

RECTOR EXIT INTERVIEW

The best way to begin any transition is to have a great ending. One important source of information for establishing the necessary skills and abilities of the new rector is the departing rector. They are the only person (apart from their predecessors) who knows what it is like to be the rector of the congregation. Too often their wisdom is neglected because of unfounded fears that the departing rector will meddle in the search. The exit interview is also the time when the nature of the rector's future relationship with the parish can be discussed.

The purpose of the exit interview is to discover the clergy resources the congregation needs if they are to be successful in the future. The interview can focus on immediate transitional ministry needs as well as discovering the skills and resources that the next rector will need if they are to have a successful ministry. When conducting the exit interview do not ask, "Who do you think we should call as our rector?" Rather, ask questions that explore what skills the rector has relied on and the dominant challenges they have faced in their day-to-day ministry.

In addition to conducting an exit interview with the rector, we recommend interviewing the transitional minister after they have been at the church for a period of time. Often parishioners, even those closely connected to the church's ministry, are completely unaware of what it is like to be the rector of the congregation and the demands of doing ministry in the community.

For example, do you know how long it takes your rector to prepare a great sermon? Many congregations list "preaching" as their first ministry responsibility, but from our experience many of these same congregations have little awareness of the resources it takes to prepare high-quality sermons on a weekly basis. One gifted preacher we know spent a minimum of one hour of preparation for every minute he preached. In another congregation, parishioners discovered that the sermons they most deeply valued occurred after the rector had been able to spend a day during the week in prayer and reading in addition to their sermon preparation time. Other clergy find that regular retreats and continuing education are essential if they are to consistently preach effectively.

A lack of awareness may also occur in situations where the demographics of an established congregation no longer reflect the demographics of the immediate area around the church. For example,

*What we call
the beginning
is often the end.
And to make an end
is to make a beginning.
The end is where
we start from.*
— T. S. Eliot

*Often parishioners, even
those closely connected
to the church's ministry,
are completely unaware
of what it is like to be the
rector of the congregation
and the demands of doing
ministry in the community.*

*Human beings,
who are almost unique
in having the ability
to learn from the
experience of others,
are also remarkable
for their apparent
disinclination to do so.*
— Douglas Adams

*The illiterate
of the 21st century
will not be those who
cannot read and write,
but those who cannot
learn, unlearn, and relearn.*
— Alvin Toffler

a primarily monocultural parish that now finds itself in an ethnically changing or changed community may be unaware of the stress it places on the clergy person who is unable to speak the language of the church's neighbors. The parishioners may be very happy with the ministry they personally receive, while being unaware of the challenges the neighborhood presents for the rector.

Even within a parish, parishioners are often unaware of the frustration and stresses that clergy face. For example, a congregation in a research community that loves vigorous debate and dissension may be unaware of how much inner fortitude a pastorally-oriented rector needs in order to survive what may be perceived as personal attacks.

Structuring the Exit Interview

There are five primary areas to cover in the exit interview:

- **Celebrating what has been accomplished.**

Discovering what has worked well and what needs to be continued into the future.

- **Current pastoral needs and concerns.**

In multi-staffed parishes this may be conducted with staff members who will assume responsibility for these ministry concerns. At this point the vestry's responsibility is to ensure that these arrangements have been made, rather than discussing the specific pastoral situations.

In smaller congregations that operate from a series of informal procedures rather than formal policies and procedures, the exit interview with a rector should also include questions with regard to parishioners who are in need of ongoing pastoral care; current policies for baptisms, weddings, and funerals; and processes for planning worship and choosing hymns.

- **Transitional ministry needs.**

From the departing rector's perspective, are there things that need to be done during the transitional time to ensure that the next rector has the greatest possibility of success?

- **Future clergy needs.**

What are the skills and abilities that the rector relied on in the course of their ministry? What things were left undone, and what will the next rector need to be able to accomplish them?

