



EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN CONNECTICUT

PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S MISSION

Transition is the New Normal

by the Rev. Lee Ann Tolzmann, Canon for Mission Leadership

NOTE: While I read many things in the course of doing this work, by far the most helpful was Quietly Courageous Leading the Church in a Changing World by Gil Rendle (Rowman and Littlefield, 2018). I highly recommend it. LAT

I Today's Context: A New Missional Age

The world today, including the Church, is changing faster than most of us can keep up. Folks in every parish, whether they are going through a clergy transition or not, have a sense that things are shifting in ways we can neither understand nor control. It has become clear that the model of church that flourished in the mid-twentieth century, which nurtured so many of us, is fading away. This is not our fault. We have not failed. We are experiencing a profound demographic shift. While church membership and attendance has been declining since the 1960's, we have now reached a tipping point.ⁱ The vast majority of younger people (i.e., under fifty) are simply not joining faith communities. It's not a question of "attracting young families." Most young families are not looking for a church to join or even to check out. Church is simply not on their radar screens. Twentieth-century parish life was based on a model of membership with associated commitments of money and time. While Baby Boomers were less likely than their parents to join churches, younger generations (Boomers' children and grandchildren) are largely not interested in becoming "members" of any organization.ⁱⁱ They have a well-founded skepticism of institutions. Their busy lives, weighed down by education debt, do not allow for much discretionary time or money. When they do have time or money to share, they want it to make a difference in others' lives, not go towards the support, maintenance, or survival of an institution.

This generational shift has resulted in a loss of privilege for the Church in our culture. Our existence, previously taken as a given, is now barely acknowledged. Sunday mornings are no longer reserved for worship services, and signature parish events, such as festivals, fairs and bazaars, struggle to attract interest. Our buildings, once the center of community life, are ill-suited for current circumstances. In many cases, they have become a heavy burden for those left to maintain them.

One result is the great sense of loss, with accompanying grief, being experienced in most of our parishes today. This pain is neither unfounded nor unfaithful. We are losing the way of life that nurtured us for decades, and it cannot be recaptured. As followers of Jesus Christ, we neither deny nor diminish loss and grief. We are also called to remember that it is never the end of the story. God is still here with us. The Gospel, with its promise of resurrection, transformation, and hope, is still true. And the world needs its life-giving message now more than ever.

The Church is being called to change, whether we like it or not. God is in this, reminding us that our faith is rooted not in the status quo, not in things staying the same, but in change, in the ultimate transformation. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's power to transform death into life is incontrovertibly revealed. New life never looks like old life. Resurrection is not a re-boot. It's a

new beginning. Today, we're being called to new ways – not just new ways of doing what we've always done, but new ways of being the Church. And the only way to find those ways, to discern and move into God's future, is to be willing to let go of the old ways and be open to what God may be doing. That is what faithful people have always done, for thousands of years. Jesus has made God's priorities clear. The purpose of the Church is not to be big, successful and affluent. We're here to be part of God's radical, saving, life-giving, world-changing work.

We are entering what Bishop Ian Douglas calls "a New Missional Age." We are being called to change our expectations. We are being reminded that the Church is a living body, and it has not always looked or lived the same way. It looked very different in the first century, in the tenth, and in the fifteenth. Only our purpose and our Savior have not changed. It's not easy to be confronted with the uncomfortable truth that the identity and the incarnation of the Church cannot be limited by our personal preferences, by what we think we know, or by what makes us feel good. As Bishop Douglas is fond of saying, "This is God's Church, and God will have the Church God needs to carry out God's mission of salvation."

We measured the success of ministry in the 20th century by the amounts of people, money, and influence associated with it. Our institutional life focused on increasing all three. And let us be clear: growth by numbers is still a good thing! But it is not the definition of faithfulness and it cannot be our purpose. The truth is that Jesus has called us not to a beautiful building, not to a convenient, comfortable hour on Sunday morning, but to a transformational way of life. We are members of Christ's body, invited by God, loved by God, equipped by God - not to save the Church or even to build up the Church - but to work with God to transform the world, a world whose brokenness has never been more obvious.

Do we want to follow Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century? If so, then we have some challenging work ahead. We're being called to remember the holy truth of who we are, who God is, and how God works in the world. We must reclaim our identity as communities of people trying to be faithful to the God made known in Jesus Christ. If we cannot, the current circumstances of life in many churches these days will seem sad, depressing, and hopeless. We can continue to worship God, participate in God's mission, and live our lives as faithful Christians and as Episcopalians, in today's circumstances. And our life will need to be very different from what we have known.

Landmarks in the Landscape of a New Missional Age

1. Our current model of church is being funded by the increased giving of a smaller and smaller number of people who are getting older and older.ⁱⁱⁱ This is clearly not a sustainable model.
2. Formerly successful models are not helpful. Trying to do what we've always done, even in new improved versions, is not the answer when the whole world is changing. And it is not a faithful response to the God of resurrection's call to move towards new life.
3. We do not know what the future of the Church might look like.
4. We must be clear about why we continue to exist. The Church is not an end in itself. It is a means for God's mission to be carried out. Our purpose is not institutional survival.
5. God's mission is still meant to be at the center of our life together. And since God's mission is about healing all that is broken in the world, those who are making or who wish to make a

difference in the world are in fact participating in what God is up to these days, whether they are members of a church or not. God is out there, going about God's saving work, with or without us.

