

Guideline for Interviewing Clergy

These days the employment market for clergy is notably different from past decades when a job posting could generate five or even ten potential applications. Therefore, it is incumbent on search committees to recognize that while they will be interviewing a prospective candidate, the candidate will undoubtedly also be interviewing the parish to see if there is a good fit.

The following are only recommendations and guidelines. In certain circumstances it may be prudent or appropriate to deviate from them, but generally it would be good to follow them in spirit if not literally.

It should be remembered that the parish's role in this process is to determine whether it is confident that a candidate would be a good fit for that parish. In the end, it is the bishop who will decide whether a candidate will be hired by the diocese and for what parish.

Membership of the Search Committee

When a parish is creating its search committee, it is suggested that the membership be limited to about 6 persons. In that number, it is recommended that there be at least one warden and (if possible) someone with human resource experience, but generally, the committee will want to include members of various aspects of the parish community. Committees larger than six get unwieldy and can be a bit overwhelming for the candidate(s), so it is also understood that representation from every aspect of parish life will not be possible or helpful. A simple cross-section of the community will be sufficient.

Financing a Full-time or Part-time Rector

Before creating the parish profile, it will be necessary for the wardens and treasurer of the parish to make a realistic assessment of whether the parish can offer a posting for a full-time clergyperson, or for something less than full-time.

Parish Profile

The parish will create a parish profile before posting the position. This profile need not necessarily be created by the search committee; the wardens will want to find writers who can fairly and reasonably present the parish to prospective candidates. While it is good to put one's best foot forward, it is important to remember that the profile is not expected to be a statement of what the parish wishes it might one day become, but rather a realistic picture of itself at present.

A parish profile may include pictures, but its main content is the description of the parish community (inside and outside the parish walls), the way it gathers to worship, and its education, fellowship and outreach programs.

Once the parish profile has been drafted, it is to be sent to the executive archdeacon for review and comments. When it is finalized, the position will be posted by the synod office. As any posting of a position in the diocese is a reflection of the diocese as well as the parish, in the end, the final decision about the form and style of the profile will require a consensus of the synod office and the parish.

Potential candidates will be directed in the posting to contact the synod office for a copy of the parish profile. It is not uncommon for a number of potential candidates to ask for a copy of the profile but then have only one or a few candidates choose to go further with the process.

Bishop's Vetting of Candidates

Once a potential candidate indicates their interest in moving forward with an application for the position, the bishop will consider the application to ensure that the applicant has the necessary training and background to be employed as clergy in the diocese. This assessment is not an evaluation of the candidate in the broadest sense, but a first screening. Once the process has moved further, the bishop's office may choose to do additional reference checks or may leave the reference checks to the search committee. This will be worked out between the bishop's office and the search committee.

Confidentiality

In keeping with provincial privacy laws and with ethics and simple decency, the information collected in this process is to be kept confidential. That includes keeping confidential the name or identifying particulars of any potential candidates. Documents created that include personal information of the candidate(s) need to be managed in accordance with the privacy laws and the diocesan privacy policies. Only once a candidate has accepted a final offer and the bishop's letter has been read in Sunday services should the identify of a candidate be made public.

Search Committee Process

Having passed the bishop's initial screening, the name and resume of the candidate is forwarded to the wardens of the parish who in turn pass them along to the search committee for consideration.

The criteria by which the search committee will determine if the candidate would be a good fit will be determined by the search committee but will include such things as the comfort level of the candidate with the worship style of the parish, the parish focus on fellowship, outreach, pastoral care and stewardship, and other issues specific to the particular parish.

These criteria might be set out in an assessment table that the members of the search committee could use. An example of the form that might take is attached. The questions being asked and the assessment regarding those questions would, of course, be fitted to the particular parish, and the assessment process is entirely up to the search committee. The first assessment would be by a review of the resume and supporting documentation a candidate may provide. If the search committee is interested in pursuing the matter further, an interview would be organized.

The Interview

It is the responsibility of the parish to cover the cost of bringing the candidate to the parish for the interview. In some cases, this will entail travel and lodging for an overnight if the candidate is from a distance where travel in one day is unreasonable. As the bishop or the executive archdeacon may wish to also interview the candidate, the search committee should coordinate with the bishop's office about interview dates.

