

**Vestry as Team**  
**January 2019**

**Vestry As a Life-Giving Team**

Chris Holmes

You have surely experienced teams that were life-giving and productive, and I'll bet you've also served on teams that were energy-suckers and a waste of your time. What caused those to be such different experiences? Which kind of team is your vestry?

Life-giving teams build community and synergy around a higher purpose while utilizing the gifts of each member of the team. This kind of a team doesn't just sort of happen. It is the consequence of a process of careful selection, intentional development and team leader training.

**The difference between a group and a team**

The first thing to realize about teamwork is that a team is fundamentally different from a group. Groups come together for sharing or learning and then apply that learning to their individual lives. Teams develop a common vision with established goals, and rise or fall together because their members share responsibility for the results of their work.

The church vestry is innately designed to function as a team with shared responsibility for church governance, structure and selection. It holds a place at the top of the local congregation's organizational structure, with the purpose of helping the congregation fulfill its mission. The best of vestry life happens when the organization functions as a team accomplishing its work productively and collaboratively. The worst of vestry life plays out when it behaves as a group of individuals protecting their silo areas, fighting for turf and refusing to budge for the greater good of the congregation.

**Six conditions of team effectiveness**

A research study involving thousands of teams identified as effective, found these six common factors:

1. Effective teams have a compelling direction. The purpose for meeting is captivating and clear and the team is able to measure what success looks like.
2. The right people are on the team for the right reasons. Most often these are stakeholders in the mission of the organization who have the ability to play well with others.
3. Team membership is well defined. There is utter clarity about who is on the team and who is not. You would be surprised at how often this is unclear.

4. The team matters to the organization and its leadership. The team is given enough authority to carry importance, has an adequate budget and undisputed organizational buy-in.
5. The structure of the team is solid. There is administrative support, a reasonable time-line, role definition and clarity about critical details.
6. The team is adequately led/coached. The leader of the team is trained and has a good grasp of working with others.

The study on Team Effectiveness found that when the first five of these factors are in place, there is a 60% chance that the team will be effective in doing its work. The other 40% chance of success in effectiveness depends upon the quality of leadership provided to the team.

This research suggests that it is imperative for the vestry to have a clear sense of purpose, membership that is chosen with intention and leadership that is capable. These elements are sometimes challenging in volunteer organizations with limited resources. However, they are essential for vestries in the process of becoming life-giving teams.

#### **Four marks of a life-giving vestry**

1. Shared leadership with clergy. Rector and vestry serve as an aligned team viewing their relationship as a partnership of shared responsibility for leading the congregation and bringing about transformation.
2. Aligned with purpose. The vestry does the important work of listening to the congregation while visioning what is possible, and then from that input, discerning a compelling purpose for the congregation. That discerned purpose becomes more than a statement on paper when the vestry constantly examines where it is spending its time and money by asking, "How does this embody and fulfill our purpose?"
3. Mission focused. The vestry shares with the rector the task of discerning where God is calling the faith community to be active beyond the walls of the church. As much time is spent in meetings discussing ministry and mission as is spent talking about governance, structure and selection. Life-giving vestries have a clear vision for how to live out God's call in the world in service to and with others.
4. Understanding of holy work. Vestry members understand that their service on the vestry is more a calling to be in ministry than an election to a position. Life-giving vestries spend time in prayer listening for the direction of the Holy Spirit. Members are faith-centered, biblically grounded and spiritually mature.

#### **Growing life-giving leadership**

Strong leaders are shaped, not born. In vestry life we have the great opportunity to help increase the leadership ability of those placed in positions of leadership in the church by teaching them the skills needed to succeed.

Consider holding a vestry workshop for new church leaders called, "How to Lead a Stellar Church Meeting," covering these essential ingredients:

- Basic group facilitation skills
- Meeting reminders with an attached agenda

- Starting and ending on time
- Grounding the work in the larger purpose of the church
- Including prayer and honoring the work of the Spirit
- Ending each meeting with clear action items and a person's name attached to each commitment

Very often, this kind of workshop can be led by a vestry member who learned team leadership skills in their workplace.

Vestry service does not have to be contentious, frustrating drudgery. Who wouldn't rather serve on a vestry that works joyfully as a team and focuses on God's amazing work in the world as the body of Christ? Life-giving vestries don't just materialize on their own, they happen on purpose when attention is given to careful election of membership, clarity of purpose with a focus on mission and intentional training of leaders.

