

# PRESBYTERY OF SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

## Pastors Who Resign, Retire or Complete Temporary Pastorates

### Preamble

The life of every congregation is punctuated by the coming and going of ministers; and the professional life of most ministers 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. It is important that former clergy (**pastor, co-pastor, associate pastor, youth pastor**) do not become involved in any way in the life of the former congregation once an exit has occurred.

These following principles have been established to safeguard the vitality of the congregation and to facilitate sound transitions and the development of a healthy relationship with the new pastor. The primary expectation is that when the pastoral relationship ends, so does the pastor's participation in any future pastoral service to members of the congregation.

- a) the former pastor is not to worship on a regular basis with his/her former congregation, and shall abstain from worship with that congregation during the pastoral vacancy or while the congregation is served by an interim pastor;
- b) the former pastor is not to involve himself/herself in any leadership or advisory role (public or private) in the former congregation.
- c) the former pastor is not to intervene, support, or give advice to anyone involved in a congregational disagreement or dispute.
- d) the former pastor is not to officiate in any special events in the lives of former parishioners or of the congregation, including weddings, funerals, baptisms, worship leadership, church anniversary, activities, etc., unless expressly invited by the Moderator of the Session.
- e) requests for pastoral services from former parishioners are to be refused, and the pastor, interim pastor, or moderator of the congregation should be informed of the request.
- f) it is not expected that friendships with individuals in the former congregation will be terminated. It is expected that former pastors will refrain from giving opinions or directions regarding church business that could undermine the transitions necessary for the church and the development of the relationship between the congregation and a new pastor (interim pastor).

- g) if a former pastor plans to visit a congregation by attending worship or a special event the Moderator of that Session should always be consulted.
- h) if the pastor receives a new call in the same presbytery, it can possibly be difficult to abide by these principles. The former pastor is to exercise diligence to abide by the covenant of closure which has been signed.
- i) the former pastor may return to regular worship with his/her former congregation only with the concurrence of the new installed pastor. COM may be consulted if that would be helpful.

### **A Covenant Among the Parties**

A Covenant of Closure is to be signed by the departing minister, the Clerk of Session, and representative from the COM in which the above principles are agreed upon. This agreement shall be interpreted to the session and the congregation, included in the minutes of the congregational meeting when the pastoral relationship is dissolved, and noted in the minutes of the COM.

## PRESBYTERY OF SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND

### COVENANT OF CLOSURE

The Rev. \_\_\_\_\_,  
the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church, and the Committee  
on Ministry (COM) of the Presbytery of Southern New England, having discussed the  
intent and requirements of the Presbytery's "Policy for Pastors Who Resign, Retire, or  
Complete Temporary Pastorates" enter into the following covenant:

1. I, the Rev. \_\_\_\_\_, agree:
  - a) not to become involved in any leadership or advisory role (public or private)  
in the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church congregation;
  - b) not to intervene, support, or give advice to anyone involved in a  
congregational disagreement or dispute;
  - c) not to officiate in any special events in the lives of former parishioners or of  
the \_\_\_\_\_ congregation, including weddings, funerals, baptisms, worship  
leadership, church anniversary activities, etc., unless expressly invited by  
the Moderator of the Session;
  - d) to refuse requests for pastoral services made by members of the  
congregation;
  - e) to consult with the Moderator of Session prior to visiting the congregation,  
attending \_\_\_\_\_ worship or attending a special event;
  - f) to refrain from giving opinions or directions regarding church business;
  - g) to explain and affirm the above principles to the congregation in writing (by  
letter or \_\_\_\_\_ newsletter) and/or pulpit before departing.

It is understood that this policy does not affect or require termination of friendships  
with individuals in the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian  
Church congregation.

2. The Session of the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian  
Church agrees:

a) to respect the terms of the Covenant agreed upon by the Rev.

\_\_\_\_\_ outlined above; and

b) to interpret the terms of the Covenant to the congregation and to 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.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature, Pastor

Signature, Clerk of Session

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature, COM Representative

Date

Approved by COM - 10/12/16

## **Role of the Committee on Ministry**

The COM shall demonstrate support and guidance to the congregation by providing resources during this transition of pastoral leadership.

A representative from COM shall attend the congregational meeting where the vote is taken to dissolve the pastoral relationship in order to interpret the process and explain the steps that will follow the pastor's departure.

A representative of COM shall meet with the session after the congregational meeting in which the pastoral relationship is dissolved and prior to the pastor's departure to explain the tasks and steps facing the church during the period between pastors. Interpretive and informational material will be provided to the session for distribution to the congregation.

A representative of COM shall meet with the session immediately following the departure of the pastor to:

- 1) recommend a moderator of the session that COM would bring to the presbytery for approval;
- 2) provide a list of approved clergy who might be available to preach and administer the sacraments on a temporary basis;
- 3) discuss with the session the various possibilities for pastoral leadership during the transition, i.e., interim, temporary supply, and provide the recommendation of COM.
- 4) if the choice is to seek an interim, ask the COM representative to provide PIFs of clergy who are available and trained for interim work and/or assist the session in developing an appropriate Ministry Information Form (MIF) and entering it into the Church Leadership Connection (CLC) system;
- 5) provide a link to other resources in the Presbytery that may assist the congregation in long-range planning, the development of a mission study, etc.
- 6) provide the session with a list of candidates suitable and available for consideration as interim pastor or temporary supply.
- 7) assist the session, or a designated Transition Team/Interim Pastor Search Committee, in selecting a person to be recommended to Presbytery to serve during the transition period.

**The COM representative shall advise the session on the timing of the election by the congregation of a Pastor Nominating Committee.**

On a continuing basis, a representative of COM shall provide guidance and support to the elected PNC as it seeks a candidate to present to the congregation to serve as installed pastor. The COM representative shall frequently be present at meetings of the PNC.

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### **A Retiring Pastor's Family**

In the considerations of any pastor's retirement when living in the same geographic area as the church continues, a particular concern arises for the needs of other family members, especially 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 church members. The Presbytery has no direct jurisdiction over the non-clergy members of ministers' 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 and an interim pastor or newly called pastor. It may be wise to consider not worshipping with the former congregation at all during the period of pastoral vacancy, or while an interim pastor is present.

### **Pastor Emeritus/Emerita**

When any pastor or associate pastor retires, and the congregation is moved by affection and gratitude to continue an association in an honorary relationship, it may, at a regularly called congregational meeting as per their by-laws, elect him or her as pastor emeritus, with or without honorarium, but with no pastoral authority or duty. This action shall be taken only after consultation with the COM of the presbytery concerning the wisdom of this relationship for the peace of the church. This action shall be subject to the approval of Presbytery or its designated entity, and may take effect upon the formal dissolution of the pastoral or associate pastoral relationship or anytime thereafter.

We acknowledge there are some double messages to a congregation and a minister 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 a pastoral function. It is expected that the retired pastor will actively discourage former parishioners if they issue invitation for his/her service. The church, in which the retired minister has worked to nurture and sustain, now needs his/her help to establish a healthy nurturing relationship with its new leader(s).

Based on the Policies for Departure from a Congregation for Pastors Who  
Retire, Resign or Complete Temporary Pastorates developed by the Presbytery  
of Cayuga-Syracuse Committee on Ministry  
Approved by Presbytery of Southern New England Committee on Ministry,  
October 12, 2016