A Directive regarding clergy boundaries after leaving a parish

When a clergy person leaves a congregation the pastoral relationships must end. Inherent in every professional pastoral relationship is a personal relationship. This mix of relationships goes to the very being of who we see and experience ourselves to be as priest in God’s church. Without both, none of us could function effectively as pastors to those who have been called into our lives. Healthy boundaries grow out of healthy pastoral relationships.

You should NOT attend worship services or other programs of the parish beginning the date of your departure through the one (1) year anniversary date of the new rector.

It is important for you to communicate to the congregation that you will no longer be able to conduct, baptisms, weddings and funerals as well as make pastoral visits after your departure. It is certainly flattering and alluring to be asked to enter people’s lives in the ways you have been trained to do. To be asked to be at the bedside of a dying member is an intimate act. Circumstances such as these and others are not situations to which we can easily say no but it is imperative to do so for the health of the church and new leadership.

It is your responsibility to communicate to each request with a firm but pastoral response. Certainly you will want to communicate that you continue to care about them and their family when declining to fulfill their request. A suggested response might be, “I’m honored that you have asked me to do such but I am sorry I cannot as it would be inappropriate for me to engage in the life of the congregation now that I am no longer the rector.” You might even want to support the new rector by saying something like…. “I know your new rector ________ will do a wonderful job.”

It is understood that the most important relationship in dealing with the ethics of clergy transition and boundaries after leaving a parish is the one between you and the new rector. When this relationship is open, honest and healthy, boundary issues rarely appear as a problem. It is understood that it is NOT the responsibility of the new rector to enforce boundaries of you, the former rector. It is not appropriate for you to ask the Interim Rector or newly called Rector to give you permission to conduct such services. This dynamic puts the interim or new rector
in a “no win” situation. When you do not abide by the boundaries set forth in this directive you put the new rector in an awkward situation which is not helpful to the congregation. It leaves the new rector in the unenviable position of either relinquishing the pastoral role or saying NO and being judged as controlling and ridged at best and at worst, uncaring to the pastoral need.

As a courtesy, please call the new rector and inform them when a parishioner has made a request of you and share that you have responded under the guidelines of this directive.

**It is also important that your spouse separate herself/himself from participation in the life of the congregation until the one year anniversary of the new rector.**

Finally, you need to schedule with the dean of your convocation a “Service of Ending Pastoral Relationship” found in the *Book of Occasional Services* prior to your departure. Please notify the Clergy Transition Officer of the service date.
A Covenant of Closure
Rector and Parish

RECTOR:

- I will separate myself from participation in the life of the congregation from which I served beginning the date of my departure through the first anniversary date of the new rector.

- I understand, for the health of the parish it is important for me to sever all pastoral ties with the people of the congregation. This includes: pastoral calls, hospital visits, giving advice, counseling with members, not presiding at weddings, funerals and baptisms of former parishioners. If asked to perform ministries in the community I will encourage those asking to form a relationship with the parish and its new Rector.

- I will confer only with my Bishop about any problems I perceive in the congregation, and not discuss them with members.

- I will communicate with my Bishop should conflict, or other differences arise between myself, the new rector and the congregation.

- After the first anniversary of the new rector, if I wish to participate in the parish I will communicate with the Bishop who will facilitate a discussion of this possibility with the new rector. I will trust and honor the decision.

- I reaffirm my vows as an ordained priest. Relying on the grace of God I also reaffirm my commitment to the renewal of the vows of ordination for this Diocese.

- I understand my spouse has also been a faithful minister to this congregation and will also abide by the guidelines of this directive by not participating in the life of the congregation until the first anniversary of the new rector.

- By signing this document I agree to live by the terms of this directive.

_________________________________________  ____________
Rector                                date
CONGREGATION:

We accept that our former rector will separate himself/herself from participation in the life of this congregation beginning their departure date through the one year anniversary of the new rector.

We will abide by this directive by NOT asking the former Rector to make pastoral calls, hospital visits, give advice, counsel, preside over baptisms, weddings, or funerals.

We will confer with the Bishop or new rector about any problems we perceive in the congregation, and not discuss them with the former rector.

We will communicate with the Bishop should confusion, conflict or other differences arise between the former Rector and this congregation.

We understand it is important for the clergy spouse of the former rector to separate his/herself from the life of the parish and will not seek her/him out to serve in any capacity nor will we seek her/his advice or comments on church matters.

Relying on the grace of God, we reaffirm our commitment to support our priests as they seek to be faithful to their ordination vows of the Episcopal Church in this Diocese.

__________________________________________  ____________
Sr. Warden                                     date

Vestry members
__________________________________________  __________________
__________________________________________  __________________
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