## Dissolving a Pastoral Relationship

Whatever the circumstances of the pastor’s departure, she or he, his or her family, other staff persons, and the congregation as a whole benefit in very significant ways from opportunities to say honest and respectful thanks and goodbye.

The pastor’s farewell messages to the congregation should include clear statements of the ethical standards to which she or he adheres. Such messages must include recognition that the pastoral relationship is ending and that, as a former pastor, she or he will no longer perform pastoral services for members of the congregation. (See *Ethics Regarding Former Ministers*)

### Exit Interview with the Pastor

Exit interviews with the departing pastor and session are extremely helpful. These interviews help all parties begin to disengage and begin the process of moving forward into the future. This is true whether the person leaving the congregation is an interim pastor or a long- term installed pastor who is leaving after many years of service. The exit interview helps provide closure for the pastor and provides information that may be helpful to the COM as it works with the congregation during its search.

* Ask the pastor to talk about things she/he feels good about their work with the congregation.
* Ask about barriers to effective ministry. These barriers might be in the congregation, or community, or the pastor.
* Ask about the relationship between the pastor and session.
* Ask about advice they might give to the next pastor.
* Talk about appropriate and inappropriate contact with the congregation after the pastor, associate pastor or other staff person has left. This is important. It is especially important if the pastor is staying in town or moving to a nearby location.

### Exit interview with the Session

The interview with the session helps the congregation begin to disengage from the pastor. The Moderator of session appointed by presbytery should be present for this interview.

* Discuss positive growth in the life of the congregation during the pastor’s time with the congregation.
* Discuss any difficulties there might have been in the relationship between the pastor and session/congregation.
* Discuss ways the session might build a strong relationship with the next pastor.
* Discuss appropriate and inappropriate contact with the congregation after the pastor has left. This is important.

### Session Responsibilities

* Give a brief overview of the call process.
* Begin discussion about maintaining regular worship and congregational life during the transition and search for new pastoral leadership.
* Share that the session is appointing a transition team.