



The EPISCOPAL DIOCESE of ATLANTA
Serving Middle and North Georgia

When Clergy Leave or Retire: Changing Roles and Boundaries

When clergy leave or retire, new roles and boundaries must be developed for the retiring or leaving clergy, for the clergy's family, and for the members and staff of the parish. These guidelines address that transition.

THE LEAVING or RETIRING CLERGY

Because clergy have such a strong influence on every facet of parish life, clergy who retire or leave should be careful, and intentional, to avoid any participation in decision-making processes in the parish during and after the transition. The retiring or leaving clergy must not participate in the selection of his/her successor, nor participate in advice for the search before leaving the parish. When the departure is announced, the remaining work is to have an orderly and good "good-bye" from the parish.

These following steps are provided by the Bishop's Office and should be considered standard policy.

- Do not attend any official parish function, including worship.
- Do not engage or discuss any pastoral liturgies and refer any requests for special liturgies to the new clergy.
- To avoid triangulation and involvement in parish decisions, be cautious about attending social functions that are attended mostly by parishioners.
- Avoid discussions of concerns about the parish with parishioners. Refer such to the new rector.

- Provide a notebook with instructions on passwords, location of documents, rationale for procedures, ongoing pastoral work, or any other matter that will smooth the transition for the successful arrival of the new rector.
- Disengage from all parish-based social media platforms.
- Be available for supply or interim work as the need arises in other parishes of the diocese.
- Nurture your worship and devotional life by attending other parishes.
- Continue to attend clergy meetings and retreats; participate in diocesan ministries; use your years of service to the church in as many ways as possible.
- Do not return to the parish unless invited by the new rector. Expect that any invitation may be after the new rector has been in place for a full year, and not before.

THE PARISH

- The leaving or retiring clergy, while still employed, should be given time and help to remove personal items from the office, allowing staff to assist. The leaving or retiring clergy may want to do this after hours.
- Unless the clergy's leave-taking is due to malfeasance, no one should be allowed access to the office of the clergy until confidential and sensitive files can be destroyed or handed to designated parish leaders.
- Parish e-mail accounts must be closed and proper forwarding information displayed. For a short time, some e-mails may be forwarded.
- The website must be updated with the new information.
- Passwords for accounts and signature cards must be changed.
- The staff should be given specific handling instruction for post office mail. Mail for the parish, addressed to the priest, will continue to arrive for many months. Discretion in opening mail is important, but all mail addressed to the parish is the responsibility of the parish to handle.
- The parish can assist the leaving clergy and family in detaching from the parish by respecting the guidelines requiring the retiring or leaving clergy to keep a distance, thus allowing all to transition to new roles.
- There is no need to end friendships, but continuing inclusion may be cause for pain rather than encouragement toward the new reality and development of new boundaries. Intention is necessary not to engage the leaving clergy and family.

THE FAMILY

- The family of the retiring or leaving clergy, who may have engaged in ministry in or out of the parish, is now in a delicate situation, having to deal with the new dynamic. It has been painful for some to let go because their ministry and networks were formed both because of their relationship to the rector, and apart from that, Experience has taught that withdrawal from these activities is best.
- The spouse/partner must also refrain from criticism of the vestry, staff, interim or new rector and avoid being drawn into any triangulation with members of the parish.

PASTORAL CARE

- The bishop and bishop's canon staff is the avenue through which pastoral care will be channeled for the leaving or retiring clergy and family.

WHEN / IF THE LEAVING or RETIRED CLERGY RETURNS

- The cleric who used to serve the parish may only re-connect with the parish at the invitation of the new rector. Any conversation about the re-entry should occur no sooner than the one-year anniversary of the new rector and will be decided in consultation with the bishop. With the advice and consent of the bishop, the new rector and cleric who used to serve the parish may discuss and decide the nature of presence and participation in the life of the parish.