

PRESBYTERY OF WEST JERSEY

DISSOLUTION OF A PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP

Dissolving a pastoral relationship is difficult because of many reasons and mixed emotions. Please know that your presbytery cares for you all and is holding you in our prayers. This document is designed to provide answers to the most commonly asked questions regarding the process. If you have other suggestions, this document is a work in progress and your input is valued. We are walking with you.

Procedure to Dissolve the Pastoral Relationship between a Church and an Installed Pastor

These procedures describe the processes to dissolve the pastoral relationship between a church and its Installed Pastor.

Process if Permanent Pastor or Associate Pastor Wishes to Voluntarily Dissolve the Relationship

The pastoral relationship between a permanent pastor or associate pastor may be dissolved **only by the presbytery**, or the Committee on Ministry (COM) acting on behalf of presbytery in months when presbytery does not meet. In this case COM makes a report to presbytery of the dissolution at the next presbytery meeting.. Either the pastor or the church may request that the relationship be dissolved, however, in most cases it is the pastor who makes the request and the church concurs and recommends to COM that the dissolution be approved, or does not concur and makes the reasons known to presbytery. (See G-2.0901, Book of Order 2015-2017)

1. The pastor informs the Executive Presbyter that he or she intends to request that Presbytery or COM, acting under delegated authority of Presbytery, dissolve the pastoral relationship as soon as he or she has decided to do so. This process will apply whether the pastor is seeking another position, is retiring, or is leaving for some other reason. The Executive Presbyter and/or the Office of the Stated Clerk collects information that will be needed later in the process such as date and time of session meetings, anticipated date of dissolution, last Sunday the pastor will lead worship, and the name and method to contact the clerk of session or other representative of session. The steps involved in the dissolution process will also be reviewed with the pastor.
2. The pastor informs the session of his/her request to dissolve the relationship and reads or distributes a letter of intent to the session members. The Executive Presbyter should be invited to the session meeting where the resignation is announced. The COM representative should be present at the next session meeting.
3. The pastor writes a letter to the congregation. This letter is reviewed by the Executive Presbyter or COM chair to ensure it is appropriate, positive in its tone and substance and clearly states the effective date of the dissolution and the last working day. In addition the letter will clearly

articulate separation ethics so that both the pastor and congregation will understand the nature of their relationship following the dissolution. The pastor distributes the letter to the members of the congregation as soon after the session meeting as is practical, with the knowledge that the information will become public soon after the session meeting and could become the subject of rumor until the letter becomes public.

4. COM appoints a representative to work with the session and is responsible for managing the process from dissolution to calling a new pastor or associate pastor.
5. It is normally most convenient for the COM representative to come at the beginning of the next session meeting and leave after answering any questions, so the pastor and the session may have time together.
6. In that session meeting the COM representative explains the following:
 - the procedure for dissolving the relationship;
 - a general outline of the procedure to seek pastoral leadership after their pastor has left and that they will receive a more detailed explanation of their various options and the process at their next meeting;
 - that the COM representative will guide them through that process. A date and time for the COM representative to meet with the session is agreed upon.
 - the terms of dissolution (unused vacation time can be taken; unused study leave has no monetary value);
 - Arrangements shall be made for the pastor to pay all outstanding loans, whether to the congregation or the Presbytery, prior to Presbytery's approval of the dissolution, to be paid in full or payments allowed;
 - When the pastoral relationship is dissolved, the former pastor shall not engage in any pastoral contacts with former parishioners, nor participate in any weddings or funerals without the permission of the Session and the new Interim or Pastor;
 - Parish Associate positions must be dissolved (if applicable).
 - Session should arrange for pulpit supply for at least 1 – 3 months. (The Presbytery of West Jersey will assist in finding a temporary supply.);
 - COM will appoint a Moderator to help the session through the months ahead.
7. The session calls a meeting of the congregation to act upon the dissolution request of the pastor. This is usually a special meeting and is called in accordance with congregational practice as stated in the church bylaws. The notice must state that the meeting is for the congregation to act on the request of the pastor to dissolve the pastoral relationship and should contain such details as date of dissolution as well as any special arrangements with the outgoing pastor. (See a sample meeting call below.) This meeting can be moderated by the departing pastor or by a person appointed by COM. In some circumstances a representative from COM may be present at the congregational meeting to answer any questions about the process. The quorum shall be as specified in the church bylaws. If no quorum is specified in the bylaws, it shall be a majority of active church members.

8. The results of the congregational vote are communicated to the office of the Stated Clerk by email and followed up with a copy of the form "*Committee on Ministry Dissolution Agreement*" found in this packet and available online as a word document form that can be completed online. This can be found on the Presbytery's website under "*Our Learning*", "*Resourcing our Congregations*", "*Committee on Ministry*", "*Dissolution Agreement*". If the result is that the congregation concurs with the pastor's request a motion is prepared by the presbytery's staff support person to COM for action. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, the motion will be to concur with the request for dissolution by the pastor and concurrence by the congregation. Presbytery or COM acting on behalf of Presbytery will act on the request for dissolution of the pastoral relationship. If Presbytery approves the pulpit will be officially vacant.
9. An exit interview with the pastor and the session separately is conducted by someone appointed by COM.
10. The process to call or contract for pastoral services is then begun.

Feel free to contact:

- Graeme Veitch, COM Co-Chair (856) 745-4555 janetandgraeme@gmail.com
- Debby Brincivalli, Executive Presbyter (856) 547-5100, revdeb@wjpres.net
- Wendy Boer, Stated Clerk (856) 547-5100, revwendy@msn.com

Call of Congregational Meeting

"Notice is hereby given of a Congregational Meeting (time & date) in (fellowship hall, the sanctuary, etc.). The purpose of the meeting is to approve the dissolution of the pastoral relationship with (name of pastor) effective (date)."

*By Order of the Session,
(Name), Clerk of Session*

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AGENDA FOR A CONGREGATIONAL MEETING TO DISSOLVE A PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP

1. Meeting opens with prayer by the moderator. (The Committee on Ministry (COM) may appoint a moderator or the pastor may moderate the meeting. It is important to help the church see the presence of presbytery at the beginning and end of a pastorate.) Clerk announces the presence of a quorum.
2. Congregation votes to approve the call of the meeting as read by the clerk of session.
3. Moderator reads the motion to dissolve the pastoral relationship including the date of the dissolution including continuation of salary and benefits (if any) or other agreed upon items.
4. The moderator must then ask the congregation, "Are you ready to proceed to the dissolution of the pastoral relationship?"
5. Congregation votes.
6. Clerk reads the minutes of the meeting and has them approved.
7. Moderator adjourns the meeting with prayer.
8. As soon as possible following the meeting, the clerk of session supplies the following information:
 - a. Name of Church
 - b. Date of Congregational Meeting
 - c. Date of Dissolution
 - d. Signature of Clerk of Session