

## **PRESBYTERY OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE POLICY CONCERNING FORMER PASTORS**

### **DEFINITION**

A former pastor is one who no longer serves as pastor, associate pastor, or in any temporary pastoral relationship in a congregation due to call to other service, retirement, or involuntary termination.

### **RATIONALE FOR THE POLICY**

When the pastoral relationship between a pastor and a congregation is dissolved, the nature and character of the relationship changes. Both the pastor and the congregation must disengage from the nature and character of the pastoral relationship, in order to engage and establish new relationships. This policy, and the attached paper on how to relate to a former pastor, address issues in this transition.

When a pastor leaves a congregation due to retirement, call to other service, or involuntary termination, there are certain ethical standards that should be followed so the ties between the former pastor and the congregation are severed and new relationships are established between the new pastor and the congregation. When those standards are followed it provides a smooth transition and happy relationship among all parties. Direction for the former pastor comes from the words of John 3:30, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

### **REQUIREMENTS FOR FORMER PASTORS**

When a pastor resigns, retires, or leaves for other reasons, due care should be exercised not to influence, by direction or indirection, by spoken or written word, the selection of any successor or the policies of that successor. After leaving a church, the former pastor shall exercise all care so as to have no further influence upon the congregation either by conversation, correspondence or other action.

During the closure phase of a ministry, the retiring / resigning / leaving pastor should publicly announce that he / she will no longer be available for pastoral services to the members of that church following the stated date of termination. Thereafter, the pastor shall fulfill that announced intention by declining all requests from members of that church to conduct baptisms, weddings, funerals, and other pastoral duties for them and shall encourage the strengthening of ties between the congregation and their present pastor. In special situations a former pastor may be called upon for services upon the invitation of the present pastor and the approval of the session. The former pastor would not ordinarily conduct services but rather would assist the present pastor at his / her direction.

The former pastor will seek a church home in another parish. If he / she remains in the community, that person bears a heavy obligation of self-restraint regarding the business and spiritual well-being of the congregation.

The former pastor shall vacate both the manse and the office by the date of dissolution or by a mutually agreed upon date. At the time of vacating, all keys must be returned to the session or proper church committee. Further, definite plans should be made by the former pastor for the disposition of pastoral counseling notes, personal records, etc. It is strongly recommended that the former pastor change her/his phone number(s).

Former pastors who are elected pastor emeritus are reminded that this is an honorary title only and carries no job responsibilities or privileges unless they are expressly stated by the session and approved by the presbytery.

Former pastors are still under the obligation of the presbytery's policies.

Subject to the needs and desires of the former pastor and his / her family, the presbytery has a responsibility to meet the spiritual and physical needs of this family and to utilize their talents and gifts to the glory of God.

**REQUIREMENTS FOR CHURCH MEMBERS**

When the pastoral relationship between a pastor and a congregation is dissolved by reason of retirement, a call to other service, or any other cause, the pastor's relationship with members of the congregation is altered in ways that must be respected by all persons involved. The relationship that formerly existed between the pastor and members of the congregation is no longer appropriate. Although the pastor continues as a sister / brother in Christ, this pastor is no longer "the pastor."

Efforts on a congregation member's part to continue the past relationship, such as asking the former pastor to perform some usual or customary pastoral services, creates an ethically awkward situation. While the former pastor may wish to honor the request (and certainly would not want to hurt feelings), ministerial etiquette and ethics make it inappropriate to render such services unless invited to do so by the present pastor and the session.

It is inappropriate to ask a former pastor to provide pastoral services for any reason (e.g., weddings, hospital calls, funerals).

It is inappropriate to discuss the congregation, the new pastor, the session, or any other aspect of congregational life with the former pastor. Especially do NOT solicit the former pastor's advice or counsel about any of these matters. However, in her / his best interest and for the health of the church, the former pastor must distance herself / himself from the congregation. Raising issues related to the congregation puts the former pastor in violation of this policy. It is inappropriate to take comments, concerns, or criticisms of the current pastor to a former pastor. This puts the former pastor in violation of this policy.

It is appropriate to pray regularly for both current and former pastors and the congregation.

I / We have read and agreed to abide by these policies.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Pastor/Associate Pastor/Interim Pastor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Clerk of Session

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date