

Working With Retired Ministers

According to the statistical information provided by the Research Services of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), over 31% of the Presbyterian clergy are retired. This means that almost one of three Presbyterian clergy is retired.

With medical advances and retirees living longer lives, the concept of retirement is being rethought today. Retirement, considered by some as re-engagement, has become a positive, planned for, and creative time in life in which increased free time and better health enable retirees to do things that have not been possible before (an excerpt from the Report of the Task Force on the Study of Present and Future Needs of Retired Ministers, Their Spouses, and Their Survivors, 1993 Minutes of the General Assembly, Part I, page 569 Copies are available by calling John Rhea in the Office of Older Adult Ministry (502) 569-5486.).

Therefore, it becomes an important stewardship concern that the creative use of the skills and experience of retired ministers be facilitated in the Church.

Services of Retired Ministers

The call to the ministry is a life long one and does not cease with retirement. Ways of fulfilling the call will probably vary in the retirement years. Some of the best Interim Pastors and Governing Body Staff in the Church are honorably retired ministers. Retirees may also chose to serve as parish associates or teach in a variety of places. More creativity needs to be used in determining how the accumulated talents and skills of retired ministers, their spouses and survivors may be used by the congregations with which they worship, the presbytery in which they reside, and in the Church as a whole.

Respecting the Need for Well-

Deserved Rest and Freedom

While retired ministers are valuable assets to any congregation and presbytery, it must also be recognized that after serving the church for forty years or more, many retirees and their spouses cherish the freedom to travel, to visit grandchildren, and not to be "tied down" to regular Sunday commitments. Most COMS have a number of pastorless churches and too few Interim Pastors, so it is tempting to pressure retirees into serving "just one more time". While this may meet the need of the COM and a church, it is not fair to the retiree and his or her family. Post retirement service opportunities should be offered and retirees contacted regularly to see about their welfare and their interest in service with the clear covenant to accept "no" graciously.

Presbytery Membership

"Honorably retired ministers are encouraged to transfer their membership to the presbytery in which they live and the presbytery is encouraged to receive them. If they are active in presbytery, additional elders may be elected to keep a proper balance between ministers and lay persons at the presbytery meetings. (G-11.0101b) Presbyteries should encourage honorably retired ministers to use their experience and skills in creative and meaningful ways. Those who are able and willing to re-engage in ministry and service to others should relate to a particular church or presbytery. For those who do not or cannot, the presbytery should provide nurture and support."

Book of Order, G-11.0412b:

Ministry of Support and Nurture

Retirees need consistent support by their presbytery. They need special care at the time just prior to retirement, during the first year of adjustment to retirement, and during critical life changes (such as death of a spouse, serious decline in health and mobility, move to retirement or nursing facility). The Board of Pensions provides excellent resources to assist COMS with both the emotional and financial support of retirees. Sometimes retired ministers move to a presbytery following retirement, but retain membership elsewhere so are unknown to the presbytery in which they live. The Board of Pensions is glad to provide a presbytery with a list of retirees living within its bounds.

Services of retirement - both at a presbytery meeting and in the local congregation - are as significant as services of installation and should receive careful attention from presbytery. Many presbyteries have annual recognition events for retirees and their spouses. Some have regular gatherings for retirees to help them remain connected with other ministers and remain active in the life of the presbytery. This is especially important for retirees who have relocated upon retirement.

National Organization of Retired Ministers, Their Spouses, and Survivors

In 1993 the General Assembly adopted the recommendation of the Task Force that a national organization of retirees be created. The National Organization of Retired Ministers, Their Spouses, and Survivors was established to provide fellowship, be a forum for sharing ideas and experiences and a place to discuss new ideas for the creative use of the additional time that retirement provides. It provides a connection through which retirees can share ideas concerning retirement experiences and the problems faced in retirement. Each year the organization sponsors a convention and it publishes a newsletter regularly. For information about these resources contact John Rhea in the Office of Older Adult Ministry - 1-502-569-5486.

Boundaries and Etiquette

In the Church we frequently talk about the relationship between pastor and people as one of "family" and, especially when pastoral relationships are long, the bonds of affection run deep between a congregation and the pastor who has been with them during times of crisis and of joy. It is especially difficult for church members to understand that the relationship must change significantly when a pastor retires and that they must share their faith journey with another pastor whom God has called to fill that role. It is also difficult for the retiring pastor who has devoted so much of his or her life to ministry. As retirement is a challenging transition for all working people, it is more so in a profession where work and identity are so closely bound.

As pastors and congregations struggle with this adjustment, sometimes problems of boundaries arise and the Committee on Ministry is asked for help (usually by the new pastor). Some sensitivity is required in handling this matter.

Some suggestions:

- Assume good intentions unless evidence shows otherwise
- Affirm both the retiree and the new pastor.

- Offer support and guidance to the new pastor as he or she takes the initiative to establish a mutually supportive relationship.
Help the retiree to find new appropriate uses for his/her gifts and energy.
- Establish a presbytery understanding about boundaries (See Appendices for some models).
Educate congregations about appropriate boundaries before the retirement occurs. (See Appendices)
- Affirm the legacy of the past and the leadership of the present in congregational celebrations in which the retired pastor is included.