



**THE PRESBYTERY OF MINNESOTA VALLEYS
COMMISSION ON LEADERSHIP**

MANUAL AND RESOURCE GUIDE

SECTION 4
TRANSITIONS IN PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

**COMMISSION ON LEADERSHIP MANUAL
SECTION 4: TRANSITIONS IN PASTORAL LEADERSHIP**

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DISSOLUTION OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH PASTORAL LEADERS

✦ BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Ordinarily and ideally a relationship between the pastoral leader and the congregation will be dissolved amicably and with a tone of celebration (and a measure of grief) as the pastoral leader moves to a new field or to retirement. On occasion, however, the relationship is dissolved under less than ideal circumstances. In this event the Presbytery is interested in providing a policy which will insure some degree of care for both pastor and congregation. Toward that end, the following policy will be observed.

Principles:

1. Calls, covenants, and contracts for pastoral leaders are established and dissolved by the presbytery.
2. Every call in the PCUSA is an agreement between the presbytery, the pastoral leader and the congregation. All three parties are involved in every decision regarding the establishment of a pastoral relationship and the dissolution of a pastoral relationship. The Commission on Leadership (COL) shall be involved in the entire process of dissolving pastoral leader relationships.
3. When the congregation and the pastoral agree upon terms of dissolution, the Commission on Leadership has been empowered to act with the power of the presbytery in this regard and reports all such action to the presbytery itself. If agreement between the congregation and pastor is not attained the action to dissolve the relationship and establish the terms of the dissolution proceeds to the floor of the presbytery as specified in the Book of Order, G-2.09.
4. All official matters regarding separation/termination of a pastoral leader shall be documented in writing and shared with all three parties.
5. All conditions for separation shall be compatible with the provisions of the Book of Order.
6. The congregation and the presbytery must approve the dissolution of the call and any severance terms.

✦ VOLUNTARY DISSOLUTION

Voluntary dissolution occurs when the pastoral leader announces to the session, and then to the congregation, that he/she is requesting the presbytery to dissolve the relationship on a specific date. Ordinarily such a request would come because the pastoral leader has received another call, or is intending to retire.

When pastoral leader relationships are dissolved, the following policies will be observed:

1. The church will provide payments of the effective salary and dues to the Board of Pensions, PCUSA, through the date the dissolution becomes effective.

2. The church will also provide payment for any unused vacation leave earned through the date of dissolution.
3. The church will provide reimbursement for all professional expenses incurred prior to the dissolution of the relationship that are in accord with the pastor's most recently approved Terms of Call or Contract.
4. All financial compensation and reimbursements due to the pastoral leader will be paid in full by the date of the dissolution of the relationship.
5. Any termination package that exceeds compensation earned through the date the dissolution becomes effective must be approved by the Commission on Leadership and by a vote of the congregation.
6. The property of the pastoral will be removed from the church office and other property (except for the manse) within 15 days of the date of the dissolution of the relationship. Any extension must be made as a recommendation from the session for approval to the Commission on Leadership.
7. The use of the manse will be provided to the departing pastoral leader for 30 days after the dissolution of the relationship.

✦ INVOLUNTARY DISSOLUTION

When the session feels that, for the peace and harmony of the church, it is prudent for the congregation to request the dissolution of the relationship with a pastoral leader, it shall consult with the COL first before calling a congregational meeting.

The COL also shall counsel with the pastoral leader involved. Following such consultation, the session may be authorized by the COL to call a congregational meeting to request presbytery to dissolve the pastoral leader relationship. The call to the meeting shall also include the date and compensation terms of the dissolution. The portion of the session meeting concerning the dissolution shall be conducted by a moderator appointed by the Commission on Leadership.

****The right to vote on this matter belongs to the congregation, not to the session. The session calls the meeting and may make a recommendation. The final authority on the matter, however, belongs to the Presbytery; the Presbytery's decision is definitive.***

1. If, in the case of conflict within a church, and after full investigation, the COL decides it would be in the best interest of either the congregation or the pastoral leader, or both, it shall initiate the process above.
2. In rare cases the COL may recommend to the presbytery that the relationship be dissolved even if neither the congregation nor the pastoral leader request it. Book of Order, G-2.0904

✦ MUTUAL DECISION FOR DISSOLUTION

If, in the case of conflict within a church, the session and pastor leader mutually agree it is prudent for the congregation to request the dissolution of the relationship with the pastoral leader or leaders, they shall consult with the COL first before calling a congregational meeting. Following such consultation, the session may be authorized by the COL to call a congregational meeting to request presbytery to

dissolve the pastoral leader's relationship at a mutually agreed upon termination date. The call to the meeting shall also include the date and compensation terms of the dissolution. The portion of the session meeting concerning the dissolution shall be conducted by a moderator appointed by the COL.

