

When a Pastor Concludes Ministry

When a pastor concludes ministry in a congregation the Session of that church has many details to address. It is easy for some items to 'fall through the cracks' and never be addressed at the time of departure. Below is a check list of details to which the Session should be alert at the time of departure.

- Have a conversation with the Commission on Ministry about the next steps in the life and ministry of the church. (This would not normally occur on the day the resignation is announced, but it needs to occur very soon thereafter. The Session will want to discuss pastoral options and numerous other details during a time of transition.)
- During the conversation with Commission on Ministry representatives, the Session is to review the policy 'Guidelines For Leaving a Congregation Separation Ethics.'
- Vote to accept the resignation. The Session needs to be clear about the concluding date.
- If the pastor is called by the congregation there must also be a vote of the congregation to conclude the pastoral relationship.
- Lake Erie Presbytery, through its Commission on Ministry, must also approve the dissolution of the pastoral relationship. In cases where the congregation and pastor concur, the COM will act on this after action by the congregation.
- The church's Personnel Committee (or Session) needs to work out the details of the departure (ex. details regarding vacation days, study leave, etc.) as well as the need for clarity concerning the date through which compensation will continue.
- Discussion should take place concerning the handling of other church property (ex. computer, books and resources purchased for the ministry of the church, etc.).
- The COM normally conducts an exit interview with both the pastor and the Session in a timely manner, allowing for both positive and negative comments.
- The Session normally organizes a farewell event of some sort (ex. coffee hour, a farewell congregational dinner, a reception, etc.). Who will arrange for that?
- If the pastor lives in a manse there, needs to be discussion about the maintenance needs in the manse as she/he departs as well as an understanding on the date when the manse will be vacated. The intention of this conversation is to make certain the Session is aware of manse issues that will need to be addressed.
- If Board of Pensions coverage is provided to the departing pastor, the Board needs to be informed of the pastor's departure.

- Please note that vacancy dues of 12%** of the total effective salary of the departing pastor must be paid to the Board of Pensions for 12 months following the departure. (This income helps the Board of Pensions to provide supplemental Medicare coverage for retired church workers. For more information on this topic please access: <http://www.pensions.org/AvailableResources/BookletsandPublications/Documents/VacancyDues.pdf#search=vacancy%20dues>.) These vacancy dues are waived if an interim/temporary supply is in place on which the church is paying Pension dues.

- The Committee on Ministry, working with the Session, will appoint a moderator of Session. The Clerk of Session will want to be in contact with the moderator of the Commission on Ministry about this detail.

- Normally the Session will need to make immediate plans for temporary pastoral leadership for the first four to six Sundays following the pastor’s departure.

- During that time, the Session will likely seek more regular temporary leadership during this ‘in between’ time. There is a range of options to consider in this discussion. The Session, in partnership with the COM, will engage this conversation. A temporary leader enters into a contract with the individual, the Session and the COM. A temporary contract is for no more than 12 months, though it can be extended.

- After addressing the immediate details of a pastoral departure the Session and congregation will want to engage in reflection on the church’s current situation as well as immediate and future directions. This time of ‘mission study’ is a rich opportunity to discuss the ministry to which the church is called. The ministry may shift due to the fact that the community is changing or you may re-affirm the basic current direction of the congregation with some variations. Or it may be a combination of both elements. Either way there is value in a mission study – especially when a congregation has not intentionally engaged such discussions for quite some time. The time spent in mission study will also be a good time to assess the church’s finances. Are you observing changes in finances? What implications does that have for the compensation package of the pastor? The Congregational Life and Committee on Ministry will assist in these important discussions.

- After a mission study is completed, which will take some time, then a Pastor Nominating Committee will be elected by the congregation. This will lead to another significant chapter in the life of the church but goes beyond the focus of this initial ‘To Do’ list when a pastor departs.

Pastor Departing _____ Date _____

Clerk of Session _____ Date _____

Commission on Ministry Representative _____ Date _____