

Transformative Vestries
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Five Ways to Become a Transformational Vestry

Donald Romanik

We talk a lot about transformation in the Episcopal Church and perhaps, at times, that word is overused. But more and more our local congregations need to become transformational faith communities as we strive to preach, teach and live out the good news of the Gospel. Transformation is a dynamic, spirit-filled process through which we grow, revitalize, engage in mission, adapt to change and prepare for the future.

For faith communities, transformation involves moving from the idea of membership to that of discipleship; from just raising money to nurturing stewardship; from recruiting volunteers to developing leaders; and from perpetuating clergy-centric models to promoting health lay-clergy partnerships. But who is going to do this important work?

Clearly, we need to raise up, empower and deploy faithful and committed leaders who will ensure that our congregations are ready, willing and able to engage in this critical work of transformation. And, in our Anglican/Episcopal tradition, the primary group of leaders charged with this task is the vestry.

Before I became President of the Episcopal Church Foundation (ECF) in 2005, I had served on vestries (or their equivalent) in a family-size parish as well as the Cathedral in the Diocese of Connecticut for almost twenty years. I also served as warden (or its equivalent) in both congregations including times of transition. My vestry service was interesting, challenging and rewarding and, at times, frustrating, exhausting, overwhelming and yes, transformational. The experience has shaped my overall leadership style and been a critical, formational component in my role as head of an organization that supports vestry members and other lay and clergy leaders of Episcopal congregations of all sizes and shapes. I look back to my vestry service with fondness and gratitude.

Ideas to help vestries move from transactional to transformational

While ECF provides a myriad of tools and resources for parish leaders, especially vestries, I thought it might be helpful to articulate five ideas that might make your vestry less transactional and more transformational. But remember, this is a process, and it may take some time and energy to move your vestry to a more transformational posture.

1. *Vestry service is holy and collaborative work.* Contrary to the traditional concept of the role of vestries, it's not just about the budget, the buildings or the boiler. Vestry service is a whole lot more. In essence, the vestry, in partnership with the rector or priest in charge, is responsible for overseeing the spiritual, missional, strategic, administrative and fiduciary aspects of the congregation. While particular individuals, especially the clergy, are charged with specific roles and responsibilities, the work of a vestry is a team effort with mutual accountability. It is holistic and comprehensive.
2. *Vestry members need to represent the entire faith community.* Despite your personal involvement in specific ministries or programs, e.g., choir, altar guild or outreach, as a vestry member you must represent the entire congregation and cannot serve as an advocate or spokesperson for a particular constituency, activity or special interest group. When making tough decisions, you need to consider the total needs of the congregation from a missional and strategic point of view, especially when it comes to issues of budgets or allocation of resources.
3. *Each member of the vestry is valuable and unique.* When you serve on a vestry, you should bring the totality of your prior experiences to the table whether personal, familial, spiritual or vocational. Don't be afraid to share your expertise or insights especially in complex or technical areas. Your feedback is important. At the same time, realize that as part of a team you must listen to other voices, even those who may not have the same background or point of view as you.
4. *Model discipleship.* Vestries are not just boards of directors of church-related, non-profit organizations. While you have important business to conduct, your primary role is to discern and implement what God is calling your congregation to be and do in a particular time and place. And this can only happen if the vestry, as a whole as well as its individual members, engage in regular and ongoing spiritual practices including worship, prayer, bible study, retreats and sharing individual faith stories. Your vestry experience should be a unique opportunity to become more spiritually grounded. It should advance your lifelong journey toward discipleship and your capacity to model that journey for others.
5. *Don't do it alone.* Vestry service should not be an isolating or lonely experience, even when dealing with critical issues or serious conflict. First of all, remember that God is an important part of the equation. That is why spiritual practices should be a regular part of vestry meetings and other gatherings. You also have each other – fellow parishioners, who, like you, are contributing their time, talent and treasure for the good of the community. Trust in yourself and each other. You also have outside resources to assist you with your work, including other parishes, diocesan officials and yes, the [Episcopal Church Foundation](http://www.ecfvp.org). As you live into your mission, remember that ECF is here to walk alongside you on this important journey of faith and commitment.

An opportunity and not a grim task

I also want to suggest transformational vestry service needs to be personally fulfilling, life-giving and fun. It is an awesome responsibility to lead a congregation, especially in times of diminishing numbers and resources. But these are also times of incredible opportunities for innovation and for exploring new ways to be the Body of Christ. It is a time to celebrate and rejoice. All of us have busy lives and lots of demand on our time and energy, but you will best serve yourself, your family, your

colleagues and your entire congregation, when you approach your vestry membership with a sense of joy and wonder.

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Resources:

- [Top Ten Ways to Thrive as a Vestry Leader](#) by Greg Syler, ECF Vital Practices blog, March 19, 2019
- [Vestry as Body of Christ](#) by Ken Howard, Vestry Papers, January 2013
- [How We Gather 'Round the Table](#) by Brian Prior, Vestry Papers, January 2019
- [Vestry As a Life-Giving Team](#) by Chris Holmes, Vestry Papers, January 2019

Multiculturalism: It's Not Optional

Caleb Tabor

Serving on and maintaining a church vestry is a challenge and a blessing. Almost anyone who has been on a vestry or worked with one will tell you that. A vestry brings the community's voices, wisdom and diversity of experience to the table to think and pray about the congregation's past, present and future. At the same time, I'm sure almost anyone reading this can see the million-and-a-half places where this can go awry and end up in tension, disagreement and just flat-out anger.

It becomes all the more complicated when we try to cultivate a vestry culture that doesn't reflect the segregated social culture. A properly multicultural vestry is an uphill challenge. Most places in our society tend to be segregated to a certain extent – sometimes self-segregated for various reasons, sometimes forced for prejudicial ones. A multicultural vestry is a countercultural idea in many ways, and there just aren't many models we can look to for guidance.

Unity, not uniformity

One of the first and most constructive things we did at St. Cyprian's, where I serve as vicar, was to ditch the idea that being a multicultural vestry was optional and make it a requirement. We wanted diverse groups represented and made diversity a part of the vestry's mission. We understood this as a spiritual imperative, in keeping with Jesus Christ's association with a diverse cadre of people in the gospels. The Book of Acts also shows us a wide variety in the early church, ranging from the Ethiopian eunuch, who represents ethnic and sexual/gender diversity, to the apostles at Pentecost, blessed with the gift of speaking in different world languages. Knowing that being multicultural isn't just a buzzword, but an intrinsic part of the Christian way of life since the time of Christ, helps keep the commitment as a priority.

