

Saying Goodbye to a Rector, Vicar, Priest
The Episcopal Diocese of Olympia
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Once a priest announces his/her retirement or resignation, it is important to begin the planning for a healthy transition and a good goodbye. A good beginning for the priest that will follow depends a lot on a good ending of this current relationship. This short paper is designed to help congregations and priests plan a good ending.

1. Acknowledge the Anxieties. There will be many which will come, and no one person's will be the same. Make a space for people to share these. You might think of this as part of the coffee hour, or set aside special times at the Adult Forum and other venues so that this can take place.
2. Get the Office of the Bishop involved early so that we can answer as many questions as we can. There is most often an urge to jump to "finding our new priest" when in fact the energy should be spent on a good ending of the current relationship.
3. Leadership should design a timeline which will include a celebration of the priest and of the relationship you shared during their tenure.
4. Leadership should mark the end through liturgy. Think of this as the mirror image of the Celebration of New and Mutual Ministry when the priest began. You can find resources for this in the Book of Occasional Services. The Office of the Bishop is happy to help you with such a service if you need assistance.
5. Think about ways you can give some permanent memories to the priest. Some congregations have collected notes, letters, pictures, and put these in an album for the priest. Some create videos of parishioners telling the priest what the relationship has meant to them. Be creative, but please do it.
6. Ask for help! If you feel you are not sure even with the ideas above contact the Office of the Bishop and we will work with you.

The following is an article by Kathryn Rateliff Barr entitled "How to Say Goodbye to a Pastor" Internet, *People of our Everyday Life*.

The church should announce a minister's impending departure as soon as possible and provide a final date to the congregation so members can prepare themselves for the change and determine how to say goodbye. People will have different ways of processing the news, and the first reaction may be shock. Don't be afraid of your emotions during this time, and be sure to seek out prayer and support.

Plan to meet privately with the pastor if time allows. Invite him/her over for dinner one last time or stop by the office to share your good wishes. If this isn't possible, express your feelings with a card, letter or phone call.

Help put together a church-wide event where church members and the pastor can share their feelings and thoughts. Allow church members to bring gifts if they wish, and expect weeping, so provide plenty of tissues. Preserve the memories in still pictures or video, and make these mementos available to the pastor. Set up a church display for parishioners.

Parishioners are bound to be nervous about what to expect next. Encourage the church to communicate openly with the congregation about who will be preaching on Sundays, who will offer pastoral support and counseling and how the church will continue operating day-to-day.

Realize the pastor and his family also have feelings to process. Assure them of your affection and prayers. Offer to help them as they prepare to leave, and pledge to continue to support the church with your prayers, presence and service so your pastor knows the church will continue to have a reliable core membership. Make plans to stay in touch and encourage one another as you both move into the new paths God has set forth for you.

Be aware that a congregation may come under exceptional stress if its pastor suddenly dies or is fired. The sense of loss may be overwhelming, and it may be much harder to maneuver through the tangle of emotions. If the pastor is leaving under suspicion of wrongdoing, parishioners may also feel betrayed, since Scriptures demand ministers possess a high level of morality and good judgment. Recognize that there is no easy way to deal with such trauma. Lean on your fellow churchgoers like never before, and have faith that the church will again find its footing.