

## **Procedure to Dissolve the Pastoral Relationship Between a Church and a Permanent, Designated or Temporary Pastor**

These procedures describe the processes to dissolve the pastoral relationship between a church and its Permanent, Designated or Temporary Pastor.

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

The pastoral relationship between a permanent pastor, associate pastor or assistant pastor may be dissolved only by the presbytery, or the Committee on Ministry (COM) acting in place of presbytery if both the pastor and the church concur on the dissolution. In this case COM makes a report to presbytery of the dissolution at the next presbytery meeting. If either the pastor or the congregation does not concur, the question must be settled by presbytery. 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-14.0600, Book of Order 2009-2011)

The Transition Team Leader is responsible for managing the process in steps 1 through 13 below and may delegate some elements to the Transition Guide or other representatives of COM.

1. The pastor informs the Transition Team Leader or Transition Guide that he or she intends to request that 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. Transition Team Leader or Transition Guide 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 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 writes a letter to the congregation. This letter is reviewed by the Transition Team Leader to ensure it is appropriate, positive in its tone, 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.
3. Four to six weeks prior to the date the pastor wishes to dissolve the relationship the pastor informs the session of the decision and reads or distributes the above letter to the session members. The Transition Team Leader and/or Transition Guide is present at the session meeting. It is normally most convenient for this COM representative to come at the beginning of the meeting and leave after all questions of them have been answered so the pastor and the session may have time together.

4. In that session meeting the Transition Team Leader and/or Transition Guide explains four things: 1) the procedure for dissolving the relationship; 2) that the Transition Team Leader, or another COM representative, will be present at the service on the last Sunday to help with the farewell; 3) a general outline of the procedure to seek for 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; and 4) that the Transition Team Leader and Transition Guide will guide them through that process. A date and time for the Transition Team Leader and/or Transition Guide to meet with the session is agreed upon. This can also be an appropriate opportunity to schedule exit interviews with the pastor and the session, separately.
5. The pastor prepares a written request asking COM, acting for the presbytery, to dissolve the relationship and delivers the request to the Transition Team Leader or Transition Guide for COM deliberation after the congregation votes on the request for dissolution. A copy is sent to the Co-Moderators for information.
6. 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.
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 must be preceded by a notice delivered no less than ten days before the meeting and include notice on two consecutive Sundays within that period. The notice must state the specific purpose 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. This meeting will be moderated by a person appointed by COM. (See attached for sample script for moderator in conducting the congregational meeting.)
8. The results of the congregational vote are communicated to the Transition Team Leader or Transition Guide by the most convenient and sure means available and followed up with a true copy of the minutes of the congregational meeting reflecting the results of the vote. If the result is that the congregation concurs with the pastor's request the Transition Team Leader prepares a resolution for COM action. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, the resolution will be to concur with the request for dissolution by the pastor and concurrence by the congregation.
9. An exit interview with the pastor and the session separately is conducted by two representatives of the COM Transition Team (See interview questionnaire for each under Tab 24 of the COM Operations Manual). These representatives will, if possible, normally include the Transition Guide.
10. Normally the church holds a reception, dinner or some other way to honor the pastor and say its "good-byes." There may also be a gift or purse of money collected from members of the congregation who desire to contribute. This token of appreciation is usually presented as a part of the going away gathering.
11. There normally is a special worship service on the pastor's last Sunday.

12. The Transition Team Leader or COM Co-Moderator assigns a moderator of the session and shares information with the session about how the session can go about filling the pulpit until the services of either a temporary or permanent pastor can be obtained. The Transition Team Leader will also forward any information that the COM or presbytery has received about pastors, candidates or students (as is appropriate to the particular church's needs) seeking pastoral positions in the area.
13. The process to call or contract for pastoral services is then begun.

### **Process if the Church and the Pastor or Associate Pastor Do Not Concur on Dissolution**

The following process may be used when the pastor and the session do not agree on whether the pastoral relationship should be dissolved or disagree on the terms and conditions of dissolution. The COM Church and Clergy Support Team Leader and/or the Case Manager from the Church and Clergy Support Team takes charge of this process. The Team Leader and/or the Case Manager meets with the session and the pastor to explain the process and to further outline the process as described in paragraph 4 above. The steps listed below are followed if both pastor and session agree to negotiate. The Church and Pastor Relations Team Leader and/or the Case Manager guides the session and pastor through the process.

