

238/21 Policy Regarding end of Incumbency

Resolved that Bishop in Council review the Parish Administration Act and all other relevant Acts and Circulars, with a view to developing policy regarding the conditions relating to the end of a period of incumbency, including:

- The use of the rectory during an interregnum, and its lease to clergy and / or other tenants;
- The payment of accrued leave provisions; and
- All other matters relating to a parish during a period of interregnum.

The Bishop and Diocesan Staff discussed this matter on a number of occasions, formulating the following Policy which takes a more holistic approach to relevant practical and pastoral considerations – for both the Incumbent and the Parish – when an Incumbent moves or retires from a parish.

Mindful that legislation cannot cover every eventuality or circumstance, the policy is intended to interpret existing legislation in the Parish Administration Act, with the advantage of being a ‘living document’ that can be more readily updated and adapted on the basis of ongoing reflection on our experience.

This Policy (below) was adopted by Bishop-in-Council in April 2022, recognising that it will require review, addition and alteration from time to time.

Anglican Diocese of Gippsland Leaving Well Policy

Preamble

The legislative background which specifies the responsibilities of a priest leaving a parish are concisely described in the Parish Administration Act 1994 (Including Amendments to 2017), Section 23. This policy provides a practical framework for the outworking of that legislation.

When a priest leaves a parish or other worshipping community, both the priest and the congregation must establish and maintain new boundaries. In addition, certain tasks are required for an orderly transition. The health of both the departing priest and the congregation are greatly affected by how well the transition is managed.

During ordination to the priesthood, the bishop instructs priests to nourish Christ’s people from the riches of his grace and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and the life to come. A priest’s intentionality around leaving a congregation is the last significant opportunity to nourish Christ’s people who have been in their care. Before a priest informs parish leadership of the intention to resign, the rector must first inform the bishop.

When a priest’s departure is announced, the remaining work is to have an orderly and appropriate “good-bye” from the parish. Then, after the priest’s departure, both the congregation and the priest can live fully into reimagining what is next for their lives.

The following are the Bishop's expectations and the Anglican Diocese of Gippsland's policy governing how priests are to leave a parish or other worshipping community.

Communication

The way the decision to leave a parish is communicated to all is of vital importance. Those in the parish who are aware of the priest's intention must keep that confidential until the day of announcement. Great care needs to be taken with words spoken in public and the announcement needs to be on the same Sunday in both parishes if the priest is moving between parishes. This confidentiality is often required to ensure adequate processes are completed, such as informing key stakeholders, such as an existing Parish Council, a sending Bishop from another Diocese and obtaining safe ministry clearances. The Bishop's Office and Registry can suggest agreed forms of words and will inform the Editor of the Gippsland Anglican. The Bishop will generally release an update to the Diocese immediately following the announcement in the parish or respective parishes.

Annual Leave and Long Service Leave

All priests are encouraged to take Annual Leave during the period when it becomes due. The accumulation of Annual Leave subsequently taken as a lengthy block immediately prior to leaving the parish is very poor practice and is to be avoided. The same applies with Long Service Leave particularly when the priest is retiring. Long Service Leave should generally be taken during the incumbency well before the priest announces their departure. It is important for the ongoing health of the congregation especially that their priest be present in ministry until the moment of liturgical farewell.

Clergy Removals

The Anglican Diocese of Gippsland makes provision for clergy retiring or moving between parishes. This is to be found in the Administrative Circular updated annually and available on the Diocesan website. Arrangements for removal should be made as soon as practicable to ensure a smooth transition. The Registrar will assist with any queries.

Liturgical Farewell

The relinquishment of a pastoral charge is a significant opportunity for priest and people to give thanks for all that has been, to acknowledge the grief and pain of closure, and to pray for all that is yet to be. It is vital that lay and remaining ordained leaders in the parish are involved in the planning and leading of such event. All centres in the parish are encouraged to gather as one to mark this important occasion. It is also an opportunity to invite representatives of the community and wider church with whom the priest has been involved.

Continuing Relationships

The Diocese of Gippsland is geographically large but numerically small where relationships between priests and former parishioners are unable to be avoided. It is important that such relationships develop into friendships without pastorally impacting on the continuing ministry of the priest's former parish. Conversation about the mission and ministry of that parish should be avoided by the priest and their family.

Requests to conduct pastoral offices should be directed initially to a member of Diocesan Staff who will speak with the new rector of the parish to glean their response. Numbers of requests are unhelpful and unlikely to be supported.

Parish Administrative Matters

Church property should be returned to the churchwardens in good order. This includes, where provided, the parish car, any phone, computer, and keys. The Inventory should be checked by the priest and churchwardens with any disputes referred to the Regional Dean initially. As, if not more important, is the transfer of intellectual property including parish content on the priest's personal computer, all relevant passwords, soft and hard copies of filed materials, rationale for procedures, and all other materials necessary for ongoing parish administration, including the Discretionary or Ministry Fund when these are administered by the priest. The priest will be expected to take reasonable steps to ensure that personal electronic and other mail is forwarded. The wardens of the parish may agree to forward personal emails for a season.

Vacation of the Rectory

This is normally expected to take place not more than thirty days after the cessation of duties in the parish. The Bishop will consider sympathetically situations where there is genuine pastoral concern including, but not only, early retirement on the grounds of ill health, bereavement in the clergy family, and intimate relationship failure. The fact that a priest has failed to provide future housing for themselves and their family will not normally be deemed sufficient reason for an extension. In circumstances where a vacating incumbent may lease the Rectory for a period following vacating a parish, they will be afforded the rights and obligations under the Residential Tenancies Act and not as a Rector of the parish.

Future Pastoral Care of the Priest

If a priest is moving or retiring within the Diocese, this remains the responsibility of the Bishop, in collaboration with members of Diocesan Staff. When a priest is moving to another Diocese, the Bishop would be in contact with the receiving bishop early in the process. Ideally an 'exit interview' with the Bishop would be part of this transition process, both for the 'debriefing' of the outgoing priest and for the benefit of the Bishop in leading the discernment process with respect to future ministry needs in the Parish.

Future Pastoral Care of the Parish.

This is in the hands of the Bishop and Diocesan Staff. The process of healing grief may be assisted by the Bishop or a member of Diocesan Staff being invited to the parish on the first Sunday after the former priest's farewell. The procedure for the appointment of the next priest is covered in Appointments Act 1994 (Including Amendments to 2019) which can be found on the Diocesan website.