

A TIME TO HEAL AND A TIME TO SEEK ~ QUESTIONS TO CANON CLARK ON THE RECTOR-SEARCH PROCESS

by Laura Dudebout (on behalf of the vestry)

Whether you know it from scripture in Ecclesiastes 3:1 or you are familiar with the 1965 hit by The Byrds “Turn Turn Turn,” you have probably heard: “to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose, under heaven.” Calvary is ready to call a new rector. We had time to heal and now it is time to seek.

When Mother Melanie suggested “Expectation” as the theme for this month’s Canticle, it felt like the perfect way to introduce this interview. We all have expectations around the rector search process and how selecting a new leader will shape the future of our parish. In order to help us set and manage our expectations, we are fortunate to be working with [The Reverend Canon Margaret A. Peckham Clark \(Margo\)](#), who is the Canon for Congregational life for the Episcopal Diocese of Newark. Many of you met her when she celebrated with Calvary on Sunday, November 14. Later that week, I had the opportunity to interview Canon Clark. Her answers helped manage my own expectations so I wanted to pass them on to you. Please reach out directly to Canon Clark or any member of the vestry with additional questions. We are all in this together.



What is your role in Calvary’s rector search process?

As the Canon for Congregational life, I am a member of Bishop Carlye Hughes’ senior staff. I work with congregations and vestries as a coach, mentor and guide on a range of issues, including clergy transitions. It is a common misconception that the Bishop appoints a new rector to a church. It is actually the vestry who calls the next rector to serve. I am here to help actively recruit qualified candidates and support the vestry as they navigate the search process.

What is the first step?

In Calvary’s recent history you have weathered a series of emotional resignations, a global pandemic and two interim rectors. Now is the time to expand on the work you started two years ago with your Advent focus groups and parish-wide survey. We need to take a meaningful look at where the parish is and where you want to go. Right now I am working with the vestry to develop focused ways to encourage conversation and reflection. This is important information for Calvary to gather so you can find the right fit. Now more than ever, calling a new priest requires a concerted effort from both the candidate and the church.

How has the process changed in recent years?

While there was a tried and true way for decades on how to go about clergy transition, it looks very different now than it did even 11 years ago when Calvary called Father Matthew Corkern. For example, if you were involved in a past search, you may have gone through the arduous process of creating a lengthy parish profile that later became a coffee table book in the office of the new priest. We have streamlined this process to meet the reality of the moment, while preserving the goal of providing a match for both a parish and rector.

You said the process has changed. What are some challenges Calvary might face with hiring a new rector?

The pool of available and qualified candidates has changed radically. There are fewer people going to seminary, baby boomers are retiring, and clergy are moving with more regularity. The average tenure of a rector is 6-8 years when a few decades ago you saw rectors staying 20+ years. Although Calvary has a lot to offer (I will get into that), Northern New Jersey has a high cost of living. Calvary has the ability to provide a competitive package for clergy, but remember there is no clergy discount at Lacrosse Unlimited!

Continued on next page.

Continued from previous page.

You have said the competition for qualified candidates is at an all time high. What do you think is attractive about our parish from a potential rector's perspective?

Calvary has also been through a turbulent time and yet you are thriving. You may have noticed the pews are fuller each Sunday and the calendar of events is growing. This shows any prospective priest that the people of Calvary are resilient and faithful. The congregation includes a strong youth presence and is located on a beautiful campus in a vibrant community with good schools. There is a lot to love.

What is the timeline for hiring a new rector?

Ideally, Calvary would welcome a new rector in late summer of 2022. Mother Melanie's letter of agreement has appointed her as Calvary's interim priest until August 2022. Mother Melanie has graciously offered to extend this slightly if needed to ensure a smooth transition, but it would be ideal to have the new leader welcome the congregation next fall. I have already begun to put out the word that Calvary is a vibrant parish that is officially starting its search in 2022. In March, I take part in the Transition Ministry Conference which is attended by an association of canons from more than 30 dioceses. There we talk about issues facing the church and parishes seeking Clergy. I will be presenting Calvary and in the past, I have received many leads from this meeting. I also have plans to visit some of the major Episcopal seminaries, as well as some other conferences and gatherings to network for leads. However, you never know when the right candidate will present him or herself and we need to keep in mind this is a fluid process. We may find someone sooner or later than we expect.

What should everyone keep in mind during the search?

First of all, calling a rector is different than a CEO or any other executive search. It requires different layers of discernment because you are through this process seeking to call both a spiritual leader and the person who leads and supports the growth and functioning of the entire parish. Secondly, I cannot stress enough that although we have a planned timeline, we must remain nimble in this ever-changing climate. As I said before, this is a fluid process with the ultimate goal of finding the best fit in a timely fashion.

You have worked with a number of parishes in Calvary's position. Any closing thoughts?

Even when faced with adversity, we have seen that the people of Calvary are resilient. I feel confident that together we are going to find a wonderful priest to serve alongside the vestry and help Calvary step forward into God's future.