



“You shall find refuge under his wings.”
— Psalm 91:4

RECTOR TRANSITION

Office of Transition Ministry — Contacts

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SECTION 1 Nurturing the Journey in Prayer

Every transition is a sacred journey. Before turning to logistics, we invite your congregation to enter this season with intentional prayer. The Office of Transition will walk alongside you every step of the way — you are never alone.

A Prayer for This Season

*Gentle us, Holy One, into an unclenched moment, a deep breath,
a letting go of heavy expectations, and shriveling anxieties,
that, softened by the silence, surrounded by the light,
and open to the mystery, we may be found by wholeness,
upheld by the unfathomable, entranced by the simple, and filled with the joy that is you.
In the name of the Holy Trinity, One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, world without end. Amen.*

— Adapted from a prayer by Rev. Ted Loder, Guerrillas of Grace

Book of Common Prayer Suggestions

The following collects, found after the Psalter in the BCP, are especially fitting:

- Collect 8 — For the Mission of the Church
- Collect 53 — For Travelers (naming this as a journey)
- Collects 57 & 58 — For Guidance

Daily Office Podcasts

If your congregation has not yet adopted a regular practice of Morning or Evening Prayer, these podcasts can lead the way:

- A Morning at the Office — Forward Movement (BCP texts)
- Daily Prayer — Church of England
- Pray As You Go — Irish Jesuits (Ignatian spirituality)

Deepening your spiritual practice is one of the most effective remedies for transition anxiety.

SECTION 2 Understanding This Strange Change

Every congregation experiences pastoral change. These re-deployments arrive in many ways — retirement, new call, discipline, dissolution. The experience is uniquely complex because our relationship with clergy leadership is unlike any other: it is not family, nor simply employment, because it is centered in Jesus and the mission of reconciliation he calls us to together.

Our hope is that the time between farewell and welcome is approximately one year — though it always takes the time it takes.

Change vs. Transition

Change is an event — situational and external. Our universe is in constant change; we embrace it when it is simple or obviously beneficial. Change is a sign of life. Without a horizon, without a “what’s next,” we would consider existence a tomb.

Transition is the internal, emotional, and social process that people move through when change occurs. It begins with an ending and implies loss of some kind — while also opening a doorway to new attitudes, skills, and a holier understanding of who we are called to be.

This Is Not a Job Search

Calling a new rector is an act of discernment — seeking a leader and companion for the journey. It is not an algorithmic matching app, nor choosing a shirt from a rack.

Discernment is a vulnerability in community with our neighbors, scripture, and prayer. It is, in a sense, saying yes until someone says no. Approached as a sacred journey into who God desires us to become, the path forward will clarify. Know that Christ is already at work in the heart of your next rector — even if they do not yet know it.

“The only real difference between Anxiety and Excitement was my willingness to let go of Fear.”

— Barbara Brown Taylor, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*

Discernment is a vulnerability in community with our neighbors, scripture, and prayer. It is said that it is a saying yes until someone says no. Approached as a sacred journey into who God desires us to become, the path forward will become clearer. It may have bumps and stumbles, it always takes the time it takes, and hopefully, it will surprise you. Regardless, know that Christ is working in the heart of your next rector already, even if they don't know it yet.



SECTION 3 Trauma Informed Transition

Congregations experience pastoral transitions as a form of trauma — even in the best of circumstances. Behavioral science helps us understand some of the unusual responses we may encounter in ourselves or others. These reactions are normal.

While we can grow into better responses, we cannot entirely avoid them.

Common Stress Responses

Response	What It Looks Like
Fight	Conflict, resistance, pushback against decisions or leadership
Flight	Withdrawal, reduced attendance or engagement
Fawn	Excessive people-pleasing, avoiding honest feedback
Freeze	Paralysis, inability to make decisions or move forward
Enter the Fray	Energized engagement — channeled well, this is a holy gift

People may cycle through all of the above in five minutes. When you notice “chicken brain” — being easily flustered, overreacting, or experiencing rapid emotional shifts — return to the four anchors:

BREATHE	PRAY	WONDER	MERCY
Pause before responding	Ask for guidance	What underlies this behavior?	Extend the grace Jesus offers

One of the most effective tools for reducing anxiety is consistent, truthful, generous, and encouraging communication with the congregation.

SECTION 4 Seeking a Priest: Who Are Clergy Today?

Understanding the contemporary clergy landscape helps set realistic expectations and opens your congregation to candidates you might not have imagined.

