

Sample Vestry Orientation

By The Rev. Dr. Valori Mulvey Sherer

Vestry Spirituality

*Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
in the breaking of bread and in the prayers?* (BCP, 302)

- What holy habits do we practice (really)? Which then, can we model?
- Ministry of presence – an icon and symbol of support just by showing up!
- Humility: knowing oneself...gifts, graces, and limitations.
- Faithfully detached: it isn't about outcomes or "success" but about listening, learning and moving faithfully ahead.

Leadership Thinking

- **Define the current reality.** Your ability to articulate the current reality will affect the solutions you come up with AND people's willingness to follow you.
- **Account for what is happening.** The past is the key to our future. Placing our seminal stories in the context of the salvation history of the church gives their individual role dignity, meaning, and significance.
- **Know where the organization is headed.** This is not about the end result – God's plans may be bigger or different than we imagined. The important thing is to inspire hope and confidence in God's desired future for us.
- **Make plans and bless the people.** Lots of people can identify the problem. Leaders determine a course of action, and bless and celebrate success.

Vestry Leadership

Transactional

- Getting things done; task oriented. Based on mutual reward.
- Accepts goals, structures of the existing organizational culture (status quo).
- Leader encourages saying: If you will do this and that, you will be a success.

Transformational

- Involves vision, integrity, ideals, and values.
- Aim is to lead the organization to a preferred future and build commitment for the long haul.
- Leader encourages saying: I know it's difficult, but it's the right thing to do... or... Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Commitment to the Church

Each individual vestry member must be committed to the church and its activities.

- The vestry casts and embodies the vision of the church.
- If an event is considered to be a major parish event ALL vestry members should be present (except for good cause). Church members notice when vestry are present or absent at events.
- The congregation will often reflect the commitment level of the vestry.

Financial Commitment

*Each member of the vestry
should be financially committed to the church.*

- The issue is faithfulness – not the dollar amount.
- Vestry members who are NOT financially committed become ongoing problems for the vestry because they are also often less committed to church activities and are often reluctant to take risks when it comes time to approve the budget or spending for a new initiative that requires faith that God will provide.
- Churches generally rise no higher than the commitment level of the vestry.

Church as a Learning Community

Congregations as Learning Communities, Tools for Shaping your Future by Dennis G. Campbell, (Alban Institute, 2000).

- Dialogue: between individual visions that emerge and a shared vision for the entire congregation.
- Dream: creating a Biblically grounded environment where people are willing to risk imagining what God might do.
- Envision: looking toward the future - a natural development of dreaming.
- Trust: there is no effort to convert or persuade, but to challenge and focus the vision, to engage ownership and commitment... as one body unity with Christ.

Which Church Model?

Acts 6:2

Community of Disciples

Characterized by consensus. Maintains focus on the bigger picture. A learning community which understands that mistakes are part of the learning process.

- **Ministry:** to serve the church
- **Purpose:** to share with the rector in overseeing the spiritual and material needs of the congregation
- **Responsibility:** to cast vision, to embody the vision, and to establish policies that will enable that vision to be realized
- **Models a teachable spirit:** reflect upon and articulate learning; learn from mistakes; recognize there may be several solutions to any problem; exhibit a passion for what they are doing

Institutional Model

Characterized by debate and voting (Robert's Rules), winners and losers, in-power and out-of-power

- **Rubber Stamp:** we do whatever the priest wants (we have no responsibility)
- **Finance Committee:** we balance the budget
- **Elected Representatives:** we represent the values and concerns of the people who elected us
- **Board of Directors:** we govern and act as liaisons to ministries
- **Loyal Opposition:** we're here to make sure the rector doesn't do anything too crazy

Church size

(1 of 2)

Family

(Less than 50)

- Membership is by adoption which occurs when secrets are shared with a new member.
- Relationships are more important than what you believe.
- Everyone needs to know by word of mouth (oral tradition and communication are norms) what's happening.
- Worship is informal, sometimes even casual and intimate.

Pastoral

(50 to 150)

- Membership is by incorporation. And is a function of participation, determined by the participant.
- Belief is strengthened by programs and participation.
- The story is important but usually written rather than told. Not everyone needs to be in the loop, and people find out stuff from newsletters and bulletins.
- Worship is more formal, tends to be less intimate.

Church Size

(2 of 2)

Family

(Less than 50)

- Leadership is dynastic and not necessarily based on ability.
- Chaplaincy, not leadership, is the norm.
- Change happens when everyone is ready.
- Focus is more inward. Mission is secondary.

Pastoral

(50 to 150)

- Leadership is democratic and tends to honor gifts and abilities.
- Clergy are expected to lead.
- Change happens when leadership says it's time.
- Focus is more outward. Mission is primary.

Four Principles For Vestries to Know

1. As organizational responsibilities increase, rights decrease.
1. The Fire Brigade – Leaders must only throw water on church fires (hurt feelings, conflict), especially when tempted to throw gasoline.
3. Triangulation – the favoritest game in church. Establish ground rules, boundaries, and procedure for intervention.
4. Always communicate upstream (vestry or staff) it avoids water pollution in town (congregation). *(Alban Institute)*

From Club to Community

Club or Clan

- Survival (what can we do for ourselves?)
- Concerned with structure, building, organization
- Problem-based agenda. Conversations focus on obstacles
- Distrust of judicatory
- Money always a problem
- Scripture and study minimized
- Worship tends to be dull and led by the same few people
- New members must adopt the values of the clan

Transformational Community

- Mission (what can we do for others?)
- Core values clarity: why we are here?
- Opportunity-based agenda. Conversations on assets, talents, gifts.
- Partnership with judicatory
- Money is not the main thing
- Scripture is studied as source for mission
- Worship is lively with diverse leadership
- New members seen as potential new life and diversity

Growth, Change, Transformation

*The way to grow a church is not by bringing in more people,
but by forming better servant leaders.*

- Leadership following the form and example of Christ is servanthood. (Read John, particularly 13:15)
- Continuity and adaptation are not mutually exclusive.
- Change within a body is cyclical (birth, growth, waning, death, resurrection). Our responsibility is to participate fully in each part of the cycle.
- The community that has been drowned in the waters of Baptism can live boldly into new life.
- We know that life will be different in the wake of metamorphosis.

A few final suggestions:

- Ground everything in Scripture and prayer
- Vestry chaplains encourage the ministry of worship of lay leadership
- Clarify the roles of Priest, Deacon, Vestry, Lay leadership annually
- Enjoy!

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