

Policy: Former Pastor Relationships

Commission on Ministry; est. 2005



The Commission on Ministry of Northwest Coast Presbytery provides these guidelines to assist pastors and congregations in avoiding awkward situations, maintaining the church's ethical standards, and encouraging new pastoral relationships that will be established.

The General Assembly (1998) adopted a Professional Code of Ethics which contains the paper, "Life Together in the Community of Faith: Standards of Ethical Conduct for Ordained Officers of the Presbyterian Church (USA)." It contains three rubrics, one of which is "I will conduct my ministry so that nothing need be hidden from a governing body or colleagues in ministry. Therefore I will:..." (among its seventeen standards are these)

1. Accept the discipline of the church and the appropriate guidance of those to whom I am accountable for my ministry.
2. Consult with the Commission on Ministry in the presbytery of my residence regarding my involvement in any ministry setting during my retirement.
3. 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.
4. Participate in the life of a ministry setting I left or from which I have retired only as directed by presbytery.
5. Provide pastoral services for a congregation I previously served only as directed by the presbytery, and provide pastoral services to members of another congregation only with the consent of their pastors.

In addition to the above standards, the policies of NWC presbytery shall include, but not be limited to:

1. A former pastor who chooses to remain in or return to the area in which the pastor has served is expected to deal with his/her needs for fellowship and church life apart from the former congregation.
2. A former pastor shall refrain from pastoral functions and not accept any position of leadership in his/her former church, nor attend meetings of the session, board of deacons or board of trustees.
3. A former pastor shall not officiate at any sacraments, weddings, funerals or other functions involving members of his/her former congregation, unless invited by the session and moderator of session.
4. Any invitations for pastoral services must be referred to the new pastor and/or the session. (Note that an invitation to officiate or perform pastoral functions in a former congregation is an opportunity to demonstrate your support and loyalty to the present incumbent. Contact the current minister and offer to assist rather than officiate.)
5. A former pastor shall avoid informal participation in or comment on the work of the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC).
6. On occasion requests are made from sessions to grant a former pastor special status (i.e., Pastor Emeritus). These requests will be considered by the COM.
7. There may be unusual situations in which these policies are modified to fit particular circumstances, but only when specifically approved by the COM.

Sessions, retired pastors and successor pastors who have questions about or desiring clarification of these policies are encouraged to seek the guidance of the COM.

LETTER OF UNDERSTANDING
Between the Rev. _____ and
the Congregation of _____ Presbyterian Church

This is to make clear the former pastor's role as he or she continues to live in _____. This information is shared with the congregation so that all may understand the role and responsibilities of the former pastor.

1. The dissolution of the pastoral relationship, effective _____, signifies his/her understanding that all pastoral functions with _____ are terminated as of that date. Any invitations for pastoral services will be referred to the new pastor and / or the session.
2. It is further mutually understood that this applies also to the interim period before another pastor is called and installed, since the congregation needs some time and space between installed pastors to discover who they are now, where they want to go, and with what new leadership. It is agreed that the session will make provision for interim pastoral ministry for the congregation.
3. The former pastor agrees that he/she will not officiate or assist at any sacraments, weddings, or funerals connected with this church, unless invited by the session and moderator of session. He/she expects to exercise his/her ministry in other churches. This will prevent divided loyalties in the congregation and pressures on either the former or future pastors or interim pastors.
4. The former pastor agrees further that if attending this church in the future, it will be as a worshipper and participant, and that he/she will not engage in any conversation that evaluates, assesses or comments upon the ongoing affairs of the church.
5. If, after a suitable period of time, there is a desire on the part of the next installed pastor to review any of the above items, he/she may instigate that with the consent of the session and COM, and provided the former pastor is willing for such review and re-negotiation to occur.

_____	_____
Session Clerk	Date
_____	_____
Former Pastor	Date
_____	_____
Commission on Ministry Moderator	Date