6. Holy Scripture has always been a guidebook for times like these. In their best moments, God's people have stepped out in faith towards an unknown future. We can turn to our sacred texts, and learn to step out, too.

7. The Holy Spirit continues to be at work in us and among us.

8. The Gospel is still true. Its truth is still life-giving. And the world needs its life-giving message more than ever. God is calling us to become something new, and when God calls, God also provides what we need to faithfully respond.

What direction do these landmarks provide? Clearly, it's time to lean in: not into trying to be the new, improved version of the twentieth century model of church, but into putting our trust, our faith, in the God made known to us in Jesus Christ.

II Parish Life in a New Missional Age

If we are clear that our purpose is faithful participation in God's mission, as opposed to institutional survival, we need to do things differently. This is not about fixing something we've done wrong. This is about figuring out how to be the Church in such a rapidly changing environment.^{iv} Instead of looking for answers to our perceived problems, we need to be developing questions that will help us explore what God is up to today and how we can be part of it.

In an effort to move our focus from saving, rescuing or preserving the institution, ECCT has developed a definition of a parish in a New Missional Age. This definition recognizes that our futures are shaped by our imagination, and that, as Christians, ours is meant to be shaped by a countercultural narrative, one that is rooted in hope: hope in the agency of God and in God's promise to use that agency on the behalf of the world. It acknowledges our call to build a community of wholeness that forms faithful disciples of Jesus Christ and sends them out into the world with God's message of hope and healing. And it reminds us that we are part of an enterprise larger than our local parish. As members of our particular tradition, the Episcopal Church (TEC), we are in relationship with all other Episcopalians and a worldwide circle of fellow Anglicans.

A parish in ECCT in the new missional age is a community ...

of theological imagination

...where our hearts and minds are moved by God's presence in our lives, in our neighborhoods, and in the world;

fed by Word & sacrament

...where our stories connect with God's story in Holy Scripture, and where we experience God's grace in baptism and Eucharist;

forming disciples and apostles in God's mission

...where people grow as followers of Jesus and are sent by the Holy Spirit into the world to join God's work of restoration and reconciliation;

and connected to the wider body of Christ

...by sharing our lives with companions in Christ across the Episcopal Church in Connecticut and the wider Church.

Worship has always been essential to the Church and it remains so. Gathering for weekly worship re-grounds and re-centers our imagination in the countercultural reality of the Gospel. It also offers holy connection to God and, through God, to each other. And, since *The Book of Common Prayer* states on page 13 that the Holy Eucharist is “the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord’s Day and other major Feasts,” this means a parish needs a priest.

Spending time immersed in Holy Scripture is also essential. **Dwelling in God’s Word** invites us to see ourselves in the story of God’s saving acts. Coming together around sacred text creates space for the Holy Spirit to be at work and for us to be more available to God. It re-centers and re-minds us.

As **disciples**, our lives are meant to be shaped by disciplines. It’s easy to name prayer, worship, and time with Scripture as necessary disciplines. However, the practice of behaviors that build healthy community and respect the dignity of all is equally essential. Such behaviors include acknowledgment of our accountability to God and to each other, caring for each other, speaking the truth to each other, forgiving each other and ourselves, and acknowledging and honoring grief.

As **apostles**, we are sent into the world to be part of God’s mission. Apostles do not view mission as projects, but as a way of life. How can we be about the business of healing and reconciliation each and every day of our lives in all that we do? Today, one of the ways each parish is sent out is by means of a current website. Without a digital presence of proclamation and invitation, a parish appears to be little more than an inward-looking club.

Isolation inhibits growth.^v As individuals, we do not practice our faith in isolation, and, as Episcopal faith communities, we are not isolated from **the wider Church**. We are connected to each other in a myriad of ways, and we are there for each other for support, celebration and simply sharing our lives. In today’s environment, parish participation in the life of their Region and ECCT is not optional. And, as Episcopalians, we are obligated to comply with the standards for our common life set by TEC’s General Convention and ECCT’s Diocesan Convention.

III Parish Leadership in a New Missional Age

Note: *ECCT has two bishops. When a parish is in a clergy transition, one of them takes responsibility for oversight of the transition as the “Bishop of Record.” When the phrase “the bishop” is used here, it refers to the Bishop of Record.*

Canonical Clergy Leadership: Church canons assume the presence of a priest in every parish. They do not assume a priest serves only one parish. They provide for two models of parish clergy leadership for parishes: rector and priest in charge (PIC).

A **rector** is elected by the vestry and the choice must be approved by the bishop. A rector has tenure, meaning they are entitled to the position and cannot be removed by the vestry without the undertaking of a canonical process of attempted reconciliation involving the bishop. While

technically a rector cannot resign without permission of the vestry, it is the norm for vestries to accept a rector's letter of resignation, if offered. In ECCT, in order to call a rector, a parish must be able to pay at least half-time and demonstrate the capacity to provide the level of compensation and benefits agreed to at the time of the call for at least five years.

