

PARISH TRANSITIONS MANUAL

SEARCHES AND DISCERNMENT



NOVEMBER 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. LEAVE TAKING & RETIREMENT.....	2
How to Say Goodbye Well	2
A Final “SEND-OFF”	2
The “PURSE”	2
ADMINISTRATIVE REMINDERS	2
III. TRANSITION TIMELINE.....	3
IV. MINISTRY DESCRIPTIONS	9
A. SEARCH COMMITTEE CHAIR	9
B. SENIOR WARDEN	9
C. SEARCH COMMITTEE MEMBERS	10
V. INTERVIEW PROCESS AND QUESTIONS.....	11
A. SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	11
B. QUESTIONS CLERGY MAY ASK	13
C. CANDIDATE REFERENCE QUESTIONS	14
VI. LETTER OF AGREEMENT BEST PRACTICES.....	15
SAMPLE COMPENSATION PACKAGE	16
VII. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS	17

I. INTRODUCTION

This manual is for lay leadership who are involved in the search and discernment process at their churches. Every transition/search in the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia must be led by the diocesan staff with approval by the Bishop. The diocese and church leadership work together through the entire process. Search processes are unique for each ministry setting, but this manual provides the foundation for all clergy transitions and searches in the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia.

On the Emmaus Road by The Rev. Dr. Mary Brennan Thorpe is our primary resource. [Click here](#) for a link to purchase the book. All search/discernment committee/team members will purchase and read this book. Vestry members can also benefit from reading Mary's book, especially Senior Wardens. The purpose of this manual is to act as a quick guide and an additional resource. There is critical and in-depth information included in *Emmaus*, which is necessary to understand the transition process and not included in this packet.

We use the term discernment to describe the search process because those involved engage in prayerful conversations with each other and God. Not only is the parish in discernment, but so are clergy who are considering a new call. You may be wondering, "What is a call?" A call is a person's vocation; it is where God is calling them to be and do ministry. That is why the search process is not like hiring a new receptionist or CEO. In the secular world you typically do not bring in a spiritual element into hiring a new employee. It is important to keep this in mind at every stage of the search process, and for lay leaders to remind the congregation of this difference. This is also why searching for a priest may take longer than just hiring an employee.

There is a high demand for priests but not enough priests to fill those roles. You may have heard there is a clergy shortage, not just in the Episcopal Church, but across all denominations. Also, clergy who own a home are not quick to pick up and move across state lines. We are seeing clergy wanting to stay in a smaller geographical area and in places where their spouse has job opportunities. For these reasons (and more), gone are the days when search committees have five or more clergy on a slate to interview for an open position. Now, we are often only able to provide one or two clergy at a time for the search committee to interview. Search committees should interview candidates as soon as they receive them and in a timely manner. You will read more about the interview stage of the search process in various sections of this manual.

Strong confidentiality must be kept during the entire search process. The search committee cannot share any information or details about the clergy they are in discernment with. There will be a point in the process when the search committee will bring in the vestry to meet the finalist(s), see section II of this document for more information and when it is appropriate to make an announcement to the congregation.

If you have any questions, please contact Liz Villanueva, Director of Transition Ministry, at lvillanueva@diosova.org or 757-213-3390.

II. LEAVE TAKING & RETIREMENT

HOW TO SAY GOODBYE WELL

Emmaus provides helpful information on pages 17 through 18 on how to say goodbye well to a priest who has announced a leave or retirement.

A FINAL “SEND-OFF”

Whether the priest is leaving to go to a new call or is retiring a good good-bye is important for the whole congregation. The conversation and planning for how congregation and priest will say farewell usually begins with the Vestry. The Vestry may want to use the “Moving On” meditation from the resource, *Meditations for Vestry Members*, p.65 as a place to start in prayer.

THE “PURSE”

This is “a monetary gift gathered by a special collection” for the departing priest (*Emmaus*, 18). The vestry, or if there is a committee planning the goodbye festivities, oversees the collection of the gift. Make sure to seek guidance and support from your church’s finance office/treasurer (whomever manages finances).

