

Walking Together

through the priest transfers

A reflection guide for our parish community
during times of pastoral transition





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✦ A WORD BEFORE WE BEGIN

You have just heard the news.
Your parish priest is leaving.

Perhaps he has been with your community for many years, baptising your children, witnessing your marriages, anointing your sick, burying your dead. He has been a steady presence at the altar, in the confessional, at your door in times of need. And now he is going.

Or perhaps he has only been with you a short while, and the announcement still feels sudden and unsettling. Either way, something is shifting beneath your feet and that is a perfectly honest movement to acknowledge.

"I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me."

John 10:14



This guide is written for you – the ordinary faithful parishioner who may be feeling a complicated mixture of sadness, anxiety, gratitude, or even a quiet relief that you would rather not admit. All feelings are accepted here!

Our aim is simple, to walk with you through this transition, offering some reflections from a faith perspective. We will share some practical information about what to expect, some prayers for the journey, and some gentle suggestions for how your community can travel this road well, together.

Pastoral transitions have been part of the Church's life from the very beginning. The apostles moved on. Communities were handed to new shepherds. Through it all, the one true Shepherd remained constant.

He remains constant still.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to be flexible. Here are some ways it might be used:

- Personal reading and prayer: Work through it at your own pace over the weeks of the transition.
- Small group discussion: Each section contains reflection questions suitable for parish ministries, small groups, and prayer groups.
- Parish preparation: The guide can be distributed at Mass before the priest's departure, giving the community time to engage with it together.
- Prayer resources: The prayers can be incorporated into parish Masses during the transition period, including at farewell Masses after the final blessing.



✦ WHAT AM I FEELING?

Recognising the reality of this transition

Do you still remember how it felt when your school form teacher changed as you went up one level? Bidding farewell to a supportive mentor must have brought up strong emotions. Such changes in our lives can sometimes feel disruptive. After all, who's to know if the new priest will be as patient with you?

Likewise, saying goodbye to a beloved priest whom you've journeyed with for many years may bring intense feelings. On top of that, there's perhaps an ocean's worth of gratitude for his guidance. The weight of this goodbye seems almost too heavy to bear, as a treasure box of cherished memories surface, while you process the upcoming change.

Facing the unknown can be scary; we worry about a new shepherd leading a parish we have so carefully built. Would he undo what we've

built up? What would our relationship be like? Would he try to understand our community before making changes?

Perhaps we might feel relief as we've heard positive things about the incoming priest. Either way, we deserve to acknowledge how we feel without guilt. Acknowledging these feelings is the first step toward accepting the coming change. Our concerns are natural and are not signs of weak faith.

Between now and when the new priest arrives, things may feel confusing and uncertain. However, we should trust that quiet hopeful work is happening. Our sense of security might waver a little, but if we move forward with understanding and patience, we will find peace as the Lord guides us through this transition. Our faith in Christ, not in any single priest, remains our anchor.



For Prayer & Reflection

1. What have you most valued about your parish priest's presence in your community? Take a moment to name these gifts specifically.
2. What particular feelings are you aware of as you face this transition? Can you name them honestly before God our Father?
3. Have you experienced transitions like this before — in faith, in life, in relationships? What helped you through them?

✦ A DIFFERENT WAY TO SEE THIS MOMENT

Christ shepherds through Priests and Bishops

In everyday life, we are used to choosing and keeping what we value. We build our routines around what works for us. We grow attached to what feels familiar. So when there are changes, especially those that touch our personal lives such as the parish priest, it can feel like an important part of our life is being taken away.

For some, this may feel deeply painful. For others, it may even bring a sense of relief, uncertainty, or the possibility of a new beginning. All of these reactions are part of being a real human community.



Even the first disciples experienced something similar. After walking closely with Jesus, they struggled to understand what would happen when He departed from them. They felt uncertain and afraid. Yet in time, through the Holy Spirit, they discovered that Christ had not abandoned them. God our Father was still leading them into something new.

In moments of transition, we too may find ourselves focusing only on what is ending, and missing the new graces God our Father may be preparing to give.



The parish itself is not built around one priest alone. The Church teaches that a parish is a real and stable community of the faithful, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a priest under the authority of the diocesan bishop.

