

Service for the Ending of a Pastoral Relationship

**with the
Leave-taking of a Rector**

*Prepared by
The Liturgical Commission of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas
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Concerning the Service

This order is provided for use when a priest in charge of a congregation terminates a pastoral relationship. The occasion of leave-taking for a Rector is an opportunity to celebrate the shared ministry of the Rector and the People, and to liturgically acknowledge the boundaries present after the conclusion of the pastoral relationship.

This liturgy is only to be used at the ending of a pastoral relationship of a Rector. For a Vicar or other ministers, a prayer is provided in the Additional Directions, to be used immediately before the Peace.

In “A Service for the Ending of a Pastoral Relationship and Leave-taking from a Congregation” in the *2018 Book of Occasional Services*, it is presumed that the Bishop or the Bishop’s Deputy is present on the last Sunday of the departing Rector. In the Diocese of Texas, the Bishop is rarely present for such an occasion. Therefore, this liturgy is adapted to reflect congregational reality, yet also sets forth a liturgical acceptance of the ending of the pastoral relationship.

Of course, if the Bishop is present, he or she presides and celebrates the Eucharist, and it is the Bishop’s prerogative to preach.

In the Diocese of Texas, it is expected that once a clergyperson leaves a congregation, that he or she will bring closure to pastoral relationships with members of that congregation. The health of a congregation is dependent upon how well the transition is managed. Former parishioners should understand from the clergy in a positive and affirming way that it is not appropriate to continue a pastoral relationship. It is expected that the clergyperson will accept no further requests from members and former members of the congregation to provide pastoral services at weddings, funerals, baptisms, or any other occasion of public worship until at least one year after the new Rector arrives. After one year, clergy may accept invitations from the Interim Rector or Rector, but may not solicit such invitations. ¹

This liturgy celebrates the completion of the ministry of a Rector with the People, asking God to be with those who leave and with those who stay.

¹ This paragraph is from the Clergy Manual of the Diocese of Texas.

The Ending ² of a Pastoral Relationship ³

This liturgy is to be used at the principal Eucharist on the last Sunday of a departing Rector.

The liturgy begins after the Prayers of the People and Confession, and before the Peace.

The Senior Warden, or other member of the Vestry, and the Rector, stands in front of the congregation and the Rector says

On the _____ day of 20____, I was inducted by Bishop N. as rector of _____. I have, with God's help and to the best of my abilities, exercised this trust, accepting its privileges and responsibilities.

After prayer and careful consideration, it now seems to me that I should leave this charge, and I publicly state that my tenure as rector of _____ ends this day.

The Senior Warden or other member of the Vestry then says

Do you, the people of _____, recognize and accept the conclusion of this pastoral relationship?

People We do.

Then the departing Rector may express thanksgiving for the time of the tenure, with its joys and sorrows, and state hopes for the future of the congregation.

The departing Rector may present to the warden(s) a letter of resignation, the keys of the parish, the parish altar service book, the parish register, or other symbols fitting to the occasion.

If a Bishop or a Canon of the Diocese is present, he or she may then indicate what provision has been made for the continuation of the ministries of the parish. They may declare the name of the interim rector, senior warden, locum tenens, or other person who is to have ecclesiastical responsibility, and may request, if it seems appropriate, other leaders in the parish to continue their leadership until a new Rector is called. He or she may express their feelings about the ministry now coming to its end.

The departing Rector and the congregation then say together the following prayer

² This liturgy is to be used within the context of the principal service of the Holy Eucharist on the last Sunday of the departing Rector. It is adapted from "A Service for the Ending of a Pastoral Relationship and Leave-taking from a Congregation" in the 2018 *Book of Occasional Services*.

³ This liturgy is only to be used in the Leave-Taking of a Rector. For a Vicar or other ministers, the prayer provided in the Additional Directions section is appropriate to be used, immediately before the Peace.

O God, you have bound us together for a time as priest and people to work for the advancement of your kingdom in this place: We give you humble and hearty thanks for the ministry which we have shared in these years now past.

Silence

We thank you for your patience with us despite our blindness and slowness of heart. We thank you for your forgiveness and mercy in the face of our many failures.

Silence

Especially we thank you for your never-failing presence with us through these years, and for the deeper knowledge of you and of each other which we have attained.