ADMINISTRATIVE REMINDERS

- The priest leaving should write down any church accounts they manage and how to access those accounts so that when they leave someone can change the account information.
- Return the church credit card to whomever is responsible for closing the card.
- Return laptop/equipment that is owned by the church.
- Return keys to the designated person in charge of managing church keys.

III. TRANSITION TIMELINE

Transitions are unique for each church, and this timeline is to be used as the standard. Depending on the setting, we may deviate from the standard timeline outlined below, which is up to the discretion of the diocese.

Step 1 – Notify the diocese that your church is entering into a transition due to clergy retirement or departure.

Step 2 – Announce the transition to your congregation.

Step 3 – The vestry meets with the Director of Transition Ministry to discuss next steps.

- At this step, the vestry can begin discussing which search method they would like to proceed with Priest-in-Charge or Rector. The Diocese may strongly recommend or require one method versus the other. See *Emmaus* pages 4 through 5 and 22 for more information.
- The vestry should establish a budget to support the work of the search committee.
- The vestry can also begin putting together a proposed compensation package for their new priest. See *Emmaus* page 148 for more information. Senior Wardens and Treasurers lead this effort. The information will eventually be shared with the search/discernment committee. [Click here](#) to access our diocesan Clergy Compensation Guidelines. Use the Pension-Based Total Compensation Table to determine the compensation range your church falls into. It is also imperative to discuss the medical and dental plans the church will offer. [Click here](#) to visit the Administration Resources page of the diocesan website, which includes a link to download the current Health and Dental Plan Rates pdf. Our Diocesan Canons state that, “health insurance coverage shall be offered on an equal basis to clergy and lay employees who are scheduled to work a minimum of 1,500 hours annually, regardless of age or Diocesan organization.” The Canons go on to say, “at a minimum, employers shall offer to eligible employees a percentage of the least-expensive individual healthcare plan through the Denominational Health Plan, the percentage being equal to or greater than 50 percent.” It is difficult for a priest with a family to accept a Call at a church only offering single level health benefits. Consider this when determining which level of health coverage you are budgeting for. See section VI of this document for more information regarding aspects of clergy compensation and medical/dental benefits.
- Make sure your church website is up to date and create a check list for updates that need to be made after your current priest has left. Potential candidates typically go to a church’s website/online presence to learn more about an open position.

Step 4 – Focus on a good goodbye and celebrate your priest’s ministry. This step is the top priority for the vestry.

You may proceed to the next step after your Priest-in-Charge/Rector has completed their service to your church.

Step 5 – When needed, an Interim Rector candidate(s) is identified by the Director of Transition Ministry and interviewed by the vestry. See *Emmaus* pages 20 through 22 for more information.

- Available and qualified interim clergy are in low supply, so it may take some time to identify a priest who can serve in that capacity.
- A finalist is chosen, and the vestry votes if they would like to call the clergy person as their Interim Rector.
- The Diocese assists with the drafting and execution of a letter of agreement.
- After the letter of agreement is signed, an announcement is coordinated between the Interim Rector and vestry.

Step 5 (if your church is not calling an Interim Rector) – Schedule a supply clergy rotation or a priest is identified as someone who can serve as a long-term supply priest. A letter of agreement may or may not be needed to secure a long-term supply priest.

Step 6 – The vestry selects and commissions a search/discernment committee. See *Emmaus* pages 24 through 29 for more information.

- If your church is in search for a Rector, a search committee will be formed from the congregation at large. Vestry members are not permitted to serve on the committee. Church members are nominated and elected to serve.
- For the Priest-in-Charge search process, the search committee can be a combination of vestry members and members of the church or just a sub-set of the vestry. The Director of Transition Ministry will assist the vestry in making this decision.
- Commission your search committee during Sunday service. See *Emmaus* pages 28 through 29 for more information.

Step 7 – The search committee meets with the Director of Transition Ministry to discuss next steps.

- At this point, the chair of the search committee should have been selected by the vestry. This person will be the point of contact with the Director of Transition Ministry.
- The committee starts working on developing a prayer to share with the vestry and congregation. See *Emmaus* page 45 for more information.

The following steps are completed by the search committee. They will make appropriate updates to the vestry and congregation along the way. Strict confidentiality is required at every step. See Emmaus pages 30 through 31 and 49 through 50 for more information.

