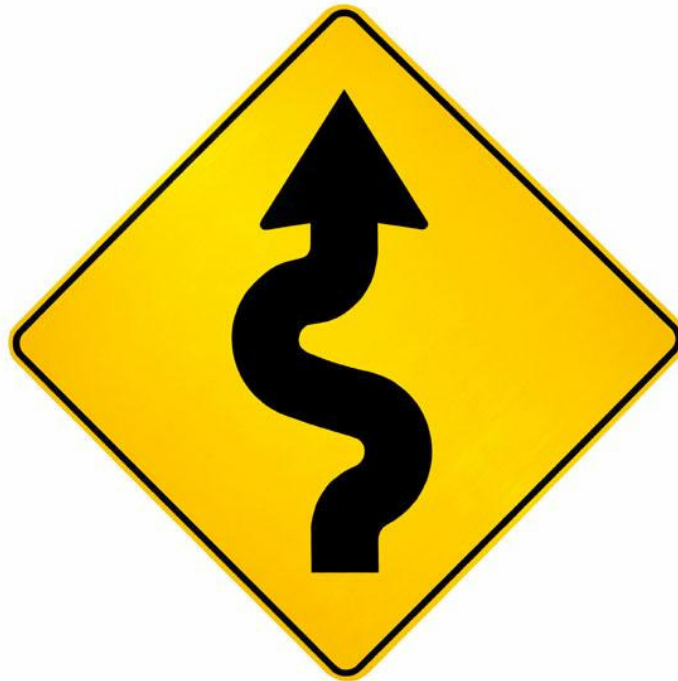


***From Seminary to Parish***  
***Navigating Your First Clergy Job Search***



by

**The Reverend Tim Schenck**

**A User-Friendly Guide for  
Seminarians of the Episcopal Church**

# *From Seminary to Parish*

## *Navigating Your First Clergy Job Search*

*From Seminary to Parish* is a practical, accessible guide for Episcopal seminarians making the leap from seminary to parish life. By shedding light on the mysteries of the initial deployment process, this work serves as an invaluable resource for any seminarian called to parish ministry. The overarching purpose is clear: to insure a smooth navigation of the clergy job search process while helping to amplify God’s call to the individual.

If you’ve ever had questions about what rectors are looking for when they hire someone fresh out of seminary, if you don’t fully understand the point of the CDO Personal Profile, if you’d like help writing a “seminarian’s resume,” or if you seek tips on interviewing with a parish search committee, *From Seminary to Parish* is most definitely for you.

Flowing out of a theology of cooperation with the Holy Spirit, this resource takes a graduating seminarian step-by-step through the parish deployment process. The information is presented with humor in an easy-to-read style that reminds us just how exciting a time this is for those called to ordained ministry

### **About the Author**



The Rev. Tim Schenck is rector of the Episcopal Parish of St. John the Evangelist in Hingham, Massachusetts. A 2000 graduate of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, he previously served parishes in Maryland and New York. He is the author of *What Size Are God’s Shoes: Kids, Chaos, and the Spiritual Life* (Morehouse) and blogs at “Clergy Family Confidential.” He lives in the St. John’s Rectory with his wife, Bryna, their two sons Benedict and Zachary, and their dog Delilah.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	4
<b>Preface to the First Edition</b> .....	5
CHAPTER 1	
<b>Getting in the Right Frame of Mind</b> .....	6
CHAPTER 2	
<b>The Job Search Process</b> .....	9
CHAPTER 3	
<b>Presenting Yourself on Paper</b> .....	18
CHAPTER 4	
<b>Interviewing</b> .....	24
CHAPTER 5	
<b>Contract Negotiation</b> .....	39
CHAPTER 6	
<b>Wrapping up a Successful Job Search</b> .....	48
<b>Afterword</b> .....	50
<b>Sample Letter of Agreement</b> .....	51
<b>Glossary of Terms</b> .....	54
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	55
<b>Endnotes</b> .....	57
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	58

## Preface

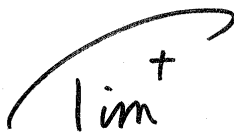
Since the first edition of *From Seminary to Parish* came out in 2001, I've become increasingly aware that "transition" is a key word in the pursuit of God's call. Those of us called to ordained ministry live in a state of (hopefully) creative transition. We have all experienced the transition to seminary from various ways of life. Some of us have experienced the transition beyond seminary, and many of you now look forward to a fruitful transition from seminary into parish ministry. Transition can be both exciting and nerve-wracking but in the context of vocation it is ultimately the fulfillment of God's call. You have dropped your proverbial net and are waiting to discern where you will begin your new life in ordained ministry.

I, too, have experienced vocational transition since graduating from seminary and accepting my first call as curate at Old St. Paul's in Baltimore. After seven years as rector of All Saints' Episcopal Church in Briarcliff Manor, New York, I was called to serve as rector of The Episcopal Parish of St. John the Evangelist in Hingham, Massachusetts. And more to the point, given the purpose of this resource, I recently had occasion to call my first curate out of seminary. So I have now seen the transition from seminary to parish from all angles.

The beauty of transition when it is accepted in the context of faith is that new challenges and opportunities are presented each day. That's one of the joys of ministry: we never know what God has in store for us and the people we serve. Again, it's all about living into the transition, finding Christ in the unknown, and giving thanks for the daily encounters with God that enrich our lives.

I wish you all the best in your future ministry and current discernment. May God in Christ bless you richly and guide you through each remaining transition.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim" with a small cross symbol above the letter "i". A curved line arches over the signature.

The Rev. Tim Schenck  
The Episcopal Parish of  
St. John the Evangelist  
Hingham, Massachusetts  
The Feast of the Ascension, 2010

## **Preface to the First Edition**

This project is the product of frustration. The summer before my last year of seminary my anxiety level slowly began to rise as I pondered the leap from seminary life to parish ministry. Looking beyond the General Ordination Exam was hard enough. Thinking about job interviews, leaving the wonderful support system that comes with living in a seminary community, and beginning work in a parish was downright daunting. One of the biggest obstacles seemed to be the unfamiliar and mysterious clergy deployment process. Being a good seminarian, my first response was to head to the library. I sought practical advice on navigating my first clergy job search, hoping to encounter tips on compiling a resume, interviewing at a parish, and negotiating a clergy contract. My primary goal was to glean valuable insights from those who had already made a successful transition out of seminary and into the parish. It turned out to be an exercise in futility. There were some solid resources available for current priests looking for new parish placements. And there's no doubt that *some* of these were applicable to my situation. Seeking a first placement out of seminary, however, is a very different circumstance. There are challenges, stresses, and rewards that are particular to those preparing to leave seminary. These existing resources were of moderate assistance but failed to give the full information and guidance that I so desired.

I left the library that day determined to pass along any helpful information that I might encounter over the upcoming year, as I participated in my own job search. This work is not, however, merely a collection of personal "war stories." I am indebted to the experiences of many newly ordained clergy and veteran rectors. It is the collective wisdom of many that I hope to have distilled and put into an accessible form for graduating seminarians. You will certainly not find all the answers to questions surrounding issues of deployment. Each person's situation is unique just as each parish community is unique. Nonetheless, this undertaking is intended to provide some helpful and timely information for making a smooth transition from seminary to your first position as an ordained leader in the Church.

The project generally focuses on those seeking jobs as parish assistants. This employment situation remains the norm for graduating seminarians and is often a very positive way to begin living into one's vocation. I recognize that there are a growing number of graduates whose first job will be as deacon/priest-in-charge of a congregation. There is much in these pages that will apply to this group, though I would recommend reading this work in conjunction with resources geared toward entering a congregation as its leader.

May God bless this exciting time in your life as you seek to discern where the Spirit is calling you to minister.

Old St. Paul's Church, Baltimore  
Lent 2001

# CHAPTER 1

## Getting in the Right Frame of Mind

In the fall of my middler year at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, I participated in a two-week parish immersion experience affectionately known as “The Plunge.” My team of four students was sent to St. Stephen’s in Lynn, Massachusetts, to study the community, the congregation, and its ordained and lay leadership. In the process we stumbled across a thriving, racially-integrated, Gospel-centered community in the midst of an economically challenged area. The folks at St. Stephen’s truly understand what it means for the eucharistic celebration to flow out from the altar and into the community. They are active participants in working to better the city of Lynn through intense faith-based community organizing and yet they always return to the communion table for strength. My fellow students and I spent a great deal of time discussing leadership with the parish’s engaging rector, the Rev. Jerry Hardy. One particular statement made a lasting impression on me. He spoke of the effective leader’s need to be both “prayerful and decisive.” To me this means working in partnership with God to allow God’s will to fully take root.

To be both prayerful and decisive is exactly the attitude needed to approach your first clergy job search. The Holy Spirit is intimately involved in your call to a parish. To pray for discernment and revelation is to enter into the process of call with the Spirit. As ministers of the Gospel, this is the heart of what we do: we pray in order to participate in Christ’s redeeming love. In this context the key is participation. It’s important not only to pray and trust that God will bring you to the community to which you are called but also to participate with God to insure that you actually end up in that community. This is the “decisive” element of the “prayerful and decisive” approach. We can decisively participate in God’s plan for us by doing everything in our power to prepare for the clergy search process. One of the goals of this work is to provide you with the necessary tools to fully participate in the call process through diligent preparation and insight into the clergy hiring system.

Clergy deployment would be much easier if the Church used the Saint Matthias model of placement (Acts 1:15-26). The death of Judas led to a clear vacancy in the apostolic ministry. This position had to be filled quickly so Peter suggested a straightforward placement system. Two candidates were nominated, the disciples prayed, cast lots, and Matthias became an apostle. It was quick, easy, and the Holy Spirit was in complete control. Matthias and Joseph, known as Barsabbas, didn’t have to write resumes, meet with search committees, consult with their bishops, or negotiate contracts. The Spirit acted and the decision was made. Times, and the Church, have changed a bit in the intervening 2,000 years. Nevertheless, prayer and the working of the Spirit remain central to the job search process. While Matthias and Barsabbas did participate with the Spirit simply by allowing their names to be put forward, the relative complexity of the modern deployment process demands a more tangible participation with the Spirit. Approaching the process with a proactive, cooperative outlook acknowledges that the Spirit is actively working with us to guide us toward the particular community we are called to serve. Who knows what Matthais would think about today’s clergy deployment process? I somehow doubt he would even own an interview “power” suit.

## Confronting the Stress

There's no question that dealing with your first clergy job search is stressful. Anyone who has ever looked for the right job knows it takes a great deal of energy, patience, and preparation. For a graduating seminarian there is added stress simply because the clergy deployment process is a new experience. Meeting with parish search committees and learning about housing allowances, for instance, are issues that have never before been encountered.

And, unfortunately, the job search is just one source of a graduating seminarian's stress! The General Ordination Exam must be taken; interviews with diocesan Standing Committees for final ordination approval must be undergone; ordinations must be planned; and moving arrangements need to be made. Ultimately, leaving seminary is a profound time of transition. As excited as you may be to leave academia for "real life," it involves an uprooting of your present existence coupled with the loss of a genuine support system. Combine all of these elements and you end up with a recipe for stress.

During my last year of seminary I was acutely aware of these pressures on both me and my classmates. I had to keep reminding myself that God called me not to seminary but to serve God's people in a parish. It's very easy to lose sight of this! So much of the ordination process is geared primarily toward getting approved to enter seminary. The danger is that seminary itself becomes, consciously or not, the final goal. By the time you reach your last year, it's no wonder the realization that you're about to leave seminary is a stressful proposition. This is a place you worked so hard just to get to and all of a sudden three years' time is up.

Contributing to this sense is the fact that even thinking about being ordained, let alone speaking about it, has felt altogether presumptuous. The ordination process, as it stands, is in large part evaluative at every step of the way. Like a nagging low-grade fever, there has been constant scrutiny throughout your years in the ordination process from your bishop, Commission on Ministry, Standing Committee, professors, field education supervisors, and seminary dean. This is not a critique of the process but rather an acknowledgment that it is not fully geared to making the transition from seminary to parish. This obviously leads to increased stress as you begin to look beyond the walls of the seminary toward your first job.

So, what to do about this stress? First and foremost, say many recent seminary graduates, is to attend to your spiritual life. Maintaining that sense of rootedness reminds us of why we came to seminary in the first place. Whatever has nurtured your soul through seminary, keep it up!

It also helps tremendously to be intentional about giving appropriate closure to your seminary years. This often gets lost in the graduation hoopla and deep friendships suddenly become neglected. In reality, the cliché about gaining lifelong friends in seminary is absolutely correct. Everyone changes in profound and meaningful ways throughout the seminary formation process. Out of the challenges and vulnerabilities we encounter come a unique set of friends. These people are true gifts in our lives during seminary and will continue to be in the years to come. Finding time to say good byes,

rather than avoiding the mixture of emotions surrounding graduation, is a vitally important aspect of taking leave from the seminary. Seminary graduation is actually a rather odd experience. With most educational experiences, graduation is the culmination of years of hard work and the final expression of academic achievement. For those entering parish ministry, graduation is often seen as a mere stepping stone to the real goal of ordination. But as seminary plays such a major role in the ordination process, it makes sense to attend to the myriad of emotions inherent in leaving the institution.

One fruitful way to deal with the specific stresses of your first clergy job search is to form a support group with several classmates. This should be made up of friends who are also looking for their first parish placements. Your meetings can be set up on either a formal basis with regularly scheduled times or more informally, meeting for coffee occasionally. The group can discuss strategies, share stories, express fears and anxieties, exchange resumes for review, and pray for discernment. Those who have used this approach have felt that the emotional support and sharing of ideas has been invaluable. Sharing this journey with others is also a tangible sign that you're not in this process alone.

As you consider forming a support group, be aware that people react differently to stress. Some people want to process verbally at every step while others tend to retreat into themselves for personal reflection. In any given graduating class some will receive calls to parishes before others and some classmates will invariably enter into the same call process with a given parish. This can be a bit tense and people handle the stress in different ways. It does help to remember that this is a call process and to be confident that God will sort it all out. It's important to be sensitive to this dynamic and recognize that this can be an awkward time no matter how close the class has been over the years. For those who have not received calls by the time graduation rolls around, it can be both scary and embarrassing. Regularly praying for your classmates is a good discipline during one's last year of seminary.

Acknowledging the stress of making the transition from seminary to the parish is important in approaching your first clergy job search. Dealing with stress is a reality of modern parish life. It's been said that in the past ordained ministry was viewed as a low stress and high prestige vocation. Today many contend that the priesthood is just the opposite. The transition out of seminary is indeed a stressful time and adding a job search to the mix only increases the potential for anxiety. It's as good a time as any to practice the spiritual disciplines that keep us centered amidst the storms of parish life. The notion of being prayerful and decisive is offered as a God-centered approach to the deployment process. It is also a model for living into the demands of parish ministry.

