

ASSESSING SKILLS: THE WORK OF THE SEARCH COMMITTEE

While this section relates directly to the work of the search committee, it is based on the **Appreciative Way** and we urge the search committee members to be familiar with the "Introduction to the Appreciative Way" section as they prepare and engage in their search process.

Assessment, not Discernment

One common problem search committees experience is confusing the tasks of assessment and discernment. The search committee's primary task is assessment: that is, determining the candidate's skills and abilities. As you encounter a candidate, resist the natural tendency to think globally and contemplate whether you would like this person to be your rector. Such global thinking is a discernment task. The discernment process is typically the work of the vestry and needs to be done only after the candidate has been qualified as having the necessary skills and abilities.

Even when the search committee is charged with both assessing candidate skills and discerning a call before presenting one final candidate to the vestry for confirmation, it is still important for the two tasks to be done separately, and in the order of assessment first and discernment last.

The assessment procedures can be thought of as a series of filtering steps. When manufacturers filter a product, coarse relatively cheap filters are first used to separate out material that is clearly unwanted. Successive filters that are finer (and generally of increasing cost) are used to separate out the desired product. The coarse filters are used to protect the finer filters and the overall cost of the process.

Likewise, the search assessment procedures are sequentially designed to provide an initial "coarse" and relatively inexpensive assessment, to be subsequently followed by a finer but more expensive assessment. Allow the coarse filters to work by being prepared to remove candidates from further consideration when obvious reasons are found that lead you to believe that those candidates will not be able to support the congregation's goals for ministry.

This may mean you will be removing candidates even if you personally would like to get more information about them. This is essential if you are starting with a large list of candidates.

Assessment and Discernment are two very different things.

Do the assessment first and never try to discern whether an unqualified candidate is called to be your rector.

*There are two worlds:
the world we can measure
with line and rule,
and the world that we
feel with our hearts and
imagination.*

*We need both worlds,
and they should not
be confused.*

— Leigh Hunt

*Hone your search skills
to a fine edge and only
use them with great
compassion.*

*It is a common experience
that a problem difficult
at night is resolved in
the morning after the
committee of sleep
has worked on it.
— John Steinbeck*

*Be open with the process,
let the congregation know
what you are doing.
Just don't tell them who
you are doing it with.*

Warning! The Following Procedures Can be Harmful if Used Inappropriately

A scalpel can be used by a skilled surgeon as an agent of healing, but also can cause great harm if used inappropriately. These assessment and discernment procedures can also be used for good or harm. These procedures have been developed to sharpen the focus of everyday observation and reflection skills, not to hone the skills of a grand inquisitor. These procedures are not designed to enable search committees and vestries to grill candidates, or subject them to intrusive or judgmental assessment. They are designed to provide a mutual process of discovery which requires reciprocal trust and respect. If a person has trouble trusting people in general and clergy specifically, they should not use these procedures, and would be advised to disqualify themselves from the search process.

Caring for the Search Committee

One of the biggest demands made on the search committee will be the amount of time the actual process will take. To reduce the pressure consider taking some or all of the following steps:

- Have each member discuss with their families the amount of time the search process will demand so that they can mutually accommodate each other's needs.
- Set a consistent meeting schedule in advance so that people can plan their lives. If you realize that you are not going to be able to make the meetings regularly it is more responsible to decline the invitation than be inconsistent in your involvement.
- Delegate tasks. Share the responsibility between all members of the committee. Some tasks, such as hospitality, can also be delegated to others outside of the committee.
- Consider temporarily resigning from other church activities.
- Don't meet for more than two hours without taking a break.
- Trust God. You are not in this alone. Laugh together on a consistent basis.

A Word on Confidentiality

Because many of the clergypersons who will be contacted are likely to already have established ministries and relationships with a parish, it is important to maintain confidentiality with respect to the names of the clergypersons who are under consideration for the new position. If it is widely known that they are searching for a new ministry, it may

jeopardize their relationship with their present parish. This is especially important if they are not finally called to the new position.

Always maintain confidentiality and never talk to a clergyperson's current parishioners without the express permission of the clergyperson.

While maintaining confidentiality with the names of candidates, be open with the congregation about the process and where in the process the committee has reached. Parishioners are more likely to respect the need for confidentiality if they are regularly informed as to the process and progress.

Creating a Search Committee Retreat

We recommend that one of the first things the search committee do is share in an overnight retreat. This can be while they are waiting to receive a list of candidates. The objective of the retreat is to create a strong sense of team with a unified mission and begin learning the procedures they will use in the search process.

Creating a sense of team does not require a set of gimmicky "ice breakers" or activities. Actually engaging in a sharing of core values and the first tasks of the search process, such as preparing written questionnaires, will create real-time activities that will create the foundations of the team.

Growing In Love

At the first meeting of the search committee, have the members read the section titled "Creating a Culture of Love and Hope." Take a few moments to share any fears and pressures you are experiencing. Later, as the process unfolds, if you find yourself or other members becoming conflicted over an issue or a candidate, step back from the specific issue and name the underlying fear. Many conflicts occur because people, without realizing that they have the same fear, seek conflicting solutions to reduce their anxiety. Sharing the common motivation and resolving the fear will reduce the conflict.

To resolve a fear you do not need to know why you are afraid. What you need to focus on is what you need to feel confident and loving.

Who Will You Discriminate Against?

Despite our best efforts it is impossible to be free from prejudice and bias. Prejudice is a final conclusion about unknown persons because they belong to a group that one has been previously biased against

*I can keep a secret,
it's the people
I tell who can't.*
— Unknown

*Great spirits have always
found violent opposition
from mediocrities. The
latter cannot understand
it when a man does not
thoughtlessly submit to
hereditary prejudices but
honestly and courageously
uses his intelligence.*
— Albert Einstein

*Prejudice is a
great time saver.
You can form opinions
without having to
get the facts.*
— E. B. White

Prejudice is a final conclusion about unknown persons because they belong to a group that one has been previously biased against by our culture or individual experience. Our prejudice actually speaks about us, our culture, and our experience. Our prejudice says nothing about the people we are biased against.

Prejudice squints when it looks, and lies when it talks.
— Duchess de Abrantes

It is not bigotry to be certain we are right; but it is bigotry to be unable to imagine how we might possibly have gone wrong.
— G. K. Chesterton

by our culture or individual experience. Our prejudice actually speaks about us, our culture, and our experience. Our prejudice says nothing about the people we are biased against.

When responding from a place of prejudice, we are trapped in the past and blind to our present reality. Such blindness also renders us incapable of being led and inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures are full of stories of people having their prejudices confronted in ways that lead to liberation and new life. For example, see Acts 11 and Peter's vision that confronts his prejudice against Gentiles, or John 1:46 and Nathanael's question, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" when he was invited to come and see Jesus.

In employment situations, prejudice causes us to discriminate on the basis of preconceived conclusions, rather than on the actual skills and abilities of the individual candidates. Prejudice can occur consciously or unconsciously. Because it is impossible to be free of all prejudice, it is necessary to become aware of how our own prejudices operate, so that we may consciously resist them and thus engage in the search process in an open manner that is fair and equitable and provides an equal opportunity for all candidates.

To create fairness we need to reflect on the actual demands of the job and whether a person can actually accomplish them. For example, it is age discrimination to reject a candidate because they are "too young" or "too old" for the position. It is not discrimination to reject a candidate who demonstrates a lack of experience in making sound decisions, or who cannot demonstrate sufficient energy to sustain a full day's work. These two situations are not age-dependent, as it is possible that a 60-year-old person may not have the specific necessary experience, or that a 30-year-old person has limited vitality. To reduce the potential for bias and prejudice, the authors strongly urge search committees to make their initial assessments of candidates "blind" to personal demographic information.

Another form of discrimination is to allow a person's position on one of the highly polarized social issues of the day to become the sole search criteria to the exclusion of all other essential requirements. Before you begin the search process, and perhaps during the search process itself, take some time to reflect on these questions:

- Who might you discriminate against, and why?
- What do you need to do to be able to suspend your prejudice and openly engage with the candidates on a journey of discovery?

Establishing an Initial List

Methods of establishing an initial list of potential candidates are often governed by diocesan policies. In some situations, parishes are given responsibility for developing the initial list, whereas in others the diocese may invite suggestions and then provide an initial list. Regardless of the process, at some point the diocese will have some input in the process, as the bishop is canonically required to affirm or reject the final election. With the reported incidents of clergy misconduct on the rise, many dioceses also perform a background investigation on potential candidates, especially when they come from outside of the diocese. Before embarking on the process, get a clear understanding from the diocese as to their process and requirements.

Sources for the Initial List Include

- Suggestions from the bishop or other church leaders.
- Clergy matched by national church computer searches.
- Self-referred clergy who request to be considered.
- Advertising in national listings of positions available or national church publications. Target publications that reflect the parish's outlook on a specific issue or aspect of church life.
- National registries of clergy with special interests.
- Parishioner's suggestions of clergy they know. Give adequate warning to parishioners regarding the final date so that they can offer names.

The executive summary provides an easy, cost-effective way to invite prospective candidates to consider being part of your search process. It can be sent to potential candidates with a letter inquiring as to their interest. At this point, the task is simply to gather names of candidates; if the person is interested, they could be asked to send a resume.

Clergy who are suggested by others or forwarded from computer searches often decline involvement in the search process. In many situations they have come to the attention of a parishioner because they are performing elsewhere in an excellent manner and appear to be enjoying what they are doing. These clergy may be flattered by the recommendation but are happy in their present position and have little interest in moving.

*"Do you believe in
computer dating?"*

*Only if the computers really
love each other.*

— Groucho Marx

Jagshemash!

*In the U.S. of A., if you
want to marry a girl,
you cannot just go to
her father and swap her
for 15 gallons of pesticide.
Here you have to do
something called dating.*

— Sacha Baron Cohen

*You can't get there by bus,
only by hard work and risk
and by not quite knowing
what you're doing.
What you'll discover
will be wonderful.
What you'll discover
will be yourself.*
— Alan Alda

*Remember your
search criteria.
Just because you like
someone doesn't mean
that they would make
a good rector
for your church.*

Similarly, clergy matched by computers searches or national registries are at varying stages in their current ministries and many have little interest in changing positions. It is not unusual for over half of an initial list to self-select out of the process after initial contact with the parish. Therefore, before any significant search process is undertaken or costs incurred, it is important to get some indication of their interest in being considered. Fortunately, the internet provides ways for large amounts of information to be made available to candidates so that they can make these initial decisions with minimal cost to the congregation.

How Big a List Should You Start With?

Our typical approach is to begin with a large broad potential list and then to use some "coarse filters" (which we will describe) to rapidly reduce the list with minimal cost to either the congregation or the candidates. Some parishes, possibly because of cost considerations, may decide to only consider clergy within a small geographical region. Others may prefer simply to have the bishop provide a short list of candidates to reduce the time and resources it takes to conduct a search.

While there may be pragmatic reasons to begin with a short list, we do encourage congregations to be open to the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit and not prematurely restrict the list. It is possible, for example, that even though you would prefer to consider only local candidates because of cost considerations, a clergyperson from outside your preferred area may have a personal reason for relocating to your neighborhood and may be willing to share some of the relocation cost to achieve that goal.

At the same time as we encourage you to be open to the Holy Spirit, don't lose site of your criteria, which the vestry have prayerfully developed and given to you as part of their mandate. Just because you happen to like someone doesn't mean that they would make a good rector for your congregation. The process needs integrity and if you make an exception for one candidate you need to offer that exception to all the candidates.

Should We Consider the Associate or Interim as a Candidate?

In the Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry section on questions, we indicated that yes/no questions are rarely helpful in dealing with difficult situations. Reliance on rules or law, as St. Paul indicates, will not result in life. Only the Spirit brings life. Most of the rules or tradition around the question of calling an associate or the transitional minister have been developed following horror stories of failed ministries and the consequent damage to both congregation and to the clergy in question. The resulting rules were designed to prevent a bad thing from happening in the future, but they don't ensure that a good thing happens.

A scenario: Imagine the associate wants to be considered a candidate. Members of the congregation will clearly know of the associate's interest in the position. Depending on the circumstances — and here the possibilities are numerous — some of the parishioners will support the associate's candidacy and others will not. Some may like the associate but think they are not really suited to being their rector; others may like the associate but think the congregation should also consider other options. In some dioceses, the decision will be made externally by the bishop that the associate cannot be considered. Alternatively, the decision may be made to allow the associate to be a candidate and included in the interviews and other discernment process.

Now imagine the following search outcome: The search committee and vestry do their work in private and end up by deciding not to call the associate. They call another candidate that the congregation does not know. The new rector duly arrives and is told by a substantial group of parishioners that they really didn't want him or her as their rector as they really wanted the associate to be their rector. From the very beginning this person's ministry will have been compromised, as will the associate's tenure in the parish.

To prevent such situations it is easy to rely on rules such as "The associate cannot be considered as the rector." But these rules prevent situations in which it would be entirely appropriate, and a blessing for all concerned, for an associate to become the rector.

So we would reframe the question to "Under what circumstances would it be appropriate to call the associate?" or "What resources would we need to see in place for it to be appropriate to call the associate as the rector?"

When considering the associate or the interim check your motivation. Are you motivated by fear of an unknown future or by a loving anticipation of God's future.

Only consider the associate or interim as a candidate when you are free not to consider them.

Some would prefer the devil they know to the devil they don't know. But who would want a devil for a rector?

*The peace of God does not
come from
the relief of anxiety
but from the awareness
of love and the assurance
of doing God's will.*

*The only man who behaves
sensibly is my tailor;
he takes my measurements
anew every time
he sees me,
while all the rest go on with
their old measurements
and expect me to fit them.*
— George Bernard Shaw

A follow-up question would be "Can we create a process that would allow us to consider the associate that would be fair to the congregation, the associate and allow the Spirit to work?"

Strategy for Considering an Associate

The following process is designed to ensure that the congregation doesn't become polarized around or against the person they know and the candidates that they don't.

- Conduct the self-study and determine the congregation's vision for the future.
- Develop the search criteria.
- If you want to consider the associate, do not engage in a search that includes other candidates at this point.
- Assess the associate with respect to the criteria.
- Do an internal check: Are you being motivated by a fear of an unknown future or are you motivated by a vision of a loving future in God? Only consider the associate if you are free not to consider the associate.
- If the congregation decides to call the associate, enter into a "priest-in-charge under special circumstances" relationship for the discernment phase. Create clear milestones that will need to be achieved to ensure that the new relationship is working, that the associate is truly transitioning into being the rector, and that the congregation is manifesting its preferred future.
- After a prescribed time, either affirm the pastoral relationship or end it. If the latter, it is likely that the associate will need to leave.
- At this point, if the associate has not become the rector, call a transitional minister and engage in a search. Do not include the associate in this search.

Here are some situations where it would probably be unwise to consider the associate as a candidate:

- When the associate is young in their ordination and their position as associate. While loving the candidate, many parishioners may have difficulty moving from seeing them as the "green" associate to the position of rector with its power and responsibility.

- When there is conflict within the congregation and the associate is more aligned with one group than the other.
- When the associate has created a significant niche ministry within the congregation. For example, in a large congregation an associate may have created an incredible pastoral care ministry. When this is their primary responsibility they will also have minimal involvement in other areas of congregational life. At heart this person may be a chaplain with no inherent desire or competence to be a leader of people. Calling this person as the rector may set in motion what is known as “the Peter Principle” — promoting a person to a place of their incompetence. To prevent this from happening, always consider the associate with respect to the totality of the rector’s position. Do not simply rely on the good work they have done in their specialty area.
- When the associate believes the former rector has been taking the congregation on the wrong path and is itching to get in control so they can do what they believe is right. The issue here is not whether the associate is right or wrong, but the extent to which the associate can serve the entire congregation and not just the part of the congregation that agrees with them. The search is not a time to play right and wrong, winners and losers. It is a time for listening to the mind of Christ that transcends polarizing either/or outcomes.

There is one situation where calling an associate may make a lot of sense, and that is when a large congregation has an associate who has served in the position for several years and who has had oversight of several significant ministries. The person knows the congregational culture, has been part of sustaining that culture, and is seen and recognized as a leader.

It is interesting to note that in the book *Good to Great*²⁶, the author Jim Collins found that twelve of the thirteen businesses he studied that went from good to great hired the CEO responsible for the transition from within the organization. In contrast, the comparison companies that did not grow hired a succession of CEOs from outside their organization. After a few years of failure, these companies would fire their CEO and look beyond themselves for a new “messiah” to come and rescue them.

The search is not a time to play right and wrong, winners and losers, but is a time for listening to the mind of Christ that transcends polarizing either-or outcomes.

The best CEOs in our research display tremendous ambition for their company combined with the stoic will to do whatever it takes, no matter how brutal (within the bounds of the company’s core values), to make the company great. Yet at the same time they display a remarkable humility about themselves, ascribing much of their own success to luck, discipline and preparation rather than personal genius.

— Jim Collins

Calvin: "Do you believe
in the devil? You know,
a supreme evil being
dedicated to the
temptation, corruption,
and destruction of man?"
Hobbes: "I'm not sure that
man needs the help."
— Calvin and Hobbes

Out of the uncertainty of
the moment people either
reach back to their past or
cling to whatever person is
present in the moment.

Clergy need to be clear
with themselves when they
take a position.
Don't take a temporary
if what you want is a
permanent position.
And don't take a
temporary position and
try to manipulate it into a
permanent position.

