

VESTRY PAPERS

To Encourage and Guide Those Called by God to Lead Episcopal Congregations



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Good Beginnings for New Ministries

by Sandra Clark Kolb

"What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from." T.S. Eliot

The former rector left over a year ago. The interim has gone to his next assignment. The new rector has arrived — this should be the start of something big. Why does it feel, then, as though we are still at an end?

William Bridges, a key thinker in the field of change management, offers a model of change to which I turn repeatedly. Bridges contrasts "change," what happens to our physical environment (e.g., the arrival of the new rector), with "transition," our psychological response to it. Both need to be managed, but only the former — change — can be scheduled and, to some extent, controlled.

Once the rector announces that he/she is leaving, we can begin planning. A search

committee is appointed; an interim called. On the appointed day the new rector arrives. Change basically lends itself to flow chart thinking. When the new rector arrives it is the "start" of a new ministry for all involved; the change has been completed.

Handling beginnings well

But a "start" is not, in Bridges' model, a "beginning." *Beginnings occur when the new ministry feels comfortable and normal, when the memories of the past are just that and not undue influences on our future.*

Beginnings are the final of three stages of transition. All need to be handled well and vestry members have a crucial role in making this happen.

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Good beginnings for congregations in transition are an essential part of long term health. Fresh Start — a partnership of Cornerstone, the Office of Ministry Development, and the Church Deployment Office — helps ensure healthy transitions for both clergy and congregations. We asked Ann Holtz, national coordinator of Fresh Start, to report on this program, now operating in 41 dioceses.

FRESH START Building for the Future

by Ann Holtz

Your new rector has told you that she is going to be away from the church again next Tuesday. Across town, the new vicar has told his congregation the same thing. They have much to learn about their congregations and many things to do. But every month they are off to this thing called "Fresh Start." What's the scoop?

Through Fresh Start, clergy new to their congregations have the opportunity to:

Connect with their colleagues. Fresh Start provides a place for new clergy to share their excitement and hesitations with others who are also in transition. This allows a support system to develop, ensuring that they are not isolated when tough issues arise and they need to talk. Clergy are at risk of feeling isolated and then behaving like "lone rangers"; Fresh Start intentionally builds lasting relationships.

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For a congregation, a change in clergy leadership is a major transition — and vestries have a special role in helping that process be as healthy and dynamic as possible. Here we explore what it means to be a parish in transition and how vestries might best respond in this crucial time. In 2004, we will examine the dynamics of the search process itself.

*This Issue:
Healthy Transitions*



Building for the Future

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Connect with diocesan resources.

Facilitated by a team on behalf of the bishop, new clergy have opportunities to access resources in support of your congregation. Diocesan staff will no longer be “them,” but individuals they have come to trust.

Fresh Start provides a place for new clergy to share their excitement and hesitations with others who are also in transition.

Connect with the bishop. Research shows that if new clergy do not develop a good relationship with the bishop in the first eighteen months, chances of that relationship developing are greatly diminished. Most diocesan bishops spend several days a year with Fresh Start participants. This time together is invaluable for exploring mutual expectations, sharing passions for ministry, and developing peer relationships. You do not know when your priest will need to talk to the bishop about personal issues and topics that concern the well-being of your congregation. Fresh Start provides the structure for that to happen. This is about health, both your rector's and that of the congregation.

Be exposed to important theories on transitions. New clergy will explore theories about congregational dynamics during times of change. They receive help in understanding history, role clarity, influence and control, and how family systems theory applies to congregations. Your rector will be able to share current experiences as illustrations of these theories. Such sharing will help make sense of chaos that is inevitably present during times of transition.

Understanding the dynamics of your congregation as it experiences a change in ordained leadership is essential for your vestry.

Start relationships with their congregations on solid footing. Fresh Start participants are being intentional about how best to get this new relationship off to a good start. Taking the time and having a safe place to stand back and reflect on what is happening in the midst of transition is a good thing. By talking

with peers and looking at situations in light of various theories, clergy can respond in new ways to things that in the past may have caused discomfort or conflict.

By participating in Fresh Start, new clergy do their part to get relationships off to a good start. What about you and the rest of your vestry?

The Fresh Start Steering Committee will soon provide a revised curriculum to help dioceses use Fresh Start with congregational leaders, both lay and ordained.

Understanding the dynamics of your congregation as it experiences a change in ordained leadership is essential for your vestry. There is also a benefit in having conversations with your peers in other congregations.

By sharing experiences you will begin to see that some of the anxiety and turmoil you may feel is not about you or your new rector, but instead, is about where you are in your transition.

