



Former Pastor Policy and Covenant of Closure **National Capital Presbytery - Committee on Ministry**

*Approved by the Congregational Transition Commission, 1/5/17
and COM Coordinating Commission, 1/17/17*

Preamble

The life of every congregation is punctuated by the coming and going of pastors; and the professional life of most pastors is punctuated by several changes in positions. For both the congregation and the pastor, it is important for these transitions to take place in as healthy a way as possible. When a pastor is called to a new congregation, she/he should be afforded every opportunity to build and nourish a vital pastoral relationship with her/his new community. To the degree to which a previous pastor lingers, he/she stands, wittingly or unwittingly, in the way of the flourishing of the new pastorate.

This policy does not require that the former pastor cast aside friendships with individuals in the congregation. The former pastor is simply no longer the pastor of the congregation and may not provide pastoral services to the congregation or its members.

The fundamental assumption underlying this policy is that the long-term needs of a congregation must transcend the needs of any particular pastor or the discomfiting circumstances of a particular pastoral transition. The burden of responsibility for ensuring a healthy transition lies primarily with the professional behavior of the pastor who is leaving, although such a transition demands empathy and maturity from all parties—the former pastor, the new pastor, the session, and the members of the congregation.

A “former pastor” is any pastor who once served a church in any pastoral capacity who retires, resigns, whose contract expires or whose call is dissolved by the Presbytery. For this purpose, the term “former pastor” applies to, but is not limited to, Installed Pastors, Interim Pastors, Stated Supply Pastors, Short-Term Supply Pastors, Pastors Emeritae and Emeriti, Certified Christian Educators and Associate Certified Christian Educators.

A Covenant Among the Parties

1. It is crucial that **all the parties** to this Covenant of Closure understand its provisions and pledge to adhere to them. The departing pastor, the Clerk of Session, and a representative from the Committee on Ministry (COM) must affirm in writing the Former Pastor Policy/Covenant of Closure. This agreement shall be interpreted to the session and the congregation, and this agreement will be included in session minutes. In addition, a letter from the COM will be sent to the congregation explaining the Former Pastor Policy.
2. **The congregation** in particular should be made aware of the Covenant and why it is necessary. When the departure of an installed or temporary pastor is anticipated, a representative of COM shall interpret the former pastor policy to the session and, in the case of an installed pastor, to the congregation as well. The departing pastor, whether installed or temporary, shall explain and affirm this policy to the congregation in writing and from the pulpit. The session shall ensure that the COM letter regarding this policy is distributed to the congregation.

3. In Presbyterian polity, the congregation is not alone as it works through the transition from one pastor to another. **The COM** shall demonstrate support and guidance to the congregation by providing resources during this transition of pastoral leadership.
4. Nor is the departing pastor left adrift. In the case of a pastor's retirement, the COM, through its **Care Team**, shall demonstrate support and care of the retiring former pastor by maintaining contact, offering opportunities for continuing service through the presbytery, encouraging the supportive fellowship with other retired clergy and informing the retiring pastor of appropriate seminars and agencies that might assist in making a successful transition to retired life. The Care Team also conducts an exit interview with all pastors within several weeks or months of their departures.
5. The dissolution of the former pastor's relationship with the congregation triggers a fundamental change in the formal relationship between the former pastor and the congregation. After that dissolution, **the former pastor** shall not:
 - a. worship with his/her former congregation without an invitation of the moderator of the session and written permission of the chair of the COM or his/her designee;
 - b. be involved in any leadership or advisory role, public or private, including teaching, in the former congregation;
 - c. intervene, support or give advice to anyone involved in a disagreement or dispute or give opinions regarding church business at his/her former congregation;
 - d. provide pastoral care to members of his/her former congregation;
 - e. officiate in any special events in the lives of former parishioners or of the congregation, including weddings, funerals, baptisms, worship leadership, church anniversaries or reunions, unless expressly invited by the moderator of the session and with the written permission of the chair of the Committee on Ministry or his/her designee. This prohibition includes providing pastoral services to members of the former congregation in locations other than the former church's property. When former pastors receive requests for pastoral services by former parishioners, they should refer all such requests to the current pastor.

The former pastor is expected to abide by the intent and requirements of Presbytery's "Code of Ethics" regarding former pastors.

