Deacons in Times of Priestly Transitions

1. Deacons when a parish transitions from a Rector to an Interim Priest In Charge

2. Deacons when a Missional Priest announces they are leaving

3. Deacons when a parish transitions from a Rector to a Provisional or Conditional Priest In Charge

1. Deacons when a parish transitions from a Rector to an Interim Priest In Charge

When a parish has a Deacon and the Rector announces that they have been called to another parish or they are choosing to resign, it is been our practice in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut (ECCT) to invite the deacon to stay during that time of transition with the Interim Priest In Charge. Typically, we ask the deacon to move six months after the new rector has been called. Occasionally there are reasons why a deacon would leave prior to that time. Those conversations are made in negotiation with the Interim Priest In Charge, the Deacon, and the Bishop.

During the time of transition, congregations also often rely heavily on the ministry of the deacon. This is particularly true before an Interim Priest In Charge is assigned. It is important for the congregation to realize that the diaconal ministry is very different from priestly ministry. While a deacon may choose to do more pastoral work during the interim priest in charge time, the reality is that the deacon is asked to serve 8 to 10 hours a week in a congregation. It would not be expected for that to increase during the interim time. Plans should be in place for emergency calls. The deacon’s ministry also is to encourage the congregation to explore the needs and wants of the communities where the parish is located and to wonder with congregations how God is calling us to engage more fully in our neighborhood. This work does not change during the interim time.

The business of the parish is the responsibility of the parish vestry. As such, requests for Sunday supply, parochial report filing, and any other business of the parish should be completed by the wardens and the vestry of the parish.

Congregations have different expectations on how often a deacon will preach. During the interim priest in charge time, the pattern established when the Rector was there would continue.
or the deacon will negotiate a new schedule with the wardens in consultation with the bishop. In the Episcopal Church in Connecticut we do not permit what have been called “deacons masses”. This expression is used often to refer to a deacon officiating at the first part of the Eucharist and then administering the sacrament which had previously been consecrated by a priest.

In practicing self-care, it is important for the deacon to continue in the pattern of keeping Sabbath time. All deacons are asked to have one Sunday month when the deacon does not worship in the parish they serve and returns to their home parish to worship with that community.

2. Deacons when a Missional Priest announces they are leaving.

A Missional Priest is assigned to a parish on an annual basis. Sometimes Missional Priests stay one year and sometimes they stay many years. Missional Priest assignments are almost always a one year renewal appointment.

A deacon is assigned to a parish for 3-4 years. This 3-4 year process typically stays in place regardless of the transitions timing of the priest. When the parish is without permanent priestly leadership, the deacon’s ministry should continue to be focused on helping the congregation engage with the local neighborhood. There may be additional pastoral care requests. When a Missional Priest leaves, plans should be in place for additional emergency calls for pastoral care. The deacon’s ministry is to be 8-10 hours a week even during these transitions.

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In the Episcopal Church in CT we recognize that the diaconal ministry is significantly different from the priestly ministry. We do not permit what have been referred to as”Deacons masses” in ECCT.

3. Deacons when a parish transitions from a Rector to a Provisional or Conditional Priest In Charge.

A deacon is assigned to a parish for 3-4 years. This 3-4 year process typically stays in place when the parish makes the transition from a Rector to a Provisional or Conditional Priest In Charge.

When the parish is without permanent priestly leadership, the deacon’s ministry should continue to be focused on helping the congregation engage with the local neighborhood.
There may be additional pastoral care requests. When the Rector leaves, plans should be in place for additional emergency calls for pastoral care. The deacon’s ministry is to be 8-10 hours a week even during these transitions.

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