The national coordinator for the Fresh Start program, Ann Holtz is a member of St. James' Episcopal Church in Knoxville, Tennessee. A member of the Fresh Start facilitation team in the Diocese of East Tennessee, she is also a senior trainer for the Leadership Training Institute.

Administered by Cornerstone, Fresh Start is a diocesan-led program for congregational leaders, both lay and ordained, during the critical period of transition when they are building new relationships with one another. This diocesan initiative is accomplished by:

- ✦ assisting with the transition issues inherent in any new ministry;
- ✦ sharpening the skills for congregational development;
- ✦ strengthening the peer relationships among the clergy of a diocese; and
- ✦ deepening the trust and interconnectedness among clergy, congregations, bishop, and diocesan staff.

For more information about Fresh Start activity in your diocese contact your diocesan deployment officer or Ann Holtz at (865) 588-0674; jannaholtz@mindspring.com

Resources abound for parishes in transition.

Get to know more of them online through our new Vestry Papers' resource section:

www.EpiscopalFoundation.org

Predictable Chaos

by Lynn Vanderford-Schmissrauter

Change is difficult, even if you know it is coming.

Change does not happen without turmoil. The “right” decision, made faithfully and prayerfully with careful discernment, still comes with *unavoidable chaos* because of the shift it demands in our attitudes and behaviors — both individual and corporate.

The evening before I was elected senior warden of my parish vestry, our rector of some thirteen years announced his plan to retire. One announcement cast a parish of over 800 members into eighteen months of anxiety, tension, and confusion.

Our rector wasn't pushed out or forced to leave. On the contrary, his time with us was healthy and stabilizing, his retirement well timed and even predictable. We had just completed a successful building campaign

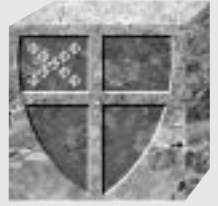
and were worshiping in a beautiful new nave. So why was everyone so uptight?

The answer is simple. *Change produces chaos.* Rabbi Edwin Friedman, who popularized family systems theory in his books *Generation to Generation* and *Friedman's Fables*, often compared a church system to a hanging decorative mobile. Tip one part of the mobile and the whole thing moves — just like a parish does when one rector leaves and another is called.

Vestries and other church leaders cannot avoid this chaos but we can do some things to make it a less painful, even fruitful time in parish life. Here are some things to consider for a healthy transition:

✚ **Pray.** Prayer is our greatest gift in times of change.

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So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock.

(1 Peter 5:1-3)

EDITOR'S NOTE

Healthy Transitions...for who?

by Lindsay Hardin Freeman

An acquaintance of mine, who is black, used to say that he was tired of interviewing, over and over again, for the job of rector. He felt that while many vestries were open enough to want a minority candidate on the slate, they did not want to actually *hire* one. He was caught in the middle.

And that is the catch in this issue of *Vestry Papers* as well. We've explored what it takes for clergy and vestries to have a healthy transition. But it's impossible to have that transition at all if the hiring itself doesn't take place.

Despite work on racism in recent years, the Episcopal Church remains predominantly white — 89.1% to be exact. And almost half of all Episcopal dioceses (48%) do not have black clergy in charge of any congregation, large or small. * Figures on other races are emerging, but not complete.

Is it that there aren't enough clergy of color willing to serve? Or is it that the Church doesn't want to reach beyond its traditional boundaries in recruitment and/or in hiring?



It is hard to know all the dynamics. But there are churches that have managed to overcome the odds and hire someone who doesn't look completely like the congregation. St. John's Lafayette Square, otherwise known as the Church of the Presidents, in Washington, DC, is one.

Its rector of some eight years, Cuban-born Luis Leon, was suggested through the Church Deployment Office (CDO) database at the Episcopal Church Center in New York as one of approximately 35-40 candidates. The Rev. James Wilson, CDO executive director, considers this a small but significant step.

“Through CDO, we've at least leveled the playing field,” he says. “It used to be that almost all calls came through the ‘old boy’ network. That still happens, but not to such a great extent.” Now, he says, a significant number of both women and minority candidates are automatically included in every compilation of names sent to parishes.

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Healthy Transitions...for who?

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Leon says he, too, sensed something different about the interview process at St. John's.

"I felt this was a group that wasn't going to use any code words in its private conversations," he said. Code words, said Leon, are phrases like "his accent is pretty heavy, you know," or "we think the congregation just isn't ready."