Considering the Transitional Minister as a Candidate

An almost universal phenomenon that occurs in transitional ministry is that at some stage the parish and the priest will begin to entertain ideas that the interim should become the permanent rector. A second phenomenon that usually follows is that, if these feelings are not firmly resisted, the pastoral relationship will become conflicted and ultimately destructive to the life of the parish and the clergyperson. The congregation is robbed of its opportunity for self-reflection, new understanding, and a healthy, healing transition between leadership.

The transitional ministry phenomenon of mutual infatuation is understandable in the light of the "wilderness" experience of transitional times. Out of the uncertainty of the moment, people either reach back to their past or cling to whatever person is present in the moment. The transitional minister needs to be intentional about assisting the congregation to come to terms with these basic insecurities, rather than assisting in repressing them by becoming the permanent rector.

Clergy need to be clear with themselves and the parish when they enter into a pastoral relationship. Clergy are just as vulnerable to the seductiveness of this phenomenon, especially when they have entered into an interim position while really wanting a permanent position. As an intentional transitional minister, the clergyperson commits to assist the congregation with their transition between leadership. To seek to change the nature of the relationship mid-course and become a candidate is to betray the commitment to assist the congregation in their transition. It is a violation of the boundaries that are established at the beginning of the relationship. These boundaries are essential, especially in conflicted situations, if the interim is to remain objective and not embroiled in the conflict. It becomes impossible to maintain credibility as a healing presence when energy becomes diverted from facilitating a healthy transition to establishing oneself as the best possible candidate.

The self-study and search process is also likely to be circumvented when an interim becomes a candidate. This is dangerous, because the skills that may make a clergyperson effective as an interim may be a liability in a permanent position. For example, effective interims are able to respond quickly to crisis situations but they may be less inclined to persist with long-term planning. The parish, while appreciative of these skills during a transition, may erroneously assume that the interim would make a good long-term rector. The transitional minister

also has an inside track on the search process. Other, more qualified candidates are likely to be overlooked because the search committee or vestry may find it difficult to choose another candidate and reject the “known” candidate. Alternatively, the potential for dividing a congregation is significant if another candidate is called over the transitional minister who is already known to the parish as available for and interested in the position.

Priest-in-Charge Under Special Circumstances

Unlike the previous situation of considering a transitional minister as a candidate, the priest-in-charge represents a very different case. From the beginning the congregation has a clear understanding that the person is being considered as a potential new rector. Consequently there is no potential for a betrayal of trust in this regard. At no time does the congregation engage in a search and compare the priest-in-charge with other candidates. This minimizes the risk of polarizing the congregation between a known candidate and several unknown candidates.

Strategies for Considering the Transitional Minister

Though this rarely happens, there may be some situations where the transitional minister may be legitimately considered as a candidate even after they have announced that they would not be considered. This may happen after a search has failed to produce a new rector and the potential to find a candidate is remote. If the transitional minister is to be considered at this point, the following steps will need to be taken:

- Consult with the bishop and vestry and ensure that all parties are willing to enter into a period of discernment.
- Do an internal check: Are you being motivated by a fear of an unknown future or are you motivated by a vision of a loving future in God? Only consider the transitional minister if you are free not to consider them.
- Do another check: Do you love the transitional minister because they are good at what they do? Would you want a lifetime of that good? Some great transitional ministers are like firefighters — they enjoy the excitement, the rush, and the challenge, but they get bored very easily, and are always looking for the next fire. Will the transitional minister find your congregation life-giving if there are no fires? Can the short-term expert inspire a long-term vision?

Confusing associates and interims with candidates is a recipe for polarizing a congregation into conflicted factions.

Some great transitional ministers are like fire-fighters - they enjoy the excitement, the rush, and the challenge, but they get bored very easily, and are always looking for the next fire. Will the transitional minister find your congregation life-giving if there are no fires? Can the short-term expert inspire a long-term vision?

*The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say "I."
And that's not because they have trained themselves not to say "I."
They don't think "I."
They think "we"; they think "team."
They understand their job to be to make the team function.
They accept responsibility and don't sidestep it, but "we" gets the credit.
This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done.
— Peter Drucker*

- Clearly announce to the congregation that even though the transitional minister had said they were not to be considered, they are now open to consider the possibility and will enter into a time of discernment.
- Cease any other search process. Consider only the transitional minister.
- Enter into a "priest-in-charge under special circumstances" relationship with the transitional minister.
- Create realistic milestones that will need to be achieved to ensure that the new relationship is working and that the congregation is manifesting its preferred future.
- After a prescribed time, either affirm the pastoral relationship or end it. If the latter, it is likely that the transitional minister will need to leave.
- At this point, if the transitional minister does not become the rector, call another transitional minister and engage in a search. Do not include the former transitional minister in this search.

Caring For the Candidates During the Search

The search process can be a stressful time for both search committees and candidates, especially since the time from an initial contact with the candidate to issuing a call can take many months. The search process is not one-sided. It is a mutual process whereby parishes and clergy are seeking to discover whether they will be a good match for each other, and whether they are called to serve God together. How the search committee cares for the candidates during the search process may have a profound impact on whether a clergyperson decides to remain in consideration or to accept a call. Here are some simple ways of caring for the candidates:

- Ask yourself, "How would I like to be treated if I was a candidate?"
- Assign each candidate a liaison member from the search committee. Do not have just one member of the search committee, such as the chairperson, be the only member who communicates with all the candidates.
- Obtain a telephone number and an address at which the candidate can be contacted. They may not wish to be contacted at their current parish. Provide the candidate with a contact person's telephone and address for reaching the search committee.
- Have each liaison person keep in regular contact with the candidates, especially when nothing appears to be happening. Remember, it will take a minimum of two months to interview six candidates, since these interviews will probably be done on a weekend, and it is probably unwise to create a demanding schedule that requires search committee members to be involved every weekend for six consecutive weekends.
- Provide sufficient time for candidates to respond to or prepare for any assessment activity. Provide specific instructions when requesting involvement in any assessment or discernment activity.
- When a candidate is no longer under consideration for the position, notify them as soon as possible both by telephone and a letter of confirmation.
- When a candidate is selected to remain under consideration, notify them as soon as possible both by telephone and in writing. In the letter, explain to the candidate the next step in the process and anything that they will need to provide.

*Love your candidates
as you would have them
love you.*

*While you are proclaiming
peace with your lips,
be careful to have it even
more fully in your heart.*
— St. Francis of Assisi

*Before you wonder
'Am I doing
things right?' Ask
'Am I doing
the right things?'*
— Stephen R. Covey

*Competence,
like truth, beauty,
and contact lenses,
is in the eye of
the beholder.*

— Laurence J. Peter

*Gentlemen, Chicolini here
may talk like an idiot,
and look like an idiot,
but don't let that fool you.
He really is an idiot.*

— Groucho Marx

The Assessment of Skills and Abilities

If you have ever attended a worship service and come away thinking, “I really liked how they did ...” or “I really hated how they did ...” then you have engaged in an assessment process. Would other people agree with your assessment? In this section we will explore how to fine-tune your assessment skills from simply liking or disliking to assessing the discrete behaviors that create effective performance.

Assessment, not Comparison

This workbook provides a method of objectively rating the skills and abilities of candidates for the position of rector. The intention of this process is not to compare Candidate A with Candidate B, but rather to assess each candidate with respect to a predetermined set of job-related criteria. To simply compare one candidate with another is a sure-fire way of creating a disaster. Patrick Maher²⁷, a personnel consultant, provides the following scenario to illustrate the danger of simply comparing candidates.

Suppose we are testing to select a competent neurosurgeon. We have five participants and will use a comparative rating scale. The participants are:

- A skid-row alcoholic with an 8th grade education.
- An attorney who specializes in medical malpractice cases.
- A veterinarian who specializes in treating domestic pets.
- A second year medical student.
- A cardiologist.

Using a 5 point comparative rating scale the alcoholic would score 1, the attorney by comparison would be 2, the veterinarian would be rated a 3 by comparison, the medical student would be 4, and finally the cardiologist, by far the most qualified and experienced would be rated a 5 in comparison to the others.

Now having made this assessment, who would you select to remove a brain tumor? Simply comparing candidates and finding the most qualified does not guarantee that they are qualified to do brain surgery. Each candidate must be assessed with respect to the criteria of brain surgeon.

Because each parish has different needs, clergy cannot be selected on the basis of comparing one clergyperson with another. They must be assessed with respect to the criteria established to meet the specific needs and character of each parish.

Rating System for Skills and Abilities

Each candidate's competency at any specific skill can be assessed with respect to the following 5 point scale.

1: Poor: The candidate's response on this factor is either totally lacking or well below that required for effective job performance.

The person indicates, regardless of the reason, that they have no successful experience or they fail to report experience of the particular criterion being rated.

About 10% of all clergy would fall in this category.

Parishioners would be angry about performance at this level.

2: Weak: The candidate possesses this factor to some degree but at a level below that required for effective job performance.

The person indicates little (or negative) experience of the particular criteria. Rather than providing evidence of experience they may stress theoretically why the criterion is important.

About 20% of all clergy would stumble in this category.

Parishioners would grumble about this level of performance.

3: Acceptable: The candidate's response on this factor is adequate or at a level just sufficient for effective job performance.

The person may indicate some experience and stress the theoretical implications or the importance of the criterion. There is little indication as to the outcome of their experience.

About 40% of all clergy would walk in this category.

Parishioners would accept this level of performance.

4: Good: The candidate's responses on this factor is clearly above the minimum required for effective job performance.

The person indicates significant experience of the criterion. Outcomes may be unclear.

About 20% of all clergy would run in this category.

Parishioners would appreciate this level of performance.

5: Excellent: The candidate possesses this factor to a high degree. Their job performance would be outstanding.

The person indicates considerable experience of the criterion with multiple successful outcomes.

About 10% of clergy would excel in this category.

Parishioners would be enthusiastically inspired by this level of performance.

This candidate would be out of their depth in a parking lot puddle.

— Unknown

This candidate sets low personal standards and then often fails to achieve them.

— Unknown

This candidate consistently over-achieves in a mediocre field.

— Unknown

This candidate consistently does ordinary things extraordinarily well.

— John Gardner

This candidate elegantly makes difficult tasks look deceptively simple.

*Statistically speaking
human characteristics
are normally distributed.*

*This means that
the majority of
people's ability on a
specific competency
will be in the
average range.
What we are looking for
is the candidate who
consistently scores in the
above average range.*

*Failure to come to
consensus about a score
is typically a failure to come
to consensus
about the criteria
and not the actual score.*

*A genuine leader is not a
searcher for consensus but
a molder of consensus.
— Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Assess What is Observable

In the objective assessment phase we need to assess observable behaviors and their outcomes. We are not assessing why a person may do (or have done) something, because that is a subjective interpretation that cannot be validated. Similarly, we assess what we observe and not what people think or theorize should be done.

One rule of thumb is to consider what a video camera would record. The camera does not interpret or attribute motivation for what it records. When creating criteria, they need to be observable statements of behavior such as a video camera would record. Because everyone should be able to observe the behavior, we use a consensual scoring process to determine the final score.

Consensual Scoring

In committee work the final rating is achieved by the committee coming to consensus. Consensual scoring is hard work, but it ensures a greater degree of fairness for both the candidates and the members within the parish. The hardest part of consensual scoring is developing the specific criteria so that they are unambiguous, readily observable, and consequently measurable. Failure to come to consensus about a score is typically a failure to come to consensus about the criteria and not the actual score. Consensus scoring requires patience, tolerance, wisdom, and a sense of humor.

One of the great secondary benefits of consensual scoring is the rapport and bonding that can develop on the committee as they come to consensus. Another benefit is that it requires committee members to think in depth about their parish, the nature of ministry, and the nature of clergy. Such reflections can deepen their personal understanding of ministry and their own commitment to Christ.

Rating Example

On the next page is a rating example. In this example the congregation has decided that one of things they want their next rector to do is lead groups of parishioners to accomplish their mission. They create a question about leadership and then set up specific criteria related to leadership.

To complete the exercise rate each of the responses with respect to the leadership criteria. After you have completed your rating go through the list as a group and come to consensus about the scoring. On the following page is how we have rated these responses.

Instructions: Rate the following responses to St. Paul's question about team ministry. Work individually first and then come to consensus on the ratings. On the following page we provide our ratings.

Question: St. Paul's has many different ministries led by a large team of active parishioners. Describe your experience of developing and leading teams of people to carry out the work of ministry.

Theme: Leadership/Enabler. Respondent needs to indicate successful experience training and enabling parishioners to participate in ministries designed to strengthen congregational life.

Criterion: Leadership development, delegation and involving others.

1	2	3	4	5
Poor: No team leading experience, regardless of reason. Weak: Negative experience, or gives theory.		Acceptable: Minimal experience, no outcomes, may stress theory.	Good: Significant experience but no outcomes. Excellent: Considerable experience with positive outcomes.	

- A. Team ministry is very important to me and is part of the heritage of all Christian people. At the great commission Jesus sent all the people out to make disciples, not just a select few. One of the main reasons the church is losing members is because too few people are doing all the work. Only as each one of us takes up our cross and follows Jesus will we be the dynamic Body of Christ proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God.
- B. I've endeavored to involve others in my ministry by calling on lay people to assist me when I needed help.
- C. As the Associate Rector with responsibility for pastoral care and evangelism I have established and provided ongoing training and support for a Pastoral Care team to help minister to the elderly, and an Evangelism team to reach out to newcomers.
- D. My current ministry is amongst the scattered tribes of Outer Mongolia and there is little opportunity to develop team ministry.
- E. Here at St. James' I have established teams to carry out most of the significant ministries, such as youth work, evangelism, pastoral care, outreach, and Christian education. These teams have been successful in establishing a wide range of opportunities for lay ministry and this has enabled our parish to reach out to a broad cross-section of our community.
- F. I tried to start a team of lay visitors but the people here are really lazy and it didn't work.
- G. My present ministry is a solitary chaplaincy position. However, I am strongly committed to the concept of team ministry and in anticipation of moving to a parish setting I have participated in several team-building and leadership training workshops.
- H. I currently have a ministry team of two full time priests, a part time youth worker, and a secretary to assist in the parish ministry. Our shared ministry has been successful in ministering to the needs of shut-ins, young families and the youth in our parish. We have also begun a ministry to gangs.
- I. If I am selected as your new Rector I will actively foster the development of your current ministries and prayerfully encourage the development of new team ministries as we seek to follow Christ and respond to the needs of the community.

Assess what you and others can observe and not what you think they meant to say.

Rating Example Scoring:

Candidate	Score	Reason
A	2	Respondent gives a theoretical answer without any indication of experience in establishing or maintaining a team ministry.
B	2	Respondent indicates that lay ministry is a last resort. There is little indication of experience in establishing or maintaining a team ministry.
C	4	Respondent indicates that within the bounds of their responsibility they have established and maintained two team ministries. No mention of outcome is given.
D	1	Respondent has no experience of team ministry.
E	5	Respondent indicates considerable experience establishing and maintaining a diverse and successful team ministry.
F	1	Respondent was unable to sustain a ministry and blamed others for its failure.
G	3	Respondent has no experience but does indicate a commitment to the concept by attending training workshops.
H	2	Respondent views ministry as the work of professionals and although they indicate leadership experience, there is no indication of developing leadership amongst the parishioners.
I	2	Respondent gives no indication of leadership experience. Instead, they talk theoretically about what they will do in the future.

This rating procedure is the basis by which all skills and abilities are assessed. It is used for assessing written responses, the responses from a structured oral interview, the presentation of a sermon, the celebration of a Eucharist or other service, or any other ability that is considered to be necessary or important by the parish.

Predicting Future Performance is an Inexact Science

Psychological and personnel research consistently shows that our ability to predict a person's future performance is very poor. Most psychological assessment is retrospective, explaining why someone did something, rather than predicting what they will do in the future.

Research has also shown that people generally continue to do what they always have done. Thus the best predictor of what a clergyperson will do when selected rector of a new parish is what they have done in previous parishes. This means assessing prior experience and its outcome will be the essential focus of this assessment process. Remember...

Past Behavior is the Best Predictor of Future Behavior

Assess Behavior, not Theory About Behavior

When selecting a brain surgeon we want to know whether the person can competently conduct brain surgery. There are people who can talk eloquently about brain surgery, or perhaps have written books on brain surgery, but that does not guarantee that they are competent to perform brain surgery. What we need is someone who can actually perform brain surgery. The ability to theorize about brain surgery is very different from the ability to successfully cut into a person's brain to remove a tumor or blood clot.

In assessing clergy candidates the same is true. We need to assess their actual ability and not their theoretical understanding of a particular action. Christianity often presents an idealized view of how people should behave — which is often in striking contrast to how people actually behave. Clergy can often speak very eloquently about the necessity of doing certain things, or how the church should run, and at the same time they may have limited actual ability to do those things.

In this section of assessing skills we want to know what the person can actually do, and not what they think needs to be done. As we have noted the best indicator of what a person will do is what they have done in the past, so we will focus most of our attention on what the candidates have actually done in the past. In particular, we will focus on assessing what they have done related to the criteria that were determined necessary to help the congregation achieve its goals.

*Prediction is difficult,
especially about the future.*

— Yogi Berra

*How come you never see
a headline like
'Psychic Wins Lottery'?*

— Jay Leno

*Beware of great theories
masquerading as
competence.*

*Knowing what needs
to be done and
actually being
able to do it
are two very
different things.*

To improve the fairness of your search process conduct the initial assessment “blind” to variables such as race, age, gender, and sexual orientation.