Step 8 – This is the self-study stage where the search committee determines which method(s) they will use to gather information from the congregation.

- See *Emmaus* pages 46 through 47, 51 through 72, and appendices A, B, and C for more information on various ways to conduct a self-study and details about the type of information you should be gathering.
- Rector searches require a more extensive process while the Priest-in-Charge method can manage with a quicker information gathering stage.

- Information gathering should help the search committee with answering the following questions. Who have we been? Who are we now? Who is God calling us to be? What are the gifts and skills we are looking for/need in our next priest?
- The Director of Transition Ministry can assist with this step of the process in whatever way is most helpful.

Step 9 – Develop the Community Ministry (a.k.a. OTM) portfolio. See *Emmaus* pages 72 through 74 for more information.

- The Director of Transition Ministry will provide a form for the search committee to fill out.
- There is information the form asks for which the search chair will need to request and receive from the vestry/Senior Warden.
- For the narrative questions, the answers are to be written in prose with complete sentences. No bullet points. Every search committee member should have the opportunity to provide their input. Work together as a team to outline the information to be included. One member of the committee is tasked with writing a draft of the answers to the questions. This ensures continuity in the answers and that they are written in the same voice. AI or Chat GBT should not be writing the final draft of the narrative answers. It is fine to use it as a tool to work on an outline, but a person needs to be the one to put the final words together. Tip: Use your church website as a reference. There may be answers to some of the narrative questions already presented on the church website.

Step 10 – Submit the OTM portfolio to the Director of Transition Ministry for review.

Step 11 – Submit the final OTM portfolio to the vestry for their review and approval. See *Emmaus* page 77 for more information.

- The vestry should not take this as an opportunity to rewrite the entire portfolio. The search committee has worked hard to put this information together and the diocese has already reviewed and approved the information. The search committee is providing the vestry with the opportunity to read the portfolio and see how the church is being presented. If there is input from the vestry, the Senior Warden and Search Committee Chair can discuss follow up. They may seek guidance from the Director of Transition Ministry if needed.

Step 12 – Once the OTM portfolio is finalized, the Director of Transition Ministry will enter it into the Episcopal Church database. See *Emmaus* pages 78 through 79 for more information.

- At this point, the position is “live”, and the search committee is ready to receive candidates.
- This is a good time to make an announcement to the congregation, which can be something like, “Our search committee has been hard at work developing materials about our parish for potential candidates to review. These materials are confidential because they include clergy compensation and other sensitive information. The input you provided during the self-study/survey/focus groups was included in these materials. Now that the materials are completed, the committee is ready to receive and interview clergy.”

- The Director of Transition Ministry networks with Transition Officers from across the Episcopal Church and shares the church's portfolio with potential candidates.
- All potential candidates come through the diocese and are pre-vetted by the Director of Transition Ministry to ensure they are clergy in good standing who we would want to bring to your church and our diocese.
- If a priest contacts the search committee/vestry directly, please have them e-mail their materials to the Director of Transition Ministry to conduct the pre-vetting process.

Step 13 – The search committee receives candidate name(s) and material(s) and begins the interview process. See *Emmaus* chapter IX for more information.

- Due to the nature of searches today and the reality of small candidate pools, gone are the days of five plus candidate slates for the search committee to interview. The Director of Transition Ministry typically can provide one or two names at a time. Schedule initial interviews as soon as possible because candidates are usually in discernment with several other churches. You may miss out on the opportunity to interview a candidate if the committee waits too long. If the committee discerns they are not going to move forward with their current candidate(s), the Director of Transition Ministry will continue to network and identify new potential candidates.
- The search committee can request from candidate(s) or search online for their sermon audio and/or video links. This is a great tool, especially if the committee will not be visiting candidate(s) at their current parish.
- At this step, conduct reference checks. Candidates' portfolios include their Bishop and Transition Officer as references. Search committees do not contact these two references. The Director of Transition Ministry has already done those checks as part of pre-vetting.
- See section IV of this document for more information on how to conduct interviews.

Step 14 – The search committee invites their finalist(s) to visit the church for an in-person interview and to meet the vestry.

