



## PHASE 1 – DISSOLUTION OF THE PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP

**To accomplish the dissolution of a pastoral relationship, the departing pastor and the session follow these steps in approximately this sequence:**

- The pastor notifies the session, the General Presbyter (GP), and the COM Chair about a new call, retirement, or other change in status. The COM appoints a Liaison. (In the case of retirement, the pastor will have consulted with the GP well in advance.)

**A partnership now begins between the Church and the Presbytery of Baltimore through its Committee on Ministry; this partnership is an expression of the connectional nature of the PCUSA.**

- The Clerk invites the GP and COM Liaison to meet with the pastor and session.
  - The pastor requests dissolution and may then be excused (depending on circumstances).
  - If the pastor is excused, either the GP or COM Liaison may moderate the remainder of the meeting.
  - The GP or COM Liaison gives the Clerk a copy of this document and talks with the session about next steps.
  - “Norms for a Healthy Transition” (**Appendix 1-1**) is shared with session. Each session member should receive a copy.
  - The GP or COM liaison explains Board of Pensions Vacancy Dues. (**Appendix 1-2**)
  - The session sets the date for a Congregational Meeting.
- The COM appoints a Moderator for the Congregational Meeting, if needed, and for future session and congregational meetings that may occur after the pastor has departed but before an Interim has arrived.
- The pastor sends a letter to the congregation notifying them of the pending dissolution. This provides an opportunity to explain what his/her relationship with the congregation will be after he/she leaves, and he/she may choose to enclose “Norms for a Healthy Transition”, found in **Appendix 1-1**.
- The session calls a Congregational Meeting, the purpose of which will be (1) to approve the pastor’s request and (2) to request the Presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship (*Book of Order* G-1.0502 and G-2.0902). The COM Liaison is invited to this Congregational Meeting.

**Who needs this? Session, Departing Pastor**

- The pastor and the session (or its Personnel Committee) negotiate the terms of dissolution to be approved by the congregation. If the pastor is leaving to go to another call or is retiring, terms of dissolution usually involve only how the pastor is to be compensated for unused vacation time. Unused study leave, sick leave, or sabbatical leave is not compensated. If the dissolution is due to circumstances other than the pastor’s retirement or new call, then the pastor and the session should consult the Presbytery’s policy, “*Dissolution of Pastoral Relationship*”, available on the Presbytery web site.
- Congregational Meeting (See sample agenda in **Appendix 1-3**):
  - The Moderator appointed by the pastor or COM moderates the meeting.
  - The pastor requests dissolution and may then be excused.
  - The Congregation approves the request and any terms of dissolution<sup>1</sup> and votes to request the Presbytery to dissolve the relationship.
  - The COM Liaison explains next steps to the congregation, answers questions, and discusses policy regarding former pastors, referring to *Book of Order* G-2.0905.
  - [Optional] The pastor, Clerk, and COM Liaison sign “Policy Regarding Former Pastors/A General Statement of Underlying Principles” (**Appendix 1-5**).
- The Clerk publishes in both the Sunday bulletin and newsletter the signed “Policy Regarding Former Pastors” (**Appendix 1-5**), if this is being used, and the excerpt from *Book of Order* [G-2.0905]. It may be useful to provide the list of expectations found in the Presbytery’s *Ministerial Ethics Guidelines* (**Appendix 1-4**).
- The Presbytery, or the Committee on Ministry on behalf of the Presbytery, will act to dissolve the pastoral relationship after the Congregational Meeting.
- Congregation and pastor develop a service of worship (or a portion of the regular worship service) that celebrates the ministry of the pastor (**Appendix 1-6**).
- COM Liaison arranges an exit interview between the pastor and the COM area team. The pastor should bring with him/her an “Exit Interview Report” (**Appendix 1-7**). The policies regarding former pastors (as in **Appendix 1-4** or **Appendix 1-5**) may be reviewed once more, if there is any expectation that there may be a problem.
- The Clerk or worship committee chair may request from the Presbytery a current list of Pulpit Supply Preachers. (Call 410-433-2012 or find it on the Presbytery website. Choose Ministry Relations on the left, then Forms & Policies. The Pulpit Supply List is available using the “Pulpit Supply” button.)
- The session may appoint an Interim Pastor Search Committee once the date of the pastor’s departure is announced. At the very latest, the session should appoint this Committee within the first month after the pastor’s departure.

