

By JUDY STARK

As a consultant to bishop elections and to parish searches, I probably spend more time than most people reading resumes, looking at Office for Transition Ministry portfolios and listening to sermon podcasts.

I know how to have a good time.

Based on all that reading and listening, let me share with you some of the things I look for when I'm seeking candidates ... the bright spots and the turn-offs ... the ways I've seen candidates undersell themselves or present themselves well.

Here's the quick takeaway: Your application packet is your best foot forward, your one chance to make a good first impression. Don't blow it. So many times, when a search committee calls a new clergy staff member, or a bishop search committee names its slate, people will comment, "This person's materials stood out from the start" or "All the great things we discovered about this candidate were embedded in her paperwork at the beginning."

So make it a good beginning.

Here are five tips.

(1) Please fill out the OTM portfolio completely. When I'm working on a search, I go trolling through the OTM database looking for likely candidates. Help me find you!

In the "Work History and Skills" section, **provide details and accomplishments**, not just job titles and short descriptors ("teaching," "preaching," "pastoral care"). This is where I often find gold nuggets that hint at a candidate's abilities ... or where all I find is gravel that doesn't tell me much.

Respond to the short essay questions. This is your chance to become a "real person" to a search committee, share a story, tell an anecdote, let us see how you think and act, help us get to know you. Do not bypass this opportunity to become more than a list of dates and job titles. What can you tell a search committee that will become a vivid memory point? ("She's the one who ..." as opposed to "Now, which one was she?")

Tailor your response to the job. If the position is "associate for family ministry," tweak your responses to highlight your accomplishments in that area. If the position oversees outreach, bump up those gifts. A one-size-fits-all response in which you seem to have no particular skills for the job in question is likely to become a one-size-fits-none.

List your references (with up-to-date, working phone numbers and e-mail addresses, please). If I see the name of someone I know -- and in the small world of the Episcopal Church, we all know how likely that is -- I'm inclined to pick up the phone and make a call.

You may say, "I'm not looking for a job right now, why should I fill in the OTM?" The answer: Because **a job may be looking for you**. A search committee may be seeking someone with just your skill set -- and it may be a position you'd love -- but if we can't see evidence of your skills, we're going to move on.

If you have questions on completing your portfolio, contact your diocesan transition

minister. The Rev. Meghan F. Froehlich (mfroehlich@episcopalchurch.org) and Ms. Sabrina Nealy (snealy@episcopalchurch.org) in the Office of Transition Ministry are also available to help with technical questions and are glad to assist you.

0. **Keep it timely.** Just this week I got a candidate's packet with the requested text of a sermon. It was a sermon the candidate had preached 14 years ago. Another OTM form referred me to the candidate's blog, where the last post was three years old. Never mind.

0. **Be specific.** Enough with the theory and head talk. I want to read about you and what you've actually done. (Which is the best indicator of what you'll do in the future.) More times than I'd like, the short essay responses are full of theory and quotations from famous people. Tell us about you. Cite a specific example. Tell us how you handled an actual situation. Let us see you in action. Put us in the room as you wade into a messy conflict and resolve it. Let us hear you inviting someone to participate in a ministry. Show us what your life is like outside of church. Are you at the gym, in the kitchen, cheering your kid's soccer team, putting your feet up with a good book and a cup of tea?

(4) Speak up for yourself! No one knows your accomplishments better than you do, so don't be shy. (See Matthew 5:14-16 for permission.) Tell us about something you have built and sustained. Give us specifics on how you delegate and motivate. Show us the numbers: increased pledges, members, kids enrolled in Sunday school or VBS, grant money received, capital campaign pledges, people helped by the food pantry or clothes closet or laundry ministry. (Yes, I know it's not all about numbers. But sometimes it is.)

0. **Don't undersell your experience in a previous vocation.** If you supervised 20 employees and managed a budget of \$2-million, or you were National Saleswoman of the Year, that's valuable experience. Women tell me that nonprofit experience is downplayed or ignored. Well, put it out there and make it one of your talking points.

Now, before you all grab your laptops and start updating your forms, do this.

Sit down with a group of friends -- clergy, lay, within the church and outside -- and ask them to talk to you about what they see as your skills, your gifts, your positives and what we refer to as your "growing edges" (i.e., you need work here, girlfriend). They may recall stories you've forgotten that are great illustrations of your capabilities. They may discern graces of which you're unaware. They may tell you hard truths you need to know. In what sorts of roles can they envision you -- or not?

A question I like to ask references is this: "What environment does this person need to succeed? Where will she thrive? Where will she wither?" Think about that; come up with your own answers; and then ask your circle of friends, above, to tell you what they think.

The answers to those questions may help you focus more clearly on what you seek in your next call. The best way to find a job you'll like, and where you'll do well, is to know what you're looking for at the start.

And let's not forget to pray. Invite Jesus into the process. The best career advice about how you can serve Jesus may come from Jesus himself.

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new clergy leaders. She was a member of the A143 task force that created the online resource Cast Wide the Net (<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/cast-wide-net>). She is a member of the Board for Transition Ministry. She lives in St. Petersburg, FL (Diocese of Southwest Florida). E-mail her at judystark.tm@gmail.com.