

SEPARATION ETHICS POLICY concerning the departure of a pastor

Pastors and their congregations form unique, close personal bonds and relationships during their times of ministering together. When a pastoral relationship is dissolved or ended, it is understandable that the pastor(s) and their former parishioners would like to stay in touch and in some way continue the relationship they have enjoyed. However, doing so makes it more difficult for congregations to begin forming new bonds and relationships with their new pastor(s).

Due to the disruption and harm former pastors may unintentionally or intentionally cause their successors and former congregations, failure to comply with this policy may result in ecclesiastical charges being filed against a former pastor, former associate pastor, former interim pastor or commissioned ruling elder under the Rules of Discipline D-10.0100, with possible charges of failure to comply with Book of Order G-2.0905 (as above), Directory for Worship W-4.4003e (“e. Will you be governed by our church’s polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God’s Word and Spirit?”), and W-4.4003g (“g. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?”).

Therefore, the Presbytery rejects any pastoral activities which invade another teaching or commissioned ruling elder’s arena or calling without a specific invitation by that minister, including returning to former calling bodies for pastoral services.

“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 session.”
Book of Order (G-2.0905)

The Presbytery affirms that this applies to all members of John Knox Presbytery, including interim pastors, commissioned ruling elders, and student pastors.

The Presbytery opposes any fostering of informal relationships in parishes in which former pastor(s) have served which in the perceptions of the current pastor(s), Session, or the Presbytery harm the ministry of the current pastor or pastors.

Commentary:

These statements allow for the exchange of annual Christmas greetings, and the occasional sharing of other “news.”

These statements prohibit a former pastor from saying: "Of course, I'll officiate at a (wedding, baptism, funeral or any other pastoral activity) if your pastor asks me."

It prohibits a communication to the present pastor that "I am going to be in town and plan to visit a., b., and c.; I hope this is all right with you."

It prohibits any other verbal or written statement that covers the above contingencies or similar ones.

This policy shall:

1. be given to a retiring or change-of-pastorate pastor at the exit interview;
2. be given to an incoming pastor at his/her initial interview with the Committee on Ministry; and
3. be given by the Committee on Ministry to the church where there has been a pastoral change to be printed in the church's paper or bulletin under the signature of the Committee on Ministry, with endorsement of the departing pastor and the Session.

The Committee on Ministry is responsible for the enforcement of this statement.

Adopted by the Committee on Ministry: August 4, 2011

Adopted by the John Knox Presbytery: August 20, 2011