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#### **Resources:**

- [There is No "I" in Team](#) by Richelle Thompson, ECF Vital Practices blog, April 26 2016
- [Norms and Covenants—Tools to Strengthen Your Team](#) by Nancy Davidge, Vestry Papers, January 2016
- [Why Team Building Matters](#) by Lesley Hartley, Vestry Papers, January 2016
- [Team Leadership](#), an ECF webinar led by Rosa Lindahl, March 26, 2015
- [Structuring Leadership Teams](#), an ECF Vital Practices Tool

#### **Music for Team Building**

Sandra Montes

When I was teaching elementary school, the easiest and fastest way to get my students to pay attention and remember what we were working on was to start singing or chanting. Somehow, putting something to music for the class to recite or sing back to me was powerful and built community. Later, when I taught music, I included easy, multilingual songs to foster community in our diverse environment.

A technique that is easy to use combines call and response phrasing, chants or songs with well-known tunes (including popular or classical music). I have used Beethoven's Fifth to say: Ready to learn? And the students' response was: Oh yes we are! I often used popular songs like "Jingle Bells" or "Thriller" to teach a variety of math or reading facts. Classes with older students came up with their own songs to help us learn. This often brought us together and helped build excitement about any subject.

## **Songs for building community at church**

When I am invited to teach a song to a group of people at church, there are several that I use. If I have very little time, I start singing the gospel spiritual “Amen.” Most people know it and will start singing along. When we finish, I say, “do you want to learn it in Spanish?” Everyone shouts: “YES!” And, I start singing it, but with the Spanish pronunciation (short A instead of long A). People usually laugh. If I have more time, I do “Somos uno en Cristo/We are all one in Christ” (found in Oramos Cantando/We Pray in Song), “Create in Me” by Mary Rice Hopkins or one of my short songs like “No tengas miedo” or “Remain in Me/Permanece en mí.”

I asked some of my musician friends to tell me what songs they use to build community and why they think music is important in team building. All of them talked about ease, repetition and the importance of the message that invites us to become one.

Jeannine Otis, Music Director at St. Mark’s-in-the-Bowery, New York, says that her favorite song for building community is “Guide my Feet.” She feels it’s easily sung and the lyrics speak to the prayer and aspiration in life to walk with God – Guide my feet while I run this race, cause I don’t wanna run this race in vain. Other verses expand on that prayer. “I want to use my life to show gratitude to God and the universe through living a life that is meaningful and of service to humankind,” says Jeannine. “For me, this song is a prayer to move forward with God, no matter what, in faith, in love and forgiveness, confident that all is well.”

Dent Davidson, Interim Director of Emerging Liturgy and Music, St. Bart’s, New York, uses a paperless song, “Come, my Beloved. Make your home in my heart.” Dent says he loves using this song because it is easy to learn. He says that he is always overwhelmed with the notion of who is making the invitation – “Are we asking God to make a home in our heart? Or is God asking us to make our home in the heart of God? Or both!” He believes that making music with our bodies is a tremendously intimate experience. It can make us vulnerable and open to what is new. Listening to each other gives us permission to use our own voice and to be heard. A group of single voices becomes one, a choir. “There’s also an element of sheer magic,” he says, “that science will never be able to explain. It’s all God, and a total gift.”

Gus Chrysson, deacon and Costa Rican seminarian at Virginia Theological Seminary, says that he teaches three choruses that will eventually overlap – “This Little Light of Mine,” “Glory, Glory Hallelujah” (Since I Laid my Burdens Down) and “When the Saints Go Marching In.” He learned this from Dr. Ysaye Barnwell, formerly of the a cappella group, Sweet Honey in the Rock. People usually know those three choruses or can learn them very quickly. He will form three groups, and ask each to sing their chorus once alone and then all together. When the groups sing together, these overlapping choruses make such nice harmonies. He thinks folk songs also work well to get people singing, and he really enjoys teaching by call and response and then making the singing progressively fancier.

Gus thinks that music is important in community building because we are human, and humans have been building community with music (and food!) forever. “Music mirrors how we praise God,” he says, “how we find joy and how we cope with grief. So, when we build community with music, it

allows us to lean into our humanness together, even if the music we know and love individually is very different.”

### **Singing together can show the way forward and bring hope**

Ana Hernández, a member of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, describes herself as a “composer/arranger, workshop facilitator, author, and mischief maker.” She discusses the power of singing together:

Whether surrounded by actual fires or communicating around dismantling racism, singing prayers together is possibly the strongest thread helping us to see a way forward on a previously unseen path. I’ve watched rooms full of people completely transformed when confronted with the following two tunes and an urgent need to work together.

John Bell's “Don't Be Afraid” reminds us to be present and faithful, even if we’re petrified. Singing together, adding harmonies and counter melodies, opens us to see new possibilities as we begin to move in sync. The fact that we notice our comfort growing as we sing allows us to explore what transformation and communion look and feel like as we practice inviting and encouraging one another and make space for each voice by deepening our capacity to listen to one another.

