

## ETHICS FOR RETIRING PASTORS AND THOSE REPLACING THEM

### Section I: Responsibilities of the Retiring Pastor

Retirement is a well-earned time of transitioning into new forms of ministry that can be just as rewarding and fulfilling as earlier ones. It does involve change, and that can be as exciting and freeing as the choices available. It does mean letting go of the former but what is yet in store can be a rich time of ministry and personal adjustment to a lessened schedule. Each cycle of ministry brings its own rewards.

With more retiring pastors owning homes within the community of their last pastorate, careful attention must be given to the church's well-being and that of the new pastor called to serve that church. With this concern in mind, the region, in cooperation with the Commission on the Ministry and Ministers Council, sets forth the following as Regional Policy regarding this matter.

1. In keeping with the National Ministers Council Code of Ethics and the policies of the region, upon retirement, a pastor severs all pastoral ties with those previously served. This includes weddings, funerals, pastoral calls and visits, giving advice and counsel, and in any way continuing the previous pastoral relationships. This also involves attending church functions and services until an agreement can be made with the new pastor. Continuing ties of friendship is one thing; pastoral ties is another.
2. If remaining within the community last served, the retiring pastor will not attend the church previously served for a period of at least six months to one year following the retirement. Visits following that period will be at the invitation of the Interim Minister or the new pastor. Participation in weddings and funerals should be by invitation of the Interim Minister or new pastor. Persons not associated with the church should be encouraged to form a relationship with the church and its Interim Minister or new pastor.
3. Once the new pastor is in place, the relationship between the new pastor and the former pastor with the church she/he formerly served can be worked out. If a satisfactory and workable agreement cannot be reached between them, they may wish to consult with the Area Minister or Executive Minister.
4. When a former pastor is named Pastor Emeritus, it needs to be understood by the former pastor and the congregation that this is an honorary title and does not include any pastoral duties or responsibilities. The retiring pastor should support and guard well the role of the new pastor.
5. It is unethical for a pastor to succeed her or himself as Interim Minister of the church immediately served. Upon retirement, the pastor will sever all pastoral ties with the former congregation. This allows for the church to call an Interim Minister to serve as a bridge between the former pastor and the calling of a new one, and to assist the congregation in its grieving process.

6. This policy of not succeeding oneself by becoming the Interim Minister has been established by the Commission on the Ministry of our region. A violation of this policy is a breach of ministerial ethics and may be subject to disciplinary action of the Commission on the Ministry.
7. Whenever a pastor is to remain within the community of a church just served, their relationship to that church, its Interim Minister, and its newly called pastor shall be evaluated with the well-being of that church in mind. What evolves as a working relationship must give first priority to the needs of the church. Individuals' needs are important but must not take priority. The relationship of former pastor, Interim Minister and new pastor must reflect the needs of the church.

## **Section II: The Responsibilities of the New Pastor**

1. In being called to a church where the former pastor is still a part of the community, the new pastor should plan an early visit in order to get acquainted and to establish the parameters of the new relationship. An invitation may be extended to the retiring pastor to share in funerals and weddings as deemed appropriate. That person's attendance and participation in the church's life should be worked out with the new pastor.

Either should seek the counsel of the Area Minister or Executive Minister if feeling uncomfortable with the working arrangement or if the former pastor is continuing in a pastoral role.

2. Invite back the former pastor on special occasions and affirm what took place in this church's history prior to your arrival. Celebrate together the on-going ministry of the congregation.
3. Your ministry in the church builds on all that has occurred with your immediate predecessor and others. Their service and sacrifice are all part of what has brought the church to the present moment. This history needs to be affirmed from time to time, and wisdom calls for making these affirmations.
4. In a new start up, there will always be transitional times during which crises may occur in which the most effective ministry may be rendered by the previous pastor. This can help cement your ties with families within the church by including the previous pastor, as needed.
5. There will not always be a good mix of the former and the new. This needs to be recognized from the start. If a good working relationship cannot be established, it is the responsibility of the former pastor to worship and attend elsewhere. Friendships and other ties should be maintained apart from any church activities.

### **Section III: The Mediation Process**

1. Questions about how Professional Church Leaders should relate in such situations should be resolved at the professional level rather than to involve any lay leadership. Most lay leaders are not equipped to resolve these issues. Professional ethics should be upheld and maintained.
2. If a former pastor, Interim Minister, or new pastor feels they have been mistreated, undermined or misunderstood, they should seek the consultation of the Area Minister or Executive Minister. Any significant breach of ministerial ethics should be addressed to the Commission on the Ministry for review and resolution.
3. Any infractions of these policies should be referred to the Area Minister or Executive Minister. Any special arrangements such as inviting the former pastor to become a part of the church's staff should be shared [in advance] with the Area Minister or Executive Minister for counsel and affirmation.

### **Section IV: Conclusion**

The retiring pastor needs to help prepare the congregation for the transition and to inform them what to expect once the transition has been made. The Area Minister or Executive Minister should be invited to share with the church's leadership, and then with the entire congregation, what to expect with the retirement of their former pastor and what the parameters will be of any continuing relating with that person. When people have not been informed, or their concerns heard, they often put demands on the former pastor without knowing the ethical boundaries for the well-being of the total congregation. Good knowledge can assist everyone in maintaining friendship ties while carefully severing pastoral ones. It also allows for mourning the loss while celebrating what has been meaningful in the past.

The Professional Church Leaders involved hold the keys that will influence how the people make the transition from the former to the new while maintaining community ties with the former. For some, this will be a very difficult transition. For a few, it will be impossible; they will feel abandoned and betrayed. Most will take it in stride, mourning their losses and moving on into the new. For everyone, it needs to be a time of trusting the Lord.

Pastors who have difficulty transitioning into retirement while remaining in the community should be encouraged to seek counsel and help, beginning with their Area Minister or Executive Minister or a trusted colleague in ministry. Occasionally the pastor who states, "I will not be a problem in this area - you can count on it," may be in denial and in time proves to be the problem they did not want to be. In all cases, what must be kept uppermost in mind is the well-being of the local congregation.

For References:

- National Ministers Council Code of Ethics
- Regional Policies Regarding the Pastor Emeritus
- Regional Policies for Interim Ministers
- Regional Guidelines for Churches and Interim Ministers
- Policies of the ABCW Commission on the Ministry

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