Developing a Supplemental Questionnaire

The supplemental questionnaire is one of the most cost-efficient and effective methods of providing an initial screening of candidates. It provides an opportunity for the initial screening to be “blind” with regard to those variables such as race, age, and gender that can lead to bias and unfair selection practices.

Supplemental questions are not intended to be essays or policy statements, but focus instead on previous experience of an aspect of ministry and its outcome. Generally, each question’s response is limited to no more than one page. They are time-intensive for both clergy and raters. Depending on the clergyperson, the questions may take two to ten hours to complete. Because of this, many clergy will self-select out of the process. Their decision may be the result of their reflection on the profile and their recognition of an incompatibility due to personal, family, or professional issues. Their own reflection may also have convinced them that their true calling is to stay where they are. Regardless of their reasoning, this outcome is a desired result. The task of this first step is to reduce the initial list of people to those who are willing to invest some time and effort into the possibility of a new ministry, as well as identifying those who are qualified for the new ministry.

Types of Questions to Ask

The task of every search process is to ascertain what a clergyperson will do in a parish if they are called as the rector. Because the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior, the best questions to ask are those that seek an account of relevant past ministry and its outcome, and how it could be adapted to a new situation. The focus is on what the clergyperson does and can do, rather than what they think. This is not to say that thoughts are unimportant, however parishioners do not have first-hand experience of the candidate’s thoughts. What they experience is the consequences or actions that result from the multitude of thoughts by the candidate. It is also possible to act continually in violation of one’s apparent thoughts. For example, a person may proclaim the love of God in thought while acting in a coercive or resentful manner.

Therefore, ask questions that begin “What have you done to accomplish...?” or “How have you done...?” Avoid questions that start with “What do you think the church should do about...?” or “How do you feel about ...?”

Ask questions that elicit stories about the candidate’s prior experience rather than theories about what should or should not be.

Crafting Questions

In our consulting work with search committees, we often find ourselves rephrasing their questions. Here are some examples of the strategies we use to create effective questions.

Search Committee's Question: Describe a time in your life when you felt the power and presence of God.

The first question to ask of this and any question is "What is the purpose of the question?" What does the search committee hope to discover using this question? At least two possibilities come to mind, but the question is not specific enough to get clarity on either.

1. Is the question being asked to discover the candidate's personal piety and their spiritual practice? If this is the case then we would rephrase the question to:

Tell us a story about a time in your life when you were very aware of the presence of God. What were you doing at the time to create or enter into the experience? What did the experience inspire you to do?

2. Is the question being asked to discover the candidate's inspiration and motivation for ministry? If this is the case then the question could be rephrased to:

Tell us a story about a time when you were aware of the power and presence of God in your ministry as a church leader. Who else was involved and what did you accomplish together?

Notice that each question begins with a request for a story. While we wouldn't use this language repetitively for every question we ask, what we are seeking from the candidates in their response is a story. We would not ask questions that could be answered with a yes or no, or ask questions that just elicit facts. Yes/no or detail questions at the beginning of an interview sequence will limit the possibility of exploring and getting to know the candidate.

For example, a search committee member may want to know whether the candidate prays regularly. Simply asking the question "How often do you pray?" will not provide any significant understanding about their prayer life and its relevance to the congregation. A better strategy would be to consider the purpose of a regular prayer life and frame the question from that perspective.

What's the purpose of the question?

What is it that you really want to know?

Why would knowing that be helpful to you in your search?

One who asks a question is a fool for five minutes; one who does not ask a question remains a fool forever.

— Chinese Proverb

*Candidates will
assess you by the
quality of your questions.*

*Forget balance,
get integrated.
To be in balance is to be in
a constant state of tension.
It is a much better strategy
to integrate all the aspects
of your life into the life-
giving essence of your
God-given purpose
rather than be torn apart
trying to balance all the
competing demands
that assail you.*

If the committee members understand the purpose of a regular prayer life is to keep the person centered in God then ask: "How do you stay centered in God?"

Follow-up questions that continue to explore their prayer life could be asked depending on how the candidate responds. If the candidate provides lots of examples about being centered in God and never mentions prayer, a more specific question could be asked as follows: "You've provided several ways you stay centered in God. I am curious, do you ever use prayer as a way to stay centered in God?"

Here the yes/no question is being appropriately used toward the end of an interview sequence to clarify an issue.

Search Committee's Question: How would you rank your personal priorities and those of your church life? How do you ensure that you allocate time to match those priorities?

What's the purpose of this question? What is the search committee looking for in an excellent response? It appears to be a question about achieving personal/professional balance. However, as written, it is possible the question will result in a response about prioritization without actually discovering what the person is prioritizing.

Notice how this question also puts the person in an either/or bind of having to choose between family and work in terms of ranking which is most important. Regardless of how the candidate answers, they are going to offend someone. We would reword the question like this: "What is it that you are passionate about, that gives you life, in your ministry and in your personal life?"

We would then follow up with this question: "And how do you do that in a way that integrates both your ministry and your personal life, so that you feel whole rather than fragmented?"

Search Committee's Question: Comment on your vision of the bishop's leadership role as it involves local congregations, the diocese, and the national church.

This is a very unhelpful question. It will result in speculative theory that is impossible to validate or use to predict whether the theory would be implemented. Rather than asking this question, we would want to ask the committee what they want the candidate to do and then ask questions about that specific behavior.

Creating Criteria For Written Questions

Example: A parish that describes itself as having a traditional faith outlook is seeking a rector with a similar faith that is sustained in a manner that is compatible to their parish. Consequently, they develop the following theme based on personal spirituality.

Theme: Personal Spirituality. Respondent needs to express an understanding of the Christian faith that is both personal in nature and in accord with the traditions of the church. Respondent also needs to describe a variety of spiritual practices and disciplines, that would be compatible with our parish, and which enables their ongoing spiritual development.

From this theme they developed a compound question:

"Who is Jesus Christ for you? How is His presence manifested in your life and ministry? How do you sustain and foster your relationship with Him?"

Additional themes and questions were also created to explore other areas important to the parish.

Developing the Rating Criteria

Specific criteria need to be developed to assess the candidates' responses to the questions. When creating criteria keep in mind:

- Criteria need to be behaviorally observable.
It is difficult to set criteria for motivation because the inner attitudes of a person's heart are not behaviorally observable. However, it is possible to set criteria for rating past experience in performing charitable work, for example, because even though the motivation cannot be seen or determined, the outcome can.
- Criteria need to be specific, objective, and unambiguous.
For example, criteria for singing the Eucharist "nicely" or "well" are open to multiple interpretations. It is, however, possible to set criteria for singing the Eucharist audibly and in tune, with which most raters could agree on the level of performance.
- Field test your criteria before using them.
We use mock answers to field test the questions and criteria to clarify them and ensure that the committee members share a common understanding of the question and the criteria.

On the following pages are examples of how criteria were developed for the theme of Personal Spirituality.

Field-test your questions to see how they work and help you clarify your criteria

*In these days,
a man who says
a thing cannot be done
is quite apt to be
interrupted by some
idiot doing it.
— Elbert Hubbard*

Instructions: Below are the individual criteria that were developed for the theme of Personal Spirituality. On the following pages are four responses that were used to field-test the question and criteria. Use the Scoring chart on the next page to individually rate the responses with reference to the criteria, then as a group discuss the ratings and come to a consensus on the score.

Theme: Personal Spirituality. Respondent needs to express an understanding of the Christian faith that is both personal in nature and in accord with the traditions of the church. Respondent also needs to describe a variety of spiritual practices and disciplines, that would be compatible with our parish, which enables their ongoing spiritual development.

Question: Who is Jesus Christ for you? How is His presence manifested in your life and ministry? How do you sustain and foster your relationship with Him?

Criterion 1.1 Enunciation of basic Gospel message. Is this person clearly a Christian? Would other Christians throughout the ages identify this person as Christian?

1	2	3	4	5
No Gospel message is presented, or presentation is clearly unchristian. Presentation is vague or covers minimal aspects of Gospel message.		Presentation of Gospel message is theoretical or Creedal without personal references, or Gospel message is overly personal without reference to traditional understanding of the faith.		Gospel presentation is clearly presented in accordance with the traditions of the Church and in a manner that indicates its personal relevance to the respondent.

Criterion 1.2 Personal Relationship to Christ. Is there evidence that Christ is active in a personal way within this person's life?

1	2	3	4	5
No personal example of relationship. May theoretically describe need for relationship. Completely academic or theoretical explanation of relationship.		Excessively theoretical, with minimal personal reference.		Active lively personal relationship. Describes Christ's presence in ways that challenge, guide, and inspire respondent. Creative outcomes of relationship such as forgiveness, healing, creativity.

Criterion 1.3 Christ's presence in ministry. Would parishioners recognize this ministry as Christlike?

1	2	3	4	5
Does not describe active ministry. Minimal presentation of ministry. Purely theoretical description of ministry without personal application.		One or two descriptions of ministry. No outcomes		Multiple description of ministry that clearly reveals ways in which Jesus' presence is manifested. Pastoring, preaching, teaching, forgiving. Multiple positive outcomes.

Criterion 1.4 Personal Devotion. Does this person have a spiritual life?

1	2	3	4	5
None or minimal or vague description of personal spiritual life. Stresses need for personal devotion without describing personal spiritual practices.		Reliance on only one form of devotion. More theory than practice.		Multiple spiritual practices (prayer, Bible study, reading, retreats, worship, dialogue, etc.) with positive outcomes.

Note: Another congregation may use the same question, but develop alternative criteria that reflect their own understanding and experience of the Gospel message.

Scoring Chart Instructions: Use the following sheet to record your personal rating in the left hand column for each of the criterion and then as a group come to consensus on the group's rating. At this stage do not spend too much time seeking consensus. The purpose of the exercise is to understand the concept and process of rating responses with respect to predetermined criteria.

Written Response Scoring Sheet								
Criteria	Candidate A		Candidate B		Candidate C		Candidate D	
	Personal Rating	Group Rating	Personal Rating	Group Rating	Personal Rating	Group Rating	Personal Rating	Group Rating
1.1								
1.2								
1.3								
1.4								
Totals								

Some Typical Rating Errors to Watch for and Eliminate from Your Scoring

- **Halo Effect:**

A favorable response on one criteria may predispose a rater to rate all other criteria highly regardless of actual performance assessed against the specific criteria. Halo effect may also occur in interviews because of race, gender, mutual experiences, etc. Although generally favorable, halo effect can also be negative and predispose raters to giving low scores regardless of actual performance.

- **Central Tendency Error:**

Non-discriminatory scoring that gives average marks to everybody.

- **Leniency Error:**

Non-discriminatory scoring that gives high scores on all criteria. This may occur because the rater does not want to be seen as "mean."

- **Severity Error:**

Non-discriminatory scoring that gives low scores on all criteria. This may occur by being "tough" and feeling that no one is good enough.

- **Projection Error:**

This involves projecting one's own value system onto the rating system. In this case the rater only scores highly a person who is a duplicate of oneself.

Question 1: Who is Jesus Christ for you? How is His presence manifested in your life and ministry? How do you sustain and foster your relationship with Him?

Candidate A's Response

Jesus is the only Son of God, the perfect image of God who shows us the nature of God. The nature of God that he reveals is that God is love. He was conceived by the Holy Ghost and became incarnate from the Virgin Mary. As the incarnate Son of God he lived as a human but without sin. In obedience to God he suffered death on the cross. In this sacrificial offering of himself he paid the eternal price for the sin of the world, thus freeing humanity from the power of sin and reconciling them to God. When God raised him from the dead he overcame death and opened the way for eternal life. In his ascension he has taken human nature into heaven where he now reigns with the Father and intercedes for us. Through baptism we are united to him in his death and resurrection. In this manner we become living members of Christ. By ordination we receive grace to represent Christ and his Church, especially as pastor to God's people, in the proclamation of the Gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and in blessing and pardoning in God's name. We sustain our relationship with Christ through regular participation in the Church's worship, reception of the sacraments, Bible study, prayer, and service to others.

Candidate B's Response

I believe that Jesus is the proof that God loves us and his ultimate intentions toward us are loving and good. Without Jesus, with just the Old Testament understanding of God, I would be in a constant state of anxiety, trying to discern whether God would ultimately save or destroy us. Jesus is also the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the Lord of all creation through whom God has redeemed not only Episcopalians but the whole of creation which I take to include humanity, animals, rocks, trees, slugs, and other bugs. Through baptism I have been united with Christ in His death and raised to new life. My life is His life and it is hid with Him in God.

Jesus is also my Lord, who calls me to follow Him and proclaim His Good News by word and deed. He is both a source of comfort and challenge. He sustains me yet challenges me to live an authentic, courageous life in the face of a world that seeks to crucify Him continuously in the myriad ways we denigrate, dehumanize, and destroy one another. Despite baptism and redemption, I mess up a lot. Yet it is Jesus who comes to me time and time again to offer his love, forgiveness, and restoration that I might live in His love and share it with those I encounter. Over the years I notice that the love has increased, fear has decreased, and messups while ever present have diminished.

I encounter Christ in several different but integrated ways. I find Jesus individually in the manner he forgives and challenges me as I have described above. I also find Him in the beauty of corporate worship and in the still small voice of silent meditation. But above all I perceive His presence when I encounter others, especially when counseling them. I view ministry as not so much something I do but rather something I become a part of. I do not need to bring God to people, but to help people identify Him who was already at work within their life long before they met me, and having identified it to simply allow myself to be a part of what He is doing. It is a great joy to me to be a part of what

He is doing and see His love healing and bringing new understanding to people's hearts. It is at these times I am most acutely aware of His presence, and share in the joy of His kingdom.

Left to my own devices I would probably do very little to sustain my relationship with Jesus. I feel fortunate for the discipline of being a priest and having to prepare sermons which encourages me to read, pray, and reflect on the nature of our human lot in the light of the One who loves us. My most common spiritual practice is an ongoing ruminatory prayer on the mysteries of life as found encapsulated in the lives of those I encounter. It is a type of prayer that encourages me to seek answers, to question answers, to dialogue with others, read scripture, and above all to be silent and surrendered before God. I also seek Him in the corporate worship of the church and in listening to sermons, especially sermons that challenge my preconceived prejudices that blind me to the enormity of God's love and the limitlessness of His abundance.

Candidate C's Response

Jesus Christ is the Lord and liberator of all creation. He is the one who inspires new hope within me that in following his way humanity can confront the evils of this day. He is not removed from our world, but calls us to identify his presence amidst the suffering and oppression in our community. He is the friend of the poor, the down trodden, the weary and overburdened. I see Jesus in the eyes of the homeless and the street people I work with. I see him at work in their lives when they leave behind their shackles of fear and mistrust and enter our shelter and begin to repair their lives. I see him at work in the business people who have had their heart's softened and help in arranging our soup kitchen. After many years of front line work amongst the poor I now see Christ calling me to challenge the political structures that oppress the poor. Those who in the name of righteousness and superior morality seek to cut off the meager aid that is given to the needy. Those who cry out "family values" yet do nothing to help those families struggling against and destroyed by poverty. I hear Jesus' prophetic voice in the cry of our advocates to the State Government. We cannot claim to be followers of Christ while we continue to walk on the poor and neglect their needs. While advocating for the poor and dealing with those in power, I find I need to remain close to those I serve in order to remain close to Christ. As I gather with them and celebrate the dawning of a new day in the breaking of bread and giving thanks I am warmed and sustained.

Candidate D's Response

Jesus for me is the one who was so open to God's influence that given a lifetime he might have shown us even more how to live faithful lives open to God's love and sharing it with a hurting world. He showed us how to live, how to be faithful, how to care and love all people, how to be a healing presence in the world. He also showed us how threatened those in power can be when the love of God is truly shared, particularly with the most vulnerable and most oppressed among us. I am most influenced by how Jesus lived and try to live as he did. My relationship is with the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, the Christ Spirit — that is my trinity — the Spirit of God that lived through Jesus and continues to live through us — always living, loving and working to bring about peace and harmony throughout creation.

*Communication
leads to community,
that is, to understanding,
intimacy and
mutual valuing.
— Rollo May*

*The only time it would
be inappropriate to use
a written supplemental
questionnaire would be
if your position never
required any written
communication.*

Developing Your Parish Related Criteria

Develop your own congregation-specific questions and criteria.

- Start by reviewing the specified list of pastoral functions, sub-specialty skills, and personal attributes considered necessary for the rector to have.
- Develop four or five individual themes that can be readily responded to in written form.
- Develop four or five specific and focused questions about the candidate's experience in the theme areas.
- Develop four criteria for each question that assess specific aspects of the question.

Additional criteria to assess things like the timeliness in which the material are returned; the organization of the written materials; the ability to write coherent grammatical responses; and the persuasiveness of the written responses can also be developed.

Field Test the Questions and Criteria

Have members of the search committee, or a non-candidate clergyperson, create some mock answers for each of the questions to use as practice examples. Rate them individually and then come to consensus on the scoring. This will not only give you practice in consensus scoring but will help you clarify the questions and the criteria. Reword the questions and criteria so that they are free from ambiguity. Also ensure that everyone has agreed on the criteria by which they will rate the candidates' responses. You need consensus on the criteria before you can achieve consensus on a score.

What About the Candidate Who Speaks Well and Writes Poorly?

Most parishes rely on some form of written communication within the parish. It is reasonable and appropriate to assess each clergyperson's ability to communicate in this manner. If a candidate cannot write grammatical sentences, how will they produce stewardship materials, Christmas letters, newsletter articles, or letters on behalf of the parish? The only time it would not be appropriate to use a written supplemental questionnaire would be if your position never required any written communication. Perhaps if you were seeking a clergyperson to develop a radio ministry it may be appropriate to have the candidates tape record responses to some questions.

