

The Episcopal Church in South Carolina Covenant of Understanding Upon the Departure of Clergy

Clergy play a central role in the life of a congregation having the opportunity to minister with members during the most joyful and sorrowful times of their lives. Significant relationships are formed between clergy and the parish members and the departure of clergy generates sadness and loss for all involved. Both parties, however, will engage in new faith journeys that will generate opportunities for healthy relationships and spiritual growth.

To encourage a healthy future for the congregation it is expected the departing clergy and family will adhere to the following:

- The departing clergy values the pastoral relationships formed over his/her tenure but also understands the need to allow the new clergyperson to engage in pastoral work. Therefore, he/she will not have contact with members of the congregation for purposes of pastoral care or give advice and counsel regarding the functioning of the church.
- The departing clergy and his/her family will be absent from the congregation throughout the interim process and for a **minimum** of one year following the arrival of the new settled clergyperson including attendance at any worship services, fellowship events, or participation in church programs.
- The departing clergyperson affirms and supports the ministry of the new clergy leadership that will follow his/her ministry. It is most probable that the new clergyperson's style of ministry will differ from that offered by the former clergy. The departing clergy commits to supporting the new style of ministry and will not interfere in any way in the work of the new clergy person including refraining from joining with those who have complaints about his/her successor's ministry.
- Social media being a large part of how we are all connected, the departing clergy and his/her family will leave any on-line groups that are dedicated to the work of the parish (such as a FaceBook page, etc.), but can continue as electronic "friends" of members of the congregation with the stipulations as listed in this document.
- If the departing clergy is contacted by members of the congregation, he/she will re-direct those persons to the current clergyperson in charge of the congregation or appropriate vestry member.
- Requests from parishioners for the departing clergy to officiate at funerals, weddings or other events may occur and he/she is to politely decline and re-direct those requests to the clergyperson in charge. The departing clergy may assist in these events only at the invitation of the clergyperson in charge. Under no circumstances should the departing clergy initiate contact with members upon receiving notice of a death or wedding, nor should the departing clergy 'blame' the current clergy for lack of participation.
- In all future interactions with the parish, the departing clergy will consult with the new clergy person.

Even after the first year, it behooves us to remain aware of proper boundaries. While always remaining a clergyperson, roles change in retirement or in times of non-employment and clergy 'sitting in the pews' must exercise new boundaries:

- Clergy are not members of parishes (though their non-ordained family members may be.) It's expected that clergy and family members will absent themselves from the parish for a **minimum** of one year.
- Lay people see clergy as clergy and do not often understand the limited roles that 'clergy in the pews' must play. 'Clergy in the pews' will keep this in mind and not allow themselves to be dragged needlessly into parish conversations in such a way as to unintentionally create misunderstanding or division.
- Clergy in the pews are not rectors, priests-in-charge or interims and will not assume the pastoral, theological, or organizational authority associated with being in charge.
- Clergy in the pews will defer in all cases to the leadership of the interim or settled clergy.
- Clergy in the pews will decline all requests for worship, teaching, pastoral care or other ministry and will refer these requests to the interim or settled clergy.
- Upon the arrival of a new interim or settled clergy, clergy in the pews will initiate a private conversation about roles and boundaries and will respect the boundaries arranged.
- Clergy in the pews will be clear in speech and behavior that the interim or settled clergy is in charge.
- Clergy in the pews will participate in leading groups or in pastoral care only at the direct invitation of the interim or settled clergy.
- Clergy in the pews will not criticize the interim or settled clergy in public or private. All issues with clergy will be resolved in private with those clergy.
- Though ordained, clergy sitting in the pews will behave as lay people, unless invited by the interim or settled clergy to do otherwise, and then only *under their authority*.

This covenant will become effective on the clergy's last day of work and will be shared with the vestry, congregation and subsequent clergy person(s) in charge of _____ Episcopal Church.

Date: _____
Departing Clergy

Date: _____
Bishop

Date: _____
Parish Warden

Date: _____
Parish Warden

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A copy of this document, once it is signed, will be provided to all parties. In addition, a copy will be sent to the new clergy leader in the parish once he/she begins their new ministry.