- **The rector's future relationship with parishioners and the congregation as a whole.**

If the rector is moving away from the area, this is not likely to be a major concern. On the other hand, if the rector is retiring and will continue to live in the community, their future relationship with the congregation needs to be discussed to develop a strategy for closure of their ministry as the congregation's rector. The purpose of this conversation is to ensure the next rector has every possibility of establishing their own leadership role in the congregation.

When the Rector is Staying in the Community

One of the participants in our training programs told the story of coming to a congregation where a well-loved rector had retired after a long tenure and remained in the community. Within the church the rector moved from his celebrant's chair in the sanctuary to the first pew. His wife remained in her place as a member of the choir. The lectern from which the rector preached was almost in a direct line between the former rector's new pew and his wife. All through the sermon the former rector and his wife exchanged looks of disapproval when the rector said something they disagreed with, which apparently was quite common. The former rector also caused considerable disruption in the life of the congregation by openly disagreeing with decisions the rector and vestry made. Finding the situation increasingly untenable, the rector resigned in the midst of great conflict and pain.

This story is an extreme example of the disruption a former rector could become in the ongoing life of a congregation. A less dramatic problem can arise when a former rector continues to engage socially with parishioners and at a social gathering voices their disapproval of something the rector or current church leadership has done. Rather than build community, these kinds of behaviors polarize members and tear the fabric of trust that is so essential for effective congregational functioning. In many cases the former rector does not initiate the polarization, but gets dragged into a congregational dispute.

Another example of problematic behavior is a loving rector who cannot say "no" to parishioners. They may hear through the church grapevine that a parishioner is in the hospital and visit the parishioner before the new rector has even heard that the parishioner has been hospitalized. While often well-intentioned, this type of caring

Growth is inevitable and desirable, but destruction of community character is not.

The question is not whether your part of the world is going to change. The question is how?
— Edward T. McMahon

Sadly policies that are designed to prevent bad things from happen rarely ensure that good things happen, and end up casting more darkness than light.

*Have you ever been at
sea in a dense fog,
when it seemed as if a
tangible white darkness
shut you in and the great
ship, tense and anxious,
groped her way toward
the shore with plummet
and sounding-line, and you
waited with beating heart
for something to happen?
I was like that ship before
my education began,
only I was without
compass or sounding line,
and no way of knowing
how near the harbor was.
"Light! Give me light!"
was the wordless
cry of my soul,
and the light of love
shone on me in
that very hour.
— Helen Keller*

*If you come to a
fork in the road,
take it.
— Yogi Berra*

prevents the new rector from establishing a pastoral relationship with parishioners, and will seriously compromise the new rector's ministry.

From an informal survey of clergy, experiences like those described above are actually rare. However, just one bad experience can be horrendous and generalized to mythic proportions of problematic, retired rectors. As a result of a bad experience, many dioceses have adopted policies that forbid clergy to have any contact with their former congregations. Sadly, policies like this, that are designed to prevent bad things from happening, are rarely effective. Dishonorable clergy — the type the rule is designed to protect congregations from — will ignore the rule because they think it only applies to others and does not take into account their special relationship with the parish. Honorable clergy, who understand the importance of good boundaries, will abide by the rule and consequently deprive the congregation of a potentially worthwhile new and transformed relationship. Just as some clergy have horror stories of former rectors, others have wonderful stories of rector emeriti who have been a blessing to the new rector and the congregation. Yet the formulation of the rule prevents these blessings from occurring.

These issues are also compounded by the local community context. In large cities clergy can often find a "spiritual home" in a neighboring church. Some parishioners may need to be encouraged to "stay home" and not follow the rector because the proximity may create the opportunity for parishioners who want ongoing pastoral care, such as family weddings or funerals, to ask the retired rector to provide the services. In smaller rural communities it may be very difficult for the rector and their family to find an alternative spiritual community. Strategies for resolving these concerns need to be discussed in the exit interview.