Search Committee chair Nan Cope says that the committee found itself inspired by the words of the retiring rector, who had urged the vestry to call an interim with "a very different style" than his had been. That done, with a married clergy couple, the search committee and vestry committed itself to "staying open to the Spirit" and praying a great deal.

And one other thing made the difference, she said. Each candidate was required to lead a 10-15 minute Bible study, on the Scripture passage of his or her choice, with the vestry.

"When that happened with Luis, there was an incredibly illuminating moment," said Cope. "Things turned around. The decision was clear."

Nine years after the search, all is well — and growing — in the parish.

Are there any lessons here? It would seem so: be open; pray consistently throughout the

calling process; try to do the work on racism before the process starts; use diocesan and national resources; be honest with the candidates; try different styles in the interim; and look for clues and direction from the Holy Spirit along the way.

My acquaintance mentioned earlier is now a rector at a large urban parish. It is a good match for both. He hesitates to go on the record about the painful days in the past, because all is working well now.

"When they first called me to interview, I told them I wouldn't do it unless they were really going to honestly consider me as a candidate," he says. "But they insisted that I come. They said they would look at me for my merits."

And it would seem that they did. Both he and the congregation are happy, content that the right choice was made.

*Statistics compiled by Louie Crew using data from *A Report on the Episcopal Church in the United States* by C. Kirk Hadaway for the Office of Congregational Development and other sources. See website at:

<http://newark.rutgers.edu/~lcrew/blkpr.html>



Have you seen the new online web portal for the Anglican Communion? View current news and uplifting stories at: www.anglicancommunion.org

Resources for Parishes in Transition

Fresh Start, sponsored by Cornerstone, a ministry of the Episcopal Church Foundation. (865) 588-0674 or www.episcopalchurch.org

The Church Deployment Office, 815 Second Avenue, New York, NY (800) 334-7626 or www.episcopalchurch.org/cdo

Interim Ministry Network — (410) 719-0777 or www.interimministry.org

The Alban Institute — (301) 718-4407 or www.alban.org

Congregational Resource Guide. A project of the Alban Institute and the Indianapolis Center for Congregations (317) 237-7799 or www.congregationalresources.org

Books and Manuals

The Vestry Resource Guide, Volume II. Order from Forward Movement Publications. (800) 543-1813

Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Changes, William Bridges. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1991.

New Beginnings: A Pastorate Start Up Workbook, Roy Oswald, Alban Publications, 1998.

Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes, William Bridges. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1980.



*Next Issue:
Youth in the
Episcopal Church*

Predictable Chaos

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- ✚ **Communicate.** Use all avenues including newsletters, service bulletins, web sites and special letters. Our vestry sent several “transition updates” to everyone in the parish. Costly? Yes. Worth it? Absolutely.
- ✚ **Remember that transition begins with the very first announcement that someone is leaving.** This period can be very difficult for the departing clergy. There is an automatic response from parishioners who will immediately ignore the individual who is leaving, going around her/him to get an answer or seek direction. I call it the “invisible rector syndrome.”
- ✚ **Ask for help.** Many dioceses train consultants for transition and searches. There are publications and resources from local and national church offices available to vestries. Our Canon for Deployment was a valuable asset during our transition, offering guidance throughout the retirement of our rector, the search, and into the new ministry of our new rector.
- ✚ **Be clear about the difference between confidential information and secrets.** The distinction is clear — confidential information, when inappropriately shared, can create widespread damage and break trust. A secret usually involves hidden information known by and kept by a few to the detriment of many. For example, if your parish has a history of clergy misconduct, this information should be shared with your new priest (preferably in the interview process). Sitting on secrets can set up both a vestry and a clergy person for real disaster!
- ✚ **Make sure your information is accurate.** Are there diocesan guidelines which will impact your search? Church canons? Special circumstances that might require a conversation with the Bishop? Get the facts early.
- ✚ **Be clear about guidelines for existing staff.** Keep staff members — both clergy and lay — in the information loop throughout the transition.
- ✚ **Understand that some people adjust more quickly than others do.** Everyone responds to change differently. To honor this is to honor our own humanity.
- ✚ **Hold parish forums so people can ask questions.** We used Sunday morning education hour to give updates and answer questions. Our retiring rector spoke at one of these to tell us about his retirement plans — and what he would not be doing (like returning to officiate at baptisms or weddings) after he left.
- ✚ **Pay attention to the questions that are asked — these can often tell you a lot about the source of parish anxiety.** Make sure clear and consistent answers are provided promptly. This means the vestry and other lay leaders (like search committees and transition teams) must be well informed. Instant sabotage occurs when a lay leader claims to “not have a clue what is happening over there at the church” even if she/he just sat through a three day vestry retreat!
- ✚ **Be clear about your own expectations.** Most of the trouble early in a new call comes from unclear or unspoken expectations — on the part of the parishioners and the new clergy. What do you expect of your new clergy? What are the things she/he needs to know about “how we have always done it”? What are you willing to let go of in order to embrace healthy change?
- ✚ **Share your vision.** What is your vision for ministry in your parish? Have you shared this with your new rector? Is it consistent with his/her vision?
- ✚ **Encourage your new priest to seek support from colleagues and do everything you can to help this happen.** See Fresh Start information on pages 1 and 2.
- ✚ **Remember to breathe.** Transition is a time for discernment for all of us. Know that God is in the chaos as well as the calm.