When a parish is without a rector, the bishop appoints a **priest in charge (PIC)**. This is done in consultation with the vestry, and the PIC is appointed for a time certain. According to TEC Canon III.9.3c, **the PIC exercises the canonical duties of a rector, subject to the authority of the bishop.**

The role of a rector or PIC is not to "do for" the congregation. It is to lead a community, in partnership with lay leaders, towards faithfulness and wholeness in the context of being followers of Jesus Christ, actively and intentionally participating in God's mission, in the Episcopal tradition. This work is done in partnership with and under the oversight of the bishops.

While administration of the sacraments is an integral part of priestly parish ministry, TEC Canon III.9.6 also explicitly lists the following duties of a rector:

- Authority and responsibility for the conduct of worship and the spiritual jurisdiction of the parish
- Use and control of the parish buildings and access to all parish records
- Ensure all persons in the congregation receive instruction in the Scriptures, the subjects contained in the Catechism, in the doctrine, discipline and worship of the Episcopal Church, and in the exercise of their ministry as baptized persons
- Ensure all persons are instructed concerning Christian stewardship
- Ensure that all persons be prepared for baptism, and that sponsors be prepared as well
- Ensure preparation for confirmation, reception and reaffirmation of baptismal vows and be ready to present them to the bishop
- Announce the intention of the bishop to visit the congregation and show the parish register to the bishop at the visitation
- Oversee the designated offerings for the poor to be applied to pious and charitable uses (i.e., oversee the Discretionary Fund)
- Read or make available copies of any pastoral letter from the House of Bishops
- Accurately maintain all parish registers, including recording all baptisms, confirmations (and their canonical equivalents), marriages, and burials, as well as all communicants and active members

The canons also state that the rector, or any such member of the vestry designated by the rector, is to preside at all vestry meetings.^{vi} These articulated duties correlate with ECCT's definition of a parish, touching on worship, Scripture, instruction and preparation for discipleship and apostleship, and connection to the wider Church.

Canonical Lay Leadership: The canons require that every parish have a treasurer, a clerk, two wardens and a vestry.^{vii} They also assume that a parish is following a set of bylaws. The vestry serves as the agents and legal representatives of the congregation in all matters concerning its corporate property and the parish's relationship with its clergy.^{viii} It is also required to ensure that standard business practices (outlined in TEC's *Manual of Business Methods in Church Affairs*) are observed.

Many parish leaders seem to feel that having a rector (as opposed to a PIC) is a sign that everything is “normal” or a sign of stability. The truth is that in ECCT today, and increasingly around TEC, the norm is a PIC. In terms of stability, a rector is free to leave at any time, and, with the increasing shortage of clergy, parish priests always have options open to them. The average rector’s tenure in TEC today is just over six years. The PIC model offers flexibility to a parish, since the terms of employment can be changed much more easily and simply than those for a rector.

In the twentieth century model of church, the rector’s primary role was to help the parish be good stewards of the money, people and influence needed to do ministry. Rectors often functioned as the “hub” of the parish wheel. Everything happened through them. In many cases, for better or for worse, clergy provided much, if not all, of the continuity, stability and institutional connection for the community. However, the reality is that we are all in transition all the time, and the pace of change is only increasing. We must learn to place our expectations of certainty and stability in God and the Gospel, rather than in parish staff or even volunteers. Connection outside the parish has never been more important. We’re all in this together! The entire parish is part of its Region, the diocese, and TEC, and its life is meant to reflect this.

This model also “professionalized” pastoral care, which has left those who have no parish clergy feeling “uncared for.” Members of Christian communities share their lives and care for one another. The assumption that only a clergy person can provide pastoral care is a denial of our call to be in authentic community with one another. Even in times of urgent crisis, we can be there for each other. Certainly, we can provide companionship for those who are hospitalized and homebound.

Church canons provide for the bishop, at the request of a leader exercising oversight of a congregation, to license lay ministers with the specific vocations of Pastoral Leader, Worship Leader, Preacher, Eucharistic Minister, Eucharistic Visitor, Evangelist, or Catechist. TEC Canon III.4 lays out the details of these particular ministries and what type of specific oversight is required for each. Since most of our parishes have only part-time clergy, it is vital to discern with and train parishioners for these vocations.

Clergy work in partnership with lay leaders to provide for the administrative side of parish life. As resources to pay staff have decreased, clergy and lay leaders have needed to do more in this area. In the twentieth century, it was not uncommon for a parish priest to say, “I am not a great administrator, but I am great at pastoral care and that’s what really matters.” Lay leaders were often led to believe that “because we’re a church, the details of finance and administration are not important, as long as we’re nice to everyone.” The result is that many parishes, of all sizes, have failed to attend to all the necessary business details of running a parish for many years. When there is no or minimal stress in the system, we can often get by without providing and maintaining a solid infrastructure. However, stress and anxiety are pervasive today, and one of the pro-active ways to address it is to be responsible about compliance. No one should be vulnerable to accusations of poor oversight. Churches operate under governmental tax-exempt non-profit status, which means certain standards of business practice must be met. The practices of transparency, operating by clear rules and boundaries, and compliance with secular laws and church canons are essential for healthy community life. The truth is that good administration IS good pastoral care - for leaders and everyone else.

