

Boundaries for Former Pastors

When a member of the clergy or professional staff of the Presbytery announces his or her desire to terminate the present call to either accept another call or to retire, there are a variety of emotions and issues to deal with. Emotionally, these persons, their families and those they served, may feel a sense of loss. There may at the same time be feelings of relief, especially if there has been conflict in the relationship. The congregation or Presbytery may feel an additional sense of concern as they anticipate a long period of vacancy in the position.

The bonds of friendship need not be broken, but the OFFICIAL relationship shall be terminated to allow for the successor to truly become the pastor of the congregation or professional staff of Presbytery. The need for this is especially critical when the person retires and remains in the community or area. When the pastor, or professional staff, their family, or the congregation refuses to cut these ties, much confusion, resentment, and pain normally follow.

These policies and guidelines are intended to assist those in parish ministry, other validated ministries, and professional staff of Albany Presbytery, as well as the bodies they serve, to deal with the situation.

- 1) Prior to the effective date of dissolution, the following shall be placed in the newsletter and/or bulletin:

When a pastor leaves a pastorate (resigning, retiring from service or attaining the status of Pastor Emeritus), that person must cease to perform official functions such as weddings, baptisms, funerals, hospital visits or counseling for people in the congregation and community. The bonds of friendship need not be broken but the official relationship must be terminated to allow for the successor to truly become the pastor of the congregation. It is inappropriate to request the former pastor to administer such pastoral duties. If requested, he or she must tactfully decline.

- 2) Prior to the exit, the Committee on Ministry (COM) representative and the General Presbyter will discuss this policy with the pastor and session. It is also recommended that the COM representative and General Presbyter meet with the spouse, and, if appropriate, other members of the pastor's family to discuss issues of separation and how they might be most effectively dealt with. If necessary, further counseling may be provided by the COM to assist in the separation.

As part of this process, COM shall counsel the exiting pastor and the family that further participation in the church following their departure may cause serious difficulties within the congregation. It is recommended that another church home be sought. COM is encouraged to assist the family in this endeavor.

We do recognize that sometimes members of the exiting pastor's family will have long and strong ties to the present congregation, and desire to continue that relationship. When this is true, those family members are encouraged to exercise extreme restraint in participating in the leadership of the church and/or discussing the current pastor's performance or the current work of the church. Failure to adhere to this policy has often led to serious difficulties within the congregation, and thus may be grounds for the COM to intervene.

- 3) ALL keys to church properties shall be turned in to the clerk of session or a designated representative of the Presbytery, by the effective date of the separation. All exceptions shall be approved by the session of the church in consultation with the COM committee. It is recommended that this "turning over of the keys" be done as a portion of the concluding worship service, thus making public the relinquishing of authority.
- 4) ALL actions of a *pastoral/professional nature* shall cease upon the effective date of dissolution of the relationship, especially if the person continues to live or work within commuting distance from the dissolved relationship.

A discussion of this policy and its guidelines shall be held with interim pastors and subsequent called pastors. This discussion shall include the application of the policy and guidelines in the particular situation.

- 5) While we do counsel a strict boundary between the former pastor and congregation, there may be limited exceptions to this at the discretion of the serving pastor (or moderator) and the session.

This policy shall be included in the Presbytery handbook. Incoming pastors shall be notified of it, and it will be mailed to pastors and clerks of session by the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery upon notification that a pastor is planning to leave or retire. The Stated Clerk of the Presbytery will call attention to this policy at a Presbytery meeting on an annual basis.