

DEPARTING MINISTER POLICY
POLICY AND COVENANT REGARDING THE RELATIONSHIP OF DEPARTING MINISTERS TO
THEIR FORMER CONGREGATIONS
Approved by Presbytery November 1, 2016

A. POLICY

The Committee on Pastoral Transition (CPT) recognizes that it is often difficult for pastors and congregations at the time of a pastor's departure. In order to assist both the pastors and the congregations, CPT presents this policy to guide pastors and congregations at this critical time of change.

The intention of this covenant is to ensure a healthy transition from the current pastor to a new pastor. Therefore, the congregation and departing pastor must exercise self-restraint in order to allow time for the congregation to reflect on past ministry, envision future ministries, and allow for a relationship with the new pastor to flourish. How pastors and congregations say "Goodbye" is just as important as how they say "Hello" and "Welcome." Pastors, congregational leaders, and members must model for one another healthy boundaries as our roles and responsibilities change. To effectively and graciously maintain such boundaries requires clarity and positive support of one another.

The purpose of this covenant is to be forthright in our commitment to create space, as needed, for those involved to grieve, reflect, and dream. It affirms agreement with Shenandoah Presbytery's Policy Regarding the Relationship of Ministers to Their Former Congregations.

While friendships with the departing pastor will surely continue, the PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP MUST NOT. This is an important distinction. It marks a boundary that is essential to the wellbeing of the congregation as it moves forward under new pastoral leadership. Hence, such friendships must not impinge on any pastoral services that are the province of the new pastor, e.g. hospital visits, weddings, funerals, baptisms, counseling, or upon any policies or programs of the church under the new pastor's leadership. Participation in these life events allows the new pastor to build his or her bonds of pastoral relationships. **The wisdom and guidance of the Book of Order must be honored.**

After the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, former pastors and associate pastors shall not provide their pastoral services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the moderator of session. (G-2.0905)

Great harm has been done to congregations and new pastors when former pastors continue to be engaged in conversations with church members about the church, to be visible on church premises, or to be present at official church functions either in public settings or private homes. Often, neutral remarks by the former pastor can be interpreted as calling into question the experience or ability of the new pastor. The former pastor's participation in significant life events inhibits the ability of the new pastor to build pastoral bonds with members of the congregation.

B. COVENANT

A COVENANT FOR OUR FUTURE
An Agreement between the Church and the Departing Pastor

- 1. With a posture of grace, understanding, and trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit we all covenant to**
 - a. hold one another in prayer, and
 - b. refrain from all intentional **pastoral** interaction in person or online.

- 2. The Congregation covenants to**
 - a. pray for the well-being of the departing pastor into retirement or a new call;

- b. read this Covenant during a worship service when a ministerial vacancy occurs and also communicate it through the newsletter (if there is one) and through email;
- c. no longer approach the departing pastor or the departing pastor's family regarding issues of pastoral care, congregational life, or future pastoral leadership;
- d. welcome and embrace new pastoral leadership and joyfully engage in a process of discerning God's calling for their future; and
- e. allow those who are feeling a sense of loss to have adequate time to grieve the end of the departing pastor's relationship with the congregation.

3. The Departing Pastor covenants to

- a. pray for the well-being of the congregation as individuals and as the gathered community;
- b. allow time to grieve the end of a pastoral and congregational relationship;
- c. participate in the life of the larger church;
- d. bear the primary responsibility for maintaining healthy boundaries, refraining from and discouraging any interactions regarding issues of pastoral care, congregational life, or future pastoral leadership, and encourage his/her family to do the same;
- e. communicate to the entire congregation, friends of the church, and staff so it is clear that although the departing pastor has valued their friendships, the pastor desires and has covenanted to not be in communication regarding the congregation, its life, any pastoral care, or discussion of future leadership, congregational issues or events. After departing the congregation, no conversations with former members should involve discussion/evaluation of the church, its status, or the new pastor;
- f. refrain from attending worship services or other events of his/her former church until one year after installation of the new pastor, unless there are extenuating circumstances, such as the funeral or wedding of a family member; and
- g. decline pastoral participation in any funerals, baptisms, counseling, weddings, etc., of his/her former church for one year after installation of the new pastor. It is permissible to accept an invitation from the new installed pastor in his/her first year to participate in and/or assist in special events or programs.

Name of Church

Departing Pastor / Date

Secretary of Congregation / Date

Presbytery Staff Member / CPT Representative / Date