God gave us the spiritual resources to engage one another in a spirit of unity, not uniformity. A multicultural vestry really appreciates and lives that out. Great, fantastic, you might be thinking. But how do we go beyond just committing to the concept and to actually doing it?

Building trust is key

The next step in the process is building trust. This is really key and not a “one and done” kind of deal. A multicultural vestry may have to go the extra mile to build and maintain trust among its members. This happens over time and experience. Sharing meals and praying together, along with a commissioning ceremony at the start of a new vestry, have all been helpful for us. Additionally, things like planning vestry retreats and making sure to ask all the members what they’d like to do or have happen are great steps toward developing trust.

Communication involves listening as well as speaking

Another key aspect is communication. Don’t be afraid to share your thoughts and ideas. Vestry meetings can be an uncomfortable place to speak for all kinds of reasons – lack of confidence in language skills, general nervousness with speaking, etc. Once initial trust is built, we have to learn to trust further that our fellow vestry members will listen to us, and to do that we must speak.

Alongside that, if others need help expressing themselves, be sure that you’re helping them and not just inserting your words into their mouths. Part of good communication is genuinely listening to other folks’ perspectives and ideas. It doesn’t have to mean agreeing, but it does mean being respectful. Miscommunication is common in multicultural situations, and can trigger all kinds of sensitivities and emotions. Listening is a hugely important step in reaching a level of personal understanding.

Contextualizing experience

A multicultural vestry needs to cultivate a universal sense of humility among its members. Not the humility that thinks poorly of yourself or lets others steamroll over you, but one that recognizes that a single person or culture doesn’t know everything or have all the answers to life and our various circumstances. Be open to learning from and genuinely appreciating those who are different from you. Appreciate those differences – don’t just gloss over them. Loving one another in spite of differences or pretending they don’t exist is a recipe for disaster and is unsustainable.

Part of appreciating differences means understanding that people differ in their sense of what may offend or hurt someone. Being careful not to universalize our own experiences and making space for the different experiences of others helps us see and respect their struggle and pain. If trust has been done well, then failures to understand or respect another can be largely avoided, or if encountered, navigated with grace and care, without fracturing the community.

Remember that while people’s experiences often reflect their larger group, they do not “speak for” those groups. An opinion may be common in a particular community, but no one can speak for everyone. Be careful to avoid expecting a single person to carry the voice of a whole community of people.

Overall, navigating a multicultural vestry rests upon grace. Cultivating that deep sense of grace within the vestry group and its individual members will go a long way in making a place where people feel at home enough to have candid conversations, whether about challenging issues or run-of-the-mill matters. Being a multicultural vestry is a requirement if we are going to have a multicultural church. Having a multicultural church is a requirement if we are going to embody the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our place and time.

***Caleb Tabor** is vicar of St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church, a bilingual, multicultural congregation in Oxford, North Carolina. He was educated at Elon University, Emory University and Virginia Theological Seminary. Originally from North Carolina, he has settled close to home in Durham, where he lives with his husband, Logan. Theology, coffee, comedy, creative writing, meditation, queer issues and drag queens are just a few of the things that keep him occupied in mind, body and soul.*

Resources:

- [Leadership in Multicultural and Multiracial Congregations](#) (Alban Institute)
- [Build a Healthy Vestry](#) by Janie Kirt Morris, Vestry Papers, January 2013
- [Facing Differences](#) by William M. Kondrath, Vestry Papers, March 2013
- [Building a Diverse Vestry](#) by Anna Olson, Vestry Papers, January 2019
- [Learning To Be the People of God—In Two Languages](#) by Sandra Montes, Vestry Papers, January 2018
- [Struggling to Become a Multicultural Church](#) by Miguel Escobar, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 7, 2011
- [Investing in a Multiracial Vision of Church](#) by Kenji Kuramitsu, Vestry Papers, November 2017

Into the Heart of God

Beth Hunt

After years of spiritual wandering, I joined the Episcopal Church a decade ago, finding my first home in a large congregation led by a vestry filled with long-time members who had waited for years to be elected. One of those members was the friend who had led me to become an Episcopalian. I found her stories about vestry work fascinating. With the requisite amount of discretion, of course, she talked about all she was learning about resolving personnel issues and disagreements among staff, dealing with budget concerns and caring for an aging building and all it held.

I remember thinking, “What an enormous task. Thank God she is part of this.”

Several years later, I realized that belonging to a congregation so far away from home was limiting my connection to God and community. For years I had driven past St. Mark's Episcopal, the

“beautiful little church on the hill” near my house. One Sunday, my daughter and I decided to see whether it fit.

It fit so well that I was asked to run for vestry a couple years later. I was concerned about the time commitment at first, primarily because of what I'd seen of my friend's experience. After much prayer and several conversations with others, I decided to take the leap knowing God would see me through.

A blessedly different approach

I discovered quickly that serving on the vestry at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Huntersville, North Carolina, is beautifully, blessedly different.

There is business to be conducted, of course. And there are difficult decisions to be made. But the cornerstone of St. Mark's vestry is spiritual connection and prayerful discernment as we seek to travel deeper, both individually and as a group, into the heart of God.

Our vestry year begins with a spiritual retreat away from the hustle and bustle of our daily lives. The nine of us gather with our rector in a beautiful part of God's kingdom to be still, to pray, to learn from one another and to grow. From the moment we arrive on Friday afternoon, you can feel the Holy Spirit moving among us. Our time is given to fellowship, prayer, discernment and discussion. We conduct no church business during these 36 hours, but focus on our souls, our relationships with one another and our desire to know Christ and make him known.

In 2019, our retreat began with a study of the life and Rule of St. Benedict. Our goal was to become familiar with the basic tenets of his teachings and to commit as a vestry to living them and sharing our experience with the congregation. The commitment to St. Benedict and his teachings that grew out of that retreat has brought us peace as individuals, drawn us closer as a group and allowed us to interact with our congregation in more spiritually meaningful ways.

Spiritual connection and prayerful discernment

Our monthly vestry meetings are similarly structured around fellowship, prayer, discernment and discussion. We start with an individual welcome to each member, a heartfelt prayer and a scripture reading, chosen and read by one of us to help us connect more deeply in the moment with each other and with God. The chosen prayers and passages and the questions that accompany them inspire conversation about scripture and its application to our lives now and in the future. We note the words and ideas that resonate with us and talk about how we see God speaking to us through them.

This discussion, which runs 30 minutes or more, is the cornerstone of our meeting. It leads our minds and our hearts to a place where we can serve our congregation with love and compassion, and it helps us make decisions that are inspired by Jesus and his teachings. These days, we use the Rule of St. Benedict to guide our conversation, mindful that stability, humility and a willingness to modify our thinking are critical to making Christ-led decisions. From here, we move to the business of St. Mark's, respecting the vulnerability shared during our scripture reading and conversation.