**PASTORAL LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS:
AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS**

This chart is meant to be used in conjunction with Pastoral Search Process Checklist found in Section 6 of this Manual, pages 604-609

<p style="text-align: center;">Pastoral Leader Session Congregation</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Commission on Leadership COL Liaison Presbytery Leader</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Suggestions</p>
<p>Pastoral Leader consults with the COL before informing the Session of any intention to seek dissolution of the pastoral relationship</p>	<p>COL Co-Chair(s) or designee consults with the pastoral leader regarding details of any announcement to the session and congregation</p>	<p>ISSUES TO CONSIDER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing • Letters • Preparation of the Congregation
<p>Session meets to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When and how to inform the congregation • Options for temporary pastoral leadership 	<p>COL Liaison is appointed by the COL Co-Chair(s) to work with the Session during the transition. Liaison meets to discuss next steps, the overall process, and options for temporary pulpit supply.</p> <p>The Presbytery Leader (EDPM) works closely with the Liaison as a resource.</p>	<p>Temporary supply discussion should be brief and non-specific. Encourage pulpit supply for the first few weeks.</p> <p><i>Normally, the search process for an Interim/Transitional Pastor will not begin until the pastor has left.</i></p>
<p>Session calls a congregational meeting to dissolve the pastoral relationship</p>	<p>COL Liaison consults with the pastor as to who will moderate the congregational meeting. The Liaison should be present for worship and the congregational meeting to introduce themselves and the process.</p> <p>COL, through the Liaison will conduct exit interviews with both the pastor and the session.</p>	<p>The congregational meeting be may be moderated by the pastoral leader, the COL Liaison, or another COL member</p> <p>When possible, encourage the Session to invite the Executive Director of Presbytery Mission (Presbytery Leader) to preach on the first Sunday following the pastor's departure.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Pastoral Leader Session Congregation</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Commission on Leadership COL Liaison Presbytery Leader</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Suggestions</p>
<p>If it is determined by the COL, in consultation with the Session that securing an Intentional Interim or Transitional Pastor is in the best interests of the congregation, the Session will arrange for an Interim/Transitional Pastor search process</p>	<p>COL Liaison assists in the search for an Interim/Transitional Pastor: providing samples of an interview process, position description, covenants, etc.</p>	<p>COL Liaison provides guidance and offers suggestions</p>
<p>The Interim/Transitional Pastor and Session will lead the congregation through the interim tasks, including some sort of a congregational self-study.</p> <p>Once the self-study is completed and the Session has developed a sense of where the congregational is headed and what its needs are, the Session will share the results with the COL.</p> <p>The Session will request permission from COL to form a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC)</p>	<p>The COL Liaison will be asked to remain as a link between the Interim/Transitional Pastor, Session, and COL, available to meet upon request.</p> <p>The COL Liaison will review the results of the self-study and will share those results with the COL.</p> <p>When the COL feels that the congregation is ready to proceed with a pastoral search, it will authorize the formation of a PNC.</p> <p>The COL Liaison will continue as a resource to the PNC</p>	

Pastoral Leader Session Congregation	Commission on Leadership COL Liaison Presbytery Leader	Suggestions
<p>If it is determined by the COL, in consultation with the Session that securing an Intentional Interim or Transitional Pastor is <u>not needed</u>, the Session will develop engage in a self-study process. <i>One possible, simple self-study is “Critical Questions”, found on pp. 613-614 (Section 6) of this Manual.</i></p> <p>Once the self-study is completed and the Session has developed a sense of where the congregational is headed and what its needs are, the Session will request permission for form a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC)</p>	<p>The COL Liaison will be a resource to the Session, as needed, during the self-study process.</p> <p>The COL Liaison will review the results of the self-study and will share those results with the COL.</p> <p>When the COL feels that the congregation is ready to proceed with a pastoral search, it will authorize the formation of a PNC and appoint the COL Liaison to continue as a resource to the PNC</p>	<p>The COL will offer simple self-study tools that can be used by the Session to conduct its self-study.</p> <p>The Self-Study must be the work of the congregation and include as much congregational input as possible. It is not the role of the Liaison to direct this process. The session must have ownership from start to finish.</p>
<p>The Congregational Nominating Committee or a special committee authorized by the Session prepares a list of nominees to serve as the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC).</p>		<p>The Session should determine, in advance, the size of the PNC.</p> <p>The PNC shall be representative of the congregation. G-2.0802</p>
<p>The Session calls a congregational meeting to elect a PNC</p>	<p>The COL Liaison should be present to meet with the newly elected members to set a first meeting date</p>	<p>The COL Liaison should be introduced, or re-introduced, to the congregation and be available to answer questions</p>

