

1 **The Presbytery of Los Ranchos**
 2 **Committee On Ministry**
 3 **PROCEDURE 10B**

4 Approved by Presbytery 3/17/2007

5
 6 **SEPARATION ETHICS: “When Pastor and Congregation Say Goodbye**

7 [The following is indebted to the previous work of the COMs of the Presbytery of Los
 8 Ranchos, the Presbytery of Winnebago, and the Presbytery of Whitewater Valley.]
 9

10 This paper terms the process of pastoral transition “**SEPARATION ETHICS.**” Certain
 11 values are important to consider during the often highly emotional experience of the
 12 dissolution of a pastoral relationship. Such values include

- 13 □ effective leadership
- 14 □ congregational health and stability
- 15 □ the ability to deal with the pain, problems, and possibilities of separation
- 16 □ the ability of the Session, lay leaders, and congregation to move positively
 17 and effectively into the next chapter of their life together.

18
 19 Ethical and professional standards should be followed in order to transition from the
 20 professional pastoral ties between the former pastor and the congregation. When all
 21 parties are intentional about the closure tasks, it helps to create space for new
 22 relationships to be established. Because this work has the potential for a variety of
 23 difficulties,¹ the following policies have been adopted by the Presbytery of Los Ranchos
 24 to enhance the health and well being of both our pastors and our congregations
 25 experiencing pastoral transitions—including discovering healthy ways for congregations
 26 to relate to former pastors.² The following guidelines are especially applicable when the
 27 pastor continues to live in or near the community served and these pastors are encouraged
 28 to become familiar with what follows.
 29

30 **BACKGROUND:**

31 The relationship between a pastor and congregation is often deeply personal, built on an
 32 accumulation of shared transitional and transformational times in personal and corporate
 33 lives. It has evolved through teaching, preaching, sacraments, wedding, funerals,
 34 presence in times of crisis, praying with and for members, counseling, and shared
 35 leadership. The pastor has encouraged people in worship, equipped them for tasks,
 36 helped bring forth gifts, and prepared them for mission. From these times, there has
 37 accumulated elements of trust, confidence, admiration, affections, fondness, respect, and
 38 love. Ending such a relationship can be a trying and traumatic experience for both the
 39 pastor and members of the congregation. It means CHANGE, which can often be

¹ When the pastoral relationship is dissolved, the nature and character of the relationship changes. Both pastor and congregation must disengage from what was and establish clear boundaries that enable all parties to engage and establish new relationships.

² A “Former Pastor” is one who no longer serves as pastor, associate pastor, or in any temporary pastoral relationship (including Parish Associate) in a congregation once served, due to a call to other service, retirement, release from or termination from ordained office, involuntary termination, or conclusion of contract.

difficult to accept and integrate. The following guidelines are intended to help all parties say “goodbye.”

SAYING GOODBYE

The departing pastor must make sure parishioners know that her or his relationship as pastor of the congregation is coming to an end. It is essential that parishioners understand this is necessary for the congregation to be free, in all respects, to make the necessary changes in leadership without the departing pastor’s influence. Because the pastor is in the professional leadership role, it is always the pastor’s responsibility to initiate and lead in this transition process so that the separation is carried out with foresight and effectiveness.

The “Standards of Ethical Conduct for Ordained Officers in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” are applicable in the transition context, especially numbers 14 to 17.

14: *“I will deal honorably with the record of my predecessor and upon leaving a ministry or office speak and act in ways that support the ministry of my successor;”*

15. *“I will participate in the life of a ministry setting I left or from which I have retired only as directed by presbytery;”*

16. *“I will provide pastoral services for a congregation I previously served only as directed by the presbytery and provide pastoral services to members of other congregations only with the consent of their pastor(s); and*

17. *“I will consult with the Committee on Ministry in the presbytery of my residence regarding my involvement in any ministry setting during my retirement.”*

I THE ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY. The Committee on Ministry is responsible for assisting ministers and congregations in the transition following the dissolution of a pastoral relationship. When this is done with sensitivity and pastoral care, it can reduce the anxiety of all parties and help build the foundation for the next chapter in ministry for the congregation, former pastor, and new pastor. To this end, the COM shall take an active roll in all transitions, including implementing the following policies governing the relationship between the former pastor and the congregation.

First Steps: Immediately upon knowledge of a pastor’s (impending) departure, the COM shall arrange to meet with the Pastor and Session to introduce these policies and to initiate any actions necessary to meet the requirements of the policy.

