

**EL REDENTOR PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CENTRAL FLORIDA, INC.
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)**
www.elRedentor.net

**SEPARATION ETHICS POLICY:
When Pastor and Congregation Say Goodbye**

(Adopted by the Session on June 18, 2015)

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to further the “peace, unity and purity” of the church, El Redentor Presbyterian Church of Central Florida, Inc. has developed a Separation Ethics Policy based upon the written policies of Central Florida Presbytery and other Presbyteries around the country.

This policy is consistent with El Redentor’s corporate Bylaws (2015), which mandates that “*the Session shall adopt and implement a Sexual Misconduct policy and Child Protection policy (G-3.0106). It should endorse and follow a Separation Ethics policy for its former pastors (G-2.0905).*”

The Separation Ethics Policy should help in assuring consistency of practice and action within the congregation, provide a foundational basis for educating both clergy members of Presbytery and laypersons of the congregation, and serve as a model for other local congregations in their development of personnel policies.

THE BACKGROUND TO THESE GUIDELINES

The pastoral relationship is very important, often deeply personal, and, in some cases, life-saving to people in a congregation. This relationship evolves through study, teaching, preaching, administering the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, weddings, funerals, presence in crises, and praying with and for members of the congregation. With the leadership of a congregation and particularly with the ruling elders, the pastor works to encourage the people in the worship and service of God, equipping them for their tasks within the church and their mission in the world. In all of these dimensions of the pastoral relationship, there are elements of trust, confidence, admiration, affection, fondness, caring, and love.

The ending of the pastoral relationship is often a trying and traumatic experience for both the pastor and the members of a congregation. It always means change for the life of the pastor involved and the congregation. *Because of the sensitivity of the pastoral relationship, it is imperative that the departing pastor assume particular responsibilities and observe necessary modes of behavior.* This will allow the congregation to be free, in all respects, without the departing pastor’s influence, to make the adjustments necessary to changes of pastoral leadership, both interim and permanent.

In essence, after leaving a church, the former pastor must exercise due care, so as to have no further influence (either directly or indirectly) upon the congregation by conversation, correspondence, social media, or other action. The former pastor will call attention to the fact that there will be another pastor to whom the people should give their loyalty and state clearly that the departing pastor should not be called upon for pastoral services, ceremonies, or sacraments. The former pastor shall seek to be supportive of the new pastor when comments are made about that person or any programs, policies, or activities in the former church. If the former pastor cannot in good conscience be supportive of the new pastor, he or she should remain silent.

The departing pastor shall state clearly that his or her relationship with the congregation will now be different. The departing pastor needs to remind the congregation that he or she was given the wonderful opportunity to get to know the congregation through baptisms, weddings, and funeral services, and that their new pastor needs to have the same opportunities.

The current *Book of Order* states the following: "*After the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, former pastors and associate pastors shall not provide their pastoral services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the Moderator of Session*" (G-2.0905).

The guidelines which follow are to provide assistance to those who find themselves facing the situation of the pastor and the congregation saying goodbye.

THE GUIDELINES FOR SEPARATION ETHICS

Saying Goodbye

The need to say goodbye to a congregation occurs for one of several reasons: (a) A pastor may receive a call to another field of service. (b) A pastor may decide to retire. (c) A pastor may decide to leave the pastoral ministry and enter another area of service. (d) The Presbytery may, for cause, take the initiative to dissolve the relationship.

This break can be a difficult time for both the pastor and the congregation. Whatever the cause, it becomes the occasion when the pastor and the congregation find they must say goodbye.

1. Saying Goodbye to Accept a Call a Distance Away

When a pastor accepts a call to a ministry a distance from the congregation which he or she is leaving, the opportunity for contact with members of the former congregation is quite limited, often non-existent. However, there frequently arise certain circumstances which pose questions for the departing pastor as to what is appropriate and what can be most helpful to the congregation and the interim and subsequent pastors. *It is always incumbent upon the departing pastor to make sure that parishioners know that his or her relationship with the congregation has ended.* It is important that parishioners understand that this change of relationship is necessary in order that the congregation be free, in all respects, to make the adjustments necessary for changes of leadership, both interim and permanent, without the departing pastor's influence.

2. Saying Goodbye But Remaining a Neighbor

When a pastor says goodbye and remains nearby, there are particularly sensitive aspects of separation which require careful attention on the part of the departing pastor.

