



*The* **EPISCOPAL DIOCESE of ATLANTA**  
*Serving Middle and North Georgia*

## **When a Rector Leaves or Retires: Changing Roles and Boundaries**

When a rector leaves or retires and plans to remain in the vicinity of the last parish served, new roles and boundaries must be developed for the retired rector, for the priest's family, and for the members and staff of the parish. These guidelines address that transition.

### **THE LEAVING or RETIRED RECTOR**

Because the priest as rector has had a strong influence on every facet of parish life, she/he should be careful, and intentional, to avoid any participation in decision-making processes in the parish. The retiring rector must not participate in the selection of his / her successor, nor 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 interim rector or bishop.
- 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 interim or 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 interim and 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 interim or the 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 rector, while still employed, should be given time and help to remove personal items from the office, allowing staff to assist. The rector may want to do this after hours.
- Unless the retirement is due to malfeasance, no one should be allowed access to the office of the retiring rector 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 retiring rector and family in detaching from the parish by respecting the guidelines requiring the retiring rector 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 retired rector and family.

**THE FAMILY**

- The family of the leaving or retired rector, 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 retired rector and family.

**WHEN / IF THE LEAVING or RETIRED RECTOR RETURNS**

- The new rector and the former or retired rector may discuss and decide the nature of presence and participation in the life of the parish. Any conversation about the re-entry of the former or retired rector should occur no sooner than the one-year anniversary of the new rector.