

## Interim Ministry Primer (Part 2) - *Ronald D. Pogue*

Gay and I arrived in late October with the expectation that we would be working with Christ Church Cranbrook for about twelve to eighteen months. In January, after three months of getting acquainted, I sent a message entitled “Interim Ministry Primer.” If you have not read it or if you have forgotten what I said, now might be a good time to review that message. It is available [HERE](#).

Now, as we begin the fifth month together, it is time to provide additional information about the work of transition. I hope it will be helpful to you and provide some encouragement as we move forward in this period of great potential in the life of this parish.

Clergy who are trained in intentional interim ministry operate on about three planes:

- We function in the capacity of rector. In that role, we do all the things a settled rector would do – pastoral care, preaching, liturgical/sacramental leadership, administration, leadership of staff, and all the rest. By virtue of the letter of agreement that is approved by the vestry and the bishop, an interim rector is granted full authority to function as rector during the interim. In contrast to some arrangements in which there is a “Priest in Charge” or “Locum Tenens” or “Supply Priest” serving between rectors, the interim rector is actually the “Rector” during the time of transition.
- We guide the vestry and parish in the work they must do during the transition from one settled rector to the next. You’ve already been told several times what the categories of that work are, but it is so important that it bears repeating:
  - Coming to terms with history
  - Discovering a new identity
  - Managing changes in power/leadership
  - Strengthening denominational relationships
  - Committing to new leadership and new future
- We provide support for the search process as requested by the Bishop and Transition Officer of the Diocese. Those who are entrusted with developing a profile for dissemination to the wider Church and those who are entrusted with interviewing potential candidates, will require resources from the interim rector and staff. There are communications, meeting room assignments, technological resources, travel arrangements, and a host of other kinds of support that will be needed at this phase. The interim rector is not involved in the committee work or communication with potential candidates, but must offer support and coordination of staff and other resources to ensure the confidentiality and effective functioning of the committees who do the work of discernment with the candidates.

I am happy to report to you that the routine, ongoing work of ministry is going quite well. Our staff and lay leadership are doing the work they have been called and empowered to do. One of the things the vestry was quite clear about in their call to me was that they were committed to

maintaining momentum during the transition and wanted me to provide the necessary leadership to accomplish that objective. Things that were in the process of getting underway, things that were scheduled to be started, ideas that were germinating, and things that needed to be discontinued or changed in some way are receiving the necessary attention. The forward movement of the parish does not and should not slow or stop during a time of transition. Vibrant and mission-focused leaders are attracted to vibrant and mission-focused congregations. If the vestry wanted to seek and call a maintenance-oriented priest, the appropriate strategy would be to maintain the status quo. Your vestry is committed to moving forward.

The work of transition is also going well. We have identified some initial information related to the history of the parish and its current identity. That information is being shaped into a series of gatherings called “Holy Conversations” that will take place after Easter. The vestry is in the process of revising and implementing the rotation system for standing committees, providing for healthy change in power and leadership. The vestry and Bishop Gibbs are working together on ways to strengthen relations with each other and the diocese. Our Holy Conversations, along with input from our committees, guilds, and ministry groups, will inform parish leadership regarding strategic objectives for the future with a new spiritual leader.

The search has not begun. Some wonder why. Some are worried that this is unusual. Some are comparing the present circumstances to the way searches at Christ Church Cranbrook have been carried out in the past. Most are content to trust the leaders you have elected to move through the process at a pace and in a manner that they believe will bring the greatest benefit to the parish in the long run. I’ll offer a few basic principles and pieces of information that may bring insight and encouragement for everyone. Although there are always a few elements of the process that are different from diocese to diocese, almost everything I’m about to describe is the way it works in every diocese of The Episcopal Church.

