

**PASTORS DISSOLVING THEIR
CALL**

**Policy for Departure from a Congregation and Covenant of Closure
Commission on Ministry – Presbytery of Chicago**

Preamble

The life of every congregation is punctuated by the coming and going of pastors; and the professional life of most pastors is punctuated by several changes in positions. For both the congregation and the pastor, it is important for these transitions to take place in as healthy a way as possible. All too often attempts are made to draw a former pastor into disputes or disagreements with an interim or with the next installed pastor. The system (or family) of the congregation often tries to place a former pastor between them and new leadership. Such triangulation only serves to intensify (and sometimes mystify) the conflict. It is important that former clergy do not become involved in any way, if or when problems arise in a former parish.

A. Exit Interview

It shall be the policy and procedure of the Presbytery of Chicago through its Commission on Ministry to conduct an exit interview with all pastors who have announced their resignation in order to accept a new call. This interview shall take place as soon as possible after the resignation is presented and before the last day of service.

The content of such an interview shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Appraisal and appreciation for service given to the congregation or agency and the Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly.
2. An appraisal of the congregation's strengths and weaknesses and opportunities for growth.
3. Plans for recognizing the conclusion of the call in the context of worship as well as a farewell celebration.
4. Explanation and clarification of the principles guiding the relationship between the former pastor and the former congregation. The following principles have been established to safeguard the vitality of the congregation and to facilitate sound transitions and the development of a healthy relationship with a new pastor:
 - a. the former pastor shall not worship with his/her former congregation during the pastoral vacancy or while the congregation is served by an interim pastor;
 - b. the former pastor shall not involve himself/herself in any leadership or advisory role (public or private) in the former congregation;
 - c. the former pastor shall not intervene, support or give advice to anyone involved in a congregational disagreement or dispute;
 - d. the former pastor shall not officiate in any special events in the lives of former parishioners or of the congregation, including weddings, funerals, baptisms, worship leadership, congregation anniversary activities, etc., unless expressly invited by the Moderator of the Session;
 - e. requests for pastoral services from former parishioners must be refused, and the pastor, interim pastor or moderator the congregation should be informed of the request;
 - f. it is not expected that friendships with individuals in the former congregation will be terminated. It is expected that former pastors will refrain from giving

opinions or directions regarding congregation business that could undermine the transitions necessary for the congregation and the development of the relationship between the congregation and a new pastor (or interim pastor);

- g. If a former pastor wishes to visit a congregation by attending worship or a special event, the Moderator of that Session shall always be consulted;
- h. Whether or not the former pastor continues to serve in Chicago Presbytery, it can be difficult to abide by these principles. The former pastor shall exercise diligence to abide by the covenant of closure which has been signed.

B. A Covenant Among the Parties

A covenant of closure is to be signed by the departing pastor, the Clerk of Session, and a representative from the Commission on Ministry in which the above principles are agreed upon. This agreement shall be interpreted to the Session and the congregation, included in the minutes of the congregational meeting when the pastoral relationship is dissolved, and noted in the minutes of the Committee on Ministry.

C. Role of the Commission on Ministry

The Commission on Ministry shall demonstrate support and guidance to the congregation by providing resources during this transition of pastoral leadership. A representative of COM shall meet with the session prior to the pastor's departure to explain the tasks and steps facing the congregation during the period between pastors. Interpretive and informational materials will be provided to the session for distribution to the congregation.

A representative of COM shall attend the congregational meeting where the vote is taken to dissolve the pastoral relationship in order to interpret the process and explain the steps that will follow the pastor's departure.

The COM shall have an exit interview with the session shortly after the pastor leaves the congregation to discuss where the congregation has been, where it is today, and ways of looking to the future.

C. The Minister's Family

In the considerations of the dissolution of a pastor's call, a particular concern arises for the needs of other family members, especially the pastor's spouse. Quite often family members have joined the congregation their spouse/parent has been serving, have become very involved in congregational programs, invested great interest and energy in the congregation's life, and established deep personal relationships with other congregation members. Chicago Presbytery has no direct jurisdiction over the non-clergy members of ministers' families, but the presbytery urges the spouse, in the context of those relationships, not to do anything that would undermine the transition necessary for the congregation and the development of the relationship between the congregation and an interim pastor or newly installed pastor.

As it is appropriate, the pastor's family will be included in Commission on Ministry discussions concerning their continuing participation in the life of the congregation. It is expected that family members will not worship with the former congregation at all during the period of pastoral vacancy or while an interim pastor is present.

**CONTINUING ROLE OF THE COMMISSION ON MINISTRY FOLLOWING DEPARTURE
OF THE PASTOR TO ACCEPT ANOTHER CALL**

First and foremost, the congregation shall be held in prayer as it proceeds through pastoral transition.

A representative of COM shall meet with the session immediately following the departure of the pastor to:

1. recommend a moderator of the session that COM would bring to the presbytery for approval;
2. provide a list of approved teaching elders who might be available to preach and administer the sacraments on a temporary basis;
3. discuss with the session the alternate possibilities for pastoral leadership during the transition, i.e., interim pastor vs. stated supply, and provide the recommendation of the Commission on Ministry;
4. if the choice is to seek an interim, ask the Associate Executive Presbyter for Ministry to provide PIFs of teaching elders who are available and trained for interim work and/or assist the session in developing an appropriate Church Information Form (CIF) to be entered into the Church Leadership Connection (CLC) system on the PCUSA website. If a stated supply will be appointed by the presbytery, the AEP for Ministry will also have PIFs for consideration by the session;
5. provide a link to other resources in the presbytery that may assist the congregation in long-range planning, the development of a mission study, etc.;
6. assist the session, or a designated Interim Pastor Search Committee, in selecting a person to be recommended to presbytery to serve during the interim period.

The COM representative shall advise the session on the timing of the election by the congregation of a Pastor Nominating Committee.

On a continuing basis, a representative of COM shall provide guidance and support to the elected PNC as it seeks a candidate to present to the congregation to serve as installed pastor.

**COVENANT OF CLOSURE
PRESBYTERY OF CHICAGO**

Pastor _____, the _____ Presbyterian Church, and the Commission on Ministry of the Presbytery of Chicago, having discussed the intent and requirements of the Presbytery's "**Pastors Dissolving Their Call**," enter into the following covenant:

1. I, _____ agree:
 - a) not to become involved in any leadership or advisory role (public or private) in the _____ Presbyterian Church congregation; and
 - b) not to intervene, support, or give advice to anyone involved in a congregational disagreement or dispute;
 - c) not to officiate in any special events in the lives of former parishioners or of the congregation, including weddings, funerals, baptisms, worship leadership, congregation anniversary activities, etc., unless expressly invited by the Moderator of the Session;
 - d) to refuse requests for pastoral services made by members of the congregation and inform the moderator of the session of the request that was made;
 - e) to consult with the Moderator of Session prior to visiting the congregation, attending worship or attending a special event;
 - f) to refrain from giving opinions or directions regarding congregation business;
 - g) to explain and affirm the above principles to the congregation in writing (by letter or newsletter) and/or the pulpit before departing.

It is understood that this policy does not affect or require termination of friendships with individuals in the _____ Presbyterian Church congregation.

2. The Session of the _____ Presbyterian Church agrees:
 - a) to respect the terms of the Covenant agreed upon by _____ outlined above; and
 - b) to interpret the terms of the Covenant to the congregation at the time of dissolution and incorporate this agreement in the minutes of the congregational meeting when the pastoral relationship is dissolved; and
 - c) to incorporate this agreement in the Session Minutes.

Signature, Pastor

Signature, Clerk of Session

Signature, Commission on Ministry Representative