

SEPARATION ETHICS

10 Guidelines For Church Members When a Pastoral Relationship Ends

(Adopted by Committee on Ministry October 7, 1997, slightly revised, May, 2006)

1. When the pastoral relationship between a minister and a congregation is dissolved by reason of retirement, a call to other service, or any other cause, the minister'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 minister as pastor and members of the congregation is no longer appropriate. The minister may continue to be a friend, and will continue to be a sister/brother in Christ. However, this minister is no longer the pastor.
2. Efforts by a member of the congregation 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 separation ethics make it inappropriate to render such services.
3. Effort should be made to schedule weddings, funerals, hospital calls, etc. so the current pastor, whether interim or installed, can provide the required pastoral services. If your church is without any pastoral leadership, the Presbytery can be of assistance in helping secure the services of someone to assist for specific occasions.
4. Although the former pastor is likely still to be interested in the health of the congregation, it is imperative that members avoid discussing the congregation, the new pastor, the Session or any other aspect of congregation life with the former pastor. Such discussions are likely to be perceived as soliciting the former pastor's advice or counsel on church matters. It is in her/his best interest and for the health of the church that the former pastor distance herself/himself from the congregation. Raising issues related to the congregation with the former pastor makes this more difficult and frequently puts her/him in an awkward ethical situation.
5. It is inappropriate to take comments, concerns, or criticisms of the current pastor to a former pastor. Attempts should be made to resolve such issues directly with the current pastor. If that fails, present the issues to the Session or Personnel Committee, if applicable. Should this prove unsatisfactory, further recourse is available through the Presbytery's Committee on Ministry. Any effort to involve a former pastor in any issue between members and the current pastor will only confuse the situation and make matters worse. It will also put the former pastor in an untenable ethical situation.
6. As quickly as possible, re-define relationships with the former pastor. A friendship based on common interests and personal compatibility is entirely appropriate. Such relationships with a former pastor may and should be continued as long as care is taken to avoid slipping into a pastor-parishioner relationship. Continue to be a colleague in ministry with the former pastor through the Presbytery, ecumenical, or community organizations. There may be other aspects of the

relationship with a former pastor that will continue after termination of the pastor-parishioner relationship.

7. If the former pastor is leaving the community, say good-byes and express affection and esteem in appropriate ways before she/he leaves the service of the congregation. This will help avoid continuing the relationship in inappropriate ways after the pastor has left the congregation.
8. Seek out the new pastor for pastoral care and support. During the transition from a former pastor to a new pastor, the task of the members of the congregation is to make the change to new leadership. Anything which aids this adjustment will contribute to the health of the congregation.
9. Work on developing an appropriate relationship with the new pastor. Talk about concerns and expectations for the congregation. Share expectations, hopes and dreams for the pastoral relationship she/he will develop with each member.
10. FINALLY, PRAY REGULARLY FOR BOTH CURRENT AND FORMER PASTORS, AND THE CONGREGATION.