The experience of pastors and congregations over the years has led many to believe that when a pastor ends a ministry with a congregation, it is best for the pastor to move out of the community. However, this is not always possible or advisable. Thus, it is particularly important *when a departing pastor remains in the community and in proximity to the former congregation, that he or she, with care and forethought, pay particular attention and accord all professional courtesies and pastoral boundaries* to what is written below with reference to a departing pastor's responsibilities to the congregation, individual members of the congregation, and to the interim and subsequent pastors.

Former pastors can be most helpful to their successors and families in gaining acceptance in their new position. Former pastors also can be the most difficult problem their successors and families can face. Be sensitive to them, encourage them, and help them any way you can, even when that means physically and completely withdrawing from the congregation.

The departing pastor and his or her immediate family should not be a part of the worshiping or fellowship life of the congregation, except upon the initiative and invitation of the next pastor. If such an invitation is extended, normally it should not occur until the new pastor has had an opportunity to establish relationships with the congregation.

Former pastors need to deal realistically with their own spiritual needs for fellowship and church life apart from their former congregations. The immediate family members of former pastors also should demonstrate their support of the new pastor in the manner suggested for former pastors. Former pastors and their families are strongly encouraged to seek alternate worship sites and opportunities. This will enable them to return on occasions as friends and help avoid the inevitable comparisons which often cause pain and problems whenever old relationships are severed and new relationships are being formed.

The former pastor shall not attend meetings or be involved in any leadership or advisory role (public or private, formal or informal) in his or her former congregation. The former pastor shall not intervene, support, or give advice to anyone involved in a congregational disagreement or dispute.

A retiring pastor who remains in the proximity of the congregation from which he or she has retired will need to give careful consideration to the responsibilities that follow below. Retired or relocated pastors are to be especially discreet when visiting in a former parish. In such cases, it is proper to pay personal respects to one's successor. *Frequent visits to one's former parish are avoided.*

A pastor in a temporary or permanent pastoral relationship is always courteous to any predecessor. In special circumstances, the current pastor may choose to invite a former pastor to participate in some service or ceremony. This is always at the initiative of the current pastor.

The former pastor shall not volunteer or promise to officiate or participate in any events, unless he or she has consulted with the present pastor. *The former pastor shall not put the current pastor in the position of making such decisions.* The former pastor shall avoid any functions or requests which will isolate or exclude his or her successors from the people that God has called them to serve.

When a pulpit is vacant and, in a rare circumstance where there is no other temporary pastoral supply, a former pastor may serve only as called upon and approved by the Presbytery's Committee on Ministry (COM) in consultation with the Session. At the coming of a new pastor, all professional functions and pastoral relationships are dissolved.

If difficulties arise and differences cannot be resolved as colleagues, then the current pastor shall consult with the Session, the Committee on Ministry (COM), and/or the Executive Presbyter/Stated Clerk of Presbytery for counsel, resolution, and enforcement of this Separation Ethics Policy, as adopted by the Session.

3. When One is Elected Pastor Emeritus or Emerita

The current *Book of Order* only states the following regarding an “Honorable Retired” teaching elder (G-2.0503c):

Upon request of a member of Presbytery, the Presbytery may designate the member Honorably Retired because of age or physical or mental disability.

When a pastor retires, however, the congregation may bestow upon him or her the honorific title of Pastor Emeritus or Emerita. This provision was found in previous editions of the *Book of Order*:

“When any pastor or associate pastor retires, and the congregation is moved by affection and gratitude to continue an association in an honorary relationship, it may, at a regularly called congregation meeting, elect him or her as Pastor Emeritus or Emerita, with or without honorarium, but with no pastoral authority or duty. This action shall be taken only after consultation with the Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery concerning the wisdom of this relationship for the peace of the church. This action shall be subject to the approval of Presbytery, and may take effect upon the formal dissolution of the pastoral or associate pastoral relationship or anytime thereafter.” (G-14.0605. Underscore added.)

To elect one as Pastor or Associate Pastor Emeritus/Emerita:

- There is evidence of a long and loving, mutually caring pastoral relationship.
- It is a congregation’s way of saying to the Church-at-large and to the world that they love this person and are thankful for his or her time with them.
- It is a gift to the retired pastor, which conveys something special to him or her.

It must be noted, nonetheless, that the pastoral relationship has been dissolved. The relationship of pastor to people has ended, and there is no expectation of the person to be present with the congregation because of the election.

All expectations and responsibilities related to the former pastor of a congregation shall apply to a pastor emeritus/emerita.