Your parish matters deeply. It is your spiritual home: where you pray, serve and belong. Your parish is also part of something larger: the life of the whole Church. Across the Church, different communities have different needs.

Priests are appointed to serve the People of God, under the authority of the bishop, for the good of the faithful.

A priest is sent. Sent to serve, sent to shepherd and sent...for a time. When the time comes to an end, he is sent again, elsewhere. Jesus also went from place to place to those who need stability and renewal, healing those who need to be stretched in their faith.

The decisions about priests are not made in the same way for every parish. At the heart of every such decision is a simple concern: that each community receives the care it needs to grow in faith. The Church has always held that the life of the parish exists for the good of souls (*Salus Animarum*), that people may come to know Christ, grow in Him, and be led to holiness.



Salus animarum is a Latin phrase meaning "the salvation of souls". It is used in Roman Catholic Canon Law (Canon 1752) as the foundation for the phrase "salus animarum suprema lex", meaning "the salvation of souls is the supreme law". This principle establishes that all other considerations in the Church are subordinate to this ultimate goal.

When the Archbishop, as shepherd of the diocese, discerns where each priest is needed, he is not thinking of one parish alone, but for the good of the whole Church. These decisions are made prayerfully, even if they are not always fully explained.

This can be difficult to accept. It is a way the Church remains alive, responsive and missionary.

When a new parish priest is appointed, it is not simply an administrative decision. It is part of how the Church is cared for.

Your priest has been a gift to you. Now is the time to give this gift to others. The priest who is coming will bring gifts that may suit your parish in this season of your life.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church 1548 tells us that in the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ Himself who is present to His Church.

As you walk in faith with the Lord, receive your priests with trust that the Lord knows what lies ahead. This shift of perspective may not remove difficulties, but it can change how you view this transition, to see more clearly, and respond with faith.





For Prayer & Reflection

1. How can gratitude for your priest's ministry deepen your desire for other parish communities to be blessed as well?
2. As you prepare to welcome the new priest, how might you choose openness over comparison?
3. What do you need to entrust to God our Father during this time of transition?

✦ SCRIPTURES FOR THE JOURNEY

The Bible is full of transitions. Abraham was asked to leave the familiar and walk towards a land he did not yet know. Moses, after carrying the people for so long, had to hand over leadership to Joshua. St. Paul loved the communities he founded, taught, and encouraged and yet, again and again, he had to leave them, entrusting them to the grace of God our Father and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Similarly, when a parish goes through a change of priests, we are not entering strange territory. We are walking a road that God's people had walked before. Scripture becomes a companion for this time of change.

We have two passages for you to sit with during this season. We invite you to use them as prayer invitations while you reflect on them and take in God our Father's message as intended.



Joshua 1:1-9

A New Leader Is Appointed

Scripture

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses's assistant, saying, "My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night,

so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Invitation

Moses, the great leader of Israel, has died. For many years, he had carried the people, led them, interceded for them, and guided them through the wilderness. Now Israel stands at the edge of the Promised Land, but they must enter it under someone new: Joshua.

It is in this moment of uncertainty that God our Father speaks:

"I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" Joshua 1:9

Notice what God our Father does not say. He does not say, “Joshua will be exactly like Moses.”

He does not ask the people to pretend that nothing has changed. The comfort he offers is simpler and more profound: I am with you.

The same God who was present in one chapter of the story is present in the next. Israel does not face the new chapter alone, and neither do we.



Reflection

1. Where do you most need courage in facing this transition? Bring your honest feelings to God our Father in prayer.
2. Who in your parish community might need the encouragement of these words right now?

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

A Time for Everything

Scripture

For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down and a time to build up; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to throw away; a time to tear and a time to sew; a time to keep silent and a time to speak; a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace.

Invitation

Life as we know it, isn't neat or tidy. It does not unfold in straight lines. Instead, it ebbs and flows as we journey through calm and rocky seasons. This litany reminds us that God our Father makes everything beautiful in His time. He promises joy and sorrow alongside trials and triumphs.

When we understand that there is "a time for everything under heaven", we can better trust the Lord's timing in all manners of our life. Even if we do not understand it fully, we can find comfort in accepting that God our Father's timing is perfect and far outweighs our human expectations.