- **Before moving forward**, the committee must notify the Director of Transition Ministry of the finalist(s) so the priest(s) can meet with Bishop Susan. This is a required step in the process.
- The Director of Transition Ministry will also initiate a formal clergy background check on the finalist(s) through Presidium Inc. A clergy background check is required for all clergy entering the diocese. The church covers the cost of the background check(s). Background check reports are not shared with the vestry or committee due to the sensitive information included. The diocese files the background check in the priest's clergy file held at the diocesan office. The Director of Transition Ministry will inform the search committee and finalist(s) if and when the background check is cleared.
- Make sure to contact clergy who will not be moving forward in the process. See *Emmaus* page 91 for more information.

- After one or two zoom interviews, the search committee should have a good idea of the candidate(s) they would like to meet in-person. This usually ends up being one priest, but it is okay to invite more. If the search committee does end up inviting more than one finalist to visit, make sure to schedule them on different days/weeks.
- The in-person visits typically take about two days. Schedule time for an in-person interview with the search committee, a tour of the church grounds and local community, and time for fellowship with the vestry. This is the vestry's chance to meet the committee's finalist(s).
- This is strictly confidential. Only the search committee and vestry may know of these visits. If your church has an Assistant or Associate Rector/Priest, they can meet the finalist at this time.
- The church pays for the travel expenses and lodging for the finalists' visit. It is easiest for the candidate(s) to pay for their own expenses, save the receipts and then request reimbursement from the church.

Step 15 – The search committee chair presents the committee's recommendation to the vestry of the priest they have discerned should be called as the church's next Priest-in-Charge or Rector.

- First, the chair should call the finalist and ask if they would like to be presented as the final candidate to the vestry.
- After the finalist(s) visits have been completed, the search committee chair coordinates with the Senior Warden to schedule a meeting between the vestry and search committee. At this meeting, the search committee chair provides the vestry with the finalist's name, candidate materials, and reasoning behind why this priest should be called.

It is at this point when the process turns over to the vestry, and the search committee has completed their work.

Step 16 – The vestry conducts a closed meeting to vote on whether to affirm the search committee's recommendation.

- This vote can take place directly after the search committee chair has made their recommendation.
- The clerk/register records the vote and includes it in the minutes of the meeting.

Step 17 – If the vestry votes to affirm, the Senior Warden makes a phone call to the priest and officially extends the call to be the church's next Priest-in-Charge or Rector.

- Either the priest will say yes on the spot or may say thank you and ask for a few days to pray. Both are normal responses and are not of concern.
- Notify the Director of Transition Ministry if/when the priest says yes.
- If the priest says no, which is unlikely but can happen, notify the Director of Transition Ministry and search committee chair to determine next steps.

Step 18 – If the priest says yes, the Senior Warden and Priest-in-Charge/Rector negotiate terms of the letter of agreement.

- The Director of Transition Ministry will provide a letter of agreement template for the Senior Warden to use as the foundation of the agreement. There are blanks throughout the template, which will need to be filled out and can be negotiated.

Step 19 – Send a final draft (unsigned) of the letter of agreement to the Director of Transition Ministry to review any changes that were made.

Step 20 – Upon approval, the Senior Warden and Priest-in-Charge/Rector sign the letter of agreement.

Step 21 – The letter of agreement is approved and signed by the Canon to the Ordinary and Bishop.

- The Senior Warden returns the signed letter of agreement to the Director of Transition Ministry to request approval and signatures from the Canon to the Ordinary and the Bishop.

Step 22 – The Director of Transition Ministry returns the signed letter of agreement.

Step 23 – The Senior Warden and Priest-in-Charge/Rector coordinate a date to announce the new call. This typically happens on the same Sunday.

- Notify the Director of Transition Ministry of when the announcement is going to be made so that an announcement can be made to the diocese.

Step 24 – The vestry plans a welcome reception/party for the Priest-in-Charge/Rector's first Sunday. See *Emmaus* pages 98 through 102 for more information on how to welcome your new priest well. Page 103 of *Emmaus* includes things to keep in mind if your church has a Rectory where the priest and their family will be residing.

Step 25 – If your church has called a Rector, contact the Bishop's office to schedule a Celebration of New Ministry.

