday as rector, six people came.

One morning I arrived at the church and saw nearly 200 people lined up. I arrogantly assumed it was because they had heard I was the new priest. WRONG. They were waiting for Mr. Hernandez, who had a ministry of distributing a box of Ruby-Red grapefruit to each person every Wednesday morning.

This was one of those times we experience a sense of distance or remoteness from our own reality. I am convinced this is what makes understanding both possible and necessary. It calls for us to lay our world aside, as best we can, and let the otherness come through all on its own. This can be difficult, especially when associated with change.

The following Wednesday I made coffee and invited everyone to come in to wait for the grapefruit truck. I asked how they knew

about this church, how long they had lived in the neighborhood, and their experience of participating at this church. I learned that this little church had played a very important role in their lives – their children had been baptized here, they had buried people through this church, gotten married, etc. This time of coffee and conversation, of waiting together, turned out to be an opportunity for people to share their connection to this little neighborhood church. I experienced the beginning of a resurrection.

The key for bringing this little church back to life was my being open to change and willing to adjust to what the community was expressing as a need for a place of worship in a challenging and changing neighborhood.

Moving Out of Our Comfort Zones

Four years later, another change was on the horizon. I was offered a job in the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles as diocesan coordinator of multicultural ministry. The role involved working with urban churches such as historically Black congregations, Asian congregations (Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Korean) and Latino congregations. After turning it down, the offer was later extended again; I began to wonder

if perhaps this could be a call from God and I was refusing to listen. I took the position, once again on a path of “transition and change.”

When I moved to Los Angeles, I quickly discovered the need to rid myself of the idea that other voices speak with the same set of meanings as I do. (An important learning for all of us.) I needed to become “suspicious,” and recognize I didn’t really know what a specific reality might mean for everyone.” Perhaps said another way – “once again, I had to give up my arrogance!”

This story of my early work with the Asian clergy in the diocese serves as an example. We had a meeting, we were in agreement (or so it seemed to me), and then they asked for a break and all went to the bathroom. Because they were all men I was excluded. After about a half hour they came back and presented me with a plan from their perspective for moving forward.

Working with this group of Asian clergy changed my life. I am convinced that without “listening from the horizon of the other” there can be no conversation. I have always suspected that true conversation occurs when I will never be the same because I have been in your presence and you

will never be the same because you have been in my presence. It is at this moment that we can begin to entertain the thought that perhaps “something else might be the case.” Perhaps the meaning we give to life is not the same everywhere in the world. Perhaps there is another way of experiencing God and God’s hand at work in the world of which we are not yet aware.

The Transitions Continue...

From Los Angeles I moved to a position at the Episcopal Church Center in New York, followed by retirement and a move to the Diocese of Arizona. After a few months, I began working at the Diocese. As Canon for Multicultural Ministry, I worked with the Sudanese community, using all I had learned before. Together we opened a Sudanese congregation in Phoenix, established a scholarship program to help members of this community attend college, and began to offer leadership retreats for them.

We next started a Spanish language congregation at the Cathedral, La Trinidad Community. Currently I am the vicar at a Spanish language congregation sharing space with the congregation at St. Mary’s Episcopal Church in West Phoenix. We worshiped

at Santa Maria for about a year and then the church burned down. Perhaps this was a sign that it was time to really retire. However the members of this mission continued to attend church although we were meeting under a tree. The church began to grow. The church was rebuilt; we moved into the new space, and currently have about 350 members.

Being Open to Change

How and why changes and transitions happen in our lives remains a mystery. What I do know is they are part of life. How we respond is profoundly based on who we are culturally, socially, and especially spiritually. Learning to manage transition is about recognizing that every change is truly an opportunity to move forward and not a stumbling block to make us stop.

Years ago I read a little book about building bridges and concluded I could learn about being open to change if I applied some of its principles. I offer them to you:

- Be free and floating yet firmly based on a relationship with God
- Accept the fact that there will always be strong winds that

will present challenges

- Remember that a good bridge must be content to being stepped on and driven over; that’s what bridges are for
- Maintain balance: exercise discernment in making choices and weigh contrasting realities.

Carmen Guerrero, an Episcopal priest, serves as pastor at Santa Maria Episcopal Church in Phoenix, Arizona. A graduate of Sewanee, her ministry has included serving as a missionary in Honduras, as a parish priest in the dioceses of West Texas and Arizona, as a member of the diocesan staff in Los Angeles and Arizona, and as Jubilee Officer for The Episcopal Church based in New York.

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Navigation Aids

BY RANDOLPH FEREBEE

What resources are available to congregations navigating a significant transition that also offer support or opportunities for deepening our connection with Christ and preparing us to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world?

Wrestling with foundational questions related to our buildings or the impact smaller congregations and shrinking resources have on staffing, program, and ministry or dealing with an unanticipated and potentially costly event, could push congregational leaders to despair. However, change can also be viewed as an occasion for new life and seeking new life more truly reflects the Good News we have received.

There is growing consensus that collegial and cooperative relationships among individuals and communities are finding traction both within and outside institutions of all types. * This is especially true in faith communities as they navigate the many changes being experienced in churches of all sizes.

How might we encourage our

diocese, deaneries, neighboring congregations, and other faith communities to explore collaboration? Is this a viable path for making our churches more stable and sustainable? Might this provide new opportunities to engage God's mission more effectively, releasing through us attentiveness to justice, formation of disciples, speech of and action on the Good News (evangelism), and support for all this through generosity?

Here are three viable pathways for engaging mission in our Episcopal context: Apostolic or diocesan networks, missional alliances, and ecumenical partnerships. Each offers a variety of connections for the purpose of mission.