## CHAPTER 2

# The Job Search Process

There's an old joke that is relevant to the situation of a seminarian seeking his or her first job. It seems that a seminarian overheard a conversation between two Sunday school children during the bishop's visit to a parish. The one said to the other, pointing to the bishop decked out in cope and miter, "Look it's God!" After the service the seminarian jovially mentioned this to the bishop who looked him square in the face and said, "Son, in your position it's best to blur the distinction."

Yes, the bishop is still in charge. The bishop retains the canonical authority to send a newly ordained transitional deacon to any parish in the diocese. Having said this, most work diligently to find a good "fit" between the seminarian and a parish community. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that few job searches occur without a significant amount of input from the bishop and the diocesan staff member in charge of deployment issues. This can be a real blessing but it is important to know who ultimately holds the cards in the initial clergy job search. Priests in the Episcopal Church may act as "free agents" in future job searches but finding your first placement is a different ball game.

Let's face it, relationships between seminarians and their bishops rarely include relaxed conversation and easy-going banter. A seminarian feels constantly evaluated and is keenly aware of the control that the bishop has on the ordination process. Even under the best circumstances, it is hard to forget that the bishop possesses the very hands that must be laid on the seminarian to affect ordination. The tension in the relationship is clearly visible whenever a seminarian is asked about the role of bishops. The eyes usually roll back into the head accompanied by a long sigh. The implication is often that bishops are a necessary evil to "get through" the ordination process. If pushed theologically, most seminarians would certainly support the role of the historic episcopate but the local manifestations sometimes present challenges to individuals. I'm by no means implying that bishops are "necessary evils" to the ordination process. Theirs is a vital ministry and seminarians generally acknowledge this. What would Anglicanism be without the episcopate? Nonetheless, it is important to remember that in practice this can be a tense relationship. It's easy to feel as if the bishop holds your entire life, quite literally, in the palm of his or her hand.

Much of the tension in the relationship between seminarians and bishops stems from a lack of communication. Bishops are phenomenally busy and under a tremendous amount of pressure. The administration of a diocese takes great effort, prayer, patience, and involves a multitude of commitments. It's simple to lose sight of this when you have only a handful of meaningful contacts with your bishop in a given year. On the other hand bishops sometimes lose sight of the fact that any conversation with a seminarian is perceived as gospel. An off-handed remark or even just thinking out loud is often taken to heart. Many seminarians feel tossed about, susceptible to every turn of events at the diocesan level. Under the inevitable stress of the first deployment, this is magnified. If a bishop mentions possible job openings one day, muses about a release the next, and then comes up with an additional list of possible placements, seminarians leave feeling very

confused and unsettled. This is partly a reflection of the very volatile nature of clergy deployment. The state of job openings in a given diocese can change immeasurably over the span of a single month. It's important for seminarians to recognize this.

While it would be nice if the expectations of the diocesan deployment process were made very clear to each seminarian entering his or her final year, this does not always occur. Personnel changes in diocesan offices as well as changing deployment situations and dynamics contribute to this. The best thing a seminarian can do is to be proactive in opening lines of communication with the diocese with respect to deployment. Set up a meeting with the bishop or the deployment officer as early as the summer before your senior year. Find out the diocese's expectations and articulate your needs and desires. Since diocesan structures vary, determine who will be your primary point of contact throughout the process. This may be the bishop, the canon-to-the-ordinary, or the deployment officer but it's critical to figure this out. Those who have not had pleasant experiences with their dioceses maintain that the major frustration has been mixed signals from diocesan officials.

The deployment process need not be a period of great intrigue. There's enough mystery in the call process already and it's essential to let the Holy Spirit take care of that end. Your best bet is to try to take the mystery out of the diocesan process. Don't worry about appearing to be too pushy. Most people involved in your diocese will appreciate your eagerness to serve the Church and help discern the place to which you are being called.

It's helpful to remember that each diocese approaches deployment differently. A uniform process for first deployments does not exist across the Church. Some bishops like to exercise a great deal of control and determine which parishes a seminarian may speak with. Others allow rectors to contact the seminarians directly and virtually stay out of the hiring process. Communicate with your diocese to get a feel for how to proceed. If you get mixed signals, seek clarification at once. It beats receiving a call from the Canon to the Ordinary asking why you contacted the rector of St. John's by the Lake without the bishop's permission.

## **Getting Released From Your Diocese**

Open communication with your diocese is particularly important if you are seeking a release from the obligation to serve in your sponsoring diocese. There are several reasons why some bishops are not receptive to the concept. First, the diocese supports its seminarians emotionally, spiritually, and financially. There is a great deal of commitment, investment, and energy expended on behalf of each seminarian and bishops often expect a return to the diocese. From the perspective of the diocese this is a fair exchange. Second, there is a very practical need for seminarians to return and serve the diocese from which they were sent. In today's Church, most bishops have a significant number of vacancies in their dioceses and they need priests to fill these positions in order to further the mission of the diocese. It is understandable then that bishops are reluctant to allow their seminarians to serve in places other than their sponsoring dioceses.

There are, however, a number of viable reasons for asking for a release. When valid circumstances dictate such a move, most bishops will generally not “force” a seminarian to return to the diocese. Again, the key is to be open and up front with the bishop. When serious problems occur it is often because a seminarian has interviewed at parishes outside the diocese without the bishop’s permission. This is a difficult action to justify and inevitably leads to confrontation with the diocese. There is often initial resistance to the idea of a release and then acquiescence if the situation genuinely warrants it. Most bishops certainly understand that a seminarian is ordained for the whole Church and not simply to a specific diocese. This understanding of the ordained ministry allows a bishop and a diocese to rejoice in God’s calling of an individual to another place. It is difficult to allow a gifted seminarian to “get away,” however, and there may be some grieving that takes place in the midst of this separation.

So what are some valid reasons for asking for a release? I know of one seminarian who simply fell in love while she was at seminary. Her future husband was not in a position to move and the seminarian was eventually granted a release and began her ministry in the diocese where she attended seminary. A classmate of mine asked for a release because of her family situation. She, her husband, and their middle school-aged children moved halfway across the country to attend seminary. After an extensive job search, her husband accepted a position in a career where high-level jobs are difficult to find. Their children became deeply connected to their new surroundings and developed strong attachments to both school and friends. Even though they had gone into the situation knowing it might be temporary, the bishop recognized the family turmoil that would ensue if he insisted they return to the diocese. The important thing to recognize is that the bishop does have the right to refuse a release, to “hold a seminarian hostage,” as someone with this experience put it. If it looks like you will request one, begin this discussion as early as possible. Bishops, like most people I know, do not enjoy eleventh hour surprises.

## **Keeping an Ear to the Ground**

How do you actually hear about open positions? There are several avenues to approach. Obviously if your bishop makes it clear that you’ll be returning to the diocese, a list of parishes will be provided. If you are granted a release the options grow immensely. Most parishes seeking a transitional deacon send job descriptions to the various seminaries. Many schools keep a bulletin board specifically designated for job postings. The Church Deployment Office (CDO) also publishes an online *Positions Open Bulletin* that includes a listing of open parish positions and a list of diocesan deployment officers. It is generally updated once a week, usually on Friday afternoons.

Diocesan web pages often list parish vacancies but these positions can be grossly out of date. On the other hand some positions *only* make it to the diocesan deployment page and not the CDO site, so don’t neglect them. Finally, check out the *Transition Ministry Newsletter*, hosted by the Diocese of Washington. I wish I could tell you that the CDO offers one-stop-shopping for open positions but it doesn’t.

If you’re interested in a specific geographic area it’s very helpful to contact the Diocesan Deployment Officer (DDO). These folks should be intimately connected with

the openings in their dioceses. They also have information about parishes that have not officially posted vacancies but are about to begin a search.

Other sources for job postings are the national publications serving the Episcopal Church. *The Living Church* and *Episcopal News Monthly* both have classified sections with advertisements for clergy positions.

Seminary deans are always good sources for deployment information. They travel throughout the Church, have many national contacts, and are often privy to movements in the job market. For that matter, any informal contacts you may have can be helpful. Be in touch with clergy friends and mentors and ask them if they know of any openings. You never know what you might unearth. A survey of rectors who have hired graduating seminarians shows that informal networking is far and away the most common method for attracting candidates.

## **Job Types**

These days, a newly ordained transitional deacon may end up in one of several job situations. This is a change from previous decades in the Church. In the past, nearly everyone coming out of seminary served as a curate (assistant to the rector) for a couple of years before moving on to another parish. The curacy was a time to grow into the priestly role, learn a new vocation, make some mistakes, and then leave for a new position. Many congregations took great pride in their ability to train curates and felt they were offering a service to the wider Church. The majority of seminarians still end up serving as assistant priests to begin their time in ordained ministry but it's no longer the obligatory norm.

There are several reasons for this. First, fewer and fewer parishes can support curacies. The changing demographics and resources of the Church have meant a reduction in the number of multiple staff parishes. Even if the Church insisted that all newly ordained clergy serve as curates, the supply would outweigh the demand. There are simply not enough parishes that can support curates. Second, seminarians themselves have changed over the years. They are no longer primarily young adults in their twenties. Today the average age of seminarians is in the mid-forties and many have chosen ministry as a second career. These folks possess a variety of professional skills, work, and life experiences. They may need ministerial training but they are often ahead of the learning curve on issues of leadership and management. These factors have combined to draw some seminarians directly into positions of parish leadership upon graduation and ordination. They serve as deacon-in-charge until ordination to the priesthood and then their title changes to either priest-in-charge, vicar, or rector depending upon the situation.

Putting a graduating seminarian in charge of a congregation can be a most effective use of personal and Church resources. Many who go this route find the work challenging, stimulating, and rewarding. Some have found it to be overwhelming, however, and fail to see it as the best introduction to full-time parish ministry. This is a big step and should be considered and prayed over carefully before entering into such a conversation with your bishop. If this is the route your call takes you, insure the diocese has a strong mentoring support program in place.

The majority of seminarians, and especially the younger ones, tend to follow the curacy model. Their first placements are served as parish assistants under the tutelage of a rector. The title may be curate or assistant but there's virtually no difference between the two positions. Traditionally, a curate may spend fewer years at a parish than an assistant but the terms have been blurred to the point of indistinction. I use the term assistant throughout this work for the sake of consistency.

Assistants generally have two options for parish settings. They may serve with a single rector or they may be part of a larger clergy staff. There are differences between these two situations that warrant some consideration. In the first instance an assistant tends to be more of a generalist. Depending on the rector, you should have ample opportunity to experience a variety of priestly functions. Presumably you'll preach regularly, once a month or more, and will have the chance to function in a range of sacramental situations.

In a parish with a staff, you'll have the advantage of greater collegiality and the ability to learn from different styles of priesthood. You'll probably be less of a generalist and your ministry will be more highly focused on a particular area. You may be primarily responsible, for instance, for pastoral ministry or you may be assigned as chaplain to the parish day school. There is obviously tremendous overlap between the two types of assistant positions but you should think about the distinctions as you prepare to meet with parishes.

Another slight variant in positions depends on the parish situation. In most cases a parish will be offering an established position. This means that the position of "assistant" was previously held by someone else. You would be stepping into a role that the congregation understands, that has been funded for some time, and that the rector has lived with. Sometimes, however, a parish creates a new position due to its own growth. This can be exciting but also risky for all involved. As one rector put it who had recently hired an assistant for a newly created position, "All you can say to a prospective candidate is 'trust me and we'll walk this walk together.'" This distinction is offered so that you can be aware that the dynamics are slightly different in the two situations.

As we've seen, there is no widely accepted consensus on the meaning behind ecclesiastical titles. As you seek a first position the most important thing is really the job description and the outline of your primary responsibilities. Whatever title is printed on your business card, whether it's *Assistant to the Rector*, *Curate*, *Assistant Rector*, or *Associate*, is not important. Finding a fulfilling placement from which you can grow and develop as a priest is the key to a first parish job.

## **Of Search Committees and Rectors**

It is sometimes difficult to see beyond your own perspective when approaching your first clergy job search. As stressful and exciting a time as it may be, it is helpful to gain some insight into how parishes and rectors view the process. Many rectors enter into the hiring process with many of the same feelings and emotions that you do. The process of calling a graduating seminarian to a parish is an exciting time in the life of a congregation. There is usually great enthusiasm and excitement surrounding the calling

of someone with new skills and gifts to add to a parish staff. A number of parishes also use this period as an opportunity to articulate and focus upon their strengths as the community comes together to tell the parish's story to prospective candidates. When a parish is seeking to fill an existing position it may use this time to assess the previous assistant's role and test the position's description. For rectors who take the mentoring role seriously it is also an opportunity to "help introduce and shape someone to ordained life and to leadership," as one rector stated.

On the other hand the hiring process is a time of risk and trepidation for a parish community and for a rector. There is always a profound vulnerability involved when a community seeks to enter into a relationship with an ordained leader. This risk is certainly felt by the interviewee but it is important to recognize parishes and rectors also feel these emotions.

Applying for a position as an assistant may or may not involve a search committee. Again, each parish call process is unique. In nearly every case, the hiring decision is ultimately made by the rector. This makes sense since the rector/assistant relationship is crucial to a productive, healthy, and successful work environment. Many rectors hire assistants without any parish consultation other than rubber stamp approval from the vestry. When this occurs, you probably won't meet with anyone in an official capacity aside from the rector. You'll surely meet parishioners and vestry members during a parish visit but not in the context of an interview setting. With this model, the rector decides which candidates he or she wants to interview, conducts all the interviews alone, and issues the call directly. This approach may sound less than collegial but it is efficient and few in the parish would tend to complain about the process.

Many parishes do form search committees when hiring an assistant. The structure, makeup, and function of these committees vary so it's helpful to ask specifically about the group's role in the hiring process. The rector typically takes a very active role on a search committee, whether present for the actual candidate interview or not, and tends to guide the process. Again, this is quite appropriate. Some of these committees receive resumes and assist with the initial screening, though many only interview candidates who have been chosen by the rector. The committee may indeed have a strong voice in the process but it is usually in an advisory capacity with the understanding that the final decision lies with the rector. Having said this, few rectors would call a candidate if the committee expressed serious reservations about the individual. While some rectors maintain tight control over the entire call process, including the search committee, others are quite adamant about not making the hiring decision unilaterally and put tremendous stock in lay involvement and participation.

