

# Presbytery of Coastal Carolina

## Ministerial Guidelines for Leaving a Congregation

### **1. When Should I Announce My Intention To Leave?**

Under normal conditions of leaving a field, four to six weeks is adequate. Two weeks is necessary to call the congregational meeting and three or four weeks then to allow for tying up loose ends and saying goodbye.

Giving notice of more than six weeks can make for an inordinately long period for everyone concerned having to hold onto grief feelings prior to the final termination, not unlike a prolonged period between a death and the funeral or memorial service. However, too short a time between the announcement and the departure is unfair to all affected, but especially to the congregation. The time after a pastor has announced her or his intention to move is a period of extremely important pastoral care: that which is extended by the departing pastor to the congregation and its members, and that which is extended to the departing pastor and family by the congregation.

A minister anticipating a move can find resources to help with the transition by contacting the Presbytery's Resource Center (Kaye Bledsoe - 800-277-7479).

### **2. Whom Should I Tell, When, And In What Order?**

- a. You should promptly notify the General Presbyter of the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina and/or the Chair of the Committee on Ministry of your intention to request the Presbytery to dissolve the relationship.
- b. Share the news with your Session before sharing it with others in the church or the community. Ask the Session to call a congregational meeting to concur with your request for the Presbytery to dissolve the relationship.
- c. You should announce your request of the dissolution officially and personally at a public worship service. Be positive and open in your announcement.
- d. The Book of Order (G-2.09) requires that you notify the Committee on Ministry and/ or the Office of Presbytery in writing of your intention to dissolve the relationship and the congregational action concurring with your request.
- e. Upon advising the Committee on Ministry and the Office of Presbytery of the dissolution and the concurrence by the congregation, the pastor will meet with the assigned liaison from the Committee on Ministry for an exit interview.

- f. The pastor must receive concurrence from the Committee on Ministry before moving from the field.
- g. It is your responsibility to see that your congregation understands that you will no longer be their pastor. You need to make it perfectly clear to them that you are no longer available to preach or perform any pastoral tasks for them.
- h. You should do every thing possible to be supportive of the Presbytery's pastor search process and encourage the congregation to work closely with the Presbytery during their search for a new pastor. The same liaison that conducted the exit interviews is assigned to lead the Pastor Nominating Committee through the process. The Committee on Ministry will also designate another minister as moderator of the Session
- i. It is the joint responsibility of you and the Session to notify the Board of Pensions of the dissolution and to file the proper papers.
- j. The pastor who is leaving, if living in a church manse, needs to make sure the manse and property are left in good condition, with all the dirt, rubbish, etc. removed.
- k. All files and records of the church should be put in order and left intact so that the next pastor may easily find necessary records and equipment.
- l. When you leave a field where you have served, you should affirm the good that has been accomplished. *Do not leave on a negative note.*

### **3. Guidelines For Relating To The Former Congregation From A Different Location**

- a. Even though former pastors and their families may continue to have friendships in the congregation, the former pastors should not perform weddings, conduct funerals or counsel members of the congregation unless asked to do so by the Session and moderator of the Session (G-2.0905).
- b. You should not participate in any way with the function of the Pastor Nominating Committee.
- c. You should make every effort to be supportive of the next pastor. Encourage persons who might make contact with concerns about the current pastor to address them to their current pastor or the Session or the Committee on Ministry. Avoid drawing conclusions about the current pastor or interpreting his/her behavior or words. Encourage openness and opportunities for growth.
- d. Should you and your family return for a visit or for a vacation, make a friendly phone call

to the current pastor prior to the visit/vacation and soon after your arrival.

- e. Any complaint to the COM will receive a first response in the form of a private meeting of the Chair and at least one other member of the COM with the person alleged to have violated the privilege of the pastoral relationships. Should they find the complaints valid, and should the practice continue, the matter may be brought before the entire COM and the accused may be subject to censure according to the Rules of Discipline.

#### **4. Guidelines For Retiring Ministers**

The Guidelines for Retiring Ministers include all the above but there are special considerations addressed in a separate paper (Attachment D).

#### **5. Guidelines For Pastors And Families Who Remain In The Area After Leaving A Pastorate.**

- a. If you choose to remain in or return to the area in which you have served as pastor you need to deal realistically with your own needs for fellowship and church life apart from the former congregation.
- b. You and your family can be most helpful to the next pastor and family in being accepted in their new situation. You and your family can also be the most difficult problem your successor and family must face. Be sensitive to them, encourage them, and help them any way you can, including physically withdrawing yourselves from the congregation for a considerable period of time.
- c. You should refrain from pastoral functions and not accept any positions of leadership in your former church, nor attend meetings of the Session, Deacons, or Trustees, unless invited by the Session and moderator of Session.
- d. You should not officiate at any sacraments, weddings, funerals, or other functions involving members of your former church, or within its properties, unless invited by the Session and moderator of Session (see 3 a. for references).
- e. An invitation to officiate or perform pastoral functions in a former church is an opportunity to demonstrate your support and loyalty to your successor. Offer to assist rather than officiate. Avoid any functions or requests that will isolate or exclude your successor from the people God has called him/her to serve. Your spouse and your family also need to demonstrate their support of the current pastor and family in the manner suggested for former pastors.

- f. You should avoid formal or informal participation in or comment on the work of the Pastor Nominating Committee.
- g. Regarding continued worship in the church where the pastor no longer serves, through retirement or other circumstances, the Committee on Ministry encourages clergy and families to seek alternate worship sites and opportunities, especially during the first few months after the new pastor and family arrive. This will help avoid the inevitable comparisons that can cause so much pain whenever old relationships are severed and new ones are being formed.

These guidelines are intended to serve as a help to pastors and churches as they go through difficult times of adjustment. They are provided as an attempt to avoid having a long and devoted pastoral relationship between a pastor and church become a source of dissension within a congregation and a source of pain for a succeeding pastor and family. The Committee on Ministry is available to counsel pastors, their families and congregations regarding these guidelines as needed in their particular situations. If you have any questions, please contact the Chair of the Committee on Ministry.

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