

GUIDELINES FOR ELECTION OF PASTOR EMERITA/EMERITUS
February 21, 2015
Lake Erie Presbytery

The retiring of a reverend and or/long-term pastor is a time of many emotions and transitions within the life of a congregation. How to say good-bye, how to honor and how to move on are important issues for the continued health of the congregation. One opportunity to honor a retiring pastor is to confer the status of pastor emerita/emeritus. Congregations are encouraged to think about other appropriate and personal ways to honor their retiring pastors.

Pastor Emerita/Emeritus defined in the Book of Order prior to 2011

“When any pastor or associate pastor retires, and the congregation is moved with affection and gratitude to continue an association in an honorary relationship, it may, at a regularly called congregational meeting, elect her or him as pastor emerita/emeritus, with or without honorarium, but with no pastoral authority or duty. This action shall be taken only after consultation with the Committee on Ministry of the presbytery concerning the wisdom of this relationship for the peace of the church. This action shall be subject to the approval of the presbytery, and may take effect upon the formal dissolution of the pastoral or associate pastoral relationship or anytime thereafter.”

Committee on Ministry Process in Lake Erie Presbytery

The conferring of this title is to be taken in consultation with the Committee on Ministry (COM). The first step in the process is for the Session, or representative of the Session, to contact the COM for their input and guidance. It is also wise for the Session to consult with the retiring pastor in order to take into account their wishes.

When can a Session approach the COM?

A congregation can approach the Committee on Ministry at any time after 12 months following the retirement of the pastor.

Who is eligible for pastor emerita/emeritus status?

Both pastors and associate pastors are eligible upon their retirement. Since this is an honorary relationship built upon gratitude and affection of a congregation for their pastor, the COM normally anticipates a pastoral tenure of 10 years for consideration of pastor emerita/emeritus status.

In entering into consultation with the COM, Sessions are reminded that the designation pastor emerita/emeritus is an honorary relationship “with no pastoral authority or duty.” It is the responsibility of the Session and the pastor emerita/emeritus to be absolutely clear on this matter and to clearly make this known to the congregation at large.

Is it appropriate for the name of the pastor emerita/emeritus to be listed in the bulletin, letterhead or masthead of the church?

No. Since the position is honorary, “with no pastoral authority or duty,” to list them along with the active staff of the congregation can and often does communicate that it is appropriate to continue pastoral expectations of the pastor emerita/emeritus. It is appropriate to have a plaque designating the pastor emerita/emeritus.

Can a congregation have more than one pastor emerita/emeritus?

Yes

Does the pastor emerita/emeritus relationship change the responsibility of the individual to follow the ethics guidelines for retired pastors?

Absolutely not. The guidelines for retired pastors are to be followed by all pastors. The pastor emerita/emertus has responsibility to follow and interpret the ethics guidelines to the members of the congregation who may misunderstand the relationship and assume a continuing pastoral relationship.

Conferring the Honorary Title

Once the COM and the presbytery have given their blessings and a congregation has, at a duly called congregational meeting, elected their former pastor or associate pastor as emerita/emertus the congregation is encouraged to celebrate this relationship in a worship service. This may be done as a simple prayer and blessing or a large-scale festival. At this celebration it is wise to remind all in attendance that the designation pastor emerita/emertus is in honorary relationship and one that implies no pastoral authority or duty.