“All Shall Be Well/Another World” combines texts by Arundhati Roy (“Another World is not only possible, she is on her way; on a quiet day, I can hear her breathing”) and Julian of Norwich (“All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well”) in an original tune, building on the themes of God's presence and comfort by adding hope. Hope adds energy to the room, permeating each person with a confidence that makes it possible for even timid singers to find and share their voices. With this kind of wholehearted participation, all shall indeed be well.

Ellis Montes, music director at Grace, Houston, says music is a way for people to get on the same page when they are getting to know each other. He says that singing simple yet thought-provoking songs like “In My Life, Lord, Be Glorified” or “Tu fidelidad/I Depend Upon Your Faithfulness” can help people focus on an idea – especially when starting an important meeting, like one that includes multicultural liturgies, prayer book revision, inclusive language, and revising the liturgical calendar. (Ellis used these songs at his first Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music meeting.)

There is a saying: “To sing is to pray twice.” For me, singing helps in remembering prayers and Bible verses. And when music is used at the beginning of any gathering, it has the potential to bring unity, comfort and love.

***Sandra T. Montes** is the Spanish Language Resource Consultant at ECF. She has spent many years developing original bilingual resources for her church, school and others and has volunteered and worked in the Episcopal Church since she was welcomed in 1986. Sandra serves as a musician, translator, speaker, consultant and writer. She earned her doctorate in education in 2016 and is a full-time freelance consultant and musician.*

#### **Resources:**

- [The Power of Spiritual Practices](#) by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices blog, October 24, 2016

- [Walking the Road of Relationship](#) by Sarabeth Goodwin, Vestry Papers, November 2015
- [Discerning Need—The Power of Openness, Listening, and Music](#) by Erin Weber-Johnson, ECF Vital Practices blog, August 6, 2015
- [Keep on Singing](#) by Anna Olson, ECF Vital Practices blog, August 12, 2015

### **Listener, Trainer and Goal Setter**

John Thompson-Quartey

Two years ago, I had the privilege of participating in Vital Teams Academy, an Episcopal Church Foundation (ECF) program, aimed at strengthening congregational leadership teams in the Episcopal Church. In my work as Canon for Ministry Development and Congregational Vitality in the Diocese of Atlanta, I focus on congregational vitality, vocational discernment and seminarian support. This means fostering collaborative partnerships between clergy and lay leaders by equipping vestries with four basic skills – identifying a common purpose, building stronger relationships, having clear processes and focusing on results.

Over the past two years, I have worked with thirty-five vestries, using Vital Teams training as a facilitation tool. My most significant learnings over this period are that vital congregations have vestry members who:

- Understand leadership as a partnership with God in ministry
- Exercise leadership by mobilizing others in a shared common purpose
- Have strong healthy relationships and focus on one goal at a time

In my preparation for this article, I spent some time in conversation with three wardens from three different congregations of varying sizes. These wardens demonstrate, in my opinion, excellent leadership skills by creating a healthy ministry environment for their peers and the congregations they serve. I call these wardens: the Listener, the Trainer and the Goal Setter. In each warden, I find in the necessary ingredients for a vestry to become not simply a group of people working together for the church, but more importantly, a team propelled by the conviction that they are partnering with God to build God’s kingdom in their corner of God’s vineyard. Theirs is more a vocation than a job function or a role.

#### **The Listener**

Joan describes herself as one who listens. A CEO (with a Ph.D. in Education) and a communications consultant, Joan brings her skills in the corporate world to her ministry as warden. She explained that in order to be successful in this translation of skills, one has to change from a “command and control” mindset to one of “holy listening,” discerning God’s mission for the congregation in its current context. Joan listens to her peers on the vestry, and the vestry team listens to the desires of the congregation. Together, they are able to discern and discover the skills and gifts they and members of the congregation bring to the service of others through the church.

It is through listening that one can determine the needs of others in order to address them. I am reminded of the story of Jesus and blind Bartimaeus, who called out to Jesus to have pity on him. When Bartimaeus finally came face to face with him, Jesus said, “What do you want me to do for you?” We cannot assume that we know what people want. We have to ask them, and listen to their response before we can meet their specific needs. Joan said that practicing the art of listening has deepened her spiritually and led to less turmoil in her life, making her more spiritually grounded.

### **The Trainer**

Ben describes himself as a consummate trainer. He holds a Ph.D. in human resource development and brings his extensive training (16+ years) to his role as warden. Ben focuses on equipping others through skill discovery and development so they can function effectively as a team. What I found most fascinating in our conversation was his deep desire to develop a strong spiritual base. He sees that as the foundation for training his vestry peers to become effective disciples of Jesus Christ.

Ben shared a conversation he once had with a priest. He told me he said to the priest, “I know what loving my neighbor is, because I see and know my neighbor, but how can I ever love God who is unseen?” The priest responded by asking Ben if he loved the sunrise and the sunset. When Ben commented that he loved sunsets, the priest said, “That is where God is.”

