



The Diocese of Michigan Guidelines for Clergy Leave-taking

A good beginning depends on a good ending. Your church's ability to call your successor and/or continuing in the ministries you lead depends on how well you leave and on your ability to let go. Your character and integrity are demonstrated in how you leave a position.

These guidelines are a collection of wisdom and good practices about an important moment in the life of every ordained person, a moment of celebration, of ending, of beginning, of death and of resurrection. (P) indicates for priests only and (D) indicates for deacons only.

Leave Taking Essentials

- If you are thinking about leaving or retiring it is best to begin discussions with your bishop, transition officer or for deacons the archdeacon.
- After conversation with the bishop, transition officer or archdeacon, inform the bishop in writing of your leaving and the date of your last service.
- Notify clergy colleagues and wardens (in person) and with the wardens notify the vestry of your decision to leave.
- (P) If you are a rector, the canons require the vestry to give formal consent of your resignation.
- (P) The canons require the warden to notify the Bishop in writing that the parish will be without a rector or vicar.
- (P) With the wardens and treasurer, clarify the terms of unused leave or vacation time, plans for continuing contributions into the Church Pension Fund, and arrangements for insurance coverage and secure the approval of the vestry. *(The only vacation time that at congregation could be liable for is a pro-rata amount of any unused vacation time for the current year. Neither sick leave or comp time are accrued or carried over).*
- (P) Notify the Church Pension Fund, securing the proper forms, if you are retiring. The bishop's signed approval is required for retirement.
- Plan a ritual ending of your pastoral relationship within the context of worship. Refer to the *Book of Occasional Services* for suggestion.
- Plan an ending with parish organizations and staff.

Communicate Your Decision

- (D) Send two letters to the congregation:
 - From the Deacon- a letter expressing your intent to end the pastoral relationship with the parish and gratitude for your shared ministry
 - From the Rector/Vicar- expressing the process of planning a good goodbye.
- (P) Send two letters to the congregation:
 - From the Priest- a letter expressing your intent to end the pastoral relationship with the parish and gratitude for your shared ministry
 - From the Wardens- expressing the process of planning a good goodbye vestry's plans for leave-taking and the next steps.
- Develop an agreement with the vestry and let the congregation know in writing that:
 - You value their friendship
 - After you leave, you will no longer be able to function as their priest or deacon.
 - It will no longer be your role to officiate at baptisms, weddings, and funerals;
 - You will come back only at the invitation of the rector/vicar and with the concurrence of the vestry or bishop's committee.

Prepare to Go

- (P) Schedule an exit interview with the transition officer
- (D) Schedule an exit interview with the archdeacon
- List all your current responsibilities, assigning a hand off date and designating a specific person to take up each task.
- Update job descriptions for paid staff as well as clarifying roles and responsibilities.
- Meet privately with individuals with whom there may have been tension or conflict
- Be clear about any commitments (baptism, weddings, funerals) you have scheduled for immediately after your leave-taking date.

Organizing for your Successor

- Prepare a written and confidential "welcome" document for your successor.
- Review the parish register to make sure it is an accurate record of your ministry
- Leave clear instructions about your congregation's participation in community or ecumenical services, as well as their expectations about preaching and hosting future events.
- Balance discretionary fund and turn it over to the wardens.
- Clean out personal files. Keep what you need and carefully dispose of the rest.
- Remove all personal belongings from the church including books and vestments.
- Throw away clutter that has accumulated and is no longer in use.
- Create a contact list of parish leaders including roles and email addresses.
- Turn in your keys, clearly tagged.
- (P) Establish with the vestry or bishop's committee a date certain for moving out of church-provided housing.
- Encourage and emphasize hospitality for welcoming new clergy and their loved ones.

- Let people say good-bye, thank you and give you their blessings.
- (P) Assist warden in making arrangements for temporary emergency pastoral coverage for the time immediately following your departure.

Help your Congregation have a Strong Relationship with their next Priest or Deacon

- Arrange for change of address and mail forwarding.
- After your last day, do not return to the office to check for mail, email or phone messages.
- Relinquish administrative rights to church social media accounts, and make it clear that you will not be posting or commenting on church related social media accounts.
- In all cases, the responsibility belongs to clergy leaving to make clear that the pastoral relationship has ended.
- Never be involved with the search process, including giving names or offering opinions about candidates.
- Avoid getting triangulated with members of the congregation about the future ministry of the church or any successors.
- Be clear that is not appropriate for you to discuss any parish business after you leave.
- Make plans to worship at another congregation.

The guidelines recognize that, during the tenure of a pastoral relationship, genuine and often lifelong relationships are formed and that there remains a need on the part of the priest and some former parishioners to maintain these long standing and meaningful friendships. However, it should be noted that clear distinctions between the pastoral identity and the identity as personal friend must be clarified and appropriate boundaries concerning the former must be established. It should also be recognized that continued participation in the life of the parish at any level may be a cause for pain rather than encouragement toward the new reality and development of new boundaries.

Guidelines for Departing Clergy's Family:

The family of the leaving or retiring rector, priest-in-charge, vicar, or deacon who may have engaged in ministry in or out of the parish, been part of leadership and in some cases employed by the church, is now in a delicate situation, having to deal with a new dynamic. It has been painful for some to let go because their ministry and networks were formed both because of their relationships to the priest/deacon and apart from that. Experience has taught that withdrawal from these activities is best. Just as the priest or deacon must leave the church, we require that the family should do so as well, for at least 1 year. Along with the priest or deacon, the spouse/partner must also refrain from criticism of the vestry, staff, priest or deacon and avoid being drawn into any triangulation with members of the parish.

We thank the Diocese of Connecticut, Diocese of Chicago, and Diocese of New Jersey for their leave-taking resources.