Protect the Criteria!

The criteria are the means by which candidates are being rated. Do not give them to the candidates. Criteria are best viewed in the same way that national exam materials are viewed. Answers sheets for SATs and the like are not made available to the people taking the test or left out where those people may fortuitously find them.

Mailing and Receiving the Supplemental Questions

Having field tested the questions, you can now send them to the individual candidates along with a copy of the executive summary of the profile and any other materials, such as Sunday bulletins or monthly newsletters, that express aspects of the life of the parish.

- Provide a specific date by which you expect the responses to be returned. Allow at least a month, and perhaps more if your request is going out in proximity to a major feast season such as Christmas or Easter.
- Do not send the criteria, just the questions!
- Use instructions for the Supplemental Questions similar to the following:

Supplemental Questions Instructions: Please read carefully.

Please respond to the following questions. Limit each response to one page and begin each question on a separate page. To provide fairness in the evaluation process, your responses will be evaluated without reference to your age, race, or gender.

While we are very interested in your previous experience, when referencing such experience please do not include demographic data in your responses. Avoid phrases like "As an (older/younger, Asian/Black/Caucasian/Hispanic, male/female) priest..."

Similarly, do not reference your experience by referring to your location by using phrases such as "Here at St. Paul's..." or "Here in El Paso I have..."

- Provide an address where all materials are to be returned. It may be the church or, for confidentiality reasons, it may be sent to the home of a member of the search committee.
- Have one person collect all the written responses. Before distributing them to the members of the search committee, remove any identifying names or correspondence and code them

The teachers I work with continue to assess our thinking on assessment. One question that guides our conversation is "Who will learn something if we do this?"

— Joanne Hindley Salch

Provide the written responses to the search committee without any demographic data to allow the rating to be done free of personal bias.

Consensus scoring is tough work, but worth the effort.

Plan to take frequent breaks and meals when necessary to keep blood sugar and attitudes in the compassionate zone.

Don't waste too much time arguing over unacceptable scores.

The task is to let the cream float to the surface rather than drown in the skim milk

with a color or letter (Candidate Blue, Candidate 4, Candidate E, etc.). Prepare a copy of each set of responses for each member of the search committee but do not distribute them until the final due date.

- Have each member individually rate the written responses prior to meeting together to do the consensus scoring.
- While waiting to receive the written responses, schedule a two-hour meeting to practice the consensual rating process with some "field test" responses.

Consensus scoring is at the heart of the rating process and scoring written responses is the easiest method to develop the group skill. Being adept at achieving consensus will save considerable time and minimize frustration in later parts of the search process.

- Arrange a meeting date to score the written responses. A weekend date is probably best. Allow at least one-half hour per candidate. Plan to take a break every two hours.

Rating Procedure: Obtaining Consensus

Obtaining Individual Scores

It is important that each search committee member is familiar with all the criteria, and that the committee has achieved a consensus on their understanding of the criteria prior to individually rating actual items, because the final score will be determined by a consensus.

- Take stock of your overall impression. Do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of the candidate's work?

Once you have determined your overall impression, set it aside so you can focus on the specific criterion. Pay attention to that criterion while not allowing your overall impression to sway your rating on an individual criterion.

- Determine the specific criterion that is being assessed. Ignore all other criteria.
- On the specific criterion, determine whether the response is acceptable or unacceptable.
- When in doubt, refer back to the 5 point rating scales.

Unacceptable Responses:

If the response is negative or unacceptable with respect to the criterion, then determine whether it obtains a score of 1 or 2. When no response is given or an exceedingly negative response is given, the score is 1. When the response is weak, the score is 2. In written responses or interviews a candidate may stress theory or the importance of the criterion rather than discussing actual experience and the outcome of the activity. Such responses are considered weak and would typically obtain a score of 2.

You have no idea what is going on in a candidate's mind, so don't try and second-guess them. If they have not responded to an item, don't try to understand why they didn't respond. If they have completely missed a criterion, then the score is 1 regardless of your imagined reason.

Acceptable Responses:

Acceptable responses are divided into three categories: average, good, and excellent. Because abilities tend to be distributed on a bell-shaped or normal curve the large majority of people tend to fall in the "average" range. Such performance on a criterion is scored at 3. One of the key tasks in assessment is to discover which candidates are consistently able to perform at an above-average ability. Such performance is manifested by multiple experiences with positive outcomes. Scores for such performance are 4 and 5, the latter being given when the performance is considered to be in the top 10% of all clergy.

- With a little experience raters can quickly determine which of the three boxes — negative, average, or positive — the response belongs in and then assign the appropriate score.
- Make sure you have scored every candidate before the search committee meeting. Circle and underline portions of the candidate's responses that you consider pertinent. It will assist you in explaining your score when the search committee seeks to establish a consensus score. It is easy to forget why you gave an item a particular score when all the raters convene several days later. This may lengthen the process and frustrate you and other committee members.
- Total the individual criterion scores to get an overall score.

Score each criteria separately and on its merits. Don't let one great response or one bad response color all your other scores.

Score what you have in front of you, and not what you imagine they meant.

The secondary benefit of consensus scoring the written responses is that it creates a platform to assess interviews and activities such as sermons where you can't refer back to written materials

Be aware that a halo has to fall only a few inches to be a noose.
— Dan McKinnon

True genius resides in the capacity for evaluation of uncertain, hazardous, and conflicting information.
— Winston Churchill

Achieving Consensus

With a large group of search committee members, coming to consensus can be difficult. If the committee is not initially a cohesive group, the difficulty in achieving consensus will be exacerbated. Field-testing the questions and criteria is essential to ensure that everyone understands the process. Field-testing also helps build the rapport necessary to achieve consensus. Considerable emphasis is placed on learning the consensus scoring using the written materials when the members can refer to the material that is objectively in front of them. This experience will stand the committee in good stead when they rate responses to interviews or other assessment activities where it is not possible to refer directly to the material presented.

Use the following steps to achieve consensus:

- Ensure that everyone has individually scored the responses.
- Check the total scores. If a candidate has consistently been rated 1 or 2 by all members on most items, do not take time to develop consensus on the individual items. Such a candidate has clearly demonstrated unacceptable performance and should be eliminated from the search process.
- Come to consensus on each individual criterion. Rate all the candidates on question one first before moving to question two, to maintain consistency through the process.
- It is entirely inappropriate for a committee member who knows the name of a candidate to reveal that name and urge the members to lower or enhance their scores.
- It is inappropriate to allow a candidate's response on one question to influence scoring on another question because the rater takes a dislike or a liking to the candidate. Score each question on its merits, not from the perspective of an overall impression.
- Do not average the scores. To do so violates the criterion and the rater's observation. It will also result in a tendency for all people to obtain an average score.
- **Failure to achieve consensus is a failure to understand and agree on the criteria rather than a failure to agree on the score.**

When the criteria are mutually understood, assigning the score is simply deciding whether the candidate performed the task.

- There is no place for mind reading or arguing over a candidate's intention. When scoring with respect to any criterion the issue is simply, "Did the candidate manifest the appropriate behavior under consideration?" When scoring a written response this issue becomes, "Did the candidate describe positive experience of the criterion under consideration?" The raters do not need to consider any material other than the response before them.
- Some raters can become "hung up" on one particular criterion and argue over one point. In the grand scheme of things, one point isn't going to have a significant impact on the total score.
- Occasionally a candidate's response style will be vague and confusing and some raters will score them high while others score them low. Ask the high scorers to provide examples which determined their score. Similarly, ask the low scorers what they would need to have read in order to have given a higher score.

When Consensus Seems Impossible

Determine whether all the raters are in the same box (negative, average, or positive).

- If all the raters are not in the same box, reexamine the criterion.
- If all the raters are in the same box the decision is over a 1 or 2, or a 4 or 5. If consensus is impossible in reconciling this decision, or it is taking too long, take a vote.

A two-thirds majority will succeed in establishing the score.

A less than two-thirds majority will average the score, i.e. give a 1.5 or 4.5.

Note: There is no 2.5 or 3.5 score as this would mean a significant disagreement on the nature of the criterion and all the raters would not be in the same box.

- Be patient. After two hours raters tend to become frustrated and tired and are likely to make hasty, grumpy decisions. Frequent breaks are needed. Manage the blood sugar, and nurture the rumps.

*The youth,
intoxicated with his
admiration of a hero,
fails to see,
that it is only a projection
of his own soul,
which he admires.*

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

*In the grand scheme of
things, one point isn't
going to have a significant
impact on the total score.*

*Arguments over
grammar and style are
often as fierce as those
over IBM versus Mac,
and as fruitless as
Coke versus Pepsi and
boxers versus briefs.*

— Jack Lynch

When setting a cut-off, remember that there is little real difference between candidates who scored within one or two points of each other. If there are two such candidates, either include or exclude both of them.

No candidate should remain on the list if they have consistently scored 1 or 2 on most items regardless of the final number of candidates. Such a candidate clearly does not have the necessary skills to competently perform the task of rector. If necessary find additional candidates rather than advance an unqualified candidate.

Shortening the List

- Once consensus is achieved on all the scores, total the scores and order the candidates by rank.
- It is not uncommon for the total scores to be in clusters with a group of candidates clustered around one score and another group clustered around a lower score. This provides a natural break and allows for the list to be readily shortened.
- When there is no natural break, a cut-off score needs to be set, whereby those above the cutoff score are retained on the list while those below are released from further consideration. Because the next step in the search process is some form of face-to-face contact and will probably necessitate travel and consequently financial expense, it is important to set the cutoff point at a realistic level. Maintaining ten candidates on the list after the written responses suggests that the cutoff point has been set too low and consequently a greater cost will be incurred in the next stage of the process. Five or six candidates is probably a reasonable number, although successful searches have been accomplished with fewer candidates.
- When setting a cut-off, remember that there is little real difference between candidates who scored within one or two points of each other. If there are two such candidates, either include or exclude both of them.
- No candidate should remain on the list if they have consistently scored 1 or 2 on most items, regardless of the final number of candidates. Such a response set indicates that the candidate is essentially unable to describe a level of experience and performance that the parish has deemed acceptable.
- If only one or two candidates achieve the cut-off score and more are required for the selection process, then it is time to seek more qualified candidates rather than lower the standards.
- After the cut-off is set, match the candidates' scores to their names.
- If for some reason a candidate who did not score above the cut-off is to be maintained on the list, then all the candidates who scored above that candidate must be maintained on the list and advanced to the next stage. Failure to do so could open the parish to a charge of an unfair hiring process.

- Verify diocesan or denominational policies. Some jurisdictions may require all people on the list to be interviewed, at least by telephone, before the list can be shortened.
- Once the shortened list has been decided, notify all the candidates of the outcome and their status in the process by telephone and in writing.

Telephone Screening Interview

If the list remains large and some candidates are a considerable distance from the parish, it may be helpful to conduct a screening interview by telephone. We recommend you only use a telephone interview as a screening procedure, and only if it is really necessary.

- If you do decide to use a telephone screening interview, do it with every candidate, regardless of their location, and use the same interview questions with each candidate.
- Information on how to prepare a telephone interview is provided in the interviewing section.

Caring for the candidates that you remove from consideration is just as important as your caring for the candidates that you advance to the next stage. Your caring speaks about you and how you want to be treated.

*It is no use walking
anywhere to preach
unless our walking
is our preaching.*
— St. Francis of Assisi

*Watch a cat when it enters
a room for the first time.
It searches and smells
about, it is not quiet for a
moment, it trusts nothing
until it has examined and
made acquaintance
with everything.*
— Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Meeting the Candidates

The next step in the search process will involve some form of face-to-face encounter and can become quite expensive. Balancing the amount and value of information gained with the cost of obtaining it is important to consider when designing search strategies. The two basic strategies are to either have the candidate come to the parish or to visit the candidate in their parish. Both have strengths and weaknesses. Whatever is chosen needs to be applied consistently to all candidates. Don't visit some and have the others visit your parish. The following are the benefits and costs of each method:

- **The clergyperson visiting the entire search committee.** The cost advantage is that the entire search committee gets to interact with the candidate at the cost of transportation and lodging for one person. This method also allows a wider range of information gathering because the search committee can conduct simulated exercises.

The disadvantage is that no first-hand observation of the candidate's current ministry is possible. This disadvantage may not be as significant if some of the candidates under consideration are associates or not currently serving in a parish.

Despite the potential disadvantages there are ways to offset the drawbacks and obtain more specific information on a variety of ministry skills and abilities that would not be available when simply visiting a candidate in their parish.

Another drawback to having all the candidates visit the parish is the time required to conduct all the visits. Typically, candidates will begin their visit on a Friday with a tour of the community. The main interview and other assessment activities occur on Saturday when all the committee can be present. To interview six candidates will require about two months to schedule. In contrast, several candidates can be visited in their parishes by different teams on the same weekend.

Despite the drawbacks, the authors favor having the candidates visit your search committee because of its cost advantage, assessment flexibility, and the richness of the information that can be gathered.

- **Visiting the clergyperson in their parish.** This is usually accomplished by sending out small groups of search committee

members to interview the person and observe them preach and conduct a service. The advantage of this method is that several people get to see the candidate's parish, which to some degree is a reflection of the candidate's ministry. They also get first-hand knowledge of their preaching in the context of a service.

When this approach is used, it is usually part of a screening process. Those candidates deemed qualified by virtue of the visitation are then invited back to the parish for an interview with the entire search committee.

The disadvantage to this is that only a small group of people is able to see each candidate and the risk of biased (either positive or negative) observation and conclusion is high. Although first-hand knowledge of the candidate's ministry is possible, this type of visitation does limit other types of information gathering.

The danger of this method is violating the candidate's confidentiality with regard to their involvement in a search process. If a visit is made, be inconspicuous and only discuss the candidate with the people pre-approved by the candidate.

Regardless of the method chosen, the same basic principles of developing questions and rating criteria apply. The following procedures are based on having the candidate visit the parish but can be adapted for use when visiting a candidate in their church.

Deciding What to Assess When the Candidate Visits

The list of necessary ministry responsibilities, sub-specialty skills, personal attributes and values provide the basis for the assessment. Prior experience of a necessary skill can be assessed by appropriate questions during an interview. Follow-up questions or clarification of written responses can also be done during the interview. Activities such as preaching or conducting services are best evaluated by having the candidate perform the task and rating their performance with respect to predetermined criteria.

Structured Interviews

Research has shown that a general interview in which people come together and informally discuss aspects of the job and the candidate's ability has very low predictive power of the candidate's future performance. Research has also shown that predictive power can be improved by structuring the interview, asking experience-based questions, and using a consensual rating system.

*He who would
search for pearls
must dive below.*
— John Dryden

*If you want to know if
someone can weld don't
ask them about which
welding school they went
to, give them steel and a
torch and get them to weld
the pieces together.*

*Same goes for clergy.
If you want to know what
they can do,
get them to show you,
rather than just have them
tell you what they think
should be done.*

*Reputations are made
by searching for things that
can't be done
and doing them.*
— Frank Tyger

*You can discover more
about a person
in an hour of play
than in a year
of conversation.*
— Plato

Simulated Work Exercises

Another important information-gathering procedure is to have the candidate perform the task which you expect them to perform on the job. For example, if you want to hire a welder you do not ask the candidate, "Can you weld?" Rather you give them some steel and a welding torch and ask them to weld the objects. This also works effectively when selecting clergy. If you want to hire a preacher, don't interview the person about their theory of preaching — have them preach. Similarly, if you want to call someone who is gifted in pastoral counseling, have the candidate perform a simulated counseling exercise. Simulated work exercises have consistently shown to be the best predictor of future job performance when compared with all other personnel selection procedures.

The recommendation for each candidate's visit is to arrange a full day of activity which includes:

- A structured interview of approximately 2 hours duration.
- One or two simulated work exercises. The latter invariably involves some type of preaching and leading worship exercise but may also include other pertinent exercises.

Most of the members of the search committee are usually unavailable during the week; therefore, it is most convenient to schedule the day's activities on a Saturday. Included in the schedule is a shared informal lunch, and a tour of the property and the neighborhood for the candidate. This can be conducted while the search committee rates the candidate's performance on the work simulations.

Some of the exercises may be videotaped or recorded. Inform the candidate if you intend to record the exercise. Tape recordings are generally unhelpful in the rating process and may simply add frustration by adding to the overall rating time.

If a committee member is not able to be present it is not appropriate to have them observe a recording and participate in the rating process. This will delay the consensus scoring, which will obscure everyone's recollection. In addition, the medium is entirely different and may result in disparate results. While it is best to have all the search committee present the advantage to consensus scoring is that the absence of one member is not likely to have a profound effect on the outcome of the overall scores.

Reviewing Past Performance, Analyzing Annual Reports

When preparing to meet candidates it is helpful to have some background information about their current and previous performance. Resumes and denominational clergy profiles typically will only provide general information about the positions the candidate has held and not how well the person has performed those responsibilities. An additional source of information is the annual reports that each parish submits to their diocese. These contain hard data on worship attendance, membership, and financial performance. Such reports are public records within the church. You can request that each candidate send you their current parish's ten most recent annual reports. Pertinent information from these reports can be plotted on a series of graphs to show performance trends. From these graphs, trends in parish performance can be observed which will enable the search committee to shape informed questions of the candidates.