As Episcopalians, our system of governance and accountability is part of our identity. Institutional support work is non-negotiable. It is not our first priority, but it provides the necessary framework

for us to carry out our first priority, that of faithfulness. It is also clear that, given our changing context, church leadership today, lay and ordained, is being called to learn a new way of life within our structure.

Leaders, lay and ordained, are called to keep focus on our central purpose, attend to parish infrastructure, and practice leadership that takes steps in the direction of an unknown future. As if that weren't enough, we must also recognize and manage the pain and grief that is a natural response to the loss of the familiar, as well as the anxiety that pervades our society. Obviously, this is an impossible job description. To be an effective leader today requires a deep spiritual life. That is why it is vital to engage in practices that sustain our faith in God. We are being called to wrestle with faithful questions that do not have simple answers, questions that call for prayer, questions such as:

- Who are we now?
- Why are we here now?
- What difference is God calling us to make in the world today?
- What are the next identifiable steps we can take?

This is very different from developing a strategic plan. We need to focus on next steps, not destinations, because we do not know where God is leading us. We only know we're committed to following. We must become familiar with and keep telling the story that will get us through our current wilderness. God's people have been here before, and Scripture offers us the crucial narrative context. We also need to be honest about our present reality, addressing questions about institutional sustainability head on. And we can do that because our real hope lies in God, not in the survival of our individual parish.

Relationship has never been more important in parish life. The circumstances of a New Missional Age call us to ask faithful questions and stay in conversation with each other, inside and outside the parish. We must constantly work at building relationships with others, including those in our Region, ECCT, and all partners in God's mission.

ECCT's definition of a parish calls for leadership that is willing to spend time and effort in building relationships, with God, with each other in the parish, and with the wider community. The following five spiritual practices, adapted from Alan J. Roxburgh's book *Joining God, Reimagining the Church, Changing the World*, are essential for faithful Christian communities today:

Listening: We listen to God by dwelling in God's Word, and in stories of God in our lives and in our neighborhoods.

Discerning: As we hear from God and one another, we ponder how God might be calling us to take action in the world.

Trying on: We experiment with new ways of joining in God's mission, trusting that God uses our failures as well as our successes.

Reflecting: We wonder together about what God is up to in our lives and in the world.

Deciding: We adopt new ways of being the Body of Christ as we listen, discern, try on and reflect.

IV Reality: A Shrinking Pool of Clergy

In terms of clergy, we are operating in a landscape very different from that of even five or ten years ago across TEC. Today in ECCT, only 38% of our parishes have a full-time clergy person. And most of the remaining 62% have or seek only a one-quarter time priest (8-12 hours per week). The canons assume the presence of ordained leadership in a parish, and ECCT requires that a parish be able to afford at least a quarter-time priest. We have a few pairs of parishes who share one clergy person, which requires flexibility and willingness to experiment.

Given the rapid decrease in the number of full-time positions, it may seem counter-intuitive, but we are also facing **a severe clergy shortage**, and it is going to continue to worsen for the foreseeable future. Most currently active clergy are members of the “Baby Boom” generation, and they are retiring in huge waves. In ECCT in 2015, 72% of active clergy were 55 and older, which is only slightly higher than the average for TEC overall. Given that a newly ordained priest today is very unlikely to be able to earn a living as a clergy person for any sustained career path, it is amazing that the Holy Spirit continues to call wonderful, faithful people, many of them young, into formation for the Episcopal priesthood. Most people cannot stop working for three years and attend seminary full-time, so ECCT offers flexible, individualized formation plans, utilizing online education, part-time seminary training, and small group work, all of which takes much longer than three years. It also requires significant investment on the part of ECCT in the formation process. Despite the challenges, we ordain about six people to the priesthood every year, with the expectation that most will do part-time parish work. However, with two to three times that number retiring from parish ministry each year, the growing resource gap is a real challenge.

The clergy shortage is compounded by a significant decrease in the number of clergy who can relocate, even for full-time work. Today, the norm is that both spouses work outside the home, and it is not unusual for the clergy person to be the lower-earning spouse. An additional challenge is that fourteen percent of Episcopal clergy are married to another Episcopal clergy person.

Across TEC, the number of parish clergy transitions utilizing an interim minister has been declining significantly, since the interim model is based on full-time work. And, due to the necessity of frequent relocation, the pool of qualified priests who do interim work has all but disappeared. In 2019, parishes have had to wait several months for an interim priest. Even the largest, most affluent parishes can have significant delays before beginning an intentional interim period. And, like all parishes today, they also have much smaller candidate pools for their rector and assisting clergy positions than they did even five years ago.

The number of parishes in ECCT that can afford only quarter-time clergy has increased at a very rapid rate in the last five years. These parishes often rely on retired clergy to serve them. It might seem that the increase in retirements would make it easier to fill these positions. However, the reality is that the number of priests today who feel called to be in charge of a parish in their retirement is not sufficient to meet the increasing demand.

Reality: Fewer parishes can afford full-time clergy.

Reality: There number of priests in active ministry will continue to decrease every year.

Reality: Clergy do not relocate for part-time positions.

Reality: Even for full-time positions, fewer clergy are available to relocate.

