

TRANSITION MINISTRY: CLERGY LEAVE-TAKING GUIDELINES

These guidelines are intended to help clergy manage the termination of a relationship in a way that celebrates what has taken place and brings a sense of closure between cleric and parish. Although some situations may be unique, the principles underlying a good ending are constant. Leading a healthy, caring, and clear goodbye to a congregation helps effect a good beginning to the transition of one's vocational life as well as assisting the congregation to have a healthy transition to the next clergy person. You may want to review this list with wardens as a checklist and note when/who/how steps are (or are not going to be) completed.

Steps to take before....

- Begin planning your departure **early**. Sufficient notice to the Bishop is considered to be **6-8 weeks** when accepting another call, and **3 months**, if **retiring** so that there is sufficient time for everyone to process feelings, to put parish business in good order, and to prepare the wardens and vestry for their role in the transition.
- Timing of the announcement(s) is critical. The impulse may be to inform the congregation as soon as possible so that they have time to make arrangements. However, a long period of good-bye can result in feelings of restlessness and a "lame duck" situation. This period only needs to be long enough to inform everyone, accomplish good-byes, and get parish business in order so that the next clergy person (or wardens) has access to the information they need for daily oversight.
- Inform the bishop of your decision and then the wardens, in **person**. Notify the vestry **with** the wardens.
- Follow this order in sharing this news:
 1. Bishop/Canon to the Ordinary
 2. Wardens
 3. Vestry
 4. Parish staff
 5. Congregation
 6. Local community leaders and other diocesan leaders (you may need to resign your seat on community or diocesan committees)

- Consulting with the wardens, send two letters to the congregation:
 - a) One from you, expressing gratitude for your mutual ministry and your intent to end the ministerial relationship with the parish. It is helpful to share information about what your future plans may be.
 - b) One from the wardens, setting forth the vestry's plan for leave-taking and the parish's future, expressing affirmation and hope.
 - c) Typically these letters are mailed on the same day or the day after an announcement is made to the congregation in the context of a principal worship service.
- Notify in **writing** the Bishop's Office (including the date of your last service) and the Church Pension Fund (especially on **retirement**). Copy Molly Girard, Diocesan Administrator, on this communication.
- Share with wardens and begin filling out the "In/Out Processing Checklist for Clergy" available on the diocesan website. Note the request to send a forwarding address to the diocesan office.
- Schedule and plan an exit interview with the Canon to the Ordinary and one with the vestry and parish leaders.
- Plan for a liturgical ending with the parish in the context of worship (see Book of Occasional Services). Coordinate with Canon to the Ordinary so that a representative from the Bishop's Office can participate.
- Plan to say a formal goodbye to shut-ins, staff, and parish groups.
- Plan final visits with individuals with whom you have special relationships.
- Issue an invitation to anyone who has "unfinished business" with you to come and talk.
- Plan ways of saying goodbye to those who have been particularly supportive.
- Make sure to clean out your office by the time of the official "last Sunday," but do so gradually.
- Clean out personal files, *including computer files*. You may wish to leave files that would be helpful to the interim. Consult with Bishop's Office about handling of confidential pastoral information.
- Let the congregation know - in writing - that, while you will remain friends, after your departure you will **no longer do pastoral or priestly things with them** (even in the interim period), such as leading a service or preaching at a wedding, baptism or funeral. You will come back for a parish event **only** at the new rector's invitation, and **then** in the capacity as a former rector.
- Prepare a thank-you and/or farewell piece for the parish newsletter.
- To facilitate the transition in pastoral care, summarize in writing any pertinent information about the sick, shut-ins or others needing pastoral care (sharing with pastoral care committee if there is one).
- Within the context of preaching the gospel, name your feelings and issues of closure in sermons. Do so in ways that allow you to share the experience of change and loss with the congregation, but **don't** lure

- the congregation into taking care of your feelings of sadness or ambivalence.
- If there is a gap between your departure and the arrival of the next clergy person to serve the parish during the transition, be sure arrangements have been made through the Bishop's Office for emergency pastoral coverage. Be sure that lay leaders know about these arrangements.
 - Have a party, in whatever style is most comfortable for the congregation!

The following are NOT the clergy person's responsibility; the vestry should request guidance from the Bishop's Office if clarification is needed:

- Arranging for supply clergy or interim clergy
- Planning farewell events for the clergy person
- Calling for or arranging for a Search Committee
- Making predictions or giving assurances about future clergy leadership, transition periods, search processes, or other transition items that occur after the clergy person is no longer present with the congregation

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