Ask each candidate to furnish their current parish's last ten years of annual reports even if they have not been in the parish all that time. Ten years will give the search committee the opportunity to detect current performance trends that a shorter period may not. Ask associates to also provide their current parish's annual reports. While an associate is not totally responsible for the parish's performance they should be able to discuss the trends, their attributions regarding the cause of the trends, and the strategies they would implement to change or maintain the trends.

Keep in mind the following when using annual reports:

- Trends may not accurately reflect a candidate's true performance. For example, a parish located in a community of declining population may be dwindling despite the best efforts of a gifted and competent clergyperson. Conversely, a church that appears to be growing may be located in a rapidly growing community and may actually be declining in relationship to the community growth rates because of the ineptness of the clergyperson. For these reasons performance trends of different clergy cannot be directly compared. Rather, they are used to assist the search committee with the development of informed questions for the individual candidates.
- Overall membership figures are notoriously inaccurate and do not reflect typical parish performance. Use actual attendance and giving, especially pledged and plate offerings, to gauge the

Would you be happy with the candidate's trends in your congregation?

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.
— Marcel Proust

*Anybody can come up
with a theory about what
caused a trend.
Real expertise is
knowing what to do
to make the trend go
in your preferred direction.*

performance of a parish. Check to see whether the parish is relying on external funds, such as trusts, to maintain its financial viability in the face of impoverished ministry and performance.

- Trends may be gradual or show significant increases or decreases over a short period. Explore with candidates their attributions as to the cause of any detected trends. If candidates blame negative trends on external events or parishioner apathy or conflict, redirect the candidate to discuss what they did in response to these external events to mitigate the trends. Does the candidate have a coherent plan to reverse the trend or are they simply wanting to escape a difficult situation? At some point leaving a bad situation is advisable and helpful for all parties and does not necessarily mean that the candidate would not be successful in another situation.

Compare the trends of your parish and the candidate's. If both are declining does the candidate have realistic plans to reverse such trends? Would such plans work in your parish?

If the trends of both are growth oriented, would the candidate's approach continue to sustain your growth? If the trends are dissimilar would the candidate's trend and approach to ministry be acceptable to your church?

When Inviting the Candidate to the Parish

- Check the parish calendar for conflicts. Coordinate with other church groups and reschedule activities that may present a problem with respect to maintaining confidentiality. Notify the parish that candidates will be visiting and ask parishioners to respect the need for confidentiality.
- Inform the candidate of the day's schedule and what is expected of them, (i.e., if you want them to preach and celebrate for the search committee, give them adequate preparation time and provide them with the readings).
- Ask the candidate if there is anything they need to assist them in their decision-making process. For example, is there additional information that is not contained in the Parish Profile that they think would be helpful to them in their preparation for the visit?

*Change will not come
if we wait for
some other person or some
other time.
We are the ones we've
been waiting for.
We are the change
that we seek.
— Barack Obama
with elements of Hopi Wisdom*

- Be prepared. If you are using simulated exercises, make sure they are field tested and you know the rating criteria. Practice the interviewing and know who is responsible for each aspect of the interview.
- Have a member of the parish that is not on the search committee provide transportation for a tour of the neighborhood and another to assist with the lunch. It is a long day for the search committee and these details are best handled by others in the parish.
- Be clear with the candidate about which expenses are paid by the church. It is reasonable to pay for the candidate's travel and lodging but at this preliminary stage it is probably not reasonable to provide travel for a spouse or family. Later, when the candidate list is narrowed down to three or less and the candidates are meeting with the vestry, it may be more reasonable to meet the candidate's spouse and provide for their transportation.
- While it may be Christian hospitality to lodge the candidate with a parishioner, it may create inadvertent pressure for both the candidate and the parishioner. Most candidates are more likely to prefer being lodged in a motel.
- Remember that this is a mutual process of discovery. Not only is the search committee evaluating the candidate, the candidate is evaluating the parish and whether they want to be the parish's next rector.
- On the following page is a schedule for a day-long visit and interview.

This is a mutual process of discovery. The candidate is evaluating you just as much as you are evaluating them. The two questions for both parties are: What is the other's best? Can we provide the resources to help them be their best?

*Always plan ahead.
It wasn't raining when
Noah built the ark.
— Richard Cushing*

*Have a plan.
Follow the plan, and
you'll be surprised how
successful you can be.
Most people don't
have a plan.
That's why it's is easy
to beat most folks.
— Paul "Bear" Bryant*

Typical Parish Visit and Interview Schedule

If the candidate is traveling from out of town provide adequate lodging the day before the interview to ensure that they are well rested for the day's activity. In the interests of fairness, use the same schedule of activities for all the candidates.

Interview and Assessment Schedule

9:00 - 10:00 a.m. Eucharist service, preached and celebrated by the candidate

Note: In the Episcopal church this is conducted for the search committee and is not open to the congregation. Check denominational practices and policies regarding confidentiality of the initial screening processes.

10:00 - 10:30 a.m. Candidate is given a tour of the church property while the search committee takes time to individually review and rate the preaching and leading of worship

10:30 - 10:45 a.m. Refreshments

10:45 - 12:45 p.m. Structured interview

12:45 - 1:45 p.m. Catered lunch

1:45 - 3:30 p.m. Additional time for interviewing or another simulated exercise

3:30 - 5:30 p.m. Candidate is given tour of neighborhood and returned to lodging or airport

3:30 - 5:30 p.m. Search committee convenes for consensus scoring of the structured interview and the simulated exercises

5:30 -6:30 p.m. Supper break

Note: It is highly likely that the consensus scoring will take more than two hours. Do not work for more than two hours without taking a break. Arrange to have a shared meal at a neighboring restaurant, order in, or have a meal prepared by other parishioners at the church.

Interviewing Principles

Interviewing a candidate is a mutual information sharing/gathering process. It is not a one-sided interrogation. Both “sides” are seeking information about the other. The type of question and the manner of its presentation is also information to the other, as it details what issues are significant. Anticipate that the candidate will question you. Be prepared to provide information as well as request it.

For each category of questions, the search committee’s objective is to discover what may happen in the life of their parish and its members if this priest is called as the rector. Will this candidate value what the parish values and find it life-giving, and will the candidate help the parish be successful?

The clergyperson’s objective is to discover, through the search committee, the nature of the parish and whether they are interested in coming to be the rector of the parish.

Every question you might develop can be evaluated in four ways:

- What does it have to do with the position?
- Why do we need to know?
- What does this convey about me or us?
- Would I be willing to answer the same question about myself?

Questions that will not assist the search committee in achieving its objective should not be asked.

Be Honest and Transparent

All ministry is built on a foundation of mutual trust. As the search committee you will be creating the first layer of trust with the congregation’s future rector. Avoid posing trick questions or resorting to deception. You and the candidate are seeking information to decide whether you can enter into a mutually trusting pastoral relationship. Deceptive questioning is not effective in establishing a trusting relationship.

Remember the candidate is evaluating you just as much as you are evaluating them. If you make use of deception you may be implying to the candidate that you cannot be honest and straightforward. How you treat the candidate is important information for the candidate in their decision-making process.

*Will this candidate
value what we value
and find it life-giving, and
will they help
us be successful?*

*We shall always keep a
spare corner in our heads
to give passing hospitality
to our friends’ opinion*
— Joseph Joubert

*Oh, what a
tangled web
we weave,
When first we
practice to deceive!*
— Walter Scott

If you try to motivate people by lighting a fire under them, all you will get is burnt butts.

A much more enlightened way to motivate people is to find the fire within them and fan it.

If you haven't found the place deep inside where you cannot not do what you do, keep looking for that which you cannot not do and go do that.

If you don't, you will simply waste your God-given potential, rob society of your gifts, and make yourself and the world around you miserable.

Is Interviewing the Best Strategy?

At the heart of the assessment process we want to know what the candidate can do and what they need in order to be successful. While interviewing is a significant part of the assessment process, it has significant limitations in that it is always a conversation about a candidate's ability. Observing them actually performing a task is a more accurate assessment of what they can do. Later in this section we will provide strategies for creating simulated work activities to assess a candidate's ability. As you prepare your interview always consider whether there may be an alternative, more effective way of discovering a candidate's level of competency.

Three General Areas for Exploration

Motivation for Ministry

What motivates this person's ministry?

What are they passionate about?

What are the major areas of ministry where this person consistently focuses their time and effort?

What areas do they consistently avoid?

Do they have sufficient personal energy for effective ministry?

Would their passion for ministry be fueled by our congregation?

Professional Skills and Abilities

When they are at their best, and what skills are they using?

What are their ministry strengths especially in reference to the core responsibilities determined for your rector?

Within the areas of expertise considered to be important by the parish, what have they done and how effective was it?

Can we as a congregation provide the resources they need to be their best?

Personal Qualities

Does this person have the spiritual and psychological maturity to be rector of the parish?

Do they know how to care for themselves while doing ministry?

Can they relate appropriately to others?

How do their qualities relate to our needs as a congregation?

Interviewing Techniques

As you endeavor to ascertain what a person will do if called as a rector, always bear in mind the following:

Past Behavior is the Best Predictor of Future Behavior

- Ask questions that will elicit a story:
 - How have you done ...?
 - How do you currently accomplish the task of ...?
 - What have you done to achieve ...?
 - What is your experience ...?
 - Please tell us about a time when you ...
- Avoid questions which will elicit theory or speculation:
 - What do you think the church should do ...?
 - How do you feel about doing ...?
 - Why would you do ...?
- Modify the questions to reflect the candidate's personal situation:
 - For a candidate who is currently a rector of a parish, ask: "In your parish how do you organize ...?"
 - For a candidate who is currently an associate, ask: "Within your current area of responsibility how do you organize ...?"

Questions About the Future

Only ask future-oriented questions (such as "How would you develop our Christian education program?") after you have ascertained their prior experience of the activity.

Remember, future-oriented questions evoke theory and speculation. Good theory without experience remains nothing more than good theory. However, in the light of their experience, it is important for the candidate to be able to describe realistic plans and have tentative ideas about how to develop programs.

Responding to Theory

If the response is simply theoretical rather than hard evidence of actual experience, then refocus the question by asking for an experientially-based example. One way to do this is to ask the candidate a question such as: "How have you done that in your current parish?"

The interview is usually your first face-to-face opportunity to develop a relationship with your next rector. Don't do something that you later have to undo.

Good theory without experience remains nothing more than good theory.

*I never learned anything
while I was talking.
— Larry King*

*Wise men talk
because they have
something to say;
fools, because they
have to say something.
— Plato*

*Remember that questions
have two parts:
The surface content and
an underlying assumption.
Check the underlying
assumption of your
question. What does the
assumption say about your
attitude and beliefs?*

Pay Attention to Outcomes

- After discovering what they actually have done seek the outcomes of the activity:

How did it work?

What was the outcome of the program?

Would you do it again?

- After posing a question, it is best to simply listen. The longer we listen the more evidence we gather. Avoid lengthy explanations of your question. Extend the original question to elicit more information with encouragements:

That's interesting, please keep going.

We're getting a really clear picture; please say more.

Can you give us another example along the same lines?

- Avoid closed-ended questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no:

Do you like working with people?

Are you good at administration?

Do you like visiting parishioners in the hospital?

Can you deal with parishioners who disagree with you?

Will you make home visits?

- Rather, ask open-ended questions and seek follow-up information. One way to avoid closed questions is to reframe your question to begin with "what" or "how":

What has been your experience of visiting parishioners in the hospital?

Please describe a time that was upsetting for you to visit a parishioner.

How have you dealt with parishioners who disagree with you?

- Closed-ended questions are appropriate towards the end of a discussion to clarify specific impressions that are developing, such as:

You seem somewhat hesitant, do you actually visit parishioners in the hospital?

If you are called as our rector will you... *(list a specific behavior such as visiting parishioners in the hospital)?*

You have described doing... would you do the same if you came here? Would you do anything differently?

- Avoid giving the desired response as part of your question:
Our last rector wouldn't visit hospitals. Will you visit parishioners in the hospital?
- Rather ask the question without explanation and seek prior experience and outcomes:
Tell us about your experience of visiting parishioners in the hospital.

Structuring the Interview

A formal interview is likely to cover a wide range of topics and may involve approximately two hours. Random haphazard interviews in which disconnected questions are "fired" at the candidate will be frustrating and time-consuming, and will minimize the potential of obtaining coherent and useful information.

To maximize the potential of gathering useful information, the interview is organized and structured to focus on specific areas of ministry and parish life. A structured interview will also enable candidates to be assessed with respect to a predetermined set of criteria. A predetermined, structured interview also reduces the possibility of the interview being hijacked by one particular "hot issue" that absorbs too much time and distracts the committee from exploring other essential issues.

The interview is structured around a series of key areas raised in the parish profile, values, goals and ministry responsibilities. Within each area, distinct predetermined questions can be asked, followed by additional questions that flow from the course of the dialogue. The most important areas are those closest to the congregation's core purpose and life-giving values.

On the following page is an example of one area or topic of a structured interview, followed by a series of criteria that were used to rate the candidate's responses. The interview is designed to be chaired by one person who keeps track of time and the overall process, while each area of the interview is led by a different primary interviewer.

He's still not interviewing other people; he's still interviewing himself.

— John Corry

By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.

— Benjamin Franklin

Planning is a process of choosing among those many options.

If we do not choose to plan, then we choose to have others plan for us.

— Richard I. Winwood

Candidate: _____ **Principal Interviewer:** _____

Theme: Motivation for Ministry. What is this candidate passionate about and finds life-giving?

Instructions: *Not all the questions may be necessary, or the candidate's responses may elicit additional follow-up questions for clarification.*

Committee Chairperson: *"I would now like to ask (Principal Interviewer) to lead this section of the interview in which we will explore what you are passionate about and find life-giving?"*

Questions

1. Please take a moment and think back over your entire ministry. Tell us about your most memorable, exciting, and satisfying experience of being in ministry.
What do you really love about being in ministry?
How has what you love about ministry and your sense of vocation changed or grown during the course of your ministry?
2. As you think over the whole of your life, what do you really love to do and find life-giving?
Could you tell us about a time when you got to do that and found it very satisfying.
Without being humble tell us what you really value about yourself?
3. Describe for us a typical week in your current parish.
What do you most like to do in your current parish?
What do you like to do least?
How do you have that area of ministry addressed?
4. We have talked about your successes and what you love about ministry. Now we would like you to tell us about your worst experience of being in ministry. Please tell us of an experience in ministry that you would hope never to repeat again.
What did you learn as a result of the experience?
What have you done differently as a result of the experience? How has that worked?
5. *(Prepare for these questions by reviewing their resume and seeing where they currently are serving and how long they have typically stayed in their employment settings.)*
Why do you want to leave your current parish or ministry situation?
If the person has a history of staying for periods of time shorter than you would prefer you could ask:
We are looking for a rector who will be with us for at least 7 years. Your resume indicates that you typically stay 3 or 4 years in a congregation. Why did you leave those congregations?
What would need to have in a congregation in order for you to stay for 7 years?
6. What interests you and attracts you to coming to serve as our rector?

At the end of the section before moving to another topic the chairperson can conclude the topic.

Committee Chairperson: *"Before we go onto a new topic is there anything you would like to add, or is there something else you would like to know about our parish with regard to this topic?"*

Instructions: Following the interview take time to rate the candidate's responses using the following criteria. Note: Keep the criteria confidential, they are not provided to the candidates.

Theme: Motivation for Ministry: The ideal candidate will be passionate and enthusiastic about ministry in ways that are relevant to the congregation and that they will find life-giving. They are attracted by the opportunity of joining the congregation and using their gifts to help the church fulfill its purpose.

Personal Vision and Passion for Ministry: The ability to enthusiastically sustain a personal ministry of service to God and others.

1	2	3	4	5
Lifeless, apathetic, overburdened. Little energy to sustain ministry. Has energy, but appears preoccupied with self interest rather than service.		Acceptable but not overly inspiring. Honest toiler but lacking enthusiasm.	Strong sense of personal energy. Is enthusiastic about ministry and the opportunity to serve others. Strong vision that has a selfless quality.	

Self-Awareness and Personal Growth: The ability to reflect on all personal experiences, to learn from them and use them as growth opportunities. Negative experiences are a source of learning rather than being unresolved episodes of discouragement.

1	2	3	4	5
No self-awareness or reflection. No indication that person has grown or changed throughout their ministry. Excessively engaged with themselves to the point that they were oblivious of others during the interview. Defensive, blames others for failures.		Some self-awareness and reflection. Growth experiences may not be profound or inspiring.	Is personally open and reflective. Able to use both positive and negative experiences as growth opportunities. Reports significant experiences of personal growth. Examples are inspiring for hearers to become more reflective.	

Relevance to Parish: Candidate's passions and interests are relevant to the needs of the congregation.

1	2	3	4	5
Is motivated for ministry but in areas irrelevant or inappropriate to church. Church would be unable to provide life-giving resources to candidate. Candidate's real interests lie outside of church and would distract their ministry.		Some areas of relevance. Candidate would have to "work" to do some of the essential tasks of church ministry.	Mutual shared interests and passion. This candidate is "one-of-us." Congregation would enthusiastically engage with this candidate. Passions and interests would help congregation fulfil its purpose.	

Motivation to Relocate: Are they escaping a situation or inspired by the opportunities the church offers?

1	2	3	4	5
Escaping a bad situation. Series of short ministries. Blames others for having to move. Says it is God's call without reference to their God-given talents and interests or the needs of the congregation.		Acceptable: Has an appropriate sense of having completed their current ministry, but is not really inspired about coming to the new church.	Not about leaving one place, but about being inspired and excited by opportunities to exercise their gifts in the new church. A sense of God's call that is congruent with their gifts and church's needs.	

