



## **LEAVE TAKING**

*As you anticipate your departure/retirement, it is important to have in writing the Bishop's expectations of the departing rector. The relationship of the outgoing rector to the congregation has a profound impact on the capacity of the congregation to accept the ministry of the incoming rector. Therefore, not only are the parameters of retirement or departure important, but how you say a good good-bye to each other is important also. A good beginning depends on a good ending. Your church's ability to call your successor depends on how well you leave and on your ability to let go. Your character and integrity are demonstrated in how you leave a position.*

*The following is collected wisdom and good practices about an important moment in the life of every ordained person, and the congregations with whom they have been in ministry. These are the expected protocols for the Diocese of Western Michigan.*

### **Leave taking Essentials**

Inform the Bishop in person of your intentions to leave/retire, and discuss your transition plans (time table, etc.) with him. Notify him in writing of your leaving and the date of your last service.

Notify the wardens (in person and in writing) and with the wardens notify the vestry of your decision to leave.

Canons require the vestry to accept your resignation in writing, with a copy of the acceptance to the Bishop.

The canons require the wardens to notify the Bishop in writing that the parish is without a priest.

With the wardens, send a letter to the congregation announcing that you are ending your pastoral relationship and expressing your gratitude for your mutual ministry.

With the vestry, clarify the terms of unused leave or vacation time, plans for continuing contributions into the Church Pension Fund, and arrangements for insurance coverage.

If you are retiring notify the Church Pension Fund, securing the proper forms. The Bishop's signed approval is required for retirement and needs several months lead time.

Plan a ritual ending of your pastoral relationship within the context of worship. Refer to the *Book of Occasional Services* for suggestions. Celebrate your mutual ministry with the congregation in a way that is appropriate to the congregation.

Prepare a "thank you" and farewell piece for the parish-wide communication (newsletter, e-mail, etc.)

Plan an ending with parish organizations and staff.

## **Communicating Your Decision**

Assist the wardens with writing a letter to the congregation that outlines your plan for leaving and assures them that they will have support and guidance from the diocesan staff through the transition.

Develop an agreement with the vestry and let the congregation know, in writing, that,

- you value their friendship;
- after you leave, you will no longer be able to function as their pastor or priest;
- you will no longer officiate at their baptisms, weddings, and funerals.
- During the time between rectors, you may not function as a priest in the parish without permission of the Bishop and at the request of the Senior Warden.
- At the invitation of your successor you may attend worship or participate in a liturgy. You may not attend worship at the invitation of any staff or laity. During such a visit your participation is as a guest, and opinions of the existing state of the congregation are to be kept to yourself.
- Because only the clergy are under the discipline of the Bishop, these expectations apply particularly to the priest. However, best practices indicate that the congregation is able to move forward with their life when the clergy spouse also lives into these expectations.

Notify local ecumenical groups or clergy associations that you are leaving and resign from positions you hold in community organizations.

## **Preparing To Go**

Complete an exit interview with the Bishop's Office designee, and hold a mutual review of ministry with the vestry and parish leaders.

List all your current responsibilities, assigning a hand off date, and designating a specific person to take up that task.

Invite anyone who may have 'unfinished business' with you to make an appointment and talk.

With the wardens, review all leadership positions, clarify roles and responsibilities.

Update job descriptions for paid staff.

Meet privately with individuals with whom there may have been tension or conflict.

Be clear about any commitments (baptisms, weddings, funerals) you have scheduled for immediately after your leave taking date. Make the families involved aware of your inability to officiate at such functions.

## Organizing For Your Successor

### Leadership

- ❖ Review with the wardens and vestry their leadership responsibilities for property, finance, and administration during the transition.

### Pastoral

- ❖ Identify those in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and home bound, noting who expects to be visited and with what regularity.
- ❖ Note significant pastoral concerns such as premarital counseling, pregnancies, divorces in process, terminally ill, and the bereaved, remembering to maintain confidentiality of matters that are pastorally sensitive. This information should be left in writing for the interim priest and may be delivered by the Senior Warden or by the Bishop's designee.
- ❖ Note preplanned funeral arrangements and where the information is filed.
- ❖ Encourage and emphasize hospitality for welcoming new clergy and their loved ones.
- ❖ Let people say good-bye, thank you and give you their blessing.
- ❖ Assist wardens in making arrangements for temporary emergency pastoral coverage for the time immediately following your departure.
- ❖ Make plans to worship with another congregation.

### Administrative

- ❖ Prepare a calendar for the upcoming year, including Episcopal visitations, homecoming, patronal feasts, Holy Week, Easter, Diocesan Confirmation, Christmas, sunrise services, graduations, every member canvas, stewardship, and annual meeting.
- ❖ Leave clear instructions about your congregation's participation in community or ecumenical services, as well as their expectations about preaching and hosting future events.
- ❖ Make sure parish lists and service registers are up to date.
- ❖ Deposit historic documents with the Clerk of the Vestry or the parish archivist.
- ❖ Clean out personal files. Keep what you need and carefully dispose of the rest.
- ❖ Take out the trash. Throw away clutter that has accumulated and is no longer in use.
- ❖ Arrange for personal and professional change of address and mail forwarding. Notify those outside the parish of your new email address.

### Finances

- ❖ Make a list of any special funds, their purpose, use and signatories, including scholarships and other financial commitments.
- ❖ Work with the parish Treasurer to reconcile the discretionary fund account(s) and turn it/them over to the wardens.

### Gather in a notebook or a set of files

- ❖ As a kindness to your successors (whether interim or settled) leave a notebook. Not a 'how to' but a 'where to.' Where to get good take-out food, get a good haircut, find a dentist, etc.
- ❖ Prepare a file of audits, parochial reports, annual reports, copies of budgets for five years, and by laws.

- ❖ Identify the location of the safe and who knows the combination.
- ❖ Identify the location of the bank deposit box and who has keys.
- ❖ Prepare a file of service leaflets for the past three years.
- ❖ Prepare a file of Vestry, Eucharistic Ministers and Visitor certificates, lists of current altar guild members, ushers, acolytes, and servers with contact information (phone numbers and e-mail addresses).
- ❖ Create a contact list of parish leaders including roles and email addresses.
- ❖ Describe unique parish customs for the conduct of worship especially weddings and funerals.
- ❖ Prepare a file of current agreements and contact information for all groups that use the buildings.
- ❖ Note the location of home communion set, chrism, last year's palms, the nativity set, etc.
- ❖ Turn in your keys, clearly tagged.
- ❖ Establish a date certain for moving out of church-provided housing and your office.

### Pass on a Blessing

Don't leave anything for the next priest. If it needs to be done, do it! Too many arriving clergy are sunk by things left undone.

### **After You Leave**

After your last day, do not return to the office to check for mail, email, or phone messages.

In all cases, the responsibility belongs to clergy leaving to make clear that the pastoral relationship has ended.

It is expected that clergy will not communicate with former parishioners about matters involving the church and will not meet with any members of the church for any reason.

Never be involved with the search process including giving names or offering opinions about candidates.

Do not triangulate with members of the congregation and your successor.

In the absence of a rector or interim priest, the wardens are canonically responsible for the worship, finances, property and administration of the parish.

Remember, you have no official or canonical role in the parish you leave and your priestly, pastoral, and administrative functions end on the effective date of your resignation or retirement.

*Prepared by the Transition Ministry Office  
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