His divine plan sometimes includes changes we least expect. Only when we learn to embrace change and let go of passing moments can we be patient with what is to come. As we face the change in our parish, let us remember that God our Father is present among us through every season. Whatever He has prepared for us comes from love. May we learn to trust in His will this season.





Reflection

1. How might Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 be inviting you to trust in God our Father's timing?
2. What kind of season do you think your parish may be entering into now? What new possibilities might God our Father be opening for your parish?

✦ NAVIGATING THIS TRANSITION

Pastoral transitions are not only personal, they are also communal. A priest may be the one receiving a new appointment, but the whole parish feels the change. The way a parish community navigates this season together can either strengthen or erode trust, bonds, and shared life.

Here are some practical suggestions for how to travel this road well:

For Farewell Season

Express Gratitude and Bid Farewell

For Parishioners: Actively participate in farewell meals, events, write thank-you notes, or offer spiritual bouquets (prayers and sacrifices) for the outgoing priest. Expressing gratitude provides closure and affirms the positive impact he had on the parish community.

Sometimes, when gathering around the memory of a previous priest, groups might unintentionally position themselves against the new priest.



Loyalty to our priest is honourable when we avoid comparisons. Loyalty that cannot make space for what is new becomes a hindrance.



For Parish Ministries: Organise meaningful farewell celebrations that honour the outgoing priest's service and allow the community to express their appreciation. Ensure these events are inclusive and provide opportunities for various ministries to participate.

Embrace Uncertainty with Faith

For Parishioners: Resist the urge to rush to conclusions or make premature judgments. Practice patience and trust in our Father's timing. Use this time for personal spiritual deepening, by focusing on Scripture or spiritual reading.

For Parish Ministries: Parish leaders to openly share accurate information regarding the transition where available. Avoid passing along unclear details which may confuse ministry members.

Maintain Parish Life

For Parishioners: Continue to actively participate in the sacraments, parish ministries, and community events. Your consistent presence and involvement are vital for maintaining the vibrancy of the parish. Let's avoid stepping back from parish life and disengaging from groups. Although this is one of the most common responses to process grief, it is rarely helpful. If you notice this happening to you, name it honestly in prayer before God.

For Parish Ministries: Ensure that all essential parish functions and ministries continue to operate effectively. Avoid making abrupt changes ahead of the arrival of the new priest. Continue ministering faithfully to the community through this time.

Ensure a Smooth Handover (for Parish Leaders & Ministries)

Work closely with the outgoing priest to ensure a comprehensive handover of responsibilities, ongoing projects, parish records, and key contacts. Document important information to ensure continuity of ministries and operations. This minimises disruption during the transition.

Review and document your ministry's current activities, resources, and needs. Prepare a brief summary for the incoming priest, highlighting key aspects and potential areas for his involvement.

Pray for the Outgoing Priest

Offer prayers for his new assignment, his well-being, and his continued ministry. This spiritual support is a powerful way to honour his service.

Welcoming the New Priest

Prepare for the New Priest

For Parishioners: Begin to cultivate an open mind and heart, ready to welcome the new shepherd with hospitality and a willingness to engage.

For Ministry Leaders: Form a welcoming committee to gather information about the parish (its history, demographics, ministries, traditions) that can be shared with the incoming priest. Prepare a welcome plan.

Active Welcome and Hospitality

For Parishioners: Extend a warm and genuine welcome to the new priest. Introduce yourself, attend welcoming events, and make an effort to engage with him. A friendly face and an open heart can make a significant difference. Bear in mind that the first weeks/months of a new priest is rarely enough to show what the relationship will become over time. Just as the parish is learning about him, the new priest is also learning about the parish. Let's avoid premature judgement and practise patience.



For Parish Ministries: Implement the welcome plan, ensuring the new priest feels supported and integrated into the parish and local community. Provide him with necessary resources and introductions to key individuals and ministries.

Openness to New Ideas and Leadership Styles

For Parishioners: Be open to the new priest's vision, ideas, and leadership style. Understand that he will bring his unique gifts and charisms, which may sometimes differ from what you are accustomed to. Give him time to observe, learn, and implement his pastoral approach.