Pastoral Leader Session Congregation	Commission on Leadership COL Liaison Presbytery Leader	Suggestions
<p>The PNC meets for the first time.</p> <p>The PNC is oriented to its task. The AA/EEO Guidelines are reviewed and the PNC makes a commitment to adhere to the Guidelines in its work.</p> <p>PNC elects a Chairperson and Clerk/Secretary</p> <p>PNC reviews the Mission Study or “Critical Questions” document.</p>	<p>The COL Liaison chairs the initial PNC meeting and attends as many PNC meetings as possible.</p> <p>At the first meeting the COL Liaison describes the work of the PNC while also answering questions.</p> <p>The COL Liaison reviews the AA/EEO Guidelines with the PNC. The PNC affirms its intention to adhere to these guidelines.</p> <p>When the Liaison is unable to attend, he/she should have a conversation with the PNC Chairperson to review what the agenda for a particular meeting will be and offer any suggestions</p> <p>COL Liaison assists PNC in its review of the Mission Study and reviews the process of preparing a Ministry Information Form (MIF).</p> <p>The COL Liaison may secure copies of the MIF and the accompanying instructions from the CLC area on the pcusa.org website.</p>	<p>Set second meeting for electing a PNC Chairperson</p> <p>Liaison encourages the PNC to go deeper in its review to fully understand what the Mission Study says.</p>

Pastoral Leader Session Congregation	Commission on Leadership COL Liaison Presbytery Leader	Suggestions
<p>PNC prepares a <i>Ministry Information Form (MIF)</i> and secures the approval of the Session, with attention being paid to the salary range</p>	<p>Liaison assists in preparation as an “outside set of eyes”</p> <p>The COL, through appointed members, reviews the MIF and ultimately approves it</p> <p>The COL, through one of the Co-Chairs assists with submitting the MIF to the Church Leadership Connection (CLC)</p>	
<p>PNC prepares for reading and evaluating Personal Information Forms (PIFs)</p>	<p>Liaison offers suggestions to the PNC as to how they might choose to review and process PIFs</p>	
<p>PNC considers PIFs from all sources – CLC, self-referral, etc., identifying those that might fit their situation and setting aside those that do not.</p>	<p>COL Liaison does not need to be present during the review of PIFS, but assists as requested</p>	
<p>PNC conducts phone interviews with individuals in whom they are interested in order to gauge their interest and to get permission to contact references.</p> <p>The PNC contacts all references to gain insight into prospective pastoral leaders.</p>	<p>COL Liaison is available to share suggestions regarding phone interviews and reference checks</p>	

Pastoral Leader Session Congregation	Commission on Leadership COL Liaison Presbytery Leader	Suggestions
<p>When the process reaches a point where the PNC has individuals that they wish to meet face-to-face, the PNC Chair requests the COL Liaison to arrange for an Executive-level reference check to be done.</p>	<p>The COL Liaison arranges for Presbytery (Executive-level) reference check for potential face-to-face candidates.</p> <p>These checks are done by the Presbytery Leader (EDPM) and must be successfully completed <i>PRIOR TO</i> arranging for an interview</p> <p>If the potential candidate is not yet ordained, the COL Liaison will consult with the Stated Clerk regarding process</p>	
<p>PNC arranges for face-to-face interviews and preaching in a neutral pulpit</p>	<p>COL Liaison reviews a suggested interview process with the PNC; Liaison assists in securing a neutral pulpit and arranges for a COL “entrance” interview</p>	<p>The Entrance Interview is to be done by two individuals, one of whom should be a current COL member the other person may be co-opted.</p>
<p>PNC hosts an interviewing visit</p>	<p>COL Liaison attends the primary interview with the PNC</p>	<p>Liaison is present for “listening” purposes and to provide feedback after the interview</p>
<p>PNC will receive a report from the COL “entrance interview” team. It is important to wait on this report before moving forward.</p>	<p>COL holds “entrance” interview and reports any pertinent information to the PNC Chairperson and COL Liaison as soon after the interview as possible.</p>	<p>Allow at least two hours for this interview</p> <p>If possible, the Liaison should be present to listen and provide feedback.</p>
<p>Note: Normally, it is likely that the PNC will bring 2-3 prospective candidates for a “Face-to-Face” visit. Decisions regarding the issuance of a call may not necessarily occur during the visit.</p>		

