

~~Committee on Ministry~~: Presbytery of Geneva

Promoting Healthy Boundaries Between a Departing Pastor and a Congregation

(Approved by COM June 5, 2018; September 25, 2018; Amended [date])

G-2.0905 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 the session. *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II Book of Order*

In the Presbytery of Geneva, the provisions of this policy shall apply to all pastoral relationships – installed, temporary (covenanted) and Commissioned Ruling Elders who have been commissioned to a particular congregation.

The Book of Order requirement provides a base line for promoting healthy boundaries between departing pastors and congregations. Such boundaries exist to help both pastor and congregation recognize that there has been a significant change in the relationship. Upon dissolution **or other termination**, the role is no longer that of pastor, though friendships may remain. It is important for both a former pastor and congregation members to maintain healthy boundaries and to distinguish between friendly relationships and pastoral relationships.

Because this Book of Order requirement is sometimes misinterpreted, it is important to emphasize that any invitation to provide pastoral services must come from the moderator of the session, not from members of the congregation nor even the session itself. Therefore, it is assumed that the former pastor will always politely decline invitations from congregation members to perform any kind of pastoral services including preaching, weddings, baptisms, funerals, hospital visitation, etc. The moderator of the session has the right and responsibility to determine when it is appropriate for the former pastor to participate in a pastoral role. There is no time limit on this restriction.

The Committee on Ministry has the responsibility to insure healthy transitions for pastoral leaders and for the congregations they have served. Navigating the relationship between a former pastor and a congregation is challenging depending on the length of tenure, the circumstances of the dissolution **or other termination**, and the duration of the interim period between pastoral leadership. This is especially problematic when the pastor is remaining in the community where the church is located. Because people and circumstances are unique to each situation, the exact nature of the boundaries between the pastor and the congregation may indeed vary.

The Committee on Ministry needs to be aware of these unique dynamics of the situation in order to offer guidance, and, if necessary, to set forth specific requirements or restrictions. In other words, there is no one standard that can be applied to every situation.

Therefore, prior to the dissolution **or termination** of any pastoral relationship, a team of Committee on Ministry representatives shall meet with the Pastor and Session to clarify the Book of Order requirement and to discuss other necessary boundaries for that situation. Ongoing communication with the Committee on Ministry will be important during the transitional period.

In most cases, the departing pastor will be asked to refrain from attending any activities at the church, including worship, for a minimum of one year in order to enable the congregation to adjust to the change in leadership. Departed pastors who have retired or have not received another call to a congregation are encouraged to seek worship and fellowship in another congregation.

To prevent misunderstanding and to assist with interpreting healthy boundaries to congregation members, a written agreement will be signed by the Clerk of Session and the departing pastor, and approved by the Committee on Ministry. This covenant will be shared with the congregation prior to the last day of service. The Book of Occasional Services offers an excellent Service of Dissolution of a Pastoral Call which can take place as part of worship on the pastor's last Sunday of service.

Agreement Between Congregation and Departing Pastor: [Note: these terms may be incorporated into an Agreement of Dissolution or other termination agreement, or be executed separately.]

The Committee on Ministry has the responsibility to insure healthy transitions for pastoral leaders and for the congregations they have served. It is important for both a former pastor and congregation members to maintain healthy boundaries and to distinguish between friendly relationships and pastoral relationships.

Therefore, the Session of __ (church) __ and (pastor's name) ("the Pastor") understand that the following boundaries go into effect when _____ the Pastor is no longer called to serve the congregation.

In compliance with the requirement stated in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Order G-2.0905:
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 the session,

_____ the Pastor will no longer provide pastoral services to the congregation, corporately or individually, without the expressed invitation of the moderator of session assigned by the Committee on Ministry. Therefore, _____ the Pastor will always politely decline invitations from congregation members to perform any kind of pastoral services including preaching, weddings, baptisms, funerals, hospital visitation, etc. All requests for pastoral services should be directed to _____ (role).

In addition, _____ the Pastor will refrain from attending any activities at the church, including worship, for a period of _____.

While letting go of the pastoral relationship and role is a challenging aspect of transition, we understand that there is important wisdom and faithfulness in honoring this agreement.

Clerk of Session _____ Date of Session approval _____

Pastor _____

Committee on Ministry date of approval _____