From this, Ben extrapolated that God is all around him – in the sunrise, the sunset, the blooming flower, the falling rain, the blazing sun and all that nature has to offer, including those who are right in front of him. He is able to use his training and facilitation skills help vestry members discover their God-given skills and talents for the sake of fulfilling God’s mission right where they are. Ben has written a customary for new vestry member orientation, ensuring that no one has to fly blind when they agree to vestry service.

### **The Goal Setter**

Gale sees herself and her peers on the vestry as “stewards of God’s house.” An accountant, and financial and medical office consultant, she brings her gifts of project management and consulting to her role as warden. She works with the vestry to focus always on setting SMART (Specific-Measurable-Assigned-Realistic-Time-sensitive) goals and getting feedback from members of the congregation. When necessary, they recalibrate or tweak their goals and objectives to achieve their common purpose, which is building a more inviting, welcoming and hospitable environment in their church. Gale’s leadership is focused on helping the vestry address goals one at a time and making sure that they take good notes about lessons learned, so that future vestry members will not have to reinvent the wheel.

Gale strongly believes in having the right people in the right ministries. A person trained in architecture and engineering may be more suitable for the building and grounds ministry, rather than stewardship or outreach. Her role as warden is to ensure that the right skills are deployed in the right ministries. This reminds me of Jesus calling fishermen as his disciples, and telling them, “I will make you fish for people.” He brought them into ministry, using the skills they had, but in a different mode.

These three wardens demonstrate to me that our call to ministry, whether lay or ordained, is to constantly seek and serve God's purpose in all that we do. With the right leadership, strong relationships and clear processes, all vestries can transform their congregations into thriving, vibrant and most of all, vital communities of faith.

*ECF's Vital Teams program is currently not available and the organization is in the process of reimagining the program.*

*The **Reverend Canon C. John Thompson-Quarley** is Canon for Ministry Development and Congregational Vitality in the diocese of Atlanta. Prior to arriving in Atlanta, he served as rector of St. Mary's by-the-Sea Episcopal Church in Point Pleasant Beach, New Jersey for nine years. Before St. Mary's, he was Chaplain for Pastoral Care and Director of the Community Outreach Program at St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Rutgers University, New Jersey and a Master of Divinity from the General Theological Seminary, New York. In his current position, he is responsible for inspiring vitality in congregations through parish stewardship support and vestry coaching; vocational discernment and seminarian support; clergy events program planning; clergy continuing education support; serving as resource person for the Community of Deacons; and supervision of Campus Ministries and Youth Ministries.*

**Resources:**

- [Vitality is an Inside Job](#) by Altagracia Pérez-Bullard, ECF Vital Practices blog, October 28, 2016
- [The Vocational Vestry](#) by Alissa Newton, Vestry Papers, January 2018
- [The Power of Discernment](#) by Charles Fisher, ECF Vital Practices blog, April 6, 2018
- [Intentional Listening](#) by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices blog, March 28, 2016
- [Ways to Let God Lead Your Vestry](#) an ECF webinar led by Blair Pogue, February 23, 2017

**10 Mistakes Vestries Often Make**

Donald Romanik

The vestry is at the heart of every Episcopal congregation. As the elected lay representatives of the parish, the vestry, in partnership with the rector or priest-in-charge, is responsible for the missional, spiritual, strategic and fiduciary life of the local faith community. Vestry service is holy and important work, and can be an incredibly rewarding experience for both the individual members as well as the entire group. However, maintaining an effective and functional vestry does not happen automatically. It requires a thoughtful, prayerful and deliberate process of discerning and responding to God's call in very practical and specific ways.

Prior to becoming president of the Episcopal Church Foundation (ECF), I served on vestries for almost twenty years. Since coming to ECF in 2005, I have had the honor and privilege of observing and working with vestries from congregations all over the country. Based on these experiences I have concluded that in order to be as effective, functional and mission-based as possible, a vestry needs to avoid the following ten common mistakes.



**1. Creating a vestry that is too large for the size of the congregation**

Not every vestry needs to have twelve members. Most congregations in the Episcopal Church are small with a median average Sunday worship attendance of only 57. Unless there are specific canonical requirements in your diocese, set the vestry at a number that is practical, manageable and sustainable given the size of your congregation.

**2. Recruiting and electing the wrong people**

Each member of the vestry must be responsive to all the needs and concerns of the congregation and able to make decisions as openly and objectively as possible. While you do not want to exclude potential vestry members who are active in a particular ministry, try to recruit individuals who get the 'big picture' and consider issues in a strategic and missional way.

**3. Failing to provide an orientation for new members**

While there is always the reality and necessity of learning on the job, there needs to be an orientation opportunity for new vestry members at the beginning of their term. It can be as simple as providing these individuals with important documents (bylaws, budget, audit, annual report) and convening for a Q&A session with the rector and wardens prior to their first meeting.

