

Retired Clergy September 2023

When a cleric retires it is often difficult to let go of the role of priest and pastor and the people we have served and loved. Yet let go we must so that good order in both our collegial and parochial life is preserved. It is common to serve in a parish for 10-15 years and in some rare cases even much longer. Relationships formed with parishioners are professional by virtue of ordination, but they also become deeply personal over time. It is hard to imagine saying goodbye permanently, but retirement requires clergy to completely disengage from pastoral work in one's former parish.

It would be ideal if clergy could arrange to retire away from the community in which they have served, but this is often not possible or practical. The retiring priest has the responsibility to inform parishioners that they will henceforth be unable to offer pastoral services at times like baptisms, weddings, or funerals. Notice of this should be provided by both letter and public announcement at the time of retirement.

How should the cleric handle continuing friendships? It is the obligation of clergy to clarify the boundaries of relationships with their friends following retirement from ministry. Friends who are members of the parish will need to be encouraged by clergy to refrain from talking about parish affairs so that the new incumbent's ministry is appropriately supported.

When requests are received by the retired cleric to make hospital calls or to conduct pastoral services they should refer people to the new incumbent or priest-in-charge. The exception is when a close friend of the retired cleric, who also remains a parishioner, makes a request for pastoral services. In this case the retired cleric should discuss the matter with and receive permission from the new incumbent about how to proceed. When a parish has not yet had a new incumbent appointed and the retired cleric receives a request for pastoral services, they will refer the matter to the regional archdeacon for a decision about appropriate action.

To ensure continuing collegial trust retired clergy should worship in a parish other than the one from which they have retired. Parishes cannot invite the retiree to remain on staff in an honorary capacity.

Are there circumstances when a retired cleric can return to the parish they have most recently served? The answer is "yes" but it must only be at the invitation of the current incumbent and should not occur within the first year following the arrival of the new incumbent.

Here are some further points that will assist when leaving the parish:

- after your last day do not return to the office to check for mail, email, or phone messages

- it is the cleric's responsibility to make clear for everyone that the pastoral relationship has ended
- it is not appropriate to discuss parish affairs after you leave
- make plans to worship with another congregation
- priestly, pastoral, and administrative roles end on the effective date of retirement
- parishioners primary pastor is always the current incumbent
- past parishioners who are also friends are not under the pastoral care of the retired cleric nor is the retired cleric their personal chaplain
- always demonstrate support for the new incumbent; appearances at the parish last served by the retired cleric only occur at the invitation of the incumbent

Being in retirement as a cleric requires courage to let go of what has been precious-the pastoral oversight of a parish. Retirement also requires clergy to carry the burden of letting go and its attendant grief, something no one else can do.

The bishop may amend or interpret this policy where local circumstances require adjustment.

Although this policy is generally focused on retiring clergy, it also applies (mutatis mutandis) to clergy leaving a parish to move to another parish or other ministry whether the cleric has been the incumbent, an interim priest-in-charge or an associate priest.