Silence

We thank you for those who have been joined to this part of Christ's family through baptism. We thank you for opening our hearts and minds again and again to your Word, and for feeding us abundantly with the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of your Son.

Silence

Now, we pray, be with those who leave and with us who stay; and grant that all of us, by drawing ever nearer to you, may always be close to each other in the communion of your saints. All this we ask for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

The departing Rector then says to the people

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

People And also with you.

The service continues with the Offertory.

At the Eucharist

The Bishop, if present, is the celebrant.

Except on Major Feasts, the Preface is that of the season, rather than Apostles and Ordinations. ⁴

⁴ In the 2018 *Book of Occasional Services*, an option is given to use the Preface for Apostles and Ordinations. However, the Preface for the season should be used, so that this liturgy does not resemble an Ordination.

After Communion

One of the usual post-communion prayers is offered.

The post-communion prayer for Ordinations is not appropriate for this occasion. ⁵

The departing Rector blesses the people, using the following or other words.

May God, who has led us in the paths of justice and truth, lead us still, and keep us in his ways. Amen.

May God, whose Son has loved us and given himself for us, love us still, and establish us in peace. Amen.

May God, whose Spirit unites us and fills our hearts with joy, illumine us still, and strengthen us for the years to come. Amen.

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you for ever. Amen.

Additional Directions

The readings of the day should be used, or the following scriptures may be appropriate:

Old Testament

Genesis 31:44-46,48-49,50b (The Lord watch between you and me when we are absent one from another.)

Genesis 12:1-9 (Abraham's departure from Haran and God's promise to bless him.)

Deuteronomy 18:15-18 (God will raise up a prophet like Moses.)

Deuteronomy 32:1-9 (The farewell of Moses.)

Joshua 24:1,14-25 (Joshua's farewell to his people.)

Ecclesiastes 3:1-7; 7:8,10,13-14 (A time for everything; better the end than the beginning.)

Sirach 50:1,11-24 (The service of the faithful priest.)

⁵ The Post-Communion Prayer should be one of those used in a usual Celebration of the Eucharist, rather than the post-communion prayer used at Ordinations or the prayer on page 371 of the *2018 Book of Occasional Services*.

Psalm

Psalm 119:89-96 or Nunc Dimittis

Epistle

1 Corinthians 3:4-11 (Paul planted, Apollos watered, God gave growth.)

Acts 16:9-10 (Paul's call from Macedonia.)

Acts 20:17-22,25-28,32,36-38b (Paul's apologia for his ministry at Ephesus.)

2 Thessalonians 2:13--3:5 (Paul gives thanks for the success of the Gospel.)

1 Thessalonians 5:12-25 (Paul encourages the ministry among the Thessalonians.)

Philippians 4:1-10,23 (Rejoice in the Lord always.)

Gospel

Matthew 9:35-38 (The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.)

Matthew 25:31-40 (As you did it to the least of these, you did it to me.)

Luke 12:35-38 (The faithful servant.)

Luke 17:7-10 (We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.)

John 10:14-18 (The ministry of the good shepherd.)

John 21:15-19 (Feed my sheep.)

The Renewal of Baptismal Vows in the *1979 Book of Common Prayer* (pages 292-294) may be used instead of the Nicene Creed.

A Litany for the Mission of the Church in the *2018 Book of Occasional Services* (pages 252-254) may be used as the Prayers of the People.

The following prayer ⁶ may also be used, as a concluding Collect for the Prayers of the People, or in another place within the liturgy. This collect is also appropriate for departing clergy who are not the Rector, or for lay persons who have served in the congregation:

Gracious God, we thank you for the work and witness of your servant(s) *N.* (and *N.*) who *has (have)* enriched this community and brought gladness to friends (and family); now bless and preserve *him* at this time of transition. Guide *him* in the continued use of your gifts. Give *him* sustenance for temporal and spiritual needs, friends to cheer *his* way, and a clear vision of the ministry to which you are now calling *him*. By your Holy Spirit be present in his pilgrimage, that *he* may travel with the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

More directions may be added later, as well as retaining some of the footnotes from the above, after those footnotes are removed.

⁶ This prayer is a Collect for Work Transitions or Retirement from the *2018 Book of Occasional Services* (pages 335-336). This collect is also appropriate for lay persons who have served in a congregation.