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RCL

What If I Don't Like The New Rector?

What if I don't like the new rector (or interim priest)? This question is surely on many people's minds as we progress through this stage of seeking a new rector for our spiritual community. It seems to me that there are two answers, the short one and the long one.

The short one is: leave now and find a place in which you are comfortable. This one is tempting because it eases our sense of discomfort and comforts us that we are *doing something about it*, a favorite need of us ever-active Americans. But this short answer has lots of drawbacks, not the least of which is missing out on some opportunities and invitations to growth.

The longer and better answer is: wait awhile – at least a year – and give a relationship a chance to grow, on both sides, from the new priest and from you. Have you ever heard a piece of music that annoyed you the first time around but on hearing it more times, you grew to like it? People can be like that. Once we get to know someone better, once we get to understand them, why they do things, how they express themselves, we may find that we have a new friend, someone it would have been a shame to have missed. I have a few married friends who quite disliked each other when they first met, but in whom familiarity fostered real love.

At the other end of this new relationship is the new priest. He or she is likely to be nervous at first, cautiously trying to find his or her way in an unknown community, liable to make misjudgments and mistakes that they would not make when they settle in. This unsettled time is an opportunity to practice real Christian virtues: humility, patience, charity. Humility tells us that the world does not revolve around us and our wants; we have to take our place within a larger order, getting some things we want and letting others go. Patience tells us that we are creatures of space and time, that the real situation and ramifications unfold themselves in time and it is needful for us to let some natural psychological and spiritual processes take their appropriate duration. Charity, or love, is that concern and care for the other which does not let us treat them as a thing to be used but as a person to be cherished, even when we disagree.

This doesn't mean that anyone has to be a doormat. After a reasonable interval, if you still have issues, I suggest meeting with the new priest and discussing the issues – humbly, patiently, kindly, charitably. It would be helpful to make a list of what you wish to discuss, think about them, refine them, and send them to the priest so he or she has a chance to mull them over before your meeting. Above all, keep emotions out of it, even in emotional situations. The purpose here is to understand, and emotions get in the way of responsibly hearing the other person, giving due weight to their position, and understanding them. You may eventually decide to leave, but that's a decision that should be arrived at coolly, unemotionally. And, remember, that other priests in other places have their issues, too!

Humility, patience, charity, kindness – you can't go wrong with these four.