Lynn Vanderford-Schmissrauter is a congregational and search consultant in the Diocese of East Tennessee and trains facilitators nationally for Fresh Start. She is currently writing Fresh Start curriculum for congregations in transition, and is a former senior warden of her parish, St. Timothy's, Signal Mountain, Tennessee.



“During transition, unresolved issues and organizational weaknesses will often re-emerge. This is a good thing, as it is best not to leave these issues for the new rector to resolve... even if they cannot be immediately corrected, they can be brought out into the open and will help in determining the congregation's needs.”

From The Vestry Resource Guide, Volume II



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Good Beginnings

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The first stage is “ending.” We need to say “good-bye” to the former rector and his/her ministry in ways that honor the past and allow us to be clear about what is ending (and what is not — which is our parish and ministry in the world). Your task, as a vestry, is to see that all parishioners have an opportunity to say “good-bye,” and to ensure that plans are in place to continue the parish’s ministry.

Bridges calls the second stage the “neutral zone.” From a biblical perspective, this is the time of wandering in the wilderness. We are uneasy because our parish routines are broken. The interim’s style is not the same as the former rector’s. Lay leaders, especially vestries, are taking on new functions. We are challenged by having to do things differently.

Your role in the wilderness is to communicate often, to keep parishioners informed about the search and other key issues, and to LISTEN, addressing needs and questions as they arise.

Emerging from the wilderness is a new sense of ministry, a new “beginning,” Bridges’ final stage of transition. But you cannot predict where people’s hearts will be, nor can you schedule them to experience their beginnings at the same time.

Logistics and trust

So what can you do to create a healthy beginning? I asked a group of clergy in new cures what had helped them. There were logistics: the rectory had been repaired and had new appliances; the office was set up and ready to use. These simple things alleviated the stress of moving to a new place. *Most important, however, was the building of trust between clergy and vestry and the extent to which the vestry helped the new clergy understand the life of the parish.*

Knowing the vestry wants the relationship to succeed is key. Honesty about situations in the parish help foster this feeling. Clergy want to know about the history, hopes and dreams of the parish, circumstances facing parishioners, and any conflicts.

One vestry scheduled appointments for the new rector with every major interest group, including those who could talk about parish history. Another took photos of every parishioner, asked each family unit to write an

introduction, and then compiled them for the new rector.

Clergy said what was most valuable was the time vestry members — particularly wardens — gave them. “We spent evenings on the front porch of the senior warden’s house talking about the parish.” One rector scheduled twice yearly dinners with the current and former wardens to talk about how things were going and to brainstorm ideas for the future.

But several clergy noted that wardens were burned out from the interim and the search. Beginnings require continuity of leadership, just as endings and the wilderness do. So what can vestries do to provide this continuity without engendering burnout?

Providing continuity

One way is to involve as many people as possible in taking on temporary responsibilities during the interim. Another is to create transition committees to help find housing, answer questions about family needs (e.g., school options for the rector’s children), and host get-acquainted receptions, etc.

Finally, during the interim and the search you have gotten used to doing things “your way.” You may have taken on new responsibilities, some of which revert to the rector once he/she is called. Recognize that the arrival of the new priest is an ending for you, too. You will need to negotiate a new set of roles and responsibilities, and to develop a new set of mutual expectations with the new rector.

Be gentle with yourself: clarify what is important to bring forward from the past; what you need to let go; and acknowledge yourself and others for the work done in leading the parish through the wilderness time. Successful stewardship during a time of transition is indeed an occasion for celebration. Well done, good and faithful servant.

Sandra Clark Kolb is an independent consultant and former senior warden of St. Thomas’ Parish, Washington, DC. A former search committee chair, she is the Fresh Start Coordinator for the Diocese, a member of the Diocesan Commission on Ministry, and co-chair of the diocesan Wardens’ Planning Committee.