Here are some of the issues that may need to be addressed:

- What does the congregation need to chart its own destiny without the rector?
- What does the next rector need to assume the role of the leader in the congregation?
- What does the retiring rector need in a spiritual community?

Some may be tired and no longer interested in exercising any ministry.

Some may feel the need to “have an altar” where they can celebrate on a regular basis.

Some may want to continue a specific aspect of their ministry such as Christian education or pastoral care without the other administrative responsibilities of being a rector.

Some may want a place where they know they belong and are loved.

- What does the former rector’s family need in a spiritual community?

Has the rector’s spouse or partner provided a ministry?

Will they continue that ministry? If not, how will that ministry continue without them?

What does the rector’s spouse/partner need in a spiritual community?

- Are there reasonable, alternative spiritual communities for the retiring rector to join?
- Are there specific friendships the rector has that need to be transformed from rector-parishioner to friend-friend?

Are there social networks that the rector and parishioners will still be engaged in? How will these relationships change?

- What do the parishioners need to let the rector retire?

Often the challenge is not with the rector, but with the parishioners, who want the rector to return to perform weddings and funerals, or who involve them in a congregational conflict.

Retiring from Work but not from Life

A deeply satisfying ministry is life-giving. The essential ingredient of a good retirement is to discover and transfer the life-giving quality to an activity or activities that are not related to being the rector of the congregation. When the retiring rector is able to find that life-giving reality somewhere else, they will be free to let the congregation and parishioners pursue their own life-giving destiny. It is sad but not uncommon for people to die shortly after their retirement. One interpretation of this phenomena is that the person retired not just from work but from life.

*Greatness is not
in where we stand,
but in what direction
we are moving.
We must sail sometimes
with the wind and
sometimes against it
– but sail we must
and not drift,
nor lie at anchor.
— Oliver Wendell Holmes*

*From a physical perspective
we will die
if we retire from breathing.
From a spiritual perspective
we will die –
spiritually,
emotionally,
and physically –
if we retire from our
life-giving purpose.*

*What the caterpillar calls
the end of the world,
the master calls a butterfly.*
— Richard Bach

*Personal leadership
is the process of keeping
your vision and values
before you and aligning
your life to be
congruent with them.*
— Stephen Covey

From a physical perspective, we will die if we retire from breathing. From a spiritual perspective we will die, — spiritually, emotionally, and physically — if we retire from our life-giving purpose.

In the section on resolving grief we explore ways to “separate a value from its vehicle.” The rector will need to explore the life-giving aspects of their ministry and then separate them from the “vehicle” of being a rector, finding new ways to engage in the life-giving activity. While this is personal work that the rector needs to engage in, the congregation may find that it is in their long-term interest to provide for some short-term retirement coaching for the rector. Here are some questions that the rector may want to explore:

Retirement Questions

Here are some of the questions that the outgoing rector might need to explore:

- What has been truly life-giving to you about your ministry?
- What is it about what you do that you deeply value?
- What is it about yourself that you deeply value?
- What is it that you love to do?

After exploring these questions the task is to identify the deeper, life-giving qualities and to consider how those qualities can be continued once they have been separated from “being the rector.” For example, if the person says what they really value about being the rector is that it is an opportunity for them to care for others, then a series of follow-up questions might be:

- Where outside of the parish do you care for others?
- What ways could you care for others without all the other responsibilities of leading a parish?
- Imagine your life being an opportunity for you to care for others on your terms, with freedom to do others thing that you enjoy. What do you imagine your life would be like if you had that opportunity and that freedom?
- What would be valuable to you about having that kind of life?
- Does any part of you object to having that life that you imagine? What would satisfy that objection?

If someone said that what they got from being the rector was that they “felt needed,” we would explore at least two different avenues:

- What kinds of things do you really love to do and be needed for?
This discovers the actual behavior for which they would prefer to be needed. The behavior may be transferable to another venue other than being the rector.
- Think of a time when you felt really needed. What deeper thing did being needed give you? And as you remember that experience now, what does that give you?
Repeating the process for several iterations will help the person discover a deeper value that is currently present and independent of being needed.