Apostolic (diocesan) networks

Local faith communities in the Episcopal tradition are naturally tied together through the bishop and organized into dioceses. These connections are vital to the life of any congregation. One regular connection is episcopal visitations that build hope and a feeling of relationship to the larger church. Another is the provision

of resources that no congregation could mount through their own resources (e.g. conference centers, camps). Dioceses may also provide a framework for strengthening connections between churches through regional deaneries, clusters, or networks.

Among the many services a diocese may offer to congregations, critical services include serving as a source for help where there is distress in the congregational system, raising up people for ordained leadership, and resourcing leadership transitions. Distributed throughout any diocese are riches of talent and expertise; when a diocese facilitates linkages this wealth becomes available to many. The challenge for dioceses is how to make the existing connections missional, discharging old processes and systems which are not missional, and raising up new networks as needed. Some dioceses have developed robust networks of congregational specialists (<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/finance-and-administration/who-can-you-call/>) available to work with congregations in a variety of areas. If your diocese does not yet

facilitate missional networking, be bold. Talk with your diocesan staff about the connections and resources you seek. If they don't exist, consider helping to start conversations and enlisting others to help form the networks that are needed. Explore the resources included at the end of this article to learn how other dioceses are encouraging collaboration and networking.

Missional alliances

A missional alliance focuses on connection and collaboration. It is based on the belief that we are better together than we are apart. The principle honored here is that every local church should seek to be in some form of a missional alliance suited to their gifts and needs. These alliances may be in two forms: association with other Episcopal churches or collaboration with local agencies or institutions.

Alliances with other congregations range from worshipping together in the summer thus providing clergy of each congregation time off, to sharing a Lenten bible study or other programming, or, as in these four Northern Indiana churches do, coming together in formal partnership, sharing clergy and other resources while each maintaining their distinct parish identity and structure.

(<http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/1-church-4-locations-2/>). Churches with financial resources might link with a smaller church which, if relieved of the cost of book-keeping, for example, be able to use these funds in other ministry areas.

Collaboration with a local agency or institution offers a path for neighborhood engagement. A friend of mine says that every church ought to be connected to a school in some diaconal way. The nearest elementary school can generate a list of needs so long that any church will find an abundance of opportunity for engagement. All Saints Episcopal Church in Concord, North Carolina (<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/advocacy/god-called-weve-got-work-to-do/>) and Christ Church Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/sharing-our-gifts/from-outreach-to-relationship/>) are two of the many Episcopal Churches committed to long term relationships with local school partners

Ecumenical and Interfaith Partnerships

Our brothers and sisters in other denominations, faiths, and traditions have something to offer. Breaking out of denominational "silos" allows us to share in ways

that make our local communities more just and stable. While ecumenical partnerships are desirable for all of us, the potential for resource sharing could be especially helpful for small churches.

These types of networks and partnerships may be seen in the form of formation and education found by linking up with a neighboring church (or churches) for vacation bible school, practical sharing of a staff member (secretary, sexton, book keeper), or working together to address an area of human need in their shared neighborhood. There are models in place. Many communities have cooperative social and/or medical ministries. Some have shared educational associations. There are ecumenical or interfaith groups and clergy associations. There are Lutheran-Episcopal congregations, such as St. John's Episcopal and Hope Lutheran, who overcame challenges both before and during the early years of their merger. (<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/vision-planning/shattering-the-status-quo/>)

In Tillamook, Oregon, four Protestant Church members of the Tillamook Ecumenical Community moved beyond collaborating to support the community's many social service programs to form a

shared worshipping community. (<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestry-papers/leading-change/pooling-resources/>) Each of these partnership types not only gives life to Jesus' prayer "that all may be one" but offer us realistic opportunities to serve God.

Navigating your own path

How might these three pathways – diocesan networks, missional alliances, and ecumenical partnerships – provide resources or options for your congregation as you discern your response to what God is asking of you at this time? How might you strengthen or change any relationships already in place? Are there new relationships that might provide support as you strive to carry out Christ's work of reconciliation in your community and the world?

As we make use of these relationships we proclaim our true identity: we are blessed so that we may be a blessing. (Genesis 12:2)

* *The Starfish and The Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*, Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom (Portfolio Hardcover, 2006) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Starfish_and_the_Spider

Randy Ferebee is a retired priest in the Diocese of Western North Carolina. Currently he is helping restart an Episcopal Church in Myrtle Beach, SC. He is a founding director of Epiphany Institute + Consulting and was instrumental in helping the Episcopal Church Foundation establish an alliance with Kanuga Conference Center to offer the annual Church Leadership Conference. Dr. Ferebee is the author of *Cultivating the Missional Church* (Morehouse/Church Publishing, 2012). (<https://www.churchpublishing.org/cultivatingthemissionalchurch>)

Try This

Randy invites us to consider three pathways in our search for addressing not only the challenges our congregations may presently face but also in response to what God is calling us to do at this time. Have you explored opportunities for networking or collaboration that may exist in your local area? Here are three questions to get you started:

- In your congregation, what areas of mission would be fortified by a connection to the people with skills, talents and experiences of other churches?

- Is there an Episcopal congregation or one of our ecumenical partner churches with whom a partnership would be fruitful? Are there opportunities to collaborate with other local agencies or institutions to strengthen an existing a soup kitchen or school or clothing ministry (to name just a few) and also expand the heart of mission in your congregation?

- What other faith communities are in your area? Do any of them share common mission areas? What might you do together: share a building, serve a community need, do Christian formation? What other faith communities are in your area? Do any of them share common mission areas?