Pastoral Leader Session Congregation	Commission on Leadership COL Liaison Presbytery Leader	Suggestions
When the PNC has the person that it wishes to call as pastor, the committee extends an invitation to the candidate and negotiates the terms of call	As appropriate, the COL Liaison helps with the negotiations for the terms of call	The Liaison should pay attention to any potential issues or difficulties that arise between the Session and PNC regarding the terms
PNC requests the Session to call a congregational meeting	COL Liaison consults with the Clerk of Session and/or the Interim/Transitional Pastor, as well as the COL Co-Chairs regarding a moderator for the meeting	Consider if the moderator should be the Interim or Transitional Pastor; often, the Interim/Transitional Pastor chooses to be away from the congregation on that Sunday
<p>The PNC plans for the Candidate's Visit, usually a weekend. The Congregational Meeting is normally scheduled for Sunday following worship.</p> <p>The PNC brings the candidate and his/her family to meet the congregation</p> <p>The Congregation hears the candidate preach</p> <p>At the congregation meeting, the congregation hears the PNC report and votes to elect the pastor</p>	<p>COL Liaison is present for the worship and congregational meeting</p> <p>Liaison sees that the call forms are properly signed and submits the forms to the Stated Clerk</p> <p>The COL acts to approve the call</p> <p>The Liaison requests that the Executive Direction for Presbytery Mission/ Presbytery Leader notifies the CLC to remove the MIF from the system</p>	<p>Note that a vote in excess of 85% is required to elect the new pastoral leader. If the vote is less than that, COL needs to consult with the pastoral leader and session before any call is finalized.</p> <p>It is possible that the congregation could vote to dismiss the PNC at this time.</p>

Pastoral Leader Session Congregation	Commission on Leadership COL Liaison Presbytery Leader	Suggestions
<p>Session and Pastoral Leader discuss plans for the Installation service</p> <p>Pastoral Leader consults with the COL Liaison regarding the formation of an Installation Commission</p> <p>Pastoral Leader consults with the Presbytery Moderator regarding their availability to Moderate the Commission and conduct the Installation.</p>	<p>The COL Liaison works with the Pastor to suggest members for the Installation Commission. The Pastor extends the invitations.</p> <p>COL receives the names of proposed commission members and approves the commission as well as the date of the Installation</p>	<p>The COL Liaison should be invited to serve on the Installation Commission and be a part of the installation service</p>

**WHEN A PASTOR IS PREPARING TO LEAVE:
SOME BASIC REMINDERS**
*(Use this section in conjunction with the Process Overview in this Section,
on pages 406-413)*

As soon as a pastoral leader (Minister of the Word and Sacrament or CP) determines that s/he will be leaving a call or commission, there are several steps for the pastoral leader, the COL, and the session to follow.

The Pastoral Leader:

1. When you begin to consider an action (e.g.: circulating your PIF to seek a new call, planning your retirement, preparing your resignation) that will result in the dissolution of your current call or commission, talk to the Presbytery Leader/Executive Director of Presbytery Mission (EDPM) and/or a Commission Leadership Co-chairperson right away for purposes of personal reflection and to become acquainted with the appropriate time-frames for sharing information.
2. Contact the COL Co-chair to invite a COL representative and, when possible, the Presbytery Leader/EDPM, to the session meeting where your resignation will be announced.
3. Be intentional about providing opportunities for closure.
4. Celebrate your ministry with the congregation.
5. Decline to be involved in the choosing of an interim pastor or the formation of a Pastor Nominating Committee.
6. Share with the congregation in a pastoral letter the presbytery's Statement of Ethics for Departing Pastors, and adhere to that statement.
7. If you accept a call in another Presbytery, verify that the calling presbytery requests a transfer of membership from the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys.
8. Submit appropriate "Change of Status" forms to the Board of Pensions in a timely manner.
9. Participate in an exit interview with the COL.

