

APPENDIX D

HANDBOOK FOR THE DISSOLUTION OF THE PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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|--|---|
| For Pastors: Are you thinking it might be time to accept a new call? | 2 |
| Guide for Dissolution of the Pastoral Relationship | 3 |
| Guidelines for Clergy Compensation Following Dissolution..... | 5 |
| Certification of Dissolution of a Pastoral or Associate Relationship..... | 7 |
| Ending an Interim Pastor Relationship | 8 |

FOR PASTORS: ARE YOU THINKING IT MIGHT BE TIME TO ACCEPT A NEW CALL?

The decision to look for a new call is never an easy one. Every call is either too long or too short in the minds of the people in the congregation and usually both sides have valid points. In this and most decisions, there is no right approach but there can be many wrong motions along the way. Don't make the decision in haste. Now is the time to talk to your family, if appropriate, and trusted peers. It is also important that you discuss your intentions with the EP of the PGR.

If you decide to circulate your PIF, the EP, the chair of the COM need to know your intent. They may get calls even if you have not listed them as references on your PIF. Any references on your PIF need to be contacted before their name is published. Remember, some may not want to be a reference and others may seek information about certain questions.

If you are looking and don't want your present church to know, don't list any members as references. This will not be a red flag to a church seeking. Make sure all your references understand your church does not know you are looking. Discuss the use of secondary references with your primary references. Some churches will ask for secondary references. You have the right to decline the request.

THOUGHTS ON LEAVING

When to announce you are leaving and when to leave is the most difficult question. When a new call is foreseen (you are scheduled to candidate for a new congregation), much thought needs to be given as to the start date of the new call. All discussions may have been done in strict confidence before the weekend of candidating for the congregation but when the congregation has met you and you have stood for election as their new pastor, the news is now public and may beat you home. Any decision to delay the announcement to your current session and congregation is usually unwise.

When to leave is a more important decision. Although the desire to start a new relationship is strong with the new congregation, don't move during church holidays. This is disruptive for your family and very disruptive for the current church family. The congregation needs leadership during the Christmas and Easter seasons. Trying to say goodbye during these times is almost impossible and will leave bad feelings with the congregation. How long to stay after you have announced you are leaving is also troublesome. A long-term "lame-duck" relationship may not be good for you or the congregation.

SEEK PGR HELP

If at all possible, have someone from COM at the session meeting when you announce to them that you are leaving. This is the time for the presbytery to show support to the local church and start to answer questions from the congregation.

If the present relationship is good, the PGR wishes you the very best in any new call you may enter. If there are difficulties in the present relationship, let the COM give you some support before you start a new call. Now is a time for review and possibly changing your approach to leadership, worship and decision making. Your insights, will also help to identify areas of growth and change for the congregation.

GUIDE FOR DISSOLUTION OF THE PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP

A. The Process.

1. To dissolve a pastoral relationship the pastor notifies the Executive Presbyter (EP) of the Presbytery of Great Rivers (PGR), **and/or** the Committee on Ministry (COM) and then

calls a session meeting to discuss his or her plans. An associate notifies the EP, the COM chair(s) and the pastor who calls the session meeting. The purposes of that meeting are:

- a. To learn from the pastor the specifics of his or her plans for departure.
 - b. To hear from COM **member** about the process of dissolving the pastoral relationship, of starting the search for a new pastor, and of appropriate interim steps.
 - c. To make plans for short-term pulpit supply and to call a congregational meeting to act on the pastor's request for dissolution of the relationship.
 - d. To meet with the COM **member**, COM will appoint a moderator of the session.
 - e. No person desiring to be considered a candidate for that pastorate may serve as moderator of that session.
2. This and subsequent session meetings might best be considered "next steps" meetings. Flexibility, support and assistance from the PGR through the COM and the PGR staff are recommended and available to meet the many variables and unknowns which inevitably occur during this time (BOO G-11.0502 and G-14.0600).
 3. The Book of Order provides (G-14.0630) "Former pastors, and associates may officiate at services for members of a particular church, or at services within its properties, only upon invitation from the moderator of the session or, in the case of the inability to contact the moderator, from the clerk of session."
 4. The church may invite a retiring pastor to become pastor emeritus. This requires prior consultation between the session and the COM, approval at a congregational meeting, and approval by the presbytery (BOO G-14.0620). COM recommends that a written covenant be established between the pastor emeritus and the session regarding the role the pastor emeritus will have in the church, and that this covenant be reviewed after the church has called its new pastor.

B. Congregational Meeting.

1. At the congregational meeting the pastor or associate presents her or his request to dissolve the pastoral relationship and, after appropriate discussion, the question is put to a vote. A majority vote by the congregation is required to dissolve the pastoral relationship. A COM **member** will attend the congregational meeting to show the support of the PGR for the congregation and to explain the next steps in the search process (BOO G-14.0530).
2. Suggested agenda for congregational meeting to dissolve the pastoral relationship:
 - a. The departing pastor moderates the congregational meeting or may appoint another minister of the PGR to do so (G-14.0612). The moderator ensures that the meeting is opened with a convening prayer.

