

Best Practices for Retired Clergy Worshiping in a Congregation (Not Formerly Served)

The Episcopal Diocese of Ohio

Introduction

Retired clergy are a valued and integral part of the spiritual fabric of our diocese. When a retired priest chooses to worship in a congregation they have not served, it can be a gift to the community — offering presence, wisdom, and prayer. Healthy and joyful participation is supported by clear roles, good boundaries, and mutual respect.

These best practices are offered to support retired clergy, active clergy, and lay leadership in cultivating a healthy and Spirit-led community life.

1. A Presence Rooted in Worship, Not Leadership

- Worship regularly and freely, but assume the posture of a congregant, not a leader.
- Let your presence be a ministry of encouragement and support, rather than guidance or critique.
- If approached about a pastoral or liturgical role, kindly direct individuals to the clergy-in-charge.

2. Beginning Well: Conversation and Mutual Understanding

When a retired clergyperson begins worshiping in a faith community, it is strongly recommended that they initiate an early conversation with the clergy-in-charge.

This conversation can help establish:

- A strong relationship
- Shared expectations around roles and boundaries
- Whether and how the retired clergy member may serve if invited
- Practices around visibility, vesture, and pastoral presence

Starting with clarity helps foster trust and mutual respect from the outset.

3. Relationships and Referrals

- Retired clergy may maintain friendships in the congregation, but avoid offering pastoral care, counseling, or spiritual direction unless invited by the clergy-in-charge.
- If someone seeks your pastoral support, a gentle redirection to current leadership helps affirm appropriate channels.

This practice supports both the health of the community and the authority of current leadership.

4. Role Clarity

- Do not vest, preach, preside, or lead public liturgy unless specifically invited by the clergy-in-charge.
- Avoid participating in parish governance, confidential matters, or decision-making unless requested.

Clerical collars: Wearing a collar while worshiping in a faith community is a personal choice for retired clergy. Be mindful that visible clerical identity may still carry authority for others and shape expectations of your role.

5. Supporting the Clergy-in-Charge

- Speak positively and respectfully about the clergy-in-charge, especially in casual or social settings.
- If you have concerns, address them privately and directly — not in groups or side conversations.
- Let your default posture be one of support and prayer for those in active ministry.

6. Financial Participation and Remuneration

Financial participation:

If a retired clergy person chooses to be part of a faith community, the bishop expects that they participate financially in the life of that community, including making a pledge, as they are able.

As of January 2026

Remuneration for service:

When a retired clergy person is invited to preach, preside, teach, or provide pastoral coverage:

- The expectation is that the faith community pays the diocesan supply rate—even if the retired clergy person is a member of that community.
- A retired clergy person may choose to decline payment and offer their service as a gift or pledge contribution, but this should be made explicit and, when appropriate, documented in writing.

Clear agreements honor both the clergy person and the congregation.

7. Online Etiquette

- Retired clergy are encouraged to maintain healthy online relationships but avoid commenting publicly on parish business, clergy leadership, or congregational decisions.
- If you're included in social media groups, be mindful that your voice still carries authority for some — use it sparingly and graciously.

8. When Invited to Serve

- If the clergy-in-charge invites you to preach, teach, or officiate occasionally, approach the invitation as a guest, not as one returning to leadership.
- If this begins to happen regularly, check in with the clergy-in-charge and the Canon to the Ordinary to ensure shared expectations are in place.

9. Diocesan Relationship and Expectations

Non-active retired clergy (not on the supply list and not regularly serving in a faith community):

- Are not required to attend Diocesan Convention
- Are encouraged to remain in pastoral relationship with the bishop
- Are required to submit an annual clergy status report

Active retired clergy (on the supply list or regularly serving in a faith community):

- Are expected to attend clergy conference

As of January 2026

- Are expected to attend Diocesan Convention
- Must remain current with Safe Church and Anti-Racism training requirements

These expectations help maintain healthy connection, accountability, and shared life in the diocese.

A Word of Gratitude

Thank you for your continued faithfulness in worship and witness. Your presence as a retired clergyperson is a blessing. By following these practices, you model mutual respect, humility, and wisdom — and help build a church of clarity, care, and Christ-centered community.