Responsibilities in Saying Goodbye

This policy speaks of “Separation Ethics.” The use of the term “ethics” implies certain values which are important to consider during this often highly charged experience of the dissolution of the pastoral relationship. Such values include:

- effective leadership;
- congregational health and stability;
- the growth of pastor and members in dealing with the pain, problems, and possibilities of separation; and
- the ability of the Session and congregation to move positively and effectively toward the next phase of their life together.

These values instruct the conduct and responsibilities of both the pastor and the congregation regarding their separation.

The material which follows is addressed to the departing pastor, the Session, and the congregation as appropriate, and finally, the Committee on Ministry (COM) of the Presbytery. However, *the pastor is the one in the professional leadership role and, therefore, the one who has the responsibility for making sure that the separation that occurs is anticipated and carried through with foresight and effectiveness.*

1. Responsibilities of the Departing Pastor

Because of the sensitivity of the pastoral relationship, it is important that the departing pastor, in any dissolution, assume certain responsibilities to the former congregation, to individual members of that congregation (including social media), and to the interim and subsequent pastors.

(a) To the Congregation:

When the date has been set for the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, the departing pastor must take the lead in beginning to prepare the congregation for their separation. Certain things will need to be communicated clearly to the congregation in order to avoid confusion on the part of members in the days ahead.

This communication should be accomplished in several ways. A formal letter (including the electronic use of media) should be addressed to the members of the congregation spelling out clearly the matters below which are part of the separation and the time that follows. A sermon may be preached containing references to the approaching separation and speaking to these matters. In casual conversation one-on-one or in groups, in public presence, in newsletters, in blogs, in social media, and/or in all contacts with people of the congregation, it is important that the following matters be communicated and every effort be made to have them understood:

- That all pastoral and professional relationships and responsibilities of the pastor with the congregation will end as of the effective date of the dissolution;
- That the pastor will not be involved in any way in the selection process of either the interim pastor or the next pastor. Neither will he or she be involved in any way with the selection of any search team or Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC).
- That the pastor, after leaving, will not become engaged in conversations which, in any way, offer opinions or criticism about the life of the congregation or the performance of the interim or any subsequent pastors;
- That any desire on the part of members of the congregation for the departing pastor to participate in congregational life or services should be discussed not with the departing pastor, but with the interim or subsequent pastor;
- That the departing pastor may participate in a wedding or funeral of the congregation, after the date of dissolution, only by invitation of the interim or next pastor, who shall be the officiant. Because they are part of the covenantal worship of a congregation, baptisms are not included, and former pastors shall not be invited to preside at baptisms.

(b) To Individual Members of the Congregation:

It is important that, with particular friends, it be made clear that the pastoral relationship will come to an end. This does not mean that friendships must come to an end. Friendships are priceless and are to be preserved, but there is a special responsibility on the part of the departing pastor to prevent friendships from becoming confused with the pastoral relationship. The pastoral functions of counseling, calling, conducting weddings, funerals, or baptisms are not appropriate. The rendering of opinions or judgments about the ministry of the former church or its pastor is unethical. *It is the responsibility of the departing pastor to see that this is communicated.*

If the former pastor receives a request to return to the congregation for a particular occasion, it is important for him or her to remind those making the request that the present pastor is the one to whom the request must be made.

In any social context, where the former pastor is with friends or other members of the former congregation, it is the responsibility of the former pastor to be sure that he or she voices no criticism or evaluative comments about the new pastoral leadership of the congregation. *It is not appropriate for the former pastor to comment on the "state of the congregation" or to be involved in any way in the selection of a successor, once he or she has departed.*

(c) With Regard to Social Media:

The above guidelines also apply to the use of any social or electronic media.

(d) To the Interim and Subsequent Pastors:

The former pastor has a responsibility to the interim pastor and to subsequent pastors to make sure that any requests that come to him or her for services in the former congregation be redirected by the requesters to the interim or next pastor.

It is important that, when any request comes to the former pastor, he or she be in touch with the current pastor to let it be known what contacts have been made with him or her. This is a courtesy which is important to be extended to the current pastor. *No pastoral functions of any kind are to be performed by the former pastor without the prior invitation or request of the current pastor.*

Should any community non-church function call the former pastor back into the community for public appearance of whatever nature, as a courtesy, the former pastor should inform the current pastor of the fact and the nature of the occasion.

2. Responsibilities of the Session

Because of the complexity of the pastoral relationship, it is important that the Session, in any dissolution, assume certain responsibilities to the departing pastor and to the congregation.

(a) To the Departing Pastor:

Following the pastor's decision to request dissolution of the pastoral relationship, the Session can give support and encouragement to the pastor in the implementation of the decision.