Resources

- "1 Church, 4 Locations," Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices' Vital Post <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/1-church-4-locations-2/>
- All Our Children: A network that promotes faith-rooted community partnerships with public schools. <http://www.allourchildren.org>

- *Cultivating the Missional Church*, Randy Ferebee (Morehouse/Church Publishing, 2012)
<https://www.churchpublishing.org/cultivatingthemissionalchurch>
- Episcopal Church Building Fund offers a rich compilation of possible uses, collaborations and opportunities to reach into the neighborhood
<http://www.ecbf.org/alternative-building-use/>
- Episcopal Church in Connecticut transition from deaneries to mission networks
<https://www.episcopalct.org/t3/> and a report from one of their new regional networks
<https://www.episcopalct.org/Blog/first-region-convocation-northeast-region-a-success-and-joy/>
- Episcopal Dioceses offering congregational consulting services include Massachusetts, Newark, Oregon, and Olympia (Western Washington)
<http://www.diomass.org/resources/congregational-consultants>
<http://www.dioceseofnewark.org/resource/congregational-consultant-program>
<http://www.diocese-oregon.org/the-diocesan-consultant-network/>
<http://www.cdcollege.org/consulting-network/>
- “From Outreach to Relationship,” Peggy Dahlberg, ECF Vital Practices’ Vestry Papers, September 2014
<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestry-papers/sharing-our-gifts/from-outreach-to-relationship/>
- “God Called. We’ve Got Work to Do,” Jacqueline J. Whitfield, ECF Vital Practices’ Vestry Papers, March 2015
<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestry-papers/advocacy/god-called-weve-got-work-to-do/>
- “Pooling Resources,” Nancy Davidge, ECF Vital Practices’ Vestry Papers, July 2014
<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestry-papers/leading-change/pooling-resources/>
- “Shattering the Status Quo,” Todd Ousley, ECF Vital Practices’ Vestry Papers, July 2013
<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/vision-planning/shattering-the-status-quo/>
- *The Starfish and The Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*, Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom (Portfolio Hardcover, 2006)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Starfish_and_the_Spider
- “Who Can You Call?,” Chris Meyer, ECF Vital Practices’ Vestry Papers, May 2014
<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestry-papers/finance-and-administration/who-can-you-call/>

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Expectations Matter: Have Faith

BY DOROTHY "D'RUE" MASSEY HAZEL

In 1971, during my preparation for confirmation, I experienced my first clergy transition. The rector of the congregation that I attended received a call to another diocese. In an instant I lost my priest, teacher, and one of the people that modeled Christ's love in my life. Even though I was in my early teens, the memories of that experience centered on loss and grief. The church home that I had known for the past seven years no longer felt the same. Shortly after a new priest was called my family left the congregation to join a church with a vibrant youth ministry. While the decision to depart from our congregation wasn't an easy one, the decision to leave was not about what the other church offered.

As I revisit that experience as a transition officer within The Episcopal Church, I am acutely aware that the decision to leave our home congregation was centered on the rector's departure and not the community of faith to which we belonged. Our family's feelings of loss eventually separated us from the community we had grown to love. The grief from that experience was evident in my own spiritual journey and

stayed with me for a long time.

As I work with congregations in transition, the emotions I felt in my teens are at times also quite palpable for members of vestries and search committees. Lay leaders will express, "If we don't get a priest soon our attendance and giving will decline." My response to such observations is always the same, "*What the leadership believes will happen after the departure of a rector or vicar will happen. If it is the expectation that attendance and giving will decline, it will. If the expectation that attendance and giving will increase, it will.*" Whether or not a congregation will engage in effective mission and ministry during a clergy transition rests primarily in the hands of its lay leadership.

Any transitional experience can be a catalyst for undue stress and strain in our otherwise normal lives. Seeking new careers, moving into a new home, children leaving for college, the death of a loved one are all examples of changes that can cause our day-to-day existence to become unpredictable. In such situations we are moved from places of routine and comfort to an

existence that seems unfamiliar. At the same time, it is within periods of transition that individuals have the greatest opportunity to proactively seek change that provides a better quality of life for ourselves, families, and the communities in which we exist. The key is to work through any grief or stress that transition brings and focus on the new opportunities, the new life that awaits. When lay leadership embrace periods of transition as opportunities for new life and strengthened vitality, congregations will flourish.

In the secular world athletes provide an example of the commitment needed for healthy transitions. Olympic gold medalist cyclist Kristen Armstrong views transition in this way:

"Times of transition are strenuous, but I love them. They are an opportunity to purge, rethink priorities, and be intentional about new habits. We can make our new normal any way we want."

Athletes understand that in the midst of training and competition, when efforts seem too great to bear, they push through the pain

and struggle while remaining focused on the goals that need to be accomplished. Lay leaders have that same ability in times of transition and the seeking of new clergy leadership. Below are some tools to help lay leadership on the transition journey:

- **Embrace your faith perspective:** In scripture there are countless examples of God's people in the wilderness. Revisit those stories and embrace the reality that, with God's help, the Promised Land will be realized.
- **Work through the pain and grief:** Take time to celebrate the life and tenure of the departing clergy person and all that has been accomplished together within the worshipping community. Grieve the departure if needed and rejoice in the new life and leadership that awaits.
- **Journey through transition in partnership with your diocesan bishop:** Seek assistance from your diocesan bishop's office and communicate regularly with the diocesan transition officer. Inquire about resources that are available to your congregation. Have honest conversation with your bishop or transition officer regarding the gifts and skills you are seek-

ing in new clergy leadership. Discover what leadership qualities the bishop values for your congregation. If there is unresolved conflict between the congregation and the bishop, seek reconciliation.

- **Prayer:** Involve the entire community in prayer as new clergy leadership is sought. Utilize the prayers in the Book of Common Prayer. Provide prayer cards for families to pray at home. Invite families to write and share prayers about the congregation's journey in seeking a new priest. Provide a prayer related to the transition for the congregation to pray together during corporate worship.
- **Identify your congregation's vocational purpose/mission:** If the congregation does not have an active strategic plan, make time to evaluate the vocational purpose and/or mission of the community. Determine what gifts and skills your congregation will need to support its mission.
- **Examine ministry priorities and objectives:** Evaluate what ministry initiatives will further your congregation's purpose. Strengthen what is working well and feel free to let go of things that may not be important.

