

ETHICS REGARDING FORMER MINISTERS

Few circumstances in their professional lives challenge pastors to exercise more wisdom and judgment than the ones raised when leaving a congregation. Naturally, the most difficult transitions are often those involving congregations in which the pastor has been warmly loved and appreciated. The dynamics of the transition involve the pastor (and family), the congregation, the session and staff, and most significantly, the new pastor or interim pastor who follow.

The 210th General Assembly of the PC(USA) adopted a paper titled, "Life Together in the Community of Faith: Standards of Ethical Conduct for Ordained Officers in the Presbyterian Church (USA)." It says, in part: "I will conduct my ministry so that nothing need be hidden from a governing body or colleagues in ministry. Therefore, I will:

- Participate in the life of a ministry setting I left or from which I have retired only as directed by presbytery.
- Provide pastoral services for a congregation I previously served only as directed by the presbytery and provide pastoral services to members of other congregations only with the consent of their pastors.
- Consult with the Commission on Ministry (COM) in the presbytery of my residence regarding my involvement in any ministry setting during my retirement."

The fundamental assumptions in the Standards of Ethical Conduct and in the Presbytery of Milwaukee Ethical Standards Policy are simply:

- Upon the termination of any pastoral relationship on a date set either by the session or by the presbytery, there should not be further contact between the minister or CRE and the congregation where the relationship existed.
- The burden of responsibility for creating a healthy transition lies primarily with the professional behavior of the pastor who is leaving. The exiting pastor, interim pastor, CRE, must work to educate the session and congregation on the Presbyterian understanding of the transition.
- The exiting pastor who works to make a positive transition also leaves the congregation with a final and selfless example of the love and care of the Good Shepherd for the beloved flock.

In light of these fundamental assumptions, the following guidelines shall apply:

FOR FORMER MINISTERS: A former minister shall never return to a former congregation to perform any pastoral function (wedding, funeral, memorial service, baptism, or even worship service) without the express prior invitation of both the session and pastor, or solely the session when the church is without pastoral leadership, and with the approval of the Presbytery of Milwaukee Commission on Ministry.

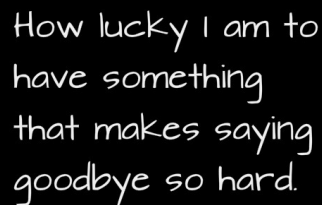
FOR SESSIONS: No former minister shall be permitted to perform any pastoral services (named above) within the facilities of the church without permission being granted and an invitation being issued upon the concurrent invitation and permission of the pastor of that congregation, and the session and with approval of the COM.

FOR CURRENT PASTORS: It is the choice of the pastor, along with the session, to invite and grant permission to any former pastor to return to that congregation to perform any pastoral function. When a pastor determines any predecessor is performing any pastoral service within the

geographical bounds of his or her former congregation without the expressed consent of that pastor and session, then the pastor and/or session should inform the Commission on Ministry.

Role of the Commission on Ministry with Regard to Boundary Issues

- The Commission on Ministry shall be sensitive to violations of pastoral courtesy, particularly when they occur on a frequent basis by the same person.
- When such information is brought to the attention of the COM, it shall take appropriate action, beginning with documented counsel and ending with disciplinary action (for repeated offenses) with its own members.
- If the flagrant offender is a member of another presbytery, then the COM of that presbytery shall be informed of the offense(s) and asked to have that minister cease and desist.
- If the practice continues with or without action of the former minister's presbytery or without his or her complying with that action, the COM may refuse to allow that person to operate within the bounds of the Presbytery of Milwaukee.
- Should failure to achieve compliance by the former minister occur, the COM of the Presbytery of Milwaukee may file a complaint with the governing body having appropriate jurisdiction.
- Representatives of the COM shall review this policy statement with each Teaching Elder who is leaving/retiring from a congregation in the Presbytery of Milwaukee. This information will also be presented to the Session of the congregation and shared with the entire congregation in a pastoral letter regarding these guidelines. An example of a pastoral letter can be found in the Appendix.
- The COM will ensure a [Covenant of Closure](#) agreement is signed by the pastor and the Clerk of Session.



How lucky I am to
have something
that makes saying
goodbye so hard.

-Winnie The Pooh

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