As the meeting comes to a close, a member asks for our intercessions and prayers of thanksgiving. We pray for those together, offering each prayer in detail. It takes a while, five minutes or more, and is a lovely and loving way to end our time together before we head back into the world. There is something wonderful about walking out of our fellowship hall knowing that nine other people are praying for each one of us and our specific needs.

Commitment to spiritual growth

I recently ran into the friend mentioned earlier. Her vestry ended several years ago, and she asked how my time was going and whether I'd come to regret volunteering. I was pleased to tell her it's been the most spiritually rewarding thing I've ever done.

My experience on St. Mark's vestry has been dramatically different from my expectations. The work we do as vestry members on behalf of our church is important, and our commitment to each other's spiritual growth and needs is critical to our ability to do that work in the image of God. By centering our vestry around prayer, fellowship, discernment and discussion, we are better able to serve the needs of our congregation and our church, and to follow the will of God as we do so.

***Beth Hunt** has been a member of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Huntersville, N.C., for six years. She's a former business reporter, editor and media executive, who now focuses on recruiting and developing talent for newsrooms across the country. Beth is a delegate to the North Carolina Diocesan Convention and senior warden on St. Mark's vestry. She is married to Brian and mom to Shannon, 14, both of whom are mathematicians. In her free time, Beth is a chef, jewelry beader, fiction reader and recovering Diet Coke addict.*

Resources:

- [Cultivating a Culture of Discernment](#) by Blair Pogue, Vestry Papers, July 2010
- [Build a Healthy Vestry](#) by Janie Kirt Morris, Vestry Papers, January 2013
- [Build bonds of joy in a spirited retreat](#) by Donald Peeler, Vestry Papers, November 2009
- [Moving from Purpose to Spirit-Driven Meetings](#) by Richelle Thompson, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 7, 2012

An Open Letter to Vestry Members From a Youth Minister

Meredith Rogers

Dear Vestry Members,

We are all probably familiar with the concept of the bystander effect in the context of an emergency. Essentially, individuals are less likely to offer help to a victim when other people are present; the greater the number of bystanders, the less likely it is that one of them will help. In our

churches, we often fall into the same trap, standing by and assuming someone else will enter the lives of our young people to help them navigate adolescence.

The prayer for young persons in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer begins: *God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world...* This is just as true now as it was in 1979, if not more so. Continuing research proves that one of the most positive influences on a child's life is having one or more caring adult role models. If a child is lucky, they have one positive parent or guardian. It's easy to think that someone else will be that trusted adult who will have a positive influence on a child. But that's the bystander effect at play. You need to be that positive and caring adult. Not someone else – you.

Listen, ask questions, talk honestly, show support beyond church

In my work as a youth minister I often encounter adults, mostly when calling potential confirmation mentors, who are intimidated by youth and have no idea how to talk to them. It's often a fair assessment, as youth are consistently talking about youtubers or vines or using language that I don't understand — and I work with them regularly. However, I have a solution — talk to them. Rather than nodding idly and tuning out while they discuss a meme you may not understand, stop them when you don't get it, ask follow-up questions, get them to share that detail from their daily lives. I believe that everyone can be “good with kids,” but it requires that you care about their lives.

Be devoted to them as human beings and the formation of their faith. You do not have to have the answers to all their questions about religion, spirituality and faith. In fact, I encourage you to share your doubts. Lately, I have come to refer to this practice as a spiritual discipline of doubt, bringing things I struggle with to other people to discuss together. We don't often solve these issues, but we feel safe enough in community to commit a bit of heresy and to recognize the ways the Holy Spirit is working within our doubt. Hold that holy space with our young people.

Be involved in the life of youth and children outside of the church, ask parents or guardians about upcoming events and go to them. The best part of my work is showing up in their lives outside of the church walls. I always meet their friends and learn about some new gift they bring to the world that they may – or may not – share at church. In these spaces they often realize that the church is not just them attending a certain place, but a community, a family, that cares about their successes and supports them in their failures. It would be incredible if it was not just the volunteer or paid person who showed up for them in these events outside of their church lives.

Encourage and support your youth programming

Encourage your youth and children workers or volunteers to be involved in the process of leading families, children and youth in difficult conversations. If our families can't turn to their church in the face of the changes and chances of this life, where can they turn? Mental health, suicide, healthy sexual relationships, death, LGBTQIA+ issues, illness, and even politics should all be informed by our faith, but how often do we sit together and talk about them? God calls us to be in relationship with God and with each other, and we cannot ignore the hurt and pain in the world around us. Support your children and youth workers in their call to hold their hands on the wounds of the world. Being

in honest relationship with young people in our churches can be profoundly and positively transformational both for them and for you.

Finally, I implore you, when you face a budget crisis, when things must be cut back and you all are left with the difficult decision of how to make ends meet, not to cut funding for youth and children. We all are exceedingly aware of the decline in church attendance, waning pledge dollars and church budgets. Children and youth are not only the future of this church, they are its present. If you invest in them and their formation you will raise up well-formed leaders within your congregation, your diocese and our Episcopal Church.

God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world: Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sincerely,

Meredith Rogers
Director of Youth Ministries at St. Mark's Episcopal, San Antonio

***Meredith Rogers** serves as the Director of Youth Ministries at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in San Antonio, Texas. She is a strong advocate of mental health in ministry and the benefits youth can gain from a summer camping or retreat program.*

Resources:

- [Back-To-Church: Youth Outreach](#), by Annette Buchanan, ECF Vital Practices blog, September 12, 2017
- [Hands Off: Letting Teens Take the Lead](#) by Richelle Thompson, ECF Vital Practices blog, September 20, 2016
- [Too Young to Lead?](#) by Liz Luna, Vestry Papers, March 2016
- [Young People: Not Merely the Church's Future](#) by Vanessa Riutta, ECF Vital Practices blog, November 15, 2013

Cinco maneras de convertirse en una junta parroquial transformativa

Donald Romanik

Hablamos mucho sobre la transformación en la Iglesia Episcopal y tal vez, a veces, la palabra se emplea excesivamente. Pero cada vez más nuestras feligresías locales necesitan convertirse en comunidades de fe transformativas y al mismo tiempo aspirar a predicar, enseñar y vivir las buenas nuevas del Evangelio. La transformación es un proceso dinámico, pleno de espíritu mediante el que crecemos, nos revitalizamos, participamos en misión y nos preparamos para el futuro.