Often the committee is formed to serve as a resource for the candidate. One of its functions is to get to know you, find out why the rector thinks you might be an asset, and answer your questions about the parish. The search committee's presence allows you to learn about the parish from someone other than the rector. This is helpful since hearing a variety of voices is obviously indispensable to your own discernment. One rector has spoken of the parish call process in terms of "concentric circles." A prospective candidate begins discussions with the leadership of the parish: the rector, wardens, and vestry. This then moves outward into discussion with a variety of parishioners engaged in differing

levels of parish involvement. This is beneficial to someone in your position because it allows you to learn as much as possible about the parish. It is also helpful for those involved in extending the call because they can turn to numerous people in the parish for feedback.

The manner in which a parish and its rector go about structuring the call process can give you great insight into how the parish functions. For instance, does the laity play a role in the hiring decision? If so, are they passive, always looking to the rector for guidance or are they proactive in their approach? Be mindful of this process as you enter into conversation with a parish and listen for the messages that are being conveyed through it.

## **The Value of Mentoring**

Working for the wrong rector in a first placement can have a tremendously negative effect on your ministry. I know of a recently ordained priest who began her work in parish ministry with great hopes but quickly realized she was in an unrewarding and unhealthy situation. Her relationship with the rector was neither nurturing nor supportive and she quickly began searching for ways to leave the parish. She described her work as little more than the rector's gopher, an extra body to do all the things he himself didn't want to do. She found herself overseeing committees destined to peter out without the rector's support. She was assigned to celebrate each week at the poorly attended Saturday morning eucharist, the one the rector fought unsuccessfully to cancel. The rector performed all baptisms, weddings, and funerals saying "the people expect the rector to do them." Although she was an energetic and gifted preacher, the rector only let her preach once per month. He never gave her constructive criticism and rarely provided feedback of any kind. Frustrated and hurt, she left after one year with a lack of both self-confidence and ministerial experience. It took several years and the nurturing tutelage of a valued mentor before she fully recovered from the experience and was finally able to start growing into her priestly vocation.

What went wrong? In retrospect there were signs that the rector would not be a strong mentor, and possibly even a negative influence. She witnessed so many positives about the parish itself when she interviewed that she chose to ignore her gut reaction about the rector. She also failed to do her homework on the rector. This sad story illustrates two things: the value of a strong mentor in a first placement and the need to actively seek out a rector with gifts for mentoring.

Many veteran rectors attest to the importance of a positive initial experience in ministry. This is often critical to building a strong foundation for the rest of one's ministry. The vast majority of these same rectors cite strong mentors early in their own careers. They attest to the enduring influence of their mentors upon their current ministries. They also speak of colleagues who started out in unfortunate situations and ultimately left the ministry altogether. This is not said to scare you or imply that a bad situation always leads to a failed ministry. Obviously that's not the case. But it is important to be vigilant about setting yourself up for a good situation that can profoundly impact the rest of your career.

Jay Conger, in his book *Learning to Lead*, cites research designed to identify characteristics of highly effective leaders.<sup>1</sup> While Conger is speaking directly to the business world, the conclusions certainly apply to the rector/assistant relationship. These leaders had opportunities early in their careers to lead, take risks, and learn from their successes and failures. The identified developmental opportunities included challenging assignments, visible leadership role models, duties that broadened knowledge and experience, and strong mentoring. These are all areas where the right rector can exert tremendous influence upon the growth and development of a newly ordained transitional deacon.

There are several practical steps you can take to determine whether a potential rector will be a good mentor. First, ask for references from past assistants. You'll quickly gain insight into the mentoring abilities of the person you're asking about. If the rector hesitates to give you references, this may be telling. Also ask the rector directly if he or she considers mentoring to be a strength. Keep in mind that some rectors are wonderful priests who simply do not have a knack for mentoring others. The boxer Joe Louis was a terrific champion in the ring. He did not, however, have a successful career training other boxers. He fought with tremendous instinct but simply could not relate how he went about throwing devastating punches. Like some rectors, he was a brilliant practitioner but a mediocre teacher.

Ask the rector if he or she enjoys mentoring. Some view it as an extension of their ministry and service to the Church. Find out what types of experiences the rector has had as a mentor. Has he or she supervised assistants in the past? If not, was mentoring part of a previous secular career? Find out specifically what the rector would do to provide for a nurturing mentor relationship.

Most newly ordained clergy agree that the quality of the mentor should be your number one priority in seeking a job. This comes from both those who have experienced strong mentors in their first placements and those who have not. If you do wind up in a situation with a rector who is not a strong mentor you should seek out other clergy in the diocese with whom you can meet on a regular basis. Your primary mentor does not necessarily have to be your rector but it sure makes life easier.

Those who have been fortunate enough to experience strong mentoring in their first jobs have identified several characteristics that mark strong mentors. Rectors who are solid mentors communicate well, provide regular constructive feedback, view mentoring as a ministry, are not threatened by an assistant's gifts for ministry, are confident in their own ministry, are healthy, self-assured, and self-differentiated, take an interest in the lives of their mentees outside of Church business, are patient teachers, and offer challenging assignments that lead to growth. If you are able to recognize a majority of these traits in a prospective employer, the odds are you're on the right track for a healthy, productive, engaging situation.

Conversely, rectors who consider themselves to be good mentors seek assistants with certain characteristics. They are looking for newly ordained clergy who will challenge them, care about them pastorally, be sensitive to the pressures unique to the rector of a parish, and act as colleagues in ministry. They also seek assistants who

understand that ultimately the assistant is there to “assist” the rector in the ministry and administration of the parish. This is not a control issue, but a recognition that boundaries and professional conduct are critical to effective parish administration and leadership.

A word of warning. When beginning the first clergy job search, some seminarians get swept away by the externals of worship, the beauty of a particular parish building, or even the size of the assistant’s office! Fortunately most quickly come to their senses and begin to recognize what is truly important in a first placement. Liturgical style is often at the forefront when a graduating seminarian starts visiting parishes since it is highly visible and quite often serves as a window into the soul of a faith community. The question is whether the liturgy of a given parish, or any other single issue, should be the sole determining factor in a job search. I’ve spoken with newly ordained clergy who have visited a parish, loved the people, valued the rector, but couldn’t stand the liturgy. Some have turned down jobs on this account while others have taken the job despite the liturgy. So how important is the liturgy? This depends partly on what’s important to you. If liturgy is your overriding passion then it may play a very significant role. If you’re an Anglo-Catholic, could you serve at a place where incense is an anathema? If the sight of a chasuble makes you cringe could you bear to wear one?

I would contend that the rector remains the most important aspect of your decision. The rector’s influence on the rest of your career will run much deeper than whether or not you use a lavabo bowl for several years. Veteran rectors agree that you won’t be labeled as a practitioner of a certain liturgical style for the rest of your ministry based on your first placement. If you wind up at a parish with a very different liturgical style from your own, look at your years there as a learning experience. Certainly don’t go into a place thinking you’ll be able to single-handedly change the liturgical style in three years. You may challenge some notions through dialogue but as an assistant you are not the liturgical leader of the community.

I know of a newly ordained priest who, as a parishioner, would never have attended the parish to which he was called. He just wasn’t comfortable with the liturgical style of the place. Nonetheless, he was drawn there because of the rector’s mentoring abilities and he has absolutely no regrets about his decision. His views on liturgy have been broadened, he understands why things are done the way they are, and sees himself as a bridge-builder between those with differing views on liturgy.

Obviously you shouldn’t compromise on what you consider to be essential whether that is liturgy, theology, politics, or something else. Think about your priorities but always within the context of the importance of a strong mentoring relationship.

## **CHAPTER 3**

# **Presenting Yourself on Paper**

### **Resumes**

I recently came across a stack of resumes for the finalists in a bishop's search. The quality was appalling! There were typos, bad layouts, and run-on sentences. These were all highly respected leaders in the Church and yet you could never tell this from their resumes. Actually, one of the resumes was in good order and it was this person who was eventually elected bishop. I'm certainly not implying that a strong resume alone will get you a job. And I'm definitely not implying that a strong resume will make you a bishop. The point is that solid resume writing is often neglected. Many in the Church fail to do service to their own careers when putting together their resumes. There is also a fear that putting together a professional resume will make the candidate appear too slick for the Church. This is most genuinely unfounded.

Creating a professional-style resume is a form of communication. It is one aspect of communicating your strengths to those who do not yet know you. A resume alone will never tell the entire story about who you are but it may lead potential interviewers to decide whether or not they want to pursue more extensive conversation. Furthermore, it can shed some light on how you work. For instance, a sloppy resume may lead some to wonder about your work habits and ability to follow through on projects. If you aren't able to pull together a respectable summary of your gifts on a resume, how will you be able to lead the evangelism committee?

Rectors tend to look at resumes, along with cover letters, as initial indications of your ability to communicate in writing. Some put more stock in them than others but they do offer insights into how you present yourself. Think of the resume as a first impression. Everyone knows the importance of first impressions when meeting someone for the first time. They may not be fair but they're important. Many rectors or members of search committees will meet your resume before they meet you. Why not put some effort into a document that will act as your "forerunner?"

For graduating seminarians pulling together a resume can seem complicated. You probably have an old resume somewhere but it's invariably outdated and was used for secular employment. Clergy resumes are similar but you are now in an entirely different line of work and your resume must reflect this. Items such as your Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) experience, which would have little relevance to most secular employment, suddenly become important.

The greatest challenge for most seminarians is determining the balance between seminary activities and previous work experience. This is a confusing time to write a resume because you're half way into the vocation of ordained ministry but not quite there yet. You're attempting to highlight ministry skills but you don't have a tremendous amount of practical ministry experience. There are exceptions, of course, but most seminarians have little parish experience.

Ultimately, your resume is a marketing tool used to communicate your gifts and abilities to a potential employer. It should contain items of particular importance to who you are and keys to how you envision your future ministry. Once you've been in a parish for any length of time your "seminary" resume will become obsolete. You'll use aspects of it, no doubt, but you will soon have genuine full-time parish experience to highlight on any future resume. In a sense this resume is only a temporary, though important, snapshot of this particular period in your life.

## **The Resume Itself**

The top of your resume should always include your name, current address, phone number, and e-mail address. This is a handy guide for people who need to contact you and can't put their hands on your cover letter.

Some resumes include a "Ministry Objective" describing the position you are seeking. This can be helpful if it matches what the parish is looking for. Otherwise it may limit potential conversations. I've known people who have rewritten this section based upon the parish they're communicating with. In any case it should never be longer than one concise sentence.

Next, your resume should include three general headings. Under "Church Experience" you should include any relevant Church-related activities. Your seminary experience should go in this section. There is no need to list every single committee you ever served on in seminary. In most cases this would have little interest to your readers. Pick out the highlights of your seminary time and mention key positions you may have held. Decide what you'd like people to know about how you spent these years. A demonstration of leadership is especially helpful to rectors.

Also in this section mention any parish fieldwork you may have completed. List the parish, its location, and your contributions. This may include preaching, pastoral care, involvement in Christian education, and special projects. Another item would be your Clinical Pastoral Education. Mention the site, your particular assignment, and the specifics of your ministry. Obviously this doesn't include a listing such as "baptized dying child." Use your judgment when describing your work in CPE.

The second section could be titled "Professional Experience." Here you should summarize your pre-seminary work experience. This should be greatly scaled back from the detail of a secular resume. A parish simply wants to know what you did before seminary and whether your professional skills might be transferable to parish ministry. Especially highlight anything that might catch someone's eye on a search committee. If you were in a career where you made many oral presentations this shows strong communication skills. Sales experience is always relevant to parish ministry. Because of the varied nature of parish work, most career paths have some form of connection and overlap. The trick is to translate your previous work experience into language that people in the Church can understand and relate to.

If you attended seminary soon after college and have little secular employment history, you'll want to provide a corresponding increase in detail about your seminary

experiences. Similarly, if you spent time raising a family, note this on your resume. All employers, whether in the Church or not, become concerned when they see inexplicable gaps on a resume.

The “Education” section rounds out the resume. List your undergraduate institution, the degree you earned, and the year you earned it. The same goes for your seminary education and any other graduate degree. No matter how hard you worked in seminary, no one cares about your grade point average. You’ll look like a show-off if you put it in your resume. If you received an important academic award you should mention it in the seminary section under the “Church Experience” heading. In actuality, it is very rare for a rector to ask for an academic transcript. They are more concerned with how you think and this comes across in the interview process.

Some people choose to include a “Personal” section. This is not necessary but it can add a personal touch to your resume. If you have a family, mention your spouse’s name, his or her career if working, and the names and ages of your children. Outside interests should be listed with caution. Listing “exercise” and “outdoor activities” is fine, calling them “massage therapy” and “hunting” may raise some eyebrows.

## **Resume Format**

There are as many resume formats as there are job seekers. There are also nearly as many resume books and guides to choose from. The format described above is merely one possibility among many. Some people choose to use bullet points under each position description, others insist on full sentences. Use a format you’re comfortable with, one that is consistent and concise. If you’re having trouble with wording, seek out a resume book with a list of action verbs. You don’t want the wording to sound overly dramatic but action verbs help to spice up the text of your resume.

Another popular resume approach is the skills-based resume. This is especially useful for second-career folks and people who have a broad range of skills. In this format, key skills are presented first followed by job and education information. Consult one of the many books on resumes for more information about this approach.

Whatever resume format you decide on, keep in mind that simplicity in design and font are always desirable – remember the majority of your resumes will be sent electronically. Nearly everyone these days does resumes on a personal computer. If you’re uncomfortable with this, odds are you have a friend or a classmate who can help you. Use good quality resume-stock paper. Beige, white, or gray is recommended; don’t use anything with speckles in it because it will become distorted if you try to fax it. If you have access to a laser printer use it to print your final copies. If not, you can bring a computer disc or flash drive into your local copy shop and have it laser printed. This step will add greatly to the professional appearance of your resume. Try to keep the resume to one page in length for the purposes of readability. Two is an acceptable maximum. Finally, ask a reliable friend to proofread your resume before you print out the final draft.

I used to think there was never any need to spend money on a professional resume service. I’m still generally of that opinion but a writer friend of mine opened his own

resume consulting business in Seattle. He helped my wife Bryna with a resume after she returned to full-time work after a decade and the result was stunning. If you have the resources you may want to consider this but it's not essential.

## **Cover Letters**

You obviously won't be sending out a resume by itself. A cover letter will always accompany your resume when you send it to a parish. This is the case whether you're sending it to a parish that contacted you to request a resume or whether you're sending it out unsolicited. It's best to keep a cover letter short and to the point. Always send it to a particular person, most likely the rector or the head of a search committee. No one appreciates receiving a letter addressed "to whom it may concern," because it shows a lack of preparation and interest.