1.1.1 Pastoral letter. A pastoral letter regarding these guidelines and the implications of the changed relationship (especially the need for boundaries) shall be shared with the congregation prior to the departure (**or as soon thereafter as practical**) of the pastor who is leaving or retiring. It is best if such a letter is initiated, written, and presented by the pastor. It shall be read in the worship service as near as possible to the last Sunday the pastor is present and shall be printed in the congregational newsletter and/or mailed to all members.

86 Sample: “Just as I have cherished the pastoral relationship we have had, I also
87 cherish for you the opportunity to form a new pastoral relationship with those
88 who will fill this position in the future. For this reason, I ask you to respect
89 the professional boundaries of ministry and not ask me to officiate for
90 weddings, funerals, baptisms, to make pastoral calls, or to provide counsel
91 regarding personal situations or the life of the congregation. After your new
92 pastor has been called and been here for sufficient time to have assumed the
93 mantle of pastoral leadership, and if he or she and the session wishes to invite
94 me to participate on occasion in the life of the church, I will gladly do so in
95 support of your new pastor. Please let him or her take the initiative. I want
96 only the best for this congregation and will do all that I can to insure the future
97 health of your ministry and not to weaken the ministry of your pastor. Please
98 continue to honor our respect and affection for one another by honoring these
99 guidelines.”

100
101 1.1.2 Remaining in the Presbytery. Former pastors, who remain as members of
102 and/or within the bounds of the presbytery, shall negotiate with the Committee on
103 Ministry a “*Boundaries Covenant*” enumerating acceptable and unacceptable
104 behaviors of all parties (including family members, where appropriate). This
105 document shall be signed by the former pastor, Session, and COM. The successor
106 shall receive a copy of this covenant. The covenant shall be reviewed and renewed at
107 least every five years, and shall be reviewed whenever there is a substantial change in
108 circumstances. A model for such Covenant is provided at the end of this document.

109
110 1.1.3 Continued Care for Pastor Remaining in the Presbytery. When a former
111 pastor remains in the Presbytery, and especially when they remain in the
112 community of the congregation served, the Committee on Ministry shall
113 continue to provide pastoral care for the former pastor, shall insure their
114 continued welcome in the work and ministry of the Presbytery, and shall
115 respect the years of service provided the presbytery and former congregation.
116 It shall actively engage in assisting the newly installed pastor to establish a
117 healthy relationship with the former pastor.

118
119 1.1.4 Persisting in Work Disapproved of by Presbytery: If a minister, even when
120 retired, fails to honor the practices outlined in this policy and will not
121 cooperate with the Committee on Ministry to arrive at a behavior that is
122 appropriate and acceptable to the COM, the minister may be subject to
123 removal from the rolls of the presbytery according to the provisions of G-
124 6.0502 and 6.0503 [GA, 2004, 78, 387, Item 05-02].

II. THE ROLE OF THE FORMER PASTOR:

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129 1.2.1 Pastoral Relationship Ends with Dissolution of the Relationship. The
130 former Pastor shall cease all pastoral activity and services in and with the
131 congregation served as of the termination date of their Call.

For this reason, the departing pastor should use every opportunity, prior to the last day of the relationship, to prepare the congregation for separation. This can include sermons, devotions, home visits, newsletters, devotions for meetings, sacraments, etc.

1.2.2 The “No Contact Norm” Normally, for two years following retirement or termination of service, **and** for the first year following their successor’s installation, former pastors should not, except as provided for in the “Boundaries Covenant”, perform pastoral functions at or for their former congregation. Due care should be taken not to influence, directly or indirectly, by spoken, written, or electronic communication, the selection of groups chosen to nominate a successor, the selection of the successor, or the policies and practices of the successor. The former pastor best honors their ordination vows by exercising self-restraint regarding the business and spiritual well being of the congregation: he/she may maintain friendships³ with members of the congregation, but must avoid spoken, written, or electronic conversations regarding policies, practices, people, or programs of that congregation insofar as they might be perceived as attempting to influence decisions or relationships within that congregation. Under no circumstances may the former pastor make public (or likely to be made public) statements or offer opinions critical of the interim or new pastor or pastoral staff.

1.2.3 The “No Triangling Norm”. Former pastors should never tell a member of their former congregation that they can perform services only at the request of the present pastor. This places an unfair burden on the current pastor and the church member. An appropriate response, firmly communicated, is *“For the continued health of the congregation, it is inappropriate for me to perform any pastoral function now that I am no longer the pastor.”* If they do not accept this answer, it is best to refer them to the Stated Clerk or Executive Presbyter for an interpretation of the policy.