Para las comunidades de fe, la transformación involucra evolucionar de una idea de pertenecer a una de discipulado, es decir de simplemente recaudar fondos a cultivar la mayordomía, de reclutar voluntarios a desarrollar líderes, y de perpetuar modelos centrados en el clero a promocionar las asociaciones laico-sacerdotales. ¿Pero quiénes van a hacer ese trabajo tan importante?

Está claro que necesitamos elevar, empoderar y diseminar líderes fieles y dedicados que hagan que nuestras feligresías estén listas y dispuestas, y que sean capaces de participar en este trabajo crítico de transformación. Y, de acuerdo con nuestra tradición anglicana/episcopal, el grupo primario de líderes encargado de esta tarea es la junta parroquial.

Antes de asumir la presidencia de la Fundación de la Iglesia Episcopal (ECF) en 2005, fui miembro de juntas parroquiales (o su equivalente) de una parroquia pequeña y de la catedral de la Diócesis de Connecticut por casi veinte años. También fui guardián (o su equivalente) en ambas feligresías, incluyendo en épocas de transición. Mi participación en la junta parroquial fue interesante, retadora y gratificante y, a veces, frustrante, agotadora, sobrecogedora y sí, transformativa. La experiencia moldeó mi estilo de liderazgo general y ha sido un componente crítico, formativo en mi rol de presidente de una organización que apoya a los miembros de juntas parroquiales y a otros líderes laicos y sacerdotales de feligresías episcopales de todos los tamaños y formas. Recuerdo mi servicio en juntas parroquiales con cariño y gratitud.

Ideas para ayudar a las juntas parroquiales a evolucionar de transaccionales a transformativas

Si bien la ECF proporciona un sinnúmero de herramientas y recursos para líderes parroquiales, especialmente para juntas parroquiales, pensé que sería útil expresar cinco ideas que pueden hacer que su junta parroquial sea menos transaccional y más transformativa. Pero recuerde que este es un proceso y que, por lo tanto, puede requerir tiempo y energía hacer que su junta parroquial adopte una postura más transformativa.

1. *Servir en una junta parroquial es una labor sagrada y colaborativa.* A diferencia del concepto tradicional del rol de las juntas parroquiales, no es solo sobre el presupuesto, los edificios o la calefacción. El servicio en una junta parroquial es muchísimo más. En esencia, la junta parroquial, en asociación con el rector o el sacerdote a cargo, es responsable por supervisar los aspectos espirituales, de misión, estratégicos, administrativos y fiduciarios de la feligresía. Si bien personas específicas, especialmente miembros del sacerdocio, desempeñan papeles y asumen responsabilidades específicas, la labor de la junta parroquial es un esfuerzo en equipo con rendición de cuentas mutua. Es holística e integral.
2. *Los miembros de la junta parroquial deben representar a toda la comunidad de fe.* Independientemente de su participación personal en ministerios o programas específicos, tales como coro, cofradía del altar o extensión, como miembro de la junta directiva debe representar a toda la feligresía y no puede ser un defensor o portavoz de un grupo, actividad o grupo de interés específicos. Al tomar decisiones difíciles, debe considerar las necesidades totales de la feligresía desde un punto de vista de misión y estratégico, especialmente cuando se trata de temas vinculados al presupuesto o a la adjudicación de recursos.
3. *Todos los integrantes de la junta parroquial son valiosos y únicos.* Cuando sirve en una junta parroquial, debe aportar todas sus experiencias anteriores: personales, familiares,

espirituales y vocacionales. No tema compartir sus destrezas o conocimientos, especialmente sobre temas complejos o técnicos. Sus comentarios son importantes. Al mismo tiempo, sepa que debe prestar atención a otras voces, incluso a las que no compartan sus antecedentes o puntos de vista.

4. *Sea un modelo de discipulado.* Las juntas parroquiales no son solo juntas directivas de organizaciones sin ánimo de lucro vinculadas a iglesias. Si bien tiene asuntos importantes que tratar, su rol principal es discernir y poner en práctica lo que Dios está llamando a su feligresía a que sea y haga en un tiempo y espacio específicos. Y eso solo puede ocurrir si la junta parroquial en pleno, así como sus integrantes individuales, participan en prácticas espirituales permanentes y constantes que incluyen culto, oración, estudios bíblicos, retiros y compartir historias de fe. Su experiencia en la junta parroquial debe ser una oportunidad única para pasar a estar más enraizado espiritualmente. Debe avanzar su jornada de toda la vida hacia el discipulado y su capacidad de servir de modelo de esa jornada a otros.
5. *No lo haga solo.* El servicio en la junta parroquial no debe ser una experiencia aislante o solitaria, incluso al tratar temas críticos o conflictos serios. Ante todo, recuerde que Dios es la parte principal de su junta. Es por eso que las prácticas espirituales deben ser una parte constante de las reuniones de la junta parroquial. También se tienen los unos a los otros: feligreses de su parroquia que, al igual que usted, están contribuyendo su tiempo, talento y tesoro para el bien de la comunidad. Confíe en sí mismo y en el prójimo. También cuenta con recursos externos para ayudarlo con su trabajo, entre ellos otras parroquias, funcionarios diocesanos y, sí, la [Episcopal Church Foundation](#). Al vivir en su misión, recuerde que la ECF está presente para ir a su lado en esta importante jornada de fe y dedicación.

Una oportunidad, no una tarea sombría

También deseo sugerir que el servicio transformacional en una junta parroquial debe ser personalmente gratificante, vitalizante y divertido. Es una enorme responsabilidad liderar una feligresía, especialmente en épocas en que los números y los recursos están disminuyendo. Pero esas también son épocas de oportunidades increíbles de innovación y exploración de nuevas maneras de ser el Cuerpo de Cristo. Es un momento para celebrar y regocijarse. Todos llevamos vidas muy atareadas y tenemos muchas exigencias sobre nuestro tiempo y energía, pero usted servirá de la mejor manera a sí mismo, a su familia, a sus colegas y a toda la feligresía cuando aborde su participación en la junta parroquial con un sentimiento de alegría y maravilla.

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Recursos:

- [La Junta Parroquial como el Cuerpo de Cristo](#) por Ken Howard, Vestry Papers, enero de 2013
- [Formación de Juntas Parroquiales Sanas](#) por Janie Kirt Morris, Vestry Papers, enero de 2013
- [Orientación para la Junta Parroquial](#), un webinar de ECF presentado por Juan Ángel Monge, 6 de febrero, 2014
- [Mis diez puntos principales](#) por Scott Evenbeck, Vestry Papers, septiembre de 2003

Part of One Body

Mary Barber

As I write this, I am working on salvaging a retreat weekend. One of my seminary classmates and I have been planning the retreat for months, and now, a day before it was to happen, it is being canceled due to a situation completely out of our control. In the midst of my sadness and disappointment and through a series of emails and texts, we have worked out a plan B. The leaders and two stakeholders from the organization that was to participate in the retreat will gather anyway. I am feeling hopeful that something will come out of this – not what I had expected, perhaps, but perhaps something good, something from God. And I am reminded of the many times something like this happened when I was serving as warden of my home church.