- b. The clerk of session serves as clerk for the meeting, or, if absent, a clerk pro-tem is elected (G-7.0307).
- c. The call of the meeting is read: "The meeting of the congregation of the church has been duly called and announced by the session, to be held on (date) for the purpose of hearing and acting upon the request of the pastor for the dissolution of the pastoral relationship between the Rev. _____ and this congregation."
- d. The clerk determines the presence of a quorum (G-7.0305).
- e. The pastor presents the request for dissolution.
- f. A motion is made that the congregation join with the pastor in requesting the Presbytery of Great Rivers to dissolve the pastoral relationship. The vote is taken.
- g. A motion to set the effective date of the dissolution. The vote is taken. (f and g may be combined in one motion.)
- i. The statement of ethics is read (see Appendix A, Guide for Churches Seeking Pastors, at www.greatriverspby.org).
- j. The next steps in the process are explained.
- k. The meeting is adjourned with prayer.
- l. The certificate of dissolution (contained in this handbook) is filled out. The clerk of the session sends this to the presbytery office within 48 hours of the congregational meeting

C. Exit Interviews.

1. When a pastor or associate resigns or retires, the COM **member** shall arrange for exit interviews with both the pastor and the session.
2. The purpose of the interview with the pastor leaving is to encourage comment on areas of his/her work concerning strengths and needs in ministry within the congregation. This can be helpful to the COM as **it** works with the congregation in search of a new pastor. The purpose of the interview with the session is to begin the debriefing of their experience with the exiting minister. It is an important time to help the session focus on the strengths of that relationship as well as what may not have gone so well. Both interviews can help **COM** become clear about their role in relation to the pastor and the congregation. The interviews also help clarify what has been meaningful in these relationships, as well as helping to bring closure as they prepare to establish effective new relationships.
3. The COM **member** conducting the interview may develop a series of questions to which the session is asked to respond. The comments are for the exclusive use of the COM. A summary will be shared with the session, interim and new called pastors, and a copy will be filed in the church's file in the PGR office.
4. The COM may decide to make recommendations to the session, other members of the PGR, or to units of the presbytery as may be appropriate. However, the pastor's responses will not be shared with the session nor the session's responses with the pastor unless specific permission has been obtained because of the need for confidentiality.

5. Vacancy dues - A fee required by the BOP, should be paid for 12 months after a pastor leaves for any position which is anticipated to be filled. For details, contact the BOP Service Center, 1-800-773-7752. If the church abolishes the position, it must be approved by COM. The stated clerk then will send a letter about the abolishment to the BOP.

GUIDELINES FOR CLERGY COMPENSATION FOLLOWING DISSOLUTION

This is intended to provide guidance only, and is not to be construed or interpreted as minimum or maximum, a requirement, or contract.

- A. Often when a pastor leaves a call, it is at the pastor's request to leave for another call or to retire. When so, a date of dissolution is requested by the pastor and the clergy receives no salary or other compensation past that date. Any unused vacation time should be paid but any unused Continuing Education time is not. The parties may agree to a limited extension to use of the manse.
- B. Sometimes clergy called by congregations to parish ministry are asked to leave. That termination may be involuntary on the part of the clergy or may be a mutual agreement. Whatever the reason, it may be with or without cause. This document is intended to provide guidelines for such clergy, congregations, the COM and others in the PGR dealing with such situations.
- C. The goal of continued compensation to terminated clergy is to provide adequate financial support for the clergy and the clergy's family, while recognizing the burdens such compensation may place on a congregation. These guidelines recognize that obtaining a call generally takes a minimum of several months. Also, these guidelines acknowledge that in most cases where the dissolution is requested by the congregation or PGR, the situation had built up over a period of time and people other than the clergy were involved in causes and effects.
- D. Most churches do not pay unemployment compensation to the state, therefore any terminated employee of the church cannot file for unemployment benefits. Today, most professional people relieved of duties are offered a compensation package in keeping with the position and length of service.
- E. All relevant factors should be considered. No single factor is necessarily more or less important, and some factors may not be relevant in particular circumstances. In addition, other factors not listed here may be relevant or even of overriding importance. The following factors may be considered:
 1. Financial support required for the clergy and the clergy's family, particularly during what may be a period of stress and/or transition.
 2. The health and well being of the congregation from which the clergy is being terminated, including the financial well-being and resources of the congregation.
 3. Legal issues regarding the reasons for the termination, possible claims against or by the clergy and for congregation and/or others, as well as legal (contractual) requirements for continued compensation and/or benefits.
 4. The clergy's prospects for securing other employment, including both church and non-church employment, full and part-time.
- F. In most situations, a minimum of two months of effective salary should be provided if the call has been in effect less than two years. For each additional year, the effective salary should be extended one month for each year of service up to six months. If the call has been in effect for more than six years but less than ten years, it might be optional to extend the salary for an additional month for each year of service at a reduced rate of 75 percent, 66 percent or 50

