

## **CONCLUDING PASTORAL SERVICE POLICY FOR DEPARTING/RETIRING TEACHING ELDERS Monmouth Presbytery**

*After the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, former pastors and associate pastors shall not provide their pastoral services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the moderator of session.*  
G-2.0905

A pastor is called to serve a particular congregation through the voice of the congregation, confirmed by the presbytery. When pastors retire or are called to other positions, the pastor, the congregation and the presbytery appropriately enter into a new relationship. This policy will guide the relations between the former pastor and the congregation as they move through this time of transition.

When a pastor retires or leaves a congregation for another call, many different emotions flow through the life of the church. Hopefully, there are strong bonds of affection between the retiring/departing pastor and the congregation. Sometimes however, anger, frustration and sadness flow through many members. Whatever the mix of feelings and attitudes, the pastor's professional relation to the congregation has come to an end. Relationships of friendship may continue but the pastoral role does not.

The following policies shall direct the process of separation and define the new relationship between the pastor and members of a particular congregation after a pastoral relationship is concluded. The COM liaisons will advise and assist the pastor and session on these policies and navigating the graceful transition of this relationship. These policies establish clear boundaries on further contact with members of the congregation and limits on entering any congregational buildings and property, or seeking access to records or materials belonging to the congregation.

### 1. Notification of Session:

- a. The retiring pastor shall inform the session officially at least 3 months prior to the retirement date. The retiring pastor also shall be in contact with the Committee on Ministry and the Board of Pensions.
- b. Departing pastors shall inform the session as soon as possible after their new call has been finalized.

2. The COM liaison will meet with the pastor and session to discuss this separation policy and any concerns about the separation and how they might be considered and managed, as well as develop a plan for communicating the separation plans with the congregation.

3. The retiring/departing pastor and session shall communicate with the entire congregation as soon as possible (see Appendix A). That communication shall include this separation policy and its requirements. Our common purpose is to seek clarity in relationships for the wellbeing of the retiring/departing pastor and for the congregation. *Let us love one another not in word alone, but in deed and in truth,* says the First Letter of John.

4. The retiring/departing pastor shall remove his/her personal belongings from the congregation's buildings and property as early as possible. All keys to the church and church offices shall be turned over to the Clerk of Session.
5. All financial obligations, church credit cards, payments or arrangements between the presbytery, congregation and/or any congregation members with the pastor and/or family members shall be concluded no later than the effective date of the dissolution.
6. The retiring/departing pastor shall not attempt to influence any congregation views or votes regarding the congregation's pastoral search or transition plans. They shall make every effort to be supportive of the retiring/departing pastor's successors, both the temporary pastor and the successor pastor. The retiring/departing pastor shall refrain from reaching out to the successor pastor until first contacted by him/her.
7. The retiring/departing pastor shall refrain from any comment or conversation on the life of the congregation or the decisions/actions of the temporary pastor, successor pastor, or session. Conversations on these issues with congregation members shall not occur in any form, whether in person, by telephone, written or electronic, including the use of social media. Concerns should be referred to and handled by the temporary/successor pastor.
8. The retiring/departing pastor shall not have any contact with congregation members for the purpose of providing pastoral care. Any requests to officiate at weddings, funerals or baptisms must be directed to the temporary or successor pastor. Taking into account the wishes of the family and the wellbeing of the congregation, the temporary or successor pastor will determine what, if any, role the retiring/departing pastor may play. The retiring/departing pastor shall defer to the judgment of the temporary/successor pastor.
9. If remaining in the community, the retiring/departing pastor shall become an active participant in another congregation, so the successor pastor may establish her/his ministry apart from the presence and influence of the retiring/departing pastor. The Committee on Ministry will make available pastoral care for the retiring/departing pastor around issues of transitioning. Although there is no rule that says the family of the retiring/departing pastor must give up its present church membership, the nature of the family's relationship with the congregation changes. For instance, there should be restraint in conversation about the congregation and the successor pastor's ministry. Family members who hold office in the congregation must be ready to be supportive and accepting of the new pastor. Family members who are employed staff members of the congregation should resign.
10. A retiring/departing pastor shall not continue to live in a manse following a termination date without the permission of the congregation, Committee on Ministry and Trustees of Presbytery.
11. The Committee on Ministry's exit interview with the retiring/departing pastor offers a time for debriefing, for recounting highlights of the pastor's ministry, for clarifying the relationship the pastor will have with the congregation after he/she has left and for signing of the Covenant of Separation by the departing pastor, the Clerk of Session and the COM Liaison. The exit interview is not an evaluation. Rather, it is a time of sharing framed by remembrance that ministry of the church is grounded in Jesus Christ and not in a particular pastor.

