

MINISTERIAL ETHICS: PASTORS AND FORMER PASTORS

(Adopted by Foothills Presbytery February 20, 1996)

INTRODUCTION

The ties that bind pastor and people are often so deep and profound as to lead to difficulties when the pastor retires or moves to another church, particularly when the former pastor continues to reside in relatively close proximity to their place of former service. Certain “unwritten” ethical standards have been established through the years, standards that have governed the relationship between a pastor and his/her successor and the relationship between a pastor and his/her congregation. When these standards are observed, the relationships can be rewarding and satisfying to all parties concerned. When they are violated, embarrassment and animosity are almost sure to arise, and the peace, purity and unity of the church may even be threatened.

Because of the sensitive nature of these relationships, Foothills Presbytery establishes the following standards to give guidance to pastors and to congregations when a pastoral relationship is dissolved. This move from “unwritten” standards to “written” standards is an effort to bring some uniformity and some clarity to a sensitive issue.

THE FORMER PASTOR

When pastoral relationships with congregations are dissolved, pastors shall:

1. announce publicly that they are no longer available for pastoral services (including, but not limited to funerals, weddings, baptisms, pastoral counseling, visitation), except at the invitation of their successor or the Session,
2. refer all requests for pastoral services to the current pastor and Clerk of the Session,
3. discourage members of a former church from “following” him/her to the next pastorate,
4. exercise great care to have no further influence on the former congregation, and
5. not criticize the work of his/her successor and refuse to listen to criticisms about his/her successor from members of the congregation. Instead, the former pastor shall encourage active support of the new pastor.

THE CONGREGATION

When pastoral relationships are dissolved, the congregation is encouraged to:

1. remember that the former pastor is no longer their pastor, and refrain from calling upon him/her to perform any pastoral services, and

2. cherish the friendships they had with their pastor, and continue those friendships, but not to confuse friendship with a pastoral relationship,
3. resist comparing subsequent pastor with their predecessors, immediate or otherwise.

THE NEW PASTOR

The new pastor also has a role to play in preventing conflict in the presence of the former pastor. The new pastor should:

1. remember that the ties that bind the members of a congregation to its former pastor(s) have been forged through the unique experience of the pastorate. A congregation that loves its former pastor(s) reveals a capacity to love its new pastor,
2. refrain from any criticism of the former pastor,
3. be aware of the body of knowledge and “hindsight” that the former pastor can provide, and
4. consider when the inclusion of the former in significant moments in the life of the church would provide an occasion for celebrating the past and its connection with the present and future.

RECOMMENDATION FOR USE

This policy statement is to be given to every pastor who leaves a pastorate and to every pastor beginning a new pastorate within the bounds of Foothills Presbytery.

The policy statement is to be sent to the Clerk of Session of a vacant church immediately after said vacancy occurs and immediately after the installation of a new pastor.