- **Focus on the development of leadership:** Know there will be periods of anxiety and stress during a clergy transition. Seek resources that will enable the lay leadership to provide a non-anxious presence to the wider community. Recruit people outside of the vestry and search committee to actively engage in ministry initiatives that further the mission of the congregation.

- **Communication:** Identify three venues that leaders will utilize in communicating during the transition. Remind parishioners to check those communications regularly. Use the congregation's website to tell the story of your parish or mission. Ensure materials are updated and pictures are inviting. Websites are the first place candidates will visit to learn more about the position offered.

Dorothy "d'Rue" Massey Hazel, deacon, serves as canon for congregational development and administration in the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina.

Try This

In "Big Blue Skies and Transition" (<http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/big-blue-skies-and-transition/>) Rosa Lindahl Mallow offers this exercise to help individuals or vestries

transcend the limits of everyday thinking by imaging the vastness of the open sky above the mountains of the western United States:

“Against that horizon of eternity, what in our work is essential? How big, important and meaningful is any one decision, action, or situation? Looking at the immensity of the sky, I have to ask if I, or if my faith community, set goals that are too small, too safe, too limited, and too limiting? A time of transition brings with it a lot of anxiety and a desire to ‘get things right’ for the next part of the story. We try to manage as many aspects of change as possible and can get swamped in the details. Whether a group of leaders in your community has been asked to steward a process of transition or you yourself are in that situation, you might want to take some time to go out where your line of vision extends towards infinity, to a place that reminds you that Earth, our wonderful island home, is a sacrament of God’s spaciousness. It’s amazing what we are able to see as possibility in the spaciousness of God love.”

Resources

- Beginning the Clergy Transition Process, an ECF webinar by Dorothy “d’Rue” Massey Hazel <http://www.ecfvp.org/webinars/beginning-the-clergy-transition-process/>
- “Big Blue Skies and Transition,” Rosa Lindahl Mallow, ECF Vital Practices’ Vital Post <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/big-blue-skies-and-transition/>
- Resources for Clergy Transitions, ECF Vital Practices <http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/resources-for-clergy-transitions/>

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From Challenge to Opportunity

BY SUSAN ELLIOTT

These are uncertain times for the Church, and instinct tells us to hunker down and put all our efforts into protecting the life we know. But sometimes, facing into uncertainty and grappling with the questions that arise when there are not enough resources to support the traditional models bring creative solutions and renewed mission. God has said, "I am making all things new." That includes us.

Clergy leadership and employment are changing

We hear "part-time" and "bivocational" applied to Episcopal clergy more and more these days, as churches wrestle with declining membership, reduced income, aging buildings, and aging congregations. The transition to part-time clergy leadership is often seen as the only way a small, struggling congregation can survive.

The upswing in part-time clergy employment also affects new clergy, seminarians, and those considering ordination. Increasingly, seminarians and those exploring ordination are encouraged to consider a second occupation to supplement their income as an Episcopal priest.

Some find another way to exercise their call to ministry.

Dioceses play a key role

Full-time clergy transition is complicated enough, without restructuring the way authority and tasks are distributed and convincing congregations to accept a very different relationship with their clergy. It's difficult to set—and keep—boundaries for work so deeply connected to a congregation's life and faith. Often part-time clergy end up working full-time for part-time pay.

Full-time clergy transition is complicated enough, without restructuring the way authority and tasks are distributed and convincing congregations to accept a very different relationship with their clergy. It's difficult to set—and keep—boundaries for work so deeply connected to a congregation's life and faith. Often part-time clergy end up working full-time for part-time pay.

In response, Episcopal dioceses around the country are stepping up to help congregations transition from full-time clergy. While each diocese faces its own distinct challenges, there are some basic

themes in these efforts:

- Guidelines, advice and training for lay leadership
- Clear and fair practices for part-time clergy employment
- Support and encouragement for partnerships and creative collaborations that can provide full-time salaries and benefits for part-time clergy

One congregation's transition to part-time clergy

When the rector of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, Southbridge, in the Diocese of Western Massachusetts retired, the small, aging congregation had to move to part-time clergy leadership. Tamsin Lucey, then senior warden, and current senior warden, Nancy Waugh, were well schooled in congregational development and leading change. Knowing the value of communication and transparency about finances, their approach during this interim period focused on honest, corporate self-examination and creating a new, shared leadership model.

Their diocese provided a long-term supply priest, who encouraged the congregation to take a hard look at itself. In small groups and large, parishioners asked: *Why are we here...what is God's purpose for us today?*

They tried things, too. Sunday worship went from two services to one. A new approach to Sunday school brought some new families. A bond was formed with a Lutheran congregation that continues as a joint Bible study today. They developed a Mutual Ministry Covenant.

At the interim's end, the congregation called Richard Signore, a retired priest, to serve for two years as part-time priest-in-charge. They created systems for pastoral needs and emergencies when he isn't there, and work hard to see that he doesn't exceed the agreed-upon time commitment. Classrooms were rented to a YMCA Daycare program, helping them connect with their neighbors.

Earlier this year, they called Signore to be their rector. Part-time, of course.

A creative collaboration in Los Angeles

In 2013, Anna Olson, rector of St. Mary's Episcopal Church, a

Japanese-American congregation in Los Angeles' Koreatown neighborhood, was sure that the only full-time jobs available when the Nancy Frausto graduated from seminary would be in affluent congregations. But Olson was determined to see that Frausto, the first person ordained from one of LA's Spanish speaking congregations, had the full-time position she needed, one that would offer mentoring and a chance to do the "scrappy church ministry" that interested her.

Together, they created two part-time positions for Frausto—associate rector at St. Mary's and priest-in-charge at Iglesia Episcopal de la Trinidad (Trinity Episcopal Church), a struggling Latino/Hispanic congregation 2.5 miles from St. Mary's. Salary and benefits were cobbled together from the two churches, diocesan assistance, and grants that included an ECF Fellowship.

