

## RELATIONSHIPS OF MINISTERS TO THEIR FORMER CONGREGATIONS:

### A Policy of the Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery of Northern New York\*

Because potentially difficult situations can arrive involving the relationship of a minister to his/her former congregation, the Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery of Northern New York has adopted this policy to assist pastors and congregations going through this important, life changing, transition. The tenacity with which the policy guidelines must be followed becomes more paramount the closer the former pastor lives to the church and community from which he/she has retired or resigned.

- Even before an interim pastor is secured, a temporary supply or stated supply is appointed, or a new pastor is called, it is necessary to refrain from pastoral functions in the former parish.
- The Book of Order specifies: “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 the case of the inability to contact the moderator, from the clerk of session.” (G.14.0606 Officiate by Invitation Only). The Presbytery of Northern New York requests that, in all cases where possible, the Moderator of the Session, following the retirement or resignation, perform funerals rather than deferring to the former pastor.
- In most rural communities, small towns and cities, a pastor may be seen as pastor to people beyond the formal membership of the church, and carry this identity beyond the formal end of his/her service to the congregation as pastor. Consequently, given the power of that pastoral role, and out of respect for the new boundaries being established, the former pastor shall not perform pastoral functions, that will remotely involve *anyone* who has participated in the life of the former parish for at least one year from the time of retirement or resignation. It is the former pastor’s responsibility to inform the funeral directors in the community of this policy.
- After the installation of a new pastor, the former pastor shall continue to avoid participation in any funerals, weddings, baptisms, etc of his/her former parish, whether formal members or participants. 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 must remain sensitive to the possible tensions that can arise from his/her presence in the former parish.
- The former pastor should respond to requests to provide pastoral service or support with a statement such as, “For the continuing health of the congregation it is inappropriate for me to perform any pastoral functions.” Other words may be said, but they are all window dressing when compared to this truth.

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\* With thanks to the Presbytery of Transylvania and Prospect Hill Presbytery, from whose policies, recorded in the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the Committee on Ministry Handbook, this policy draws.

- It is permissible for the former pastor to accept an invitation to preach in the former parish, to assist or substitute for the installed pastor, after the new minister has been present for at least one year, by invitation of the current pastor only, according to G-14.0606. If the former pastor is approached first, before the current pastor is consulted, it is most appropriate for the former pastor to respond to the request by saying, “\_\_Name\_\_ is the pastor now. It would be inappropriate for you and I to continue this conversation until you have talked with him/her.”
- If tensions emerge between a new pastor and a former pastor, including the role of the former pastor’s spouse, the Committee on Ministry will insist that the former pastor and family worship with another faith community.
- A pastoral letter regarding these guidelines shall be shared with the congregation, and is best initiated by the retiring/resigning pastor rather than by the Committee on Ministry or Session.
- A Committee on Ministry representative shall review these guidelines with the minister who is leaving/retiring, and with the Session prior to the election of the Pastoral Nominating Committee.
- The Committee on Ministry welcomes and encourages consultation with former pastors or sessions should any questions or concerns arise.