

GUIDELINES FOR THE RELATION OF MINISTERS TO THEIR FORMER CONGREGATIONS

TRANSYLVANIA PRESBYTERY

The Presbytery of Transylvania recognizes that there are potentially difficult situations involving the relationship of a minister to his/her former congregation. In order to assist both the pastors and the congregations, the Presbytery adopts the following guidelines:

Even before an interim pastor is secured or a new pastor is called it is advisable to refrain from pastoral functions in the former parish. However, in churches where there is no associate pastor and where an interim has not yet been named, it is permissible to perform pastoral functions in accordance with the Book of Order, which states:

"Former pastor, associate pastors, and assistant pastors may officiate at services for members of a particular church, or at services within its properties, only upon invitation from the moderator of the session or, in case of the inability to contact the moderator, from the clerk of session."

(G-14.0606 Officiate by Invitation Only)

After the installation of a new pastor, the former pastor should continue to avoid participation in any funerals, weddings, baptisms, etc., of his/her former parish. This practice will be difficult, but if the first invitation is accepted, there will be no reason to refuse other requests. At all times, the former pastor should remain sensitive to the possible tensions that can arise from his/her presence in the former parish.

If there are options for church membership and participation in another congregation, it is recommended that the former pastor and his/her family become active in the work and worship of another congregation. Remaining in the same congregation can lead to tensions and difficulties, which no one intends, but which may not be avoidable.

It is permissible to accept an invitation to preach in the former parish after the new minister has been present for at least one year, again in accordance with the Book of Order G-14.0606 Officiate by Invitation Only.

Representatives of the Committee on Ministry shall review these guidelines with the minister who is leaving/retiring, and with the Session prior to the election of a Pastoral Nominating Committee; and a pastoral letter regarding these guidelines shall be shared with the congregation.

The Committee on Ministry welcomes and encourages consultation with former pastors or sessions should any questions or concerns arise.

STATEMENT OF ETHICS

To be read from the pulpit at the dissolution of a pastorate, or other pastoral relationship, and published for distribution to active membership.

When a pastoral position with a congregation ends, there are bonds of affection between the minister and members of the church that continue to be cherished. Relations of friendship continue, but the pastoral relationship does not. In order to avoid awkward situations, and to encourage the new pastoral relationship that will be established, the Presbytery asks that the congregation be reminded of the following from our Book of Order:

"Former pastors, associate pastors, and assistant pastors may officiate at services for members of a particular church, or at services within its properties, only upon invitation from the moderator of the session or, in case of the inability to contact the moderator, from the clerk of session.
(G-14.0606 Officiate by Invitation Only)

This statement would apply to all pastors, retired or not, regardless of whether they have served particular churches. The best interests of all involved would be better served if church members do not request a former pastor to perform pastoral duties, and if former pastors, when asked, would tactfully decline.

While implementing this action is the responsibility of the session, it is most appropriate for such action to be initiated by the departing pastor.