For Parish Ministries: Be prepared to listen to the new priest's vision and work collaboratively to implement new initiatives. Offer your support and expertise while respecting his leadership. Facilitate communication between the priest and various ministries.

Support New Initiatives

For Parishioners: If the new priest introduces new programmes, ministries, or approaches, consider offering your time, talents, and support. Embrace the opportunity for growth and renewal within the parish.

For Parish Ministries: Actively support and champion the new priest's pastoral plans. Help communicate his vision to the wider community and mobilise resources to ensure the success of new initiatives.

Pray for the Incoming Priest and New Beginnings

Offer continuous prayers for the new priest as he settles into his role, for his spiritual and physical well-being, and for his fruitful ministry in your parish. Pray for the entire parish community as it embarks on this new chapter.



For Prayer & Reflection

1. Which of these suggestions will you take on so as to contribute to a spirit of welcome and patience within your parish community?
2. Who among your parish community will you reach out to help bring to life some of the activities suggested here?
3. How might you welcome your new parish priest into your parish community?

✦ PRAYER GUIDANCE

As you prepare your heart and mind for new beginnings, here are some prayers to guide and comfort you through the different stages of the pastoral transition. Use these prayers on your own where needed or with your community.

Communal Prayer for Unity During Transition

O God, Father of all peoples and source of all unity, we gather as one humble parish family to praise You and entrust this time of change within the parish to You. While we may have different feelings about our priests' transfers, we know that You will guide us through this transition. You continue to be with us as we support one another with love and patience.

Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, we lift up our parish community and our beloved priests to You.



We know that the Holy Spirit will sustain the life of our parish, reminding us to listen with open hearts, to speak with kindness and truth, and to remember that we are all on this journey together. May we emerge from this transition stronger in faith, more faithful to Christ, and more deeply rooted in His love for Your glory. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Almighty loving Father, we thank You for the gifts You have showered upon our parish all these years. As we, Your humble servants, move through this transition, we pray for a spiritual renewal in our parish. Use us in this season of change and help us deepen our faith, to strengthen our bonds as a community, and to recommit ourselves to the mission of Christ. May we see this transition not as a disruption, but as an opportunity for growth. Through Your will, we shall emerge from this change with a renewed sense of purpose, a deeper love for one another, and a stronger commitment to living out the Gospel in our daily lives. We know that Your presence through this passage will bring us safely to the other side, transformed by Your grace. Amen.

Prayer for Acceptance

Heavenly Father, we come before You today with hearts open to Your divine will. As we stand at the threshold of change within our beloved parish family, we acknowledge the stirrings in our hearts, the comfort of the familiar and the apprehension of the unknown. Grant us, we pray, the grace of understanding and the knowledge of Your loving hand in this transition, along with the gift of patience and courage to navigate it with peace. We lift our humble hearts and minds to You Lord, openly accepting what is to come, trusting that Your plan is always for our good. Enable us to listen deeply to one another, to offer compassion, and to lean on Your unfailing love that guides us through every season of life. May the Holy Spirit fill us with wisdom and unity. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer for the Outgoing Parish Priest

Father God, we lift to You our beloved priest, Father [Name], as he prepares to leave our parish. We thank You for gifting Father [Name] to us all these years, and for the care we have received from him. We entrust him to Your loving care and ask Your abundant blessings upon his life and ministry. Bless him with good health of body, mind, and spirit as he transitions to his next parish with his gifts, wisdom, and pastoral experience. Strengthened by Your providence, may he find joy in the new friendships amongst the community, and new opportunities to minister and serve Your Kingdom. By the intercession of Saint John Vianney, patron saint of priests, and all the saints who have faithfully served as shepherds of Your flock, we ask that You bless Father [Name] abundantly. May his life be a witness to Your love, his ministry a source of grace, and his heart ever devoted to Christ and His Church. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer for the New Parish Priest

Father God, with apprehension and anticipation, we welcome our new shepherd to guide our parish towards Your mission. We know that as always You will fill him with the Holy Spirit, granting him strength, discernment, and boundless grace for the ministry ahead. We know that You, our loving Father, will grace us, Your faithful, to open our hearts and steady our minds as we commit to working together in this new journey. May our community give You true service as we strive for unity, supporting our new parish priest and collaborating wholeheartedly to accomplish Your divine will. Grant us patience and understanding in the process of getting to know him, and inspire us to build a strong, faith-filled relationship. We remember that You are our ultimate guide, and through our collective efforts, Your Kingdom shall flourish. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

✦ FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do priest transitions work in our Archdiocese?