**Appendix 1-1**  
**Norms for a Healthy Transition - When a Pastor Leaves**

When a pastoral position with a congregation is dissolved due to retirement or a call to other service, there are often bonds of affection between the minister and members of the church that continue to be cherished. Relations of friendship continue, but the pastoral relationship does not. In order to avoid potentially difficult situations which may arise involving the relationship of a minister to her/his former congregation; to encourage the new pastoral relationship that will be established; and to assist pastors, sessions, and congregations in making smooth and healthy transitions, the Presbytery of Baltimore follows these guidelines:

The Pastor's Responsibility: During the closure phase of a ministry, the pastor should publicly announce that he or she will no longer be available for pastoral services to the members of that church following the stated date of termination. The excerpt from the *Ministerial Ethics Guidelines (Appendix 1-4)* or the "Policy Regarding Former Pastors..." (**Appendix I-6**) may be shared with the congregation before his or her departure. Thereafter, the pastor shall fulfill that intention by declining all requests from members of that church to conduct baptisms, weddings, funerals, and other pastoral duties for them and shall encourage the strengthening of ties between that congregation and their present pastor. In special situations, a former pastor may be called upon for services upon the invitation of the present pastor and the approval of the session. The former pastor would not ordinarily conduct services but would assist the present pastor at his/her direction. This is in accordance with the *Book of Order*, which states:

"Former pastors, associate pastors, and ministers who do not have a pastoral relationship with the particular church as defined in this chapter may officiate at services for members of the church, or at services within its properties, **only upon invitation from the moderator of the session or, in case of inability to contact the moderator, from the clerk of session.**" (G-2.0905, **Officiate by Invitation Only**)

When a pastor retires, we recommend that the pastor and congregation be aware of and abide by the guidelines in the excerpt from the *Ministerial Ethics Guidelines*, (**Appendix 1-4**), and that the pastor worship elsewhere until his or her successor is comfortable with the return of the retired pastor, usually one or two years after the new pastor is installed.

Former pastors who are elected pastor emeritus are reminded that this is an honorary title only and carries no job responsibilities or privileges unless they are expressly stated by the session and approved by the Presbytery. (*Book of Order* G-2.0905)

These guidelines apply to all pastors, retired or not, regardless of whether they have served particular churches. The best interests of all involved will be better served if

church members do not request a former pastor to perform pastoral duties, and if former pastors, when asked, would tactfully decline.

**The Congregation's Responsibility:** sessions and church members must remember that a congregation is strengthened as members call upon the new pastor's support and nurture. This is the time in which the seeds of a new pastoral relationship may be sown. During times of transition, the task of the members of the congregation is to make the change to new leadership. Anything that aids this adjustment will contribute to the health of the congregation.

**Presbytery's Responsibility:** Representatives of the Committee on Ministry and the General Presbyter shall review these guidelines with the minister who is leaving/retiring, and with the session at the meeting of the session discussing the pastor's request for dissolution.

The Committee on Ministry Liaison shall review these guidelines with the congregation at the congregational meeting voting on the request for dissolution. In addition, the session will take the responsibility of informing all members on the Church Roll of these guidelines.

The Committee on Ministry welcomes and encourages consultation with former pastors or sessions should any questions or concerns arise. Subject to the needs and desires of the former pastor and his/her family, the presbytery has a responsibility to meet the spiritual and physical needs of former pastors and to utilize their talents and gifts to the glory of God.

*Appendix 1-2*  
**Board of Pensions Issue: Vacancy Dues**

**THE BOARD OF PENSIONS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)**  
**2000 Market Street**  
**Philadelphia, PA 19103-3298 (800) 773-7752**  
**www.pensions.org**

When a ministerial position becomes vacant, we are frequently asked if churches must continue to remit dues for the Benefits Plan. The answer is that churches are expected to remit vacancy dues to the Board of Pensions. Vacancy dues are consistent with the community nature of our Plan because churches continue bearing some limited expense of providing benefits to Plan members.

Vacancy dues are provided for in Article IV, Section 4.5 of the Benefits Plan and approved by the General Assembly to help fund the Medicare Supplement program for retirees. Medicare Supplement coverage helps protect retired members from bearing all the medical expenses not covered by Medicare alone. Vacancy dues are calculated at 12% of the Pension Participation Basis of the last minister who occupied the vacant position. They are payable for the first twelve months that the position is vacant or until the position is filled, whichever comes first.

Vacancy dues are not required when the church decides to abolish a position and the Clerk of Session informs the Board in writing of the decision. In that situation, vacancy dues end on the date that the position was abolished.

The Board of Pensions may waive vacancy dues when, in extenuating circumstances, the church cannot afford to remit the 12% vacancy dues. To determine the waiver, the Board needs a written request from the governing presbytery explaining the circumstances.

When a vacant position is filled by a retiree receiving pension benefits through the Board of Pensions and scheduled to work at least 20 hours a week, Post-Retirement Service dues are payable and cannot be waived. Please refer to the Benefits Administrative Handbook for Churches and Employing Organizations or call the Board of Pensions at 800-773-7752 for information.