12. The Committee on Ministry's exit interview with the Session is a time to discuss the separation policy and plan for how its requirements will be shared with members of the congregation, who should be encouraged to release their dependency upon the departing/retiring pastor and move forward as guided by the Holy Spirit. They also must understand that they cannot contact the departing/retiring pastor for pastoral care, worship or discussing any church matters. The vows in a Farewell Liturgy will reinforce this (Appendix B).

13. The congregation may wish to plan one or more farewell events to express gratitude to the departing/retiring pastor and to celebrate the ministry they have shared together. It is appropriate to plan a Liturgy of Farewell during the final worship service with the congregation.

Both the departing/retiring pastor and the congregation have a responsibility to make sure that the congregation is free to act when the search process for a temporary/installed pastor begins. If a pastoral departure is handled well by both pastor and congregation, a range of emotions will be expressed, relationships will be celebrated, and the congregation will be free to discern its own future mission and ministry.

The COM ultimately must ensure, to the best of its ability, the health of congregations in the very sensitive matter of the dissolution of pastoral relationships. It therefore reserves the right to intercede in extraordinary circumstances, which may include a discussion and urging to cease the current behavior of former pastors, elders, deacons and spouses of former pastors, which may be jeopardizing the health of the congregation.

## **Parish Associate**

The agreement between the session, the parish associate, and the presbytery shall terminate when the call to the pastor is dissolved. The presbytery may dissolve the relationship between the session and the parish associate upon the recommendation of the Committee on Ministry.\*

\*The *Book of Order* 2017-2019 does not specifically mention Parish Associates. The Committee on Ministry has agreed to abide by the description above, last specifically cited in the old *Book of Order* 2009-2011 (G-14.0573).

## APPENDIX A: COMMUNICATION TO THE CONGREGATION

The following statement has been approved by the COM, the departing pastor, and the session of the congregation from which the pastor is departing, for communication to the congregation. It is to be read from the pulpit and published (bulletin and/or newsletter, etc.) for distribution to the membership at the dissolution of a pastorate or other pastoral relationship:

When a pastor leaves a congregation, bonds of affection between the pastor and members of the congregation continue to be cherished. Relationships of friendship continue, but the pastoral relationship does not. In order to spare pastors and congregation members from embarrassment, and to encourage the new pastoral relationship that will be established; and, in the case of multiple staff members, to clearly affirm the pastoral relationship(s) that remain, the Presbytery of Monmouth directs that the congregation be reminded of these requirements:

***Book of Order, G-2.0905 Officiate by Invitation Only***

*After the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, former pastors and associate pastors shall not provide their pastoral services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the moderator of session.*

When any pastor resigns from a pastorate, or retires from service, or becomes a pastor emeritus/emeryta, the pastor should cease to perform such functions of a pastor as funerals, baptisms, and weddings, unless invited to participate in such capacity by the temporary/successor pastor or by the moderator of churches with vacant pulpits. (General Assembly Minutes, 1948, p. 119, Status of Retired Ministers)

The spirit of this action applies to all pastors, whether retired or not, and whether they have ever served as pastors of particular congregations. (General Assembly Minutes, 1959, p. 208, Overture 39)

Individual members are asked not to place former pastors in the awkward position of asking their friend to perform the duties of a pastor. Ministers of the Word and Sacrament are directed to tactfully decline all such invitations that come from former parishioners rather than from other pastors or governing bodies.

## APPENDIX B: SUGGESTED FAREWELL LITURGY

*After the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, former pastors and associate pastors shall not provide their pastoral services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the moderator of session.*  
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LEADER: On *date* this church called *name* to serve as *position*.

