



EPISCOPAL DIOCESE *of* INDIANAPOLIS

Guidelines for a Rector's Leave-Taking

Good beginnings, both for priest and parish, depend upon good endings. The ability for a parish to have a healthy interim period that provides for growth and clarity of mission requires that a departing rector, together with the Bishop, diocesan staff, wardens and vestry, all understand and relate agreed-upon boundaries with care and consistency. A rector's final act of pastoral care for her or his parish is in departing the parish well. This means leaving the rector's sacramental and pastoral roles in such a way that members of the church can begin to discern without distraction the ways that God is calling the church to move forward, as they seek the priest who will lead them into a new future.

A good farewell for the church is best for the departing rector, as well. Rectors have baptized and buried and married and absolved people in the congregations they have served – a distinct kinship in which the priest's path intersects people's profound occasions of sorrow and joy. Pastoral relationships between clergy and parishioners deserve to be reconciled when there has been conflict, celebrated where they have been fruitful, and grieved, as the loss of what has been necessarily changes. When that takes place in a healthy fashion, the departing priest is also better prepared to recognize God's call and continue in life-giving ministry.

Departing as rector

1. If you decide to retire, schedule a meeting to notify the Bishop in person and subsequently in writing at least six months in advance. The conversation and written correspondence should include the date of your last service as rector of the congregation. Your meeting provides the opportunity to consider your needs and the needs of the parish, including implications on clergy staff, lay staff, and lay leadership.
2. If you discern a call to ministry in a new place, notify the Bishop at least three months in advance. You may schedule a meeting with the Bishop to discuss the needs of the parish, including implications for clergy and lay staff and lay leadership.
3. Notify the wardens in person. Together with the wardens, notify the vestry 3-6 months prior to retirement, or at least 6 weeks prior to departing for a new call.

4. Together with wardens and treasurer, determine remaining vacation time and unused leave, clarify parish contributions to the Church Pension Fund and medical insurance coverage, and notify the vestry of these determinations.
5. If you are retiring: Notify the Church Pension Fund. Formal notification requires the Bishop's signed approval.
6. If you plan to remain in the area after your departure as rector: you will need to worship at a congregation other than the one you presently serve as rector.
7. Begin to plan the liturgy that will mark your farewell from the congregation in this role, incorporating elements from "A Service for the Ending of a Pastoral Relationship and Leave-taking from a Congregation" in The Book of Occasional Services, as most closely fits the needs of the parish.

Communicating your anticipated departure

Together with your wardens, send two letters to the congregation:

1. A letter from you to the parish, giving thanks for the ministry you have shared and expressing your intent to conclude the pastoral relationship
2. A letter from the wardens to the parish, with plans for leave-taking and next steps

Clarify with your wardens and vestry, and consistently relate to the parish that:

- You are grateful for the ministry that you have shared in your time as their rector
- After your final service as rector, you may no longer serve as their priest or pastor
- After you leave the parish, you will not take part in conversations with them about the interim minister, the search process, or issues of church leadership
- You may not officiate at their baptisms, weddings, or funerals, regardless of location, without the express invitation of the next settled rector and approval of the Bishop
- You will return to the parish only at the invitation of the next settled rector and with the agreement of the vestry

Preparing to Leave

- Schedule an appointment with the canon to the ordinary for congregational development and leadership. This time provides the opportunity for you to share your thoughts about the particular gifts and challenges you have found at the parish, and to share what you believe are the most important needs that the Bishop and canon should be aware of as the parish moves into the interim period.
- Together with the wardens, review leadership positions and clarify roles and responsibilities of clergy staff, lay staff, and lay leaders.
- Create a calendar with both formal and informal dates, in order to prepare the congregation to continue well in ministry after you have gone (i.e., dates of Annual Giving campaign, as well as the dates when you have generally begun to prepare for the campaign...date of seasonal services such as a summer schedule, etc.). Include official dates for the upcoming year, including the Bishop's Visitation, Patronal Feast, Homecoming, Annual Giving, Graduate Recognition, Annual Meeting, customary celebrations and observations of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter,

Pentecost, and other traditional customs in the parish. Provide this calendar to your wardens and discuss it with them, preparing an additional copy for the interim priest.

- Update job descriptions for clergy and lay staff, and for key lay leader roles; share these updates with wardens.
- Reconcile your discretionary account; return all statements, checks, debit cards, and credit cards to your wardens.
- Update signatures on rector discretionary accounts, other church bank accounts, safety deposit boxes, etc., to remove your name and signature.
- Meet with individuals with whom you have experienced conflict, seeking reconciliation prior to your departure.
- Clarify with those for whom pastoral liturgies have already been scheduled (weddings, baptisms, funerals, etc.) that these services will be officiated by the continuing clergy of the congregation you are departing.
- Notify the parish of your new mailing address and email; prepare a response message to those who contact your church email account and voicemail with the news of your departure.

Preparations for the Future

- Note issues of pastoral care in writing, to be shared with wardens and the interim priest; these notes should include those who are in long-term care or homebound, those involved with premarital counseling, the bereaved, divorces that are in process or recent, those who are chronically or terminally ill.
- If parishioners have given you their funeral plans, note for your wardens, interim, and successor where those files are kept.
- If your congregation has participated in community or ecumenical events (i.e. if your church is a local polling place or has hosted an ecumenical Thanksgiving service), leave clear instructions about that involvement, contact information for leaders who are involved, and expectations about future involvement.
- Update and provide files from vestry meetings and actions during your tenure as rector.
- Ensure that parish registers are current.
- Remove your personal files and possessions. Throw away clutter. Donate or distribute books you do not plan to take with you.
- Provide a file of worship bulletins for at least the past three years, either electronically or in hard copy.
- Update a list of all organizations who currently use the church building, ensuring that they are aware of your departure and providing them with a new parish contact.
- Update the list of all contractors and vendors with whom the church currently does business, including relevant contracts, passwords, scheduled services and renewals, etc.
- Establish with wardens the date you will move out of church-owned housing.
- Provide and participate in opportunities for members of the congregation to say goodbye, and to give you their blessing.
- Turn in all church keys, clearly labeled.
- Assist wardens and Bishop's staff in securing temporary emergency pastoral coverage for the time immediately following your departure.

- Encourage and emphasize the importance of hospitality in the church welcoming your successor and her or his family.
- Leave a notebook for your successor of some of the places you recommend in the community: favorite park, grocery store, good takeout, dry cleaner, hair salon, veterinarian, etc.

After your Departure

- It continues to be your responsibility to clarify with former parishioners that you no longer serve them in a pastoral role.
- Never offer your opinion to former parishioners in discussions of the interim priest, the search process, candidates or potential candidates for rector, lay leaders, or your successor.
- Your official canonical role with the parish concludes on the date of your departure; after that point, your priestly, pastoral, and administrative functions as rector are complete.
- We are people of resurrection: while grief is always present as we leave those we love, our trust is in God's promise of redemption. Seek the appropriate help you need as you grieve this farewell, recognizing that the Bishop and Bishop's staff are prepared to be a resource to you in the process of leave-taking.