

Should a Retiring Pastor or Pastor Emeritus/a Remain in the Congregation Procedures and Principles

Should a retiring Pastor or Pastor Emeritus/a remain in the congregation he/she is retiring from. **The short answer is: NO!** Even for those with the best of boundaries, ethics and respect for the new pastor *and* congregation, ***by their very presence*** there hold back the full and potential growth of the congregation and the ministry of their successor. Walk into the church, the sanctuary, the coffee hour and enquire of someone's health and suddenly the congregation is pulled back into "the good old days" and consciously or unconsciously evaluate the present pastor/situation by that presence and memory of that time. By your presence, the temptation is reinforced when dear Susie is ready to be married to ask you before the current pastor..... You know how it goes.

None-the-less, some pastors and family have lived most of their lives in that community and due to age or circumstance find it hard – or it would even be cruel – to have to pick up and start life all over again. So **the second short answer is: if you must, attend a different church!** And then, this is not always possible. So keeping the above in mind, below is only sensible procedure and manner in which one may stay.

1. Immediately following the Sunday of retirement, the retired pastor and spouse should make a **complete** break with the congregation for an **extended period of time** (at least through the interim period and first months of the new pastorate) to allow for the cultivation of new relationships and opportunities for bonding. This might involve becoming engaged in a lengthy interim ministry in another community, an extended vacation, a planned sabbatical, visitation of other congregations in the area, or other possibilities.
2. The retiring pastor **should always decline** all requests to perform pastoral services in the congregation, such as pastoral calling, funerals, weddings, baptisms or communion. All functions of the parish belong to the new pastor (interim or succeeding pastors). The retiring pastor should also decline all major offices of the congregation and should view all involvement in the life of the congregation with discretion and the due consideration given to its impact upon the successor's ministry. The retiring pastor could better utilize her/his skills, expertise and faith through the specialized ministries in service of Conference and Association boards and committees. It is helpful to remind both pastors and congregation of the following promises from the UCC *Minister's Code of Ethics*:
 - I will not perform pastoral services within a parish or for a member of a parish without the consent of the pastor of that parish.
 - I will deal honorably with the record of my predecessor and successor.
 - I will not, upon my termination and departure from a ministry position, interfere with nor intrude upon the ministry of my successor.

A good example of a letter to the congregation upon retirement concerning this issue is included with this document.

3. Upon the arrival of the successor Pastor, an Association Minister will invite to a conversational-meeting the following: the Retiree and Spouse (if any), the Successor and Spouse (if any), and the Church President/Moderator. The Association Minister will chair the session, going over this *Paper on Principles and Procedures*, urging open discussion of concerns and seeking an understanding of all points of view, to the end of avoiding misunderstanding ill feelings as the future unfolds. It is further urged that agreements and understandings reached be shared by letter or newsletter with the Congregation.

4. The retiree and spouse should recognize and affirm a) that they have retired from leading the congregation, and b) that they recognize and affirm the succeeding clergyperson and spouse (if any) as their own clergy and clergy-family. The retiring pastor should seek to nurture a private, personal and positive relationship with the successor, including assurance of non-involvement in pastoral functions unless otherwise invited, and the discussion of congregational matters only with the new pastor instead of congregational members.
5. Equally important: that the successors accept the retirees with warmth and affection, respecting and affirming both as part of the congregation, treating them with concern, compassion and civility as afforded any other parishioner. The retiree and spouse (if any), living in the community where they have been living/serving, deserve and have the right to live a normal existence as do all other citizens, exercising/enjoying their civil rights. Activities, involvements and friendships should not have to be cut-off because one might “get in the way” of a successor.” We affirm the right of retirees to be themselves and live fully in whatever community they may live.
6. Any problems or improprieties between the retiring pastor and the new pastor should be brought to the attention of the Association Ministry of Caring for Ministers through the Association Minister as soon as possible in order to facilitate a satisfactory resolution.

WHEN PASTORS RETIRE



From the Pastor

How does one conclude forty years of ministry—somewhat gracefully? I am reminded of the sage advice of one of our spiritual leaders of this age, the distinguished priest, writer, missionary, and Roman Catholic professor Henri Nouwen, who talks about “the art of leaving.” He says we need to cultivate that art. We need to learn to be “creatively absent.” We need to find ways of creative withdrawal.

Through this year of preparing ourselves for this leave-taking, I have to confess I have had many, many good strokes from my colleagues in ministry, from the official family of the United Church of Christ, and from all of you who are part of this church and the community. Everyone has been most generous in their a) surprise at my retirement with the pleasing accolade “you don’t look that age,” b) and kind recognition of the forty years of service in the church. I treasure those comments—even its blarney—and give thanks for all such “strokes.”

But the leave-taking is upon us. I hope it can be done “artfully” and creatively. We all need to remember that come the end of October I will continue to be your friend but not your pastor. For pastoral care you look to the selected new pastor—and until he or she comes, to those designated to fulfill that function. This means as far as I am concerned I cannot return for weddings, funerals, or other pastoral functions. I must be discreet and firm about it, and I trust you will be too. Harsh as that may seem, that’s the way of ministry and of church protocol and ministerial ethics. Pastoral loyalty needs to shift to your new leader. I covet for my successor the same kinds of acceptance and concern and “care and feeding of the pastor” that you have tendered me. I give thanks and rejoice for you all, in a new pastoral relationship!

On leave-taking,