

VESTRY PAPERS



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

Calling Others to Service: A Theological Task

by Diana Butler Bass

During a congregational focus group interview about two years ago, I asked parish leaders what had changed in the ways that their church conducted business. A woman immediately responded, "The vestry meetings are fantastic. We pray, study the Bible, and talk about theology. We care about each other. Then we work on issues. It has transformed the place." Others in the group enthusiastically affirmed her observations. The vestry saw itself as a small group devoted to spiritual leadership within the congregation.

At the time, the answer surprised me. My impression was that vestries saw themselves as corporate boards, councils of business professionals going about the church's work in mostly secular ways. However, in additional interviews over the next few months, I heard similar comments in a number of churches. From that research, I began to conclude that a new emphasis on spirituality—

especially the ideal of servant leadership—appears to be quietly reshaping vestry leadership in many congregations. The switch from business to Bible study, from secular to spiritual leadership, will have profound implications throughout the church. One such change will be the way in which vestries recruit candidates for lay and ordained ministries.

Under the business model, candidates for ministry discerned a personal call, approached the priest, and then were presented to the vestry (or discernment committee of the vestry). The vestry would approve the candidate, attest to the person's fitness for ministry, make a recommendation to the appropriate authorities, and provide resources from further training. Vestries generally served as the "first hoop" through which a candidate had to jump, a kind of clearinghouse for professional ministry, and *continued on page 6*

What is the role of a vestry in supporting and recruiting individuals for ordained ministry? This issue of Vestry Papers explores how vestries might best respond to this important task.

A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WILLIAM G. ANDERSEN, JR.

This issue of *Vestry Papers* introduces an Interim Editor as we recruit new staff for Cornerstone. Bill Craddock and his staff in Memphis are shifting attention from Cornerstone to the Church Pension Group's CREDO Project.

Spirited thanks go to Bill, Stephanie Cheney and Debbie Burnette for their careful attention to all aspects of *Vestry Papers* production, from story development to the mechanics of fulfillment. We wish them well in their new venture and know our mutual interests will keep us in contact.

We welcome the Rev. Lindsay Hardin Freeman as Interim Editor. Lindsay is a

seasoned parish priest and professional writer and editor. She has worked with the Foundation for over ten years. She has produced and edited diocesan newspapers as well as worked as a writer for ministry units at the Episcopal Church Center in New York. She makes her home in Long Lake, Minnesota, with her spouse Leonard Freeman, who is rector of St. Martin's by the Lake Church, and their two children.

While the editor has changed, the editorial policy has not. We are committed to serving vestry interests in achieving effective congregational leadership and management.



CORNERSTONE

IS A MINISTRY OF

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FOUNDATION



Our Greatest Crisis: The Lack of Gifted Young People in the Ordination Process

by the Rev. Mark Anschutz

*Editor's Note: Saint Michael and All Angels Church in Dallas has taken a proactive stance in encouraging young people to consider careers in ordained ministry. We asked the Rev. Mark Anschutz, rector, to explore for our readers both the motivation behind that decision and the specific program, **Pathways to Ministry**, that the parish has designed to address this problem.*

The greatest crisis facing our Episcopal Church in the next ten to fifteen years has little to do with the kinds of social and theological issues reported with such passion in our diocesan and national church publications. Rather, it is the lack of gifted young persons being allowed to come forward in the ordination process. **The most current figures available indicate that, in a church serviced by an active ordained base of just under nine thousand clergy, there are only three hundred priests beneath the age of thirty-five and, of that number, only fifty are below the age of thirty!** Unless this sad tendency is not swiftly and decisively reversed, this much beloved church of ours stands at enormous risk of being severely crippled by not having talented, well formed and experienced persons to guide our parishes and provide the high level of theological leadership this church has depended upon for centuries.

Much to our credit, we Episcopalians have made extraordinary strides, over the past thirty years, with regards to ministry. We have elevated lay ministry towards that central and vital place it played in the early church. We have continued to heighten our awareness of the valued place minorities need to have in the life of the church as it moves into this new century. We continue to be engaged in the deep and often painful process of discerning God's will with regard to issues related to human sexuality and ordination. And we continue to expand the rightful place of women in lay and ordained ministry. But over this same thirty year period, we have allowed ourselves to be owned by the false paradigm that in order to be ordained one must be over age forty-five and beaten and battered by the world. In this we have lost sight of the fact that the best place to form deacons and priests is

within the life and ministry of the church! We have forgotten that King, Bonhoeffer, Calvin, Luther, St. Francis, St. Margaret, Aquinas, St. John, St. Peter and our Lord all did their best and primary work before any of them reached the age of thirty-five. The language I use is firm, but true: we have failed both ourselves and young persons by either not allowing them to come forward for ordination, or strongly discouraging them from doing so by the lengths of our process. In the doing, we have put at risk our future.

