

The Constitution of the United States was drafted in Philadelphia in 1787 and was ratified in 1788. About that same time, the Constitution of the Episcopal Church was drafted in Philadelphia in 1785 and was ratified in 1789. Several of the same men participated in both constitutional conventions.

That means that there are parallels in the way our church and our country's governments are organized. And there are a number of checks and balances in the way our church is governed.

We have a bicameral legislature made up of a house of Bishops and a house of Deputies, which includes lay people and clergy. The Episcopal Church has a Presiding Bishop who is elected by the Bishops and ratified by the Deputies. We'll be electing a new Presiding Bishop this summer. In our diocese, our Bishop was elected by the clergy along with lay representatives from each congregation. At St. Paul's, I was selected as rector by the vestry, which is a group elected by the congregation. And in the Episcopal system, the Rector and Vestry together govern the church. We each have areas of responsibility that complement each other.

Some of you have been on search committees to find new rectors, either me or one of my predecessors. I myself have been on 2 search committees for bishops. The first was in this diocese and resulted in the election of Bishop Ohl in 1998. The other was a national search committee in 2003-2006 for the current presiding bishop.

Being on a search committee in the church these days is complicated business. There are lots of criteria to sort through. There are attributes in potential candidates that are looked for.

Sometimes the wish list gets so long and idealized that no human being could possibly meet all of the criteria.

And yet, the first search committee in the history of the Christian church was quite different. We heard about it in our lesson from the Book of Acts.

After Jesus' Ascension, but before Pentecost, the Church gathers together. At that time the Christian community numbered about 120. Peter gets up and tells the church that they need to replace Judas, who betrayed Jesus and then killed himself. Peter even sees a Biblical precedent. He quotes a couple of Psalms. The 2nd one is interesting. It says, "Let another take his position of *EPISKOPE*."

In the NT, this word EPISKOPE is sometimes translated as oversight, which is its literal meaning. In the NT, the related word EPISCOPUS is translated as overseer, which is also translated as bishop. In fact, EPISKOPE & EPISCOPUS are where the Episcopal Church gets its name, since we are a church with bishops. Now, I must add that the early church's understanding of what a bishop was is somewhat different from our job description of a bishop today. In fact, the understanding grows and changes somewhat from the early NT period to the late NT period.

Nevertheless, the selection of the church's first new bishop in the year 29 AD is instructive to us. These days when we look for a new leader we come up with a long list of criteria. In 29 AD, Peter comes up with a list of just one qualification.

Here's the job description: The new bishop should be *"one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us."*

To put it very simply the "successful candidate" will be someone who has known Jesus. That's it. One qualification.

In the group of 120, they found 2 who fit that qualification, 2 people who were not part of the 12 and yet had known Jesus throughout the breadth of his ministry:

1. Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus.
2. Matthias.

We know nothing else in scripture about these men. There is an ancient tradition outside scripture that Matthias was one of the 70 that Jesus sent out in the gospels to preach and heal. But that's it. No other mention.

So, after coming up with these 2 candidates, the early church prays. Then they cast lots, and Matthias is chosen.

By the way, casting lots was a common practice in the OT. But this is the last time it is mentioned in the NT. The assumption is that once the Holy Spirit is given to the church in Acts ch2, casting lots is no longer necessary.

But instead of just pooh-poohing the apostles for being primitive, I think we should honor their discernment process. They did not have clear orders from God. Jesus didn't command them to replace Judas. And yet, they tried to prayerfully discern what God would have them do. And to discern, they turn to scripture. Then they look to the candidates' relationships with Jesus. Then they pray. Not too bad a model. We could do a lot worse in our selection of our leaders.

But there's one thing we need to be very careful about when it comes to leadership positions in the church. We need to be very careful about unrealistic expectations.

Sometimes we get the false idea in our heads that if we just elect the right person, if we just do the right screening, if we just find a someone that matches all our criteria, then things will go smoothly and perfectly. People do this when they get married. Congregations and rectors do it to each other. And dioceses and bishops do it as well.

We all generate unrealistic expectations. And then we're sometimes disappointed to find that our spouse or rector or bishop or congregation isn't perfect. Instead, they turn out to be flawed human beings just like we are.

I heard of an interesting study recently. It was a study of marriages, but I think it can be applied to other relationships. The study was this.

The group sampled was a group of couples, all of whom had been married for 7 years. Then, during their 8th year of marriage, each spouse kept daily records of their interactions with their spouse throughout the day. Getting up in the morning. Getting off to work or school. Any contact they might have during the day. Coming home in the evening. Dinner. Any evening interactions: conversations, being intimate, eventually going to sleep.

Each spouse graded each and every interaction on a scale of 1 to 10.

10 is wonderful, couldn't be better.

1 is the pits, completely awful.

They did this every day for a year. And then, after the year of detailed record keeping, they went back to life as usual. And the study went on for another 7 years, until the 15 year mark had been reached. Then, after 15 years, the researchers looked at trends with the couples based on their responses during their eighth year.

The results broke down this way. Remember the scale: 10 is wonderful, couldn't be better, 1 is the pits, completely awful.

After 15 years of marriage, the couples who averaged 1 to 3 in satisfaction during their 8th year of marriage were almost all divorced. Remember what a score of 1 to 3 means. They were dissatisfied with their relationship most of the time. If marriage is for better or worse, they were having a lot more "worse" than they were having "better," and their relationships didn't survive.

Couples that averaged around 4 were often still married, but their marriages tended to be very rocky and in trouble.

Couples that averaged around 5 to 7 tended to have fairly stable marriages. Think about what that kind of score meant. Somewhat to mostly satisfied, half to most of the time. Yet that turned out to be the basis of a relatively stable marriage.

Then there were the couples that scored 8 to 10. They all lived happily ever after. Right?

No. The couples that scored 8 to 10 tended to be divorced. Let me say that again. The couples who scored 1 to 3 tended to be divorced. Why?

The researchers posited that those who scored their interactions with their spouses as 8 to 10 were not being very realistic. They had romantic illusions that colored their perception of their interactions. They were overly idealistic. They were looking through rose colored glasses. They weren't being honest with themselves about who their spouses really were. But over time, reality set in. And a real spouse could not live forever in that 8 to 10 artificial bubble. Eventually reality came crashing down on them. And their marriages mostly ended in divorce.

The conclusion is that an honest and sustainable human relationship is based on partial happiness, give and take, compromise, accepting the other's faults. If we're going to be in long-term relationships, we need to be realistic 5 to 7 kind of people. Basically happy and contented 50 to 70% of the time. And willing to accept the other's faults the rest of the time.

This goes for my relationship with Renee. I'm not always thrilled with everything she does, and I know she gets frustrated with me at times. And we have to give each other the space and forgiveness to accept those shortcomings. We have to allow each other to be human.

It goes for my relationship with you as Rector. There are times when I'm not especially thrilled with everyone in the congregation. And I suspect that there are times when you might not think everything I do is peachy-keen. But we have to give each other the space to be human.

And it goes for our relationship with our deacons, and with our bishop. That goes for whoever is elected as our new Presiding Bishop this summer. No human being can be perfect. Even though we may have very high expectations, we also need to be realistic.

We need to be 50 to 70% kind of people. We need to remember that every bishop, every priest, every deacon, every Christian is a flawed and fallible human being.

But, then again, we don't need someone perfect. We don't need another savior. We already have one. Jesus alone is perfect. And no human being can ever measure up to his perfect standard.

In Acts 1, the apostles didn't seek a perfect candidate to replace Judas. They just wanted someone who knew Jesus.

That was the best they could do.

And that's probably the best that any of us can expect to do.