1.2.4 Participate by Invitation Only. The former pastor may accept invitations to preach in the former congregation, to assist or substitute for the installed pastor, or engage in pastoral activities **after the new pastor has been installed for at least one year, but only upon invitation from the current pastor and Session and with a Covenant agreement as set forth in “b” above.** (14.0606). If the former pastor is approached prior to contact being made with the present pastor, an appropriate response is “ (name) is now your pastor. It is inappropriate to continue this conversation until he/she has been consulted.” Whenever possible, the current Moderator should perform funerals rather than deferring to the former pastor

[It is incumbent upon the former pastor to notify the interim or successor whenever such a request is received.]

³ It is important that “friends” understand that the pastoral relationship has come to an end. It does not mean the friendship has to also. Friendships are priceless and are to be preserved, but the pastor must be clear about the new boundaries to prevent the friendship from becoming confused. **No** pastoral functioning is appropriate: weddings, funerals, chaplain type hospital visits, baptisms, etc.

174 1.2.5 Former Pastor and the Community: By virtue of their office, interests, and
175 family, a pastor usually become a contributing member of the larger community.
176 They may be involved in civic, ecumenical, educational, fraternal, service,
177 governmental, and other groups, often serving on boards and committees or
178 volunteering time. This results in the minister often being seen as representing a
179 particular congregation and/or as pastor to people beyond the formal membership of
180 the congregation served. This identity continues beyond the end of his/her service to
181 the congregation. Continuing as a member or attending functions as a participant or
182 volunteering in a non-pastoral role are appropriate, provided it is made clear that it is
183 no longer in their capacity as an installed minister or pastor of a specific
184 congregation. However, given the power of the role and out of respect for the new
185 boundaries that need to be established, former pastors should not, for at least two
186 years following retirement, resignation, or termination, perform any pastoral
187 functions or role in the community that would be seen as functioning in a pastoral
188 role unless provisions for doing so are specifically mentioned in the “Boundaries
189 Covenant” with the Presbytery.

191 1.2.6 Parish Associate. After at least three years absence from the congregation
192 served, a former pastor may be invited to become a Parish Associate following the
193 procedures provided for in the Book of Order. Both the new pastor and former pastor
194 must consult with the Committee on Ministry prior to seeking Session approval for
195 such arrangement—and is contingent upon presbytery approval.

197 1.2.7 Pastor Emeritus. When a pastor Retires from a congregation, the
198 congregation may bestow upon him or her the honorary title of “*Pastor Emeritus*” to
199 convey their affection and gratitude. This may be done only after consultation with
200 the Committee on Ministry, is subject to approval by the Presbytery, and takes effect
201 only upon dissolution of the pastoral relationship. Former pastors are reminded that,
202 even in this situation, the pastoral relationship has been dissolved—the relationship to
203 the congregation AS PASTOR has ended and there are no responsibilities,
204 expectations, or privileges attached to this title.

206 1.2.8 Family Members. While most former pastors leave the immediate area of
207 their former congregation, not all are able to do so. Normally, the presbytery has no
208 jurisdiction over family members of the former pastor. However, if tensions emerge
209 between the Session and/or new pastor and the former pastor (including the role of
210 the former pastor’s spouse and/or family in the life of the congregation), the
211 Committee on Ministry shall mediate and may determine it is in the best interests of
212 all parties for the former pastor (and spouse and/or family) to establish a relationship
213 with another congregation. Good judgment and restraint will go a long way toward
214 preventing such situations. If specific concerns need to be addressed, they should be
215 included in the “Boundaries Covenant”.

217 1.2.9 Former pastors and their family shall have access to the Committee on
218 Ministry to assist in mediating situations where the new pastor is unable or unwilling
219 to relate positively to a former pastor who must remain in the community.

220 Special care shall be taken to clarify procedures for mediating any difficulties that
221 MAY arise from behaviors of the former pastor, the new pastor, or the congregation.
222

223 **III. THE ROLE OF SESSION AND CONGREGATION**

224 With the departure of the former pastor, primary responsibility to oversight of the relationship
225 between the congregation and the former pastor becomes that of Session, even after a new pastor
226 is called and installed. It is thus incumbent upon the Session to continue to communicate and
227 interpret these policies to the congregation.

228 1.3.1 If situations arise where these policies must be applied, the Session is
229 expected to assist all parties in doing so in a fair, compassionate, and pastoral manner.
230 The Session may always seek the assistance of the Presbytery staff and/or the Committee
231 on Ministry in interpreting and mediating such situations.