By paying vacancy dues promptly and in full, churches play a vital role in providing support and care to the retired servants of the church.

Please call the Board of Pensions at 800-773-7752 if you have any additional questions about vacancy dues.

**Appendix 1-3**

**Sample Congregational Meeting Agenda: Dissolution of the Pastoral Relationship**

COM will have appointed a minister to moderate this Congregational Meeting. The Clerk of Session serves as secretary for the meeting, or, if the clerk cannot be present, a secretary pro tem may be appointed.

1. Convening Prayer
2. The reading of the call of the meeting: “A special meeting of the congregation of \_\_\_\_\_ Church has been duly called and announced by the session, to be held on \_\_\_\_\_ (date), for the purpose of hearing and acting upon the request of the Reverend \_\_\_\_\_ for the dissolution of the pastoral relationship between herself/himself and this congregation.”
3. The pastor presents this request and is excused from the meeting.
4. Motion that the congregation of \_\_\_\_\_ Church join with the Reverend \_\_\_\_\_ in requesting the Presbytery of Baltimore to dissolve the pastoral relationship now existing between them, effective \_\_\_\_\_ (date).
5. Remarks
6. Vote on the request and effective date of dissolution.
7. Next steps outlined by COM Liaison:
  - a. An Interim Pastor Search Committee will proceed in collaboration with the COM and the GP.
  - b. A Mission Study will commence.
  - c. After permission from Committee on Ministry, a Pastor Nominating Committee will be elected.
8. The COM Liaison and the Clerk of Session share the Policy Regarding Former Pastors/A General Statement of Underlying Principles concerning former pastors and their families with the congregation. (It may subsequently be printed in the bulletin and newsletter.)
9. The minutes of this special meeting may be approved before adjournment or submitted to the session for approval.

Adjournment and Benediction

**Appendix 1-4**  
**Excerpts from the Presbytery's Ministerial Ethics Guidelines**

**C. Leaving a Congregation**

When pastoral relationships with congregations are dissolved, certain ethical behavior is required in order to preserve the peace and unity of the church. In the case of honorably retired ministers, a continuing ministry within the presbytery beyond the congregation(s) served is encouraged. When a pastor leaves a congregation:

1. All pastoral and administrative duties in the congregation are to be terminated.
2. The pastor is not to return to officiate at any baptism, wedding, or funeral, except at the invitation of the new pastor and/or the session.
3. Ordinarily the pastor is not to return as a regular worshipper or participant in the congregation without consultation with the General Presbyter or the Committee on Ministry.
4. Pastors shall exercise great care to have no further influence on the former congregation and its members by conversation, correspondence, or other action.
5. All belongings are to be removed from church and manse so that the interim and new pastor can use the facilities.
6. Former pastors shall exercise no part in the selection of a Pastor Nominating Committee or in the selection of a successor (pastor, interim, stated supply).
7. Interim pastors and stated supplies shall not encourage personal loyalties because their tenure is temporary and their function is intended to prepare the congregation for the calling and installation of a new pastor.

**D. Pastor and Predecessor**

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament who become pastors of congregations from which ministers have been called, retired, or resigned have responsibilities toward the former pastor(s).

1. The relationship is to be marked by courtesy.
2. The relationship is to be marked by awareness of loyalties that have been in place. Courtesy and wisdom should unite to cause the currently installed pastor to be sensitive to those loyalties. In some cases the pastor may invite former pastors to participate in events that have great meaning for members of the congregation. The same sensitivities and courtesies are to be exercised by ministers who are interims or stated supplies.

**E. Pastor and Successor**

Ministers who have resigned, retired, or accepted another call shall behave in a professional manner that affirms the ministry of the successor.

1. Ministers are to treat successors with courtesy.
2. Ministers are to refrain from commenting on or voicing judgments about the ministry of a successor.
3. Ministers are not to initiate professional contacts with persons in former parishes.
4. Ministers making social visits with members of former congregations are to take care that professional matters do not intrude.

**Appendix 1-5**  
**Policy Regarding Former Pastors**  
**A General Statement of Underlying Principles**

The Rev. \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church of \_\_\_\_\_ have agreed to request that the Presbytery of Baltimore dissolve the Pastoral Relationship that exists between them with the terms outlined in the separate Dissolution Agreement.

All parties agree to conform to and abide by the Ministerial Guidelines of the Presbytery of Baltimore and understand that all financial payments shall be forfeited if the minister violates these Guidelines and those stated in the Dissolution Policy of the Presbytery of Baltimore. It is understood by all parties that the retiring Pastor will neither provide ministerial services nor be asked to provide such by either the congregation or its members after the pastoral relationship is dissolved.

