



Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia Policy on Retiring/Departing Clergy

January 1, 2020

When clergy resign or retire from a congregation, it is incumbent upon them to set appropriate boundaries in order to create space for incoming clergy to build pastoral relationships with the congregation. The health of the congregation as well as that of the departing clergy is dependent upon the care with which the transition is managed, as is the successful ministry of incoming clergy.

The policy of the Diocese of Southern Virginia is that departing clergy have the responsibility for bringing closure to pastoral relationships with congregation members and helping the congregation to understand future boundaries and why they are important. This includes stating clearly and positively that engagement in the life of the congregation will end. Additionally it means that those who are terminating pastoral relationships are on an emotional and spiritual journey of grieving that is undergirded by the hope that their future is in the hands of a loving God.

The Bishop and the Canon to the Bishop are available to provide resources, support, and guidance to help both clergy and congregations to navigate the journey of transition in ways that will ensure the future health of the parish.

It has been our experience that the termination of pastoral relationships is best done in a very focused manner. The Episcopal Church provides a liturgy for "The Ending of a Pastoral Relationship and Leave-Taking from a Congregation" (Book of Occasional Services, 2003). This liturgy celebrates the clear closure to the pastoral relationship. The departing clergyperson is expected to include this liturgy as a part of the final service(s) at the church.

Once clergy have left a position, it is expected that she or he will refrain from accepting requests from members or former members of the congregation to provide pastoral services such as baptisms, weddings, funerals, or any other act of public worship. Additionally, it is not appropriate for prior clergy to solicit such invitations.

After a period of one year has elapsed following the first public worship service conducted by the incoming clergyperson (Interim Rector, Rector, Priest-in-Charge, etc.), departed clergy may, with the consultation and consent of the Bishop Diocesan, accept invitations from the new clergyperson to participate in specified life events of the congregation. This period of one year is renewed afresh upon the arrival of the next Rector (or subsequent Interim, Priest-in-Charge, etc.) to assure that the incoming clergyperson has the opportunity to cultivate pastoral relationships and engage fully in the development of ministry within the congregation.

Having left their former position, clergy and their families are strongly encouraged to nurture their faith life in other parishes as well as through participation in diocesan or national ministries, retreats, spiritual guidance or through other gatherings. The Bishop's office stands ready to support clergy and clergy families in their transition.