

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

Guidelines 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 clergy, outside of the local congregation). 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 on the last page) and provide for the nurturing and effective development of new ministry.

The purpose of these guidelines is to facilitate the shift of leadership and responsibility from one pastor to another. These guidelines are intended to promote healthy beginnings and endings of pastoral relationships for all concerned: arriving clergy and their family, if any; departing clergy and their family, if any; 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 12-18 months beyond the interim period.) Clergy are urged to consider serving as pulpit supply in another community, 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 consider membership in another congregation, where possible, 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.

- C.
 - I. In consultation with the current pastor(s) a former pastor can participate in the life of the church. However, former clergy should decline all major offices of the congregation and should participate in the life of the congregation with discretion and consideration for the ministry of one's successor. 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.

2. 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.

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

- D. "Pastor Emeritus" status is an honorary title with no specific pastoral functions.
- E. Any problems or improprieties between the departing clergy and the new clergy would ideally 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.

III. Concluding Pastorates: Congregations

- A. Congregational members should encourage and allow departing clergy to make a complete break with the congregation for an extended period of time 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, where possible, 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 special circumstances warrant this, they should first seek their 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 all major offices of the congregation and 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.
- F. Any problems or improprieties between the departing clergy and the new clergy would ideally 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.

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 these guidelines 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 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.

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 other 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.