Reality: There are very few qualified priests available for interim ministry today.

Reality: There are not enough retired clergy to fill all of ECCT's quarter-time positions.

V Clergy Transitions in a New Missional Age

When a rector or Priest in Charge leaves, many parish leaders expect a clergy call to unfold in familiar fashion. They anticipate a process of gathering information about the needs of the parish and the desired qualities in the next rector, advertising the details in a published profile, interviewing a pool of candidates, and making a choice. While this work is being done, an Interim PIC carries out the duties of the rector and prepares the parish for a new clergy leader.

This model of a "search process" and interim ministry is very much of the latter twentieth century. If a rector has been in place for five years or more, it is likely that the parish has established a comfortable status quo. Often, this status quo has enabled them to ignore the sea changes occurring across the church today. It is as if the parish were all traveling together on a plane, which is being flown by the rector and lay leaders together. Meanwhile, the landscape below is changing significantly. When the rector leaves, it is time to land the plane and look around and see where the parish is, where it is being called to go next, and how to faithfully continue their journey.

In ECCT, over the last decade, we have sought to focus clergy transitions on the question of what kind of leadership God needs in order for a parish to move into God's preferred future for them. We shifted from "Search Committees" to "Transition Teams." Their primary work was broken into "Discernment" and "Recruitment", with the emphasis on seeking God's will. And now, because of the changing environment, including an acute clergy shortage, a lack of qualified interim ministers, and increasing stress and anxiety in parishes, we clearly need another shift.

The next step is **not** to place a "help wanted" ad for a new clergy pilot, so that the plane can return to the air as quickly as possible. It is to join in what God is up to on the ground and working with partners from outside the parish to move forward. In all that we do, particularly in the selection of leaders, we need to be looking toward the future that God is calling us into. Rather than trying to discern the greatest passions within parts of the congregation, our work is to discern the most faithful path ahead for the whole body.^{ix} We need to resist the temptation to expect the Church to be something that it is not. It is not a secular organization with a slot to be filled. Every qualitative change in the life of a parish, including the departure of their priest, is an opportunity to attend in new ways to what God might be up to, a way to go deeper into the ongoing work of the great transition that the Church is currently undergoing.

Any parish, whether they seek a priest for fulltime work or for quarter-time work, could be without a rector or PIC for as long as a few months to a year. Supply clergy, who cover Sunday worship only, are also increasingly scarce. The development and training of lay worship leaders to officiate at Morning Prayer is important. In the absence of a rector or PIC, the wardens take full responsibility for duties normally shared with the clergy such as staying in regular communication with the bishop and diocesan staff, responsibility for the administration of the parish, and oversight of the property. In addition, they take on some duties normally carried out by the priest, such as making provision for Sunday worship, convening and presiding at vestry meetings, and keeping all of the congregation's registers and records up to date.

In the familiar model of clergy transitions, an interim minister was charged with carrying out five developmental tasks with the parish while the Search Committee did its work. These five tasks, first articulated in the 1980's, are: coming to terms with history, negotiating shifts of power and

leadership changes, rethinking the relationship with the denomination, and committing to new leadership and a new future. These tasks are not adequate for our current circumstances.

First, God is calling us to become something new. And second, today's stressful environment has negatively impacted the health of many congregations. Chris Gambill, Director of the Center for Congregational Health at Wake Forest University, spoke at a recent gathering of TEC diocesan transition ministers. In describing his presentation, he wrote in part: *"In addition to basic pastoral skills, the previous model for successful pastoral transition processes paid attention to five broad areas of congregational life: identity, history, external relationships, leadership and future-orientation. In recent years, additional areas of concern have emerged that can undermine a successful transition. These potential derailers include superficial community formation, dysfunctional communication and decision-making processes, unacknowledged and unresolved conflict, intergenerational disconnection, misaligned congregational focus, and an honest assessment of viability and sustainability."*

Certainly not every parish faces all of these obstacles, and some face others not named above. All parishes are suffering from some degree of challenges that make the work to which we are called today - the work of listening, discerning, experimenting, reflecting, and deciding - more difficult. God is trying to transform us into the Church God needs for this time. It seems that taking 12-18 months to outline **our** preferred future and **our** needs, and find a person to meet them, is not a faithful step into **God's** preferred future.

Our current transition process entails the setting aside of many, if not all, of the most competent parish leaders for up to a year to carry out the work. The normal life of the parish and/or the lives of the individuals involved are likely to be negatively impacted by the time and energy required by the traditional process. It also makes it seem that this work is more important than anything else going on in the life of the community. And if that is the case, then the expectation is that the call of the next rector (and who that rector is) is the most important decision the parish ever makes. The traditional process over-emphasizes the role of the rector at the expense of the role of lay leadership. It also puts too much focus on the call itself, at the expense of the work God is calling the new rector and the parish to do together (i.e., there is a sense that "we're done" once the call is made). Both those tasked with the work of the call and the rector themselves are likely to feel undue pressure about the future of the parish. The fact that this process is becoming nearly impossible to carry out may mean that God is calling us to do a reset on how parish clergy leadership is chosen and what their role actually is. How can we be more open to that call?

