

Policy concerning Former Pastors

Definition

A former pastor is one who no longer serves as pastor, associate pastor, or in any temporary pastoral relationship in a congregation once served, due to a call to other service, retirement, release from or termination of ordained office, or involuntary termination.

Rationale

- (1) When the pastoral relationship between a minister of Word and Sacrament and a congregation is dissolved, the nature and character of the relationship changes. Both the pastor and the congregation must disengage from the nature and character of the pastoral relationship in order to engage and establish new relationships. This policy addresses issues in this transition.
- (2) When a pastor leaves a congregation due to reasons identified in #1 above, there are certain ethical standards that should be followed in order for the ties between the former pastor and the congregation to be severed and for new relationships to be established between the new pastor and the congregation. (Among such standards are those provided in the "*Standards of Ethical Conduct*" adopted by the 210th General Assembly.) When such standards are followed, it helps to provide for a smooth transition and for a happy relationship among all parties.

THE POLICY

1. During the closure phase of ministry, the "former pastor" shall provide written correspondence to the congregation indicating the implications of this changed relationship--especially the need for boundaries in this new relationship. [Presbytery shall have available for church members, copies of Guidelines on how to relate to a former pastor.]
2. When a pastor resigns, retires, or leaves for other reasons, due care should be exercised not to influence, by direction or indirection, by spoken or written word, the selection of any successor or the policies of that successor.
3. We recognize the unique problem of a former pastor who will continue to reside in the community which he/she served. Normally, former pastors shall have no contact with the church previously served for at least two years following dissolution of the pastoral relationship. If there is another Presbyterian presence within reasonable distance, the former pastor will be advised to worship with that congregation. If there is no other Presbyterian presence except the congregation formerly served, the former pastor may petition the Committee on Ministry to continue to worship in his/her former parish following the above two year period. The Committee on Ministry must approve this association with a former parish through a Covenant agreement clearly enumerating the boundaries of acceptable behaviors by all parties (including families--see #f).
4. If the former pastor remains in the community, that person best honors their ordination vows by exercising self-restraint regarding the business and spiritual well-being of the congregation. He/she may maintain friendships with members of the former congregation, but he/she must avoid conversations regarding policies, practices, or programs of that church as such conversations could be perceived as attempting to influence decisions or relationships within the congregation. Under no circumstances may the former pastor make public (or likely to be made public) statements critical of the new pastor.
5. We remind the former pastor of the professional behavior standards as indicated in the Book of Order, G-14.0606 and the **CODE OF ETHICS** adopted by the 210th General Assembly, which make clear that former pastors may not officiate (funerals, weddings, baptisms) or provide worship leadership in a former Parish unless personally invited to do so by the current Moderator of Session.

6. While the Presbytery has no jurisdiction in making policy regarding family members (of former pastors) who may wish to remain members of the church, it does recommend that good judgment and restraint be practiced in order not to interfere with the transition to a new pastor.

(Adopted by COM, August 1998)