

POLICY STATEMENT Presbytery of Palo Duro

WHEN A TEACHING ELDER LEAVES A CONGREGATION

1. WHEN SHOULD I ANNOUNCE MY RESIGNATION?

Under normal conditions of leaving a congregation, four (4) to six (6) weeks' notice is adequate. This will allow sufficient time for tying up loose ends and for saying good-bye.

Giving notice of more than six (6) weeks can make for an inordinately long period for everyone concerned having to hold onto grief feelings prior to the final termination, not unlike a prolonged period between a death and the funeral or memorial service. However, too short a time between the announcement and the departure is unfair to all affected, but especially to the congregation. The time after a pastor has announced her or his intention to move is a period of extremely important pastoral care: that which is extended by the departing pastor to the congregation and its members, and that which is extended to the departing pastor and family by the congregation.

A Teaching Elder anticipating a move would do well to refer to the following resources:

Running Through the Thistles, by Roy Oswald

Ending Well, Starting Well, by Roy Oswald

Saying Goodbye, Ed White

These resources are available at www.rowman.com.

2. WHOM SHOULD I TELL, WHEN, AND IN WHAT ORDER?

- A. Promptly notify the Stated Clerk or Executive Presbyter of presbytery and/or the Moderator of the Committee on Ministry of your intention to resign.
- B. Share the news with your Session before sharing it with others in the church or community. Ask them to call a Congregational Meeting to concur with your resignation.
- C. Announce your resignation officially and personally at a public worship service and by letter to the congregation. Be positive and open in your announcement.
- D. Arrange for an Exit Interview with the area Committee on Ministry representatives.
- E. It is your responsibility to see that your congregation understands that you will no longer be their pastor. Make it very clear to them that you are no longer available to preach or perform any pastoral tasks for them. See: "Standards of Ethical Conduct" (PDP October 15, 2011).
- F. Be supportive of the Presbytery's pastor search process and encourage the congregation to work closely with the Presbytery during their search for a new pastor. The Committee on Ministry will appoint one of its members to be a liaison to the church prior to the vacancy, as well as designating a Teaching Elder as moderator of the Session, once you have left.

- G. You should make sure that the manse property is left in good condition, with all dirt, rubbish, etc. removed.
- H. Put all files and records of the church in order and left intact so that your successor may easily find necessary records and equipment.
- I. When you leave you should affirm the good that has been accomplished. DO NOT LEAVE ON A NEGATIVE NOTE.

3. GUIDELINES FOR RELATING TO YOUR FORMER CONGREGATION FROM A DIFFERENT LOCATION

- A. Even though former pastors and their families may continue to have friendships in the congregation, former pastors ordinarily should not perform weddings, conduct funerals, or counsel members of the congregation unless asked to do so by the Session and moderator of the Session (G-2.0905).
- B. A former pastor shall not participate in any way with the function of the Pastor Nominating Committee.
- C. The former pastor shall make every effort to be supportive of his/her successor. Encourage persons who might contact you with concerns about your successor to address them to their new pastor, the Session, or the Committee on Ministry. Avoid drawing conclusions about your successor or interpreting his/her behavior and words. Encourage openness and opportunities for growth.
- D. Should you and your family return for a visit or for vacation, make a friendly phone call to the pastor.

4. GUIDELINES FOR RETIRING PASTORS

The Board of Pensions suggests that the process of retiring begin six (6) to nine (9) months before the anticipated date of retirement; and six (6) months' notice to the congregation would be appropriate.

Ministers anticipating retirement should request the booklet, *Information for Members Planning to Retire*, from the Board of Pensions.

Up to five (5) years before retirement, you should begin tracking Board of Pensions estimates for your retirement disbursements. Similarly, you should be in contact with your local Social Security office to be aware of those allowances. In this age of digital access, you can do all of this work online.

Presbytery must certify retirement to the Board of Pensions, taking such action at one of the stated meetings. Be sure enough time is allowed to assure the application can be acted on in a very timely manner. The Board of Pensions suggests requesting a retirement application at least ninety (90) days prior to retirement, but a longer time may be wiser. Also, if you elect one of the joint survivor options, the appropriate form must be submitted to the Board at least three (3) months prior to the retirement date.

Six (6) to nine (9) months before the anticipated retirement date, you should contact the local Social Security office, or online, to begin the application process for benefits.

5. GUIDELINES FOR PASTORS AND FAMILIES WHO REMAIN IN THE AREA AFTER LEAVING A PASTORATE

- A. A former pastor who chooses to remain or return to the area in which he/she has served as pastor needs to deal realistically with his/her own needs for fellowship and church life apart from the former congregation.
- B. You and your family can be most helpful to your successor and family in being accepted in their new situation. You and your family can also be the most difficult problem your successor and family must face. Be sensitive to them, encourage them, help them in any way you can, including physically withdrawing yourselves from the congregation for a period of time.
- C. A former pastor shall refrain from pastoral functions and not accept any positions of leadership in his/her former church, not attend meetings of the Session, Deacons, or Trustees unless invited by the Session and moderator of Session.
- D. A former pastor should not officiate at any sacraments, weddings, funerals, or other functions involving members of his/her former church, or within its properties, unless invited by the Session and moderator of the Session (G-2.0905).
- E. An invitation to officiate or perform functions in a former church is an opportunity to demonstrate your support and loyalty to your successor. Offer to assist rather than officiate. Avoid any functions or requests that will isolate or exclude your successor from the people God has called him/her to serve. Spouses and families of former pastors need to demonstrate their support of the new pastor and family in a manner suggested for former pastors.
- F. A former pastor should avoid formal or informal participation in or comment on the work of the Pastor Nominating Committee.
- G. Regarding continued worship in the church from which the pastor retires, the Committee on Ministry requires clergy and families to seek alternative worship sites and opportunities. During the time of transition, beginning at your departure and for least the first six (6) months after the new installed pastor and family arrive, the retired pastor will consult with the installed pastor and the Committee on Ministry about their participation in the life of the congregation. This will enable you to return as a longtime friend and will help avoid the inevitable comparisons that can cause so much pain whenever old relationships are severed and new ones are being formed.
- H. When congregants ask for your opinion regarding any church business or decisions, refer them to the session or pastor.

6. SOCIAL MEDIA

The Congregation and/or members and the former pastor shall discontinue contact on any social media. This may involve "unfriending people on Facebook," "not following on Twitter," and/or "deleting" contacts. Extreme discipline to resist even the most innocent interactions will be required as these have developed over time. After a period of six (6) months if a

member/friend of the former congregation wishes to re-establish contact on social media, they may initiate such a request. Pastors may not initiate such a request.

This policy is intended to serve as a help to pastors and churches as they go through difficult times of adjustment. It is provided as an attempt to avoid having a long and devoted pastoral relationship between a pastor and church become a source of dissension within a congregation and a source of pain for a succeeding pastor and family. The Committee on Ministry is available to counsel pastors, their families, and congregations regarding this policy as needed in their particular situations. If you have any questions, please contact the Moderator of the Committee on Ministry.

At the time of the congregational meeting to dissolve the pastoral relationship, this policy will be presented to the congregation by representatives of the presbytery/COM so that it is aware of boundary expectations and practices required of pastors as they leave their congregations.

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