

# Covenant of Closure – Ministers Accepting a New Call

## Policy for the Dissolution of Pastoral Relationships

### Commission on Ministry - Presbytery of Chicago

*Approved by the Presbytery Assembly on December 11, 2007*

*Updated and Amended November 5, 2022*

***“An installed pastoral relationship may be dissolved only by the presbytery.”***

- Book of Order, G-2.0901

### **Preamble**

The life of every congregation is punctuated by the coming and going of installed pastors and associate pastors; and the professional life of most ministers is punctuated by several changes in pastoral relationships with congregations. For both the congregation and the minister, 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 or associate into disputes or disagreements with an interim pastor 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 ministers do not become involved in any way, if or when problems arise in a former parish.

The policy shall be followed with any minister serving in an installed pastoral relationship with a congregation; the spirit of this policy shall be followed with any minister serving in a temporary pastoral relationship with a congregation.

### **A. Exit Interview**

In order to foster healthy pastoral transitions, the Presbytery of Chicago through its Commission on Ministry shall conduct an exit interview with all ministers who desire to dissolve their pastoral relationship with a congregation, in order to accept a new call, or to retire, or for any other reason. This interview shall take place as soon as possible after the Session has taken action to call a Special Congregation Meeting to act on the pastor's request for a dissolution of call. This request for dissolution must be approved by the Congregation as well as Chicago Presbytery, through the Commission on Ministry (*see G-2.0901*).

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, 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 / associate pastor and the former congregation. These 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. The guiding principles are as follows:
  - a. The former pastor shall not worship on a regular basis with his/her former congregation, and shall abstain from worship with that 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 parishioners or of the former congregation, including weddings, funerals, baptisms, worship leadership, church anniversary activities, etc., unless expressly invited by the Moderator of the Session.
- e. Any requests for pastoral services from former parishioners must be gently refused, and the former pastor, interim pastor or Moderator the Session 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 church business that could undermine the transitions necessary for the church and the development of the relationship between the congregation and a new pastor (or interim pastor).
- g. If a former pastor plans to visit a congregation by attending worship or a special event, the Moderator of that Session should always be consulted.
- h. If the pastor receives a new call in the same presbytery, it can possibly be difficult to abide by these principles. The former pastor must exercise diligence to abide by the covenant of closure which has been signed.

The COM shall also arrange for an exit interview with the Session shortly after the pastor leaves service with the congregation in order to discuss where the congregation has been, where it is today, and ways of looking to the future.

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

A covenant of closure is to be signed by the departing minister, the Clerk of Session, and a representative from the Commission on Ministry, noting agreement with the above listed guiding principles. 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, published in any church newsletter, and 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 from 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.

A representative of COM shall meet with the session after the congregational meeting in which the pastoral relationship is dissolved and prior to the pastor's departure to explain the tasks and steps facing the church during the period between pastors. Interpretive and informational material will be provided to the session for distribution to the congregation.

## Covenant of Closure - Presbytery of Chicago

The Rev. \_\_\_\_\_,

the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church of \_\_\_\_\_,  
and the Commission on Ministry of the Presbytery of Chicago, having discussed the intent and requirements of the Presbytery's Covenant of Closure / Policy for the Dissolution of Pastoral Relationships, enter into the following covenant:

I, the Rev. \_\_\_\_\_ agree:

- a. To fully support the future pastoral leadership of this congregation;
- b. To refrain from involvement in any leadership or advisory role (public or private) in the former congregation;
- c. To not to intervene, support, or give advice to anyone involved in a congregational disagreement or dispute;
- d. To gently refuse requests to officiate in any special events in the lives of former parishioners or of the congregation, including weddings, funerals, baptisms, worship leadership, church anniversary activities, etc. unless expressly invited by the Moderator of the Session;
- e. To gently refuse requests for pastoral care services made by members of the congregation;
- f. To consult with the Moderator of Session prior to visiting the congregation, attending worship, or attending a special event;
- g. To refrain from giving opinions or directions regarding church business;
- h. To explain and affirm the above principles to the congregation in writing (by letter or newsletter or email), and/or from the pulpit before departing.

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

The Session of the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church agrees:

- a. To respect the terms of the Covenant agreed upon by their former pastor or associate pastor as outlined above;
- 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;
- c. To incorporate this agreement in the Minutes of a Session Meeting.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature, Pastor

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature, COM Representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date