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## NORTHWEST COAST PRESBYTERY POLICY ON SEPARATION ETHICS WHEN DISSOLVING A CALL

The use of the term “ethics” implies certain expectations which are important to consider during the often highly charged experience of the dissolution of the pastoral relationship.

Such expectations include:

- a) effective leadership
- b) congregational health and stability
- c) the growth of pastor and congregation in dealing with the pain and problems of separation
- d) the ability of the Session and congregation to move positively and effectively toward the next phase of their life together

While these expectations apply to the conduct and responsibilities of both the pastor and the congregation regarding their separation, the pastor is the one in the primary leadership role and therefore the one who has the responsibility for making sure that the separation is accomplished with foresight, effectiveness, and in a professional manner. All parties are expected to conform to and abide by the Policy Concerning Former Pastor Relationships, a copy of which is attached at Appendix A.

### **Responsibilities of the Departing Pastor**

#### **1. To the Congregation.**

The following five topics must to be communicated clearly in order to avoid confusion on the part of members in the days ahead. This communication should be accomplished by a letter addressed to the congregation spelling out clearly matters which are part of the separation, by remarks during regular worship gatherings containing references to the impending separation, and in casual conversations and in newsletters. In all contacts with people of the congregation it is important that the following be communicated and every effort made to have them understood:

- a) All pastoral and professional relationships and responsibilities of the pastor with the congregation will end as of the effective date of the dissolution.
- b) The pastor will not be involved in any way in the selection process of either the interim or the next installed pastor. Neither will he/she be involved in any way with the selection of any search team or pastor nominating committee.
- c) The pastor, after leaving, will not become engaged in conversations with church members or staff which offer opinions or criticism about the life of the congregation or the performance of the interim or any subsequent installed pastors.
- d) 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 or subsequent installed pastor.

- e) The departing pastor may participate in a wedding, a funeral, or a baptism of the congregation, after the date of dissolution, only by invitation of the interim pastor or installed pastor. This applies to all services whether held in the church or in community facilities.

## 2. To Individual Members of the Congregation.

Pursuant to G-2.0905 it is important that, with particular friends, it be made 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. The pastoral functions of counseling, calling, conducting weddings, funerals, or baptisms are not appropriate. Neither is the rendering of opinions or judgments about the ministry of the former church or its pastor. If the former pastor receives a request to return to the congregation for a particular occasion, it is important for her/him to remind those making the request that the present pastor is the one to whom the request should be made.

In any social context where the former pastor is with friends or other members of the former congregation, it is the responsibility of the former pastor to be sure that he/she voices no criticism or evaluative comments about the new leadership of the congregation. It is recommended that the pastor sever all social media connections with members of the congregation, and that he or she not initiate new contacts with members of his or her former congregation; this is particularly important with younger members of the congregation and youth.

## 3. To the Remaining Staff and Personnel of the Church.

The former pastor has a responsibility to the remaining staff and personnel of the church in the following ways:

- a) Prepare them for the separation that will occur.
- b) Encourage them to receive and welcome the interim pastor and the next installed pastor and be prepared to alter working patterns and relationships as may be needed.
- c) Make clear that he or she will not be available for counsel or advice regarding the life and work of the church

## 4. To the Interim and Subsequent Installed Pastors.

The former pastor has a responsibility to the interim pastor, and to subsequent installed pastors, to ensure that any requests that come to him/her for services in the former congregation be redirected by the requesters to the interim pastor or installed pastor. It is important that, when any request comes to the former pastor, she/he communicate to the current pastor that contacts have been made. There should be no pastoral functions of any kind performed by the former pastor without the prior invitation or request of the current moderator of the Session and approval of the Commission on Ministry.

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Should any community non-church function call the former pastor back into the community for public appearance of whatever nature, as a courtesy, the former pastor should inform the current pastor of the fact and the nature of the occasion.

### **Responsibilities of the Session**

#### 1. To the Departing Pastor.

Following the pastor's decision to request dissolution of the pastoral relationship the session should give support and encouragement to the pastor in the implementation of the decision. This can be done by assisting the pastor in interpreting the meaning of the end of the pastoral relationship to the congregation and to the wider community. As a caring expression of closure, it is appropriate for the session to arrange for an occasion when the congregation, the community, and pastor formally say goodbye.

#### 2. To the Congregation.

The session will want to be sensitive to the feeling of loss experienced by members of the congregation while demonstrating through their actions the meaning of the end of the pastoral relationship. It is important that session acknowledge the congregation's need to grieve the loss, regardless of the reason for the dissolution of the pastoral relationship.

Additional session leadership may be needed in the transition period so that worship, congregational life, and fellowship may continue. The session can help the members of the congregation by encouraging them to see this time as an opportunity for growth and change. It can be a time for listening to individuals and groups in the congregation. It can be a time for examining present life, ministry, and service, and to be open to new possibilities. It is important that the congregation be prepared for change and for new pastoral leadership.

### **Responsibilities of the Commission on Ministry**

#### To the Interim and Next Installed Pastors.

The Commission on Ministry shall review these guidelines with the interim pastor and the next installed pastor and be available for counsel should any difficulties arise regarding relationships with the former pastor.

## APPENDIX A

### Policy: Former Pastor Relationships

*approved 2005 in former North Puget Sound Presbytery and continues in the new NWC Presbytery 2016.*

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.

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## APPENDIX B

### SAMPLE 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