



## **Leaving Well Policy** ***When a Priest Leaves an ECCT Parish or Worshiping Community***

When a priest leaves an ECCT parish or other worshiping community, both the priest 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 priest and the congregation are greatly affected by how well the transition is managed.

During ordination to the priesthood, the bishop instructs priests to nourish Christ's people from the riches of his grace, and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and the life to come. A priest's intentionality around leaving a congregation is the last significant opportunity to nourish Christ's people who have been in their care.

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

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

### **Before departure the priest:**

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

- Relationships with members of the parish are valued
- The wellbeing of the priest 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)
- The priest cannot, in any way, participate in the selection of their successor
- After the departure date, the priest will no longer function as a pastor or priest to those affiliated with the parish, which means that the priest is not permitted to officiate at baptisms, weddings, and funerals for those affiliated with the parish
- After the departure date, the priest will avoid 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.

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 priest of the parish.

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 lay leaders a liturgy to mark closure of relationships and the priest's departure. Considers inviting a bishop or canon to participate in such a service using a service found in the *Book of Occasional Services*. A version of the liturgy without diocesan representatives is also available, from the Canon for Mission Leadership.

Avoids being named rector, priest, or associate 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 priest and parish move on.

In addition to not participating in the selection of their successor, the priest may not provide any advice or opinions regarding the search for a new priest, particular candidates, the process itself, etc.

*If the departing priest is rector:*

Before a rector informs parish leadership of the intention to resign, the rector must first inform the bishops.

An exit interview is scheduled with the Canon for Mission Leadership, and the rector provides all requested documents for that interview.

**Before departure, the parish:**

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 priest and congregation.

Respects the privacy of the priest's office space (unless the departure is due to malfeasance). No one should be allowed access to the priest's office before confidential and sensitive files can be destroyed or handed to designated parish leaders.

Gives the priest, while still employed, permission to allow the staff to offer time and assistance in removing personal items from the office. The priest may instead prefer to do this after hours and on their own.

Lay leaders plan with the priest a liturgy to mark closure of relationships and the priest's departure. Leaders may consider inviting a bishop or canon to participate in such a service using a service found in the *Book of Occasional Services*. A version of the liturgy without diocesan representatives is also available, from the Canon for Mission Leadership.

**After departure the priest:**

Does not attend any official parish function, including worship.

Does not engage 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 priest.

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.

If retired, is available for supply or interim work as the need arises in other ECCT parishes.

Nurture their worship and devotional life by attending other parishes.

If retired, 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 unless invited by the current parish priest in consultation with a bishop. An invitation may be made after the new priest has been in place for a full year, and not before.

**After departure the parish:**

Supports the priest and their family in detaching from the parish by respecting the policy requiring the priest 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 priest and family.

Ensures that the priest'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.

Ensures that staff has specific handling instructions for post office mail. Mail for the parish, addressed to the priest will 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.

**If /when a priest returns to the parish:**

The new priest and the former priest may discuss and decide the nature of presence and participation in the life of the parish. Any conversation about the re-entry of the former or retired priest may not occur before the one-year anniversary of the new priest having established their authority in the life of the parish and must be in consultation with a bishop.

**Pastoral care:**

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

**The priest's family:**

The family of the priest, 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 priest's departure and the requirements laid out in this policy. It has been painful for some to let go because their parish ministry and connections formed both because of their relationship to the priest as well as apart from that. Experience has taught that withdrawal from these activities is best.

For the wellbeing of the parish, the priest's spouse/partner must refrain from criticism of the vestry, staff, and new priest and avoid being drawn into triangulation with members of the parish in any and all interactions, including through social media.

**When a former parish priest remains in the vicinity:**

When a priest leaves or retires and plans to remain in the vicinity of the last parish served, new roles and boundaries must be developed for the retired priest, for the priest's family, and for the members and staff of the parish. These above policies address that transition.