When asked to be warden, I had already been a member of St. George's in Newburgh for over ten years. I had been confirmed there, had watched our daughters serve as acolytes and had legally married my wife there. She and I had sung in the choir together for years, and both of us had previously served on vestry. Still, there was something different about this, something that grabbed me and undeniably changed me.

One friend warned me against accepting a warden nomination. "It will ruin your spirituality," he said. "You will be trying to worship, and you'll notice the cracking plaster and all the things needing repair. Plus, people will be coming to you at coffee hour with all the problems." Yes, all this turned out to be true. Yet my friend's prediction didn't come to pass. In fact, I found the opposite to be the case – the work, even with its problems and frustrations, greatly awakened my spiritual life.

I was assigned to be the property warden, an area I basically knew nothing about. Other than killing the occasional bug or plunging a toilet, I am not a handy person at home. So in my first meetings, our buildings committee walked around so that I could see and learn about everything. We climbed up into the bell tower, and we stooped to walk through the labyrinthine dirt cellar, full of relics from past eras. And in that committee, I was opened to seeing for the first time a living example of the Body of Christ – everyone doing their part for this church with almost no property budget, quietly and without fanfare.

Now when I sat in worship, to be sure I was aware of the cracks and other flaws, but I could also look at the altar rail that one committee member had fixed, or the chair in the parish hall that another member had taken home and repaired. I could think with wonder on the many times that a repair or upgrade was identified and with little to no budget, people donated, volunteered, passed the hat and otherwise made amazing things happen.

Several months after my start as warden, we were preparing for an architect's survey, the first step on a long and deliberate path that led to a capital campaign and plan for structural restoration of the 200-year-old building. When the architect told us that all those cellar artifacts needed to go before the survey could be accurately done, the Body sprung into action. Over a weekend, building committee members and their spouses and friends dragged one thing after another up to the curb and swept away piles of debris. A good friend of the church hauled it all away in his truck.

Later, as a seminarian, I would say to my fellow chaplain interns, “doing God’s plan is funner when you do it together!” It’s what I learned from that building committee.

Even in less joyful times, I felt a strong sense of purpose in my time on the vestry. There were the boiler and furnace problems, tromping around in the cellar after a rain to find the leaks in the church’s two behemoth heating systems, and the daunting problems discovered in the survey conducted by the architect and engineer. By facing these things together – the rector, wardens, vestry and congregation – we got through them. We learned and grew together.

I don’t think it’s any coincidence that during this time, I started feeling the pull to pray more and in different ways than ever before. In silence, journal writing, spiritual reading and more frequent worship. In the prayer go-around at the end of vestry, I began to find my voice. I went to a workshop the rector led on the Daily Office, and was moved to start a weekly Evening Prayer at our church. There was a little fire growing inside me, something kindled in part by that innocent little “yes” I said to being warden.

And it all worked together. The well of prayer I was growing helped with the challenges. There was the difficult year when our small church community had eleven funerals. A couple years later, there was the morning when I sat with the rector in his office as we absorbed the shocking news that our music director had suddenly died of a heart attack. We sat quietly, talking out a way to move forward. We got through it, grieved and reflected and made a plan B. And prayed. Together.

This is not one of those “how I joined vestry and we grew our church into a bazillion people and we did tons of good works in the community” stories. To be sure, we did do a lot of great stuff at St. George’s in the almost four years I served on vestry. Church involvement and spiritual commitment grew during that time. I participated in two very successful plays, which brought local youth, and a nearby monastery in as partners. The capital campaign was successfully completed. Evening Prayer continued for a few years and involved other lay worship leaders. Our little church continued to do incredible outreach, operating a large food pantry and two youth programs.

But this is not what is foremost on my mind as I sit writing this, reflecting on how I am now halfway through my time at seminary. It is another signpost in my path to ordination as a priest, a path that I now realize I was already on when I was waking up to Christ’s body there in the St. George’s building committee. What is striking me most today is that body, that community – and how without others I likely would never have awakened to the presence of God right in front of me. Without that body, the fire inside might never have been kindled. Without that community, I would not be here now.

Now I am not trying to say that serving on the vestry will put you on the path to the priesthood. There is always a risk, of course! But your call is likely to be something entirely different. What I am saying is that we often discover our deepest gifts and deepest selves in community, by learning and growing and working and playing and being frustrated and grieving together. We become our truest selves as a part of one Body.

This, I learned while serving as a property warden.

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Resources:

- [You're a new warden: Now what?](#) by Donald Romanik, Vestry Papers, January 2009
- [Feeding your soul in the small church](#) by Kevin Spears, Vestry Papers, September 2009
- [Me And My Engineers: A Rector's Perspective On Selecting A Senior Warden](#) by Anna Olson, ECF Vital Practices blog, January 23, 2015
- [Lessons From a Senior Warden](#) by Anne Rudacille Schmidt, Vestry Papers, January 2017

The Sons of Korah

Nicole Foster

Attend an Episcopal church long enough and you'll hear people saying things like, "So you're on the vestry? Well, bless your heart"; or "Oh wow – you're on the vestry? There's a crown for you in heaven, for sure!" Add a look of surprise or concern with these statements and you've got the recipe for the average response to the idea of being on a vestry. What is it about serving on the vestry that causes such a reflexive response?

Protecting the worship of God

The responsibilities of vestry members are quite weighty. Vestry service can keep a person up at night and deepen their prayer life like never before. Duties that range from executing rector searches to seeing that the parish can continue to thrive for generations to come are nothing to scoff at. While the rector may be the authority in a parish, the vestry is a ministry that guards the house of God – just as did the sons of Korah in the first book of Chronicles.

1 Chronicles 9:19-22 states

Shallum son of Kore, son of Ebiasaph, son of Korah, and his kindred of his ancestral house, the Korahites, were in charge of the work of the service, guardians of the thresholds of the tent, as their ancestors had been in charge of the camp of the Lord, guardians of the entrance. And Phinehas son of Eleazar was chief over them in former times; the Lord was with him. Zechariah son of Meshelemiah was gatekeeper at the entrance of the tent of meeting. All these, who were chosen as gatekeepers at the thresholds, were two hundred twelve. They were enrolled by genealogies in their villages. David and the seer Samuel established them in their office of trust.