The cover letter should explain who you are, why you're sending your resume, how to contact you, and should briefly outline why you think your strengths would be a good fit for the job. Express enthusiasm about the position and excitement about the possibility of pursuing further discussions. Finally, note any enclosures such as your resume, list of references, or CDO Profile. If you have personal stationary with a current address, use it for the cover letter. If not, you can easily create an attractive letterhead with a personal computer. Be attentive to grammar and spelling since the cover letter, like the resume itself, helps to form the all-important first impression.

## **References**

Nothing is more vague than a resume that states "references furnished upon request." It sounds as if you're not sure you really want to share them with a potential employer. It's best to create a reference list that you can send along with your resume and cover letter. This should be on a separate sheet titled "References for (your name)." Three to five is an appropriate number of references to use. Make sure they are from more than one area of your life. In other words, you wouldn't want all of your references to be from your seminary. Two from your seminary is a good number, maybe one from the dean and one from a favorite professor. Someone from your home parish is a good bet and be sure to include at least one from a lay person. You're really looking for people that can attest to your character and your skills for ministry. You may have had a terrific secular boss but if he or she has no concept of Church life the person may not be able to provide a parish with the type of information they are seeking.

On your list make sure you include the reference's name, title, current position, address, email, and phone numbers. Save yourself some embarrassment and be certain you've asked them to serve as references. You may want to give them a heads-up when you send your references to a parish so they're not caught off guard. If there are particular strengths you'd like to highlight for a given parish, communicate this to your references. In some cases it's even helpful to send along a position description to your references when you're certain someone from a parish will be speaking with them.

## The CDO Personal Profile

When you enroll in your last year of seminary it's finally time to enter the intriguing world of the Church Deployment Office (CDO). The CDO is an arm of the National Church charged with assisting clergy, lay professionals, and congregations in the deployment process. There's no reason why you would have had any contact with the CDO prior to this, unless you have worked formally in the Church. When initial contact is made with the CDO, most seminarians find themselves entering uncharted waters. If you haven't done so, check out their web page at [www.episcopalchurch.org/cdo](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/cdo). In the last couple of years the CDO has spent much time and effort making itself more user and web friendly.

As you become more familiar with the CDO, of particular interest to you will be the CDO Personal Profile. This document is designed to provide general information about you and your background as well as to reflect specific areas of your gifts for ministry. In their words, "The personal profile which you construct through the CDO is meant to be a theological document, a credal statement of what you believe about yourself as a child of God, whom God has called and equipped for ministry."<sup>2</sup> The CDO views the process of filling out the profile forms as a time to give some genuine thought to how you perceive your own ministry.

The form is, of course, also used in the deployment process. Once completed, the document is placed into the CDO's database. Then, after a parish confers with its diocese on the qualifications it is seeking in a new clergy person, the computer spits out matches. The parish may then contact the individual to determine whether further conversation will be pursued regarding the job opportunity open at the parish.

Filling out the CDO Personal Profile is not an easy process. It is time consuming, involves considerable self-examination, and the form itself is complex. Most seminaries offer workshops to assist you with this, usually led by the deployment officer serving in the seminary's diocese. You can always contact either this person or your own deployment officer for guidance. You may also work on the profile yourself. In fact, you can call the CDO and request a Personal Profile registration packet at any time. Make sure you tell them you're a seminarian and they'll send it without charge. As long as you have the CDO on the phone, ask them about other relevant publications for your situation. They publish various pamphlets with some helpful information about the deployment process, available for a reasonable fee. For a complete listing of their guides and pamphlets, and an order form, you can log onto their web page, accessed through the Episcopal Church's home page. In fact, you can even register with the CDO on-line, just make sure to click "seminarian" so you'll be able to order some of the publications without charge.

There is one section of the Personal Profile in particular that should be addressed. Perhaps the most visible piece of the profile is the "personal ministry statement." This is often the first place people look and the CDO concurs that it is the most important item on the profile. Certainly it is the one place where your personality can shine through. All in 140 spaces including punctuation! Given the space constraints, it is nearly impossible to say something profound and meaningful. And, as someone with a tremendous amount

of experience with these forms told me, the only way the statement will catch someone's eye is if it is outstandingly bad. It's generally not worth trying to be cute or clever. I hate to recommend writing a generally bland statement but it's probably your safest bet. Say something about how you would define your approach to ministry but know that anything perceived as controversial will only limit your choices.

Understand that filling out the CDO Personal Profile alone will not lead to a job. That's not the intention. It is simply another tool that may help you gain an interview. In reality, the profile usually does not play a role in hiring decisions for graduating seminarians. There are a couple of reasons for this. First, unless you've been released by your bishop, you won't be engaged in a nationwide job search. Second, most rectors acknowledge that the CDO profile is not the best tool for evaluating seminarians.

As it stands the CDO Personal Profile is just not geared for those leaving seminary headed for their first parish placement. This became evident to me as I filled out the forms during the fall of my senior year. It was a frustrating endeavor to try and match up "ministry codes" reflecting the experiences of parish ministry with my own lack of parish experience. At times it felt like I was being asked to jam a square peg into a round hole. I got it in there all right but I just didn't feel I was prepared to answer the questions being asked. As with much of the literature written about clergy job searches, the CDO Personal Profile is geared to those already in parish ministry. Obviously priests serving congregations will have a much better feel for their ministerial strengths than seminarians. A seminarian can guess or have some idea of these strengths but cannot be quite certain until he or she has been in full-time parish ministry for some time.

I'm by no means suggesting that seminarians avoid filling out the profile. It's important to get familiar with a deployment tool that will undoubtedly come in handy down the road. You should recognize, however, that it is much more useful for those already serving parishes who may be listening for a new call. This is the real strength of the CDO system. Unfortunately, it is of limited value for graduating seminarians seeking their first placement. I've spoken with remarkably few newly ordained clergy who cited it as a factor in their call process. In addition nearly every rector said they used informal networking to attract candidates for assistant positions rather than the CDO system.

The profile is quite simple to update in comparison to the work it takes to fill it out initially. And it can now be updated online through a password system set up during your initial registration. It has been suggested that after a year or two in your first job you update your profile to more accurately reflect who you are and where you see your ministerial gifts. Once you've been in the parish for awhile you'll have a much greater feel for filling out the profile and it will be that much more meaningful.

Once you do fill it out, you'll receive a copy back from the CDO. It's printed on a large piece of paper that should be reduced to 8 1/2 x 11 and printed on white copy paper for distribution. It is also available electronically. If a parish specifically requests it, you can send it along with a cover letter, resume, and list of references. Incidentally, no rector ever asked me to provide a copy of it. This never bothered me since I always thought that my resume was a better reflection of my strengths than the Personal Profile. Some rectors, though, do ask for it as a matter of course.

## **Electronic Submissions**

One change that's taken place in the past ten years is that almost everyone now requests all of your "paper" items to be submitted electronically. It's worth converting your documents into pdf files to make for clean, readable electronic copies of your materials. One reason for this – other than the fact that it's simply life – is it's much easier to share electronic copies with members of a committee. You'll also want to have at least one sermon digitally recorded that you can share if requested.

## CHAPTER 4

# Interviewing

### Why We Dread Interviews

Of the many aspects of a graduating seminarian's foray into the deployment process, few are more dreaded than the interview. There are several reasons for this. First, seminarians typically have not interviewed for a job in quite some time. For nearly all of us, three years of graduate-level schooling has meant isolation from the job market. If you worked in the same job for just two years before entering seminary, all of a sudden it's been five years since you've had a job interview.

Second, the interviews that seminarians have had in the intervening years have been with Commissions on Ministry, Standing Committees, and bishops. As positively as the results of these interviews may have turned out, most of us remember the great anxiety they produced as every aspect of our lives was poked and prodded. It's no wonder many of us are a bit gun shy when it comes to thinking about our first clergy job interview!

Finally, our secular culture holds dear to the notion that interviews are at best necessary evils when it comes to landing a job. At worst they bring out all of our insecurities about being rejected, unwanted, and unemployed. And, in a culture that tends to equate who we are with what we do, a decidedly un-Christian notion, the unemployed remain social pariahs. Most of us fear the situation of being unemployed and having someone casually ask us what we do for a living. If we have no answer, we have no identity. With this as the context, it's no mystery why people bring such anxiety to interview situations.

Before we get into how to handle the interview itself, it's important to address how to approach the interview process in a positive light. That doesn't mean we're merely trying to put a happy face on an unfortunate situation. The process itself is actually quite beneficial to you and should be a pleasant experience.

### The Interview as Genuine Opportunity

The first step is to erase the negative image of the interview as a "me versus them" proposition where you either pass or fail. Interviewing is not akin to taking your driver's license test. You're not a nervous 16-year old and the rector is not some crusty, old Archie Bunker type of evaluator. If you enter an interview with this mentality you're not only setting yourself up for an uncomfortable situation, but you will undoubtedly have difficulty listening to God's call.

One thing that helped me tremendously was Christopher Moore's description of interviewing as "mutual exploration" in his book *Opening the Clergy Parachute*.<sup>3</sup> This entails approaching the interview process as a means for both you and the parish to explore whether God is calling you into relationship with one another. In order to fully understand this concept, it is necessary to move beyond viewing the clergy deployment

process as merely seeking a job. It must be placed firmly in the realm of discerning a call to service in Christ's name. Yes, many of the skills involved in seeking a first placement overlap with those needed to find a position in the secular world but the clergy search process is different. That's not to deny that the Holy Spirit is involved in secular job searches, but both sides often fail to let the Spirit guide the hiring process. In an authentic clergy deployment process we can only pray that the Spirit is intimately involved in calling a clergy person to serve in a particular community. Loren Meade of the Alban Institute makes this point clearly when he writes of clergy deployment, "You are looking for the right place to invest your personal gifts and graces in God's service."<sup>4</sup> This involves much more than just looking for a job.

If the concept of mutual exploration guides your approach to interviewing, much of the customary pressure is lifted. The interview is no longer a one-sided barrage of questions in which you are the passive job seeker searching for the "correct" answer. The interview process becomes a conversation in which you are a fully engaged and active participant. Your aim, and hopefully the aim of the congregation, is to determine whether your gifts and approach to ministry are compatible with the needs of the parish. Never forget that you, too, are interviewing the rector and the parish.

The interview, then, should be exposed for what it really is: an invaluable opportunity for you to learn as much as possible about the parish, the rector, and the community. The interview is your opportunity to determine first-hand whether you would fit in as a clergy person in a particular parish setting.

### **Pre-Interview Arrangements**

Now that you're in the proper frame of mind to enter into an interview situation, what happens once you are asked to interview for a position? There are some definite practical considerations that warrant your attention. You will feel much more confident going into an interview at a parish if the logistics of your visit have been discussed and the expectations on both sides are clear. If you are coming in from out of town, it is essential to determine whether the parish will pay for your travel expenses. Clarifying this up front will save you from a potentially awkward moment when you arrive with your airline receipt in hand and are greeted with blank stares when you present it. While the parish should ideally pay for your trip, avoid a misunderstanding and ask how the expenses will be handled.

If the issue of travel expenses has not been raised, it is certainly appropriate to ask the rector directly whether the parish will cover them. No one will be turned off by the question and it may indicate your forthrightness. If you have a family, find out whether they will be included in the visit and ask about their level of participation. A spouse probably won't be invited to an actual interview session but may be asked to meet parishioners at an informal reception later in the day. If a family is not included at all in a parish visit, this may give you some insight into the parish and the rector's acceptance of family priorities. Assuming a spouse or family is invited, determine whether the parish intends to pay their travel expenses as well. For some parishes this can cause undue financial strain despite their best intentions. With a first position, the diocese may help a parish in this situation. Contacting your deployment officer is often helpful at this point.

Along the same lines, find out if you should make the travel arrangements and be reimbursed upon arrival or if someone at the parish will make the reservations and send you an itinerary. You should also determine ahead of time whether the parish will put you up at a hotel or if you will be staying at a parishioner's house. Transportation is another consideration. Will you need to rent a car or will someone meet you at the airport and take you to all of your appointments? Obviously if you rent a car and are reimbursed, be sensitive to financial stewardship issues. An economy car is your best bet. Save splurging on the bright red convertible for your vacation to Hawaii.

Parish visits range from the highly structured to the very loose. The more informed you are about the scheduled events of the visit, however, the more relaxed you will be. Find out exactly whom you will be meeting with, when the meetings will take place, and whether there will be social obligations in addition to formal interviewing. It is useful to then send a follow-up letter outlining your understanding of the financial situation and the schedule. This will clear up any potential miscommunication and ensure that both sides have similar expectations for your visit.

It's better to err on the side of over-packing when traveling for an interview. You'll be more relaxed if you have the appropriate clothes for any given situation. If, on a whim, the rector decides he or she would like you to meet the chair of the young adults group for an informal chat at the local coffeehouse, you'll feel silly wearing your interview suit. Pack enough of a mix of formal and informal attire to get you through any situation.

Finally, the timing of your visit is important. It's one thing to meet with the rector during the week and tour an empty church building. It's quite a different experience to visit on a Sunday morning, worship at the parish, and meet parishioners during coffee hour. Sharing Sunday morning worship is invaluable to your own discernment. If at all possible, schedule your parish interview during a period that overlaps with a Sunday.

## **Doing Your Homework**

The next stage, before the actual interview, revolves around careful preparation. The first step should come naturally to seminarians: do your homework. Prior to the interview, gather as much information about the parish and the rector as possible. There are a number of effective ways to do this, but rest assured that this is a critical step in the interviewing process. In practical terms, doing your research shows initiative, interest, and enthusiasm about the position, which can only make you look better during the interview itself. You will be better prepared to mutually explore whether you are called to the parish since you'll be spending more time during the interview on pertinent questions. It's the difference between asking, "How many mid-week worship services does the parish offer?" and "What would the assistant's responsibilities be at the two mid-week worship services?"

Some interview preparation resources include asking the parish for its most recent parish profile, requesting several current issues of the newsletter, and checking to see if the parish has a web site. These will not, of course, give you the true essence of the parish but they are valuable guides to understanding how the parish perceives itself and the

values it attempts to espouse. The web site will give you a sense of the parish's "public face" and the way it presents itself to newcomers. The newsletter will present insights into the everyday life and ministry of the congregation. Also helpful is *The Episcopal Church Annual*, which provides rough attendance figures.

If the parish is located in an unfamiliar area it is appropriate to ask for some "tourist" information. If it hasn't already been offered, the parish can certainly mail you some information from the local chamber of commerce or bureau of tourism – though this is mostly available online. Also, if you have children, a request for information about local schools is a good idea. This will be helpful toward your overall discernment.

Find out if the parish has a written job description for the position you will be discussing. While this is not essential, it does show that the rector and the search committee have put some thought into the needs of the parish. If there is not a written job description you will want to find out verbally what the primary responsibilities entail.

