

Preparing our endings and leavings

Making good endings is an important task in every stage of life. One of the core tasks of pastoral and priestly ministry is to help people prepare for such times. But the very thing we offer faithfully to others can be the most difficult to do well for ourselves.

As we approach the endings and leavings represented by our retirement, we might begin by asking:

What would a good ending include contain for me?
and - so far as I can be aware -

What would a good ending include for *them* - those I have been living and working among and am now leaving?

Of course, these questions are for sharing and working through with all most closely involved in this particular journey with you – spouse, partner, wider family, networks of friends and representatives of church communities.

For the sake of keeping what follows uncluttered the text that follows is addressed to 'you'. Please adapt it as helpful and necessary.

Their farewells to you ...

It is always the hope that the community(ies) you are about leave will give generous and sensitive thought what will most appropriately honour your time among them and bless you on your way. They will hopefully consult with you too.

Your farewells to them ...

You are encouraged to give thought to what endings and farewells will be particularly important to *you* and how you wish to mark them. Only you can do that. It is helpful to give this thought well ahead and to communicate clearly with those who need to know. In the pressure of endings and movings it is surprisingly easy to miss important actions, words and meetings.

Setting down your present ministry context ...

The work of ministry is never finished. We will be stopping in mid flow. Relationships and tasks will be left incomplete. Some of this may feel a relief. But it may also come with sadness and even guilt. Often it is a mixture of many things.

Take some time to gather and name specifically the various roles, tasks, responsibilities that you will be setting down.

Take time to reflect upon these and to notice your responses and feelings to the approaching reality of setting these down.

What are you most grateful for – the blessings and gifts? Are there ways to express this?

Where have been the wounds, the cost? Are there people or stories where reconciliation is needed (if possible)?

Not all of this can be public or needs to be. Some gather all this in their journal.

Some find it helpful to go to confession as part of the work of setting down ministry in the grace and mercy of Christ.

Setting down with the diocese

Your archdeacon will invite you out to a pub lunch and will offer you an exit interview.

Are there things you want to say? Are there people you particularly wish to seek out at this point?

Setting down your wider ministry story ...

Retirement marks the ending of more than just the last place your ministry has been expressed. Some find it helpful to take time to remember the longer story.

Some prepare for retirement by visiting previous places they have lived and served.

Some seek out or write to previous colleagues, friends and significant guides/mentors over the years.

Leaving up-to-date records – *is there a policy on this?*

It will be helpful to talk this through with Church Wardens and key church officials.

There needs to be due regard to data protection. A general guide might be to leave behind whatever you would be glad to receive if you were the new incumbent.

Symbolic actions

Handing over keys or another symbol of office and ministry.

Laying these on the altar or handing to a church official.

Are there people or groups to particularly seek out to thank?