Commission on Leadership:

1. Name and send a COL liaison (when possible, the Presbytery Leader/EDPM should accompany the liaison) to the session meeting at which the pastor's resignation is announced for the following purposes:
 - a. To assure the session of COL availability;
 - b. To convey the importance of a clean and positive parting;
 - c. To address the need of a congregational meeting to dissolve the call;
 - d. To invite initial responses from the elders;

- e. To provide the session with an opportunity to talk about separation ethics for a departing pastor;
 - f. To give preliminary information about transitional issues:
 - i. Pulpit supply and other options for providing on-going ministry
 - ii. Session Moderator following the pastor's departure
 - iii. Transitional staffing – interim tasks, how to search for transitional leadership
 - iv. Board of Pensions issues and vacancy dues
 - g. To describe the pastoral search process, including the importance of an assessment for the church's readiness to undertake a search, the need for permission to form a pastor nominating committee, and the need for a search budget.
 - h. To discuss the MIF (Ministry Information Form) and PIF (Personal Information Form) process and options for completing the MIF (i.e., will the PNC do this, will the session and/or congregation have input, and if so, how).
 - i. To discuss the appropriateness of the Presbytery Leader declaring the pulpit vacant and preaching the first Sunday after the pastor's departure.
2. When possible, the COL Liaison should be present at the congregational meeting to dissolve the pastoral relationship. If the COL Liaison is a Minister of the Word and Sacrament and unavailable to be present due to responsibilities in his or her home congregation, another COL member could be appointed for this one occasion.
 3. The COL Liaison should remain in close touch with appropriate session members and work with the session and Presbytery Leader/EDPM to help seek and obtain interim pastoral staffing.
 4. The COL Liaison should attend the first meeting of the PNC and several meetings thereafter at significant junctures in the process, such as the first receipt of PIFs and the development of interview questions.
 5. The COL Liaison shall review and discuss the MIF as its formation develops to assure its ultimate approval by the COL leadership.
 - a. The COL Co-chairpersons will be able to help the PNC access the on-line services of the Church Leadership Connection (CLC).
 6. The COL Liaison will stay in close contact with the PNC, offering to provide information and training throughout the process as necessary.
 7. The COL Liaison will, at the appropriate time, contact the Presbytery Leader/EDPM when "Executive Clearance Checks" are requested by the PNC for prospects whom the PNC wishes to bring for a face-to-face interview.
 8. The COL Liaison will arrange for "Entrance Interviews" with COL representatives for all prospective candidates who come for a face-to-face interview.
 9. The COL Liaison will work with the PNC to ensure that all parties have appropriate documents when needed, such as terms of call, statements of faith, and autobiographical information.
 10. The Liaison will work with the Commission on Leadership to schedule an exit interview with the departing pastor and for the Session.

The Session:

1. Should consult with your COL Liaison on a regular basis through the early stages of the transition.
2. Make plans to celebrate the ministry of the departing pastoral leader.
3. Call a congregational meeting to concur with the pastoral leader's request to dissolve the pastoral relationship with the congregation, and invite the COL liaison to attend this meeting.
4. Consult with the COL Liaison and/or the Presbytery Leader/EDPM about transitional pastoral leadership, as well as pulpit supply.
5. Work with the COL Liaison to gain COL approval for transitional leadership.
6. When it is deemed appropriate, request permission of COL to form a PNC.
7. Support the congregation and the PNC with prayer and adequate budget funding for transitional leadership and the PNC search process.
8. Communicate regularly with the congregation about how the life of the congregation is being sustained.
9. Approve, at the appropriate time, the Ministry Information Form (MIF) and commend it to the COL leadership for approval.
10. Abide by all agreements that were made with the departing Pastor and continue to interpret those agreements to the congregation.

SEPARATION ETHICS FOR PASTORAL LEADERS
[Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and Commissioned Pastors (also known as
Commissioned Ruling Elders)]

“When Pastoral Leadership and Congregations say Goodbye”

Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys

Approved by the Commission on Leadership, November 17, 2016

Few circumstances in their professional lives challenge those in pastoral leadership to exercise more wisdom and judgment than the ones raised when leaving a congregation. In addition to making a professional move, they and possibly their family may be leaving supportive friends and community. When the transition involves the medical disability or retirement of a Minister of the Word and Sacrament or Commissioned Pastor (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elder) who elects to remain in the community, and perhaps even in the community of the church, the issues become even more complex and challenging.