IV. MINISTRY DESCRIPTIONS

There are several lay roles in the search process, and it is helpful to know the responsibilities of each person involved. It is also beneficial to know how the roles interact with each other. See *Emmaus* pages 24 through 29 for more information.

A. SEARCH COMMITTEE CHAIR

- Promotes and expects confidentiality of all people involved in the search process.
- Organizes, calls and leads all meetings of the search committee.
- Serves as chief communicator about the work of the search committee to the congregation through brief updates, while keeping strict confidentiality, in the church's newsletter and oral reports at all services. These updates should, when possible, be at a predictable frequency (monthly is recommended).
- Serves as the point person who communicates with the Director of Transition Ministry on all business related to the search, including sending and receiving the names of clergy to be considered.
- Schedules candidate interviews and parish visits. Coordinate with the Senior Warden to schedule finalist visit(s) to the church. Part of that visit is time spent with the vestry.
- Communicates progress updates to the Senior Warden/vestry when needed and appropriate.
- Will represent the search committee to make the presentation to the vestry about the recommended candidate for the call to be issued. The presentation includes the name of the candidate and their materials, along with the rationale for that selection.

B. SENIOR WARDEN

- Assures a budget is established by the vestry to support the work of the search committee.
- Serves as ex officio of the search committee with voice but no vote, not visiting or interviewing candidates. May appoint a vestry liaison to the search committee.
- Occasionally attends full search committee meetings to discern progress being made.
- Stays in close contact with the search committee chair for updates.
- Assures reports of the committee's work are made to the vestry.
- Arranges with the chair of the search committee a time for the finalist(s) to meet the vestry.
- Arranges with the chair of the search committee a meeting of the vestry to receive the search committee's candidate recommendation so the vestry can issue a call.
- Contact the Director of Transition Ministry to share the results of the vestry's decision and then issue the call to the candidate. This is done by phone call, not an e-mail.
- Negotiates, with assistance from the diocese, the terms of the letter of agreement with the candidate.
- Arranges the signing of the letter of agreement.
- Make an announcement to the congregation of the accepted call at the same time as the candidate's congregation gets the news of the call.

C. SEARCH COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Make participation on the search committee their highest priority of ministries.
- Work prayerfully and collaboratively with the other members to do the tasks assigned.
- Be accountable for assigned responsibilities.
- Listen to other team members, pray for the work of the group, be honest and thoughtful, remembering that each team member represents the congregation.
- Maintain strict confidentiality at all times during the search process.

V. INTERVIEW PROCESS AND QUESTIONS

Clergy interviews are a bit different than those that take place in the business world. Remember, this is a discernment process centered around prayer and identifying God's call for the parish and priest.

It is common practice for the initial one or two interviews to be conducted over zoom. You must conduct all initial interviews the same way, either in person or by zoom. The goal of the initial interview is to get to know the candidate. Give them some time to introduce themselves. Interview questions should be centered around finding out the priests' gifts and skills, what about your church interests them, and past achievements/challenges. Included below is a list of sample questions. It is impossible to ask every question on the list, so focus on two or three for the initial interview and use the list to help narrow down questions for follow up interviews. Use the results of the search committee's information gathering stage to inform which questions are asked. Make sure there's plenty of time at the end for candidates to ask questions of the search committee. There are also questions listed below that candidates may ask.

All search committee members must read the following article, which provides questions that are considered illegal to ask during an interview: <https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/4037-illegal-interview-questions.html>.

The search committee should divide up the reference checks found on the last page of the candidates' OTM portfolio. Do not contact the Bishop or Diocesan Transition Minister of their current diocese. We have already done those checks. See below for sample reference questions.

After the initial interview, you may want to schedule a follow up interview to dive deeper.

The vestry cannot extend a call to the finalist until they have meet with Bishop Haynes and we have conducted a background check through Praesidium Inc. We will get these steps done once it seems like things are progressing with a particular candidate.

A. SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Note: These questions are in no particular order.

Professional:

- What are the major accomplishments of your congregation over the past three years?
- What are the main problems confronting your congregation right now? What are you and the members of the congregation doing about them?
- What are your goals as a priest?
- Do you believe that your goals are attainable at our parish? How?
- What within the materials we have sent you, gives you a sense that your goals and our stated challenges match? Where do they *not* match?
- Tell us of anything special you feel you can bring to this parish.
- How do you see your relationship to the vestry?