Interpersonal Communication: The ability to share personal information and stories in an engaging and inspiring manner that leaves the hearer wanting more. (Note: This criteria can be rated across all of the interview question responses and not just the motivation for ministry question.)

1	2	3	4	5
Boring presentation. Easy to dismiss the person and what they are saying. No eye contact or engagement with listeners. No reciprocity of listening. Grandiose presentation that lacked credibility or engagement with hearers.		Acceptable. Overall average. Some good moments of effective communication but not overly inspiring.	Great engagement, sense of speaker and listener being connected. Mutual enjoyment of each other. Compelling use of language that used hearers perspective to tell their story. Hearers left with a sense of "wow!"	

*You are designing
a journey of
mutual discovery
not an interrogation.*

*All questions need
to be framed from
the perspective of
the candidate's
performance of
job-related tasks.*

Developing Your Interview

Using the example as a guide, develop a structured interview covering different areas of inquiry related to your search criteria. Establish the themes or area of inquiry by referring to the predetermined pastoral responsibilities, ministry skills, personal attributes, goals, and values that were developed in the self-study. About seven interview areas should be sufficient to cover all the necessary areas of ministry responsibility. Within each area list the specific, relevant questions that you would like to ask.

Some Difficult Questions

While many dioceses and denominational authorities perform background checks on the candidates, it is still appropriate to ask the candidates in a face-to-face encounter questions related to possible clergy misconduct, or conduct such as child abuse, or other conduct that is job-related and may place the parish in moral and legal jeopardy if the conduct continued in the parish.

It is neither appropriate nor legal to ask questions of a personal or legal nature that have no relation to the performance of the job. Some appropriate questions are:

- Have you ever been suspended from the ministry or denied a license to minister because of clergy misconduct?
- Have you ever been convicted of a sex crime, such as rape or child abuse?
- Have you ever been convicted of embezzlement?
- If the parish requires the rector to operate a motor vehicle ask:
Are there any current restrictions on your driving license?

It would not be appropriate or legal to ask someone if they were an alcoholic. If alcohol use was a potential concern you could ask:

- Have you ever been late to work or failed to perform your job satisfactorily because of alcohol or drug use?

These questions typically seek a yes/no response. If the answer is a "yes", then the area will need to be explored to determine whether the person's ability to perform their ministry remains impaired.

An alternative to asking these questions in the interview is to include them as a set of conduct questions in the application package, with a request for the candidate to provide background information

and explanation in writing. These will need to be reviewed with the candidate during the interview.

In addition to further exploration with the candidate, an affirmative response to any of these questions would warrant conversation with the bishop to determine if the person has gone through a period of rehabilitation, and to ensure that the candidate has the bishop's support to engage in ministry.

Developing Your Criteria

Once the questions have been developed, your next step is to develop the specific criteria by which the candidates will be assessed. Begin by imaging yourself asking the question and hearing possible responses. Then reflect on these questions:

- What do we want to know by asking these questions?
- What would an excellent response be?
- What would an unacceptable response be?

Establishing the criteria is often an iterative process. We find that field-testing the interview and criteria will lead to further clarification.

A review of the criteria presented in the interview example will show that the interview can also be used to rate criteria that are not directly covered in an interview area. For example, interpersonal communication can be assessed across the entire interview. Other skills that can be assessed across the entire interview include:

- Oral communication skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Decision-making ability and personal judgment
- Ability to care for self and integrate the demands of family, church, and self
- Personal and corporate vision
- Working with staff and volunteers

Converting a Parish Profile into an Interview

On the following page is a complete list of interview topics that could be developed and used by the St. Paul's Middletown congregation featured in the parish profile example.

Keep in mind that the true measure of a man is how he treats someone who can do him absolutely no good.

— Ann Landers

One measure of leadership is the caliber of people who choose to follow you.

— Dennis A. Peer

Pay attention first to those areas that relate to the congregation's core purpose and life-giving values.

St. Paul's parish profile was used to create the following interview topics and possible criteria.

In preparing to meet a specific candidate, review their resume and include specific questions about the candidate's experience in relationship to the specific topics.

1. **Personal Experience and Understanding of God:** The congregation has both traditional and contemporary understandings of God. In the interview we would ask questions about:

The candidate's personal spiritual practice and how they experience God.
How they help people explore and grow in their own experience of God.
How they deal with others who don't share their experience.

Possible Criteria: Compatibility of candidate's spirituality with congregation, and their openness and hospitality to other people's experience, leading people into their own experience of God.

2. **Passion and Interest for Ministry:** The congregation has a passion for outreach and community action. We would use an interview similar to the one provided to explore the candidate's passion and its relevance to the congregation's passion.

Possible Criteria: See the motivation for ministry example. The critical issue is: If the candidate was able to live their passion in our congregation would we be helped in fulfilling our purpose? In addition we need to explore whether being our rector would be life-giving to the candidate.

3. **Preaching and Worship:** This core ministry responsibility would be first assessed as a simulated ministry exercise, which is presented in detail in the next section. In the interview we would follow up and ask about their typical Sunday sermon preparation and their strategies for designing worship.

Possible Criteria: In addition to the assessment of preaching and worship criteria in the next section, criteria could be established to assess how they engage the congregation in designing worship, how they integrate traditional and contemporary aspects of worship.

4. **Leadership Community Organizing and Outreach Ministry:** Here we would create questions to explore the practical ways the candidate has engaged in these activities and their outcomes.

We would also include questions about how they have facilitated community conversation about social justice issues which is derived from the congregation's second goal. This goal would also lend itself to being explored as a simulated ministry exercise, which we will cover in the next section.

Possible Criteria: Candidate's experience and expertise in outreach and community development, their ability to engage others in these ministries. Of critical importance is whether they have engaged in this ministry both personally as an individual and also by creating and leading a group of people to engage in the work.

5. **Leadership Parish Growth:** Moving from pastoral to program-size church is a core goal of the congregation. We would ask questions related to the candidate's experience of growing a church and how they have planned and lead change, including things like resolving resistance and managed conflict.

We would also include a general question about pastoral care of members. This is not a significant expressed interest of the congregation. However, growing from a pastoral to a program-sized church results in a change in how pastoral care is provided and a question about the candidate's experience of conducting weddings and funerals, hospital visiting etc. would be helpful to establish mutual expectations in this area that is typically part of congregational life.

Possible Criteria: Candidate's experience at growing a church, managing change, transforming congregational culture, conflict management, responding to resistance, quality of decisions.

6. **Stewardship, Capital Campaigns, Building Renovation:** Regular stewardship and a capital campaign to fund a building renovation is a core goal for the congregation. Questions would be developed to explore the candidate's experience of creating stewardship programs, capital campaigns and building renovation.

Possible Criteria: Candidate's experience and effectiveness at stewardship and capital campaigns, caring for buildings, creating a shared vision that people will financially support, creating a stewardship team.

7. **Difficult Questions:** If the committee decides to include legal/professional issues questions we would ask them at this time, and not as the last question. In most cases the difficult questions are yes/no and will not take much time. If the response is "yes" to a question such as being convicted of a felony that has a bearing on ministry, it will be important to explore the issue not only with the candidate but also the bishop to determine if they have been or are inhibited from engaging in ministry.

Possible Criteria: Typically we would not create rating criteria for these questions but consider whether the issue continues to be a problem that would limit their ability to minister effectively.

8. **Radical Hospitality:** The congregation is looking for a pastor who loves and leads people of all ages, genders, and sexual orientations in a diverse congregation. They also value their Anglican heritage and the intellectual hospitality of the Episcopal church. In the interview we would explore:

Their experience of leading and teaching a congregation to be a welcoming community and especially to welcome people different from themselves.

What they value about the Episcopal church and how they share that value with others?
Their personal and corporate responses to the current issues facing the Episcopal church.

Possible Criteria: Candidate's ability to not only be personally welcoming but also to lead a congregation to be welcoming, compatibility of values with those of the congregation.

*Practice is the best
of all instructors.
— Publilius Syrus*

*Curiosity, wonder, awe, and
delight are characteristics
of great discoverers.
Enjoy the opportunity to
wonder and discover what
lights this person's fire,
what they have
accomplished,
and what they have learned
along the way.*

*The size of your success
is measured by the
strength of your desire;
the size of your dream;
and how you handle
disappointment along
the way.
— Robert Kiyosaki*

Practice and Field Test Your Interviewing

Once you have created your interview and the criteria, ask to interview your consultant or the transitional member. Modify the questions and criteria to ensure they are helping you discover the information you need to make wise decisions.

If you have specific concerns, decide within which area they belong and have your questions included in the interview. Any question that is critical to your decision making needs to be practiced.

At the Actual Interview

- One person needs to be designated as the chairperson and timekeeper for the entire interview. This person is responsible for ensuring that all the topics are adequately covered.
- Have the committee chairperson introduce the interview topic and the principal interviewer.
- Inform the candidate that, while the interview is structured to ensure that all the important issues are covered, what the committee desires is an open conversation of mutual discovery.
- Use a binder to keep all your questions and notes in order.
- Different members should accept responsibility for introducing a topic and then, with the assistance of others, completely explore the area. Work as a team to let the conversation unfold.
- Take appropriate notes in an unobtrusive manner that will later assist you to reflect on the interview. Focus your notes on recording specific experience and outcomes. If you are the principal interviewer for a topic allow other members to take notes so that you can stay engaged with the candidate.
- Avoid complex questions or asking several questions at one time as the candidate is likely to respond to only part of the question. If you have a two-part question ask the first part and then use the second part as a conversational follow-up.
- Avoid entering into an argument. Accept the candidate's response but do not try to change their mind on a particular issue if you disagree. Once an area is covered allow the conversation to proceed to other areas.
- The chairperson needs to make a deliberate conclusion before beginning a new topic.

Interviewing By Telephone

Developing a telephone interview is very similar to developing a face-to-face interview. Creating a series of questions and setting individual criterion to evaluate the responses is used for the telephone interview as in the face-to-face interview. In general we would only use a telephone interview as a screen to reduce the number of candidates to be interviewed in person. Keep in mind the following if you are conducting a telephone interview:

- Use the same interview for all candidates and interview all the candidates that are on or remain on the list, so that all undergo the same assessment process.
- In a prior communication with the candidate, explain the nature of the call and arrange a mutually agreeable time when the interview call can be made.
- Field test your questions, criteria, and technology.
- Use a speaker phone system so that all members can hear the interview. It will probably be less confusing if only one or two members engage in the interview.
- Don't make it too long. A forty-five minute conversation that covers one or two significant topics should be all that is necessary for a screening interview.
- Consider developing the entire in-person structured interview prior to the telephone interview and use one question, such as a question of motivation for ministry, for the telephone interview.
- Complete the interview training before the telephone interview.
- Field test the telephone interview. Ask if you can interview the interim pastor or a search consultant over the phone.
- Recognize the limitations of a telephone interview. If you are assessing motivation you will not have access to many of the non-verbal cues that reinforces a sense of congruency between what a person says and does.
- Once the interview is concluded, take some time to rate it individually and then come to a group consensus on the ratings using the same principles previously discussed.
- After all the candidates have been interviewed, combine the scores with the scores from the written questions and set a cut-off score as previously discussed.

Field test your technology as well as your procedures. You want to create an opportunity for candidates to present their best and not be compromised by malfunctioning equipment.

If you are using telephone interviews, to assure fairness, all candidates including local candidates who could be interviewed in person need to be interviewed by telephone.

*Many stars cannot
be concealed by a
small cloud.
— Maori Proverb*

*My grandfather once told
me that there were
two kinds of people:
those who do the work and
those who take the credit.
He told me to try to be in
the first group.
There is much
less competition.
— Indira Gandhi*

Rating the Interview

- The same rating and consensus scoring system that was used for rating the written responses is used for rating the interview.
- Information used to rate a particular criterion may be derived from several different questions or, as in the case of criteria such as personal motivation or interpersonal skills, from the entire interview.
- Information for rating the criteria may come from your direct experience of the candidate during the interview and/or may be inferred from the candidate's responses, such as a description of a leadership activity.
- Inferences need to be based on experiences the candidate has presented rather than their theory of how something should be done.
- When rating a specialized skill it is possible that a candidate is not personally equipped to directly provide it. However, they may have the ability to ensure that it is provided within the totality of a parish's ministry.

For example, youth work is a specialized skill that the majority of clergy do not have, or if they do, they often lack the ability to relate effectively to other age groups. What needs to be assessed is the candidate's attitude to youth work and how they ensure that quality youth programs occur in their parishes.

For instance, a candidate who, while not personally effective as a youth worker, hires skilled youth workers, ensures that 10% of the parish budget is spent on youth, and reports that their current parish has a large effective youth program, clearly indicates an excellent attitude toward youth ministry and that they are effective in enabling quality youth work to occur in their parish.

Designing/Assessing a Simulated Work Product

Assessing a simulated work product is one of the most effective and reliable personnel selection procedures currently available²⁸. One of the most common simulated exercises in clergy selection is observing and assessing a candidate's preaching and leading of worship.

Simulations provide the candidates and opportunity to show the search committee what they can actually do. With a little creativity virtually any act of ministry can be used to provide a simulated work product.

Design Real Plays, not Role Plays

The simulation needs to be real and relevant to the congregation's needs and not simply an exercise to "test" the candidates. Remember the simulation is also communicating the nature of your congregation to the candidate. If the simulation involves deception you will be communicating that as a congregation you are not trusting of clergy.

- To be fair to all the candidates, ensure that the exercise is replicable and all are given the same instructions.
- Give adequate information and time for the candidates to prepare. Often this can be done by mailing the information to the candidate when they are invited to the parish.
- Use activities that are commonly done in the parish and as the parish does them. For example, if the parish's normal style of worship is a Eucharist, have the candidates celebrate a Eucharist, don't have them lead an Evensong service.
- For a simulation that includes search committee members as participants, use the same people in the same roles for each candidate. For example, if you were simulating a counseling session, use the same person and the same problem for all candidates, but allow the conversation to flow. Use a realistic scenario. Don't prompt the candidate for the "right" answer.
- When using search committee members as part of the simulation have them "be themselves." This is a time to be real in order to get real answers. If you deceive the candidate you are likely to get deceptive answers and ruin your individual and/or corporate credibility with the candidate.
- Develop the criteria. Individual criterion are developed in the same manner as they were for the written responses. Break the

*To be fair
to all the candidates ensure
that all aspects
of the search
are replicable
and all candidates are
given the
same instructions.*

*We cannot
hold a torch to light
another's path
without brightening
our own.*

— Ben Sweetland

*Only rate behaviors
that you can observe.
You cannot rate
interpretations of behavior.*

*Most clergy can
talk the talk,
but can they
walk the talk?*

*Tell me and I'll forget;
show me and
I may remember;
involve me and
I'll understand.
— Chinese Proverb*

activity into its component parts and the necessary discrete skills. Develop criteria to evaluate each discrete skill.

For example, preaching is a complex skill made up of many discrete skills. At the end of this section we have broken the complex task of preaching into its individual component skills. The same can be done for any other ministry activity.

- You can only rate behaviors that you can observe. It is impossible to rate a candidate's intention or attitude. Focus the criteria on observable behaviors.

For example, "the candidate was caring" is an abstraction or conclusion based on the interpretation of a behavior, and not simply a behavior itself. When creating criteria, focus attention on the underlying observable behaviors. If we were assessing caring, we would focus on the behaviors such as listening, attention, body posture, tone of voice, the suggestions they offer, and the outcome of the interaction. Was it helpful to the person being cared for?

- Field-test the exercise and the rating criteria. For example, ask the transitional minister if you can rate one of their Sunday sermons and celebrations, or visit a neighboring congregation. Rework the exercise and edit the criteria as necessary.

Examples of Simulations

- The parish profile example congregation, St. Paul's Middletown, wants to position themselves as a center for community dialogue on social issues.

Instead of talking about this goal the search committee asks the candidate to lead them in an hour-long conversation on how to respond to a particular social issue.

Criteria can be created to not only assess the candidate's ideas but their ability to lead a community dialogue and interpersonal skill.

- A congregation who requires their rector to be bilingual has the candidates conduct a Bible study in the first and then second language with representative groups of the two cultures.

If the participants are not all members of the search committee, choose participants who can maintain confidentiality. The observers may or may not be participants in the simulation but do need to be conversant in the language being used.

- A congregation with a large financial deficit has the candidates lead a stewardship Bible study with the search committee.
- A congregation hiring an associate pastor, who will spend significant time ministering as a hospital chaplain, observes each candidate conduct several patient visits. This real play requires that permission be obtained from the hospital and patients.
To respect the dignity of the patient-pastor relationship, have only two people rather than the entire search committee observe the hospital visit. With well-developed criteria and trained observers the rest of the search committee will be able to trust their findings.
- A congregation heavily divided and losing members over a hot political issue has each candidate compose a letter in response to a letter from an irate parishioner. An actual complaint letter can be used with personal identifiers removed.

When the search committee is also doing the discernment phase of the search process and presenting one finalist to the vestry, it may be helpful to use the Simulated Vestry Retreat exercise from the discernment process.

Possible Preaching Simulations

As previously noted, having the candidates preach is probably the most common simulation used in the clergy search process. If you want to call a preacher it is essential to hear the person preach. How they prepare their sermons, and their theology of homiletics, is largely irrelevant in knowing whether their preaching will be life-giving to your congregation. Personally observe the person preaching to determine their competence. Having discovered that they are competent preachers, discovering what resources they need to preach competently is important. These resources may be time, solitude during the week, study, continuing education, secretarial services, etc. but they are follow-up factors that need to be considered, not the essential factors.