Profile of Today’s Priest

- Average age is now 50
- Approximately half are women and/or LGBTQIA+
- Less likely to be a second career after a long first career
- Often “converts” from another Christian tradition
- Most come from two-income households
- Hesitant to relocate more than 100 miles
- More racially and culturally diverse than most congregations
- Absolutely religious; fiercely spiritual
- Tend to be theologically orthodox and socially progressive
- Commonly nerdy; frequently unconventional

Diocesan Expectations

All clergy in this diocese are expected to be:

- Team players who build up the Body of Christ
- Responsible caretakers of parish resources and relationships
- Able to navigate complexity with grace and wisdom
- Disciplined disciples — formed by and accountable to Jesus
- Called to love, serve, and teach
- Committed to the Episcopal Church in 2026, its teachings, constitution and canons especially regarding liturgy and ordination
- Hard-working, self-caring, and playful

Rites of Ordination

If you have never attended an ordination, we invite you to do so — or watch one on our YouTube channel or the Cathedral’s. Reading the rite in the BCP is itself a formative experience.

SECTION 5 Structure of the Transition Process

The transition process involves three committees working alongside the vestry, each with a distinct role and rhythm. Each committee should include at least one vestry member, one “umbrella person” who coordinates across all three, and members who can collaborate graciously without personal agendas.

Committee	Focus & Responsibilities	Duration
Prayer	Gathers for the entire process including the welcome period. Shapes congregational prayer through weekly gatherings, solicited prayers and readings, or both. This is vital work, not “busy work.”	Entire process
Profile	Intensive work over a shorter period. Creates the congregation’s narrative profile and prepares OTM and TMC portal answers. Informed by demographic data and congregational survey results.	Months 3–5
Search & Discernment	Reviews vetted applicants, conducts interviews, invites finalists to visit, and recommends one candidate to the vestry. Must take confidentiality and prayerfulness with utmost seriousness.	Months 4–10

Role of the Vestry

The vestry maintains its core fiduciary and organizational leadership throughout the transition, in partnership with interim clergy. The vestry appoints all three committees, receives the Search Committee’s finalist recommendation, decides whether to extend a call, oversees the Letter of Agreement process, and eventually bids farewell to interim clergy and welcomes the new rector.

True Cost in 2026

A full-time, non-retired priest with limited experience, living in a rectory, with benefits for one person: approximately \$153,000 annually.

SECTION 6 Profile, Promotion & Vetting

Your Online Presence Is Your Sales Pitch

Everything your congregation has ever posted online is part of your profile. Candidates will search you before you ever see their name. The formal profile document tells the story of your congregation’s heart, soul, history, and dreams — informed by demographic data and a congregational survey.

Where You Will Be Listed

- OTM (Office of Transition Ministry) — the official diocesan portal
- TMC (Transition Ministry Conference) — a grassroots clergy network
- Episcopal News Service — churchwide posting
- Affinity groups and networks curated by the Transition Office

Confidentiality Is Non-Negotiable

Because clergy often discern a new call without the knowledge of their current congregation — and because the Episcopal Church is a tightly networked community — confidentiality is critical.

- A priest who applies may say they did so
- No one at the parish may ever disclose that a specific priest applied (except the one who ultimately joins)
- All internal communication may reference numbers, never names, genders, or identifying details

All Applications are directed to

the DIOPA Canon for Transitions

No clergy person should contact the parish directly.

All applications and inquiries come through the DIOPA Transition Office. This aids in the work of confidentiality.

Every application undergoes initial vetting:

- Examination of materials
- Simple internet search
- Red flag call with the applicant’s diocesan transition officer.
 - Conduct, Character, Capacity
- Pre-flight conversation between Canon for Transitions and applicant

We will not pass on any materials for any person who we cannot welcome as a priest in this diocese. Ultimately the Bishop has the final say on who is a priest in this diocese. This process prevents heartache and the wasting of your time.

Regular communication with the Canon for Transitions is essential for a good process. It is different than any other ‘hiring’ process, and aligns with the best and normative practices of the Episcopal Church.

Finalists Vetting Steps

When the Search Committee is at the semi-finalist stage, two additional steps are required.

If any issue arises, the candidate will be withdrawn:

1. Bishop-to-Bishop call between DIOPA and the candidate’s home diocese
2. Professional background check

When there is a finalist, there will be a Bishop-to-candidate call with the Bishop of Pennsylvania

SECTION 7 Search & Discernment Committee Guide

DIOPA typically receives twice the churchwide average of applications for a full-time call.

However in the rebalancing of clergy available, the pool is easily half what it used to be a decade ago. Moving with an inquiring heart and a hearty pace can help a call not lose a good candidate who takes another call first.

The Search Committee must be able to listen to one another, complete tasks promptly, dedicate time to reading and interviews, make collective discernments, and gracefully let go of personal favorites.

How to Review Candidates

- Read all resumes and cover letters carefully
- Explore sermons and services available online
- Conduct initial video or phone conversations
- “Paper cuts” may be necessary — do not dawdle
- Notify the Canon for Transitions when a candidate is not continued, especially if there are concerning reasons
- Stay in regular communication with all candidates who remain in consideration

Finalist Visits

Semi-finalists (or a clear single finalist) should be invited to:

- Tour the property
- Preach a sermon and preside at liturgy in your nave
- Share a meal with the committee
- Tour the wider area
- Ask questions of the committee and parish

The vestry should discern whether to meet the finalist during this visit or after the committee’s recommendation. Congregational conflict and individual capacity for confidentiality must be carefully discerned.