Outstanding loans and equity sharing arrangements are to be settled in accordance with the loan or equity sharing agreement. Such loans are part of the terms of call of the pastor, and any forgiveness of such loans, unless provided for in the loan documentation, constitutes a change in call that must be approved by the congregation and the presbytery. The COM will be consulted prior to negotiating any such agreement. Definite plans should be made by the former pastor for the disposition of pastoral counseling notes, personal records, etc.

The former pastor is also responsible for establishing and maintaining new boundaries concerning all use of social networking (all online communication). The former pastor shall, for example, remove him/herself from internal communication lists, groups, documents from his/her former church and delete any groups or lists that he/she created that set aside congregational members in news or update streams.

6. **The session** is expected to do the following:

- a. to respect the terms of the policy agreed to by the former pastor;
 - b. to interpret the terms of the policy to the congregation and incorporate this agreement in the minutes of the congregational meeting when the pastoral relationship is dissolved; and
 - c. to incorporate this agreement in the session minutes.
7. Any initiative to engage a former pastor in the ministry of his/her former congregation remains entirely within the authority of **the new pastor**. When a former pastor remains in the community, the new pastor may ask for the insight and services of the former pastor, but the congregation may not. The new pastor shall determine if and when to request the services of the former pastor. New pastors should be cautious about involving the former pastor; once a pattern is established, it may be difficult to retrieve authority or roles that have been ceded to the former pastor.
8. If the former pastor and the current pastor believe there to be **an unusual, extenuating circumstance** (e.g. special anniversary or homecoming celebration) that indicates a particular pastoral or missional need to involve the former pastor in some capacity, the former pastor can do so only with the written permission of the chair of the Committee on Ministry or his/her designee.
9. **If this policy is violated** by the former pastor, in the judgment of the COM, the Stated Clerk or the General Presbyter, the following steps will be taken:
- a. The former pastor will be contacted with a pastoral warning by a representative of COM.
 - b. If the violation continues, the former pastor will receive a written notice that will be placed in the pastor's permanent file, and the former pastor will appear before the Coordinating Commission of the COM.
 - c. A third violation will result in formal disciplinary charges being filed which may result in censure or other alternatives listed in D-12.0100.

The Former Pastor's Family

When a former pastor remains in the community—especially upon retirement— a particular concern arises for the needs of other family members, particularly the pastor's spouse. Quite often family members have joined the church their spouse/parent was serving, have become very involved in congregational programs, invested great interest and energy in the church's life, and established deep personal relationships with other church members. It is strongly recommended, however, that the former pastor and his/her family become active in the work and worship of another congregation. It is acknowledged that the Presbytery has no direct jurisdiction over the non-clergy members of pastors' families, but the Presbytery urges the spouse, in the context of those relationships, not to do anything that would undermine the transition necessary for the church and the development of the relationship between the congregation, an interim pastor, and a new called pastor. It is requested that the former pastor's family refrain from worshipping with the former congregation at all once the pastor has left the congregation. As it is appropriate, the pastor's family will be included in retirement planning, discussions, workshops and seminars.

Pastor Emeritus/Emerita

One year following a former pastor’s tenure a session may request that the Presbytery approve the former pastor as “Pastor Emerita/us.” The COM acknowledges that this provision sends mixed messages to a congregation and a pastor when the church and Presbytery name that person pastor emeritus/emera and then the Presbytery asks the pastor emeritus/emera not to be involved in pastoral functions. It is expected that the retired pastor will actively discourage former parishioners if they issue invitations for his/her service. The church in which the retired pastor has worked so long and hard to nurture and sustain now needs his/her help to establish a healthy nurturing relationship with its new leader(s).

Affirmations

The pastor, before departing, is expected to explain and affirm this policy to the congregation by letter or newsletter and/or from the pulpit.

This policy describes the permanent relationship between a congregation and a former pastor. The policy does not expire after the passage of time.

It is expected that this policy, except as noted, will be monitored by the Coordinating Commission of the Committee on Ministry.

I, the Pastor of _____ Church, agree to abide by this policy.

Signature, Pastor

Date

The Session of _____ Church agrees:

- a. to respect the terms of the Covenant agreed upon by the Rev. _____;
- b. to interpret the terms of the Covenant to the congregation; and
- c. to incorporate this agreement in the Session minutes.

Signature, Clerk of Session

Date

Signature, COM Representative

Date