Another useful way to prepare for the interview is to speak with the diocesan deployment officer about the parish. He or she will be at least somewhat familiar with the parish and may be able to provide considerable information about the place. Some deployment officers are outstanding professionals who know their dioceses, function effectively and efficiently, and communicate with the bishop regularly. Unfortunately this isn't always the case. The position is not always filled by a full-time diocesan staff member. Sometimes the bishop also serves as the deployment officer, at times the canon-to-the-ordinary functions in this capacity, in some cases it's a part-time job held by a parish rector, and sometimes the duty falls to an overworked diocesan staff member as an additional responsibility. Just keep this in mind as you learn about the deployment situation in your home diocese or a diocese to which you may be called.

Perhaps the most valuable insights are garnered through your own personal contacts. If you are fortunate enough to have trusted friends or acquaintances familiar with the parish and the rector these are often your best resources. Information from these sources is so useful because they know both you and the parish. Clergy contacts in particular can give you a "read" on the rector's reputation in the diocese and his or her strengths and weaknesses.

One of the most effective and essential means of preparation for an interview is available through the diocesan deployment office. While this jumps ahead to the contract negotiation phase, it is imperative to know the diocesan minimums for clergy compensation. Most dioceses publish a single sheet that contains salary minimums for all levels of clergy. It's not difficult to determine which one applies to a newly ordained clergy person. It's the lowest figure you'll see. In addition to the minimum cash stipend, inquire about other benefits such as a housing allowance and health care. It is important to ascertain what is required by the canons of the diocese, what is standard but not required, and what is purely optional. Some dioceses also have a standard form for a contract or letter of agreement for assistants. By all means request a copy of this if you don't see it on the diocesan web page.

If possible, it is also helpful to speak with the person who most recently held the position for which you're interviewing. He or she can offer fresh and valuable insights on the rector's management style and the culture of the parish. Find out what he or she felt was rewarding about the position and what was frustrating. It is also useful to find out why the person left the parish. In the case of an assistant's job, odds are that the priest was simply ready to move on to new challenges, but you never know.

One final resource to check is the *Episcopal Clerical Directory*, published bi-annually by Church Publishing. Your seminary library should have a copy. Look up the rector and any other clergy associated with the parish. This can be beneficial as you move deeper into the discernment process. For one thing, you might have something in common with some of the people with whom you will interview. If, for instance, you attended the same educational institution, mentioning this can ease the flow of conversation during the initial stages of the interview. Again, it's simply smart to be as informed as possible before you enter the actual interview. You'll feel more confident and will be better able to uphold your side of the mutual exploration that is the interview.

### **Arm Yourself with Self-Knowledge**

The last aspect of interview preparation involves being intentional about knowing yourself, your particular gifts, and the type of parish environment in which you feel called to serve. It's important to remember, however, that this is a continually evolving process. Don't feel frustrated if you are a bit ambiguous about what you're really looking for and what your ministerial strengths are. This is natural for those just leaving seminary since, after all, you've never served a parish in an ordained capacity. Sure, you've served in field education parishes and have spent a considerable amount of time in seminary "trying on" different aspects of ministry such as preaching, pastoral care, and liturgical leadership. But it will most certainly take a few years in full-time parish ministry before you have a true sense of your giftedness and level of satisfaction. Nonetheless, you probably have a general idea of what your strengths are and the setting in which you would initially like to minister. For seminarians heading to their first placement it is also important to think about areas of potential interest. For instance, if you believe that you may be a strong teacher but have never actually led an adult education series, this counts as an area of potential strength and satisfaction.

Self-knowledge is emphasized because you are attempting to determine whether your gifts and strengths mesh with those needed by the parish with which you will interview. Only if you pay close attention to your own assets and are clear about what is important to you in a first placement can the interview itself take on the model of mutual exploration. Know what is important to you and be able to articulate this. I would even suggest rank-ordering your priorities so that they are clear in your own mind.

The most obvious starting place is to reflect on your successes and levels of satisfaction at your field placement site, Clinical Pastoral Education, seminary course work, and leadership opportunities in the seminary community. Think about what excited you the most. Were there areas to which you seemed to naturally gravitate? What about situations in which you were challenged but recognized significant growth? Also, be sure not to discount the same criteria from areas of your pre-seminary life and career.

Along similar lines, it's helpful to identify areas of ministry that either do not excite you or to which you don't feel particularly called. If you simply don't have a taste for youth ministry, it's probably not a great idea to accept a call to a parish where it's a significant part of the job description.

Two other issues of self-knowledge also greatly impact your first clergy job search. First, you should have a sense of the size and setting of your ideal starting position. That's not to say that you'll necessarily rule out certain positions because of one particular criteria but you should know whether you would be more comfortable in a family, pastoral, program, or resource-sized parish. You should also have some sense of whether you would prefer to minister in an urban, suburban, or rural setting.

Second, you will probably show a preference for the type of position you're interested in. For example, do you want to be the curate at a resource-sized parish, the assistant at a program-sized one, or the vicar of a small mission? Answering these questions may or may not determine where you serve in your first placement but it's important to examine your preferences.

There are several very strong guides out there to help you work toward better self-knowledge in preparation for your interviews. In his book, *Opening the Clergy Parachute*, Christopher Moore has a chapter titled "Your Ministry in Twenty-Five Words or Less."<sup>5</sup> It's a very helpful resource for defining your goals as you head into the interview process and it ends in the composition of a "ministry-goal statement."

Another valuable resource is a publication put out by the Church Deployment Office called *More Than Fine Gold*, the workbook used to fill out the CDO Personal Profile. The advantage of taking the time to fill it out is that it helps you to identify skills and satisfaction levels for ministerial functions.

Finally, Arthur F. Miller writes a very informative chapter in the Alban Institute publication, *Your Next Pastorate: Starting the Search*. In his essay "Build Your Search Around Giftedness," Miller stresses several beneficial tactics for better self-knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

While you will find any one of these resources extremely helpful, keep in mind that they are not specifically geared toward clergy seeking a first position. If you approach them with this in mind you will easily determine what does and does not apply. Remember that gathering appropriate self-knowledge takes time and is in its very essence a continual process. It is also critical to successfully entering into the interview itself as a mutual exploration of matching your gifts with the parish's needs.

## **Common Sense Interview Do's and Don'ts**

Now, finally, it's the moment you've been waiting and preparing for: the actual interview itself. Interviewing is a form of communication. As ministers of the Gospel we are called upon to communicate every single day. It is our deepest responsibility to communicate the powerful message of Christ's love through preaching teaching, and counseling. Furthermore, most of us have a fairly strong ability to relate to people. Again, this is what ministers of the Gospel are called upon to do every day. So, if

communicating and relating are the keys to a strong showing in an interview, and these are exactly the skills needed to serve the Church, why are we so often intimidated by interviewing? One possibility is that we are used to communicating the power of Christ, not the power of ourselves. “Tooting your own horn” is seldom seen as a Christian virtue. Yet if we view the interview as an opportunity to communicate our gifts to a community seeking ordained leadership, the entire process is much more palatable as it takes on the characteristic of mutual exploration.

Many books have been written that discuss the art of interviewing for a job. Any number of them might be helpful to you (see especially *What Color is Your Parachute*, by Richard N. Bolles).<sup>7</sup> The point here is not to give you an authoritative and comprehensive list of what to do and what not to do in an interview setting, but rather to spell out some generally accepted guidelines to coming across well in an interview. Much of what appears here may seem to be common sense. Good. That means you’re starting to think in the right frame of mind for interviewing.

### **DO**

Err on the side of overdressing.

(studies have shown that dark colors are preferable)

Pay attention to personal cleanliness and a neat appearance.

Shake hands firmly and look people in the eye when speaking with them.

Be prepared to open with prayer.

Bring something to write with and on, stored in a briefcase or a clean folder.

Speak clearly and answer questions concisely with specific examples.

Be enthusiastic about your ministry and the parish you’re visiting.

Maintain a fairly equal balance between listening and talking.

Turn off your cell phone!

### **DON'T**

Ramble on endlessly when answering questions.

Speak negatively about past ministerial experiences or seminary life.

Smoke without asking for permission.

Forget to thank the interviewers at the conclusion of the session.

Try to be someone other than yourself.

Mumble or look at your feet when answering questions.

Forget to look in the mirror before you leave for the interview.

Neglect to greet the parish staff warmly and respectfully.

Aside from bringing a writing implement and something to write on, there are several additional items you will want to bring into the interview itself. Extra copies of your resume and CDO profile are important to have on hand since you never know if you will be asked to meet with additional people. Also, bring copies of at least two recent sermons. This is a common request from interviewers and it’s nice to be able to provide them on the spot.

## **What is the Rector Looking For?**

While each rector's needs and desires vary when calling an assistant, there are certain characteristics and qualities that are consistently sought after. Rectors understand that the period immediately following seminary will be highly formative for a newly ordained transitional deacon. They are by no means looking for someone who is a "finished product." In fact, quite to the contrary, they seek people who display potential for ministry skill development and are excited about the potential growth that lies ahead. One rector, echoing the comments of many, spoke of the desirability of candidates who demonstrate a "willingness to grow, learn, and stretch" and to be "open to the continued exploration of self."

Rectors also universally seek people who are confident in their ministerial gifts but not arrogant. Coming across as someone who already has all the answers is a major turnoff. Rectors want to hire people who are flexible enough to meet the challenges and demands of parish ministry and not rigid in their views and approaches to ministry. They also look for candor, honesty, and a desire to serve. The ability to exhibit a sense of humor is also an important quality. As one rector put it, "if they're too grim that's a bad sign."

Ultimately, the main criteria for rectors is to find a colleague they feel they can work with. They need to be able to establish a positive working relationship with an assistant, a factor often based on the rector's intuition. This is obviously not a quantifiable trait but should serve as a reminder that you should also be looking for a similar "gut reaction" to the rector.

## **What Questions Will I Likely Be Asked?**

If you've spent the time to fully prepare for the interview by doing your homework and seeking a better understanding of yourself and your objectives, the interview will take care of itself. Your role is simply to draw on your preparation and let your personality and gifts shine through. Most people do find it comforting, nonetheless, to think about some of the questions that might be asked. Obviously each parish, rector, and search committee is unique and the questions asked will reflect this. However, there are certain topics that you should expect to encounter in the interview. These are most easily thought of in terms of broadly defined topic areas. The predominant topic areas can be articulated as follows:

### *Ministry*

What do you consider to be your strongest ministerial gifts? Areas where you need improvement?

What most appeals to you about this parish?

What did you most enjoy about seminary? Least enjoy?

### *Leadership*

Can you share some examples of situations in which you exercised leadership? Describe your leadership style.

What do you anticipate ordained leadership to be like?

How do you deal with issues of conflict? Examples?

Do you work well under pressure? Examples?

### *Personal*

Describe the disciplines of your spiritual life. How do you experience your relationship with Christ?

[if married] Tell us about your family life. Does your spouse expect to be involved in the parish?

How do you take care of yourself? What do you do for fun?

## **What Questions Should I Ask?**

If the interview process is to be truly mutual, you should spend at least as much time thinking about your own questions. These questions should generally revolve around three major areas: the parish, leadership, and the specifics of the position. Some are designed specifically for the rector while others could be addressed to a search committee. Remember that these are initial interview questions and that there will be a separate set of questions once mutual interest has been established. If you are interviewing with more than one parish it is helpful to ask similar questions of each of them for ease of comparison. Feel free to take notes during the interview itself. This demonstrates both interest and an attention to detail on your part. Further, it provides you with a valuable resource for your own post-interview analysis. It also sends a message that you are interviewing the parish in the same manner that they are interviewing you. You can be assured that whoever is interviewing you is also taking notes on your responses.

### *Parish*

Can you describe what Sunday worship looks like at St. \_\_\_\_\_?

Has the worship life of the parish changed much since you became rector?

Is there currently any discussion about implementing any changes to the worship life?

What attracts people to St. \_\_\_\_\_? Why do they stay?

Has the parish experienced any significant growth in recent years? [if so] What factors have contributed to this growth?

How are newcomers welcomed and incorporated?

What is the parish's vision for the future?

Where do you see the parish in 5 years? 10 years?

What staff resources does the parish have?

Do volunteer lay leaders play a significant role in parish administration? In what capacity?

Describe the work dynamic existing between the parish administrator and the assistant.

How are children incorporated into Sunday worship?

Does the parish support parents who bring their children to the entire service or is this considered a distraction?

### *Leadership*

Can you describe your management style?

What is the relationship between lay and ordained leadership?

Have you supervised assistants in the past?

[if yes] How would you characterize your working relationship with your assistants?

[if no] How would you go about providing guidance and mentoring to a newly ordained transitional deacon?

### *Position*

What would be the assistant's primary responsibilities?

Do you have a written job description?

What qualities and gifts are you seeking in an assistant?

How would parish and ministerial responsibilities be shared between the rector and assistant? (ie. preaching, celebrating, pastoral duties)

How long a commitment are you looking for?

## **What Questions Should I *Not* Ask?**

The following list comes from rectors who have hired a number of assistants over the years. These are actual questions asked by candidates who, for a variety of reasons, did not get the job. This list is not necessarily to imply that the issues underlying the questions are unimportant. Rather, it shows that the context of the initial interview is not the appropriate forum to address the issue at hand.

1. How many hours per week would I work? *[implies that the candidate would have a “punch the clock” mentality, an unrealistic understanding of parish ministry]*
2. I don't do \_\_\_\_\_. *[shows a lack of understanding about the generalist nature of ordained ministry and insensitivity to team ministry; furthermore it's implicitly telling the rector what he/she will do.]*
3. What does this job pay? *[Beware of overemphasizing monetary concerns in an initial interviews. If you've done your homework, you already have some idea of what to expect. In time, specifics will be outlined but it's possible to come across as preoccupied with finances.]*
4. What would I have to do to get fired? *[Shows the rector that you have low standards, a poor work ethic, and may be trying to determine what you can “get away with.”]*

### **Interview “Non-Verbals”**

As with all conversations, there is more to an interview than the actual spoken words themselves. Sure, you need to attend to the words being spoken on the surface but the interview behind the interview is often very telling and can provide terrific insights toward your discernment. One of the first things to look for is the manner in which the interview is being conducted. Who exactly is conducting the interview? Is it only the rector? Is it the rector along with a lay search committee? This can shed some light on the culture of the parish and the decision-making process.

If you are being interviewed by a committee consisting of the rector and a lay search committee, actively look at the interaction between them. Do the lay people always seem to look to the rector for guidance or answers? Or is there a greater sense of mutuality among members of the group? Do you sense any conflict between members? Do they seem to be in agreement about the responsibilities of the position?

