

Dear Disciples of the Risen Christ,

The transition from one pastor to another should be a time of celebration, when the congregation's past witness is affirmed and its future calling is anticipated. We all know that we must say goodbye, really goodbye, if we are fully to welcome and embrace the new. In God's good time, you will have a new pastor; in the meantime, you will need to detach yourselves from your former pastor. Friendships and mutual affection can and should continue and flourish, but the pastoral relationship has been, and needs to be, severed. We all know from experience that a new pastoral relationship takes firm root only when a new pastor preaches, teaches, prays, marries, buries and baptizes. If we request or permit a former pastor to perform those fundamental pastoral roles, we intentionally or unintentionally stand in the way of the deepening attachment of new pastor and new flock. Moreover, we inadvertently put our former pastor in the awkward position of being an obstacle to the flourishing of the new in our midst.

One critical responsibility for a former pastor and the Session is leading the congregation in a positive and appropriate detachment from the former pastor's pastoral role. The enclosed "Former Pastor Policy and Covenant of Closure" produced by the Committee on Ministry (COM) of the National Capital Presbytery directs and guides the former pastor and Session as they ensure that detachment. Please read it, attend to it and note that the Covenant of Closure has been signed by the departing pastor, the Clerk of Session and a representative of COM. There really is no way to avoid this commitment.

If at any time you are confused regarding the appropriate boundaries, you may contact the General Presbyter or the chair of the Committee on Ministry who will counsel you. The COM looks forward to walking alongside your congregation during this transition and helping to make it a time of growth and new energy.

Grace and Peace,

Committee on Ministry Chair

General Presbyter

Stated Clerk