These examples explore the underlying experience of being needed to set the person free from the need. There may also be great benefit to just doing the simplest thing and finding another place to be needed that does not interfere with the new rector’s relationship with the congregation. A part-time pastoral associate’s position in a neighboring congregation may provide a rewarding opportunity to be needed.

There are two aspects to experiencing self-worth:

- Temporal: We get self-worth from doing what we value or find worthwhile.
- Eternal: We get self-worth from knowing we are loved by God, a love that is independent of what we can do or have done.

When self-worth is based entirely on what a person can do, they will be vulnerable to feeling a loss of worth if they are prevented from doing what gives them a sense of worth. Growing in an awareness of worth that is located not in a person’s abilities but in God’s love will give the person freedom to explore other life-giving options.

The Challenge of Friendships

One of our concerns about the “no contact” policies is that they violate norms of common decency and caring. I (Rob) was an interim pastor in a congregation that was close to my permanent home. After I had left the parish, I continued to live in the community, but did not attend their church activities.

*The things which are seen
are temporal;
but the things which
are not seen
are eternal.*

— II Corinthians 4:1-18

*At times our own light
goes out and is
rekindled by a spark
from another person.
Each of us has cause
to think with
deep gratitude
of those who have
lighted the flame
within us.*

— Albert Schweitzer

*Before you
criticize someone,
you should walk
a mile in their shoes.
That way when
you criticize them,
you are a mile away
from them.
— Jack Handey*

*For a former rector to
return to return to a former
congregation without the
new rector's blessing is to
violate the integrity of the
new rector's relationship
with their congregation.*

I did continue to have a relationship with a non-parishioner who was the child of one of the senior elders in the congregation, whom I had also been close to during my time at the church. The senior elder had a major illness and was hospitalized for a significant period of time. The "no contact" policy would mean that I was to ignore my caring for both the person I was in contact with and their parent.

Such a response, from my perspective, is simply inhumane, and does not respect the dignity of my caring, the person being cared for, and the dignity of Christian community. My response was to contact the new rector and ask permission to visit the person. With the rector's knowledge, I went as a friend, not as their priest. I prayed with them as a friend but I did not offer them sacraments as their priest.

There are other examples of special friendships that can be honored in ways that are not destructive of the congregation's future — for example, returning to conduct the wedding of a child of a parishioner who has remained a close friend. Rather than create yes/no rules, the **Appreciative Way** asks the question, "Under what circumstances would it be appropriate for the retired rector to conduct the service or engage in some other congregational activity?"

Here are some questions that are important to consider:

- How will this impact the new rector's relationship with the congregation?

When that relationship is strong and the congregation is vibrant an occasional return visit will probably evoke warm memories and the ability for all to delight in the good things that are currently occurring in the congregation.

- Does the retired rector delight in the new rector's ministry?

Their affirmation is likely to strengthen the passing on of the mantle of leadership.

- Is the retired rector highly critical of the new rector's ministry?

This would be a time for the retired rector to stay away, regardless of the validity of their criticism. Few clergy are good poker players and their criticism will be made manifest in some way and will not enrich the current congregational life.

- Is there conflict in the congregation? Or is the request to return because an individual is in conflict with the new rector?

The former rector's presence will just create opportunities for triangulating and increased polarization and will be unhelpful to the congregation.

- Has the new rector blessed the retired minister's return?

To return without the new rector's blessing is to violate the integrity of the new rector's relationship with the congregation.

- While a retired rector may have well defined boundaries how would their returning to conducting a service be perceived by parishioners who don't have good boundaries?

Can the retired rector say "yes" to some parishioners and "no" to others? How will the "no" to some parishioners be perceived by those rejected?