In particular, when pastoral relationships with congregations are dissolved, certain ethical behavior is required in order to preserve the peace and unity of the church. When a pastor leaves a congregation:

- a. All pastoral and administrative duties in the congregation are to be terminated;
- b. The pastor is not to return to officiate at any baptism, wedding, or funeral, except at the invitation of the moderator of the session;
- c. The pastor is not to return as a regular worshipper or participant in the congregation without consultation with the General Presbyter or the Committee on Ministry;
- d. Pastors shall exercise great care to have no further influence on the former congregation and its members by conversation, correspondence, or other action;
- e. All belongings are to be removed from church and manse so that the interim and/or new pastor can use the facilities;
- f. All church property, including all church keys, will be returned on the last day of service;
- g. Former pastors may not use the services of the church office or support staff;
- h. Former pastors shall exercise no part in the selection of a Pastor Nominating Committee or in the selection of a successor (pastor, interim, stated supply);
- i. Pastors are to treat successors with courtesy.
- j. Pastors are to refrain from commenting on or voicing judgments about the ministry of a successor, including in social or other gatherings.
- k. Pastors are not to initiate professional contacts with persons in former parishes.
- l. Pastors making social visits with members of former congregations are to take care that professional matters do not intrude.
- m. Pastors shall not agree to the status of "Pastor Emeritus" until at least two years have passed since serving the congregation. This shall be done in consultation with the current minister and Committee on Ministry.
- n. This letter of agreement will be shared throughout the congregation so that others may understand the changes in the pastoral role and responsibilities and can



*Phase 1 – Dissolution of the Pastoral Relationship*

**Who needs this? Session, Departing Pastor**

cooperate as the church and pastor move into another phase of their respective lives.

Received by:

Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Committee on Ministry Representative \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Clerk of Session \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Copies to: Minister, GP, Clerk of Session, Stated Clerk, Chair of COM

**Appendix 1-6**  
**Sample Litany of Farewell**

Liturgist: On (date), upon recommendation of the Pastor Nominating Committee, our congregation voted to call (name of departing pastor) to become the (Pastor, Associate Pastor, Co-Pastor). (Name of departing pastor) came at a time of great transition in the life of our church, and we were grateful for (his/her) courage and sense of call in coming to us.

Departing Pastor: I thank (church name), its members and friends, for the love, kindness, and support shown me these last (number) years. I ask forgiveness for the mistakes I have made. I am grateful for the ways my leadership has been accepted. As I leave, I carry with me all that I have learned here.

People: We receive your thankfulness, offer forgiveness, and accept that you now leave to minister in a new place. We pray that you will be aware of the Spirit's guidance on your journey. We express gratitude for your time among us. We ask your forgiveness for our mistakes. Your influence on our faith and faithfulness will be long lasting.

Departing Pastor: I forgive you and accept your gratitude, trusting that our parting is pleasing to God.

Liturgist: Do you, the members and friends of (church name) release (name of departing pastor) from the duties of (Pastor, Associate Pastor, Co-Pastor)?

People: We do, with the help of God.

Liturgist: Do you offer your encouragement for (his/her) ministry soon to begin as (Pastor, Associate Pastor, Co-Pastor) of (name of new church and location)?

People: We do, with the help of God.

Liturgist: Do you, (name of departing pastor), release this congregation from turning to you as pastor?

Departing Pastor: I do, with the help of God.

Liturgist: Do you offer your encouragement for their continued ministry here and for the relationship with others who will come to serve?

Departing Pastor: I do, with the help of God.

Liturgist: Let us pray:

All: God of grace, whose everlasting love for all is trustworthy, help each of us to trust the future which rests in your care. The time we were together in your name saw our laughter and tears, our hopes, disappointments, and accomplishments. Confirm in us these treasured memories, even as we move in new directions, until that promised time when we will be completely one with you and with each other, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Appendix 1-7*  
*Exit Interview*

A written report shall be submitted by the pastor to the interviewing team and shall become the confidential property of the Committee on Ministry unless the Committee on Ministry wishes to share it with the Interim Minister. The report shall address the following:

- a. The major strengths and weaknesses of this congregation.
  
- b. The major strengths and weaknesses of this community.
  
- c. The major strengths and weaknesses of your ministry as you look back upon it; your dreams when you came (fulfilled or not); your achievements; your problems; any recommendations you would like to make to your successor.
  
- d. Are there any critical problems that in your judgment should be dealt with before the congregation proceeds to look for a new pastor?
  
- e. Have you any specific recommendations to make to the Committee on Ministry?