

MINISTERIAL GUIDELINES FOR LEAVING A PARISH

The ending of the pastoral relationship is often a trying and traumatic experience for both the pastor and the members of a congregation. It always means change for the life of the pastor involved and also for the congregation. There are several circumstances that may occur in order for the pastor to become the "former pastor." The Committee on Ministry must consider its role in all of the following:

1. Resignation to accept a new call.
 - A. Far away
 - B. One hundred miles or less (usually within the same presbytery)
 - C. A call to other work in the same community. .
2. Resignation under pressure. Usually means a division of opinion within the church family.
3. Retirement.
 - A. Intending to continue living in the same community.
 - B. Moving to another community in the same area.
 - C. Moving far away.
4. Death or Divorce.
 - A. The role of the spouse and other family members in the local congregation.
 - B. The role of the congregation in ministering to the family.

Whatever the cause, it becomes the occasion when pastor and congregation find they must say goodbye. In the light of the *Book of Order* and the best of our traditions, the following guidelines represent what the departing pastor and the congregation will want to do as they face saying "Goodbye."

Remembering the Past and Moving Into the Future

When a pastor leaves a church, she/he leaves not only a professional relationship, but also an emotional and communal support group. Some folks will have become personal friends -golf buddies, bridge cronies and social companions. Beyond that, some will have developed emotional ties...Good old pastor X married us and baptized our children. Pastor X conducted Dad's funeral (and we want [expect] him/her to conduct Mother's funeral).

When a new pastor moves onto the field, he/she expects to find a new community of folks with whom she/he can work and develop new relationships and friends. The problem that evolves has to do with leaving what is past and allowing a congregation to move into its future. Both congregations and individuals have a sense of hope for a future under the leadership of a new pastor -but they also have a degree of sadness and nostalgia at the leaving of a pastor.

It is important that the departing pastor make it clear that the pastoral relationship will come to an end. This does not mean that friendships must come to an end. Friendships are priceless and are to be preserved, but there is 'a special responsibility on the part of the

departing pastor to prevent friendships from becoming confused with the pastoral relationship.

General Guidelines

1. A departing pastor should seek to find a new church home whenever possible. (Obviously this is easier in a city where there is more than one Presbyterian church.)
2. If relating to another church is impractical or impossible, a former pastor should limit his/her activity and seek to redefine his/her role in the local church.
3. A former pastor should firmly, but in a positive and caring way, tell the congregation that he/she will not participate in a leadership role in any activity or special services in the church.* .
4. A former pastor and family continuing to live in the community will have many personal ties. It is appropriate and necessary that those relationships continue. It is incumbent upon that former pastor and family to zealously refrain from discussing the church, changes that are taking place, and other items of church . life.
5. The *Book of Order* allows for the former pastor to participate in weddings, funerals and baptisms after the date of dissolution only by invitation of the session and the moderator. A departing pastor should have as his/her first concern the impact this participation would have on the relationship between the current or future pastor and the congregation.
6. Any desire on the part of members of the congregation for the departing pastor to participate in congregational life or services should be discussed not with the departing pastor, but with the interim pastor or subsequent installed pastor.
7. Normally, invitations to the departing pastor to be apart of the worshipping or fellowship life of the congregation should not occur until the installed pastor has had an opportunity to establish relationships with the congregation.
8. The session needs to be firm in declaring to the people that former pastors may not participate in a leadership role in the church.
9. The session needs to set the guidelines for the departing pastor and assist him/her in interpreting them to the congregation and to the community.**
10. Ordinarily, requests from sessions to grant a former pastor special status (i.e. pastor emeritus or parish associate) will not be considered by COM until one year following the pastor's resignation.

* A sample letter to the congregation from the departing pastor follows.

** A sample letter to the congregation from the session follows.

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My Dear Friends;

As our official relationship as Pastor and Congregation draws to a close, I want to share with you my hope. In the past ten years that I have been your Pastor we have shared many special moments. There have been those special good times ... the baptism of babies ... weddings ... picnics, and other fun activities. There have also been those times of sharing in sorrow, with hospital and nursing home visits and funerals of loved ones. My retirement includes handing those pastoral responsibilities on to another. This is not because there are rules to follow, but because I want to give the new pastor lots of space to develop his/her own ministry. I remember how I felt when I was the new pastor, and how my predecessor gave me the opportunity to develop new, personal ties with the congregation by staying in the background giving me moral support.

So, when you have need of the pastor's services, call the new pastor. If your daughter is getting married, and I'm invited, I'll be there in the congregation rejoicing with you ... and I'll offer my help ... by making our spare bedroom available for some of your out of town guests ... or by offering to go to the airport to pick up guests ... but the new pastor will be planning the wedding, counseling the kids, and performing the service.

I'll still see you at Rotary Club, continue in the bridge group, and see you at church league softball games and High School football games ... but, when we meet ... don't ask me what I think about the new pastor or the session's latest project. I'd appreciate knowing that someone is sick, and Suzy is graduating from college with honors and other joys and concerns within the church family, but not other business.

Together, let's continue our concerned relationship, but please help me stay out of church business.

Love, Bill, HR

*** A sample letter to the congregation from the session follows:**

TO: The Congregation of _____ Presbyterian Church
FROM: The Session

As of May first, Bill E. Bop will no longer be the Pastor of our church. His ministry here has been well received and many close ties and friendships have been forged. We cherish them and hope they may continue.

The Session of the church is charged with leading the church into new relationships. For a period of time, while the church, through a Pastor Nominating Committee, seeks a new pastor for the congregation, we will be served by an Interim Pastor.

Part of the reason for an Interim Pastor is to provide "for the managing of the church's business, worship and spiritual life. It also serves as a kind of a bridge from what has been in the life of our church, to what our ministry in the future will be.

We're aware of the letter you've received from Pastor Bill, asking for your help in allowing him to really retire. We, as your session, also ask you to help the church move from what has been into our next phase of ministry. Please support us by cherishing what is past while working for today and tomorrow. Please allow our Interim Pastor, and the Installed Pastor, who will follow, to become your pastor. Remember, roles are changing. Bill will continue to be your friend, but others now must take over the pastoral roles and duties. Help make this transition a positive experience by supporting the Session during this time.

Sincerely yours,

For the Session
Jane Jones, Clerk