

**Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ
Committee on Ministry**

Policy for Clergy and Congregations Concluding Pastorates

(This applies to all pastoral relationships, whether installed,
interim, licensed, conference staff, or other.)

I. General Statement

The Committee on Ministry (COM) of the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ (PNCUCC) recognizes through pastoral ministry, unique and powerful bonds are forged between clergy and congregation. When clergy leave a congregation, compelling reasons exist for all concerned to clearly: (1) dissolve their present relationship; (2) provide for a transition; and (3) establish new relationships for both the departing clergy, and the congregants of the local church. Just as pastor and congregation covenant with one another at the beginning of their mutual ministry, so must they each understand and honor their responsibilities at the conclusion of their formal relationship with one another. In so doing, they may honor their time of ministry to and with one another appropriately and within established ethical guidelines (*refer to UCC Manual on Ministry excerpt attached to this document*), and provide for the nurturing and effective development of new ministry.

The purpose of this policy is to facilitate the shift of leadership and responsibility from one pastor to another. This policy is intended to promote healthy beginnings and endings of pastoral relationships for all concerned: the arriving clergy and family, the departing clergy and family, and the congregations that must say goodbye to the familiar in order to welcome the new. No bright line clearly delineates appropriate and inappropriate behavior in all situations; rather, we invite honest consideration of and response to the basic question: "What is in the best interests of this congregation?"

II. Concluding Pastorates: Clergy

- A. Clergy should make a complete break with a congregation for an extended period of time beyond the interim period to allow for the establishment and cultivation of new relationships. (In most cases 18-24 months beyond the interim period.) This break includes all forms of formal and informal communication between the departing clergyperson and members of the congregation. To include:
- Any and all forms of pastoral care
 - Phone calls, text messages and email correspondence
 - Social media.

In some instances a complete break in communication and interaction with former congregants is not possible, particularly as it relates to members of the clergy person's family and/or community activities and involvement. In these instances it is the clergy person's responsibility to limit the interaction to that particular activity and ensure that issues related to the former church and congregation are not discussed.

If not accepting another call, upon departure from a congregation clergy are urged to consider serving as pulpit supply in another community, taking a planned sabbatical, an extended vacation and or other creative possibilities. We strongly encourage churches to make use of the liturgy for *Ending an Authorized Ministry* in the *Book of Worship of the United Church of Christ*.

- B. Clergy should seek membership in another congregation, and must decline all requests for pastoral services (e.g. baptisms, weddings, funerals, hospital calling, etc.) in the church formerly served. The purpose of this is to facilitate the development of new relationships and to discourage lingering feelings of dependency within the congregation.

When sought by her successor, a departing pastor may seek to nurture a private, personal and positive relationship with her successor. However, under no circumstances should a departing clergy person become involved or interfere with the leadership of the incoming pastor.

- C. Clergy are urged to consider their role of minister in the wider community, with sensitivity to a new pastor's need to establish himself in the wider community through participation and or membership in various community organizations and endeavors.

- 1. Clergy should refrain from initiating or responding to comments regarding their successor(s).

- D. To maintain standing in the Conference, upon leaving their current position (whether interim, settled, or specialized ministry), all clergy shall contact COM to have an exit interview, using one of the following options:

- 1. meeting with the Eastside COM or a sub-committee of the Westside COM
 - 2. meeting with the Conference Minister and a COM representative
 - 3. invite COM or their designated representative to the church's exit interview
 - 4. submit a written report to COM with a phone interview.

In conjunction with the exit interview, clergy will be presented with a copy of these requirements and asked to reaffirm their commitment and adherence.

- E. "Pastor Emeritus" status is an honorary title with no specific pastoral functions This policy also applies to clergy who have been granted this honorary title.
- F. Upon expiration of the required separation time period, if a clergy person **desires** to return to a former congregation as a member, the returning clergy **must** first meet with the COM, to discuss the parameters of said return.

Upon return to a former church, the utmost care and caution should be taken to avoid any interference with the ministry and leadership of the current pastor. Former clergy should decline all major offices of the congregation. The focus of all decision-making should rest with the new pastor. Clergy are encouraged to utilize their skills, expertise and faith through conference boards and commissions or specialized ministries.