- What is your view of the delegation of responsibility, especially in a parish this size?
- How would you describe your leadership, pastoral, and preaching styles?
- Describe your views about Christian Formation—including all age levels.
- Give us a sense of your understanding of stewardship.
- What are your experiences with outreach programs?
- Describe how you design and lead the Liturgy.
- Given what you know at this point, what would be your vision for our church?
- How do you see your relationship to the diocese? The bishop?
- What would you try to do at our church in the first six months?
- Describe a visitation program as you would see it at our church.
- Describe the style of worship in your congregation. What changes have you made and how have you made them?
- Describe the present Christian Education program in your Parish. Are you satisfied with it? Why or why not?
- Describe your leadership style.
- What is your current continuing education program?
- State your personal vocational goals.
- Tell me about the start-up of your ministry at Past Church. In particular, how did they welcome you? What was it like when you first arrived?
- What was it like during the years of your ministry there? [overview]
- What were some of the “critical” issues?
- Tell me about some of your most satisfying moments at [Past] church.
- What were some of your frustrations over the years?
- What have you had to let go of in the past few months?
- What dreams do you have for Our Church?
- How would you describe...
 - the mission of the church?
 - the role of the local parish? -the ministry of the laity? -the role of youth?
 - the ministry of the clergy?
 - the role of the clergy spouse?
 - the importance of ecumenical cooperation?
 - the importance of cooperation with other Episcopal congregations?
 - the role of the Diocese as it relates to your congregation?
- Describe your journey of faith.
- Discuss your approach to preaching and liturgy.

- Describe the key elements of your theology.
- In our Parish Profile, we identify several challenges facing our Parish. Please address one of these issues and suggest how you would help us with it
- Describe a particularly difficult counseling problem and share how you handled it.
- Describe a situation where you brought a diverse group of people together to work successfully on a common cause.
- Describe a typical week in your present life (professional and personal).

Personal:

- What do you consider your greatest strength? Your greatest weakness?
- Describe your call to the ministry.
- How do you balance your church and private life?
- How do you relax?
- Tell us of any critical events in your life and how they have changed you.
- Describe the most exciting thing that has happened in your ministry.
- Describe the most difficult challenge you ever faced and how you handled it.
- Describe your personal prayer discipline.
- What role does your spouse play in your ministry?
- What are your continuing education needs?
- What is your personal ministry statement? Please explain to someone who doesn't know you well.

B. QUESTIONS CLERGY MAY ASK

- How does this parish live the Gospel?
- Name three ways in which this parish encourages ministry.
- How will this parish reveal love for my spouse, my family?
- To what future is God calling this community?
- How does this parish live out the "Apostles teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers"?
- What is of essential value to the life of this community? What would you never let go?
- How does this community live its life of prayer?
- What are the parish resources like, in people and in finance?
- What issues exist for this congregation?
- What do you believe calls me to possible ministry in this place?
- Are there critical issues of historical importance for this place?

- What do you most appreciate about one another?
- What mission that you haven't yet explored exists for this congregation?
- What kind of risks do people in this parish take for the sake of the Gospel?
- How do you communicate?
- What's the "Third Rail"? What would I have to do to get fired here?
- What do you do here that makes you want to invite your friends and family here?

C. CANDIDATE REFERENCE QUESTIONS

The search committee will need to check the references of all candidates under serious consideration. The diocese will confirm information about schools and employment. Choose questions that match your concerns or design others. These are general in nature, in no particular order, and may be arranged or modified to suit your needs. These questions might be asked during a telephone interview or by letter. You would not be expected to ask a reference all these questions.