Consistency Matters

All interactions must be equivalent. If one interview is on Zoom, all interviews must be on Zoom. We do not recommend visiting a candidate’s current congregation.

When a Priest Says Yes

The Letter of Agreement (LOA) is facilitated by the Canon for Transitions and must be approved by the Canon for Finance. Templates are available. The LOA must comply with diocesan compensation guidelines. No public announcement may be made until the Bishop has signed the LOA, and the announcement must be coordinated with the priest's home congregation.

If a Priest Declines

It happens, and it is not a failure. Financial realities, family circumstances, or another call may lead a priest to decline. The position will be reopened. Time and again, a wonderful match was simply not ready the first time a position was open — the Spirit is working with both you and them through the whole journey.

SECTION 8 Transition Checklist

Before discovering your new priest, ensure the following are in place. Use this page as a working checklist with your vestry.

Vestry Training & Compliance

- At least 2 vestry members are current on Safe Church training (contact Kionna Lipscom: klipscom@diopa.org)
- At least 2 vestry members have begun or completed Anti-Racism Training (multi-session Zoom; see diopa.org for schedule)
- At least 2 vestry members have completed the Serviam Vestry 101 course or read the Vestry Resource Guide (both at diopa.org)
- Congregation is current on its audit schedule
- Additional vestry members are subscribed to diocesan publications

Financial & Practical Preparation

- Budget established for moving costs
- Insurance needs reviewed and updated as needed
- Rectory (if applicable) assessed, repaired, and ready for occupancy
- LOA drafted and reviewed with Canon for Finance
- Compensation reviewed against diocesan guidelines

Committee Formation (suggested)

- Prayer Committee formed (at least 1 vestry member; begins at the start of the process)
- Profile Committee formed (at least 1 vestry member)
- Search & Discernment Committee formed (at least 1 vestry member)
- One “umbrella person” identified to coordinate across all three committees
- Consultant engaged, if desired (contact Canon Jane for referrals)

SECTION 9 Timeline at a Glance (12-Month Classic Search)

The following is a guideline — transitions always take the time they take. The Office of Transition will confirm and adjust with you.

Month(s)	Milestone	Who Leads
1	Say farewell to departing rector; first meeting with Transitions Office	Vestry + Transition Office
1-2	Arrange supply or interim clergy coverage	Vestry + Transition Office
2-3	Appoint three committees; begin financial & training preparation	Vestry
3	Congregational survey and data story gathering	Profile Committee
3-5	Draft parish profile and OTM/TMC portal documents Profile must be approved by Office of Transition	Profile Committee
4	Search Committee begins planning discernment process	Search Committee
5-6	Profile published; applications open; names received by Office of Transition, candidates who pass vetting are presented	Transition Office
6-8	Initial review, vetting, and interviews	Search Committee
8-9	Finalist visits; Bishop potential approval of finalist	Search Committee + Bishop
9-10	Finalist recommended to vestry; vestry votes to call	Vestry
10	Finalist accepts; LOA negotiated and signed by Bishop	Vestry + Canon for Finance
11-12	Announce, prepare, and welcome new rector	Whole Parish

SECTION 10 Resources & Glossary

Suggested Reading

- Like Dating Only Worse — Michael Durall
- Rector Transitions — Van Sheets
- Uproar — Peter L. Stinke *
- Being Christian — Rowan Williams *
- Listening Hearts — Farnham, Gill, McLean & Ward
- Perseverance — Margaret Wheatley
- A Change of Pastors — Loren B. Mead
- Transitions — William Bridges *

* Available as audiobooks

Self-Directed Learning (YouTube)

- Fight, Flight... — The Helpful Professor (stress response overview)
- Bridges Transition Model — Everyday Change channel

Key Terms Glossary

OTM — Office of Transition Ministry. The official churchwide clergy search portal used by dioceses and clergy.

TMC — Transition Ministry Conference. A grassroots clergy networking and search platform.

LOA — Letter of Agreement. The formal document outlining the terms of a rector's call, required before any announcement.

Supply Clergy — Priests who cover Sunday worship during a vacancy, arranged through the Transition Office (contact Pam Prell).

Interim Clergy — A priest called specifically for the transition period, providing pastoral and organizational leadership while the search proceeds.

BCP — Book of Common Prayer. The liturgical and devotional foundation of Episcopal worship.

Vestry — The elected lay governing body of a parish, responsible for fiduciary and organizational oversight.

“The possibility of fulfilling its promise may depend upon a brave participation, a willingness to hazard ourselves in a difficult world.”

— *David Whyte, Consolations (Destiny)*



Remember: the transition is not over for at least a year after your new rector arrives.

Every congregation is always in some form of transition, you have the benefit of knowing it.

Use this season to deepen your love of Jesus, your discipleship, our neighbors.

May this time build up trust, and prepare for the unknown futures that God is already preparing for you.