- Should the retired rector share a ministry event with the new rector?

On some occasions it may be very appropriate and affirming for the new rector and the retired rector to share in a funeral, with perhaps the retired rector providing the eulogy/homily of a person they knew well, and the new rector leading the liturgy. Such events may be outward signs that the mantle of leadership has changed.

Redefining Relationships

As the rector prepares to leave the congregation they need to help parishioners redefine their relationship. One conscientious rector we know started with a stock "retirement letter" and realized that everything it contained was negative. It simply stated what he and they were no longer able to do. This does not help people know what is appropriate and respectful. Nor do these letters honor the integrity and the quality of their relationship. He rewrote the letter from an appreciative perspective using the following structure:

- He remembered and gave thanks for the good things they had experienced, paying attention to the qualities they had shared rather than specific times when they had occurred. For example, he gave thanks for times of love, caring, and being aware of God's presence without referring to identifiable dates and circumstances when these had occurred.

*Observe always
that everything is
the result of change,
and get used to thinking
that there is nothing
Nature loves so well as to
change existing forms and
make new ones like them.*
— Marcus Aurelius

*If the only prayer you said
in your whole life was
"thank you"
that would suffice.*
— Meister Eckhart

*To speak gratitude is
courteous and pleasant,
to enact gratitude is
generous and noble,
but to live gratitude
is to touch Heaven.*
— Johannes A. Gaertner

*Treat people
as if they were
what they ought to be
and you help them to
become what they are
capable of being.*
— Johann Wolfgang
von Goethe

*Education makes a
people easy to lead,
but difficult to drive;
easy to govern,
but impossible to enslave.*
— Lord Brougham

- He then invited the congregation to imagine how they would experience those qualities as they journeyed into their separate futures. For example, he said “As I leave you I look forward to discovering how you and I will continue to be led by God and find places of love and caring.”
- He also stated clearly that his relationship with them would be changed. He would no longer be their rector and their priest. He remembered special times when he had conducted weddings and funerals and how meaningful they were to him and how he wanted the next rector to share in the privilege of ministering in these times. He remembered with gratitude the respect the former rector had given him when he arrived and offered that same respectful opportunity to the new rector to share in the joys of those ministries.
- He ended by assuring them that they would remain in his prayers and his memories. He gave thanks for their love of him and prayed they would share that love with their new rector.

In reviewing the letter it is interesting to note that at no time did he say what he or the people couldn't do. Rather he recalled blessings they had experienced and provided ways that those blessings would continue to be available to the people. For example, he did not say, “I won't be able to celebrate a wedding.” Instead, he recalled joyous times like weddings and expressed his desire that the next rector experience those same joys. In that phraseology, he is helping people keep in their minds a picture of the future with joyous weddings.

A statement like “I won't be able to do weddings” just paints a black hole in people's minds and leaves them feeling resourceless rather than resourceful. In this circumstance the only way they can feel resourceful is to not let him go and keep inviting him back.

If he had remained in the community he could also have said something like, “And if by chance we see each other it will be the meeting of old friends rather than a meeting between a rector and parishioner.”

Skills for Leaving

One of the things we are aware of is that many clergy, especially caring ones, are simply unskilled at saying “no” to parishioners. Having a few guidelines and practiced responses may help the retiring rector to stay retired. There are also ways to affirm the past relationship,

acknowledge the fact that it is changed, and support the new rector and their relationship with the congregation when responding to a request to provide ministry to a former parishioner.

Here are two different responses to a request to perform a funeral:

- Appropriate response: "I am honored by your request, but you know, I am no longer your priest. I will be at the funeral as your friend but the new rector will conduct the service."
- Inappropriate response: "I'm sorry I can't do the service as the new rector won't allow me to take services."

The first response honors the past relationship and affirms the new pastoral relationship, while the second response is destructive of the new pastoral relationship. It sets the new rector up as the "bad guy" and drives a wedge between the new rector and the parishioner. The destructiveness of this kind of comment is also likely to ensure that the new rector will be even more vigorous in putting barriers between the retired rector and the congregation.