Trinity had been without a priest for two years, and Frausto spent most of her first year stabilizing operations and addressing pastoral concerns. Since then, she splits her time, working from St. Mary's several weekdays, running community gardens and classes to help the church connect with the surrounding Hispanic neighborhood. Once a month, the congregations worship

together at St. Mary's.

Now in its third year, Olson and Frausto's collaboration has:

- Made both churches stronger and healthier
- Helped St. Mary's reach out to its immediate neighbors and restart a Sunday Spanish language service
- Strengthened Trinity's mission and work in a community that needs a safe place
- Provided collegial support and companionship, strengthening both priests' ministries.

"If we'd had to deliver on exactly what we thought would be happening three years out, this would look like a failure," says Olson. "Yet if you were to come and worship with either congregation and see where they are now, there's no way you would see it that way." She sees that as a good argument for supporting ideas like this but "not being too tied to a specific set of measurable outcomes."

"Our job is to have a vision," says Olson. "God does what God will and our job is to go along."

The future

Current statistics on Episcopal congregations* — 34.5% with only part-time or unpaid priests, 11.1% without a priest, plate and pledge income down .7%; — are discouraging, but stories like Holy Trinity’s transition and Frausto and Olson’s partnership encourage us to support new models for clergy and congregational leadership.

Economics drive the rise in part-time clergy, but the concerns it raises are larger. It represents a major shift in the way we build the life and faith of our congregations and the way we prepare our leaders. It raises questions about what our churches will look like in the future. It’s important that we help one another see the possibilities—because there are always possibilities for growth.

Change always means struggle and letting go, but we’re resurrection people. Perhaps these words from Canadian singer/songwriter Leonard Cohen’s “Anthem” say it best:

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That’s how the light gets in.*

Susan Elliott is a writer and editor, working with ECF, Forward Movement, Renewal/Works, and parishes and other organizations in the Episcopal Church. She is the writer of ECF’s 2015 Vestry Resource Guide, and collaborates with Jay Sidebotham on “Slow Down. Quiet. It’s Advent,” published annually by Forward Movement.

In preparing this article she spoke with Dr. Matthew Price, Vice President for Research and Data, Church Pension Group; the Rev. Sarabeth Goodwin, Transitional Latino Missioner, Episcopal Diocese of Washington; Heidi Shott, Canon for Communication and Advocacy, Episcopal Diocese of Maine; and the Rev. Neysa Ellgren, Canon for the Ordinary, Diocese of Oregon, in addition to those named above. Each provided helpful background and perspective on this subject.

The Episcopal Church Foundation (ECF) has received a three-year grant as part of Lilly Endowment’s National Initiative to Address the Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders. ECF’s grant entitled “From Economic Challenges to Transformational Opportunities” will provide lay and clergy leaders of the Episcopal Church with resources, tools and other support to help address the financial and leadership challenges of congregational ministry in the 21st century. This article was made possible by

the Lilly Endowment grant. For more information on ECF’s Lilly Endowment Initiative go to www.episcopalfoundation.org

Try This

Individually, as a leadership team, or congregation (before trying any of these suggestions with a congregation, first try them with the leadership team)

1. Reflect on a time when you chose to make some change or transition in your life--perhaps you left or took a new job, started or ended a significant relationship.

a. What were the unexpected challenges and gifts in the time of transition?

b. What strategies or sources of support sustained you during that time of transition?

Now reflect on a change or transition in your life that you did not choose. Respond to the same two questions. How might those strategies support you now in the face of change or transition?

2. Practice stopping and identifying your emotions with regard to a specific event or issue you are facing. Identify what that feeling is telling you, and decide how you will get that need met. Share this with another while the listener practices being present and receiving what is shared; remember, all emotions are valid.
 - Holy Trinity Church Mutual Ministry Covenant, Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts (Print pdf from [ecfvp.org](http://www.ecfvp.org))
 - “Part Time ≠ Less Than,” Cathie Caimano, ECF Vital Practices’ Vestry Papers
<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestry-papers/transition-and-change/part-time-less-than/>
 - “Preparing for Lay Only Leadership,” Heather Barta, ECF Vital Practices’ Vestry Papers
<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestry-papers/facing-leadership-challenges/preparing-for-lay-only-leadership>
3. Take time during a vestry meeting to share how you and others are being good stewards of your emotional resources. Explore how vestry members can support each other in this effort.

Resources

- *Born of Water, Born of Spirit: Supporting the Ministry of the Baptized in Small Congregations* by Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook & Fredrica Harris Thompsett, Alban; 2010. This book shares the findings of a study of small churches and the ways in which they used the gifts of all the members of the congregation to create vital communities, with or without the benefit of regular clergy presence.
https://www.amazon.com/Born-Water-Spirit-Supporting-Congregations-ebook/dp/B00JNLQWY0?ie=UTF8&*Version*=1&*entries*=0
 - “Shared Leadership,” Beckett Stokes, ECF Vital Practices’ Vestry Papers
<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestry-papers/leading-change/shared-leadership/>
- Don't miss an issue of Vestry Papers! Sign up for your free subscription here. <http://www.ecfvp.org/account/register>***

Transition Planning

BY SUSAN TAMBORINI CZOLGOSZ

"If agency is indeed an important antidote to uncertainty, people need to understand how they can play their appropriate role."

- J. Russ Crabtree, *Transition Apparitions*

All Souls Episcopal Church is a smaller congregation of joy and vitality. It is making a difference as it is a place where the Good News of Jesus is being made real and lives are being transformed. What contributed to this sense of joy and vitality? Leadership at All Souls anticipated the retirement of its rector.... three years before his leaving.