**4. Not having an annual vestry retreat**

In order to function as an effective team, rather than a group of random individuals, vestry members need to be able to get to know each other, share their stories and build community. The easiest way to facilitate this process is to conduct an annual retreat at the beginning of the new vestry year. While an overnight event has its advantages, it is not always practical or feasible especially with smaller congregations.

**5. Not establishing vestry norms**

The most effective vestries are those with clear norms and expectations on how they are going to conduct their business – starting on time, frequency and length of meetings, ensuring that everyone has a chance to talk, etc. Once established, these norms should be reviewed for compliance and continued relevancy on a regular basis.

**6. Spending insufficient time on prayer and other spiritual practices**

Unlike other nonprofit boards of directors, vestries are responsible for local faith communities who are actively engaged in God's mission in the world. Consequently, God needs to be at the center of everything a vestry does. This requires ample opportunity for spiritual practices during vestry meetings beyond just an opening and closing prayer. Bible study, often using the daily lectionary, is one easy and effective way of beginning a vestry meeting in a spiritually grounded way.

**7. Having an open-ended agenda without any priorities**

The best way to ensure an effective vestry meeting is to set the right agenda that includes ample time for prayer and Bible study and ranks individual items based on their level of importance, the need for extended discussion or specific action or follow-up. Consider using a consent agenda for those routine items, e.g. minutes, that don't require any discussion or for those matters that are fully covered or explained in a written report.

**8. Focusing too much on the 'weeds'**

Vestries often spend too much time trying to manage the minute details of individual programs or tasks instead of focusing on big picture issues that are essential to the mission

of the congregation. Vestries should set broad policy and priorities and leave the specifics to committees, task forces or other individuals.

**9. Working as individuals and not a team**

In order to discern and respond to God's call, a vestry needs to function as a team and not just a collection of individuals with their own personal biases or priorities. This is the reason why opportunities for prayer, Bible study and fellowship are so important.

**10. Failing to engage in succession planning**

One of the primary roles of vestry members is to help select their successors. Even in small congregations, vestries should always be engaged in the process of identifying, nurturing and developing new leaders for the congregation. This requires a deliberate and ongoing process of engagement, openness and outreach, especially to newcomers.

Making your best effort to avoid these ten mistakes will help ensure a more productive and mission-based vestry experience for the entire community. Please let us know if there is anything ECF can do to help you and your vestry on this important journey.

*Donald V. Romanik is president of the Episcopal Church Foundation. He is a strong advocate and proponent of lay leadership and the ministry of all the baptized and frequently writes and speaks on topics relating to leadership and resource development for Episcopal communities of faith.*

**Resources:**

- [The Vestry Goes on Retreat](#) by Nathan E. Kirkpatrick, Vestry Papers, January 2017
- [Today's Vestry Challenge—Keep it Simple and Nimble](#) by Randy Ferebee, Vestry Papers, January 2018
- [Vestry Orientation](#) an ECF Vital Practices webinar led by Donald Romanik and Brendon Hunter, January 11, 2018
- [Who Will Replace You--Succession Planning in the Church](#) by Annette Buchanan, ECF Vital Practices blog, August 7, 2017
- [The Consent Agenda—More Efficient Meetings](#) by Bob Schorr, Vestry Papers, January 2014
- [Models for Vestry Leadership of Faith Formation](#) an ECF Vital Practices webinar led by Lisa Kimball and Kyle Oliver, March 8, 2016

**Building a Diverse Vestry**

Anna Olson

How do you build a strong and functional vestry that reflects the breadth of your church's membership? In more and more of our churches, building a strong vestry includes creating and supporting space for ethnic, generational and linguistic diversity. A vestry that looks and sounds like your congregation and reflects the life experience of all your members (not to mention your changing neighborhood) probably won't "just happen" without intentionality. The good news is that building and maintaining a strong, multicultural, multilingual vestry requires disciplined and consistent attention to basics that will make any vestry stronger. Even congregations that don't identify as particularly diverse can benefit from these practices.

### **Pay attention, invite and innovate as needed**

Building your vestry starts well before the first meeting. It begins with paying attention. Who in your congregation shows signs of a fruitful prayer life, of spiritual growth? Who is patient and kind? Who solves problems rather than creating them? Who takes life as it comes, with calm and faithful resilience, instead of anxiety? Who pays attention to congregational dynamics? Who notices opportunities to connect with the local community? Who sets an example of service? Who is creative? Who serves as a bridge between language and cultural groups within the congregation? Who listens, at least as much as they talk?

