Endings, beginnings, and the transitional times that fall between are a part of life; a process even the church itself is not immune from. The story of the choosing of Matthias (Acts 1:21-28) provides us with the first example of dealing with transition within church leadership. As you may recall, that gem of scripture recounts the story of Matthias being chosen to replace Judas via the casting of lots.

I am not suggesting that parishes simply need to cast lots; however, three steps taken by the disciples have clearly informed our own present process. The disciples’ mission - to bear witness to the Risen Christ - informs the three steps in their search process: setting the criteria - in this case, the person who had been with the disciples throughout Jesus’ public ministry and had been a witness to Christ’s resurrection; assessing potential candidates, resulting in two finalists - Joseph called Barsabbas, a.k.a Justus, and Matthias - and, finally, selecting the rightful person who is called by God through prayer and casting lots.

These three basic steps are clearly modeled around and reflected in the search process used throughout the Diocese of Southwest Florida. At the initial meeting with the vestry of a congregation in transition, I bring along copies of our diocesan transition manual entitled The Search Process, and together we review the steps of the process. The vestry’s first task is to create four subcommittees: a self-study subcommittee, a profile subcommittee, a website subcommittee, and compensation committee. The combined work that these subcommittees perform lays the foundation for a successful search for a priest, bearing in mind that the Holy Spirit is a omnipresent participant in the process. While the four subcommittees are working, the vestry can begin to explore potential members of the search committee.

The subcommittees’ completed tasks are delivered to the vestry, and a formal search committee is appointed and charged with recommending a candidate (or candidates) to the vestry. I then meet with the search committee to walk through the Search Process manual and review their role and responsibilities. The posting for the position goes “live” via the Office of Transition Ministry, our diocesan website, the Episcopal News Service digital listings, and regional transition networks. Nominations may come from several sources: the congregation, candidate self-nominations, and/or diocesan nominations from our active pool of candidates within and outside Southwest Florida.

All the materials of priests who are offered as candidates funnel through the Office for Mission and Ministry - my office. Initial reference checks are performed for all nominees, typically occurring between me and my counterpart in the diocese of the prospective candidates. Not all nominated candidates are passed on to the search committee. The Bishop will review the final list and make any necessary edits, which ultimately becomes the official roster of candidates.