1. The session and pastor agree to negotiate. The intended result of the negotiation would be an agreement under which the pastor agrees to request that Presbytery dissolve his or her pastoral relationship with the church and the church agrees to certain terms and conditions related to the pastor's severance.
2. The session and the pastor each select an individual to act as advocate in the negotiations.
3. The session and the pastor each develop a negotiating strategy with their respective advocates.
4. The advocates meet to negotiate the pastor's separation. The pastor may be present at the negotiation meetings at his or her option. The session may also have representatives there at its option. One or both of the Co-Moderators of the Committee on Ministry and/or the Church and Clergy Support Team Leader and/or the Case Manager will normally be present to act as resource persons. The representatives from COM will depend largely on the what relationship each of the above have had with the church leading up to the decision to negotiate and the process to this point.
5. The two sides negotiate an agreement (hereafter: the "Agreement").
6. The Agreement is to be written and signed before the responsible parties leave the negotiations. Letting time pass between the verbal agreement and the written agreement can lead to further disagreement about its agreed content. The written Agreement should include that the pastor will request from Presbytery, or from COM in place of Presbytery, that the pastoral relationship be dissolved. This can

be written into the Agreement so that the request is a part of the Agreement.  
Language such as, "By this document I, (*name of the pastor*), hereby request that

Presbytery approve dissolution of the pastoral relationship between me and the (*name of the church*).” In cases where the pastor does not wish to leave, but the congregation has determined that it is expedient that he/she do so, the terms of the Agreement are to be consistent with stated presbytery policy concerning such dissolutions.

7. The session ratifies the Agreement in a regular or special meeting. Details may be discussed in executive session. The resolution to ratify should include official calling of a special meeting of the congregation for the purpose of considering and acting upon the Agreement.
8. Call a special meeting of the congregation by giving notice of the meeting no less than ten days prior to the meeting and notice to be given on two consecutive Sundays within that period. The purpose of the meeting must be clearly stated in the notice.
9. Prepare a resolution in writing for the congregation to consider and act upon at the special meeting. The resolution should have the terms of the Agreement and a request that Presbytery approve the dissolution of the pastoral relationship under the terms and conditions of the Agreement.
10. Conduct the special meeting of the congregation to present and act upon the resolution. The meeting is moderated by a person appointed by COM.
11. The results of the congregational vote are communicated to all concerned parties including the of the Transition Team Leader and the Church and Clergy Support Team Leader, and the Co-Moderators by the most convenient and sure means, followed by a true copy of the minutes of the congregational meeting covering this resolution. If the result is that the congregation concurs with the pastor’s request for dissolution as negotiated, the Transition Team Leader prepares a resolution for COM action. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, the resolution will be to concur with the request for dissolution by the pastor and concurrence by the congregation.
12. Two representatives from COM conduct an exit interview with the pastor and the session separately (See interview questionnaire for each under Tab 24 of the COM Operations Manual). These representatives will, if possible, include the Transition Guide.
13. Normally the church holds a reception, dinner or some other way to honor the pastor and say its “good-byes.” There may also be a gift or purse of money given by those of the congregation who desire to contribute. The gift is usually presented as a part of the going away gathering.
14. There normally is a special worship service on the pastor’s last Sunday.
15. The Transition Team Leader or COM Co-Moderator assigns a moderator of the session and shares information about how the session can go about filling the pulpit until the services of either a temporary or permanent pastor can be obtained. The Transition Team Leader will also forward any information that the COM or presbytery has received about pastors, candidates or students (as is appropriate to the particular church’s needs) seeking pastoral positions in the area.

16. The process to call or contract for pastoral services is then begun.

### **Process to Dissolve the Relationship Between a Church and a Designated Pastor**

The call of a designated pastor is for a specific period of time from two to four years. When the time of the pastor's contract has elapsed the relationship will end with no further action required by the designated pastor, session, COM or Presbytery. The contract may be renewed, however, for a period of two to four years with the agreement of the designated pastor, the session and COM. (See the "Process for Calling a Designated Pastor" under Tab 16 of the COM Operations Manual) If at the end of the designated pastor's contract both the pastor and the congregation being mutually pleased with the relationship the congregation may vote to offer the pastor a permanent call. This may take place if, and only if, the search conducted by COM prior to the call of the designated pastor was an open search.

### **Process to Dissolve the Relationship Between a Church and a Temporary Pastor (Interim, Stated Supply, Temporary Supply)**

The contract of a temporary pastor is for a specific period of time. If that time has elapsed the relationship may be dissolved by not renewing the contract. No further action is required by COM or Presbytery. If the contract is still in effect when either the pastor or the congregation wishes to end the relationship, the terms of the contract shall apply. Most temporary contracts are written with a 30 to 60 day termination clause activated at the behest of either the pastor or the congregation. If this provision of the contract is invoked the relationship will be automatically dissolved with no further action required by the church, pastor, COM or Presbytery .