- G. Any problems or improprieties between the departing/returning clergy and the new clergy would ideally be dealt with in conversation between the clergy and should not involve members of the congregation. If issues cannot be resolved they should be taken to the Conference Minister as soon as possible to facilitate a satisfactory resolution. The Conference Minister may choose to bring the issues to the attention of the COM.

III. Concluding Pastorates: Congregations

Upon notification of a pastor's pending departure, COM will provide a copy of this policy to the congregational leadership (i.e. Moderator, Board Chair, etc.). Church Councils, Boards, PRC, etc. are encouraged to begin sharing this information and making congregants aware of what will be required of their departing pastor.

- A. Congregational members should encourage and allow departing clergy to make a complete break with the congregation for 18-24 months, beyond the interim period to enable the establishment and cultivation of new relationships.
- B. Congregational members should know and understand that departing clergy are strongly encouraged to consider membership in another congregation and are ethically bound to decline all requests for pastoral services (e.g. baptisms, weddings, funerals, hospital calling, etc.) in the church formerly served. The purpose of this is to facilitate the development of new relationships and to discourage lingering feelings of dependency within the congregation.
- C. Congregational members should recognize that, having called clergy to provide pastoral leadership within their church, they should not invite other clergy to provide pastoral services within the church or to members of the church. When rare special circumstances warrant this, they should **first** seek their current pastor's consent. The focus of all decision making should rest with the new pastor.
- D. Congregational members should know and understand that departing clergy are expected to decline to participate in the life of the congregation with discretion and consideration for the ministry of successor clergy. Furthermore, they should know and understand that clergy are encouraged to utilize their skills, expertise and faith through conference boards and commissions or specialized ministries instead of the local church.
- E. "Pastor Emeritus" status is an honorary title with no specific pastoral functions, and clergy holding such title are also bound by the provisions of this document.
- F. Any problems or improprieties between the departing clergy and the new clergy should be dealt with in conversation between the clergy. If issues are not resolved they should be taken to the Conference Minister as soon as possible to facilitate a satisfactory resolution. The Conference Minister may choose to bring the issues to the attention of the COM. Additionally any problems or improprieties between the departing clergy person and members of the congregation should also be brought to the attention of the Conference Minister.

IV. Conclusion

The importance of clergy making clean breaks from congregations once served cannot be underestimated. It allows (1) new pastors to establish their ministries on a positive note, without interference or undue emotional influence; (2) congregations to experience the gifts and talents offered by their new clergy; and (3) departing clergy to leave their pastoral roles.

When exceptions arise, the focus of decision-making should always rest with the new pastor. The intention of this policy is to clarify roles and expectations for all concerned; to help new pastoral relationships take root; and to ease departing clergy's transition from pastor to peer in the hearts, minds and souls of pastors and congregations. Ethical provisions set out in the United Church of Christ (UCC) *Manual on Ministry* govern both clergy and members of the local church:

For clergy:

- I agree to sever all relationships and on-going communications with members of my former parish for a period of no less than 18-24 months.
 - I agree to discuss any exceptions to this requirement with COM.
- I will not perform pastoral services within a parish or for a member of a parish without the consent of the pastor of that parish.
- I will deal honorably with the record of my predecessor and successor.
- I will not, upon my termination and departure from a ministry position, interfere with nor intrude upon the ministry of my successor.
- Should I desire to return to my former parish as a church member or regular attendee, I agree to meet with COM prior to my return.

Signature

Date

For members of local churches:

We recognize that we have called our pastor as the pastoral leader of this local church, and we will not invite another pastor to provide pastoral services within this church or to members of this church without our pastor's consent.

We will establish policies regarding baptism, communion, marriages, funerals, use of church facilities, and personnel in consultation with our pastor and will honor them in our life as a local church.

We acknowledge and support this policy placed upon our departing pastor by the Pacific Northwest Conference.

Moderator/Board Chair Signature

Date