Another situation that caring clergy can get trapped by is providing ongoing pastoral care and visiting of parishioners. In some of these situations the retired rector may know hours or even days before the rector that a person has been hospitalized.

If someone calls from the "church grapevine" to let the rector know a parishioner has been hospitalized the retired rector needs to redirect the parishioner to call the rector. Here are some additional ideas and guidelines:

- Have the parishioner call the new rector. As the retired rector, do not take this responsibility from the parishioner. Stealing someone's responsibility is not an act of caring; it is imprisoning them in a state of dependency.
- If the parishioner says, "I called the church office but no one was there. Can you come to the hospital?" then ask the parishioner the extent of the pastoral need. Is the person in imminent danger of dying, or could a visit wait until the following day?

If it is an emergency, invite the parishioner to call the church office again and use the "emergency" pastoral care service that most churches provide. Alternatively, ask the parishioner to get the nursing supervisor to contact the on-call chaplain if the hospitalized parishioner wants pastoral care.

Stealing someone's responsibility is not an act of caring; it is imprisoning them in a state of dependency.

When caring is involved, the guilt of not-caring is about the caregiver and not about the recipient. This guilt is not from God; it comes from a false sense of not being a good caregiver, or wanting to preserve an image of yourself as a caring person.

If there is conflict between the new rector and congregation, the retired rector needs to stay away. Any attempt they make to help, even with the best of intentions, will not help but make it worse. The people in distress need to be referred to the diocese for some neutral mediation.

Happiness cannot be traveled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed. Happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace and gratitude.
— Denis Waitley

Only after the parishioner has made these calls and not been able to locate the rector or a pastor, and if it was an immediate emergency, would it then be appropriate for the retired rector to visit the parishioner in the hospital before the new rector has the opportunity.

In this case, the retired rector would then need to contact the new rector and inform them of the ministry they had provided.

- For non-emergency pastoral care, inform the new rector that you would like to visit. Arrange the visit for a time after the new rector has visited the parishioner.

Remember that the retired rector needs to visit as a friend not as a priest. In other words, leave the collar at home — and leave the sacraments at home, too.

- When caring is involved, the guilt of “not-caring” is about the caregiver and not about the recipient. This guilt is not from God; it comes from a false sense of not being a good caregiver, or wanting to preserve an image of oneself as a caring person. This is an example of “should” thinking, which is really about caring for our own self-image, rather than a genuine caring for another person.

Only when a person is free not to care can they genuinely care. The good news of retirement is that people have the opportunity to care on their own terms and not from a place of “should” or the expectations of others.

Once the retired rector has resolved the guilt of “not-caring” they will be free to care in a way that respects the integrity of the new rector’s relationship with the congregation.

Another situation where well-meaning, caring clergy can get trapped is when there is conflict between the new rector and the congregation. Retired rectors can get caught running interference for one party or the other, or by being dragged into one side of a conflict in a way that deepens the polarization and conflict.

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Making a Break

When a rector would like to remain in the congregation, it may be helpful for them to take a significant break from attendance and engagement with parishioners. In one situation we know of, the rector of a small rural town retired from a long successful ministry. Following his retirement he rented his house and took a transitional ministry in another part of the country. After the new rector had established their relationship with the congregation and the retired rector's transitional ministry appointment was completed, he and his wife returned to live in their home and resumed worshipping in their former church.

The rector established a mutually supportive relationship with the new rector, and the retired rector and his wife led and participated in several ministries, such as leading a Bible study and assisting in worship. In many ways, it was like having well-loved grandparents in residence, and their presence was a blessing to all concerned.