The next step is invitation. In many, if not most, cultures, there is stigma attached to volunteering for leadership. Offering oneself may seem forward, pushy, presumptuous or arrogant. Many of your best potential vestry members need to be invited to serve and sometimes more than once. They may need time to think about it, or they may need to be invited several years running. It can help to invite more than one person from each of the major generational, cultural, gender and linguistic groups in your parish. It is tough and sometimes anxiety-provoking to be the “only” person under 30, Chinese-speaker, transgender or Latinx person.

Effective innovation may involve some compromise with typical Episcopal vestry practices. One innovation tried at my parish in recent years is offering potential members one-year terms instead of the usual three years. The one-year term allows those who have never served on a vestry to try it out for a reasonable amount of time. Building a vestry that looks like a growing and changing congregation may involve inviting people who have only been in the congregation for a few years. For them, a three-year term may look like an eternity. Interestingly enough, we have found that our old-timers appreciate the one-year option as well. People sometimes say no to vestry service because they don't want to fall short on the commitment. Work schedules, health, access to transportation and responsibilities for child or elder care can be difficult to predict three years at a time. Many people are more comfortable making commitments a year at a time. We have had several people serve three consecutive one-year terms!

### **Training and support help bring diverse gifts to the table**

Once you have assembled your vestry, the challenge is to enable everyone to bring their gifts. A diverse vestry brings varied experiences of being heard — from those who speak up and expect everyone's attention, to others, who long ago realized that speaking up in official contexts usually brings trouble. Some will be intimately familiar with financial statements and spreadsheet formats. Others will need clear explanations of what to look for in carrying out the vestry's fiduciary responsibilities. Many folks will never have dealt with a budget larger than their households and will need help scaling up and understanding concepts like liability. People's confidence in their ability to contribute will vary as will the ways they signal their interest in vestry process. Different cultures will show and perceive respect in different ways.

New vestry members need training and support. An extended vestry retreat early in the year provides an opportunity to set expectations and build relationships. Training should explain the roles of the various players in an Episcopal Church — vestry, rector, wardens, bishop(s), lay leaders

and active members of the congregation. Vestry members should know what to do when people in the congregation approach them with ideas or complaints, as well as what to do when they have a concern about or disagreement with the rector or another member of the staff. Vestry members need to understand and agree on basic norms for vestry communication, confidentiality, conflict resolution and consensus-building. These will vary from congregation to congregation.

Preparation for vestry meetings is critical. In our parish, the rector meets with the wardens two weeks before each meeting and works through the agenda. The agenda is written up in both English and Spanish and emailed to vestry members. In one case, the email goes to the daughter of a vestry member who does not have her own account. We have experimented with various formats for agendas, sometimes including notes on major agenda items. Another idea would be to have an experienced vestry member contact each first-year member before meetings to go over the agenda. This builds relationships as well as preparing people to participate actively in each meeting.

Vestry meetings should be planned to include every voice at the table. In our parish this means starting with a Bible study where each person invites another to share. It also means that when we are making a big decision we take the time to go around the table and ask for each person's input. Responses are translated carefully. There is time for questions. Because we are big on not un-making decisions, we try to make sure that everyone expresses their concerns before we move forward.

### **Overcoming the language barrier**

We handle language diversity in several ways in our parish. We made an intentional transition to bilingual meetings a few years ago. Previously, we had only invited vestry members who had enough English to follow along. Now we translate all our written materials, and invite several bilingual candidates each year who can help the monolingual folks keep up. We translate all of our important discussions, providing summaries of those that run long. We check in regularly to make sure everyone is following. Non-native speakers of both English and Spanish are encouraged to try out their second language skills in a supportive environment, but they always have the option of speaking in their first language. If this sounds like it makes for longer vestry meetings, it does. There's no way around that, although we all try to keep things moving. Our shared commitment to full participation usually provides sufficient fuel to get through the time it takes. A person who does not have the patience for multilingual meetings may not be a good fit for vestries in multilingual congregations.

Finally, diverse vestries need to work toward developing diverse vestry leadership. We have used a co-warden format at our parish – pairing experienced junior and senior wardens with co-wardens who represent various segments of the congregation. Working in partnership with the clergy leadership, they provide valuable perspective to the rector and assure the congregation that a wide range of voices are heard and taken into account.

***Anna Olson** is a graduate of Union Theological Seminary and Stanford University, and was ordained in the Diocese of Los Angeles in 2000. She lives and works in the diverse Koreatown neighborhood of Los Angeles, serving since 2011 as rector of Saint Mary's Episcopal Church, Los Angeles' only historic Japanese-American Episcopal church. Her interests and expertise in parish ministry include working*

*with historic congregations to connect with the needs and gifts of new neighbors; developing models for multilingual and inculturated liturgy; liturgy in public spaces; and opening space for marginalized communities to reshape and revitalize the church. She has a partner and two children, is fluent in Spanish and holds a second-degree black belt in taekwondo.*