High school is the best time to plant that seed...

While we must remember that "recruitment" must always be the work of God's Holy Spirit, the church needs to be hard at work creating a "user-friendly" environment in which young persons and the Holy Spirit are given the freedom to carefully consider ordained ministry. And truly responsible, forward thinking, parish clergy and vestries need to be deeply dedicated to the business of setting in place a new and enabling environment for encouraging youthful ordained vocations.

continued on page 3

Pathways Prayer:

Almighty God, you have entrusted to us the care of your church in this and every generation. Grant us such vision, self mastery, and pure devotion that we may raise up able persons for ordained ministry. Aid us in helping young persons see the value of life lived for others, and the wonder found in relating your love story to all the world. May many come to that place where their gifts are freely used to teach, lead, challenge, for the sake of others, in the name of Christ, Our Lord, and Great High Priest. Amen.

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Our Greatest Crisis

continued from page 2

Church planner and visionary Lyle Schaller says high school is the best time to plant that seed. And with this in mind, our parish, Saint Michael and All Angels in Dallas, has begun a national initiative to enable gifted and able young persons to consider the rich privilege of pursuing ordained ministry as a life vocation. In addition to raising the point regularly with the youth at our group meetings, summer and winter mission projects, and weekly Bible studies, our new **Pathways to Ministry** program reaches out to high school youth across the country. Key components include:

- ✚ an annual national high school conference in which youth from throughout the nation (last year from Hawaii to Georgia, from Texas to Pennsylvania) are gathered together to meet one another, enjoy themselves, ask questions and hear about the possibilities contained within the entire framework of ordained ministry: parish priest, military chaplain, school and college chaplaincies, hospital ministry, educational and counseling ministries.
- ✚ a six week summer parish internship program for college sophomores and juniors to work in a variety of parish settings.
- ✚ a ten-month expanded program for young persons graduating from college who are eager to experience in-depth parish ministry before moving on to the formal ordination process.
- ✚ financial assistance to help reduce the large burden that quality theological education often imposes.
- ✚ aid in helping young persons find parishes and dioceses that recognize the importance of enabling young ordained vocations.
- ✚ initial work in creating a mentoring program for those persons just graduating from seminary by identifying “priest’s priests” and coupling them with recent graduates in the initial and crucial formative years of ordained ministry.
- ✚ earnest prayer on the part of all those lay and ordained persons in the parish concerned with the erosion of leadership and intellectual competence in the Episcopal Church.

We stand ready to help any clergy, vestry or parish that wants to labor together with us in addressing this issue.



We have allowed ourselves to be owned by the false paradigm that in order to be ordained one must be over age forty-five and beaten and battered by the world.

It's Worth the Journey

by the Rev. Dr. Melford (Bud) Holland

Editors note: *Exactly what are the canonical requirements that vestries must follow in order to endorse an individual for ordination? We asked the Rev. Dr. Melford (Bud) Holland to elaborate.*

On the one hand, the canons of the Episcopal Church appear straightforward and simple. A certificate is required in Title 3, Canon 4. 4d from the rector and vestry for all persons who wish to be considered as a postulant for Holy Orders. The certificate must be signed by the rector of the parish of which the applicant is a member and by two-thirds majority of the whole vestry. The clerk of the vestry or the recording secretary of the vestry meeting at which the vote was taken then attests this certificate. This process then repeats itself when a postulant is being considered as a candidate for Holy Orders (Title 3, Canon 5. 1c). A similar declaration is made before ordination (Title 3, Canon 6. 6c1,2). Some variations occur depending on

the previous ordination status of the person seeking ordination in the Episcopal Church. In the case of persons ordained under Canon 9, provision is made for the certification to be signed by four confirmed adult communications in good standing, if there does not exist a council of the congregation (Title 3, Canon 9. 2a1). A review of these canons and all of the ones under Title 3 are being undertaken by the Standing Commission on Ministry Development, which will give its recommendations for possible revision to the 2003 General Convention.

A Time of Discernment

One normally proceeds to ordination as deacon and as priest by first becoming an aspirant, then a postulant, and finally a candidate. The initial phase of aspirant is a time of discernment within a community of faith to assist the person in determining the

continued on page 5

A call to ordination emerges out of the soil of our fundamental call to ministry through our baptism.