When preparing for the interview, the search committee will develop a profile of the ideal candidate for their parish. However, it is important that the search committee keep in mind that it would be unrealistic to expect any candidate to be stellar in all areas of priestly life. What is hoped for is a well-rounded priest who meets the majority of the criteria the search committee wishes to see in their rector.

Remember that the interview is a two-way process, with the search committee attempting to determine if the candidate is a good fit, and the candidate attempting to determine if the parish feels like a good fit for them. Therefore, the search committee will want to create a setting and process for the interview that makes all concerned feel as comfortable as possible. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the questions and comments put to the candidate are appropriate. Questions about the candidate's marital status, age, sexual orientation, and so forth are, of course, not acceptable, and might well be unlawful and could open the diocese to legal damages if the candidate decides to pursue a remedy. Care should be taken to ensure the members of the search committee understand what is acceptable and what is not.

It is appropriate to ask when the candidate might be available to start, if an offer were to be made.

In the past, some parishes have asked candidates to “perform” by preaching a sermon to the search committee or leading a mini Bible study. With the advent of online services and the ability of the search committee to take in a candidate’s preaching style in a real service setting, those kinds of practices are no longer expected. Interviews now are a discussion between prospective partners in ministry rather than a “prove to us you are worthy” kind of exercise.

Offer Letter

Assuming the interviewing process goes well, and the search committee is happy with the candidate, the search committee will advise the bishop’s office of its position. The bishop will then let the parish know if anything of concern has arisen since the initial screening, or if an offer might be created for the candidate. If an offer is possible, the parish’s wardens and treasurer will obtain from the diocesan finance officer a costing sheet that sets out the cost to the parish and the diocese if that candidate is hired. The finance officer will create the costing sheet and the wardens and treasurer will then confirm that the parish can support the candidate at the levels indicated.

Assuming the parish is fine with the costing sheet, the bishop will create an offer letter with the standard clauses about the responsibilities and pay levels as well as a projected start date. The letter will be sent by the bishop’s office to the candidate.

Acceptance

The candidate will either accept the offer (or not).

Letter to the Parish

If the candidate accepts the offer, the bishop will create a letter to be read by the wardens at services on a particular Sunday announcing the appointment of the candidate and their start date. The wardens and search committee should await that letter before making an announcement as the successful candidate will also need to coordinate the timing of announcing their departure from their previous parish with the public announcement of their appointment to your parish.

Candidate: _____

Question	Notes	Ideal Answer (Rate on a scale of 1-5)	Score
<p>Tell us about why you feel called to the role of incumbent at this parish.</p> <p>Follow-up if required: How do you feel your previous experience has prepared you for this particular parish?</p>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Service oriented / people oriented. 2. Liturgically high, medium, low church? 3. Experience in other parish(es) 4. Describes how position fits their personality/interests. 5. Verbalizes experience and/or understanding of the pros and cons of this size, style and location of the parish. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
<p>If a parishioner was consistently griping to other parishioners in the parking lot about some issue, how would you respond? What if the complainer was a warden or parish council member?</p>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Articulates qualities of patience and compassion, but also firmness and fairness. 2. Describes healthy communication techniques. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2.
<p>What do you see as the most important mission or ministry of this parish in the coming decade? What do you see as the greatest challenge in fulfilling that mission, ministry?</p>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expressed long-range view of the church. 2. Expresses comfort with liminal time. 3. Demonstrates understanding of this parish and its strengths and challenges. 4. Interested and curious about the future of the church. 5. Learns/problem solves through troubleshooting and research. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
<p>The job requires a high level of organizational skills, but also flexibility.</p>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reaction to being challenged. 2. Demonstrates adaptability. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3.

Tell us about a time when you worked with others to implement change on a large or small scale, even when some might have been reluctant to change.		3. Demonstrates a process of change-management theory (assessment, analysis, implementation, etc.) 4. Verbalizes empathy or patience for changing circumstances.	4.
Do you have any questions for us about the position?			
Ask about availability to begin the work, housing possibilities.			
Overall impression:		1. Friendliness / warmth. 2. Verbal communication skills. 3. Sense of humour. 4. Relaxed demeanour.	1. 2. 3. 4.