



Best Practices for Healthy Clergy Transitions

Funerals, Weddings, and Community Involvement

The work of the pastor serving the local congregation is intrinsically relational. In some cases, pastors are invited to walk alongside people who are hurting, grieving, or celebrating solely because that pastor represents the Church. In other cases, relationships are built by cheering on the same team at high school basketball games or serving together on mission trips. It is a true gift for God to bless both the pastor and congregation members through relationships.

And because ministry is fundamentally relational, it creates opportunities for confusion about the boundaries of the relationship when the Bishop and Cabinet move a beloved pastor on to a new ministry appointment and bring a (yet-to-be-known) new pastor into the community. An important aspect of the clergy covenant between pastors is to support the current pastor of a congregation as THE pastor of a congregation and its members. The best practice is that when a pastor moves on to a new appointment and a new pastor is appointed, the outgoing/former pastor no longer participates in the spiritual life of the congregation, trusting them to God's care through the incoming/current pastor. It is also the primary responsibility of the former/retired pastor to maintain this boundary. Ultimately, the clergy relationship is so important that it is a chargeable offense for a pastor to participate in "relationships and/or behavior that undermines the ministry of another pastor" (§ 2702.1.f). The best practice is always whatever best supports the current pastor's ministry in the church and the community and allows the new pastor the full opportunity to build relationships necessary for that mission field. When there is a rare exception for considering pastoral participation with former congregation members or in a former community, pastors (incoming and outgoing) and congregations could consider the following questions:

To guide an outgoing (or former) pastor in setting his/her boundaries:

- As I consider my clergy covenant with the current pastor, what are my guiding principles for how I will support the newly forming pastoral relationship with the current pastor?
- If I say yes to this ministry opportunity, will it interfere with the current pastor forming relationships for ongoing ministry in the community/with the family?
- If a current pastor *does* ask me to participate to protect their relationship with their new congregation, are they trusting that I will say 'no' and give space for them to develop this pastoral relationship without me?
- If I *do* return at the current pastor's invitation, or for another reason, how do I say yes to one former congregation member and not another?

- What are healthy dynamics related to social media involvement with people of my former appointment to give the new pastor “space” in this area?
- Is time a factor in any of my decisions about boundaries? (In other words, do I expect that my commitment will change with time?)
- What other ways can I express my friendship, condolences, or support if I determine that it is best for me to not be present at an invited/expected event?
- Under what circumstances would I agree to provide ministry leadership or even simply attend a wedding/funeral/activity of a former congregant?

Feel free to reach out to the current District Superintendent of the church for guidance if questions arise.

To guide an incoming/current pastor in making requests related to former pastor involvement in church:

- As I consider my clergy covenant with the former pastor, what are my guiding principles for how I establish a pastoral relationship with a family/parishioner?
- What reservations do I have about an ongoing relationship between my current congregation(s) and their former pastor? In what is the reservation rooted?
- What are my personal boundaries about ministry or engagement with members of previous congregations? (weddings, funerals, community involvement, social media)
- How can I kindly and firmly introduce my expectations about the role of a pastor in “big” events to my congregation?

Feel free to reach out to the current District Superintendent of the church for guidance if questions arise.

To guide a member of a church member in making requests related for a former pastor to be involved in ongoing ministry with members of the church:

- Will requesting a former pastor to be involved in a current ministry opportunity prevent me from receiving the gifts of my current pastor?
- Are there other ways to receive the gifts of my former pastor than primary leadership for my “big” ministry event?
- Why do I want my former pastor to provide primary pastoral support in my “big” ministry event?
- What opportunities do I have to build a relationship with the “new” pastor through sharing with them in this challenging/hard/exciting time?

Feel free to reach out to the current District Superintendent of the church for guidance if questions arise.