Note: There is a big difference between a written sermon and a preached sermon. Preaching is largely an exercise in oratory, not in writing. A well-written sermon that is poorly preached is virtually useless in the life of a congregation. To assess preaching, assess a real-time delivered sermon, not a written copy. Even a tape recording is limited in that it doesn't account for the non-verbal cues that make up a substantial part of a typical Sunday sermon.

You can observe a lot just by watching.

— Yogi Berra

If you want to call a preacher it is essential to see and hear the person preach.

Don't read their sermons or listen to a sermon on a tape unless you want to hire someone to write a book of sermons or perform radio broadcasts.

Preaching is first and foremost oratory and not writing.

How they prepare their sermons, and their theology of homiletics is largely irrelevant in knowing whether their preaching will be life-giving to your congregation.

To ensure fairness when assessing preaching every candidate should be assessed on sermons from the same readings and set of instructions.

Rate the sermon as soon as the preaching and worship exercise are completed, while the experience is fresh in your memory.

Within the Episcopal tradition, candidates do not preach to the entire congregation. The following scenarios use the search committee as simulated congregations. In a few instances it may be important to invite specific observers to also participate. For example, if you were assessing a candidate's ability to preach in a second language, you would need observers who spoke that language to participate. In this case explain the issue of confidentiality and choose people who can maintain the confidentiality.

- To ensure fairness every candidate should be assessed on sermons from the same readings and set of instructions.

Give the candidates the same lessons or theme to preach from. Provide instructions in advance so that the candidates know explicitly what is expected and so they can adequately prepare.

- As an alternative to a "Sunday sermon" have the candidates preach a focused sermon. Consider what kinds of preaching are valued by the congregation. Choose a topic that speaks to the needs of your congregation. Here are some possibilities:

A current political issue.

Stewardship or pledge drive sermon

A funeral homily. Provide a brief, realistic funeral scenario that candidates could potentially be called on to preach.

A children's sermon. Invite several young children to come and listen to the sermon and assess the candidates' sermon and their interaction with the children.

A large church or cathedral may choose a sermon that the rector or dean may preach at a civic occasion.

- The parish profile example congregation, St. Paul's Middletown could ask each candidate to preach a sermon to motivate community action and outreach using Matthew 25:31-46.

Creating the Sermon Rating Criteria

On the following pages are the rating criteria for a typical Sunday sermon. The criteria are provided as they are almost universally known, having been the substance of many homiletics classes. No amount of reading the criteria will make a bad preacher into a good one!

If you have chosen to use a specific focused sermon such as a funeral homily to assess pastoral sensitivity, you will need to create several additional criteria to assess the specific skills.

Candidate: _____

Instructions: Use the following pages as a workbook for your assessment and rating of the sermon and celebration. Either unobtrusively during the service or immediately following the service make brief notes or circle appropriate items in the criteria boxes. Following the service it would be appropriate to have the candidate taken on a tour of the property or schedule a similar activity that will allow the search committee members time to make their individual assessment.

Be aware of your overall impression. As you rate the individual criteria do not allow your overall impression to color the individual scores. Use the scoring sheet to record your rating. Circle the score and transfer it to the score sheet. Use the consensus scoring rules to achieve committee scores.

Sermon Assessment

1. Audibility. Are you able to clearly hear the preacher.

1	2	3	4	5
Too quiet, inaudible, mumbling, trailing off sentence endings. Too loud, yelling.		Audible but affected accent/tone that detracts. Mixture of adequate with some poor quality. Acceptable but not inspiring.		Consistency of audibility with appropriate inflection. Easy to listen to.

2. Non-verbal Communication: Posture, hand gestures, and eye contact.

1	2	3	4	5
Posture stiff and distracting. No hand gestures, Detractive hand gestures. No eye contact with listeners. Stares at just one person.		Acceptable, some inconsistency. No distractive gestures but minimal positive gestures. Relaxed posture but no eye contact.		Appears relaxed and comfortable. Hand gestures emphasized point. Relaxed eye contact with most listeners.

3. Preaching Style: Ability to establish rapport with listeners.

1	2	3	4	5
Reads script verbatim. Doesn't use script but rambles. Minimal rapport with congregation. "Loses" congregation.		Acceptable but not captivating.		Script does not interfere with rapport. Effective extemporaneous style. Consistent "contact" with congregation.

4. Organization of Presentation: Note: this is largely independent of content and appropriateness of presentation. Is there a clear opening, middle and conclusion without inappropriate repetition, distraction, and/or discordance? Is it neither too short nor too long?

1	2	3	4	5
Rambling, repetitive, needless digressions. Abrupt transitions and conclusions. Too long, too short.		Acceptable, has opening, middle and conclusion. Generally good but requires some energy to follow and sustain attention.		Creative but not excessive use of discord. Presentation easy to follow, coherent with smooth transitions. Good length, (Note: a good sermon may seem short.)

Candidate: _____

5. Content of Sermon: The sermon is based on the readings provided. Balance between academic and personal perspectives, use of humor, and extra Biblical stories.

1	2	3	4	5
Minimal relation to readings of the day. Entirely academic with minimal personal relevance. Preacher gets lost in own personal material.		Acceptable but imbalance may detract from overall presentation.		Readings of day well integrated into presentation that balances academic and personal perspectives. Use of humor and other stories enhances presentation.

6. Appropriateness of Content: Sermon appropriate and relevant to the congregation gathered.

1	2	3	4	5
Content entirely inappropriate for Sunday service. Content not within general teaching of Church.		Content appropriate and relevant for Sunday Service.		Sermon integrated with rest of service. While very appropriate for Sunday service, preacher has adapted the sermon to be relevant to search committee.

7. Creativity and Imagination: The ability to present information in novel and persuasive ways.

1	2	3	4	5
Sermon lacking any originality creativity or imagination. Boring. Excessively creative that detracts from message or loses the hearer.		Acceptable, "solid". Presentation was not boring but showed only minimal originality. Preaching reaffirms what hearer already knows without opening possibilities to new understanding.		Presentation and content contains degree of creativity that captivates the imagination of the hearer. "Hearing the old message in a new way."

8. Energy and Enthusiasm: The ability to appropriately modulate joy when preaching.

1	2	3	4	5
Presentation lifeless. Excessive energy, hyper or manic in ways that distracted. Energy incongruent with content.		Acceptable. Enthusiasm generally appropriate but constant throughout the sermon. Enthusiasm varied but sometimes without congruence to the content.		Lively and engaging. Effective use of well modulated emotion that is congruent to the content and engages the hearer.

9. Authenticity of Preaching: A global assessment of the believability or congruency between what the preacher says, how they say it, and the manner in which they live or embody the message.

1	2	3	4	5
Phoney. Affected pronunciation. Speaking down to congregation. No indication that preacher lives or believes their own message. Preacher appears personally uninspired.		Acceptable, but not inspiring. Presentation may appear genuine but without indication that the Gospel is really a life-giving reality in the person's life.		Preacher embodies the message. Congruency between message, manner of presentation and personal references. Preacher expresses the personal life-giving relevance for living the Gospel.

Assessing Worship Leadership

The same process that was used to assess a sermon can be used to assess the candidate's ability to lead worship. When requesting a candidate to lead worship, describe the type of service you want them to lead and what resources are available, i.e. lay readers, acolytes, prayerbooks, etc. On the following pages are two different sets of criteria developed for two congregations who had very different needs and understandings of worship.

Creating Your Church's Worship Criteria

To create the criteria for assessing the worship, spend some time as a committee reflecting on:

- The purpose and outcome of worship.
- Memorable experiences of worship in your congregation.
What made the worship memorable and effective?

Think of the entire worship experience as a diamond that lets light shine. A diamond is comprised of many facets that each impact the transmission of light. Separate the worship experience into its facets or component behaviors that are important to your congregation and that you can observe and rate. Some possibilities might include:

- Interaction with other worship leaders, such as acolytes, in ways that express a shared, loving community gathered in prayer.
- Prayerfulness. Note this is an abstraction that is interpreted from observing behaviors such as the pace of the prayers, the tone of the voice, and the person's posture.
- Engagement with the congregation.
- The ritual acts of celebrating Eucharist.

Using the following examples as guides create your own criteria for assessing a candidate's ability to lead worship. Because the examples were developed for specific congregations they may be entirely inappropriate in your church, but they can serve as models for you.

As you develop your criteria ask yourself whether the assessment context will allow the desired behavior to be assessed. For example, if the candidates will be celebrating in your church with just the search committee present, it may be unrealistic to assess the celebrant's welcome to the community. Once you create your criteria, field-test them in a neighboring church.

*People are like
stained-glass windows.
They sparkle and shine
when the sun is out,
but when the
darkness sets in,
their true beauty is
revealed only
if there is a
light from within.*

— Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

*Always rate a
candidate's performance
with respect to
the pre-set criteria
and not in comparison
to other candidates*

Candidate: _____

Instructions: The following criteria were developed for an Anglo-Catholic (AC) congregation that required significant amounts of chanting by the Celebrant during the service. Lay Eucharistic Ministry and Acolyte duties were provided by Search Committee members. Rate the celebration as soon as the worship service is completed while the experience is still clear and present in your memory.

Take stock of your global impression. Is your overall impression positive or negative? Now set that impression aside and rate the individual criteria. Remember that the ratings are being made with respect to the pre-determined criteria and not in comparison to other candidates that you may have already observed.

1. Interaction with Lay Eucharistic Minister and Acolyte:

1	2	3	4	5
Does not seek advice or make requests. Argumentative. Dogmatic. Ignores during service.		Acceptable. Some positive interaction.	Mutual exchange of information prior to service. Smoothly interacts during service. Recovers graciously from "glitches".	

2. Prayerfulness:

1	2	3	4	5
Spoken parts of service are raced through. Inaudible. Affected accent/tone when praying.		Acceptable. Deliberate but not joyful. Joyful but not attentive.	Prayers are spoken attentively, deliberately, smoothly, joyfully.	

3. Chanting:

1	2	3	4	5
Unable to maintain chant. Inaudible. Chanting distracts rather than enhances.		Acceptable. Minor errors.	Maintains chant well. Chant enhances worship.	

4. Ceremonial:

1	2	3	4	5
Minimal AC ceremonial. Overly dramatic that distracts. Fussy.		Acceptable but not inspiring.	AC ceremonial that is well integrated into spoken and chanted parts of service.	

5. Interaction with Congregation:

1	2	3	4	5
No appropriate eye contact with congregation. Cuts off congregations prayers. "Drowns" out congregation. Oblivious to congregation.		Acceptable but not really engaging.	Strong sense of priest and congregation worshipping together.	

Candidate: _____

Instructions: The following criteria were developed for a small congregation who were going to visit candidates in their own congregation. The search committee's primary concern was that the church had a strong sense of being a welcoming, supportive, community gathered together to worship God and care for one another.

1. Welcome: The people were welcomed and invited to engage in the worship service.

1	2	3	4	5
No recognition of congregation's presence. Welcome overdone to the point it felt disingenuous.		Acceptable: Celebrant engaged with parishioners. Welcome may very good but conducted in the middle of the service after the people had been together for considerable period of time.		Celebrant extended a warm welcome to those gathered at the beginning of the service. People welcomed into the community gathered at God's Table

2. Announcements: The announcements were used to invite people into and build community.

1	2	3	4	5
Announcements were rambling, poorly prepared, and disorganized.		Acceptable: Announcements gave relevant information about coming events.		Announcements used to succinctly share part of the community story and to invite and engage people to participate in coming events.

3. Intercessions: The intercessions were relevant to the gathered community

1	2	3	4	5
Intercessions were unrelated to specific needs of the gathered community. Intercessions had no relationship to the rest of the service.		Acceptable balance of praying for congregation, local community and worldwide needs.		Intercessions connected thematically to rest of service and expressed community's local and worldwide concerns.

4. Engagement: Celebrant and congregation connect with each other during the worship.

1	2	3	4	5
Celebrant not connected. Looks of rebuke or admonishment between celebrant and assistants.		Acceptable but not inspiring: Adequate rapport between celebrant and congregation.		Excellent rapport throughout the service. Good eye contact, smiles of recognition. Mutual enjoyment of each others presence.

5. Transcendence: Celebrant and congregation connect with God during the worship.

1	2	3	4	5
No awareness that the community is gathered to worship God. Excessive fellowship distracts from worship. Feels like a "Rotary" meeting not a church service.		Clear, but not inspiring sense, of being in a worship service.		Strong sense of community gathered to prayerfully worship God. Good pacing, moments of holy silence. Celebrant and community use their interpersonal connection as a spring board to transpersonal awareness.

Practice your visitation skills by visiting a neighboring parish as a group. Compare your findings to develop a consistent pattern of discovery, so that each candidate will be assessed according to the same criteria.

You can't tell a Christian by their name or the color of their skin. Hopefully you can tell one by their actions.

Other Worship Scenarios

The parish profile example congregation, St. Paul's Middletown, values innovative forms of worship. When the candidates visit they could be invited to celebrate the Eucharist using a liturgy that they have developed for a special occasion. Criteria can be developed to assess the creativity and the blend of traditional and contemporary liturgical forms.

When Visiting a Candidate in Their Own Parish

Most of the information provided on rating, developing and assessing a structured interview, assessing a sermon, and celebration is applicable when visiting a candidate in their parish. In addition, an observation checklist containing items such as general maintenance of the buildings, candidate's interaction with parishioners, timeliness of services, service bulletins, etc., can be prepared. Use the following guidelines when visiting a candidate in their own parish:

- Prepare well in advance and practice so that visiting teams will be using and understand the same assessment standards.

One of the goals is to provide consistent assessment so that other team members can trust the information that a small group is bringing to the committee as a whole.

- Prepare a structured interview and observation checklist with criteria which can be used at each candidate's parish.

Prepare for the visit by practicing interview and observation skills. As a group, visit a neighboring parish and then complete the observation checklist to ensure everyone understands what and how criteria are being assessed.

- Always obtain pre-approval from the candidate for the visit and contact with any parishioners.
- Have at least two people visit a candidate.
- Bear in mind when visiting a rector that much of the parish will reflect aspects of their ministry. In contrast, little of the parish may reflect the ministry of an associate.
- Develop a structured interview with criteria, and schedule time during the visit to interview the candidate. Be flexible. Be prepared to include questions that relate to your observation of the parish. For example, if the place is a mess, determine the candidate's

attitude toward the mess and what resources would need to be found to make the place tidy.

- If the candidate allows, schedule an interview with a parishioner such as the senior warden. Develop a structured interview with criteria for the interview.
- Develop criteria for assessing the candidate's interaction with parishioners.
- Develop criteria for assessing the sermon and the celebration.
- While at the church be inconspicuous. Do not sit through the service taking notes. Politely ignore any public welcome of newcomers or visitors. If anyone asks, you are just visiting for the day.
- After the service retire to your motel and individually rate and then come to a consensus score for the sermon, celebration, and the candidate's interaction with the parishioners.
- Rate the interviews.
- Combine all the scores to achieve a total score for the visit.
- Based on your observation and the scores, determine if the candidate should be kept in consideration or dropped from further consideration.

Concluding the Visitations

As soon as convenient after a visit, present your findings to the committee as whole. After all the visitations have been completed, gather as committee to review the complete list of applicants.

- If the visitations were a screening device to consider who to invite to the parish, develop cut-off scores and determine which of the candidates will be invited to the parish.
- If the visitation was a confirmation exercise to validate information gathered in the assessment, determine whether to keep the candidate on the short list or whether to drop them from further consideration.
- Inform all candidates of their status in the search process and what the next steps will be.

*While at the church
be inconspicuous.*

*Do not sit through the
service taking notes.*

*Politely ignore any public
welcome of newcomers or
visitors. If anyone asks,
you are just
visiting for the day.*

*Show me your hands.
Do they have scars
from giving?*

*Show me your feet.
Are they wounded
in service?*

*Show me your heart.
Have you left a place for
divine love?*

— Fulton J. Sheen

Reference checks are notoriously unreliable in predicting future performance. However, they are an important way to validate the veracity of your assessment findings.

Concluding the Assessment Process

Once all the candidates have been assessed, the committee will need to schedule a meeting to review all the candidates' results.

- Rank order them from the ratings. Remember that this done with respect to the criteria and not simply by comparing one candidate with another.
- Determine which candidates have consistently scored in the above-average range.
- Are there any natural breaks in the scoring? Often there will be series of groupings where candidates are grouped around "consistently above average," "average," and "consistently poor."

Where possible, use the natural groupings to determine who to continue with and who to drop from the process. There is little significant difference between candidates who score within a few points of each other.

- Check references. Because research has shown references to be notoriously unreliable, and to reduce time and costs, check references only on those candidates that are being considered as the finalists who will be given to the vestry as qualified candidates.

Recommendations should be used to validate your assessment and not to establish completely new information about a candidate's skill or ability.

Checking References

Research has shown that of all the personnel selection procedures, reference checking is the least reliable means of predicting future performance²⁹. Many employers, including churches, have been led astray by glowing references only to later discover that the reference was given by a biased colleague or dubiously given to an employee as part of a termination deal.

Good general references may also be inaccurate when used to predict future performance in a new ministry. For example, many parishes have called accomplished and successful associate clergy only to find they were incapable of performing the administrative and leadership duties of a rector.