The Sons of Korah were entrusted with the care of the place where God's presence dwelt with ancient Israel by guarding the tent of meeting. Not only did they guard the tent of meeting, they

were also skilled warriors in King David's army (1 Chronicles 12:6) and singers in the temple (1 Chronicles 9:33,34). They spent the night around the house of God to open it in the morning (1 Chronicles 9:27), were in charge of the chambers and the treasuries (1 Chronicles 9:26) and were responsible for baking the showbread (1 Chronicles 9:32). They were also in charge of the temple vessels and furnishings (1 Chronicles 9:28,29) and the temple oil and incense (1 Chronicles 9:29), along with composing 11 of the 150 Psalms.

Overall, the sons of Korah protected the worship of God, and protected the community that God was in covenant with. They helped ensure that both the worship and reverence of God would be upheld from generation to generation. This ministry for the Lord and the community is essentially the inheritance of today's vestries.

Honorable and dangerous work

The duties of the sons of Korah were immense, as are those of our vestries. It is both honorable and yet dangerous work: Honorable in the fact that you are the gatekeepers of God's house. It is a dangerous ministry, because what you decide and execute will affect the spiritual life of generations to come. Vestry members guard and govern God house, God's worship, and God's inheritance in the saints.

So, if you serve on the vestry or have served in the past, as believers in Christ Jesus, we say thank you. Thank you for ensuring that God is honored and adored; and thank you for guarding God's house, so that we, as God's children, have a place to meet the Most High.

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Resources:

- [Top Ten Ways to Thrive as a Vestry Leader](#) by Greg Syler, ECF Vital Practices blog, March 19, 2019
- [How We Gather 'Round the Table](#) by Brian Prior, Vestry Papers, January 2019
- [There is No "I" in Team](#) by Diane Jardine Bruce, Vestry Papers, January 2019
- [Planning to Seek Light](#) by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices blog, November 13, 2017

A Path of Transformation

Lou Blanchard

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed

to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12: 1 -2, New RSV.

God invites us on a path of transformation, as St. Paul reminds us, calling us as individuals and as congregations. Today Christian leaders face a rapidly changing world where old patterns no longer work. We are called to awaken to God’s perspective, to follow God’s direction and to participate in God’s new creation. Leaders shape congregations, and therefore have the responsibility to create a God-centered culture in which God can bring about God’s transformation.

The best process I have found for leading groups in a transformational path is outlined in Otto Scharmer’s book Theory U. Although Scharmer writes for the business world and uses generic language, his process is a spiritual path of kenosis in which people become increasingly open to the presence of God and the creativity of the Holy Spirit. Scharmer describes this life-giving process as moving through four emotional/social “fields” to the place of Presence – the place of transformation.

Field 1, Download

In the first Field of perspective, vestry members see the congregation as something that simply is. They each see their place in the congregation from an unexamined and unquestioned perspective. Everything appears just fine. They all conform to what has been, the way they’ve always done it, seen it and been it. When a challenge or problem arises, they just download what they’ve done before to address it.

Vestries in this Field follow a set agenda, look to the same experts and authorities to solve problems, conform to tradition and are outwardly polite to one another. Seeing the congregation from this perspective assures very little change or transformation will take place. Moving from this field to the next field means changing perspective from the current position in the congregation to the edge, to see the congregational system as a whole.

Field 2, Debate

In this field, vestry members perceive the congregation in a more detached manner and with a more critical eye. The shift happens by opening their minds to real data, facts and information about the congregation and the system they have created in all its functional and dysfunctional ways – its location, its relevance to the surrounding community and its effectiveness in proclaiming the Gospel and making disciples.

This choice to see the system more objectively often leads to questioning, debate and even confrontation. The shift also means suspending judgment, letting go of preconceived ideas, prejudice, blaming, herding, reactivity and quick fixes (as Ed Friedman, would say in Failure of Nerve). Vestries in this field are courageously looking in the mirror, seeing the truth about themselves and practicing some self-compassion. To move into field 3, they will need to connect in new ways with one another, God and the community around them.

Field 3, Dialogue

Seeing from this field takes place when the personal perspective shifts to seeing the self as an agent within the system, as someone who can bring about change and has responsibility for the way things are. Dialogue with differing perspectives inside and outside the congregation opens not just the mind, but also the heart. This spiritual shift calls for vulnerability, empathy and compassion. It requires vestry members to suspend their voices of cynicism, shame, prejudice and polarities (liberal/conservative, high/low, grace/law, faith budget/balanced budget, etc.).

For example, I was working with congregations located in border communities dealing with immigration. Members of these congregations included border patrol as well as advocates for immigration reform. These leaders had to find ways to dialogue and create safe, vulnerable spaces for conversation and connection with brothers and sisters inside and outside the congregation, moving beyond the paralyzing polarity of the issue. Leaders moving to Field 4 are called deeper still - to that transformational New Creation of God in meeting the opportunity/challenge before them.

Field 4, Presence

Seeing from the fourth field, means connecting with the creative Spirit within and beyond the community to see possibilities that capture and reflect God's imagination. In this field, vestry members open not just their minds and hearts, but their wills in alignment with God's will for them. This future-facing shift is risky business, and it means facing fears.

God's ways are not our ways. God could be calling the community of faith to be Church in a totally different way. Practicing contemplation, talking about God's track record within the group, building faith and trust are all spiritual practices that open us up and invite us to live more bravely in this God-drenched field. When vestries function in this field, they experience discernment of God's leading, a collective creativity which sparks energy, life and hope.

Imagine disciples of Jesus called into a community of leaders, daring to open minds, hearts and wills, connected to the Holy Spirit, to each other and to the surrounding neighborhoods. Imagine co-creating oases of God's Reign in a chronically anxious world. Could you be such a transformational vestry?

*The Reverend **Lou Blanchard** is the retired Canon Missioner for Congregational Development in the Diocese of Colorado and is currently teaming with the Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA in the Excellence in Leadership Program.*

- For more information on the nuts and bolts of how to work this process see "Excellence in Leadership" on the Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA website: www.rmselfca.org.
- Scharmer, Otto; *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2009.
- Friedman, Edwin; *A Failure of Nerve*, Seabury Books, 2007
- Brown, Brene; *Dare to Lead*, Random House, 2018

Resources:

- [Cultivating a Culture of Discernment](#) by Blair Pogue, Vestry Papers, July 2010
- [Vestry #101: Encouraging hearts & souls](#) by Jim Lemler, Vestry Papers, May 2009
- [Moving from Purpose to Spirit-Driven Meetings](#) by Richelle Thompson, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 7, 2012
- [Adapt or Die](#) by Ken Howard, Vestry Papers, January 2014

The Finance Resource Your Vestry Needs

Nicole Seiferth

Finance-related issues are a major topic of discussion for vestries – whether the discussion focuses on this year’s stewardship campaign, the budget, the church treasurer’s monthly balance sheet, or whether or not the church needs a new roof. Those conversations can seem daunting at times for a myriad of reasons, including gaps in knowledge between leaders, differing language and varying experiences with money and finances. ECF’s new [Finance Resource Guide](#) (FRG) is here to help, not only to make those conversations less daunting, but also to provide a framework for transformational vestries as they explore financial opportunities and issues together.