232 1.3.1.1 This includes arranging for a meeting early in the newly installed minister’s
233 term, including a representative of the Committee on Ministry, to review this
234 policy, the Covenant agreement, and the role of the Session in assisting the
235 newly installed pastor in implementing the policy.
236

237 1.3.2 It is the Session’s responsibility to mediate when the congregation or
238 former pastor does not respect the boundaries established under this policies or the
239 Covenant Agreement.
240

241 1.3.3 The Congregation. Until such time as the newly installed pastor has had
242 time to establish their leadership role, the congregation should be regularly reminded of
243 the boundaries established under these policies and the “Boundaries Covenant”. It is
244 unfair to expect the newly installed pastor to have to interpret or enforce them.
245

246 1.3.4 When a pastoral relationship with a congregation ends, there are bonds of
247 affection that continue to be cherished and valued. Friendships continue, but the
248 professional pastoral relationship must not. In order to avoid difficult situations and to
249 encourage the new pastoral relationship that needs to be established, Los Ranchos
250 Presbytery requests that Session regularly remind the congregation of G-14.0606:
251 “Former pastors and associate pastors may officiate at services for members of a
252 particular church, or at services within its properties, only upon invitation from the
253 moderator of session, or in the case of the inability to contact the moderator, from the
254 clerk of Session.”
255

256 **IV. THE NEWLY INSTALLED PASTOR**

257 While the above policies are intended primarily to protect the congregation and newly
258 installed pastor from inappropriate and unhealthy relationships with and by the former
259 pastor, it is also incumbent upon the newly installed pastor to recognize the potential
260 benefits of a healthy relationship with a former pastor, especially when that pastor
261 remains in the community. The former pastor has information, relationships, history, and
262 influence that can facilitate the leadership transition when applied in a pastorally sensitive
263 manner. The newly installed pastor is thus encouraged to work with the Session and
264 Committee on Ministry to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that a positive
265 working relationship is established with the former pastor.
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BOUNDARIES COVENANT
Presbytery of Los Ranchos

270 {Normally this Covenant will be read and signed during a service of worship of the
271 congregation. Copies shall be kept by the Pastor, Clerk of Session, and Presbytery.}

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273

This covenant will guide the future relationship between

274 **the Rev. _____ (hereafter referred to as “the pastor ”) and the**

275 _____ **Church**

276 **of _____ California (hereafter referred to**

277 **as “the church ”) who both understand and accept the terms of this covenant in order**

278 **that the relationships with new pastoral staff can develop in positive ways.**

279

280 **This covenant is designed to set healthy boundaries in the process of separation from any**

281 **further pastoral duties as of _____ . Both Pastor & Session (on**

282 **behalf of the church) mutually agree to support the following conditions of the covenant:**

283 **1. As of the above date, the pastor will relinquish all pastoral and administrative**
284 **duties and will no longer function as part of the pastoral or administrative team of**
285 **the church.**

286 **2. The pastor is determined to be supportive of future pastoral and lay leadership of**
287 **the church and will refuse to receive or participate in any negative comments,**
288 **conversations or activities which might undermine any program or person of the**
289 **church.**

290 **3. Any future contacts which may occur between the pastor and the congregation will**
291 **be as friends and not in a pastor/parishioner relationship. The pastor will not**
292 **participate in any weddings, funerals, baptisms, nor engage in any hospital or**
293 **pastoral visitation or serving of Holy Communion unless requested by the Session**
294 **(which includes the Moderator/installed Pastor/Head of Staff). This is intended to**
295 **allow the new pastoral relationship to develop.**

296 **[Exceptions to this provision must be agreed to prior to signing this Covenant and**
297 **attached as an Appendix.]**

**SEPARATION ETHICS/FORMER PASTOR
POLICY—WITH “BOUNDARIES COVENANT”**

298 *This covenant is offered to the church for the sole purpose of strengthening the ministry of the*
299 *church in the future. It grows out of a deep gratitude for the special relationship that develops*
300 *between pastor and congregation.*

301

302 In signing, the parties indicate a commitment to abide by the above “Boundaries Covenant” and
303 that they have received and understand--and will abide by-- the “Separation Ethics” policy of the
304 Presbytery of Los Ranchos.

305

306 _____ (Clerk of Session)

307 _____ (The Pastor)

308 _____ (Moderator of Committee on Ministry)

309 _____ (Stated Clerk of Presbytery)

310 _____ (Next Installed Pastor)

311 _____ (Date Signed)

312

1 PROCEDURE 10

2 Revised 3/2007

3

4 MINISTERIAL ETHICS

5

6 This procedure paper assumes familiarity with and adherence to the denomination’s Standards of
7 Ethical Conduct (1998) for Pastors and Officers; the Sexual Misconduct Policy of the Presbytery
8 of Los Ranchos; and some exposure to the need for professional boundaries. It also assumes that
9 pastors practice honesty and purity of conduct and, consistent with Constitutional and legal
10 standards, will maintain appropriate confidentiality. This set of guidelines attempts to address
11 several specific behaviors and conduct with regard to fellow Ministers of Word and Sacrament⁴
12 and congregations.