#### **Resources:**

- [An Uncomfortable Home?](#) by Jeremiah Sierra, ECF Vital Practices blog, January 26, 2015
- [Multi-Lingual leadership and Multi-Cultural Churches](#) by Sandra Montes, Vestry Papers, July 2015
- [Is Gift-Based Ministry by of the Problem?](#) by Anna Olson, ECF Vital Practices blog, February 18, 2015
- [Investing in a Multiracial Vision of Church](#) by Kenji Kuramitsu, Vestry Papers, November 2017
- [Learning to Be the People of God—in Two Languages](#) by Sandra Montes, Vestry Papers, January 2018

#### **Música para fortalecer el trabajo en equipo**

Sandra Montes

Cuando era maestra de escuela primaria, el método más fácil y rápido para hacer que mis alumno/as prestaran atención y recordaran lo que estábamos aprendiendo era empezar a cantar. Por algún motivo, convertir algo en música para que lo recitara o me lo cantara la clase era poderoso y formaba comunidad. Más adelante, cuando enseñé música, incluí canciones fáciles y multilingües para fomentar comunidad en nuestro medio diverso.

Una técnica fácil de usar combina fraseos de llamadas y respuestas, canciones con melodías muy conocidas, incluyendo música popular o clásica. Emplee la Quinta de Beethoven para decir: ¡A aprender! Y la respuesta de los estudiantes era: ¿Qué será hoy? A menudo usé canciones como “Cascabel” y otras similares, como “Thriller”, para enseñar una variedad de temas de matemáticas o de lectura. En las clases con alumnos de mayor edad ello/as traían sus propias canciones para ayudarnos a aprender. Eso a menudo nos unió y ayudó a crear entusiasmo sobre todas las materias.

#### **Canciones para formar comunidad en la iglesia**

Cuando me invitan a enseñar una canción a un grupo de gente en la iglesia, uso varias. Si tengo muy poco tiempo, empiezo cantando el espiritual “Amén” en español. Casi toda la gente lo sabe y empieza a cantarlo. Cuando terminamos digo, “¿Lo quieren aprender en inglés?”. Toda la gente grita: “¡Sí!”. Y yo empiezo a cantar, pero con la pronunciación en inglés (básicamente la misma palabra). Por lo general la gente se ríe. Si tengo más tiempo, cantamos “Somos uno en Cristo” (encontrado en Oramos Cantando), coritos, o alguno de mis cantos cortos, como “No tengas miedo” o “Permanece en mí”.

Les pedí a alguno/as de mis amigo/as músicos que me dijeran qué cantos usan para formar comunidad y por qué creen que la música es importante para fortalecer el trabajo en equipo. Todos dijeron que lo principal era que los cantos fueran fáciles y repetitivos. Además recalcaron la importancia del mensaje que nos invita a unirnos.

Jeannine Otis, directora de música en St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery, Nueva York, dice que su canción favorita es "Guide my Feet - Guía mis pies". Siente que es fácil de cantar y que la letra apela a la oración y a aspirar en la vida a caminar con Dios: Guía mis pies mientras que corro esta carrera porque no quiero correr esta carrera en vano. Otros versos expanden esa oración: "Quiero emplear mi vida en demostrarles gratitud a Dios y al universo viviendo una vida significativa y sirviendo a la humanidad", dice Jeannine. "Para mí, esta canción es una oración para caminar hacia adelante con Dios, pase lo que pase, en fe, amor y perdón, confiado/as en que todo está bien".

Dent Davidson, director interino de Liturgia Emergente y Música en St. Bart's, Nueva York, usa un canto simple: "Come, my Beloved. Make your home in my heart - Ven, mi amado(a). Haz tu hogar en mi corazón". Dent dice que le encanta usar esta canción porque es fácil de aprender. Dice que siempre está asombrado con la noción de quién está realizando la invitación: "¿Le estamos pidiendo a Dios que haga su hogar en nuestro corazón? ¿O Dios nos está pidiendo que hagamos nuestro hogar en el corazón de Dios? ¡O ambos!". Él cree que hacer música con nuestros cuerpos es una experiencia enormemente íntima. Escucharnos mutuamente da permiso para usar nuestra propia voz y hacernos oír. Un grupo de voces individuales se convierte en una, un coro. "También hay un elemento de verdadera magia", dice, "que la ciencia nunca podrá explicar. Es todo Dios y un don total".

Gus Chrysson, diácono y seminarista costarricense del Seminario Teológico de Virginia, dice que enseña tres coros que en algún momento se van a traslapar: "This Little Light of Mine (Esta lucecita)", "Glory, Glory Hallelujah (Gloria, Gloria Aleluya)" y "When the Saints Go Marching In (Cuando los Santos marchen ya)". Aprendió esto de la Dra. Ysaye Barnwell, anteriormente del grupo Sweet Honey in the Rock. Por lo general la gente sabe esos tres coros o los puede aprender muy rápidamente. Él forma tres grupos y le pide a cada uno de ellos que cante su coro una vez solo y después todos juntos. Cuando los grupos cantan juntos, estos coros superpuestos hacen armonías maravillosas. Él piensa que las canciones folclóricas también funcionan bien para inspirar a la gente a cantar y disfruta muchísimo enseñar llamadas y respuestas y después hacer que lo que se cante sea progresivamente más complejo.

