

Presbytery of West Virginia

ETHICS FOR DEPARTING PASTORAL LEADERS

These guidelines are meant to supplement G-2.09 and *Standards of Ethical Conduct for Ordained Officers in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)* approved by the 210th General Assembly (1998) Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) #OGA-98-009, or <<http://www.pcusa.org/ogaethics/officers.htm>>. The Ministry Committee is available to counsel ministers, their families, and congregations regarding these guidelines as needed in their particular situations. If you have questions, please contact the Chair of the Ministry Committee.

1. WHEN TO ANNOUNCE INTENTIONS

Under normal conditions, a pastor leaving a congregation to accept a call from another congregation is advised to provide four to six weeks notice. This will allow sufficient time for tying up loose ends and for saying goodbye. Longer-term pastorates might require more advanced notice, even up to six months. Ministers planning to retire may want to provide up to six months advance notice.

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.

Ministers anticipating or planning to leave a congregation would do well to read the Alban Institute monograph, *Running Through the Thistles* by Roy Oswald and the book, *Saying Goodbye* by Edward A. White. Copies are available in Presbytery's Resource Center.

2. WHOM TO TELL, WHEN, AND IN WHAT ORDER?

- a. A pastor desiring to dissolve a pastoral relationship should inform the presbytery in writing, through the Stated Clerk, General Presbyter, or Chair of the Ministry Committee of his/her desire to dissolve the pastoral relationship.
- b. A pastor desiring to dissolve a pastoral relationship should share the news with his/her Session before sharing it with others in the church or community, at the same time requesting the session to call a Congregational Meeting to concur with the request to dissolve the pastoral relationship.
- c. A pastor desiring to dissolve a pastoral relationship should announce his/her desire officially and personally at a public worship service, being both positive and open in his/her announcement.
- d. Soon after a pastor has publicly announced to the congregation his/her desire to dissolve the pastoral relationship, he/she should arrange for an exit interview with the chair of the Ministry Committee.
- e. A pastor must receive concurrence from the Ministry Committee before moving from the field.
- f. It is the departing pastor's and Ministry Committee's responsibility to see that his/her congregation understands that he/she will no longer be their pastor. The pastor needs to make it very clear to the congregation that he/she is no longer available to preach or perform any pastoral tasks for them. The Ministry Committee will send a pastoral letter to the session, for

distribution to the congregation, making it very clear to the congregation that the former pastor is no longer available to preach or perform any pastoral tasks for them.

- g. A pastor who is leaving needs to support Presbytery's pastor search process and encourage the congregation to work closely with the Presbytery during their search for a new pastor.
- h. A pastor who is leaving should make sure that the manse and associated property are left in good condition.
- i. A pastor who is leaving should make sure that all church files and records are in order and left intact so that his/her successor may easily find necessary records and equipment.
- j. A pastor who is leaving should affirm the good that has been accomplished and never leave on a negative note.

3. GUIDELINES FOR RELATING TO A FORMER CONGREGATION FROM A DIFFERENT LOCATION

Standards of Ethical Conduct for Ordained Officers in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) relevant to ministers relating to former congregations include "11.14 Deal honorably with the record of my predecessor and upon leaving a ministry or office speak and act in ways that support the ministry of my successor 11.15, "Participate in the life of a ministry setting I left or from which I have retired only as directed by presbytery; 11.16, "Provide pastoral services for a congregation I previously served only as directed by the presbytery and provide pastoral services to members of other congregations only with the consent of their pastors; and, 11.17. Consult with the committee on ministry in the presbytery of my residence regarding my involvement in any ministry setting during my retirement."

- a. Even though a former pastor and his/her family may continue to have friendships in the congregation, a former pastor ordinarily should not perform weddings, conduct funerals, or counsel members of the congregation unless asked to do so by the Session and moderator of Session. (G-2.0905; W-1.4004 . 1.4006; G-3.0201)
- b. A former pastor should not participate in any way with the function of the Pastor Nominating Committee.
- c. A former pastor should make every effort to be supportive of his/her successor by encouraging persons who might contact him/her with concerns about his/her successor to address them to the new pastor or the Session or the Ministry Committee, avoid drawing conclusions about the successor or interpreting the successor's behavior and words.
- d. If a former pastor and his/her family return for a visit or for vacation, a friendly phone call to the pastor prior to or soon after arrival is both appropriate and recommended.

4. GUIDELINES FOR RETIRING PASTORS

The Board of Pensions 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.

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

- a. A former pastor who chooses to remain in or return to the area in which he/she has served as pastor needs to deal realistically with his/her own needs for fellowship and church life apart from the former congregation. He/she should refrain from attending worship and fellowship activities in the church formerly served and should seek to worship in other congregations and engage in ministries not directly related to the former congregation. There are numerous opportunities to engage in part-time ministries in congregations in West Virginia Presbytery other than in the congregation retired from.
- b. In view of the complexities that may arise as part of a pastoral departure, the Ministry Committee, the Session, and the retiring pastor will engage in a pastoral conversation before departure. This should lead toward a clearer understanding of the relationship between the leaving pastor, friends, colleagues, business associates and relatives in the former congregation.
- c. A retired pastor and his/her family can be most helpful to a successor and successor's family being accepted in their new situation, or be the most difficult problem a successor and successors family must face. Be sensitive to a successor and a successor's' family.
- d. A retired pastor and his/her family shall refrain from pastoral functions and not accept any position of leadership in his/her former church, nor attend meetings of the Session, Deacons, or Trustees.
- e. A former pastor shall refrain from officiating at any sacraments, weddings, funerals, or other functions involving members of his/her former church, or within its properties. (G- 2.0905; W .1.4004 .1.4006; G-3.0201)
- f. An invitation from the Session or Moderator to officiate or perform pastoral functions in a former church is an opportunity for a former pastor to demonstrate support and loyalty to a successor. You may offer to assist when asked to officiate. Avoid any functions or requests, which may isolate or exclude a successor from the people God has called him/her to serve.
- g. A former pastor shall avoid formal or informal participation in or comment on the work of the Pastor Nominating Committee.
- h. The presbytery advises retiring ministers not to retire in the community which they have most recently served. If they do so, the presbytery expects the retired minister and family to attend another congregation during the transition period, and for six/twelve months following the establishment of new pastoral leadership in the former congregation. This will enable a retired pastor and his/her family to return as a longtime friend and avoid the inevitable comparisons which can cause much pain whenever old relationships are severed and new ones are being formed. If after that period of time, and in consultation with the Ministry Committee and the current pastoral leadership, a retired minister returns to worship regularly in the former place of pastoral leadership, they should regularly consult with the Ministry Committee, General Presbyter, and current pastoral leadership as to their involvement in the former congregation.

These guidelines are intended to serve as a help to ministers and churches as they go through difficult times of adjustment. They are provided as an attempt to avoid having a long and devoted pastoral relationship between a pastor and church become a source of dissension within a congregation and a source of pain for a succeeding pastor and family