

**Diocese of Rhode Island
Covenant of Understanding
Upon the Departure of Clergy**

The Wardens and Vestry of

_____ **Episcopal Church, in** _____ ,

the Bishop of the Diocese of Rhode Island, and the Rev. _____

Clergy play a central role in the life of a congregation. Significant relationships are formed between clergy and members of the congregation through times of shared joy, sorrow, and mutual ministry. The departure of clergy often generates sadness and a sense of loss for all involved. Both parties, however, are called to 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, along with the church leadership, will adhere to the following guidelines:

- The departing clergy acknowledges the value of the pastoral relationships formed over *his/her* tenure, and also understands the need for *her/his* successor to develop *her/his* own pastoral relationships in the church. Therefore, *s/he* will not have contact with members of the congregation for purposes of pastoral care or give advice or offer counsel regarding the functioning of the church.
- The departing clergy and *his/her* family will absent themselves completely 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 outgoing clergyperson and family may only return at the invitation of the new clergy person.
- The departing clergyperson will affirm and support the ministry of the new clergy leadership that will follow *his/her* ministry. It is 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 online groups that are dedicated to the work of the parish (such as a Facebook page or Instagram), but can continue as electronic "friends" of members of the congregation with the stipulations as listed in this document.

- The Wardens and leadership of the congregation will refrain from contacting the departing clergyperson, and will both model and encourage appropriate boundaries in a changed relationship with the clergyperson.
- If the departing clergyperson 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 first with the new clergy person.

It is essential to remain aware of proper boundaries beyond the first year of a new priest's ministry. While always remaining a clergyperson, roles change in retirement or in times of non-employment, and clergy 'in the pews' must exercise new boundaries:

- Clergy are not members of churches, though their non-ordained family members may be. It is expected that clergy and family members will absent themselves from the church for a **minimum** of one year after the new rector, vicar, or priest-in-charge is in place.
- Laypeople see clergy as clergy and often do not understand the limited roles that clergy 'in the pews' must play. Clergy worshiping in the congregation will keep this in mind and not allow themselves to participate in church conversations in such a way as to unintentionally create misunderstanding or division.
- Clergy worshiping in the congregation are not rectors, vicars, 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 worshiping in the congregation 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 worshiping in the congregation 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 worshiping in the congregation 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 person’s last day of work and will be shared with the vestry, congregation, and subsequent clergy person(s) in charge of

_____ Episcopal Church in _____
 (location: town, village, city)

_____ Date: _____
 Departing Clergy

_____ Date: _____
 Bishop

 Please Print Name

 Please Print Name

_____ Date: _____
 Parish Warden

_____ Date: _____
 Parish Warden

 Please Print Name

 Please Print Name

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

Revised April 2021