

MINISTERIAL GUIDELINES FOR LEAVING A CONGREGATION

November 14, 2009

For Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Commissioned Lay Pastors

Separation Ethics

Departing pastors, particularly those who have served long and successful pastorates, need to be sensitive to the necessity to sever all formal and official ties with their former congregation once the pastoral relationship has been dissolved.

It is important for the health of the congregation, the departing pastor (and family), and the new pastor (and family), that there is no confusion concerning the pastoral relationship. While personal friendship may continue, the departing pastor and the congregation must understand that the professional pastoral relationship has ended.

WHEN SHOULD I ANNOUNCE MY RESIGNATION?

Under normal circumstances, four to six weeks notice is adequate. This will allow sufficient time for tying up loose ends and for saying good-bye.

Giving notice of more than six weeks can make for an inordinately long period for everyone concerned having to hold onto grief feelings prior to the final termination, not unlike a prolonged period between a death and the funeral or memorial service. However, too short a time between the announcement and the departure is unfair to all affected, but especially to the congregation. The time after a pastor has announced her or his intention to move is a period of extremely important pastoral care: that which is extended by the departing pastor to the congregation and its members, and that which is extended to the departing pastor and family by the congregation.

A minister anticipating a move would benefit from reading the Alban Institute monograph, *Running through the Thistles* by Roy Oswald, copies of which are available in Presbytery's Resource Center. Another good resource is *Saying Goodbye: A Time of Growth for Congregations and Pastors*, by Edward White, also published by the Alban Institute.

WHOM SHALL I TELL, WHEN, AND IN WHAT ORDER?

- a. You shall promptly notify the Stated Clerk, General Presbyter, and the Moderator or Co-Moderators of the Committee on Ministry of your intention to resign.
- b. Share the news with your Session before sharing it with others in the church or community. Ask the session to call a Congregational Meeting to concur with your resignation.
- c. The pastor shall announce his/her resignation officially and personally at a public worship service. Be positive and affirming in your announcement.
- d. The *Book of Order* requires that you notify the Committee on Ministry and Office of Presbytery of your resignation and the congregational action concurring with your request (G-14.0602).

- e. Upon advising the Committee on Ministry and the Office of Presbytery of the resignation and the concurrence by the congregation, the pastor will meet with representatives of the Committee on Ministry for an exit interview.
- f. The pastor must receive concurrence from the Committee on Ministry before moving from the field.
- g. It is the pastor's responsibility to make certain that his/her congregation understands that he/she will no longer be their pastor. He/She needs to make it very clear to them that he/she is no longer available to preach or perform any pastoral tasks for them after the official date of departure from the call.
- h. The pastor who is leaving needs to be supportive of the Presbytery's pastor search process and encourage the congregation to work closely with the Presbytery during their search for a new pastor. As soon as possible, the Committee on Ministry will appoint one of its members to be a liaison to the church during the transition time, as well as designating another minister as moderator of the Session. If possible, the Sunday after the pastor's last Sunday in the pulpit, a representative of Presbytery will be present to declare the pulpit vacant and preach.
- i. If there is a manse, the pastor who is leaving shall make sure that the manse property is left in good condition, with all dirt, rubbish, etc., removed.
- j. All files and records of the church shall be put in order and left intact so that the successor pastor may easily find necessary equipment, information, and records.
- k. When a pastor leaves a congregation where he/she has served, he/she shall affirm the good that has been accomplished. **DO NOT LEAVE ON A NEGATIVE NOTE.**

GUIDELINES FOR RELATING TO A FORMER CONGREGATION FROM A DIFFERENT LOCATION

- a. Even though former pastors and their families may continue to have friendships in the congregation, former pastors shall not perform weddings, conduct funerals, or counsel members of the congregation unless asked to do so by the Session and moderator of Session. (G-14.0606; W-1.4004-1.4006; G-10.1012d) It is important for the former pastor to understand that the pastor serving the congregation in whatever capacity is the one who shall determine if and when to request the services of the former pastor. Former pastors shall not put the current pastor, moderator of Session, or Session in the position of making such decisions.
- b. Former pastors shall not participate in any way with the function of the Pastor Nominating Committee.
- c. The former pastor shall make every effort to be supportive of their successors. Anyone who might contact them with concerns about their successors shall be directed to address any and all such concerns to their new pastor directly or to the Committee on Ministry. Former pastors shall not involve themselves either directly or indirectly when problems arise in a former congregation. The former pastor shall not volunteer or promise to officiate or participate in any events unless he/she has consulted with the moderator of Session.
- d. Shall you and your family return for a visit or for vacation, make a friendly call to the pastor soon after your arrival.

GUIDELINES FOR RETIRING PASTORS

The Board of Pension suggests that the process of retiring begin six to nine months before the anticipated date of retirement, and so six months notice to the congregation would be appropriate.

Ministers anticipating retirement should request the booklet, *Information for Members Planning to Retire*, from the Board of Pensions.

Up to five years before retirement, pastors should send a request for a pension quote to the Board of Pensions, as well as a request for Social Security benefits quote to the local Social Security office.