When a rector retires to live in the community and is not able to make a significant break, the transition time between rectors may be an important time to help the rector and congregation make the transition to "retired rector and congregation." This may require that the transitional minister facilitate the transformation of the relationship into one that respects both the past relationship and prepares the way for future pastoral relationships. In our experience this may require all three aspects of compassion — tenderness, fierceness, and mischievousness — on the part of the transitional minister to prepare the way for the new rector.

Creating the Exit Interview

After reviewing this section, create an exit interview that meets your congregation's needs. On the following pages are a sample exit interview. The intention is to use the interview schedule as a guide for the conversation rather than creating a "fill-in-the-boxes" questionnaire that restrains the opportunity to explore important issues.

If we don't change our direction, we will likely end up where we are headed.
— Chinese Proverb

Reviewing Accomplishments, Skills and Challenges

When you think back over your time here, what do you think was your greatest success?

What skills and abilities did you use to achieve that success?

Please describe a typical week here in our church. What are the things that take up a large amount of your time?

Apart from preparation for our Sunday worship, what is your most commonly used ministry skill here in the parish?

What are the other skills and abilities that you have relied on?

Are there one or two additional ministry skills that you would like to have had when ministering here in our church and our community?

As you leave, what is one thing that you would have liked to have accomplished?

What do you see as the biggest challenge that the new rector will face?

What do you see as the biggest challenge that the congregation is facing?

If you were to imagine the congregation being really successful in the next 5 years, what do you imagine the congregation would be doing?

(If they say something like "improving finances," ask follow-up questions like "How do you imagine they did that?" Keep asking until you get a tangible behavior that people could actually perform. Remember this is just information gathering; you do not have to agree with the vision. Yet it is a vision you want to at least listen to, as it will be based on their experience of being your rector.)

Is there anything that you believe we need to take care of during the transitional time to ensure that we and the next rector are successful in our ministries?

Current Pastoral Concerns

Are there any pastoral concerns that we need to take care of?

(If the rector mentions shut-ins that they visited, inquire into the frequency of visitation and the type of ministry, such as bringing the sacrament, that the people have come to expect. Pastoral concerns will need to be referred to volunteers within the congregation, or to the transitional minister.)

Are there any weddings scheduled? If so, who will be conducting them?

Are there any people who are close to dying? If so, have plans been made for their funerals?

Are there any staffing or administrative issues we need to know about?

What arrangements have been made to transfer signatures on bank accounts? *(This includes the discretionary account which belongs to the congregation but is administered at the discretion of the rector.)*

Future Relationship with Parishioners: When the Rector is Moving Out of Town

How will you respond to parishioners who want you to come back and conduct a wedding or funeral?

Future Relationship with Parishioners: When the Rector is Staying in the Community

The task here is not to tell the retiring rector what they can and cannot do, but to help the retiring rector find the resources they need to successfully make the transition from rector to retirement and leaving the congregation free to pursue its destiny. Here are some possible questions:

How do you imagine spending your time when you retire?

What do you imagine your relationship with the congregation will be?

Where do you intend to worship?

If the rector intends to worship in the congregation use the following question:

What will you do to ensure that the new rector has the freedom they need to establish their relationship as the congregation's rector?

How will you respond to parishioner's requests to conduct baptisms, weddings, or funerals?

What will you do if parishioners ask you to visit them in the hospital?

Following the interview, review the retiring rector's responses and whether they are realistic. It may be appropriate for someone, possibly the deployment officer from the diocese, to spend some time coaching the retiring rector in ways to deal with the challenges of being retired and responding to parishioners' demands.

Exit Interview Action Steps

Having completed the exit interview, review the information gathered and consider what action steps need to be taken. Rather than wasting the information gathered, assign people to act on what has been discovered. Here are some possibilities that may need to be acted on:

- Have situations in the congregation come to light that can be taken care of immediately?
- Are there relationships that need to be repaired before the rector departs?
- Have you discovered accomplishments that need to be celebrated at the rector's farewell?
- What information needs to be provided to the transitional minister, such as pastoral care situations?
- Does a memorandum of understanding need to be filed with the vestry about a retiring rector's future relationship with the congregation?
- Does the rector need to be referred for retirement counseling?