So how can the FRG be helpful to you and your vestry today or at your next vestry meeting or retreat? Here are a few ways:

Speaking the same language

It’s a time of year when many vestries are welcoming new members into their midst and taking time to get to know one another as a congregation’s chosen leaders and fiduciaries. While some of these new members may work in finance, there are likely others who have never had to read a balance sheet – and many levels of financial literacy in between.

The FRG invites all church leaders, regardless of their previous finance-related experience, to learn together about how finances work in the particular context of a faith community and – more particularly – your faith community. Every chapter is geared to help a vestry engage together on questions that encourage conversation and greater mutual understanding on a variety of finance-related issues, such as:

- What story does your balance sheet tell about your congregation?
- What are your congregation’s assets?
- How has your congregation prepared for a disaster that might impact your building, your data systems or your leadership?
- What are the advantages that your congregation enjoys because of its size?

In addition to exploring aspects of church finances together, welcoming and orienting new members is an ideal time to refresh the group’s understanding of the vestry’s responsibilities for the church’s finances, as designated in your congregation’s by-laws, church canons and state and

federal laws. While that might sound a bit intimidating – especially to new vestry members or those with no background in finance or non-profit leadership – the FRG provides a brief introduction to this topic in a chapter on “The Vestry and Church Finances.” The support materials in the FRG also provide a guide for engaging in a group study around finances and leadership that can be helpful when a vestry “on-boards” new vestry members at a special meeting or vestry retreat.

To make sure all your vestry members are on the same page, sometimes quite literally, the FRG also includes a glossary of “Essential Financial Terms.” While by no means exhaustive, this list is helpful in ensuring that, for example, vestry members better understand what the church treasurer is talking about when she reports on the variance between budget and actual in her monthly report.

Stewardship and talking about money

Sometime this year, your vestry as a whole or with a committee that includes vestry members is going to begin talking about the year’s “Stewardship Campaign.” And by that, most congregations mean a campaign to invite and encourage the community’s members to make their financial pledge to the church for the coming year. When the leaders of a community of faith ask members to make a pledge or gift to the church, those leaders also need to be ready to share their experiences, personal and institutional, about giving and money.

Chapter 1 of the FRG begins and ends with what Jesus had to say about money. This is a great place to start the conversation amongst vestry members and begin thinking, not just about the fundraising aspect of stewardship, but the formational one, as well. Chapter Two, “Stewardship,” is a helpful guide in looking at stewardship as a whole and learning ways to make it a transformational experience for your entire congregation.

Strategizing your congregation’s future (financial and otherwise)

While “strategic thinking” and “budgeting process” may not, at first glance, sound exciting, these opportunities in your church year are an ideal time to ask each other and your congregation questions that have the power to further energize and transform your community. Questions like, “Is your spending aligned with your mission and vision?” can ignite a new way of looking at your budget for the coming year. The FRG takes you through various ways to look at where money and mission align (or don’t) in your congregation and how to engage in strategic thinking and budgeting that can be adapted to be effective and authentic for your community.

How to afford that new roof for the church building

While the vestry pulls back to look at the larger picture, they also engage in more specific discussions and decisions that affect the finances of the church – such as, when and how to replace the church building’s roof. The FRG can help guide conversation on looking at your financial health and how to begin addressing issues like whether or not you have a capital reserve fund and how those funds can best be built and managed for the long-term good of your community. Conversations about pressing and immediate financial needs are, of course, specific to your community’s context, which is why every chapter of the FRG includes first-person stories and

articles from church leaders who are doing this work and wrestling with these issues in congregations of many different sizes and situations.

The Finance Resource Guide is a starting point and a guidebook for church leaders. Every chapter and the supporting materials at the end of the book point to many other resources, both digital and print, that address in more detail the concepts and ideas mentioned throughout the FRG. The best resource – and the one the FRG encourages you to utilize throughout the book – is one another. There are financial leaders and experts in your congregation, your community and your diocese, and the FRG provides suggestions for questions and topics you can use to engage these other leaders in helping you and your vestry chart your congregation's financial course for many years to come.

Click [here](#) to learn more and purchase a copy of the FRG.

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Resources:

- [Finance Resource Guide Tools and Resources](#), an ECF Vital Practices tool
- [Five Things Every Church Treasurer Should Know](#) by Linda Puckett, Vestry Papers, March 2018
- [Facing Financial Uncertainty, Testing and Re-testing the Budget](#) by Greg Syler, ECF Vital Practices blog, April 27, 2018
- [Money – What's It to You?](#), an ECF webinar presented by Donald Romanik and Demi Prentiss, April 4, 2017

Parte de un cuerpo

Mary Barber

Al mismo tiempo en que escribo esto, estoy tratando de salvar un retiro de un fin de semana. Uno de mis compañeros de clase del seminario y yo habíamos estado planeando el retiro por meses y ahora, un día antes de que ocurriera, se canceló a causa de una situación completamente fuera de nuestro control. En medio de mi tristeza y desilusión, y mediante una serie de correos electrónicos y textos, elaboramos una segunda opción. Los líderes y dos interesados de la organización que iba a participar en el retiro se iban a reunir. Me siento optimista de que algo saldrá de todo esto, tal vez no lo que yo esperaba, pero seguramente algo bueno, algo de Dios. Y recuerdo las muchas veces en que había ocurrido algo similar cuando fui guardián de mi iglesia local.

Cuando me pidieron que fuera guardián, ya había sido miembro de St. George's en Newburgh por más de diez años. Me había confirmado, había visto a nuestras hijas ser acólitas y me había casado en esa iglesia. Mi esposa y yo habíamos cantado juntas en el coro por años y ambas habíamos integrado la junta parroquial. Sin embargo, había algo diferente sobre esto, algo que me atrajo e indudablemente me cambió.

Un amigo me advirtió sobre aceptar un nombramiento de guardián. "Arruinará tu espiritualidad", me dijo. "Vas a estar tratando de alabar a Dios y notarás las rajaduras en el enlucido y todas las cosas que haya que reparar. Además, la gente acudirá a ti en la hora del convivio con todo tipo de problemas". Sí, todo eso resultó ser cierto, pero la predicción de mi amigo no se convirtió en realidad. De hecho, me ocurrió lo opuesto: el trabajo, incluso con sus problemas y frustraciones, despertó enormemente mi vida espiritual.