The amount of thought and time put into the call process itself can shed much light on the intentions of the rector or parish. Do they seem genuinely interested in finding the right fit or are they merely trying to fill a staffing vacancy? Does the rector want a colleague with whom he or she can minister effectively or just another “employee” to round out the payroll?

Unfortunately with non-verbal communication, there's not a simple checklist you can refer to. The best advice is to never minimize your own gut reactions. Trust your powers of perception to stay out of an unhealthy or hurtful situation. Sometimes, a situation or a conversation just doesn't feel right. One newly ordained priest I spoke with told about an interview where she couldn't put a finger on precisely why she wasn't comfortable with the rector. On the surface of things, she didn't have a good reason for turning down a subsequent call, but she did just that. Several months later she found out that the rector had just been involved in a diocesan intervention due to issues of alcohol abuse.

## **Post-Interview Analysis**

So, how did it go? It's very important to take some time to reflect on any interview you may have. I find it tremendously helpful to jot down observations as close to the conclusion of the interview as possible. What did you learn about the rector and the parish? What felt good about your time together? Do you have follow-up questions that didn't occur to you at the time? What issues may be potential stumbling blocks for you? Do you feel that you could work effectively with the rector?

Many people find it beneficial to debrief with a spouse or seminary colleague after an interview. Another viewpoint can certainly be an asset in this situation and you may recall aspects of the interview you had forgotten simply by talking about it.

The most important thing you're trying to determine is whether you want to continue to pursue a call at the parish. Recognizing that the perfect parish does not exist, could you see yourself serving as an ordained leader in the parish with which you just interviewed? It's also very important to determine whether the outlined position responsibilities are engaging and challenging. Let's face it, some rectors are seeking assistants to serve as little more than "window dressing." Fortunately this attitude is rare, but you want to insure that your primary responsibilities run deeper than doing the things that the rector doesn't want or doesn't like to do.

Finally, you'll need to write a brief and timely thank you note to the rector and key lay leaders involved in the interview. I usually bring an addressed, stamped envelope with me so I can write the note and mail it the same day. It's helpful to ask for business cards at the end of your time together so that when you send your thank you notes you'll be certain the names are spelled correctly. Even if the parish is clearly not a good fit from either perspective it is imperative to write a thank you note. Regardless of the experience, you may end up as the rector's colleague in the diocese so be as cordial as possible.

## **Phone Interviews**

Due to the sheer cost of flying candidates in from extended distances, some parishes use a phone interview as the initial screening process. This is clearly not the ideal way to conduct an interview and it is limiting from both sides. The absence of non-verbal language takes away a significant part of the conversation. It can also be a bit awkward for both parties involved since most people are not used to participating in this manner of interview. Most phone interviews are less comprehensive than face-to-face interviews, though you should prepare as if it were a regular interview. No parish will hire solely on the basis of the phone interview so a positive conversation usually leads to a parish visit. Nor would you accept a call without experiencing a parish first-hand.

Aside from the usual interview preparation, it is highly recommended that you practice over the phone with a friend or two. I like to stick in the ear piece from my cell phone, clip the phone to my belt, and do laps around the dining room table as I speak. You'll soon find out that your warm hand gestures, so engaging in person, are worthless. Still use them if this makes you more comfortable but recognize that you need to pay more attention to the inflection of your voice.

The phone interview will normally be set for a specific time and date. Make sure you are available to take the call a full 30 minutes before and after the appointed time. If a committee has several phone interviews set up on a given morning they may very well be running either early or late. A group of people conducting a phone interview will normally go around the room and introduce themselves at the beginning of the interview. If they neglect to do this politely ask them to do so. Some people who have experienced phone interviews have found it helpful to write down the names in a circle on a sheet of paper. This gives you a visual set-up of the interviewers. If you can recognize people by their voices it is very impressive to use their names when answering a question. If you are anything like me, however, this is not a practical option. As with any interview, don't monopolize the conversation. This becomes even more pronounced over the phone and can turn off the interviewers. On the other hand, be very prepared to ask questions of your own throughout the interview, so that the conversation remains a mutual exploration. There is a tendency in a phone interview to lapse into the mode of playing "20 questions" where the interviewers ask the questions and the candidate dutifully responds. The good news about any phone interview is that you can wear your bathrobe.

### **Follow-Up/Pre-Negotiation Phase**

Once you've determined that mutual interest exists between you and the parish, it's time to focus your conversation. This stage usually takes the form of a follow-up interview or a conversation with the rector. This is a critical juncture of the call process. Both you and the parish have recognized initial interest and have agreed to move ahead with the conversation. You need answers to questions that were not appropriate to ask during your initial interview session, including determining the parish's financial offer. Your job at this stage is to continue to listen and write down everything that is said. It is especially vital to understand the rector's expectations for how you will proceed from this point, as you've just entered into a deeper level of mutual exploration.

The rector should inform you of the financial package at this time, but it is perfectly acceptable to ask about it if he or she fails to bring it up. There are two scenarios for discussing financial compensation at this stage. Some rectors will merely present the package with the understanding that negotiating may occur only if and when a call is extended. Some people would argue that it is fine to listen to a financial offer at this point but that any attempt at negotiation should not occur until after a call has officially offered. To do so, they contend, puts you in a weakened position for subsequent negotiation.

On the other hand, some rectors insist on hammering out the financial details before the call is extended. The theory here is that if the financial package truly is not acceptable, it would be a waste of everyone's time to proceed with further conversation. It also leaves no room for misunderstanding when a call is extended. By the time the parish issues a call, everything has been dealt with up front so all sides know exactly what is on the table.

These are simply two different approaches to dealing with financial compensation issues. It's most important to find out how the rector would like to proceed and then determine your comfort level with the process. If you're not comfortable with the parish's

approach, it's perfectly acceptable, assuming you have a good reason, to question their process. If nothing else, it tells you something about the parish if they are inflexible or unconcerned about your comfort level.

### **What Questions Should I Ask During the Follow-Up/Pre-Negotiation Phase?**

Would you describe the relationship you had with your previous assistant [if applicable]?  
How would I be building on his/her work?

How do you encourage balance between parish and personal life?

What is your day off and *do you take it*?  
Do you allow for a study day or sermon preparation time?

Is participation in Diocesan activities encouraged or is this seen as taking time away from the parish?

How would my job performance be evaluated? What means of feedback would be offered?

Does the parish have a commitment to the continuing education of its clergy? What specifically is offered in terms of financial assistance?

What salary and benefits is the parish prepared to offer an assistant?

Cash stipend?  
Health benefits?  
Housing allowance?  
Other benefits such as travel reimbursement, phone service, business expenses?  
Vacation time?

Does the parish maintain a discretionary fund for the assistant? How is it administered?  
Will it travel with me when I leave the parish?

## CHAPTER 5

# Contract Negotiation

The Church has a confused attitude toward money. We're not exactly sure what to make of gospel parables that raise the issue of wealth. We hear that we should store up treasures in heaven, give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. We also have an ideal of the priestly ministry that highlights the metaphor of the suffering servant. The priest surely doesn't need money to be happy, goes this line of thought. All he or she needs is the Gospel of Christ. The monastic mentality often pervades how we perceive ordained ministry as well. If St. Francis could survive living among the animals and owning only the cloak on his back, what's wrong with us? There is a guilt factor that arises when discussing being paid for ministry and many in the Church feel awkward even approaching financial issues. As difficult as it is for some clergy to reconcile money and ministry, Episcopal clergy remain the highest paid of any denomination in the United States.

This attitude of cowering from the issue of financial compensation is magnified when it comes time to negotiate a clergy salary. Many clergy fear being viewed as greedy if they seek higher salaries. Some feel that they will somehow be tainted by worldly matters if they place too much emphasis on finances. It is helpful to understand that appropriate compensation for ministry is nothing to feel guilty about. In fact, it is a way of recognizing that the ordained ministry is important to a faith community. The Rev. Roddey Reid, director of The Church Deployment Office from 1971-1983 points to a twofold purpose for clergy compensation. It is "to provide a living and so to free the clergy, as far as possible from being distracted from proclaiming the Gospel; and to honor them for their service, honor which, incidentally, God accepts as given to Himself since it is He who sends them in the first instance."<sup>8</sup> So clergy compensation is founded on principles of furthering effective ministry and honoring those who play a unique leadership role in congregational life. It is also a clergy wellness issue. In his book *Ministry for a New Time*, The Rev. James Fenhagen describes a number of characteristics of "well, effective and thriving clergy." One of these revolves around financial stability. Clergy members who fit this category "have taken steps to meet their economic needs...None of them sees living on an inadequate income as virtuous."<sup>9</sup>

There is a psychological benefit to receiving what you would consider fair compensation for your services. No one likes to begin a new job feeling that they should be earning more money or feeling frustrated that they didn't ask for slightly more when they had the chance. Such a beginning tends to spur resentment that, in time, affects job commitment, attitude, and outlook on life. In a parish setting, this is a negative situation for everyone involved and does little to enhance the work of ministry. On the other hand, entering a new job feeling that people are excited about your ministry and are willing to compensate you fairly for your gifts, provides a solid foundation for your future at the parish. When both sides have agreed harmoniously through compromise on a package of financial compensation a level of trust has been established. If it is trust that allows relationships to be built and to flourish, a new clergy person who has undergone a fruitful contract negotiation is off to a good start.

For many of us, the concept of negotiating conjures up images we would just as soon avoid. We think about the dreaded process of buying a car. Yes, it's exciting to drive a new car off the lot but the salesmanship games are mind-numbing. The term "make me an offer" means engaging in a strange ritual of back-and-forth that eventually leaves you wondering how much you just overpaid for your new mini-van. Clergy contract negotiation should be a process of mutual compromise between two parties who would like to enter into relationship with one another. Approach it in similar fashion to the interview process and recognize that it's not an us-against-them proposition. This is not a Cold War era arms reduction negotiation. You need to insure that your interests are being protected, that you're satisfied with the agreement, and that your integrity remains intact.

Needless to say, clergy contract negotiation should not be a game of "hardball." We're talking about smart negotiating, not hardball negotiating. Though it might be helpful, priests don't have slick agents who wear \$2,000 suits. Unlike professional athletes entangled in nasty salary disputes, priests don't usually hold out and refuse, say, to work during Lent until contract demands are met. They don't storm into the Senior Warden's office and demand that he or she "show me the money," a la the movie *Jerry McGuire*. Certain televangelists aside, most people don't enter ministry to reap great financial rewards. If hardball negotiating is the antithesis of clergy contract negotiations, mutuality in negotiation is, thankfully, much more the norm in parish settings. Hopefully the parish you are negotiating with understands and adheres to this principle. Regardless, it is incumbent upon you to insure that mutuality, openness, and fairness are indeed the operating guidelines.

### **Congratulations, You've Received a Call – Now What?**

It's finally happened! After all your years in the ordination process, seminary training, and job anxiety, you've received a call from a parish. It may have been in the form of a phone call, a letter, or a face-to-face conversation with the rector. Now what? The first piece of advice might sound strange but it's imperative that you do not accept the call immediately. You need time to pray about the situation, reflect upon what you know about the parish, and talk to friends and family. Even if you truly feel called to the particular parish the same advice applies. No parish or rector will insist that you respond instantaneously. Thank the person extending the call, express enthusiasm, and inform him or her that you will be in touch in the next several days. Before ending this conversation it is appropriate to say something like "of course, I'll also need to see the proposed financial package," if this hasn't already been addressed.

In situations where the financial package hasn't already been discussed and negotiated, it is smart to iron out the details before accepting the call. Most rectors will fully understand this and expect to subsequently enter into the contract negotiation phase. It can be very beneficial, however, to accept a call subject to an acceptable contract negotiation. This shows good faith on both sides and can lead naturally to a follow-up visit to the parish to sign the contract and deal with housing issues.

It is conceivable that you will receive more than one call at the same time. This is a wonderful position to be in but it can also be quite a delicate situation. It is imperative to be open and honest with the rectors involved about your level of interest and other interviews that might be taking place. Remember, it's an amazingly small Church and word travels quickly. You need time for genuine discernment but you must also be sensitive to the parish communities that have issued calls.

## **Contract or Letter of Agreement? Should You Negotiate?**

When a call has been extended and accepted a written document is signed by both parties that lays out expectations and obligations. This is called either a contract or a letter of agreement but the principles remain the same. The mutual discussions that have ensued are put on paper so that there is no misunderstanding about the relationship that has been entered into. Typically both sides enter into this relationship with nothing but honorable intentions but potentially awkward and painful situations can be avoided by putting everything in writing.

At a minimum, the contract should include a position description and a detailed outline of the salary and benefits. Some dioceses provide "fill-in-the-blank" forms for this purpose and others rely on the parish to generate a letter of agreement. For most newly ordained clergy the contract or letter must be approved by the bishop to become official.

In reality, contract negotiation often takes place during discussions surrounding the creation of the contract. Normally the rector will sit down and outline what the parish is prepared to offer. Most rectors expect some negotiation at this stage and are prepared to engage in the discussion. Obviously, you won't sign the contract until you are satisfied with its provisions. Once the contract is signed you must be prepared to live with it since the window for further negotiation has effectively been shut.

The position description should be fairly detailed and include all of the expected responsibilities. What committees will you be working with? How many times per month will you preach? What are your Christian Education responsibilities? Vague descriptions invariably lead to miscommunication regarding expectations. Obviously, situations will arise that will not have been spelled out in a clergy contract. That's the very nature of parish ministry. But it's important for both you and the parish to be clear on your primary responsibilities.

The section on salary and benefits should be very specific and cover the entire range of potential benefits. A dollar figure should accompany the following items: cash stipend, housing allowance, Church Pension Fund payment, health insurance, life insurance, automobile expenses, moving expenses, discretionary fund, continuing education, and business expenses. It should also outline the provisions for vacation, sick days, continuing education time, use of Church buildings, and supplementary compensation. In addition, any other agreements that arise during the negotiation should be spelled out in the contract.

The contract should further include your start date and term of your contract. It is critical to have the start date in writing and agreed upon before the negotiation has ended. It cannot be over-emphasized how important it is to take two to four weeks off between seminary graduation and the beginning of your professional ministry. You've worked hard for three years, you're making a monumental life transition, and you're most likely moving to a new home. Take some time to rest your body, mind, and spirit before you enter this new phase of your life. You'll be healthier in the short-run and a more effective minister in the months to follow. It's very tempting to jump right into your parish duties. You've been waiting for years to get to this point, you're excited, and many rectors expect you to begin right away. Pushing off your start date is a tangible sign that you are willing and able to set limits with the rector and the parish. Even a rector most eager for you to start immediately will respect this and recognize your awareness of the need for self-care.

