

## STATEMENT OF ETHICS FOR TEACHING ELDERS

*Approved by Presbytery September 17, 2013*

Keeping in mind the health of a congregation and the health of a departing/retiring pastor, the following statement of ethics is needed. Above all, this document urges both congregations and pastors "to do no harm" When a teaching elder retires/departs from a church there are bonds of affection between the pastor and members of the congregation which continue to be cherished. Relationships of friendship continue but the pastoral relationship does not continue.

### Ethics for the Retiring/Departing Pastor.

- a. The **retiring** pastor should make known his/her intentions with the Session of the church between 3 and 6 months prior to the retirement date. This allows the Session time to begin planning how to proceed for the interim time without a called teaching elder and to find ways to celebrate the ministry of the retiring pastor in such a way as to provide a fitting and mutually satisfactory good-bye. The retiring pastor should also be in contact with the Committee on Ministry (COM) and the Executive Presbyter as to his/her plans for retirement.
- b. A **departing** pastor should make known his/her intentions as soon as possible to facilitate the actions that are needed to terminate the pastoral relationship.
- c. The retiring/departing pastor should draft a communication to the congregation that explains to them the upcoming retirement/departure and the fact that the pastoral relationship ceases upon retirement/departure and that the functions of the pastor for that congregation are ended. This should be accomplished in a firm but pastoral manner.
- d. If a retiring/departing pastor moves to another community the following actions are advised:
  1. During the first year it is essential to refrain from all pastoral contact including electronic and social media.
  2. The retired/departed pastor shall remain sensitive to possible tensions that can arise from his/her presence within the congregation. The retired pastor should make every effort to be supportive of his/her successor. Contacts from members of the former congregation shall always be referred to the present pastor or the Session of the church.
- e. And if a retiring/departing pastor remains in the community; these special guidelines also need to be followed.
  1. It is strongly recommended that the retired/departed pastor and his/her family become active in the work and worship of another congregation.
  2. A former pastor shall refrain from all pastoral functions and not accept any leadership responsibilities in his/her former church including teaching, visitation, or pulpit supply
  3. A former pastor shall refrain from formal or informal participation in or comment on the work of a pastor nominating committee.
  4. Any invitations to participate in weddings or funerals or special services for members of the church should be taken under advisement with the stipulation that the former pastor assists and does not officiate. This invitation shall come from the new pastor.
  5. The conducting of funerals of nonmembers defined as persons never connected with the congregation might continue to be done so long as the services do not occur in any place other than the funeral home or cemetery.

- 6. Weddings shall not be performed given the context of the need for approval of weddings by the council of the church.
- f. A former pastor may not continue to live in a manse or church provided housing following the termination date of service nor may purchase said housing without the permission of the Committee on Ministry. Exceptions to this may be only in short term extenuating circumstances not to exceed one month.

**Ethics for the Congregation of the Retiring/Departing Pastor**

- a. Members of the congregation should not request a former pastor to perform pastoral duties.
- b. While there continues to be bonds of affection between members and the former pastor, members should not discuss nor should the retired pastor encourage discussion about church business, issues, personalities, or events.
- c. Congregations should be encouraged to celebrate with the retiring/departing pastor the achievements within his/her time in the church and the parting should be within the bounds of mutual affection, admiration, and respect.

**The Role of the Committee on Ministry**

- a. The COM shall receive the request for retirement and counsel the retiring pastor in regard to the necessary steps to take in regard to application for Pension benefits, beginning the process of closure with the congregation, and determining whether to grant Honorably Retired status to the retiring pastor with the retirement being approved as per Book of Order by the Presbytery.
- b. The COM shall counsel the Session of the church as to procedures necessary for calling interim pastors and called teaching elders and for providing continuing pastoral care for members of the congregation.
- c. The COM shall enforce the above statement for guidelines for retiring/departing pastors and shall respond immediately to any complaints involving the above statement for guidelines by counseling with the retired pastor and the congregation.

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Pastor

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Clerk of Session

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Date

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Date

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Committee on Ministry

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Date

Revised 9/18/2013