Me dieron el cargo de guardián de la propiedad, algo sobre lo que sabía poco y nada. Aparte de haber matado un insecto de vez en cuando o de haber desatorado el inodoro, no tenía mayores conocimientos al respecto. Así que, en mis primeras reuniones, el comité de edificios y yo recorrimos las instalaciones para que viera y aprendiera acerca de todo. Subimos al campanario y nos agachamos para recorrer el laberíntico sótano con piso de tierra, lleno de reliquias de épocas pasadas. Y en ese comité estuve receptiva a ver por primera vez un ejemplo viviente del Cuerpo de Cristo, en el que todos hacían su parte para la iglesia casi sin un presupuesto para el edificio, discretamente y sin fanfarria.

En ese entonces, cuando estaba en el culto de adoración, sin duda estaba consciente de las rajaduras y de otras imperfecciones, pero también podía ver la baranda del altar que uno de los miembros del comité había reparado o la silla en la sala parroquial que otro miembro se había llevado a su casa y arreglado. Puedo recordar maravillándome las muchísimas veces en que se había identificado una reparación o una mejora y en que con poco o ningún presupuesto la gente donaba, trabajaba gratis, pasaba el sombrero y de alguna manera u otra hacía que las cosas sucedieran.

Varios meses después de mi inicio como guardián, nos estábamos preparando para una evaluación de un arquitecto, el primer paso de un trayecto largo y deliberado que condujo a una campaña de capital y a un plan para la restauración estructural del edificio de 200 años de antigüedad. Cuando el arquitecto nos dijo que había que quitar todos los artefactos que estaban en el sótano antes de que se pudiera hacer la inspección con precisión, el cuerpo entró en acción. Durante un fin de semana, los miembros del comité de edificios y sus cónyuges y amigos arrastraron una cosa tras otra hasta la acera y barrieron pilas de escombros. Un buen amigo de la iglesia se llevó todo en su camión.

Posteriormente, como seminarista, les decía a mis compañeros de capellanía que "¡realizar el plan de Dios es más divertido cuando se realiza junto con otros!". Es lo que aprendí de ese comité de edificios.

Incluso en épocas menos felices tuve un fuerte sentido de propósito en mi tiempo en la junta parroquial. Había problemas con la caldera, había que recorrer el sótano después de una lluvia para encontrar goteras en los dos enormes sistemas de calefacción de la iglesia... por no mencionar los tremendos problemas que encontraron el arquitecto y el ingeniero en sus inspecciones. Al

enfrentar estas cosas juntos -- el rector, los guardianes, la junta parroquial y la feligresía -- logramos solucionarlas. Aprendimos y crecimos juntos.

No creo que haya sido una coincidencia que durante ese tiempo no solo empecé a sentir más fuertemente una atracción hacia la oración, sino que también de maneras diferentes a las anteriores. En silencio, escribiendo en mi diario, con lecturas espirituales y orando más frecuentemente. En la oración de grupo al final de la junta parroquial, empecé a encontrar mi voz. Fui a un taller encabezado por el rector sobre el Oficio Diario y sentí el llamado a iniciar una oración vespertina semanal en nuestra iglesia. Había un pequeño fuego dentro de mí, encendido en parte por ese pequeño "sí" inocente que contesté sobre ser coadjutora.

Y todo funcionó. El ánimo de orar que crecía en mí me ayudó a afrontar los desafíos. Hubo un año difícil en el que en nuestra iglesita hubo once funerales. Un par de años después, una mañana me senté con el rector en su despacho absorbiendo la noticia de que nuestro director de música había fallecido de un infarto. Nos sentamos en silencio y después hablamos sobre cómo seguir adelante. Pasamos por ello, nos desconsolamos y reflexionamos, y elaboramos un plan alternativo. Y oramos. Juntos.

Esta historia no es una de aquellas que cuentan de "cómo me uní a la junta parroquial y el número de feligreses aumentó inmensamente e hicimos montones y montones de buenas obras en la comunidad". Sí hicimos muchas cosas grandes en St. George's en los cuatro años en que integré la junta parroquial. La participación en la iglesia y el compromiso espiritual crecieron durante ese tiempo. Participé en dos representaciones teatrales muy exitosas, que atrajeron a jóvenes locales y a un monasterio cercano como asociados. La campaña de capital se completó exitosamente. La Oración Vespertina continuó durante unos años y participaron en ella otros líderes laicos. Nuestra iglesita siguió realizando una extensión increíble al operar un gran centro de distribución de alimentos y dos programas para jóvenes.

Pero eso no es lo más importante que tengo en mente al escribir esto, reflexionando sobre cómo soy ahora en que estoy en la mitad de mi tiempo en el seminario. Es otro indicador en mi senda hacia la ordenación como sacerdote, una senda que ahora me doy cuenta de que ya estaba cuando me estaba despertando al cuerpo de Cristo en el comité de la propiedad de St. George's. Lo que más me impacta actualmente es ese cuerpo, esa comunidad, y la manera en que sin otros probablemente nunca habría despertado a la presencia de Dios que tenía frente a mí. Sin ese cuerpo, ese fuego que tenía en mí nunca se hubiera encendido. Sin esa comunidad, jamás me hubiera encontrado donde me encuentro hoy.

No estoy diciendo que servir en la junta parroquial te pondrá en la senda hacia el sacerdocio. Siempre hay ese riesgo, ¡por supuesto! Pero lo más probable es que tu llamado sea algo completamente diferente. Lo que estoy diciendo es que a menudo descubrimos nuestros dones más profundos y nuestro ser más profundo aprendiendo y creciendo y jugando y estando frustrados y en afligirnos juntos en comunidad. Nos convertimos en nuestros seres más verdaderos como parte de un Cuerpo.

Esto lo aprendí sirviendo como guardián de la propiedad.

*Después de haber sido psiquiatra y administradora de un hospital por veinte años, **Mary Barber** ahora está en su segundo año del Episcopal Divinity School en el Union Theological Seminary. Es postulante para el sacerdocio en la diócesis de Nueva York. Vive en Newburgh, NY, con su esposa Alleyne y son las orgullosas madres de dos episcopales de toda la vida.*

Recursos:

- [La Junta Parroquial como el Cuerpo de Cristo](#) por Ken Howard, Vestry Papers, enero de 2013
- [Lo esencial para tener un Equipo de Liderazgo saludable](#) por Victor Conrado, Vestry Papers, enero de 2019
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