

STATEMENT OF ETHICS WHEN A PASTOR DEPARTS

Newark Presbytery
(COM Approved 11/09/06)



The following statement is to be read from the pulpit and published (bulletin and/or newsletter, etc.) for distribution to the church membership at the dissolution of a pastorate or other pastoral relationship:

When a pastor leaves a church, bonds of affection between the minister and members of the congregation continue to be cherished. Relationships of friendship continue, but the pastoral relationship does not. In order to spare ministers and church members from embarrassment, and to encourage the new pastoral relationship that will be established, and in the case of multiple staff congregations, clearly affirm the pastoral relationship(s) that remain, the Presbytery of Newark directs that the church be reminded of these requirements:

Book of Order, G-14.0606 **Officiate by Invitation Only**
Former pastors, associate pastors, and assistant pastors may officiate at services for members of a particular church, or at services within its properties, only upon invitation from the pastor, moderator of the session or, in case of the inability to contact the moderator, from the clerk of session.

When any minister resigns from a pastorate, or retires from service, or becomes a pastor emeritus/emera, the minister should cease to perform such functions of a pastor as funerals, baptisms, and weddings, unless invited to participate in such capacity by the pastor or by the moderator of churches with vacant pulpits.
(General Assembly Minutes, 1948, p. 119, Status of Retired Ministers)

The spirit of this action applies to all ministers, whether retired or not, and whether they have ever served as pastors of particular churches. (General Assembly Minutes, 1959, p. 208, Overture 39)

Individual members are asked not to place former pastors in the awkward position of asking their friend to perform the duties of a pastor. Ministers of the Word and Sacrament are directed to tactfully decline all such invitations that come from former parishioners rather than from other pastors or governing bodies.

Newark Presbytery Policy Concerning Former Pastors

DEFINITION

A *former pastor* is one who no longer serves as pastor, associate pastor, or in any temporary pastoral relationship in a congregation once served, due to a call to other service, retirement, release from or termination of ordained office, or involuntary termination.

RATIONALE

- (1) When the pastoral relationship between a minister of Word and Sacrament and a congregation is dissolved, the nature and character of the relationship changes. Both the pastor and the congregation must disengage from the nature and character of the pastoral relationship in order to engage and establish new relationships. This policy addresses issues in this transition.
- (2) When a pastor leaves a congregation due to reasons identified in #1 above, there are certain ethical standards that should be followed in order for the ties between the former pastor and the congregation to be severed and for new relationships to be established between the new pastor and the congregation. (Among such standards are those provided in the “*Standards of Ethical Conduct*” adopted by the 210th General Assembly.) When such standards are followed, it helps to provide for a smooth transition and for a happy relationship among all parties.

THE POLICY

1. During the closure phase of ministry, the "former pastor" shall provide written correspondence to the congregation indicating the implications of this changed relationship--especially the need for boundaries in this new relationship. [Presbytery shall have available for church members, copies of Statement of Ethics When A Pastor Departs on how to relate to a former pastor.]
2. When a pastor resigns, retires, or leaves for other reasons, due care should be exercised not to influence, by direction or indirection, by spoken or written word, the selection of any successor or the policies of that successor.
3. We recognize the unique problem of a former pastor who will continue to reside in the community that he/she served. Normally, former pastors shall have no contact with the church previously served for at least two years following dissolution of the pastoral relationship. If there is another Presbyterian presence within reasonable distance, the former pastor will be advised to worship with that congregation. If there is no other Presbyterian presence except the congregation formerly served, the former pastor may petition the Committee on Ministry to continue to worship in his/her former parish following the above two-year period. The Committee on Ministry must approve this association with a former parish through a Covenant agreement clearly enumerating the boundaries of acceptable behaviors by all parties (including families).
4. If the former pastor remains in the community, that person best honors their ordination vows by exercising self-restraint regarding the business and spiritual well being of the congregation. He/she may maintain friendships with members of the former congregation, but he/she must avoid conversations regarding policies, practices, or programs of that church as such conversations could be perceived as attempting to influence decisions or relationships within the congregation. Under no circumstances may the former pastor make public (or likely to be made public) statements critical of the new pastor.

COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

5. We remind the former pastor of the professional behavior standards as indicated in the Book of Order, G-14.0606 and the **CODE OF ETHICS** adopted by the 210th General Assembly, which make clear that former pastors may not officiate (funerals, weddings, baptisms) or provide worship leadership in a former Parish unless personally invited to do so by the current Moderator of Session.
6. While the Presbytery has no jurisdiction in making policy regarding family members (of former pastors) who may wish to remain members of the church, it does recommend that good judgment and restraint be practiced in order not to interfere with the transition to a new pastor.