- How would you describe the candidate's preaching style? Can you give an example of a sermon that you have heard?
- Tell me about the candidate's teaching skills? Can you give me an example of a great teaching experience?
- How does the candidate handle conflict?
- Is the candidate well-grounded theologically?
- Share an example of a pastoral situation you witnessed between the candidate and a parishioner.
- Large church: Do you think the candidate can handle a parish of _____ members and a staff of _____? Why?
- Small church: Tell me an example of how the candidate worked well with small groups and individuals?
- Is the candidate a capable administrator; can s/he delegate administrative and/or pastoral tasks?
- What is your perception of the spiritual depth of the candidate?
- Is the candidate Biblically oriented?
- Share some examples of how well the candidate communicates with people.
- What do you think is this candidate's biggest challenge? How does he/she need to grow?
- What are this candidate's greatest gifts?
- If you were on a search committee, would you recommend the candidate to become your rector?
- Is there anything you would like to add about the candidate?
- Describe your church congregation and ask if the candidate has the skills to handle your specific parish.

VI. LETTER OF AGREEMENT BEST PRACTICES

Drafting the letter of agreement and subsequent negotiations between the priest and Senior Warden/Treasurer is an important part of the transition process. As mentioned previously, the Director of Transition Ministry will provide a template for the Senior Warden to use as the foundation of the agreement. There is specific language in the template that we are Canonically required to include. Additionally, the letter of agreement must adhere to current labor and employment laws. There are blanks within the initial draft template for the priest and Senior Warden to negotiate. Included below are standards for some of the blanks. You will also find a sample compensation package to help illustrate the various aspects of clergy compensation.

The Director of Transition Ministry reviews the final draft of the letter of agreement before it is signed to make sure all requirements are met and anything added by the priest or vestry is within the above stated regulations and guidelines.

Below are standards for specific agreement clauses.

- Resources for the “Compensation” section of the letter of agreement:
 - [Click here](#) to visit the Clergy Resources page of the diocesan website, which includes a link to download the current Clergy Compensation Information and Guidelines pdf.
 - [Click here](#) to visit the Administration Resources page of the diocesan website, which includes a link to download the current Health and Dental Plan Rates pdf.
- The following only apply to Priest-in-Charge letters of agreement.
 - There is a statement regarding continuation of all salary and benefits should the agreement be terminated. The standard is for there to be three (3) months continuation of all salary and benefits after the agreed upon termination date.
 - In the “Expenses” section, there is a clause regarding Professional Development Allowance and accumulation of unexpended portions of the allowance should the Priest-in-Charge’s tenure be extended. The standard is three (3) years of accumulation.
- Under “Other Agreements,” there is a statement about payment to the priest’s direct dependents in the event of the priest’s death. The standard is three (3) months.

Regarding start date, the best practice is for the priest’s start date to be the first of the month because that is when medical benefits begin. Clergy can only be enrolled in health benefits at one institution at a time. Sometimes, a priest will negotiate a date after the first of the month to begin duties. This is fine if benefits begin on the first, or the church they are leaving covers medical benefits through the end of the month. We do not want the priest and their family to have a lapse in coverage. See *Emmaus* page 97 for more information about the priest’s start date.

SAMPLE COMPENSATION PACKAGE

The information below is only to be used as an example to illustrate the various aspects of clergy compensation. Figures come from the 2025 compensation guidelines and 2025 medical/dental plan rates.

In this example, the church is calling a Priest-in-Charge that has a spouse and child. This priest has served previously in a similar role and brings experience. The church has an average Sunday attendance of 120 and \$300,000 in pledge & plate. This categorizes them as both a Pastoral and Transitional sized church. When that is the case, they should use the salary range for the Transitional category. This church has budgeted \$1,000 towards the priest's expense allowance and \$750 towards continuing education.

\$90,000.00	base salary (includes housing allowance)
\$6,885.000	SECA support =base salary*0.0765
\$96,885.000	base salary plus SECA (Pension Based Total Compensation)
\$17,439.30	Pension payment = (base salary + SECA support) * 0.18
\$230.40	Group Life (\$19.20 per month)
\$750.00	Cont. Ed
\$1,000.00	Expense Allowance
\$116,304.70	Total = base salary + SECA + pension + group life + cont. ed + expense allowance

Medical Insurance Examples (2025 Rate)

\$42,576.00	PPO 80 - family (\$3,548)
\$1,440.00	Delta Dental Basic - family (\$120)

Total Cost to Church

\$160,320.70 = **Total** + medical + dental

VII. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What do we do when our current priest announces retirement/leave?

