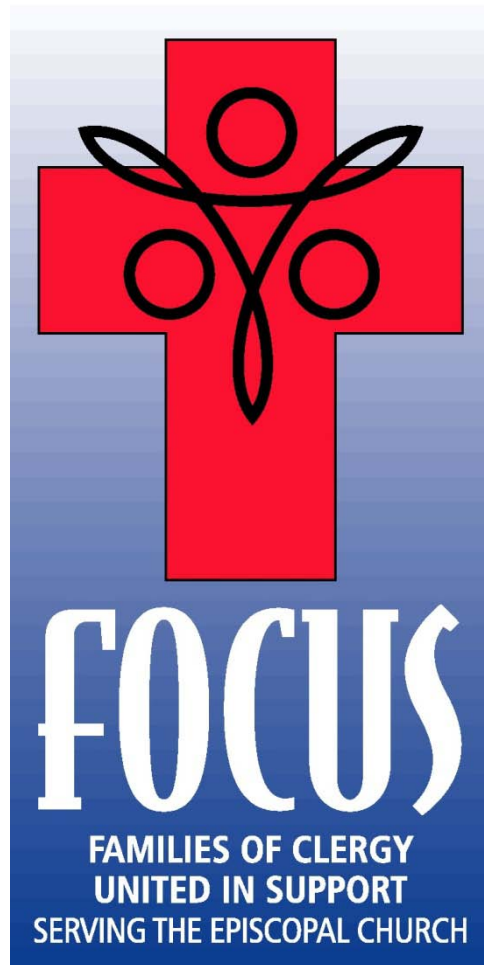
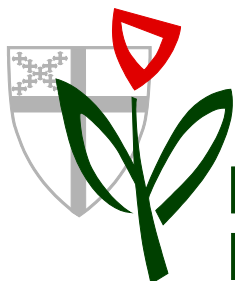


Vestry and Congregational Leaders



Prepared in partnership with:



National Episcopal
Health Ministries

Vestry and Congregational Leaders

Table of Contents

Vestry and Congregational Leaders	2
General Support of Family Members of Clergy	3
Vestry and Congregational Leaders	3
Clergy Families in Transition due to Changing Cures.....	4

Vestry and Congregational Leaders

If you are reading this document, you already know that family members of clergy are important parts of the church system, along with clergy and lay professionals. Congregational leaders can play a key role in facilitating support for family members of clergy by acknowledging the importance of the clergy person's commitments to his or her family, by respecting the family members as persons in their own right, by discerning and respecting their degree of involvement in the parish, and by helping establish church/home boundaries for congregants to honor.

Some families of clergy may choose to view the ordained family member's vocation as a job like any other which brings income to the family, and therefore may elect not to participate in any of these programs. That choice is honored. But most families of clergy discover that with the ordination of a family member come life-altering changes. The families of clergy deserve the church's support as they adapt to and live out these changes.

Diocesan staff ideally will provide support for family members of clergy, such as a voluntary directory of family members of clergy, chaplains or pastoral support for family members, programs and information tailored to their needs.

See the Appendix for more information about:

- Resources for general support of family members of clergy
- Transitions from one clergy family to another
- Ideas for a congregational discernment committee
- Support of family members when someone in the parish is considering ordination

General Support of Family Members of Clergy

Vestry and Congregational Leaders

Vestry and wardens

Search committees/transitional teams

People in the pew

The primary goal of this section is to help members of a congregation recognize the presence, gifts, and boundaries of the family members of clergy. In many cases, part of a clergy member's family life is lived in public within the congregation. Since the family of clergy is often more in the spotlight than other families and is, willingly or not, understood to be example for the congregation, lay leaders need to set communication standards that minimize gossip, triangulation, or exploitation of sensitive information.

However, some information about the clergy and his or her family may be public knowledge, such as pledging, salary information, living arrangements in the rectory, and perhaps medical conditions. Lay leaders need to be sensitive to how this information is communicated, as well as how widely it is shared and used.

There is no one template for either congregational expectations or family of clergy participation, so clear, effective communication is essential. The section below is meant to help congregational leaders think intentionally about how to care for family members of clergy.

Clergy Families in Transition due to Changing Cures

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 for a new Rector. It is inevitable that much time and effort is spent discussing the “care and feeding” of clergy candidates: how to read resumes, how to conduct a telephone interview, what to look for when you visit a candidate’s congregations 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 neglect, first by the Diocesan Deployment Offices, 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. The Rev. Charles Fulton quoted from a Lutheran Church study at a 2004 Conference of Diocesan Executives meeting 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 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.

Primary responsibility for the decision to take a new cure rests with the family. Each family has its own ways of discerning geographic moves or changes in employment. Families can devise their own lists of things they need to know before they make a move, such as the quality of the schools, the repair allowance for the rectory, or the availability of specialized medical resources. They may also have a sense of how much contact they would like to have with members of the potentially new congregation. The reality of mutual evaluation can make the family of clergy, or members of the potential cure, hesitant to ask for what they need, yet the more accurate the information, the more useful it will be in coming to the best decision.

Some responsibility for thinking through what information might be helpful, or making explicit the congregation’s expectations of family of clergy, also rests with the search committee or transition team. See Appendix for specific suggestions meant to help families and members of search committees think through some of the issues well.