DEPARTING PASTOR: I thank *church name*, its members and friends, for the love, kindness and support shown to me. As I leave I will carry with me all that I have learned here.

**PEOPLE: We receive your gratitude and accept that you now leave to minister elsewhere. Your influence on our faith and faithfulness will not leave us at your departure.**

### VOWS OF RELEASE

LEADER: Do you, the members and friends of this congregation release *pastor's name* from the duties of this church and will you refrain from contacting *name of pastor* for pastoral care, worship or to discuss any church matters?

**PEOPLE: We do and we will, with God's help.**

LEADER: Do you offer your blessing for his/her ministry soon to begin at *name of church*?

**PEOPLE: We do, with God's help.**

LEADER: Do you, *name of departing pastor*, release this congregation from depending upon you, and will you agree to uphold the guidance of the separation policy?

DEPARTING PASTOR: I do and I will, with God's help.

LEADER: Do you offer your blessing for the continued ministry here and on the relationship with another who will come to serve?

DEPARTING PASTOR: I do, with God's help.

MODERATOR OR REPRESENTATIVE OF PRESBYTERY: On behalf of the *Presbytery name*, I bear witness to the words spoken. The members of Presbytery hold each of you in prayer. We pledge our support in the transition signified in this service.

LEADER: Let us pray.

**ALL: Almighty and gracious God, whose everlasting love for all is trustworthy, help each of us to trust the future which rests in your care. The time we shared in your name saw our laughter and tears, our hopes and disappointments. Guide us as we hold these memories but also move in new directions. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. AMEN.**

BENEDICTION: Go now, surrounded by our love and led by the promises of God, the presence of Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

## APPENDIX C: COVENANT OF SEPARATION

By signing this form the departing/retiring pastor and the congregation, through the Clerk of the Session, indicate that after separation each party will seek to act in ways that promote the good health of the other. When questions arise if certain behavior is appropriate, each party will discuss them with the COM liaison or the Presbytery Leader. Both sides affirm that although the relationships of friendship continue after departure, the pastoral relations do not.

### Ethics for the Retiring/Departing Pastor

- A. If a retiring/departing pastor moves to another church community the following actions are encouraged:
1. During the first two years it is essential to refrain from all pastoral contact with the former congregation.
  2. The retired/departed pastor shall remain sensitive to possible tensions that can arise from his/her presence within the former congregation. The retired pastor should make every effort to be supportive of his/her successor. Contacts from members of the former congregation shall always be referred to the present pastor or the Session of the church.
- B. If a retiring/departing pastor remains in the community; special guidelines need to be followed.
1. It is strongly recommended that the retired/departed pastor and his/her family become active in the work and worship of another congregation.
  2. A former pastor shall refrain from all pastoral functions and not accept any leadership responsibilities in his/her former congregation including teaching, visitation, or pulpit supply
  3. A former pastor shall refrain from formal or informal participation in or comment on the work of a pastor nominating committee.
  4. Any invitations to participate in weddings or funerals or special services for members of the former congregation should be taken under advisement with the stipulation that the former pastor assists and does not officiate. This invitation shall come from the temporary/successor pastor.
  5. The conducting of funerals of nonmembers defined as persons never connected with the former congregation might continue to be done so long as the services do not occur in any place other than the funeral home or cemetery.
- C. A former pastor must be cautious in the use of social media: guarded and gracious as to what is posted and sensitive to possible interpretations of responses to the posts of others.

### Ethics for the Congregation of the Retiring/Departing Pastor

- A. Members of the congregation shall not request a former pastor to perform pastoral duties.
- B. While there continue to be bonds of affection between members and the former pastor, members shall not discuss nor shall the retired pastor encourage discussion about congregation business, issues, personalities, or events.
- C. Congregations should celebrate with the retiring/departing pastor the achievements within his/her time in the congregation and the parting should be within the bounds of mutual affection, admiration, and respect.

### The Role of the Committee on Ministry

- A. The COM shall enforce the above statement of policies for retiring/departing pastors and shall respond immediately to any complaints involving the above policies by counseling with the retired pastor and the congregation.

Church: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Pastor  
date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Clerk of Session  
date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
COM Liaison  
date: \_\_\_\_\_