

The Care and Feeding of the Clergy Family



During Times of Transitions

By Bonnie Jean M. Durning

Introduction:

Caring for Families of Clergy in the Deployment Process

When a congregation enters what different dioceses refer to as the calling, search or discernment process, it receives a great deal of information from diocesan officials about the methods for the search of a new Rector. It is inevitable that much time and effort is spent discussing the “care and feeding” of clergy candidates: how to read the CDO profiles and resumes, how to conduct a telephone interview, what to look for when you visit a candidate’s congregation, and, of course, the importance of hospitality and confidentiality. What is often neglected in these discussions is any mention of the “care and feeding” of the candidates’ families.

This oversight, first by the Diocesan Deployment Office and subsequently by the calling committee, can have a serious negative effect on the outcome of the search process. The decision to accept a call to a new congregation by a candidate with a spouse, partner, or family is no longer the prayerful decision of the clergy person alone. A Lutheran Church study was quoted at a 2004 Conference of Diocesan Executives meeting saying that as many as 75% of calls made and accepted for a new pastor do not come to fruition because of family issues.

Today’s clergy family, like most American families, is typically composed of two breadwinners. It is often true that the spouse or partner of the clergy person has a career and is the family’s primary source of income. Children, especially junior and senior high school age youth, will more than likely be involved in the decision concerning the call. Given these realities, it is imperative that the Search Committee and the Vestry take care to be responsive and sensitive to the needs and concerns of all members of the family of clergy candidates.

Taken from *A Resource Guide To Promote Wellness
Within the Families of Clergy*
by **FOCUS**
(**Families Of Clergy United in Support**)

Welcoming New Clergy and Their Family



Welcoming New Clergy and Their Family

In October of 2003, in the Diocese of Maine, “The Committee of Clergy Family Wellness” for the Diocese in conjunction with FOCUS: Families Of Clergy United in Support put out a brochure called Preparing a Vestry for the Arrival of a New Clergy Family. This brochure advocates that a liaison who has been specially trained by the deployment office visit the vestry after the call has been made and accepted and before the arrival of the new clergy and their family to instruct the Vestry in what preparations should be made for the new family.

We at FOCUS advocate that wellness in families of clergy will promote the health of the clergy and the congregation. We encourage wellness from the beginning for a family of clergy. We also believe that family, clergy, and the congregations are all interdependent entities that impact each other leading each to wholeness or to dis-ease. We also know that transition or change is a busy time with much stress for every member of the family. Remember that for families the change often involves a change in schools for the children, the finding of new friends, change in employment for the spouse, locating of new doctors, dentists, hair dressers, utility companies, etc.

The Vestry or Bishop's Committee can be a model of healthy behavior and respect for the clergy and their families to the congregations. The Vestry or Bishop's Committee should discuss and set the physical, emotional, social and spiritual boundaries between the congregation, clergy and clergy family.

A physical boundary may include the Church Rectory. It may be a good idea to have someone clean and paint, if necessary, the Rectory and check and repair the various systems, such as the plumbing, heating and air conditioning systems, before the arrival of the new family. The Vestry or Bishop's Committee should then make a list of the different quirks in these systems and a list of reliable repair people complete with phone numbers and guidelines about Vestry or Bishop's Committee's permission for expenses. Involve the new family in the decisions regarding any painting or redecorating that might need to be done before they arrive.

The Vestry or Bishop's committee can also promise to avoid gossip about the clergy and family. They can promise to avoid any triangulations or speaking to a family member in hopes that a message would get to the clergy. Even positive comments about sermons should be made directly to the clergy or positive comments about the spouse or children should be made directly to the one being complimented.

In the areas of Social and Spiritual boundaries that the Vestry and Bishop's Committee can help to model is that they should clear time each week that the clergy can use as a time off to be with their family for family time. The new clergy and their family members should be remembered in prayer by name once the accepted call has been announced. Realizing that the family does not have a pastor, or may be of another denomination, the Vestry and or Bishop's Committee should model respect for the right of the family to express their worshipping and baptismal ministry the way they choose.

Each member of the clergy family should be seen as individuals and not as extensions of the clergy. The Vestry or Bishop's Committee should model acceptance of the family member's availability or involvement level as decided on by the family member.