Gus piensa que la música es importante para la formación de comunidad porque somos humanos, y los seres humanos hemos estado formando comunidad con música (¡y comida!) desde tiempo inmemorial. "La música refleja cómo alabamos a Dios", dice, "cómo encontramos alegría y podemos lidiar con el dolor. Entonces, cuando formamos comunidad con música podemos apoyarnos junto/as en nuestra humanidad, incluso si la música que sabemos y amamos individualmente es muy diferente".

**Cantar juntos puede generar esperanza**

Ana Hernández, miembro de la Comisión Permanente de Liturgia y Música, se describe como “compositora, arreglista, facilitadora de talleres, autora y revoltosa”. Habla sobre el poder de cantar juntos:

Ya sea si uno/a está rodeado/a de incendios o comunicando sobre el desmantelamiento del racismo, cantar oraciones junto/as posiblemente es lo más importante que nos ayuda a ver la vía hacia adelante en una senda que anteriormente no habíamos divisado. He visto salones llenos de gente totalmente transformada cuando se encuentran con las dos melodías siguientes y una urgente necesidad de trabajar conjuntamente.

“Dont Be Afraid – No tengas miedo”, de John Bell, nos recuerda estar presentes y fieles, incluso si estamos aterrado/as. Cantar juntos, añadiendo armonías y contramelodías, nos hace sentir receptivo/as a nuevas posibilidades a medida que empezamos a movernos en sincronía. El hecho de que nos empezamos a sentir más cómodo/as a medida que cantamos nos permite explorar cómo lucen la transformación y la comunicación y cómo nos sentimos a medida que practicamos invitarnos y estimularnos mutuamente y empezamos a dejar un espacio para cada voz mediante la profundización de nuestra capacidad de escucharnos.

“All Shall Be Well/Another World – Todo va a estar bien/Otro mundo” combina textos de Arundhati Roy (“Otro mundo no solo es posible, sino que está en camino; en un día tranquilo lo puedo oír respirar”) y de Julian de Norwich (“Todo irá bien, todo irá bien y toda clase de cosas irán bien”) con una melodía original, reforzando los temas de la presencia y el consuelo de Dios añadiendo esperanzas. La esperanza da energía al salón, permeando a cada persona con una confianza en sí misma que posibilita que hasta lo/as cantantes tímido/as encuentren y compartan sus voces. Con este tipo de participación incondicional todo realmente irá bien.

Ellis Montes, director musical de Grace, Houston, dice que la música es una manera de hacer que la gente sienta que parten de una misma base cuando recién se están conociendo. Él dice que cantar melodías simples pero que hacen pensar como “En mi vida, te alabaré” o “Tu fidelidad” pueden ayudar a la gente a centrarse en una idea, especialmente al iniciar una reunión importante, como una que incluya liturgias múltiples, revisión del libro de oración común, lenguaje incluyente y modificar el calendario litúrgico. (Ellis empleó estos cantos en su primera reunión de la Comisión Permanente de Liturgia y Música).

Hay un dicho que dice: “Cantar es orar dos veces”. A mí cantar me ayuda a recordar oraciones y versos de la Biblia. Y cuando se usa la música al principio de cualquier tipo de reunión, tiene el potencial de generar unión, consuelo y amor.

**Sandra T. Montes** es la Asesora de Recursos en Español de la Fundación de la Iglesia Episcopal. Pasó muchos años desarrollando recursos bilingües originales para su iglesia, escuela y otros, y fue voluntaria y trabajó en la Iglesia Episcopal desde que le dieron la bienvenida en 1986. Sandra se desempeña como música, traductora, asesora y escritora. Obtuvo su doctorado en educación en 2016 y es asesora y música independiente a tiempo completo.

**Recursos:**

- [¿Qué cantamos el próximo domingo?](#) de Sandra Montes, ECF Vital Practices blog, agosto 24, 2015
- [Alcemos cada voz](#) de Sandra Montes, ECF Vital Practices blog, julio 23, 2015
- [Recorrer la senda de las relaciones](#) de Sarabeth Goodwin, Vestry Papers, Noviembre 2015
- [¡El Espíritu de Dios se mueve, se mueve, se mueve! ¡Oh hermano deja que se mueva dentro de tu corazón!](#) de Ema Rosero-Nordalm, ECF Vital Practices blog, abril 25, 2014