For Parishes Seeking Fulltime or Three-quarter Time Priests:

Beginning January 1, 2020, parishes in clergy leadership transitions who are seeking a fulltime or three-quarter time priest will enter into an extended time (average three years) with a Priest in Charge, who can then become a candidate for rector.

The following is from ECCT's document titled "The Role and Ministry of a Provisional Priest in Charge":

"At times, a parish begins a clergy leadership transition under circumstances when "business as usual" is no longer possible because the parish system has shifted or is shifting in some significant way. The Provisional Priest in Charge (PPIC) process is a gift of time and expertise to the parish, so that important questions, not directly related to the calling of a new rector, can be addressed in an intentional and life-giving way. Through guided, deeper conversation, new possibilities for

relationships and ministries are explored, with the goal of moving to a reinvigorated place, able to engage collaborative ministries and claim a faithful place in God's mission. If necessary, the PPIC process can also offer a time of necessary focus on pastoral care and healing for all.

The Provisional Priest In Charge (PPIC) is assigned as a rector *pro tem*, to help the parish through this time of reflection and discernment, focusing on new opportunities in God's mission and imagining possibilities in what may be new and unfamiliar circumstances. The PPIC guides the parish in addressing questions about identity, potential obstacles to systematic health and growth in faithfulness, and exploring new possibilities and previously unthought-of future paths, all with the goal of helping the congregation to grow in confidence and strength and prepare to call its next rector."

This PIC model, initially developed by Bishop Laura Ahrens several years ago, was to address situations that seemed to be relatively rare at the time, but can now be found everywhere in some form. It is time to make it the norm when a priest departs. The now non-negotiable work of adaptive change (in addition to whatever technical changes are called for), means that all parishes need a three-year (or more) time frame in which to carry out the work if they are to have a chance to truly be transformed.^x And the reality is that there are not enough Interims to keep the old model going. This also addresses the complaint of not getting "settled" with someone for the year minimum it takes to make the traditional call (i.e., "we always have to put everything on hold").

- The norm becomes the appointment of a Priest in Charge
- Assisting clergy on parish staff can NOT be candidates for the PIC position
- All parishes have crucial identity work to do today - this is the opportunity
- In addition to the common work to be done by all parishes (see some suggestions below for questions to be explored), each parish will also have specific work to be done, determined by the bishop, vestry and PIC
- Specific issues that need to be addressed in a particular parish will likely be able to be described in terms of the aspirational descriptors in our definition of a parish in a new missional age
- The Canon for Mission Leadership (CML) meets with vestry upon rector's departure:
 - o describes reality, including availability of supply clergy
 - o emphasizes focus on faithfulness to what God is up to
 - o names any specific issues and asks about others
 - o provides training for vestry on how to engage parish in discernment, completing forms
 - o makes sure they're informed of responsibilities while there's no PIC or rector (even if there is supply on Sundays)
- Bishop and CML review OTM and TMC forms before they're posted^{xi}
- Vestry will need anti-bias and interview training of some kind
- PIC position is advertised immediately, for four to six weeks
- CML and bishops screen candidates
- CML delivers names to the vestry
- Vestry and bishop conduct interviews
- Vestry asks bishop to make appointment
- All PIC's go through a training as soon as they begin,
- All PIC's are in a cohort group that meets monthly (no more New Call)
- Build communities of practice and accountability among the PICs

(and perhaps among lay leaders as well)

- Consultants are utilized only for particular moments, such as
 - the initial process of posting the position and interviewing PIC candidates
 - anti-bias and interview training
 - yearly Mutual Ministry Reflection and Planning
 - preparation for rector call
 - need for a particular subject matter expert
- Bishop, PIC, and vestry agree on signs necessary for rector call
- The work would take at least 2-3 years, sometimes longer
- Work would always include getting website in good enough shape to recruit candidates for rector if necessary
- PIC is eligible to be a candidate for rector without a search
 - Vestry discerns with PIC only (as we do now with PPIC's)
- If they don't want to call the PIC to be rector, or PIC does not want to stay, the rector position is posted
 - a simple template for the "rector search" tab on the parish website is provided
 - OTM and TMC forms are completed
 - the position is posted for 4-6 weeks
 - candidates are vetted by CML and then presented as a group to the vestry, who makes the call, with the approval of the bishop

This points the emphasis away from the "search process" as the focus, and the consequent feeling that "we're done" when the call is made. The new rector, when called, will have some specific work to continue with the parish.

Here are some ways to articulate some of the work of PIC transition time:

- Name new reality and figure out how to live in it
- Live into the definition of parish in a new missional age
- Develop new spiritual practices and new models of life
- Respond to the realities of the present rather than those of the past
- Stop being formed by what needs to be changed and work to make the changes
- Understand what it means to be part of a much larger, living, constantly shifting ecosystem
- Make sure all administrative details are in order, so structure is in place to support this work
- Attend to the grief

In *Quietly Courageous*, Gil Rendle emphasizes the **importance of conversation** in this kind of holy work (He co-wrote *Holy Conversations* with Alice Mann, which has a number of concrete tools in it).^{xii} He notes that people think in fragments, and that it is dialogue that leads to connection of fragments.^{xiii} He also encourages us to accept mystery and not knowing the answers right away, calling on us not to "reduce the space God uses to alter the story of the community."^{xiv} He says that faithful outcomes for a faith community today can be described in terms of **what we need to learn** how to do, how to live, next. And that an outcome could be articulated in this form: 1. the intentional difference that 2. one believes God has called them to make 3. in the next chapter of their life or work: an intended change, related to God's will, to be accomplished within a defined time.^{xv}