13

14 1. GOSSIP VS DUTY. Every minister admitted to presbytery membership is entitled to
15 respect and Christian consideration. We are never to make judgmental or disparaging
16 remarks about other ministers without seeking to determine all facts. When we are aware
17 of unacceptable behavior by colleagues in ministry, we are called to pursue the advice of
18 scriptures and go first to that person to seek reconciliation and/or their response. If we
19 are unwilling to do this, we are to remain silent. If they are unwilling to correct such
20 behavior, our constitution provides for appropriate remedies.

21

22 2. MINISTER AND NON-MEMBER. When a minister is called upon to officiate at a
23 wedding, funeral, or baptism for families who are not members of a Presbyterian
24 congregation, the minister should first determine if they are church members. If there is
25 no membership, this may be an opportunity to counsel them toward membership. If they
26 are members of a congregation, Presbyterian or otherwise, the minister should use all
27 reasonable measures of persuasion to encourage them to use the services of the pastor of
28 that church. If such effort fails, the minister, with the knowledge of those seeking such
29 service, shall inform their pastor of the contemplated service and explain the
30 circumstances. In no case shall a minister officiate at a service for a member of a
31 neighboring church, Presbyterian or otherwise, without making every effort to contact
32 and obtain the permission of the pastor of that church.

33

34 3. THE MINISTER AND NEIGHBORING CHURCHES. A pastor should never
35 knowingly make pastoral contact with a member of another church in the community
36 unless that person takes the initiative and explicitly makes known that he/she is actively
37 seeking another church home or is seeking spiritual counsel regarding their membership.
38 Pastors should encourage the same behavior among their own members. [This does not
39 preclude pastors covering for each other while on vacation, study leave, sabbatical, etc.]

40

41 4. THE MINISTER AND PRESBYTERY. All ministers are appointed by, installed by, or
42 validated by the Presbytery. Any change in the pastoral relationship (“Call”) including
43 changes in compensation, must be approved by the Presbytery. All members of
44 Presbytery are expected to participate in the life, ministry, and mission of the Presbytery

⁴ “Minister of Word and Sacrament” denotes those ordained to office and in this paper is referenced as “minister”.
When the term Pastor is used, it in reference to those serving congregations.

45 and such expectation shall be included in the Call. Failure to live up to this expectation
46 is a matter for review by the Committee on Ministry in a manner consistent with the
47 Constitution.
48

- 49 5. THE MINISTER AND STAFF. While a pastor serves as Head of Staff in a congregation
50 and bears the responsibilities this description implies, the spirit within the staff should be
51 one of mutual respect and common ministry where all bring their particular gifts to the
52 work of building of the Body of Christ. To this end, each should be understanding of the
53 limitations and mistakes of others and seek to give support, guidance, and help when
54 needed. It is never appropriate for any member of a church staff publicly to criticize,
55 speak negatively about, or seek to demean the character or performance or gifts of
56 another member of the staff. Any criticism or complaint should be addressed through the
57 appropriate processes of the Session. When disagreements arise between staff members,
58 every effort should be made to settle the differences privately and amicably within the
59 structures provided for by the denomination and congregation. If unable to do so, the
60 matter should be referred to the appropriate body of Session or to Presbytery’s
61 Committee on Ministry for counsel and mediation.
62
- 63 6. THE MINISTER AS INTERIM PASTOR. The purpose of interim ministry is to
64 provide pastoral service and to prepare a congregation for a relationship with new
65 pastoral leadership through accomplishing identified goals for the interim period.
66 Interim pastors will not seek to build loyalties to self, but to Christ and to the Church, His
67 Body on earth. **An Interim Pastor shall not, under any circumstances, be a**
68 **candidate for the position being served.** (G-14.0513b)
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70 The Interim Pastor shall regularly and intentionally make clear to the congregation that
71 **he/she is not, and cannot be, a candidate for the installed position** for reasons having
72 to do with the long term health of the congregation.
73

74 Interim pastors shall normally be expected to have completed at least one week of a
75 presbytery recognized interim pastor training program. **No Interim contract will be**
76 **renewed beyond one year without at least one week of an Interim Pastor Training**
77 **program. If not certified as an Interim, Certification shall be obtained before any**
78 **contract will be renewed beyond two years—or a new Interim position approved.**
79 Interims are also expected to participate in meetings of the presbytery’s Interim Pastor
80 Network.
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