It will be helpful for the Session to support and assist the pastor in interpreting the meaning of the end of the pastoral relationship to the congregation and, if need be, to the wider community.

As a caring expression of closure, it is appropriate for the Session to arrange for an occasion when the congregation and the pastor may formally say goodbye.

(b) To the Congregation

The Session will want to be sensitive to the feeling of loss experienced by members of the congregation, while demonstrating through their actions the meaning of the end of the pastoral relationship.

Additional Session leadership may be needed in the transition period so that worship, congregational life, and fellowship may continue.

The Session can help the members of the congregation by encouraging them to see this time as an opportunity for growth and change. It can be a time for listening to individuals and groups in the congregation. It can be a time for examining present life, ministry, and service, and to be open to new possibilities. It is important that the congregation be prepared for change with new pastoral leadership.

With the help of the Committee on Ministry (COM), the Session should interpret the role of the Committee on Ministry (COM) of the Presbytery during the transition period. This will involve the naming of a Moderator of Session, the process of ordinarily obtaining an interim pastor, and the calling of a pastor in either a temporary or permanent pastoral relationship.

3. Responsibilities of the Committee on Ministry

Because of its connectional and constitutional relationship, it is important that the Committee on Ministry (COM), in any dissolution, assume certain responsibilities to the departing pastor, to the Session and the congregation, and to the interim and next pastors.

(a) To the Departing Pastor:

Upon learning of the pastor's intention to retire or resign, a representative of the Committee on Ministry (COM) shall meet with the pastor to discuss these guidelines.

(b) To the Session and the Congregation:

A Committee on Ministry (COM) representative will be present at the meeting of the Session when the pastor announces his or her resignation. The purpose of this meeting is to fully inform the Session of these guidelines and to orient the Session in the process of seeking pastoral leadership following the departure of the present pastor.

A representative of the Committee on Ministry (COM) shall be present at the meeting of the congregation when the pastor requests concurrence in her or his plans to leave, to inform the congregation of the process for obtaining subsequent pastoral leadership.

When a congregation plans to elect a retiring pastor as Pastor Emeritus/Emerita, an interpretive statement on the meaning of Pastor Emeritus/Emerita should be sent to the Session for use in the congregation.

(c) To the Interim and Subsequent Pastors:

It will be important for the Committee on Ministry (COM) to review these guidelines with the interim pastor and the next pastor and to be available for counsel should any difficulties arise regarding relationships with the former pastor.

SUMMARY

This Separation Ethics Policy has been prepared in the hope that it will provide guidance, support, and encouragement to the pastor, the Session, the congregation, and the Presbytery in those situations in which a pastor and congregation discover that they must say goodbye, especially when the former pastor lives in or nearby the church community.

Departing pastors, particularly those who have served long and successful pastorates, must be sensitive to the *need* to sever all formal and official ties with their former congregation once the pastoral relationship has been dissolved.

It is important for the health of the congregation, the departing pastor (and family), and the new pastor (and family), that there is no confusion concerning the pastoral relationship. While personal friendship may continue, the departing pastor and the church must understand that the professional pastoral relationship has ended.

While it is initially and primarily the responsibility of the pastor to inform the congregation of these guidelines, it is highly recommended that the Session affirm to the congregation the separation policy required in the *Book of Order* and by the Committee on Ministry, in an effort to prevent any misunderstanding and potential difficulties when a former pastor declines to return to officiate any and all services and pastoral responsibilities.

This can be done by the Session communicating to the congregation this policy, which requires that former pastors refrain from initiating, participating, and officiating at any sacraments, weddings, funerals, or other functions involving members of their former congregations.

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Sign-Off Form for Departing Pastor and Session

El Redentor Presbyterian Church adopted a Separation Ethics Policy on June 18, 2015, which specifies Standards of Conduct for the Departing Pastor (Teaching Elder), the Session (Consistory), the Congregation, and the Presbytery.

For the Teaching Elder

I, _____, have received a copy, read it, understand it, and acknowledge that this Separation Ethics Policy, as adopted by El Redentor Presbyterian Church, applies to me.

Signature of Teaching Elder

Date

For the Session

We have received a copy, read it, understand it, and acknowledge that this Separation Ethics Policy, as adopted by El Redentor Presbyterian Church, applies to our departing pastor.

Signature of Clerk of Session

Date

It is recommended that the Session post this form online and in the church building, or otherwise present it to the congregation, so it can be fully informed about the Separation Ethics Policies of El Redentor Presbyterian Church and Central Florida Presbytery.

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