Contact the Diocese so we are aware of the retirement/leave date. In most cases, the priest shares this news with the Senior Warden/vestry and the Diocese at the same time. Retirement/leave announcements should be made around six to eight weeks before the departure date. Once the announcement is made to the congregation, the focus is on celebrating your priest and their ministry and saying a good goodbye. You can find more information about this on pages 17 through 18 of *Emmaus*.

Note: when clergy are leaving a parish their employment must be terminated through the Church Pension Group. Coordinate with your priest on the timing so that there is not a lapse in benefits. Perfect timing is when your parish covers benefits through the end of the month, and the priest's new church starts their coverage on the 1st of the next month. Contact Susan Allen, our Diocesan Benefits & Program Administrator, at sallen@diosova.org if you need assistance with this process.

What do I do if I need supply clergy?

Contact Liz Villanueva, Director of Transition Ministry, at lvillanueva@diosova.org for the current supply clergy list. It is the duty of the Senior Warden to contact clergy on the supply list to schedule them to serve supply.

Can our Interim Rector be our Rector?

No, and there are several reasons why. Interim Rectors are trained and called to do interim ministry, which is different from the work that a Priest-in-Charge or Rector is called to do. Also, there are a limited number of skilled Interim Rectors available, so once they have finished their role they are very much needed at another parish to do this important work.

Can our Associate/Assistant be a candidate?

No, see page 33 of *Emmaus* for the reasoning behind why calling your Associate and/or Assistant priest as your Priest-in-Charge/Rector is not beneficial to your church.

Additionally, Associates/Assistants are not to be called as Priest-in-Charge during an interim period while the search is taking place. This creates a dynamic when your new Rector/Priest-in-Charge arrives that is not ideal. For example, congregants may have the tendency to go to the Associate/Assistant instead of the Rector, when they really should be bringing things to the Rectors attention. Your Rector/Priest-in-Charge will have a hard time settling into their leadership role.

What is the difference between a Priest-in-Charge and a Rector?

A Priest-in-Charge and Rector have the same roles, responsibilities and relationship with the vestry. The only difference is the length of their agreement with the church. Priests-in-Charge have a three-year agreement, and Rectors are permanent with automatic tenure. It is more difficult to end the relationship with a Rector compared to a Priest-in-Charge. The Priest-in-Charge search

method allows for a period of continued mutual discernment to determine if this is a good fit. At around the one-year mark, the vestry can call the Priest-in-Charge as Rector

How long is the search for our new priest going to take?

Search/transition timelines look different for each church. Rector searches typically take longer than Priest-in-Charge. When searching for a Rector, the vestry first needs to call an Interim Rector. That can take some extra time. The Interim Rector is usually at the church for around twelve to eighteen months while the search committee and vestry do their work of calling a Rector. In short, it takes a minimum of two years to call a Rector. A Priest-in-Charge search can be anywhere between six months to a year, sometimes even longer depending on the current candidate pool and where God is calling them to serve. Everything, even search processes, are in God's perfect timing, which we are not always aware of. It requires trust in the Lord and often perseverance. God is preparing your next priest to serve in ministry with you. Sometimes that takes time.

Where is our position advertised?

The Director of Transition Ministry networks with colleagues across the entire Episcopal Church, especially those on the East Coast, to share all open positions in the Diocese of Southern Virginia that are currently receiving candidates. The portfolios of these positions are also posted on the Episcopal Church Office of Transition Ministry database where clergy can learn more about the church in search. Search Committees can decide if they would like to post their open position on the Episcopal New Service's (ENS) job board. There are free and paid postings that ENS provides. Word of mouth is also a great way to let people know that your church is currently searching for a new priest. Your church website can advertise the position. Include a button or link on the home page of your church's website that directs congregants and potential clergy candidates to more information about the search process and how to apply. Finally, our diocesan website has a webpage dedicated to Transition Ministry and lists parishes in search. [Click here](#) to visit our Transition Ministry webpage.

Do we visit candidates at their current parish?

Visiting candidates at their current parish is an option, but not a requirement. These visits can be expensive and timely. Thanks to the internet and more churches utilizing live streaming, often the search committee can find several audio and/or video links to candidate sermons and services.