Rendle maintains that the work of leaders is primarily to tell stories of identity - which is not just who people are, but why they are as well. He offers the following five lessons about what he terms "narrative leadership"^{xvi}

- Tell the honest story of current reality
- Also break down/deconstruct old story that held it all in place
- Make sense of people's experience
- Help others find themselves in the story
- Connect next identifiable steps to the larger story of meaning, purpose and possibility

And he suggests nine questions for fruitful conversations:^{xvii}

- Who are we right now?
- Who is our neighbor now?
- What does God call us to do now?
- What difference do we believe God is calling us to make in next 3-5 years?
- What would it look like in 3-5 years if we are faithful and fruitful?
- How will we do it?
- How will we measure our progress toward fulfilling our call?
- What have we learned from our experience?
- What reshaping or changing do we need to work on because of what we have learned?

The work of "narrative leadership" and answering those nine questions is the baseline work to be done by all parishes in transition. The following questions could be used to articulate work in a specific parish situation:

How does the parish live into ECCT's definition of a parish in a new missional age?

To be faithful apostles/disciples, what kind of:

relationships

worship

catechesis

do we need?

How are decisions made?

How does something new get introduced into the system?

How does our community deal with conflict?

What are the gifts/abilities God has given us?

What is our unique situation?

What are the opportunities being presented to us?

What are the attitudes, assumptions, prejudgments, influences, fears that limit our openness to God?

How does our community know that our parish loves them?

An excellent resource for crafting ongoing work is the 2019 book *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You Are Going Leading in a Liminal Season* by Susan Beaumont. Her chapter titles are:

1. An Introduction to Liminality: Neither Here nor There
2. Leading with Presence: Holding Steady
3. Tending the Soul of the Institution: Finding Soul in Place
4. Deepening Group Discernment: Seeking What God Is Up To

5. Shaping Institutional Memory: Tell Me Our Story
6. Clarifying Purpose: Who Do We Choose to Be?
7. Engaging Emergence: Are We There Yet?

*NOTE: A parish seeking a half-time priest **can** do the transitional PIC work articulated above and proceed to call a rector. They also have the option of ongoing life with a PIC (below). It must be noted that candidates for half-time work are local. They are not identified by a "national" search, as no one relocates for a half-time (or less) position.*

All parishes who begin the transition process for calling a rector after January 1, 2020 will have a clergy person appointed with the canonical title "Priest in Charge." They will then move through an approximately three-year PIC period to the calling of a rector. This process can be described as utilizing a Priest in Charge who is transitional.

For Parishes That Are Seeking Half-time or Less Clergy

Our current model of part-time work, largely parishes with what we've called "Missional Priests in Charge", is not working as we designed it. We have not supported the necessary lay leadership development. And clergy do not have time to do the work we have asked them to do within their 8-12 hours per week. Add in the reality of the small number of clergy available for this work, and it is clear that we must find more flexible ways for our part-time clergy to function. The truth is that with the "every Sunday" expectation, a quarter-time priest has no time to do anything except worship and a little pastoral care if they keep their boundaries - and our bi-vocational priests have no choice but to keep their boundaries. Half-time is better, but still not great. Part-time PICs are also supposed to do vestry work, funerals, participate in region and diocesan life, and supervise any licensed lay ministers. Also, if a parish has a priest every Sunday, most of them don't see that anything has changed from the full-time model. We have addressed (poorly) how clergy leadership is intended to function in the part-time model. We have barely addressed at all how lay leadership is intended to function in this circumstance. Thus, the following change:

Beginning January 1, 2020, part-time parish work in ECCT would not necessarily mean the priest is present every Sunday. The following terms are to be negotiated between the parish and the priest:

- ¼ = Priest is present one Sunday per month minimum*
- ½ = Priest is present two Sundays per month minimum*
- ¾ time = Priest is present 3 Sundays per month minimum*

Parishes must identify candidates for specific licensed lay ministries in this part-time PIC model. If they have a priest for half-time or less, at the very least, they need a Eucharistic Minister, Eucharistic Visitor, Worship Leader and a Pastoral Leader.^{xviii} Region teams should be trained for these roles and function wherever needed.

Vestry meetings (and the carrying out of other canonical duties) remain non-negotiable work for the PIC. This change in Sunday time will make sharing of clergy among parishes more feasible. It will also make it possible for part-time clergy to keep healthy time boundaries around their work, and to fit in things like funerals, weddings, as well as region and diocesan events. It is likely to make part-time work not just more attractive, but more possible for many clergy.

The vestries of parishes who have part-time PIC's in place should plan to have a conversation about this change before the MPIC's Letter of Agreement comes up for renewal. The vestries of

parishes with part-time rectors are also be encouraged to consider this change in the terms of their Letters of Agreement with their clergy.

