



Leaving a Congregation

Things to Do

- Notify the Bishop in person of your decision to jointly determine the date of departure, and when to inform the wardens, vestry and congregation.
- Begin planning early so that there is sufficient time to process feelings, to get the business of the parish in good order, and to prepare the wardens and vestry for their role in the transition. You should plan to give 60 days notice--longer and the closure is prolonged and people become eager for you to leave so they can move on.
- Write a letter from the rector expressing your intent to end the pastoral relationship with the parish and gratitude for your shared ministry. Let the congregation know that while you will remain friends, you will no longer do pastoral or priestly things with them, such as officiating or preaching at a baptism, wedding or burial. With the exception of the celebration of new ministry, you will only return for a parish event after two years, and only at the invitation of the next rector.
- The wardens should write a letter with the vestry's plans for leave-taking and next steps. The warden should contact the Canon for Congregational Vitality as soon as a rector's departure is confirmed so preparations for the search process can begin.
- Notify in writing the appropriate community, diocesan and national personnel.
- To facilitate the transition in pastoral care, summarize in writing any pertinent information about the sick, home-bound or those with special needs.
- Plan ending conversations with individual parishioners and staff
- Issue an invitation to anyone who has "unfinished business" with you to come by and talk.
- There will be a hiatus between your departure and the arrival of the Interim Rector. Be sure that the vestry has made provision for pastoral care during this time and that appropriate lay leaders and staff know who to contact.
- Change mailing address and phone number in a timely manner. Clean out personal files including computer files. Return all keys and equipment, such as ministry cell phones, to the parish office.
- Plan for the final service. The Book of Occasional Services includes "A Service for the Ending of a Pastoral



Relationship and Leave-taking from a Congregation.”

- Celebrate! In whatever way is most comfortable for the congregation, celebrate your time together.

Things to Avoid

- Do not become involved in the search process for the new rector.
- Don't continue pastoral relationships with parishioners after your departure.
- Don't continue in positions in the community that are extensions as your role as rector. For example, if you always officiated at the lighting of the community Christmas tree, then you need to resign from that position as well.