Do not assume the person is competent to perform the job in your specific parish because the diocese or denominational authorities have forwarded the candidate's name to you. Many dioceses perform background checks on clergy seeking to move to their diocese; however, these checks usually only screen for gross negligence or misconduct. These checks are extremely important, but they do not assess a candidate's specific ministry skills or abilities as they relate to your congregation's needs.

Why Conduct a Reference Check?

Despite the limitations and susceptibility to providing misleading information, there are several reasons to conduct reference checks. There are also ways to improve the reliability of the information from the reference check. Reasons for conducting the due diligence of a reference check include:

- Ensuring that the candidate has been honest with their presentation and the information they have provided. While the reference check may not accurately predict future behavior, the reference check will screen for gross dishonesty and misrepresentation.
- Validating and corroborating the candidate's presentation, especially with regard to the outcomes of their ministry. Have they actually achieved what they said they have achieved?

As a validating process we would only check references on topics that have already been discussed with or assessed with the candidate directly. References should be used to confirm your knowledge base of a candidate, not create a new knowledge base. For example, if one of the search criteria is for a bilingual rector

*How many legs
does a dog have
if you call the tail a leg?
Four. Calling a tail a leg
doesn't make it a leg.
— Abraham Lincoln*

*Reference checking
should be used to
confirm or reject your
knowledge base of a
candidate and
not create a new
knowledge base.*

*The hero is one who
kindles a great light
in the world, who sets up
blazing torches in the
dark streets of life
for men to see by.
The saint is the man who
walks through the dark
paths of the world,
himself a light.*
— Felix Adler

*Unsolicited written
references that are
unrelated to the specific
issues of your parish are of
very limited value and may
be a distraction from your
real concerns.*

in a multi-cultural parish, we would not ask a reference whether the candidate can speak another language, because we would already have conducted a portion of their interview or observed them interacting with a group, such as leading a Bible study in the second language. We would use the reference to confirm the outcome of their multi-cultural ministry in their current or previous positions.

- Satisfying search committee members' objections to the candidate being retained or released from the search process. In the course of the interviews and assessment process, specific questions about a candidate will arise and need to be answered before a decision can be made whether to recommend the candidate for the discernment phase of the search process.

When to Conduct the Reference Check?

Reference checking should be done at the end of the assessment process. By their nature, they break the confidentiality of the search process, and this step should be taken only with the finalists to minimize the potential disruption in the other candidate's lives and ministry. Since references are used to corroborate or validate information, they need to be done after the assessment phase has been completed.

Three Critical Elements of Reference Checking

- Selecting the right people to interview.
- Using a structured interview process rather than an informal discussion of a candidate's performance.
- Selecting the right person(s) to conduct the reference check.

Seeking References

When selecting people to provide references it is especially important to ascertain the reference's personal experience of the candidate's actual ministry. For example, unsolicited written references that are unrelated to the specific issues of your parish are of very limited value and may be a distraction from your real concerns.

Many clergy work individually in congregations and their ministry is seldomly observed by other clergy. For example, in your search criteria you may have decided that exemplary preaching is a primary skill required of your rector. If you ask a fellow priest in a neighboring parish or their bishop for a reference for the candidate in question the

probability is high that the priest or Bishop has never or rarely heard the candidate preach and consequently they cannot accurately provide a valid reference for their preaching. For this reason references need to be targeted to specific behaviors observed by the reference.

Obtain a written list of references from the candidate. In the information sent to the candidate prior to the search committee assessment process, include a form for the candidate to provide the following reference information:

- Ask the candidate to provide the names of three individuals from their current parish who have observed or engaged with them in areas that are covered in the search criteria. Include at least one member of the vestry; the chairperson of a significant parish organization or ministry; and, if the candidate is an assistant or associate, their supervising rector.
- Additionally, ask the candidate to provide references from former parishes or places of employment. Also ask for at least one reference from a fellow clergyperson who is familiar with their ministry.
- Include a waiver for the candidate to sign which acknowledges your right to contact references and allows the reference to speak openly and honestly about the candidate.
- Inform the candidate that references will not be checked until after the search committee assessment process and only if the candidate remains under consideration.

Other people that can provide references:

- If a member of the search committee knows a parishioner in the candidate's parish and can trust that person's judgement, then seek to interview the parishioner after you have notified the candidate.
- Diocesan or denominational personnel such as the deployment officer for a candidate's diocese may not have first-hand experience of a candidate's ministry, but they are likely to know about a candidate's involvement in diocesan activities. They are also likely to know whether complaints regarding performance, or the merits of any complaints, have been made to the bishop.
- The rectors of a candidate's neighboring parishes may be able to provide a peer evaluation.

The most serious mistakes are not being made as a result of wrong answers. The truly dangerous thing is asking the wrong question.
— Peter Drucker

A true leader has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He does not set out to be a leader, but becomes one by the quality of his actions and the integrity of his intent.
— Mike Jones

Be aware of potential biases and prejudices that may have arisen during the course of the search committee assessment and their impact on the reference checking.

Most important leaders can conceive and articulate goals that lift people out of their petty preoccupations and unite them in pursuit of objectives worthy of their best efforts.

— John Gardner

Choosing the Reference Checkers

The characteristics of a successful reference checker include the ability to probe a reference's responses in order to obtain the most complete information possible, and to be able to do this without a reference feeling interrogated or their integrity challenged.

- Before checking the references the search committee will need to determine the information they would like clarified or verified for each candidate.
- Be aware of potential biases and prejudices that may have arisen during the course of the search committee assessment and their impact on the reference checking.

For example, references for a candidate who has performed well throughout the assessment may be casually sought and crucial information ignored. At the same time, a less favorable candidate may be subjected to more scrutiny and biased inferences derived from a reference's comments.

- To reduce the potential for bias and to spread the workload, ask several members to check references rather than relying on one person to check all the references.

Structuring the Reference Interview

Treat reference checking like a structured telephone interview. To structure the reference interview, the search committee needs to identify key ministry areas and related questions that directly assess the candidate's fit with the needs of the parish.

Interviews will also need to include a section specific to each candidate that verifies the work history and information they provided during their interview with the search committee. While very similar to the method used to develop the structured interview, some of the questions can be focused "yes/no" questions to confirm information.

The Structured Reference Interview

The following is a basic outline for creating a reference interview. This will need to be modified depending on the specific person who is providing the reference, the nature of their experience of the candidate, and the specific reference questions that have arisen from the candidate assessment process.

- **Set the Context**

Begin the reference checking interview with an explanation of who you are, what your role is, and that you have obtained permission from the candidate to contact the person as a reference. Assure the reference of the confidentiality of their comments. Also mention that they are one of many references that the search committee will be contacting, in order to ease any reluctance the reference might have if they disclose negative information.

- **Clarify the Nature of the Candidate/Reference Relationship**

Ask the reference how long they have known the candidate and the nature of their relationship.

- **Best Experience of the Candidate's Ministry**

Start the reference interview with a global appreciative question: "Tell us about your best experience of (name's) ministry." This will set the tone for the interview. It will also provide valuable information about the nature of the person's relationship with the candidate and whether they are really in a position to provide pertinent reference information. The best experience will also provide insight into the candidate's core strengths.

- **Specific Topics**

From the search criteria develop specific questions related to the congregation's key needs.

Determine whether the reference has personal knowledge of the specific activity. For example, if you desire to know about a candidate's preaching, the first question needs to be "Have you heard (name) preach?"

Follow-up questions might include:

What has been your best experience of (name's) preaching?

What did the sermon inspire you to do?

Have you ever invited someone to hear (name) preach?

Would you call (name) again as a rector because of their preaching?

What are the areas (name) needs to improve their preaching to make it more valuable?

I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.

— Helen Keller

Pity the leader caught between unloving critics and uncritical lovers.

— John Gardner

*When leaders
take back power,
when they act as
heroes and saviors,
they end up exhausted,
overwhelmed, and
deeply stressed.*

— Margaret J. Wheatley

*The ultimate measure of a
man is not where he stands
in moments of comfort and
convenience,
but where he stands
at times of
challenge and controversy.*

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

- **Ministry Development Questions**

During the interviews or assessment exercises you may have identified weaknesses, areas for improvement, or areas in which you have identified a potential mismatch between the candidate and the congregation's needs. It is appropriate to ask a reference questions which will help the search committee determine whether these weakness are relevant to helping your church achieve its goals.

Questions regarding the candidate's areas for improvement can be framed similarly to exploring their strengths. Even if an area is a weakness, we need to know what their best is in the area and not if it can be improved.

For example, if team leadership is an important skill defined in the search criteria and a possible weakness in a candidate's leadership was detected in the assessment, a series of reference questions could be created to clarify your concerns:

Have you ever served on a committee or team when (name) was the leader?

What was most memorable about their leadership?

What did they lead you and the team to achieve?

Was it successful?

How were the people on the team treated?

What are (name's) leadership strengths?

What are their leadership weaknesses and development needs?

Would you serve on a team under their leadership again?

If no, follow-up with:

What would (name) need to do or develop in order for you to be willing to serve with them again?

- **Forced-Choice Possibilities**

To move from general statements in which everything about a candidate is great, use forced-choice questions.

These questions would typically be framed in the following manner: Is (name) stronger in administrative tasks or visiting parishioners in the hospital?

A follow-up question to their response might be:

Why do you say that (name) is stronger in administration than hospital visitation?

or

Could you provide me with an example when (name) did a particularly good job in this area?

- **Due-Diligence Question**

This question simply needs to be asked to cover the possibility of gross misconduct.

To your knowledge, has (name) ever been charged with misconduct or questionable ethical behaviors, or ever been inhibited from their ministry?

If the answer is “yes,” then the issue needs to be fully explored. Since this is a question that should have been raised with the candidate, additional inquiry is going to be needed to discover why it wasn’t raised with the candidate in person. Was the question omitted from the candidate interview, or was it answered falsely? In these situations it would also be important to talk with the bishop or diocesan representatives to clarify the candidate’s standing and the circumstances around the charges. If the candidate has been through a process of rehabilitation it is important to ensure transparency rather than creating secrets that prevent the development of trusting relationships.

- **Re-Hiring Questions**

Toward the end of the interview, ask the reference to reflect back on the candidate’s performance and, in light of that performance, consider whether they would hire or call them again to that position.

Would you, if you were responsible for hiring a rector, recommend that (name) be rehired?

Do you think (name) would be rehired by the parish, without reservation, with some reservation, or absolutely not? And if not, why not?

- **Concluding Question**

Is there anything else that we haven’t talked about or considered that we as a search committee need to know about (name) in order to make the best possible decision?

Humans are ambitious and rational and proud. And we don’t fall in line with people who don’t respect us and who we don’t believe have our best interests at heart. We are willing to follow leaders, but only to the extent that we believe they call on our best, not our worst.

— Rachel Maddow

Servant Leadership

Do those being served grow as persons? Do they, while being served become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society, will they benefit, or, at least not be further deprived.

— Robert Greenleaf

The most dangerous leadership myth is that leaders are born – that there is a genetic factor to leadership.

This myth asserts that people simply either have certain charismatic qualities or not.

That's nonsense; in fact, the opposite is true.

Leaders are made rather than born.

— Warren Bennis

Remember that sustained, competent, preaching of the Gospel will alienate some members and has caused more than one crucifixion.

- **Modifying the Interview**

When seeking a reference from a neighboring clergy colleague, ascertain the reference's knowledge of the candidate and their ministry. It is quite common for neighboring clergy to have considerable social knowledge of each other but relatively limited specific information of their actual ministries.

If the reference is unfamiliar with the candidate, ask them to provide you with the name of a clergy colleague who is more familiar with the candidate's ministry.

Ask if parishioners have moved membership from the candidate's parish to the reference's parish. If yes, inquire as to the circumstances of any change of membership. Remember that sustained, competent preaching of the Gospel will alienate some members and has caused more than one crucifixion. On the other hand, when large numbers of parishioners leave because of rudeness or incompetence, the search committee needs to know this.

- **Concluding the Reference Check**

Following the interview, consider the additional information you have obtained.

Is the information the result of a very biased or prejudiced reference or an accurate depiction of the candidate's performance?

Was the information balanced, expressing both the candidate's strengths and weaknesses?

Was the reference highly biased, either positively or negatively?

Was the information received from the reference check what you expected?

Does the reference check confirm or question what you discovered in the assessment process?

Do you need to find additional references to clarify unresolved questions?

After the Reference Checks are Completed

- If the reference checks verify the information previously gathered and the search committee agrees that the candidate meets the requirements for the job, then the candidate can be forwarded to the vestry and/or the discernment phase.
- If significant information has been discovered that would make a candidate questionable, widen the reference checking to seek verification and clarification.

If a persistent pattern of poor performance is found, do not consider the candidate any further. This may necessitate seeking references on the next candidate on the assessment list in order to present to the vestry their required number of candidates.

- If the reference checks reveal that a candidate has significant personal problems, it is probably unwise and unloving to submit their names to the vestry for consideration.

While the church needs to be a healing community and provide compassion for its leaders, calling a person as rector who has significant personal problems is not an act of loving compassion. It is likely to be unhelpful both to the clergyperson and to the parish. It would be more beneficial for the candidate to take a leave of absence from ministry or to work in an associate position while resolving their problems before taking on the responsibility of establishing a new ministry in a new parish.

On the following page is an example of a Reference Telephone Interview that you can use as a guide to create your church's reference check.

While the church needs to be a healing community and provide compassion for its leaders, calling a person as rector who has significant personal problems is not an act of loving compassion. It is likely to be unhelpful both to the clergyperson and to the parish.

Candidate: _____ **Interviewer:** _____

Reference Provided By: _____

How long have you known the candidate?

Please describe how you know the candidate.

As you think about their ministry, what has been your best experience of their ministry?
What did they do and what was the outcome?

What do you think is the core essence of their ministry?

What do you think are their greatest strengths?

What do you think are their weaknesses or areas they need to improve to make their ministry more valuable?

To your knowledge, has the candidate ever been charged with misconduct, ethical violations, or been inhibited from ministry?

Specific Questions Related to the Congregation's Search Criteria:

Criteria 1: Have you ever observed or participated with the candidate in _____?
What did the candidate do and what was the outcome?

Criteria 2: Have you ever observed or participated with the candidate in _____?
What did the candidate do and what was the outcome?

Criteria 3: Have you ever observed or participated with the candidate in _____?
What did the candidate do and what was the outcome?

Criteria 4: Have you ever observed or participated with the candidate in _____?
What did the candidate do and what was the outcome?

Candidate: _____ Interviewer: _____

Reference Provided By: _____

Interpersonal Functioning Questions *(If not covered in the search criteria section.)*

What is the candidate like to work for? Would you want the candidate as your supervisor?

How does the candidate deal with their frustration and anger?

How does the candidate mend or heal broken relationships?

Candidate Specific Questions *(These questions are developed to explore any candidate specific issues that may have arisen during the as a result of the interviews and assessment process.)*

Candidate Specific Questions 1:

Candidate Specific Questions 2:

Candidate Specific Questions 3:

If you were responsible for calling a rector, would you recommend that the candidate be called? Why?

Do you think the candidate would be rehired by their current parish, without reservation, with some reservation, or absolutely not? And if not, why not?

Is there anything else that we haven't talked about or considered that we as a Search Committee need to know about the candidate to make the best possible decision?

Only forward the names of competent candidates for discernment.

Do not include a poor performer just to make up the numbers.

If you need more candidates, start again.

South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu walked by a construction site on a temporary sidewalk the width of one person.

A white man appeared at the other end, recognized Tutu, and said,

"I don't make way for gorillas."

At which Tutu stepped aside, made a deep sweeping gesture, and said, "Ah, yes, but I do."

— Walter Wink

Concluding the Assessment of Skills

- Review the vestry's instructions regarding the number of candidates they wish to consider.
- Determine whether there is a natural break for referral to the vestry. There is no significant difference between two candidates who score within a point or two of each other.
- **Do not include on the final list a candidate who has consistently scored at the barely acceptable level regardless of the number of final candidates.**

The search committee has spent valuable time, money, and energy determining that this person does not have the necessary skills and abilities to competently perform the job. Forwarding their name will only provide confusion for the vestry, add to the overall cost of the search, and increase the likelihood of an inappropriate choice.

- If there is less than the requested number of finalists, consult with the vestry to determine whether they want the search committee to widen the search and obtain more potential candidates.

If the vestry wants more names than the search committee has qualified, do not add an unqualified or a previously disqualified candidate. You will need to widen the search and obtain a new list.

- Inform all candidates of their status in the process by telephone and in writing. Caring for the candidates, both those who were selected and those who weren't, is an important responsibility of the search committee. It says a lot about how you care for people and how you will care for your future rector.
- Some candidates are likely to be upset if they were not selected. This is not a time to enter into negotiation or to re-open their application. At this point in the process the issue is not that you are rejecting a candidate, but that you have found other candidates who are better qualified on the criteria that the search committee has determined are essential to performing the job of being your rector.
- When it is time to forward the candidates to the vestry, provide a summary of their relative skills and abilities of the finalists.

- Be available to the vestry when they engage in their discernment process. Members of the search committee may be able to help with logistics, such as escorting candidates or candidate spouses, and other activities that let the vestry focus on their discernment task.
- If the task of the search committee is to provide only one name to the vestry, then the Search committee will need to complete the discernment phase on the following pages.

If not ...

... schedule a party for the search committee.

Congratulations, your job is done!

*To follow without halt,
one aim; there is
the secret of success.
And success?*

What is it?

*I do not find it in
the applause of the
theater; it lies rather
in the satisfaction of
accomplishment.*

— Anna Pavlova
