

POLICY REGARDING FORMER PASTORS For Departing Pastors* and Their Former Congregations

[Approved by Commissions for Congregational Life and Church Professionals,
05/04/2015]

[Approved by Presbytery, 05/19/2015]

[Responsible Body: Commission for Church Professionals]

Background

Pastors have privileged, precious and confidential relationships with congregations and their members. When a pastor's professional service to a congregation concludes, those privileged relationships, of necessity, must end. The *Book of Order* states: "After the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, former pastors and associate pastors shall not provide their pastoral services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the moderator of session: (G-2.0905).

Former pastors should offer neither solicited nor unsolicited pastoral counsel to their former congregants. If they become concerned about developments in their former congregation, they should communicate such concerns only to the Presbytery staff or appropriate Commission, and not to the church's session or members. Pastoral concern for the congregation requires that, as a member accountable to the Presbytery, the departing pastor and session are responsible for ensuring that these separation policies are met.

Bonds of affection and friendship will remain between the pastor and his/her family with church members. Friendship of a social nature only may continue, but integrity to the ministry of the church and ongoing health of the community of the church requires that any pastoral relationship and service do not.

Policy

In order to provide that new and effective pastoral relationships may be called and established, Presbytery affirms the following minimum standards of conduct:

1. Former pastors will agree not to preach, lead worship, or provide any pastoral functions including, but not limited to, presiding at sacraments, weddings and funerals unless invited by the church's moderator.
2. Any conversation, including electronic communication, with members regarding internal congregational matters, decisions or personalities is inappropriate.
3. All church property, including, but not limited to, keys and any church owned credit/debit cards shall be returned to the clerk of session. Any financial accounts which have required a pastor's signature, will be changed prior to or on the day of departure.

The Presbytery understands that separation from a congregation is a difficult transition for the congregants and can be especially stressful for the pastor and his/her spouse and family. For the pastor's family, physical separation is preferable, but in rare, select, controlled circumstances an ongoing association as a member of the church may be useful to both the family and congregation as determined by the Presbytery's Commission for Church Professionals (CCP). CCP needs to provide active support for former pastors and their families. Ordained pastors are reminded that the Presbytery continues to be their congregation and pastoral community.

Honorably retiring pastors and spouses may contribute richly to the life of other congregations and are encouraged to do so as they remain active participants in Presbytery and the larger church.

Healthy relationships between congregations and former pastors may include, but not be limited to, various forms of contact, including the following:

1. Occasional consultation to maintain institutional memory and goodwill
2. Collegiality between former and successor pastors
3. **At the invitation of the new pastor only,**
 - a. Occasional attendance at services and special events, such as dedications and anniversaries
 - b. Sharing bereavement, by attending funeral services
 - c. Occasional assistance in ministry

After a new pastor is installed in a congregation, and at least a year has passed, a former pastor may on other special occasions accept the invitation of the newly called pastor and session to co-officiate in ordinances and services of the church. At such time and in consultation with and concurrence of the installed pastor, further participation in the ordinary life of the congregation is permissible.

Further, after one year from the date of a former pastor's leaving his/her church service, that pastor may be made a Pastor Emeritus/Emerita by vote of the church's session and congregation and concurrence by the Commission for Church Professionals.

Presbytery through its Commission for Church Professionals (CCP) will advise pastors regarding their contacts with former congregations.

**References to teaching elders in this document include, but are not limited to, associate pastors, parish associates, interim/transitional pastors, commissioned ruling elders, stated supplies and all professionals in service to a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (USA).*

By signing here, the departing pastor and the clerk of session (or other designated congregational representative) pledge that they understand and will abide by this policy in their future relationships.

Departing Teaching Elder

Date

Clerk of Session or Other Church Representative

Date

Presbytery Representative

Date

Strategy for Communicating This Policy

1. At the CCP exit interview, the CCP and/or Presbytery staff representative shall discuss this policy with the departing pastor.
2. At the session meeting when the pastor announces his/her departure (or as soon thereafter as reasonable), the CCL liaison or Presbytery staff member shall provide copies of this policy to the session and explain its meaning and importance. The departing pastor and session will be asked to affirm their willingness to abide by it and sign it appropriately.
3. In communication with the congregation regarding a pastor's plans to leave service to that congregation, the leaving pastor shall affirm this policy to the session and congregation.