percent. Rarely is any compensation extended past one year. This extension is terminated when the clergy finds full employment or a call elsewhere. Accrued vacation time or pay may be considered in determination of the termination date. No vacation time or study leave shall accrue during any continuation period. When the clergy has been living in a manse, the cash equivalent housing allowance or substitute housing should be provided. It is usually best if the clergy vacates the manse as soon as practical.

- G. This guideline does not cover continuation of pension/medical benefits. Specific requirements for continuation of benefits are covered in the policies of the Board of Pension and may be mandated by federal or state law. The congregation may pay medical benefits beyond those provided by the Board of Pensions.
- H. Clergy actively seeking a church-related call must have a current PIF in the search process and be accepting face-to-face meetings with churches seeking a pastor. The PGR EP will verify PIF information when called for a reference check.
- I. In appropriate circumstances, other arrangements could be made. Examples:
 - 1. The clergy is participating in career or other counseling.
 - 2. The clergy could be offered a flat continuation of compensation for six months with no provisions for extension.
- J. Provisions may be made for a pro-rata reduction of the continued compensation if the clergy procures part-time employment. In the event that full-time, church-related employment (or other employment desired by the clergy) is obtained during the continuation period, the clergy may be offered a payment equal to one-half of the compensation that would have otherwise been paid to the clergy during the continuation period. This payment is an incentive for clergy to seek employment often and early while potentially saving the congregation the expenses of a full continuation period.
- K. In the event that the reason for termination involves alleged criminal conduct on the part of the clergy, there shall be no obligation for continued compensation. If termination involves court-adjudicated, admitted, or pleaded criminal conduct on the part of the clergy, there shall be no continued compensation. Appropriate provisions for pastoral and financial support of the clergy family may be made.
- L. PGR may wish to recommend or require career or other counseling for the terminated clergy. Every attempt should be made to insure that such counseling is approved by the Presbyterian Church (USA) Board of Pensions (or its medical representative) and by PGR through its COM. PGR may also require that the congregation and/or the session engage in a COM approved conflict management training. This training may occur before the pastor's call ends. Alternately, the training may be required before the session may make a contract with an interim pastor or any other temporary pastor or before the congregation may call a new pastor.
- M. In every case where there is compensation continuation for clergy, an appropriate release of claims against the congregation and PGR should be obtained as a condition of compensation continuation. No commitments for continuing compensation or other support should be made without first obtaining the approval of the PGR through its COM, the session of the congregation and/or other required consents, and no legal documents should be signed without consultation with PGR's legal representative.

CERTIFICATION OF DISSOLUTION OF A PASTORAL OR ASSOCIATE RELATIONSHIP

In fulfillment of the requirements of the Book of Order (G-14.0611), this is to certify that a duly called and constituted meeting of the congregation of the _____ Church of _____ was held on the date of _____ for the purpose of acting upon the request for the dissolution of the pastoral relationship existing between itself and _____.

Effective date: _____

There were _____ members of the congregation present, and the results of the vote, taken by written ballot, were as follows:

_____ In favor of the Dissolution

_____ In opposition to the Dissolution

_____ Abstentions

We, the undersigned, were appointed by the congregation to present and prosecute the action of the congregation before the presbytery:

Name _____

Name _____

Address _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Phone _____

ENDORSEMENTS

Moderator of the meeting _____

Chair, COM _____

PASTOR'S REQUEST FOR DISSOLUTION

I request that the (pastoral/associate) relationship be dissolved effective _____ (Date)

Signature _____

ENDING AN INTERIM PASTOR RELATIONSHIP

- A. All good things come to an end and so must an interim pastor's ministry with a congregation. When the congregation has called a pastor and knows when she/he is arriving, the session should give written notification to the interim pastor according to the contract.
- B. The interim pastor and session should formulate a checklist of duties and things that need to be done before the interim leaves and the new pastor arrives.
- C. A time should be set aside for appropriate good-byes and closure for the interim pastor and the congregation. This can be done during the interim's last worship service with a reception, dinner, or other creative celebration. This is a very important part of the interim period, which prepares the congregation for the next step.
- D. The session shall notify the **COM** of the date of termination. It is appropriate for a commissioner to say a few words of appreciation about the interim pastor at a PGR meeting.
- E. The COM will schedule an exit interview for the interim.
- F. Realize if the relationship was a good one it will hurt when the interim pastor leaves. It also will be hard for the interim pastor to leave. Celebrate this parting together.