I know of one graduating seminarian who got swept up in the excitement of the moment when she landed her first job and agreed to begin the day after her ordination. She soon found herself knee-deep in work and overwhelmed by her new job with the rector on vacation. She was exhausted and had a nagging feeling that she had made a terrible mistake deciding to start right away. This is obviously not the best way to begin a much-anticipated life in parish ministry.

The term of the contract, or commitment, varies. For a newly ordained assistant this is typically two to three years. Often, contracts will include a provision for renewal. In other words you may have an initial commitment for two years, which is subsequently renewable on a yearly basis. Some rectors, sticking to the traditional curacy model, will accept a newly ordained seminary graduate for two years only. The thinking behind this is that you will learn a tremendous amount about living into your new vocation in two years. Then it's time to move on to a different situation for the sake of your own growth. Think about your own timetable and be certain that you and the rector share expectations.

Another aspect of the clergy contract may be a provision for a ministry review. Regular feedback is quite helpful for newly ordained clergy persons. It is a way to determine if your job performance is meeting expectations and to learn how you can improve the quality and focus of your work. A review may be a formal affair consisting of a meeting with the rector every six months to evaluate your job performance. More likely, you will simply have a regularly scheduled time to meet with the rector, process what you've seen, and seek guidance and feedback. This is important to an effective mentoring relationship whether it is formally outlined in the contract or informally agreed upon.

## **Diocesan Minimums**

In one sense negotiating a first clergy contract is simple. Most dioceses have mandated salary minimums for transitional deacons that are set by diocesan convention. Before you even get to the contract negotiation phase, contact the diocese and request this information. This will give you a strong sense of what your salary will look like. Some dioceses also specify housing allowances or provide a formula for calculating it (such as 30% of your cash stipend). I'm aware of a situation where a priest transferred in from

another diocese, failed to get this information, signed a contract below the minimum salary, and didn't find this out for over a year! Again, there's no need to play hardball in contract negotiations but there is a need to play smart. While some parishes have a bit of room above the diocesan minimum, the cash stipend (the standard 'salary' figure) usually ends up very close to the published figure. In other words there's usually not much negotiating room on the salary itself.

There's another reason that a newly ordained transitional deacon's salary is not often very negotiable. Let's be honest, you don't have much of a track record being fresh out of seminary. You can't point to a list of wonderful accomplishments during your many years serving in parish ministry. This will no doubt come with time. There has been a recent trend, however, for parishes to offer slightly above the diocesan minimum. This is seemingly a nice gesture and very helpful as you begin to pay off residual student loans. In truth it is more a reflection of the current job market. Since there are more positions available than seminary trained clergy to fill them, some parishes have sweetened the proverbial pot to attract strong candidates. This normally translates to an extra \$1,000 or \$2,000 in annual salary.

It's always important to keep in perspective just how much it costs for a parish to hire a full-time clergy person. Many seminarians are shocked to find out the actual cost to a parish for their services as a transitional deacon. For example a newly ordained clergy person earning \$30,000 in salary may actually cost a parish over \$60,000 annually. This takes into consideration the housing allowance, benefits, payment into the Church Pension Fund, and other expenses. To help defray this cost many dioceses provide financial assistance to parishes hiring an assistant for the first time. It's usually done on a sliding scale providing more generous support in the first year and then tapering off after two or three years. The thought is that a parish will then be able to support the extra priest on its own in subsequent years.

## **Housing Issues**

After living in a cramped one-bedroom seminary apartment for three years my wife and I were thrilled at the prospect of moving into a house. Our son Ben turned one year old several days after graduation and, as he became increasingly mobile, we were ready for extra space! For many seminarians post-seminary housing is an exciting topic. Dreaming about having a kitchen with more than one drawer kept us going on numerous occasions.

The clergy housing issue is unique. Understanding the different options available is helpful before you enter into a discussion with a particular parish. Few parishes provide housing for assistants. There are some 'curate's houses' out there, but normally a parish that provides housing supplies it only to the rector. More standard is the cash housing allowance. A housing allowance is a monthly payment on top of your cash salary that is dedicated to your housing expenses. The majority of the allowance typically goes toward your rent/mortgage payment. Other items covered include taxes and maintenance. The housing allowance may be applied to a rental property or to the cost of owning your own home.

One of the most important steps to take before you consider what the parish has to offer is to determine your housing needs. How much house do you want? Are there particular family considerations? Would you prefer to rent or buy a home? These are vital decisions to make which will impact your lifestyle and quality of life. Once you've determined your needs you're in a much better position to enter into a discussion with the parish about housing options.

It is also important to get a handle on typical housing costs in each area you are considering. Here, a call to a local real estate agent or a survey of the internet can be most helpful. This information could change similar compensation packages dramatically!

There are advantages and disadvantages to living in parish provided housing versus accepting a housing allowance. A church-owned home means you need not worry about making repairs. They may not necessarily be corrected promptly but you are not financially responsible. If the house is located near the parish you will have the convenience of a short commute to work. You may also be able to live in an area that would ordinarily be out of your price range. If you don't plan to serve a parish for more than several years, you will have few logistics aside from packing and moving when you leave. This means you will not be beholden to the whims of the local real estate market. Living in a provided house does mean that you have to deal with a landlord, often in the form of the junior warden. Also, the convenience of living near the parish can mean a loss of privacy for clergy families.

Renting a home with the use of a housing allowance offers a great deal of flexibility. You can pick the neighborhood, though some parishes do like to be consulted, and you can move easily. Many assistants committed to a parish for two or three years prefer this option. Of course there are differences between renting a house and renting an apartment. Renting a house often involves being responsible for snow removal, yard work, trash removal, and minor repairs. There may also be limitations on improvements such as painting, wallpapering, and other changes to the property. When considering a rental of any kind it's important to ask questions and be informed about these issues. The general rule of thumb in real estate is that it only pays to own a home if you remain in it for at least three years. Otherwise it doesn't make financial sense once you've considered the closing costs to purchase and then sell a home.

Using a housing allowance to buy a house is the final option for newly ordained clergy. If you have a contract for at least three years or if you are very committed to remaining in a certain area this can be attractive. You will spend much more time and money on a house that you own. You'll be making repairs and simply dealing with the realities of home ownership. Some people enjoy mowing the lawn and find it to be a source of relaxation! You will also be building equity, which is always prudent financial management, though risks are always involved in home ownership. There are tax advantages to owning a home, such as being able to deduct the interest off your mortgage, that should be discussed with a qualified accountant. It does get a bit more complicated when you're ready to move. Whether you end up making or losing money on a transaction, selling a house is quite stressful and time-consuming.

If you buy a home you will most likely end up with a mortgage to finance the purchase price. Before entering into a relationship with a financial lending institution, it can't hurt to find out if the parish will hold the loan for you instead. This is not financially feasible for many parishes, but parishes with significant resources can and sometimes do hold the loans for their clergy. The advantage to this is that you will save on many of the closing costs associated with a conventional loan, and you may be offered an interest rate below what banks are charging. It certainly doesn't hurt to ask.

If you end up in a church-owned home you still have some negotiating to do. Your contract should spell out exactly what the church will provide in terms of phone costs, utilities, upkeep, and maintenance. It is especially helpful to outline the procedures for routine and emergency maintenance. Determine who you should call in a given situation and discuss a method of reimbursement should you use your own funds for maintenance work. Remember that even if you live in a church-owned home, you are entitled to have a portion of your salary designated towards housing expenses. This allows you to take advantage of the fact that housing allowances, up to a certain amount, are not taxable as income.

Another benefit that some parishes offer clergy living in church-owned housing is called an equity allowance. This is money that the parish sets aside for the priest in order to provide him or her with the same kind of equity that would be earned if a home was purchased. This is a terrific way to build equity while maintaining the benefits of living in parish-owned housing.

Housing allowances are the most negotiable portion of a newly ordained clergy person's contract. This is in large part because it's the most variable. Some dioceses have formulas that are adhered to when calculating the allowance, though many parishes wait to see what your circumstances require before committing to a specific number. It will undoubtedly cost a family of five more per month for housing than a single priest. Neighborhoods are also a factor. In my own case, the parish to which I was called preferred that my family live within the city limits. I concurred since I was, after all, serving a downtown parish. After some initial research, it quickly became evident that this would mean higher property taxes and car insurance rates. Once I articulated my financial concerns and expressed my desire to comply with the wishes of the parish, the initial offer for the housing allowance was increased. Not every parish has the financial resources to do this, but it shows that researching the market can produce positive results when it comes time to negotiate.

## **Financial Benefits**

Aside from the cash salary and housing allowance, parishes offer a number of other benefits. Some of these are standard and some are negotiable. As always, check with the diocesan office to determine which benefits are mandated by diocesan convention. Canonically, the parish must pay into the Church Pension Fund for all of its clergy. This computes to 18% of your salary plus housing. Health and life insurance should also be covered. Dental coverage is optional for some dioceses. If you have a family, determine whether or not the parish intends to provide a family health plan. Not all dioceses mandate this as a requirement. Double check to be certain your family will indeed be covered. Also, make sure to ascertain the date that your health benefits begin.

Automobile expenses are routinely paid for by the parish. Most will reimburse you at the standard IRS rate per mile. This method means, of course, that you must log your work miles each time you get in the car for parish-related business. The other method is to provide a yearly lump sum for automobile expenses.

I find that a smart phone is an integral part of my ministry. You may well want to ask for a cell phone allowance – I suggest researching the plan first. It may be cheaper if you are added to an existing parish account.

The parish should pay for your moving expenses from seminary to your new home. Find out if you will be reimbursed by the parish or if the moving company will bill the parish directly. The latter is more advantageous for tax purposes.

Your working hours and days off should be discussed and written into your contract. Some dioceses publish a standard number of hours that comprise the work week. This is often at odds with the hours clergy actually put in but should be used as a guide nonetheless. Ordained ministry is different from many secular jobs in that you are always a priest, whether technically on the clock or not. Balance between work, family, friends, and time alone is continually being challenged and readjusted. When you discuss hours per week, know that a priest's schedule must be flexible enough to provide pastoral care at any given moment and also to provide you with a healthy lifestyle. When this is acknowledged, you, the parishioners, and your ministry benefit.

Four weeks paid vacation (including four Sundays) is fairly standard for newly ordained clergy. Find out when the rector takes his or her vacation since you'll need to work around this. Hopefully it won't start the day you begin. Two weeks per year are generally provided for continuing education. This normally comes with a stipend ranging from about \$200 to \$750. Find out whether this transfers from year to year or whether you lose it if you don't use it.

You may be reimbursed for business expenses such as books, journals, and dues for professional organizations. Determine if there is a provision in the budget for this and find out how these expenses will be administered. Aside from your in-office business expenses, some parishes pay for your local home phone service. They may also provide a cellular phone if this is warranted. Some parishes have an entertainment budget for their clergy to encourage them to entertain parishioners. It's always helpful to find out if this is a traditional parish expectation.

Depending on parish regulations, you may be entitled to benefit from supplementary compensation. Priests are often allowed to accept monetary gifts from weddings, funerals, and baptisms. If you plan to teach, lecture, or write you should be allowed to profit from this as long as it doesn't interfere with your parish duties.

You may be provided with money for a discretionary fund. Find out the purposes for which this money is normally used. It is traditional that offertory collections from ordination services go to the discretionary fund of the ordinand. Determine whether the parish will open an account for these funds. Also, with any discretionary fund, ask if the money will go with you when you leave the parish.

## **Intangible Benefits**

While there is often little negotiating room on the cash stipend and other financial benefits, the other factors comprising the entire package are more fluid. This is where you can get creative and help to forge a situation that is most beneficial to you and your circumstances. Remember that it is not financial compensation alone that makes up a mutually beneficial contract. There are intangibles such as a flexible schedule, continuing education provisions, and even scheduling time for sermon preparation at home. It is helpful to reflect upon how you work and what circumstances contribute to your most effective exercise of ministry. Obviously as an assistant you may not have too much control over all of these factors. Nonetheless, you can probably set up some compromises with the rector if you're clear on what you would like to ask for. If your requests are not acceptable to the rector he or she will let you know. As with many issues, up front communication is always your best bet. It's better to learn sooner rather than later that the rector expects you to be in the office every Saturday morning.

I'm aware of a number of creative provisions negotiated into contracts that have contributed to the health and well being of newly ordained clergy persons. One graduating seminarian knew that he wrote his best sermons when he had quiet time alone at his home. He negotiated for permission to stay at home one morning per week for sermon preparation time whenever he was preaching on the following Sunday. He's less stressed about his sermon writing and the parish benefits from better preaching. Another priest who has several children negotiated a "sacred time" into his contract. Unless there is a pastoral emergency he spends the hours between 4 and 7 pm at home with his family. He serves a large parish with many evening meetings so this time is essential for his family. I negotiated with the parish to provide child-care for our son whenever my wife and I were expected to be at parish or diocesan events. This relieved some financial strain as well as some emotional pressure. And the rector's daughter was a babysitter! Be creative but decide what is most important to you and pursue it. No rector wants to receive a laundry list of oddball demands but will probably work out a compromise on something reasonable that means a lot to you.

## CHAPTER 6

# Wrapping Up a Successful Job Search

“Always make sure you choreograph your exit.” This advice came from a wise parish priest who served several parishes as an interim before his retirement. He was a big proponent of smooth, graceful, and quick transitions for clergy leaving parishes. The same may be said for those entering parishes in an ordained capacity. Choreographing your entrance may be more critical for a new rector but it’s also important for a newly hired assistant. With the help of the rector and the parish staff you can influence your own transition into the parish.

Once you have received and accepted a call it is imperative that you work with the rector on an entrance strategy. Your official start date may be several months away but you’ll need to determine how you’ll announce that you’ve accepted a position. The first place to start is with your bishop. The bishop will most likely want to approve your contract before it’s official. He or she may also decide at what point you can make your call public. The last thing you want is to endanger your relationship with the bishop at this late stage of the game. Communicating with the bishop is not just common courtesy, it’s an absolute necessity. The bishop may have very good reasons for suppressing the announcement of your call. If you haven’t yet been approved for ordination by the Standing Committee of your diocese, it may be seen as presumptuous to rejoice in your newfound placement. Also the bishop may want to wait for General Ordination Exam results to come in before making the announcement. If negative results would jeopardize your ordination or even just delay it, holding off on the announcement will benefit everyone involved. Be certain your new rector understands this situation and refrains from announcing the call to the parish. At this point it makes sense to inform your home parish rector of your situation, reiterating that the call has not yet been made public.