All parishes with part-time clergy, particularly those with ¼ time priests, should be aware of and regularly reflect on the following:

A parish is not just people. As an Episcopal Church, it has a defined infrastructure that must be maintained. **The following responsibilities are non-negotiable**, whether there is a clergy leader in place or not:

- staying in regular communication with the bishop and diocesan staff
- responsibility for the administration of the parish
- oversight of the property.
- making provision for Sunday worship,
- keeping all the congregation's registers and records.
- participation in diocesan life
 - convention
 - convocation
 - sign up to get Region and ECCT emails and read them
- phone messages checked
- mail attended to and bills paid
- vestry meetings held and minutes recorded
- compliance with all ECCT 2019 Safe Church Policies
 - (wardens and vestry should do training)
 - someone has to do background and credit checks when required
- annual budget prepared and presented at annual meeting
- annual financial review - report filed by September 1
- Parochial report filed by March 1
- Common Mission Support paid
- Endowment practices must meet canonical requirements

Today, parishes can go months, even years, without any clergy in charge. The requirements for maintaining parish infrastructure, most of which are determined by TEC canons, are increasingly needing to be met by lay leaders. As parishes continue to shrink in size and the average age of parishioners continues to rise, it is increasingly challenging to carry out the work of running a parish.

If it appears there will not be Sunday supply clergy for four weeks or more, the parish should either schedule an "off-time" service of Holy Eucharist (i.e., not Sunday AM) so they can get a supply priest, or agree to go somewhere else as a community on a Sunday morning at least once a month.

If a parish is seeking a clergy person for less than ¾ time, **serious consideration must be given to whether lay leadership has the capacity and desire to keep running things indefinitely**, including a constant search for supply clergy.

The work of attending to our infrastructure, addressing the pervasive pain, grief, loss and anxiety, and stewarding our future is a lot for any small group of leaders to handle. It is very appropriate to be REGULARLY asking whether they can continue to do it. If not, there are options and to choose

to not keep going is NOT FAILURE. It is a choice for health and faithfulness. As ECCT lives into the new diocesan canon allowing for “intentional Episcopal communities,” possibilities for life together other than as a parish may arise.

If the requirements for trying to keep things going with fewer and fewer (and older and older) folks are becoming too much for a community to meet, there are options to be considered. The following choices all presume there is the will and capacity among the lay leaders to do significant work, convene necessary meetings, and work closely with diocesan staff, especially Bishop Laura Ahrens, who shepherds mergers and closings:

- 1. Formal collaboration:** If getting everything done is the problem, it is possible for neighboring parishes to share the burdens. With some flexibility, parishes can share clergy, musicians, bookkeepers and parish administrators. This option requires the will and capacity to enter into exploratory conversations and openness to experiments.
- 2. Sell the building:** If the building is an overwhelming problem, a parish can work with ECCT leadership to sell it. They can then take the net proceeds and rent space somewhere else. Please note that the process of selling church property is neither simple nor fast, and there must be capacity among the lay leaders to do the necessary work. The parish continues to exist in its new space.
- 3. Merger:** If moving to a different space or cooperating with other parishes seems impossible, it is time to consider a more serious change. If lay leadership is willing to do the work of selling the building and exploring possible partners, again working with ECCT leadership, all proceeds and other net assets can be taken to another parish as part of a merger.
- 4. Close:** If the work of selling the building and exploring merger possibilities is not possible, the next step is to ask the bishops and Standing Committee for permission to take a vote to close the parish. Members can decide to go together to another church or simply all go their own ways. Because the parish no longer exists, its net assets, if any, become part of diocesan resources for future ministry.

All of this work points to an important truth: we have neglected the formation and support of lay leaders at our peril. Going forward, this must be a major focus for the Church. And it is clear that priestly formation must emphasize competency in teaching.

In her sermon at ECCT's 2019 diocesan convention, Bishop Barbara Harris spoke of the difference between a movement and an institution: An institution has leader-centered groups. A movement has group-centered leaders. The changes outlined here are meant to be steps toward our transformation into an authentic movement.

NOTES

ⁱ See Pew Research Center, *In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at a Rapid Pace* (Oct. 17, 2019), available at:

<https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>

and Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (Simon & Schuster, 2016).

For TEC data, go to <https://www.generalconvention.org/research-and-statistics/> . For parish data on attendance and giving, go to <https://episcopalchurch.org/research-and-statistics> .

ⁱⁱ See Rendle, *Quietly Courageous*, Chapter 2

ⁱⁱⁱ Rendle, p. 178

^{iv} Rendle, p. 28

^v Rendle, p. 5

^{vi} TEC canon I.14.3

^{vii} ECCT canon I.6.A

^{viii} TEC canon I.14.2

^{ix} Rendle, p. 119

^x Rendle, p. 28 and Chapter 3. See also Ronald Heifetz's work on adaptive change

^{xi} Information for TEC's Office of Transition Ministry and the Transition Ministry Conference, two places where open clergy positions are posted

^{xii} Rendle, pp. 240-250

^{xiii} Rendle, p. 244

^{xiv} Rendle, p. 237

^{xv} Rendle, p. 206

^{xvi} Rendle, pp. 224-228

^{xvii} Rendle, p. 249

^{xviii} See TEC canons III.4