As the family arrives there are many ways that the Vestry or Bishop's Committee can provide for a smooth transition. They could provide a subscription for a local newspaper for the family. Stocking the refrigerator and cupboards with basic food items would be nice. Providing a Welcome Packet with such things as coupons for restaurants, car washes, oil changes, etc. and a list of babysitters, doctors, dentists, vets, mechanics, complete with phone numbers, and addresses would also be helpful. Perhaps even a local map with such things as parks, hardware stores, grocery stores, museums, schools, cleaners, libraries, and restaurants marked. This packet should also include the most recent pictorial directory of the congregation, a calendar with key diocesan, congregational and other community events noted. A copy of the compensation agreement and health insurance information and Social Security impact should also be included in the packet.

The Vestry or Bishop's Committee should plan a suitable welcoming service for the family or invite the Bishop to celebrate the New Ministry. The clergy family should not be made to sit alone during the service. The Vestry or Bishop's Committee could hold a pot luck supper or special reception to welcome the new clergy and family. The congregation could also plan a community coffee or reception hour or several small gatherings for welcoming the new family so they can meet others in the community. It would be a good idea to provide a list of guests invited for the new clergy family ahead of time. Name tags should be encouraged at all times to make all feel more comfortable.

Publicity, such as pictures of the clergy and family posted on a bulletin board, letters to the congregation or newspaper articles about their arrival could also be planned. First though, the permission of the clergy and their family must be obtained. The privacy of the clergy and their family needs to be respected.

Saying Goodbye



Saying Goodbye

So far we have been discussing the arrival of new clergy and their families. It is also important to remember to care for the clergy and their family as they depart your congregation. When a clergy person leaves a congregation their leaving often sets the tone for the arrival of the new clergy and family. The congregation needs to say a “good” goodbye to all the household including the pets. The Book of

Occasional Services has a liturgy to say goodbye to clergy and their families. Remembering to say Thank-you to the clergy and their family members individually is very important.

The congregation should host a special gathering for the church community at large to say goodbye and thank-you to the clergy and their families. These should be scheduled with the approval of the clergy and their families’ schedules in mind.

The Senior Warden and perhaps the Deployment Officer should offer the clergy an exit interview. The clergy spouse and other family members may also want to be included in this interview process. Their wishes should be honored and accepted.

On moving day the Vestry or Bishop’s Committee could be most helpful. They can offer support and help for the family by offering the family meals, overnight accommodations, childcare or pet care as needed. If the family has been living in a rectory, have a list of items that were in the rectory before they arrived and ask the family for suggestions for future building improvements. They may even be able to assist with the information for the Welcoming Packet for the new clergy and family.

Remember to pray for the departing clergy and family.

The Clergy Family's Responsibility For Self Care During Transitions



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First and foremost the clergy and their family members need to stay in close communication with each other and with God through prayer. They are to be encouraged to pray together and often as a family. The clergy and spouse should have open discussion throughout the times of search and have open discussion throughout the times of search and transition. Other family members should be included in these discussions as is appropriate for their age and development.

The family should seek support at their home base during the search process. They will need to be aware of the need for trust and confidentiality. These supports should be kept throughout the entire search, call, acceptance and transition.

When formulating the contract the clergy and spouse should keep certain compensation issues in mind. They need to know the impact of Social Security taxes when moving into a rectory. They will need to learn about any possible changes in their retirement benefits with the move. They will also need to learn the impact of any possible changes in their health insurance coverage and benefits.

There are other topics that the clergy family should investigate when considering a move. They should seek advice about schools in the area. They will need to learn about what youth activities are in the community. The clergy family should investigate what medical services are available. The clergy should also seek out the availability of continuing education in the new position.

The clergy family should investigate what is best for themselves in their own situation and time of life. They should be aware of how the move will impact the careers of the family members.

The clergy family should pray for the congregation.

Prayers for Clergy Families

God, may pastors and their families receive love, honor, and encouragement of their people.*

1 Tim. 5:17

God, bless pastors' families. Be their refuge and fortress. Preserve their time together. Meet their needs.*

Ps. 91:1-2

God, raise up prayer teams who will pray diligently for pastors and their families.*

1 Tim. 2:1-2

****Taken from the North Georgia
United Methodist Missionary District***



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FOCUS

FAMILIES OF CLERGY
UNITED IN SUPPORT
SERVING THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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by
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