



The Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina

Policy on Clergy Leave-Taking

“Keep in mind that one’s role as a parish priest is to serve as a guide and companion for one section of their pilgrimage, after which they are handed off to the next guide and companion, who will bring different but equally important gifts. Only God serves as their companion for the entire journey.”¹

When a priest (rector, interim rector, priest-in-charge, assistant, or associate) or a deacon leaves a parish, two simultaneous truths emerge: grief as friendships and pastoral relationships that have been nurtured for years begin to change or end and the crucial need of the parish to transition to their new priest or deacon and the important work of nurturing new pastoral relationships.

While the Bishop is sensitive to the pastoral issues which can arise for a clergy person who leaves a parish, especially if that person leaves to retire, clergy have a duty to serve the best interests of the parish and to follow the pastoral direction of their bishop.

Priests leaving a parish are not to attend worship or any function at the parish or communicate with parishioners regarding parish matters during the interim period or for a period of one year after the new rector has arrived. If the priest wishes to attend his or her former parish for any reason at the end of this period, the priest should contact the new rector for a time to discuss this option. It is at the sole discretion of the new rector if his or her predecessor may return to the church community or function sacramentally in the parish.

The policy regarding deacons when a new rector is called is covered in the Deacon’s Manual and provides that deacons may stay only with the support of the new rector and the Bishop. A deacon who retires (for reasons other than age) must absent him/herself from the parish for a minimum of 12 months. Deacons absent from a parish are not to attend worship or any function at the parish or communicate with parishioners regarding parish matters during the period of absence.

Clergy leaving a parish (or preparing to absent from a parish) are required to make clear to the parishioners that the pastoral relationship has ended and that it will not be appropriate for parishioners to discuss parish matters with the clergy person or to ask the clergy person to function sacramentally (regardless of the location of the service) during this period.

Clergy who are leaving a parish must schedule an exit interview with the Bishop. The Bishop strongly encourages spouses to attend.

¹ On the Emmaus Road, Mary Brennan Thorpe, Church Publishing Inc., New York, NY. 2020.