Vestries & Ordination: Strange Bedfellows or Inseparable Partners?

by Dr. Donn Morgan

The following brief thoughts are not focused on the canonical responsibilities of vestries in the ordination process, for there are many far more capable than I to discuss this. Rather, on the basis of many years of experience with parishes and candidates for ordained ministry as a seminary professor and now a dean, I want to set forth some working premises/hypotheses about ordination and the parish, and then to draw conclusions about possible roles the vestry might have if such premises were acceptable. My overall goal is to stimulate consideration for a strong role of vestries in the ordination process. I hope what follows contributes to this task.

Working Hypotheses

1. Ordination, the placing of particular people in particular orders within the body of Christ, is first and foremost an activity that is meant to build up and strengthen the people of God so it can fulfill the mission given to it by God.
2. Given that ordination is for the people of God, it follows that the people of God should have something to say about the process by which people are selected, nurtured, educated, and supported as they progress toward such a ministry.
3. While bishops, priests, and deacons play vital roles in the recruitment, discernment, and nurture of candidates for ordination, they alone should not be primarily responsible for this process (the Commission on Ministry system rests on such a hypothesis).
4. At the present time there is too much "self-selection" (individuals experiencing initial "calls" with little relationship to congregations) of candidates for ordination.
5. At present there is a lessening, rather than an increasing, of social infrastructures that have often been determinative in the "call" process (e.g. the waning of campus ministries, the lessened role of bishop, a commission structure focused on response rather than a proactive role).

Proposal

The parish needs an infrastructure for:

- a. Identifying promising candidates for ordained ministry.
- b. Promoting and aiding in the discernment process for ordained ministry.

- c. Support of candidates for ordained ministry.
- d. Providing knowledge of the Episcopal Church, its mission and ministry, to candidates for ordination.
- e. Counsel and advice about educational needs and opportunities for candidates for ordination.
- f. Working in concert with parish and diocesan clergy and others charged with responsibilities for candidates for ordination.
- g. To represent and witness to the parish as a primary matrix for the understanding of ordained ministry, its roles and purposes.

In order for the parish to accomplish the tasks associated with such an infrastructure, the vestry must be integrally involved. If the infrastructure is not a special part (e.g. standing committee) of the vestry itself, the vestry must have official liaisons to it. Providing the infrastructure functions suggested above should not be given to a small group with special interests. Rather, such a group should have connections and relationships with all major activities of the parish—and the vestry itself is the most logical such body!

Overall Goal

At this time when we may or may not have a clergy shortage, when we seem to want younger candidates for ordination in addition to the many fine older candidates we already have, in such a time I have no idea what God is actually calling the church to do with regard to the nature of future candidates for ministry. But, I do believe the parish is a central player in this unfolding drama and that it must put itself, its perspectives, and its needs intentionally in dialogue with the diocese, with the province and the national church, and with seminaries and other institutions where theological education for candidates for ordination occurs. If such a dialogue informs the church and those who will be called to ordained ministry, then vestries will have done their part in an important facet of the church's life and mission.

Donn Morgan is Dean of the Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, California.



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It's Worth the Journey

continued from page 3

nature and focus of a call to ministry. This may lead the aspirant to consider a number of different possibilities of expression of her or his ministry including a renewed sense of one's ministry in daily life. Often a group is appointed by the rector and vestry to assist the aspirant in this discernment phase. That group then reports their recommendations to the rector and vestry. In some dioceses this discernment phase is held in a neighboring congregation.

Becoming a postulant means that one is preparing for ordination and that phase has to have the approval of the bishop of the diocese. This preparation takes many forms (seminary, diocesan school, mentoring, or a combination of all three). When one is considered as a candidate (requiring the approval of the bishop and the Standing Committee) it means that she or he has proceeded in a satisfactory way in this preparation phase so that the church, including the rector and vestry, can reaffirm their earlier affirmation and recommendation. The same reaffirmation holds true just before ordination.

***Then I heard the Lord asking,
"Whom shall I send as a messenger
to my people? Who will go for us?":
And I said, "Lord, I'll go! Send me."
Isaiah 6:8***

What lies behind these recommendations and what discoveries await vestries?

First of all, we know that, even with common canons, the discernment and ordination processes vary somewhat from diocese to diocese, so it is best to check with the bishop's office to see what the process is in your diocese. We also know that the name rector in the canons is also often interpreted to mean vicar or perhaps regional missionary or chaplain at a college or university. The word parish can also mean mission or regional cluster or be referred to as congregation. Vestries may also mean Bishops Committees or chaplaincy committees. Here again it is best to contact your diocese.