Parish priests are appointed by the Archbishop of Singapore, who is responsible for the pastoral care of the whole Archdiocese.

Appointments are usually made for fixed terms – typically six years for a parish priest and three years for an assistant parish priest, as decreed by the The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei (CBCMSB), the official episcopal body representing the Catholic Church in these three Dioceses, in 2015, Complementary Norms on Canon 522.

When appointment letters are issued, they reflect pastoral governance: decisions made through discernment, consultation, and prayer.

While we naturally see things from the perspective of our own parish, the Archbishop must consider the needs of the whole Archdiocese. Trusting this process is part of trusting how the Church orders her pastoral life.

Will sacramental records be affected?

No. Baptismal, marriage, and other records are maintained by the parish independently of individual priests. They are safe.

Will Masses, ministries, and parish activities continue as usual?

In most cases, yes. The ordinary life of the parish continues: sacraments, catechesis, ministries, and parish activities do not stop because of a change in priest. There may be some adjustments over time, but the parish remains the parish, and its mission continues.



Can I speak to the new priest about my personal situation?

Yes, in time. Give him space to settle in first. Most priests genuinely welcome getting to know their new parishioners, and a simple introduction is always appropriate.

What if I don't like the new priest?

Give him time, a genuine, generous amount of time. First impressions in parish life are often misleading, and the priest is also adjusting to you. If after a reasonable period there are genuine pastoral concerns, speak with your Parish Pastoral Council.

Is it appropriate to stay in contact with the outgoing priest?

This depends on the priest. Some maintain friendships with former parishioners; others prefer a clean handover for good pastoral reasons. Take your cue from the priest, and respect his lead.

Should we tell the new priest about how things have always been done?

Yes, but gently, and with the right spirit. It is helpful for a new priest to understand the parish's traditions, rhythms, sensitivities, and hopes. Do try to share these as gifts of context, not as demands. A helpful phrase is: "Father, this has been meaningful to our parish because..." rather than "Father, we have always done it this way."

✦ A CLOSING WORD: THE CHURCH ENDURES



Image by RobertCheaib
pixabay.com/photos/hug/saint-peters-basilica-rome-4013620/

There is a remarkable statue in Rome, in the great Basilica of St. Peter's. It is the bronze statue of St. Peter himself, seated in majesty, his right foot worn smooth by centuries of pilgrims who have touched it in prayer.

The faces and names of those pilgrims are long forgotten. St. Peter himself died nearly two thousand years ago. But the Church he helped to build continues — in Rome, in Singapore, in your parish, and in you.

Pastoral transitions, however significant they feel in the moment, are part of this much longer story.

The parish you belong to has seen priests come and go. It will see more. And through every transition, the Eucharist has continued to be celebrated, sinners have been reconciled, the sick have been anointed, and the dead have been commended to God our Father.

The transitions happening across our Archdiocese are not an interruption to the Church's life. In a real way, they are an expression of it. The Archbishop's pastoral governance, the willingness of priests to go where they are sent, and the faith of communities to receive what is given, these are all signs that the Church in Singapore is alive, moving, and trusting.

You are not beginning again. You are continuing, with new priests for the journey, new gifts being brought to the altar, and new chapters being written by the same Spirit who has been at work in your community from the beginning.

Go forward in hope. Grieve honestly. Welcome generously. Pray faithfully. The Church endures.

“And remember,
I am with you
always, to the
end of the age.”

Matthew 28:20

FOR FURTHER SUPPORT

If you or members of your parish community are finding the transition particularly difficult, please speak with a trusted parish leader, a deacon, a priest, or contact your Parish Pastoral Council.

“The Church is not a museum of saints but a hospital for sinners”

Pope Francis



Image Note

Some images in this guide are AI-generated and are used for illustrative and reflective purposes only. They do not depict actual parishioners, priests, parish events, or specific pastoral situations unless otherwise credited.



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