

Presbytery of Northern New York

Policy for

RELATIONSHIPS OF MINISTERS TO THEIR FORMER CONGREGATIONS

Because potentially difficult situations can arrive involving the relationship of a minister to his/her former congregation, this policy is intended to assist pastors and congregations going through this important, life changing, transition. The tenacity with which the policy guidelines must be followed becomes more paramount the closer the former pastor lives to the church and community from which he/she has retired or resigned.

* Even before an interim pastor is secured, a temporary supply or stated supply is appointed, or a new pastor is called, it is necessary to refrain from any and all pastoral functions in the former parish.

* The Book of Order specifies: "After dissolution of the pastoral relationship, former pastors and associate pastors shall not provide their pastoral services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the moderator of session." (G. 2.0905 Officiate by Invitation Only). The Presbytery of Northern New York expects that, in all cases where possible, the moderator of the session or someone designated by the moderator, following the dissolution of a pastoral relationship, performs funerals, weddings and similar pastoral functions rather than deferring to the former pastor.

* In most rural communities, small towns and cities, a pastor may be seen as pastor to people beyond the formal membership of the church, and carry this identity beyond the formal end of his/her service to the congregation as pastor. Consequently, given the power of that pastoral role, and out of respect for the new boundaries being established, the former pastor shall not perform pastoral functions that will remotely involve anyone who has participated in the life of the former parish for at least three years from the time of dissolution of the pastoral relationship. It is the former pastor's responsibility to inform the funeral directors in the community of this policy.

* After the installation of a new pastor or designation of a temporary supply, the former pastor shall continue to avoid participation in any funerals, weddings, baptisms, etc. of his/her former parish. This practice will be difficult, but if the first invitation is accepted, there will be no reason to refuse other requests. At all times, the former pastor must remain sensitive to the possible tensions that can arise from his/her presence in the former parish.

* The former pastor should respond to requests to provide pastoral service or support with a statement such as, "I am no longer the pastor and for the continuing health of the congregation it is inappropriate for me to perform any pastoral functions." Other words may be said, but they are all window dressing when compared to this truth.

* It is permissible for the former pastor to accept an invitation to preach in the former parish, to assist or substitute for the installed pastor, after the new minister has been present for at least three years, by invitation of the moderator of the session only, according to G-2.0905. If the former pastor is approached first, before the current pastor is consulted, it is most appropriate for the former pastor to respond to the request by saying, "___Name___ is the pastor now. It would be inappropriate for you and I to continue this conversation until you have talked with him/her."

- * If tensions emerge between a new pastor and a former pastor, including the role of the former pastor's spouse, the Commission on Ministry will insist that the former pastor and family worship with another faith community.
- * A pastoral letter regarding these guidelines shall be shared with the congregation, and is best initiated by the pastor whose relationship is being dissolved rather than by the Commission on Ministry or Session.
- * A Commission on Ministry representative shall review these guidelines with the minister whose relationship is being dissolved, and with the Session prior to the election of the Pastoral Nominating Committee.
- * The Commission on Ministry welcomes and encourages consultation with former pastors or sessions should any questions or concerns arise.