We recommend that you create a summary review of the rector's position for use by the vestry and search committee. This may not be needed for several months, but it would be helpful to create the summary now while the information is fresh in people's minds.

Creating a Job Review of the Rector's Position

After the exit interview has been completed, create a summary review of the responsibilities and required skills for the rector's position. The purpose of this review is to establish some understanding of the current demands on the rector. At this point we want a simple assessment of what the tasks have been without reference to what they "should" have been.

This information will be used when establishing the search criteria. Following the development of the congregation's purpose and values, these tasks, time, and skills will be reviewed and prioritized to bring them into alignment with the core life-giving purpose of the congregation.

On the following page is a list of ministry competencies and a summary sheet for you to make a summary of your findings.

Leadership is a word and a concept that has been more argued than almost any other I know. I am not one of the desk – pounding types that likes to stick out his jaw and look like he is bossing the show. I would far rather get behind and, recognizing the frailties and the requirements of human nature, would rather try to persuade a man to go along, because once I have persuaded him, he will stick. If I scare him, he will stay just as long as he is scared, and then he is gone.

— Dwight David Eisenhower

Blessed are we who can laugh at ourselves for we shall never cease to be amused.

— Unknown

Leadership: The art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.
 — Dwight David Eisenhower

Perfect pastors don't tend to stay long. When the world was given the perfect pastor we killed him.

Job Review of the Rector's Position

Below are some broad categories of ministry competencies that cover most of the areas that parish clergy might engage in. As you review the responsibilities of the rector, consider which of these competencies were most important in the rector's ministry.

- **Administrative Leader:** Ability to manage the affairs of the congregation, diocese, or other institution, including programs, organizations, and finances.
- **Christian Education Leader:** Ability to lead in the design and implementation of comprehensive programs of Christian Education to help persons of all ages to understand and live the Christian faith.
- **Community Leader:** Ability to organize community groups and to respond to social issues such as unemployment, housing, or crime.
- **Ecumenical Leader:** Ability to lead and work in programs sponsored interdenominationally by a number of churches.
- **Evangelism Leader:** Ability to train and lead others to know Jesus Christ as Savior and follow him as their Lord.
- **Outreach Leader:** Ability to enable the congregation to become aware of and respond to persons in need.
- **Pastor:** Ability to respond to people so that they are nurtured and challenged for growth within the community of faith when they are facing personal challenges such as birth, sickness, trauma, relationship issues, death, and dying.
- **Preacher:** Ability to preach with clarity, and to make the Gospel relevant in people's lives.
- **Spiritual Director:** Ability to lead and train others in the formation and development of a spiritual discipline.
- **Staff Leader:** Ability to lead, empower and supervise others.
- **Stewardship Leader:** Ability to lead in the development and use of individual and congregational resources.
- **Worship Leader:** Ability to plan and conduct liturgical and non-liturgical services of public worship.
- **Youth Worker/Leader:** Ability to inspire youth and incorporate them into the full life and ministry of the church.

Instructions: Summarize the information that you have gathered from the exit interview. This is not a review of the rector's performance nor an assessment of what the position "should" be, but rather a simple summary of what the rector's responsibilities have been, the skills they have used, and the tasks they identify as needing to be accomplished.

Reviewing Accomplishments, Skills and Challenges

What did the rector feel was their greatest success?

What skills and abilities did they use to achieve that success?

What did they do in a typical week, and what took up the most time?

Apart from preparation for Sunday worship what was their most commonly used ministry skill?

What are the other skills and abilities that they have relied on?

Are there one or two additional ministry skills that they would like to have had?

What is one thing that they would have liked to have accomplished?

What did they see as the biggest challenge that the new rector will face?

What did they see as the biggest challenge that the congregation is facing?

