

INTRODUCTION: The ties that bind pastor and people are often deep and profound and may lead to difficulties when the pastor retires or moves to another church, particularly when the former pastor continues to reside relatively close to the place of former service. Certain “unwritten” ethical standards have been established through the years that have governed the relationship between a pastor and his/her successor and the relationship between a pastor and his/her former congregation. When these standards are observed, the relationships can be rewarding and satisfying to all parties concerned. When they are violated, embarrassment and animosity are almost sure to arise, and the peace, purity, and unity of the church may be threatened.

Because of the sensitive nature of these relationships, Foothills Presbytery establishes the following standards to guide pastors and congregations when a pastoral relationship is dissolved. This move from “unwritten” to “written” standards is an effort to bring some uniformity and clarity to a sensitive issue.

THE FORMER PASTOR: When pastoral relationships with congregations are dissolved, pastors shall:

1. Announce publicly that he/she is no longer available for pastoral services (including, but not limited to funerals, weddings, baptisms, pastoral counseling, visitation), except at the invitation of his/her successor or the Session.
2. Refer all requests for pastoral services to the current pastor and/or Clerk of Session.
3. Discourage members of the former congregation from “following” him/her to the next pastorate.
4. Exercise great care to have no further influence on the former congregation.
5. Refuse to criticize the work of his/her successor and refuse to listen to criticisms from members of the former congregation. Instead, the former pastor shall encourage active support of the new pastor.

THE CONGREGATION: When pastoral relationships are dissolved, the congregation is encouraged to:

1. Remember that the former pastor is no longer their pastor, and refrain from calling him/her to perform any pastoral services.
2. Cherish the friendships they had with their pastor, and continue those friendships, but do not confuse friendship with pastoral relationship.
3. Resist comparing the new pastor with his/her predecessor, immediate or otherwise.

THE NEW PASTOR: The new pastor also has role to play in preventing conflict in the presence of the former pastor. The new pastor should:

1. Remember that the ties that bind the members of a congregation to its former pastor(s) have been forged through the unique experience of the pastorate. A congregation that loves its former pastor(s) reveals a capacity to love its new pastor.
2. Refrain from criticizing the former pastor.
3. Be aware that the former pastor has a body of knowledge and “hindsight” that may be useful at times.
4. Consider including the former pastor in significant moments in the life of the church that may provide an occasion for celebrating the past and its connection with the present and future.

RECOMMENDATION FOR USE:

- This policy statement shall be given to every pastor who leaves a pastorate and to every pastor beginning a new pastorate within the bounds of Foothills Presbytery.
- The policy statement shall be sent to the Clerk of Session of a vacant church immediately after the departure of the former pastor.