You must also take the time to inform any other parishes with which you’ve had contact that you have accepted a call. Phone the rector, tell him or her your situation, express thanks for his or her time and interest, and wish the parish the best in their continued search for an assistant. It is very important that you speak with the rector directly to give them this news. Don’t leave it to an answering machine, letter, or e-mail. You would expect similar treatment from a rector if a call were extended to another candidate. Most rectors will recognize the Spirit’s work in the call process and offer their congratulations. Some will be disappointed, hurt, and even angry. If you face the brunt of these gut-reactions, always deal with the person professionally and with pastoral sensitivity.

The bishop, your new rector, and your home parish rector are the most important people to be in contact with at this time. You may also want to contact some others to let them know your news first-hand. It’s important to inform your seminary dean, academic advisor, clergy mentors, and close friends in the Church who have taken an interest in your call to ordained ministry. If a public announcement still has not been made, stress that you are sharing the information in confidence.

Once the bishop has given the go-ahead to announce your hiring you'll want to coordinate with your new rector on how to handle the parish announcement. He or she will probably announce it to the parish on a Sunday morning and may want you to be present. Logistically this will depend on the parish's proximity to your seminary. In addition to a Sunday morning announcement there will most likely be an item about your call in the parish newsletter. Some rectors ask newly hired seminarians to write an article of introduction to the parish. Others will gather some biographical data and write it themselves. Your home parish rector will also want to make a similar announcement. It's a nice gesture to write an article for your home parish newsletter telling them about the position and thanking them for their support during your time at seminary.

When I hired my first assistant I announced it via e-mail to the vestry, sent out a e-blast to the whole parish, put an insert in the Sunday bulletin, had an article in the parish newsletter, and told the world through Twitter, Facebook, and my blog. Overkill? Perhaps – but it was a great way to joyfully share this news with as many people as possible.

If you are able to be present at your new parish for an introduction, the rector may ask you to preach. This may be a valuable way for parishioners to get to know you. Before you agree to this, however, think about whether you would like to be introduced in this manner. Undoubtedly you'll feel some pressure preaching on a Sunday when you'll be meeting many people for the first time. Besides this, ask yourself if you'd rather preach for the first time as a deacon rather than as a seminarian. There's something about being in a formal ministerial role when you preach for the first time that adds to your credibility. I'm not saying that a person needs to be ordained in order to have credibility but there's a certain authority that you'll be claiming as an ordained clergy person that you lack as a seminarian. This is an issue of first impressions more than anything else. There's another reason to decline the offer to preach before your formal start date. When you visit the parish for an introduction you may very well be sitting in the pews for the last time. You'll be in a better position to experience and observe the liturgy in your new parish if you're not playing an active role. You should cherish the opportunity to see the parish from the perspective of a newcomer.

Practically speaking, there are some ways that you can begin to feel attached to the parish before your start date. Request to be placed on the parish mailing list. Receiving the newsletter and information about parish events will help you to become quickly immersed in your ministry upon arrival. Also ask for a copy of the parish directory. Becoming familiar with parishioners' names will make meeting them and connecting faces to names much easier. Many new assistants keep notes on parishioners to aid in getting to know people. This type of documentation can never start too early. The parish to which I was called took the initiative to send me the Sunday bulletin each week. This was a great way to keep up on parish activities, learn the names of vestry members, and hear about the work of active parishioners. Finally, ascertain whether a parish history has been written in recent years. These are always entertaining reading and can give you a sense of the parish's origins.

## Afterword

It is my sincerest hope that you have found these pages helpful as you continue to pursue God's call. One of my goals in putting this project together was to be able to look back and say to myself, "I wish I had had this guide when I was in seminary." In fact, I'm comfortable saying this. I might have done some things differently, but most of all it would have taken much of the anxiety out of the process.

I would be delighted to hear about your own experiences and approaches to this exciting time in your vocational life. Don't hesitate to pass on any pearls of wisdom or suggestions from your own foray into the world of clergy deployment. If you have a moment, please consider sharing what about this resource was helpful to you, what was less effective, and what you think might be added or expanded. With your assistance and input, subsequent editions can be even more beneficial to those who come after us.

Peace and blessings to you in your continued service to Jesus Christ.

The Rev. Tim Schenck  
The Episcopal Parish of St. John the Evangelist  
176 Main Street  
Hingham, Massachusetts 02043  
781-749-1535  
frtim1@gmail.com

Website: [www.frtim.com](http://www.frtim.com)  
Blog: "Clergy Family Confidential"  
[frtim.wordpress.com/](http://frtim.wordpress.com/)  
Twitter: [twitter.com/FatherTim](https://twitter.com/FatherTim)

# Sample Letter of Agreement

## Letter of Agreement for Assistant Clergy

between

The Reverend \_\_\_\_\_

and

The Reverend \_\_\_\_\_

Rector of (name of church)

The Vestry concurring,

who has appointed him/her to be Assistant with the understanding that his/her appointment shall continue until (date), or until dissolved by mutual consent or by arbitration and decision.

### **Section A - Time of Work**

The Rector expects the Assistant in this congregation to work six days per week, or approximately 50 hours per week.

### **Section B - Annual Revision**

This Agreement is to be revised and evaluated annually by the Rector and Vestry.

### **Section C - Evaluation**

The Rector and Vestry agree to an annual discussion and evaluation of the Assistant's work in the congregation, the purpose being:

1. To provide the Assistant with a more accurate picture of how the congregation sees him/her than he/she might receive informally.
2. To allow the Assistant to express his/her opinions about how well the Rector and Vestry have fulfilled their responsibilities to him/her.
3. To establish goals for his/her work in the congregation in the following year.
4. To isolate areas of conflict or disappointment which have not received adequate attention and may be adversely affecting working relationships.
5. To clarify expectations on all sides which will help put future conflicts in a manageable form.
6. To provide an additional and valuable factor for the Vestry to use in setting future compensation.

### **Section D - Compensation**

The Assistant's annual cash stipend will be (amount). This stipend is to be established within the guidelines passed by the annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of \_\_\_\_\_ (A copy of the current guidelines is attached to this agreement.)

He/she will be provided housing according to the following arrangement (choose the option which applies):

- An annual housing allowance, in accordance with the Internal Revenue Service Code, in the amount of (amount).
- The use of a parish owned dwelling. The Vestry assumes responsibility for the following expenses of maintaining the house: \_\_\_\_\_

- The use of a parish owned dwelling. The Assistant assumes the following responsibilities for the parish owned dwelling, for which he/she will be paid a Housing Reimbursement of (amount). The congregation will pay all utilities.

The Vestry agrees to pay the following benefit premiums:

- a. The Church Pension Fund assessment on the Assistant's cash stipend and housing allowance/reimbursement in accordance with Church Pension Fund rules.
- b. Individual/Family life and health insurance benefits, either from the Diocese of Maryland or the equivalent.
- c. Workers' Compensation Insurance.
- d. Income Replacement Insurance as provided by the Church Insurance Company.

### **Section E - Expenses**

The Vestry agrees to reimburse the Assistant for the following expenses incurred by him/her in fulfilling his/her professional obligations:

1. Moving Expenses - From former location to this congregation shall be paid in full.
2. Office - All necessary office space, furniture, equipment, and supplies will be paid for by the Parish.
3. Communications - The Vestry agrees to provide for a telephone in the Assistant's office. All postage for church business will be included in the congregation's budget.
4. Travel - The Assistant is to be reimbursed for all travel for church business at the current Internal Revenue Service rate, currently .345 cents per mile.
5. Discretionary fund - A fund of (amount) per year will be provided for expenditures at the discretion of the Assistant.
6. Entertainment - Any entertainment done by the Assistant in the course of church business will be reimbursed as negotiated.
7. Professional dues - All dues of the Assistant for professional organizations up to (amount) will be paid by the congregation. This amount includes the cost of the annual Convention and Clergy Conference, as well as other clergy events.
8. Continuing education - The Assistant will be given an allowance of (amount) annually to further his/her continuing education.

### **Section F - Leave Time**

The Rector agrees that the Assistant will have the following periods of leave during which he will continue to receive his/her full compensation and expense allowances:

1. One day off per week, which normally will be (day).
2. One calendar month vacation each year, which will be available after (date).
3. Two weeks per year annually for professional development or continuing education.
4. One month per year of service of sabbatical leave, to be available after the third year, and cumulative through the sixth year.
5. Two weeks childbirth leave for the period immediately surrounding the birth of a child to the Assistant or Assistant's spouse, beginning at a time decided by the Assistant.
6. Sick leave as follows: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Section G - Supplementary Compensation**

The Assistant may receive income from other sources, including, but not limited to, compensation for performing the Rites of the Church (except as below), teaching, counseling, lecturing, writing, and providing consultative services not performed on the church property. The Assistant shall not charge for performing the Rites of the Church,

including but not limited to Baptism, Marriage and Burial, done on church property to members of the congregation.

**Section H - Use of Buildings**

The Rector and the Assistant have reached the following agreement concerning the use of the Church and affiliated buildings: \_\_\_\_\_

**Section I - Other Agreements**

[Here or in a separate appendix a mutually established list of expectations for the ministry of the parish is recommended. This is then used as a reference at the time of evaluation (see Section C).]

Date \_\_\_\_\_ (Signed) \_\_\_\_\_ Assistant  
Date \_\_\_\_\_ (Signed) \_\_\_\_\_ Rector  
Date \_\_\_\_\_ (Signed) \_\_\_\_\_ Warden

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## Glossary of Terms

**Assistant** – A general term for a priest serving as an assistant to the Rector. These days it is normally viewed as interchangeable with the term Curate. *see also* Curate.

**Canon to the Ordinary** – A diocesan staff member who is often responsible for the administration of a diocese. This person sometimes serves as the Diocesan Deployment Officer as well. *see also* Diocesan Deployment Officer.

**Cash Stipend** – The main portion of a clergyperson’s salary. The Cash Stipend does not include the Housing Allowance, which is a separate item. *see also* Housing Allowance.

**Church Deployment Office (CDO)** – The arm of the National Church responsible for charting clergy deployment trends and assisting clergy and lay professionals with parish placements. *see also* CDO Personal Profile.

**CDO Personal Profile** – The CDO Personal Profile is a form that provides personal and professional information about clergy and lay professionals for the purposes of deployment. Filling out this form is generally the first contact a seminarian will have with the Church Deployment Office. *see also* Church Deployment Office.

**Church Pension Fund** – A corporation established by the 1916 General Convention that oversees and administers the clergy pension system for the Episcopal Church. As part of clergy compensation packages, and as directed by the Church’s canons, a parish must pay into the Church Pension Fund for all of its clergy. This adds up to 18% of your salary plus housing allowance.

**Curacy** – A term usually used to denote the period that a newly ordained transitional deacon will serve at his or her first parish. Traditionally this is two to three years in length, with an emphasis on vocational development, at which point the new priest moves to another position. *see also* Curate.

**Curate** – Originating from the Latin *curatus*, meaning “care of,” this title has been used in a variety of ways throughout Anglican history. Today it generally refers to an assistant priest serving in a parish and is interchangeable with the title Assistant or Assistant to the Rector.

**Deacon-in-Charge** – in this context, a Deacon-in-Charge refers to a newly ordained Transitional Deacon who takes on the leadership of a parish. When the deacon is ordained a priest, the title changes to Vicar, Priest-in-Charge, or Rector, depending on the circumstances.

**Deployment** – The process of seminarians or clergy considering and accepting calls to serve in parishes. Yes, it sounds a bit militaristic but it does capture that sense of being “sent forth” to do God’s work.

## Acknowledgments

This project could not have come together without the help of a great number of people. I first vocalized the concept to The Rev. John L. Dreibelbis, Professor of Christian Ministries at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary. He helped me to narrow my focus and later assisted in the development of questionnaires used to guide my research. John's encouragement, counsel, and friendship have been so invaluable that words cannot adequately express my profound gratitude.

The Rev. James B. Lemler, Dean and President of Seabury-Western during my time there and currently rector of Christ Church, Greenwich, Connecticut, was instrumental in offering practical guidance as the project unfolded. He also graciously met with me on several occasions as I engaged in my own first call process.

I am indebted to several folks from the National Episcopal Church. The Rev. Dr. Melford E. "Bud" Holland, Jr., Coordinator of Ministry Development, and his associate The Rev. Lynne Grifo encouraged me early on to pursue the project, despite having first met me mere hours after I had my four wisdom teeth removed! The Rev. Patricia Coller, who works with the Church Pension Fund took a great interest in my work and offered many insights that were subsequently incorporated into the manuscript.

This certainly would not have been a fruitful endeavor had I relied solely upon my own experiences. I spoke with numerous rectors who have hired people right out of seminary and also with newly ordained clergy who had recently been engaged in their first clergy job search. Those I formally interviewed included The Rt. Rev. James Mathes, Bishop of San Diego; The Rev. Jim Lemler, rector of Christ Church, Greenwich, Connecticut; The Rev. Robert Meyers, rector of the Church of the Holy Comforter in Kenilworth, Illinois; The Rev. David Price, vicar of St. Francis Episcopal Church in Mill Creek, Washington, and The Rev. Heather VanDeventer. Without this input and candid exchange of ideas this project could not have been completed.

I should also say that I had one particular group of seminarians in mind while I was engaged in this work. Since the goal has always been to provide a valuable resource for those who will soon make the transition from seminary to parish, I thought specifically about the seminary classes immediately behind my own. I kept the Seabury-Western classes of 2001 and 2002 firmly in my mind throughout my work to put a tangible face on a group that might benefit from such a project. They are now engaged in fruitful ministry all over the country.

I would be remiss if I didn't thank The Rev. David C. Cobb and the congregation of Old St. Paul's, Baltimore, for greatly impacting, if indirectly, this endeavor. Calling me as curate early in my senior year allowed me to spend considerable time working on this project without the undue strain of a drawn-out call process. They were also tremendously supportive as the project neared its completion.

It would be impossible to close this section without mentioning two of my seminary classmates. The Rev. Rick Swanson and The Rev. Todd McDowell made up quite a support group as we shared the highs and lows of receiving and accepting our first

calls to parishes. Both read my manuscript and offered valuable and poignant suggestions. More importantly, we kept one another sane throughout our final year at seminary.

I'll have to add the Rev. Anne Emry to this list. I called her as curate to my parish in Hingham from Church Divinity School of the Pacific. *After* formally issuing the call I handed her a copy of "From Seminary to Parish" and she soon contacted me to tell me that it was indeed still relevant as a resource. With her encouragement I made some tweaks and decided to make it available in electronic form. Thanks, Anne!

Special thanks to my eldest son Benedict, whose naps during his first year of life gave me semi-regular time to crank out some writing. Zachary wasn't yet born when I wrote this but I can't leave him unnamed. Finally, not only did my wife Bryna read and comment upon this manuscript on many occasions, she also offered loving support and encouragement throughout the process.

## End Notes

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