The Book of Order offers brief, but important guidance in the matter of transitions: **(G-2.0905)** *“After the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, former pastors and associate pastors shall not provide their pastoral services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the moderator of session.”* These guidelines refer to any former ministerial relationship with a congregation as defined in *The Book of Order G-2.0504* as well as those in a Commissioned position.

While such transitions involve several entities (i.e. sessions, congregations, church members, etc.), the Commission on Leadership (COL) believes that the burden of responsibility for creating a healthy transition lies primarily with the professional behavior of the pastoral leadership who is leaving. They must view the process of separation and transition as a final and critical part of their ministry to the congregation they have served. To not do so undermines the future health of the church and is a violation of professional ethics. The use of the term, “ethics” implies certain values which are important to consider during this often highly charged experience of the dissolution of the pastoral relationship. Such values include: *effective leadership; *congregational health and stability; *the growth of pastor and members in dealing with pain, the problems, and the possibilities of separation; and *the ability of the session and congregation to move positively and effectively toward the next phase of their lives. (Previous two sentences courtesy of Winnebago Presbytery)

Practically, the departing pastoral leader must work to educate the session and congregation on the Presbyterian understanding of the transition. She/he ought to take great care in expressing his/her support of the process and the role that presbytery plays in it.

Emotionally and spiritually, the departing pastoral leader can play a positive role in the welcome that future temporary, transitional, or installed leadership will receive. Explaining the transition process and the reasons for it will also assist in clarifying for all, the importance of following and maintaining proper boundaries.

Specific guidelines, based on the *Book of Order*, and developed through the experience of COL are found in the attached PASTORAL DISSOLUTION AGREEMENT and COVENANT OF CLOSURE. Representatives of COL will carefully review that document with each Minister of the Word and Sacrament or Commissioned Pastor (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elder) who is leaving/retiring from a congregation in the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys. The information will also be reviewed with the Session of the congregation affected by the move (prior to the election of a PNC) as a part of the transition meeting conducted by representatives of COL.

The PASTORAL DISSOLUTION AGREEMENT and COVENANT OF CLOSURE shall be signed by:

- Outgoing pastoral leader
- Spouse (if applicable)
- Clerk of Session of the congregation
- Representative/s of COL.

When completed, the original copy shall be filed in the leader's file in the Presbytery Office and a copy placed in the Church's file in the Presbytery Office as well as copies sent to the departing leader and the clerk of session of the congregation.

SAMPLE LETTER

To be sent to members of the congregation by a pastoral leader leaving a congregation

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I am writing this with all the mixed emotions that necessarily are a part of saying good-bye to folks who have been important in my life. Soon I will no longer be in a pastoral role as I [begin my retirement/take up that task in another place]. I leave confident that God will continue to care for and meet all your needs. The Presbytery will assist in working with you to provide pastoral leadership and “prepare the way” for future leadership to arrive and lead you into a new chapter of your life as (name of church)_____.

Leaving a congregation that has become dear is not easy. I know that in the days to come, I will continue to “feel” like your pastoral leader. There is an element of grieving in this. It will be tempting to try to keep up with the life of _____ Church — the community of faith of which my own life has been so much a part. I suspect that some of that same thing might be true on your part as well.

We can serve each other in this. The Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys has had a good deal of experience in this business of “saying good-bye” to pastoral leadership. Guidelines have been developed that provide clear boundaries. These guidelines will help each of us bring honor to all that we have been to each other as well as all we have achieved together, and will bring a healthy closure to our shared ministry. Fundamental to these guidelines is the simple reminder that when pastoral leadership leaves a congregation, it marks the end of the pastoral relationship. It does not mark the end of love and care for each other, but of necessity, the end of our former relationship. Toward this end, after (date of departure), I will not involve or insert myself in any part of the life of _____ Church.

For the sake of the success of your next pastoral leadership, it would be inappropriate for me to continue as a theological guide, as an officiant for weddings or funerals, or as your pastoral presence in times of crisis such as hospitalization. As one who poured energy, time, and emotions into the health of this congregation, I want the church to continue to prosper. For that reason, please do not ask me to choose between my care for you and success in your future by asking me to perform pastoral duties that rightly rests with another person.