- We are an *episcopal* Church. That means we vest ecclesiastical authority in bishops who oversee the work of dioceses. “The ministry of a bishop is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese; to guard the faith, unity and discipline of the whole Church; to proclaim the Word of God; to act in Christ’s name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and to ordain others to continue Christ’s ministry” (BCP, p. 855). Our bishop is The Right Reverend Wendell N. Gibbs, Jr. He has been the bishop of this diocese for thirteen years. In our system, congregations are given a tremendous amount of autonomy. However, the diocese is the basic unit of governance in this Church, not the congregation. Each congregation is a “branch office” of the diocese. One of the roles of the diocesan bishop is to determine which persons are permitted to serve as ordained clergy in the diocese under the bishop’s leadership. And, each diocesan bishop is responsible for overseeing order in the life of the diocese. Therefore, the bishop of each diocese is always responsible for developing a process of calling clergy and for overseeing that process. Most of our bishops delegate the details of this important work to one or more members of the diocesan staff. In our case, the transition officer is Canon Lisa Gray.
- The Episcopal Church has a committee, staff, and offices at the general level that serve all bishops and dioceses in the overall scope of healthy searches and transitions. Those involved

in that work received input from across The Episcopal Church regarding ways to improve the ways congregations go about finding and calling new rectors. That resulted in some changes, some new best practices, and new online tools and resources for bishops, clergy, and congregations. When the work of those involved in providing resources for transitions changed three years ago, the Church Deployment Office (CDO) became the Office of Transition Ministry (OTM). In addition to information about church size, physical resources, attendance, and compensation, there are now twelve questions that must be answered as truthfully as possible about the congregation, its history, its current self-understanding, its leadership, its role in the diocese, and its vision for the future. Arriving at those answers takes time and prayerful self-examination on the part of the parish. The process has not been simple for a long time and this new process is not any simpler. But it is different and, we hope, more effective for Episcopal churches in the early days of the twenty-first century.

- Bishop Gibbs determined at an early stage in the transition at Christ Church Cranbrook that the process leading to the search for and call of a new rector should not be rushed. This is because it is a process of prayerful and mutual discernment on the part of the parish and those clergy who will be under consideration. While there may be some similarities with hiring a new CEO for a corporation or an educational institution, there are many other ways in which the process is not at all similar. In his role as the Chief Pastor and Priest of the diocese, Bishop Gibbs wants to be sure that the parish is taking ample time to work through those five developmental tasks and give the most truthful answers to the questions that will eventually be placed on the OTM website for all to see. There are elements of the history of the congregation and its relations with its rectors and bishops that need to be examined and understood. There are also some aspects of parish life that need to be examined and understood. There are numerous ways in which the parish today is remarkably different from the parish it was only three years ago.
- The vestry you have elected to govern this parish is committed to working in harmony with Bishop Gibbs and Canon Gray during the transition and the search for a rector. They need your prayers, patience, and support as they fulfill the work they have been called to do on behalf of the entire parish.
- The *transition* began the day The Rev. Gary Hall announced his call to become dean of the Washington National Cathedral. It will conclude on the day your new rector arrives. Bishop Gibbs and Canon Gray will be monitoring the progress of the transition and, at some point later this year, when they are confident that the parish is ready, the *search process* will be allowed to move forward.
  - The process begins with a *self-study or profile committee*. That committee will provide the information that is needed for the OTM profile. Their information will be obtained in a variety of ways, including the conversations we are already having in *Cultivating Fruitfulness*, *The Bible in One Year*, various meetings throughout the parish, and in the *Holy Conversations*. After their report is approved by the vestry and the bishop, a parish portfolio and profile will be made public and the information will be placed on the OTM website. At that point, the position becomes “open to receive names.”

- The second part of the search process is the appointment of a *search committee* or *interview committee*. It will be appointed at about the time the portfolio and profile is made public, with the approval of the bishop. The position will remain open for an agreed upon period of time, typically six to eight weeks, and after an initial vetting by the bishop, the names of priests who are interested will be passed along to those responsible for assessment and interviews. The process of elimination eventually leads to several finalists and then to the one whom the committee will recommend to the vestry for election as rector. If the vestry elects that person and that person accepts, a letter of agreement will be worked out. When the letter of agreement is approved by the vestry, the bishop, and the candidate, you will have your new rector.
- One final word: The process that leads to the call of a rector is one of *mutual discernment*. The candidates are looking as closely at the congregation as the committee is looking at the candidates. This is a time for Christ Church Cranbrook to be at your best. This wonderful prayer is one we should pray daily throughout the process:

Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

I understand that this has been a lengthy explanation, but I hope it is of some help to you as we work together during these days of transition. If you have questions or concerns, I will welcome an opportunity for conversation.