



EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN CONNECTICUT
PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S MISSION

Leaving Well Policy for Deacons

When a Deacon Leaves an ECCT Parish or Worshipping Community

When a deacon leaves an ECCT parish or other worshipping community, both the deacon and the congregation must establish and maintain new boundaries. In addition, certain tasks are required for an orderly transition. The health of both the departing deacon and the congregation are greatly affected by how well the transition is managed.

When a deacon's departure is announced, the remaining work is to have an orderly and appropriate "good-bye" from the parish. Then, after the deacon's departure, both the congregation and the deacon can live fully into reimagining what is next for their lives.

The following are the bishops' expectations and ECCT policy governing how deacons are to leave a parish or other worshipping community in Connecticut.

The Deacon: Before departure from a parish or worshipping community

Communicates in writing and verbally to all members of the parish that:

- Relationships with members of the parish are valued
- The wellbeing of the deacon and parish require that they work together to bring closure to all relationships (this includes seeking healthy closure to relationships that have been life giving as well as those that have been challenging).

Seeks support from the bishop and other appropriate sources outside of the parish for ongoing processing and spiritual and mental health (i.e., spiritual director, therapist, peer clergy, etc.).

Plans, with parish clergy and lay leaders, a liturgy to mark closure of relationships and the deacon's departure.

Avoids being named deacon emeritus. The canons do not provide for such honorary titles, and this practice, besides being intrinsically confusing, is not grounded in seeking health and wholeness as both deacon and parish move on.

Works to bring all relationships to healthy closure, both individually and corporately. It is important to find ways to celebrate the ministry shared between the deacon and congregation.

Notifies local ecumenical groups or clergy associations of their leaving and resigns from positions held in community organizations when the position is held by virtue of serving as deacon of the parish.

After departure from a parish or worshipping community

Does not attend any official parish function, including worship.

Does not engage in or discuss any pastoral liturgies and refers any requests for special liturgies from parishioners to the current priest* or bishop.

Avoids triangulation and involvement in parish decisions, and refrains from attending social functions that are attended mostly by parishioners.

Avoids discussions of concerns about the parish with parishioners, and refers such to the current clergy or lay leaders if there is no clergy.

Informs the current parish priest of conversations with former parishioners who make any request, seek advice or pastoral care.

Disengages from all parish-based social media platforms.

Disengages from all social media interactions with those affiliated with the parish.

Avoids participating in or commenting on activities of past, current and future clergy, including on social media.

Nurtures their worship and devotional life by attending other parishes.

Continues to attend clergy meetings and retreats; participates in diocesan ministries; faithfully uses their experience and wisdom in service to the church.

Does not return to the parish for one year. After one year, only if invited by the current parish priest in consultation with a bishop. This includes wakes, writing pastoral notes, or other forms of communication.

No longer functions as a pastor to those affiliated with the parish, which means that the deacon is not permitted to participate in baptisms, weddings, and funerals for those affiliated with the parish.

Avoids social contact with former parishioners. Leaves instructions on passwords, location of documents, rationale for procedures, and any other materials necessary for ongoing parish administration, including the Discretionary Fund.

The bishops and ECCT staff are the avenue through which pastoral care will be provided for the leaving or retired deacon and family.

The Parish or Worshipping Community after the departure of the deacon:

Supports the deacon and their family in detaching from the parish by respecting the policy requiring the deacon to keep a distance, thus allowing all to transition to new roles. Continuing inclusion may be cause for pain rather than encouragement toward the new reality and development of new boundaries. Intention is necessary not to engage the deacon and family.

Ensures that the deacon's parish e-mail accounts are closed and proper forwarding information displayed. For a short time (90 days or less), some emails may be forwarded.

Updates the website with the new information.

Changes passwords for accounts and gets new signature cards if necessary.

Ensures that staff has specific handling instructions for post office mail. Mail for the parish, addressed to the deacon, may continue to arrive for many months. Discretion in opening mail is critical, and all mail addressed to the parish is the responsibility of the parish to handle.

The Deacon's Family

The family of the deacon, who may have engaged in ministry in or out of the parish, is now in the delicate situation of having to deal with the new dynamic created by the deacon's departure and the requirements laid out in this policy. It has been painful for some to let go because of their own parish ministries and connections they have formed. Experience has taught that withdrawal from these activities is best.

For the wellbeing of the parish, the deacon's spouse/partner must refrain from criticism, comment, or engagement of the vestry, staff, and present clergy and avoid being drawn into triangulation with members of the parish in any and all interactions, including through social media. It is encouraged that the deacon's family also find a new worshipping community.

Deacons who go on to serve in communities near the parish and/or regional ministries

Deacons may be assigned to a setting near their previous parish. As a deacon's ministry is to invite persons to engage in collaborative ministries outside of the parish building, a deacon may find an opportunity to connect parishioners from their previous parish/es with a ministry of their current setting including regional ministries. If the invitation is to "go out" into the world, the deacon must connect with the current parish leadership before exploring whether parishioners might be interested in joining these collaborative ministries.

With the permission of the parish's present clergy or lay leadership if there is no clergy, deacons may invite former parishioners to "go out into the world". The deacon may not "go back" to the parish for any events or functions. Any "going back" of the deacon would need to be with the permission of the bishops.

Some general notes on deacons

Deacons serve 8-10 hours in the parish and community when they are assigned to a parish.

Deacons are not paid for their ministry. They do receive mileage for pastoral visits and funds for continuing education.

Deacons are generally assigned to a parish within a 20-30 mile/minute radius of their homes.

Deacons rotate through a variety of ministry settings with 3-4-year assignments during their active ministry.

Deacons do not serve in their home parish as this is the context for their monthly Sunday "off."

* Where this document references priest, if there are no clergy presently serving the parish, the elected lay leadership are the ecclesiastical authority for making decisions.

[revised 10-19]