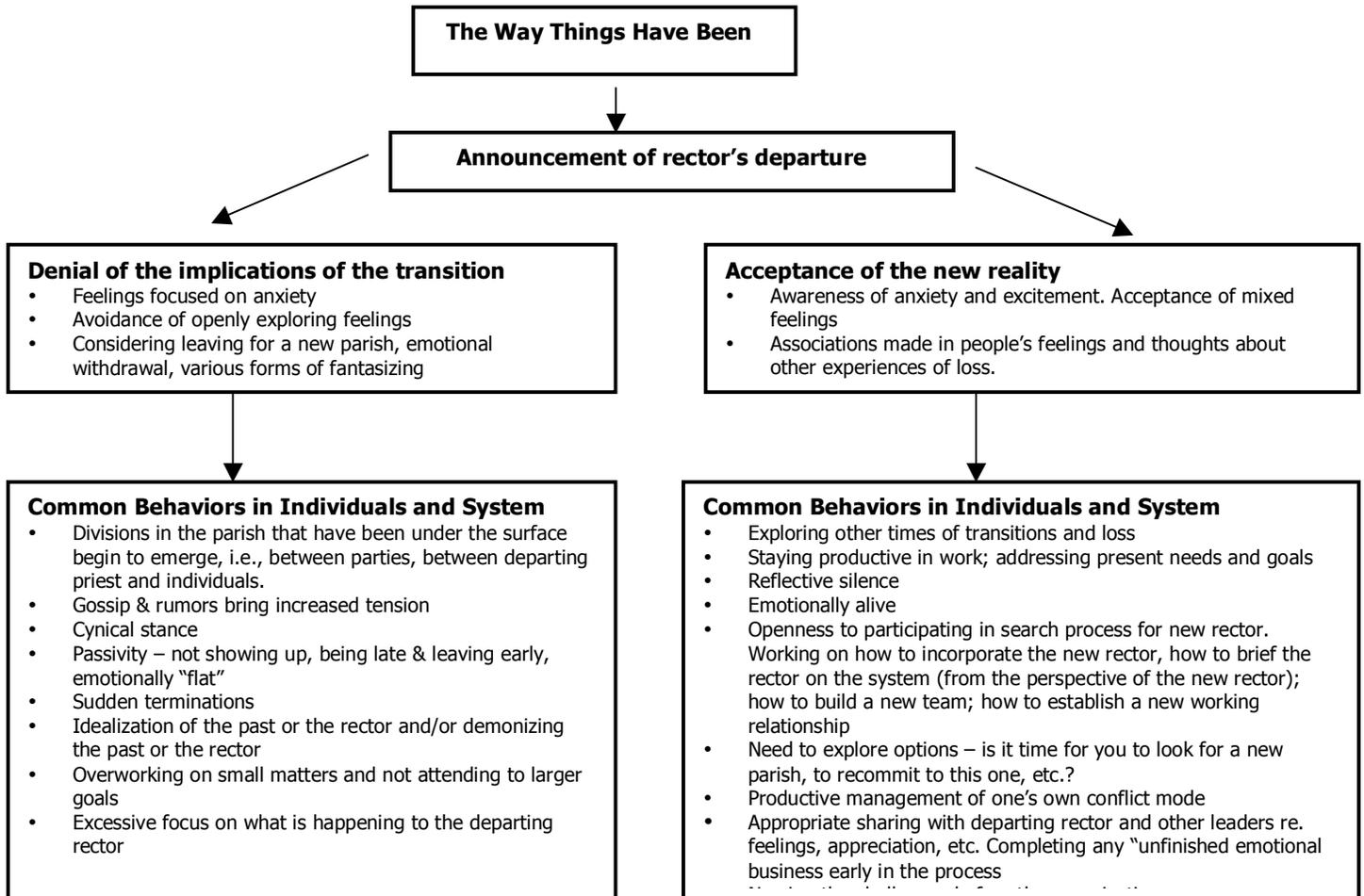


Transition Dynamics: The Rector's Departure

Here are some of the common dynamics among parish leaders that emerge when the rector leaves. The assumption is that the rector has been in-place long enough to have had a significant impact on the parish and to have established deep working relationships with others. The rector may be moving onto a new position, retiring or leaving because of illness or changes in life circumstances. The ways of working that had been created will change. The nature of relationships will change. Leaders in the parish will begin to experience concerns and hopes about the basic ways of working that have been in place and about their place in the organization. New choices will present themselves.



During the transition it's important for leaders to create a space of hospitality for themselves and others in the organization. This might include offering opportunities to reflect on the past, the "here & now", and the possible futures. Doing any such reflection in a manner that provides adequate emotional safety and distance from the pressures of the parish. Such opportunities can be initiated by the departing rector, the vestry or a transition team. Both the priest and the parishioners need to "let go" of one another. Behavior that shows intimacy and openness will diminish, the existing patterns of control and influence will weaken, and even the customary signs of inclusion will fade. This can be managed in a way that is graceful. It can also be ignored or poorly done; in which case there will be emotional problems that will haunt the priest and the parish.

It's also important for the departing rector to:

- Allow the other leaders to struggle; avoid attempts to "save" them; do not create detailed plans for what is to happen after departure; also do not accept a "lame duck" position; do not leave before you have left.
- Identify work and goals that are significant "unfinished business" for the parish. Write a few pages that identify 3 or 4 major challenges before the organization.
- Focus on his/her own departure process. The rector needs to experience the death of what has been and his/her excitement about the future.