No, the congregation was not fully aware of the retirement date. However, the vestry was well aware of the coming transition. Instead of waiting until it the retirement was upon them, they chose to plan ahead in order to ensure the momentum of the life of their congregation. They assessed the strengths and needs of their current ministries and the needs of their surrounding community; they engaged in a thorough audit of their physical plant, their finances, and especially of their congrega-

tion's culture, energy, satisfaction, and priorities for the future; and they created action steps for the next three years. In essence, they created a vision and strategic plan for the transition from their current rector to their next.

A clergy transition in the life of a congregation is not and should not be a disruptive event in the life of a congregation. It should be regarded as a piece of a continuous succession planning mindset; a witness to the nature of our faith life. When part of the ongoing visioning process, a clergy transition can become a key pathway to increased congregational vitality; without this, it may become a time of high risk. The outcome of the transition essentially rests on the intentionality of congregational leaders, the intentionality of their mindset, and the organizational intelligence they gather to make critical decisions.

Decisions as to whether or not to use an interim minister, and about the search/call process have been the typical foci of the clergy transition process. Diocesan resources are available to assist congregations during this part of the transition process. What's not as com-

mon are resources directed at this broader process of planning ahead for a clergy transition. While not all transitions can be planned for, the notion of succession planning should be integral to any congregational leadership system and practice. We need to develop pastoral transition training for resigning pastors, lay leaders, and congregations."

Succession planning is a visionary and strategic mindset, a strategic view broader than the transition from one clergy leader to the next, beyond the search process for a new rector. With such a mindset, congregational leaders pay attention to the culture of their organizational system, to the experiences of their members, to the strengths and limitations of their communal life, to the articulation of their purpose and how their ministries embody that purpose, and to the needs of the world outside the doors of the church. Attention to these factors informs succession planning: What kind of leaders (both clergy and lay) can take the congregation into a vital future? What experiences and training will prepare leaders to lead in effective ways? What kinds of ongoing

data and organizational intelligence are necessary to make informed decisions? These questions form the continuing vigilance of congregational leaders so that when the time of a pastoral transition inevitably happens, there is clear preparation for the process.

Considerations when a transition is imminent

This reflection takes particular focus on the time of transition planning immediately before a retirement/leave taking and the time after a new rector has been called. Leaders need to have a sense of mastery over the succession process and clarity about what to focus on besides the hiring of an interim and the naming of a search committee.

Once it is known that a pastoral transition will happen, leaders have a number of fiduciary responsibilities to consider:

1. How do we manage this transition effectively?
2. How will we effectively sustain our ministries?
3. How do we graciously say goodbye to our rector?
4. How do we prepare ourselves for the next rector?
5. How do we prepare our next rector for the beginning of ministry in this congregation?

6. How do we produce cohesion within the congregation at a time when this is most important?

These fiduciary responsibilities begin with leaders developing a vision for the transition process: How might we imagine a transition that is healthy, celebratory, transparent, non-anxious, filled with gratitude and hope? How do we engage the entire enterprise of this transition from God's perspective?

The transition work from the time of the resignation/retirement announcement of the rector to planning for the arrival of the next rector has many layers. The following checklist provides some directional hints:

Pastoral:

- What are the needs of the outgoing rector and his/her family?
- What kind of celebration of ministry would they find most appropriate for a healthy goodbye?
- What kind of support system would be helpful as they prepare to leave?

Spiritual:

- What are our spiritual resources?

- How do we keep the congregation engaged and how do we provide them a sense of agency in this process?
- What spiritual disciplines and prayer life might the leadership and the congregation engage in to direct their hearts toward God's desire for this transition process? For example, All Souls began a two-month adult forum series where the entire congregation was invited into a recommitment of their spiritual development. A new spiritual discipline was taught and practiced weekly, including Lectio Divina, Centering Prayer, Ignatian Examen, Zen Meditation, and simple Yoga and breathing exercises. These experiences motivated the congregation to create spiritual discipline groups, some were in person gatherings, and others were online groups. They were intentional in their focus on God's will for the future of their congregation, and participants testified that the most important by-product was the strengthening of their relationships with God *and* with one another.

Organizational:

- What is our vision for this transition time?

- Peacemaker Ministries <http://peacemaker.net/espanol/>
 - Adequate communication throughout the congregation?
 - What resources are available to us as we enter this transition? Who are the key players?
 - How do we care for other staff members?
 - Taking a thorough audit of our financial health – what resources do we have now – what resources will be available to us in the future – what resources do we need for the future?
 - How do we create a healthy boundary with our out-going rector (a letter of separation)?
 - Taking a thorough audit of the physical plant – what aspects of our building and grounds need attention and what can wait – what are the costs involved?
 - **Start up plan for the next rector:**
 - How will we assist with the relocation of the next rector and family?
 - What additional financial resources might we need for this transition time?
 - Welcome activities/celebrations – internal and in the local community? Office set-up?
 - What kinds of organizational intelligence do we need to make good decisions throughout the transition?
 - Communications: internal and external?
 - What are our goals for the time between rectors – do we need healing/reconciliation?
 - Orientation to the facility, operations and technology?
 - Are there program or administrative issues that need attention?
 - Organizational data: policies, procedures, congregational assessment results, meeting minutes?
 - What congregational strengths can be called upon?
 - Scheduling of introductions: formal and informal gatherings?
 - How do we ensure open and
 - Vision for the first three to six months, the next year?
- A clergy transition in the life of a congregation can be a time of life

giving possibility or a time of chaotic, stressful, herky-jerky movement from one leader to another. Who we are and what we do as people of faith is shaped by the nature of our organizational life and the God we worship. Our planning and our processes in times of transition are organizational, interpersonal, and spiritual. How we minister to one another, to the outgoing and incoming rectors are a convincing witness to our authenticity of faith. All of our actions are consequential and reflect Christ. Will we be keenly aware of God in our midst and act out of a commitment to faith? Will we demonstrate love to one another and reach out beyond our zones of comfort to assist the transition process? Will we possess a positive, hopeful spirit? We certainly can be known by our acts of Christian generativity and maturity. It takes our focused intentionality.

