

**Ministerial Guidelines for Leaving a Congregation  
PALO DURO PRESBYTERY**

**WHEN SHOULD I ANNOUNCE MY RESIGNATION?**

Under normal conditions of leaving a congregation, four to six weeks' notice is adequate. This will allow sufficient time to tie up loose ends and say goodbye.

Giving notice of more than six 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 teaching elder (minister) has announced his or her 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 (minister) anticipating a move would do well to read the following Alban Institute resources: *Running Through the Thistles*, Roy Oswald; *Ending Well, Starting Well*, Roy Oswald; *Saying Goodbye*, Ed White

**WHOM SHOULD I TELL, WHEN, AND IN WHAT ORDER?**

- A. You should promptly notify the stated clerk or executive presbyter of PDP and/or the moderator of the Committee on Ministry of your intention to resign.
- B. You should 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. You should announce your resignation officially and personally at a public worship service. Be positive and open in your announcement.
- D. You should notify the Committee on Ministry and/or the office of presbytery in writing of your resignation and the congregational action concurring with your request.
- E. If possible, you should arrange for an exit interview with the area Committee on Ministry representatives.
- F. It is your responsibility to see that your congregation understands that you will no longer be their pastor. You need to 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" (1998) 210th GA.
- G. You need to be supportive of the presbytery's pastor search process and encourage the congregation to work closely with PDP 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 designate another teaching elder (minister) as moderator of the session, once you have left.

- H. It is your responsibility to assure yourself that everything pertaining to receiving the call through the hand of your own presbytery has been followed to your satisfaction.
- I. You should make sure that the manse property is left in good condition, with all dirt, rubbish, etc., removed.
- J. You should put all files and records of the church in order and leave them intact so that your successor may easily find all necessary records and equipment.
- K. When you leave a congregation, you should affirm the good that has been accomplished.  
**DO NOT LEAVE ON A NEGATIVE NOTE.**

### **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 session.
- B. A former pastor should not participate in any way with the function of the Pastor Nominating Committee.
- C. The former pastor should 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 soon after your arrival.

### **GUIDELINES FOR RETIRING PASTORS**

The Board of Pensions suggests that the process of retiring begins six to nine months before the anticipated date of retirement, and so six months' notice to the congregation would be appropriate.

Teaching Elders (ministers) anticipating retirement should call the Board of Pensions at 800-PRESPLAN to speak with a BOP retirement programs specialist who will walk you through key considerations, resources, and options. Other educational resources, including *Planning to Retire: Your Benefits Options at Retirement*, are available at <https://www.pensions.org/for-members-planning-to-retire>.

Up to five years before retirement, you should send a request for a pension quote to the Board of Pensions as well as a request for a Social Security benefits quote to the local Social Security office. 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 ensure the application can be acted on in a timely manner. The Board of Pensions suggests requesting a retirement application three to four months 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 months prior to the retirement date. Six to nine months before the anticipated retirement date, you should contact the local Social Security office to begin the application process for benefits.

## **GUIDELINES FOR PASTORS AND FAMILIES WHO REMAIN IN THE AREA AFTER LEAVING A PASTORATE**

- A. A former pastor who chooses to remain in 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, and help them in any way you can, even if it means physically withdrawing yourselves from the congregation for a period of time.
- C. A former pastor should refrain from pastoral functions and not accept any position of leadership in his/her former church, nor 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 session.
- E. An invitation to officiate or perform pastoral 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 also need to demonstrate their support of the new pastor and family in the 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 a pastor retires, the Committee on Ministry encourages clergy and families to seek alternate worship sites and opportunities, especially during the first several months after the new pastor and family arrive. This will enable you to return as a longtime friend and help avoid the inevitable comparisons that can cause so much pain when old relationships are severed and new ones are formed.

These guidelines are intended to serve as help to pastors and churches as they go through difficult times of adjustment. They are provided as an attempt to prevent a long, devoted pastoral relationship between a pastor and a church from becoming 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 these guidelines as needed in their particular situations. If you have questions, please contact the moderator of the Committee on Ministry.

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