

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
601 Poyntz Avenue
Manhattan, KS 66502

15 July 2020

Vestry of St. Paul's,

I've had a lot of difficulty putting together a letter of resignation for you. Even though my end date has been known for almost six months, I've procrastinated. So an hour before my final vestry meeting, I'm writing to do what must be done.

The Canons (Laws) of The Episcopal Church govern this moment in a canon called *Dissolution of the Pastoral Relationship*. The relevant part is terse, "Except upon mandatory resignation by reason of age, a Rector may not resign as Rector of a parish without the consent of its Vestry, nor may any Rector canonically or lawfully elected and in charge of a Parish be removed there from by the Vestry against the Rector's will, except as hereinafter provided." The rules make it clear that the relationship I have with you (the "royal" you as in: St. Paul's) is a specific type: Pastoral. It's something that is connected to the structures of the Church and as such, it can only be dissolved by mutual consent.

As I understand it, this mutual consent is one of the ways that the Church protects us and honors our relationship. It recognizes that, most of the time, the pastoral relationship is a blessing and a balm. A pastoral relationship expects connection in times of joy and times of sadness. But this rule exists because sometimes the pastoral relationship is also necessarily difficult. As much as we are supposed to comfort and care, Rectors are supposed to poke and prod; to tell difficult truths and to challenge. The spiritual journey requires us to be cared for and challenged. The canon exists because it seeks to protect both parish and clergy from rash decisions predicated on hurt feelings or bruised egos. It asks us to recognize that we are stronger together and that we grow only as much as we are able to persevere through our difficulties.

Thinking back on the last seven years, my mind wants to pull out the scales to do a reckoning of the blessings and the difficulties. As I start to place moments and memories on either side of the scale, I find the task impossible. Partially because I think systemically and it's difficult for me to disentangle any one moment from all that preceded and followed. I can't honestly tell myself that any one moment can fully go on one side or the other. But more than that, I find I can't quantify my memories because I'm so profoundly and deeply filled with gratitude.

I cannot imagine any seven years stretch of my life that has been or will be as transformative as this time has been. In July 2013, I was approaching the fourth anniversary of my marriage to Michael. I had no children. I owned no house. I'd been ordained for only two years. In this moment of reflection, I'm filled with gratitude that, just as I have loved you through ups and downs, you have loved me through my own. And it wasn't enough for you to just love me, you have loved Michael through hers, and you have loved Eirín and York through theirs.

The difficulty of this moment has almost nothing to do with the dissolution of the pastoral relationship. Your next priest is going to be great in their own way. You'll struggle with them, you'll rejoice with them and eventually you'll fall in love with them. And that's why this is hard: the relationship between a congregation and priest, a congregation and priest's family, isn't just a mechanical, administrative relationship, it grows and changes and it involves sticky feelings: friendship, antagonism, joy and pain.

And ultimately that's why it's helpful to have rules laid out for how this is supposed to go down. A rector makes it known that a new call has been offered and accepted, the rector writes a letter tendering their resignation and the vestry receives it and consents. It feels very Anglican to me: firm handshake, stiff upper lip! It's helpful to have the framework because inside I'm filled with so much. And so I follow the rules. . . Reaching inside I grab ahold of something to offer and when the emotional chaos dissipates, all that's left:

THANK YOU

I resign my position as rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Manhattan, Kansas. My last day will be July 31, 2020.

Inspired, Cared and Accepted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "A. Patrick K. Funston". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rev. A. Patrick K. Funston