Presbytery must certify retirement to the Board of Pensions, taking such action at one of the stated meetings. Prior to the Presbytery action, the Committee on Ministry will consider the application for retirement. Be sure enough time is allowed to assure the application can be acted on in a timely manner. The Board of Pensions suggests requesting a retirement application at least ninety days prior to retirement, but a longer time may be wiser. Also, if one of the joint survivor options is elected, the appropriate form must be submitted to the Board at least three months prior to the retirement date. Six to nine months before the anticipated retirement date, the pastor should contact the local Social Security office to begin the application process for benefits.

GUIDELINES FOR PASTORS AND FAMILIES WHO REMAIN IN THE AREA AFTER LEAVING A PASTORATE

- a. Former pastors who choose to remain in or return to the area in which he/she has served as pastor need to deal realistically with their own spiritual needs for fellowship and church life apart from the former congregation.
- b. Former pastors can be most helpful to their successors and families in gaining acceptance in their new position. Former pastors can also be the most difficult problem their successors and families can face. Be sensitive to them, encourage them, help them any way you can, even if it means physically withdrawing from the congregation for a period of time.
- c. Former pastors shall not be involved in any leadership or advisory role (public or private) in their former congregation.
- d. Former pastors shall not intervene, support, or give advice to anyone involved in a congregational disagreement or dispute.
- e. Former pastors shall refrain from pastoral functions and not attend meetings of the Session, Deacons, or Trustees unless invited by the Session and moderator of Session, along with the concurrence of the Committee on Ministry, while the congregation is without an Installed, Designated, Interim, Temporary, or Stated Supply Pastor or Lay Pastor commissioned to that congregation.
- f. Former pastors shall not officiate at any sacraments, weddings, funerals, or other functions involving members of their former congregations, or within their properties, unless invited by the Session and moderator of Session. (G-14.0606; W-1.4004-1.4006; G-10.0102d) . The former pastor shall not volunteer or promise to officiate or participate in any events unless he/she has consulted with the

moderator of Session. Former pastors shall not put the Pastor, Moderator of Session, or Session in the position of making such decisions.

- g. Former pastors shall avoid any functions or requests which will isolate or exclude their successors from the people God has called them to serve. Spouses and families of former pastors also need to demonstrate their support of the new pastor in the manner suggested for former pastors.
- h. Former pastors shall avoid formal or informal participation in or comment on the work of the Pastor Nominating Committee.
- i. Former pastors and their families are strongly encouraged to seek alternate worship sites and opportunities. This will enable them to return on occasions as friends and help avoid the inevitable comparisons which often cause pain and problems whenever old relationships are severed and new relationships are being formed.
- j. Former pastors shall state clearly in their final worship service that their relationship with the congregation will now be different. Former pastors need to remind their congregation that they were given the wonderful opportunity to get to know the congregation through baptisms, weddings, and funeral services, and that their new pastor needs to have the same opportunities.
- k.

These guidelines are intended to assist pastors and congregations as they find themselves in times of transition in pastoral relationships. They are provided as a resource following a long and devoted pastoral relationship. The Committee on Ministry is always available to counsel pastors, their families, sessions, and congregations regarding these guidelines as necessary in their particular circumstances. If you have questions, please contact the Moderator or Co-moderator of the Committee on Ministry.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE A SESSION WHEN A PASTOR DEPARTS

Separation Ethics

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It is important for the health of the congregation, the departing pastor (and family), and the new pastor (and family), that there is no confusion concerning the pastoral relationship. While personal friendship may continue, the departing pastor and the church must understand that the professional pastoral relationship has ended.

While it is initially and primarily the responsibility of the pastor inform the congregation of these guidelines, it is highly recommended that the Session affirm to the congregation the separation policy required in the Book of Order and by the Committee on Ministry, in an effort to prevent any misunderstanding and potential difficulties when a former pastor declines to return to officiate any and all services and pastoral responsibilities.

This can be done by the session communicating to the congregation this policy which requires former pastors refrain from participating and officiating at any sacraments, weddings, funerals, or other functions involving members of their former congregations.

These separation ethics are especially important to affirm and support when the former pastor lives in or nearby your community..

PRESBYTERY OF LAKE ERIE

Sign-off Form for Departing Pastor and Session

The Presbytery of Lake Erie adopted this revised Separation Ethics Policy, which specifies standards of conduct for departing ministers of Word and Sacrament on _____.

For Minister of Word and Sacrament

Or Commissioned Lay Pastor

I have received a copy, have read it, and understand it, and acknowledge that these Separation Ethics as adopted by the Presbytery of Lake Erie apply to me.

Signature

Date

For the Session

We have received a copy, have read it, and understand it, and acknowledge that these Separation Ethics as adopted by the Presbytery of Lake Erie apply to our departing pastor(s).

Signature- Clerk of Session

Date

[It is recommended that the Session post this form in the Church building, or otherwise present it to the congregation so they can be fully informed about the Presbytery Policy.]