***Susan Tamborini Czolgosz** is a church and organizational development consultant, specializing in congregational and middle judicatory vitality. She has provided consulting to a broad range of organizations – Fortune 500 companies, not-for-profit agencies, and middle judicatories and churches of various denominations throughout the Chicago metro area and the*

United States. In her work with judicatories and churches, she provides guidance in transition and search processes, leadership development, strategic planning, congregational vitality, and conflict mediation. Susan has 15 years of experience as a healthcare executive and four years as a counselor/therapist. Her graduate work is in counseling psychology, followed by combined graduate studies in business and theology, and holds certificates in conflict mediation.

Susan has worked on the Bishop's staff in the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago and currently serves as consultant to the diocesan program for the Thrive program for congregational development. She is also affiliated with Holy Cow! Consulting. With Holy Cow she is the director of training for equipping for the use of organizational intelligence instruments designed by Holy Cow. She also affiliated with Samaritan Center for Congregations in Naperville, Illinois. There she is a judicatory and congregational consultant and educator.

Try This

Susan's considers a clergy transition as part of the fabric of a congregation. She counsels congregational leaders to think of – and plan for - it as part of their ongoing

strategic thinking and vision. As a vestry, what's your response to this statement?

“Succession planning is a visionary and strategic mindset, a strategic view broader than the transition from one clergy leader to the next, beyond the search process for a new rector. With such a mindset, congregational leaders pay attention to the culture of their organizational system, to the experiences of their members, to the strengths and limitations of their communal life, to the articulation of their purpose and how their ministries embody that purpose, and to the needs of the world outside the doors of the church.”

Resources

- All Souls Episcopal Church, Miami Beach, Florida
www.allsoulsmb.org
- The Congregational Assessment Tool, available through Holy Cow! Consulting,
www.holycowconsulting.com
- The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken about Pastoral Transitions, J. Russell Crabtree and Carolyn Weese, Jossey-Bass, 2004.

<http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0787972576.html>

- Ignation Model for Scriptural Reading (pdf), overview offered by Susan Tamobrini Czolgosz and Joseph Czolgosz
- Lecto Divinia (pdf) offered by Susan Tamobrini Czolgosz and Joseph Czolgosz
- The Method of Centering Prayer, The Prayer of Consent, Thomas Keating © 2006 Contemplative Outreach, Ltd (pdf) <http://coutreach.org/documents>
- Succession Planning Worksheets (pdf), Holy Cow! Consulting, adapted by Susan Tamobrini Czolgosz <http://www.episcopalreliefdevelopment.org/episcopal-relief-development/>
- Transition Apparitions: Why Much of What We Know about Pastoral Transitions is Wrong, J. Russell Crabtree, Magi Press, 2015.
<https://holycowconsulting.com/publications/transitions/>

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Where Is the Invitation Here?

BY BR. JAMES KOESTER, SSJE

Listening Deeply to the Self, the Other, and God

Listening, not speaking, is the primary stance in which revelation occurs. This is true both in our prayer and in our discernment with others. When we listen deeply, as individuals and as a group, we can begin to let go of our own personal aims and listen together for the will of God moving in and through us.

As a Brother in the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, I experience listening as directly connected to obedience, one of the three vows that we take upon profession. Now obedience means something very different in the monastic context than in the colloquial one: It is not about authority, nor is it some promise to follow by rote every ruling passed down from those above us. Rather, this is a vow about listening and it's the one that shapes our community life. As our Society's Rule defines it, obedience "is a promise to work together to discern God's will as a body and act in concert to God's glory." All of us, as members of Christ's Body, are called to practice obedience in

this sense of common engagement and deep listening. When people asked Jesus, "What is the most important commandment?" he replied by quoting the Shema: "Hear, O Israel." The English word "obedience" comes from the Latin root *obaudire*, which means to listen deeply. That is where we are to begin, congregations, vestries, and monastics alike: We listen. (http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Scripture/Torah/The_Shema/the_shema.html)

While certainly no vestry would take a vow of obedience, I imagine most vestries could benefit from knowing more about how the monastic practice of obedience asks us to listen. Perhaps most of all because it presupposes some letting go of individual desires to benefit the common good. Our Rule explains, "Monastic obedience gives us constant practice in letting go of attachment to our individual preferences and learning to trust in the wisdom of the community. It trains us to be resilient and prompt in responding to the Lord in the here and now." It places us in a receptive posture, the prime posture from which to

listen deeply.

When engaged in listening, the question I always find helpful to ask is, "Where is the invitation here?" "To what is this person, or this situation, or this challenge inviting them – me – us?" In raising this question, we aim to engage with the whole person as we listen; to recognize that their life, their experience, their givens, are very different than my own; they're coming to this from a completely different angle, which needs to be recognized and honored. When I recognize the wholeness of another's experience, it becomes much harder to dismiss them when I encounter conflict or differences of opinion. If somebody is reacting to an issue badly, or strangely, or oddly, or negatively, rather than dismissing them, or arguing back with my own position, I ask: "Where is the invitation here?" It may be that what I'm hearing actually has more to do with what happened to this individual last week, or last year, than it does with what's in the room right now. Rather than just thinking "They're nuts," I try to ask them "What do you think is behind this reaction?" And if I

cannot do that, then at least I admit that there's clearly more going on here than I know; at least I recognize that I don't have the whole picture.