Ministry through Baptism

Behind all of these processes is a discovery and re-discovery that we all have ministry through our baptism. The discovery that often occurs for vestries and parish discernment committees alike is a renewed sense of their own ministries. A vestry can best prepare for this journey by helping to create a climate of mutual ministry in a congregation and by being open to ongoing discernment of their own ministries, by being explorers and discoverers themselves. A call to ordination emerges out of the soil of our fundamental call to ministry through our baptism. The vestry can not only respond to a person who senses a call but also initiate conversation with persons whom the vestry believes may exhibit the kind of leadership and character needed for a variety of ministries including ordained ministry.

Discernment is of the community, by the community, for the community. In this important work with others every effort should be taken to affirm the worth of others and the gifts they bring, even as the vestry also has a responsibility to consider the needs of the wider church. Raising up leadership for the church is a key role for the vestry of a congregation. Even as we do this work we realize that the leader we recognize and affirm is also one who is often called upon to exercise leadership in a broader forum of the wider church and in the world. Our individual communities of faith, likewise, are inextricably connected to others. Seeing ourselves as being an integral and complementary part of a larger mosaic of the church is a privilege and opportunity in which we all share.

It is not always an easy road to take, but it is worth the journey!

Bud Holland is the Coordinator for Ministry Development at the Episcopal Church Center in New York.



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continued from page 1

introduced the potential minister to the rules of the process. Functionally, the vestry served as a kind of religious personnel committee, the gatekeepers to a better position in the denominational corporation.

When vestry members understand their identity as servants, as those entrusted with spiritual gifts to empower God's people, the vestry's role in recruitment also changes. The most profound shift is one of self-understanding: church leaders are not the gatekeepers to a profession, they are brothers and sisters in mutual ministry with the person-seeking to hear and follow God's call. Theirs is not an adversarial task on behalf of an institution. They are not executives trying to find the right employee.

Rather, they are called to friendship, spiritual direction, and shared listening with those in the community who wish to serve God and the body of Christ. A vestry's theological identity leads to the theological task of identifying those whom God calls for service.

This has several implications for vestry leadership in the area of recruitment for ministry. First, vestries should be more active in seeking out those who may have a call. In the past, candidates often discerned a private call and presented him or her self to the vestry. A better biblical model is that the elders of a congregation identify potential leaders and ask those persons if a call is discerned. Vestries should look for those who demonstrate vision and skill in ministry.

Second, the vestry does not simply approve a call. Rather, a vestry should help develop a potential call. This involves mentoring and formation, placing the candidate in positions of ministry and responsibility, and working with that person to be an effective leader. Ideally, senior members of the congregation should offer spiritual direction and wise guidance from their own experience. Vestries should provide opportunities for theological reflection as well as whatever theological training is available. Vestries could promote discernment, practice, education and formation, and reflection in the congregational setting—no aspect should be postponed until the diocesan process or seminary.

Third, the vestry should provide more resources than simply writing a yearly check to a seminary. The vestry should support candidates with a variety of resources while

they explore their call. Some of those resources might be financial: conference fees, books allowances, new ministry positions on staff. However, relational resources are ultimately more significant. Is there a retired clergy person in the congregation who has time and vision to mentor a young candidate? Is the vestry willing to spend time getting to know this person? Do lay committees for ministry discernment help a variety of people and ministries in the congregation? Does your parish regularly offer classes or retreats helping members discover their spiritual gifts and call to ministry?

Fourth, the vestry must promote a congregation-wide vision that baptism calls every Christian to minister in God's name. As part of God's call to the church, some people will hear calls to particular service in Christian community or the world. A visionary vestry will support both someone called to the priesthood or someone called as a lay theologian with appropriate care and enthusiasm. With equal commitment, the vestry should invest in those who minister from within their community—the lay youth minister, Sunday school teachers, the soup kitchen director, or a deacon raised up in the congregation. The vestry needs to recognize Christ's dazzling variety of calls to serve and develop innovative ways to hear and support those calls in their local setting.

Over the years, I have heard vestry members complain about both the availability and quality of clergy and lay professionals. In revisioning their own role in the process of recruitment, local church leaders can make a significant difference in developing and training spiritual leaders. As servants who seek to hear God's call to other servants, vestries can help transform the culture of clergy professionalism to the kind of passionate and compassionate ministry so desperately needed in vital communities of Christian discipleship.

Diana Butler Bass, Ph.D. is Director of Adult Formation and Spirituality at Christ Church, Alexandria, an adjunct professor at Virginia Theological Seminary, and a research consultant to the Episcopal Church Foundation. She is the author of the forthcoming book, Strength for the Journey: A Mainline Pilgrimage through Post-Christian America, due out from Jossey-Bass Publishers in Fall 2001.

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