

**PASTORS WHO RETIRE**  
**Policy for Departure from a Congregation and Covenant of Closure**  
Commission on Ministry - Presbytery of Chicago

**Preamble**

A 1990 study by the Board of Pensions indicates the average male member of the Pension and Benefit Plan of the Presbyterian Church (USA) lives eighty and one-half years and the average female member lives to be eighty-four. Retirement, which has been viewed by some as a time of disengagement from professional service, needs to be considered a positive, creative time of life in which increased free time enables retirees to do things that have not been possible before.

The call to ministry is life-long and does not end when a pastor retires. It is, therefore, an important stewardship concern that the Church not only provides support and nurture to its retired teaching elders, but facilitates the creative use of their experience and talents. Teaching elders will find many different ways to fulfill their calls during the retirement years, including supply preaching, parish associate relationships, interim positions, teaching, and volunteering in church and community.

The Presbytery, through its Commission on Ministry, shall maintain an active relationship with retired teaching elders, to ascertain through regular contact any problems that may need assistance and to discover ways to respond to retiree concerns. It shall, as part of its efforts and, in cooperation with the Board of Pensions, offer regular retirement planning seminars in which not only the financial issues related to retirement are addressed, but also include the spiritual, social, and vocational concerns of retirees.

The Commission on Ministry, shall continue to relate to retired pastors, and offer to each its collective creative imaginations to discover ways accumulated talents and skills may continue to be used, and to encourage the development of new skills in retirement.

In retirement, some teaching elders continue to reside in the community where their last congregation is located. It is important to clarify, both in advance of the retirement and as circumstances dictate afterward, the changes in relationships that retirement will require.

**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 teaching elders who have announced their impending retirement. This interview shall take place as soon as the retirement date is available. The teaching elder's spouse may be included with the agreement of all parties involved.

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. plans for recognizing the conclusion of this last call in the context of worship, as well as a farewell celebration;
3. opportunities for further service in the presbytery (interim work, pulpit supply, additional committee work, etc.) or in the community;
4. an appraisal of the congregation's strengths and weaknesses and opportunities for growth;
5. explanation and clarification of the principles that guide the relationship between the retired pastor and the former congregation and have been established to safeguard the vitality of the congregation and facilitate sound transitions and development of a healthy relationship with the newly installed pastor.

- (a) The retired 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 retired pastor shall not be involved in any leadership or advisory role (public or private) in the former congregation.
- (c) The retired pastor shall not intervene, support or give advice to anyone involved in a congregational disagreement or dispute.
- (d) The retired pastor shall not officiate in any special events in the lives of former parishioners or of the congregation, including weddings, funerals, baptisms, worship leadership, congregational anniversary activities, etc., unless expressly invited by the Moderator of the Session.
- (e) Requests for pastoral services by former parishioners shall be refused and such requests shall be referred to the moderator of the session.
- (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 (or interim) pastor.
- (g) If a retired pastor wishes to visit her/his former congregation by attending worship or a special event, the moderator of that session shall always be consulted.
- (h) The retired pastor shall explain and affirm the above principles to the congregation in writing (letter or newsletter) and/or from the pulpit before leaving the congregation.

The Commission on Ministry shall hold an exit interview with the session shortly after the retired pastor leaves the congregation to review the congregation's history, its present mission and program, and ways of looking to the future.

### **B. A Covenant Among the Parties**

A covenant of closure is to be signed by the retiring 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, and be included in the minutes of the congregational meeting when the pastoral relationship is dissolved. It shall also be noted in the minutes of the Commission 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 retirement 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 Commission on Ministry shall demonstrate support and care of the retiring pastor by maintaining contact, offering opportunities for continuing service through the presbytery, encouraging the supportive fellowship with other retired clergy and informing the retiring pastor

of appropriate seminars and agencies that might assist in making a successful transition to retired life.

If the retired pastor remains in the community, the newly installed pastor shall determine if and when to request the services of the retired pastor.

### **C. The Pastor's Family**

In the considerations of any pastor's retirement, 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 was 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 members of pastors' families who are not teaching elders, 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 retired pastor's family will be included in retirement planning, workshops and seminars, as well as 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 is present.

### **D. Pastor Emeritus/Emerita**

We acknowledge there are some double messages to a congregation and a pastor when the congregation and presbytery name that person pastor emeritus/emera and then the presbytery asks the pastor emeritus/emera not to be involved in pastoral functions. It is expected that the retired pastor will actively discourage former parishioners if they issue invitations for his/her service. The congregation in which the retired pastor has worked so long and hard to nurture and sustain now needs his/her help to establish a healthy nurturing relationship with its new pastor(s).

**CONTINUING ROLE OF THE COMMISSION ON MINISTRY  
FOLLOWING RETIREMENT OF THE PASTOR**

***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, e.g., interim pastor vs. stated supply, and provide the recommendation of COM;
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) and entering it into the Church Leadership Connection (CLC) system of the PCUSA. If a stated supply or temporary supply will be appointed by 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 the COM shall provide guidance and support to the elected Pastor Nominating Committee as it seeks a candidate 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 Who Retire" 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, congregational 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;
  - 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 and to 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 and the congregational minutes when the call of the pastor is dissolved.

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Signature, Pastor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature, Clerk of Session

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Signature, Commission on Ministry Representative