Deep listening may lead to unexpected places

We Brothers recently experienced a concrete example of this kind of deep, receptive listening in our monastic internship program, which hopes to help young people discern the next steps of their lives. The program was begun a few years ago at the instigation of our late brother, Tom Shaw, who was reading the signs of the times that he was experiencing as bishop: especially how young adults are searching for authentic community and rich worship, a connection with the environment, and the desire to serve. We began the monastic internship program to meet these needs. As these young people live and work alongside us for a year, we've found that it provides an exceptional opportunity for listening deeply to them in the totality of their being. We encounter them over the dishes, in mentoring relationships, in profound conversations, in worship, and in all kinds of silliness. Because we can engage the whole person – rather than just aspects of the person, like “straight-A student” or “son” – we can listen in a very multidimensional way. And this is

not the way they're used to being listened to. In fact, it's often the first time that these individuals have been listened to and treated as whole adults, rather than as students or sons and daughters. They've shown us again and again the transformation that happens when a person's full humanity is recognized and honored in discernment.

This happened quite profoundly with one young woman named Tedi. It was amazing watching her transformation. At first, she came to us as a fairly typical university graduate, who rebelled against having to do the same thing every day at the same time. But over the course of the internship, she discovered that she really thrived under the discipline of a fairly ordered life. She discovered in herself a need for this sense of stability, as well as the freedom to be found in order, routine, and repetition. In our conversations with her, she began to ask where else in the world there might be such an ordered life. I think she was quite surprised in the end – as were we – when she signed up for the Marines! Three years later, she is thriving in that life.

She recently wrote to us from Okinawa, where she is serving as an officer: “The environment during my internship provided me with the kind of focus necessary

to dedicate myself to the vocation that called to me in that time. Listening and being listened to was a vital part of the decisions I made and the success that I found. The decision to join the military was the biggest decision I'd ever had to make, and it was the first decision that I felt I needed to make solely on my own. I decided not to inform my family or ask their opinion, because after all, I alone would be the one responsible for all actions to follow. I had many discussions with the Brothers regarding that decision, and their words of encouragement gave me the strength and insight that I needed to push forward on my journey.”

Tedi reflects back to us one final, crucial point about listening: Listening well to others requires that we listen well to ourselves. Again, an insight from our Rule's chapter on obedience: “The vow of obedience requires us to be constantly attentive to the voice of the Spirit within our hearts, endowing us with our own unique authority and gifts. We are called to be obedient to our true selves as they are being formed in Christ. Only where there is a growing respect for our true selves can there be authentic participation in the community's common endeavor to discern and carry out God's will.” Listening deeply enables us to grow in obedience to the

Spirit's voice, speaking deep within us.

Be willing to be surprised

When we listen deeply, engaging the wholeness of the other people in the group, we can make room for real surprises. When we're too agenda-oriented, we can miss the ideas waiting beyond the margins of the practical and the necessary. It can be transformational, from time to time, to invite one another to discover and listen to our wildest ideas and inspirations.

In her reflections on her own discernment process during the internship program, Tedi shared with us how meaningful such free play was for her:

I recall quite clearly the particular exercise that helped guide me to where I am today. We had to list anything and everything we could imagine ever doing in our lives, without limitations. I had a two-page list, ranging from learning to play the piano, to building my own house. On that list however, there was one thing that was heavily dependent on time and circumstance. I only listed it out of curiosity. And that was to become a United States Marine. The more I contemplated, the more I read over my list repeatedly, the more

I saw that was the only thing that had to be done while I was of a certain age and able-bodied. The tipping point that really made me jump and dive into the process was the fact that opening that door did not close a single other door on my list. I could become a Marine and still strive to do the multitude of other projects or vocations that my imagination cooked up for me that day.

Tedi surprised herself – and us – in the decision she ultimately reached by listening to what this time of brainstorming revealed about her deepest desires.

Don't go into a conversation with your mind already made up

One of the most helpful pieces of advice I have ever received was to keep an open mind. All too often we go into a situation knowing what we want to hear or knowing the outcome that we want. Real listening involves a willingness to have our minds changed and our hearts set on fire because we are willing to be converted by another. Real listening is a willingness, on our part, to be converted.

In our Rule's chapter on obedience, we read how "it is a pledge to listen to the voice of the Spirit

speaking within the heart and to respond to God's invitations to self-surrender." God loves to catch us unawares. In your times of discernment, be ready to be surprised by where the Spirit might be leading you.

Br. James Koester, SSJE, was born and raised in Saskatchewan, Canada. After serving parishes in British Columbia, he came to the United States in 1989 to test his vocation with the Society of Saint John the Evangelist in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He currently serves as the Superior of the community.

Try this

Make Room for Silence

It's hard enough to find silence in our own lives; it can be almost impossible to do so in a group setting. Yet silence is essential to deep listening – alone, as well as in a group of two or twenty! Sometimes an individual needs a minute or two to be able to put into words what they are thinking and feeling. If other people are constantly jumping in, then they may never be able to do that internal, archeological work that allows them to speak from the heart.

I see this all the time in spiritual

direction: somebody will say something and there will be a moment of silence; then without any prodding on my part, they'll say something else, which has taken them down to a slightly deeper level; they'll sit with that for a minute and then they'll say something else, which is even deeper. The silence has allowed something deeper to emerge, so that we end up talking not about the first thing that they said, but about the fifth thing. If I'd responded immediately to item A, we would never have gotten down to items C or D.

In your vestry meetings, try building intentional times of silence into your conversations, so that people can really listen to what is being said. Used in this way, silence honors what has already been said, by not overlaying it immediately with something else. We value silence not because there aren't important things to be said –there are – but because there are good things to hear, which we might miss without the silence that invites them forth.

Resources

- “Listening Across Difference,” Nancy Davidge, ECF Vital Practices Vital Post <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/listening-across-difference/>
 - The Rule of the Society of Saint James the Evangelist <http://ssje.org/ssje/category/rule-of-life/>
- Don't miss an issue of Vestry Papers! Sign up for your free subscription here. <http://www.ecfvp.org/account/register>***
- “Listening Campaign,” Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices Vital Post <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/listening-campaign>