I understand this may take time to accept. Please trust experience has taught that when a pastorate is ended, the responsibility of leadership and care must end as well. For my sake leaving a field, but even more, for your sake and this church, an ethic of separation needs to be honored by all. I hope you welcome future pastoral leadership with the same warmth and love that enveloped me when I arrived as a stranger among you. I will try to honor you by focusing my energy on that which God has determined for my future, and will joyfully, in whatever I do, share all that you have taught me about ministering in God's name.

Sincerely,

**PASTORAL LEADER'S DISSOLUTION AGREEMENT and
COVENANT OF CLOSURE
Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys
Commission on Leadership**

Following the dissolution of a pastoral leader's relationship, it is important for the departing pastoral leader and the congregation to understand that all previous pastoral functions must cease. These functions include, but are not limited to: home, hospital, and nursing home visitation; personal counseling (including grief issues); and all liturgical functions such as preaching, weddings, baptisms and funerals. As per G-2.0905, former pastoral leadership shall not provide services to and with members of their former congregation without the invitation of the moderator of session. ***This Dissolution Agreement shall consider fairness to all parties involved, length of pastoral tenure and expedience of needed dissolution.***

Dissolution Agreement between _____ Presbyterian Church of _____

and (pastoral leader) _____. Length of relationship: _____

- Dissolution initiated by Pastoral Leadership
- Dissolution initiated by Congregation/Session
- Dissolution initiated by Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys

Dissolution Date (by which all pastoral functions are concluded): _____

Last Day in the Pulpit: _____ Last Day in the Church Building: _____

Last Day in the Manse (if applicable): _____

(Note specifics if any rent and/or utilities are required from the exiting leadership if the manse is not vacated by this date:

Salary (including Housing Allowance) to be paid through (date): _____ and/or any Termination Bonus Pay for pastoral leadership: \$_____. Note final payment date for these payments: _____. (All salaries paid and/or Termination Pay are part of Effective Salary and therefore shall be accompanied by Board of Pension dues for retirement and medical or other retirement payments.)

Pastoral Leader _____ and his/her spouse (if applicable), the

_____ Church of _____, and the Commission on Leadership of the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys, having discussed the intent and requirements of the following Presbytery policies regarding pastoral dissolution, agree to the following covenant.

Please note: There are no time limits to these responsibilities. They do not expire after a certain period of time has passed. **It is understood that this policy does not affect or require termination of friendships with individuals in the congregation, but these friendships must be carefully continued in the spirit of the following agreement.**

AGREEMENT- Departing Pastoral Leader

As of effective Dissolution Date, I understand and agree:

- When Presbytery dissolves the pastoral leader's relationship, all pastoral functions must cease.
- For the health of the congregation and its potential relationship with future pastoral leadership, it is necessary that the departing pastoral leader find a different congregation with which to worship. For the same reasons, if the spouse happens to be employed by the church as well, this relationship should terminate as of the effective Dissolution Date.
Possible exception: Special services of worship such as funerals, weddings, etc. as a congregant and not as one actively participating in the leadership of the service.
- Adult children of the former pastoral leader, who wish to continue membership in or worshipping with the congregation previously served by their parent/s, should consult with the new pastoral leadership and the Session as to the propriety of such a decision and abide by their advice.
- It is inappropriate to involve myself in any leadership or advisory role (public or private) in the congregation. This includes, but is not limited to: *commenting on potential persons for leadership; * intervening, supporting or giving advice to anyone involved in a congregational disagreement or dispute; * giving opinions or directions regarding church business that could undermine the transitions necessary for the church and the development of the relationship between the congregation and new pastoral leadership.
- It is inappropriate to officiate in any special event in the lives of former parishioners or of the congregation, including, but not limited to, weddings, funerals, baptisms, worship leadership, church anniversary activities, etc. unless expressly invited by the Moderator of the Session.
- Any request for pastoral services by a member of the congregation shall be declined and the member be referred to the current pastoral leadership. At no time, shall the former leader give any indication to the request that he/she would be glad to officiate if only the current leader would invite her/him. Such action is contrary to the spirit of this covenant.
- I will assure that all financial obligations within the community are completed so that the church will not be responsible to bear any burdens on my behalf.
- I will leave the church study and the manse, if applicable, in a clean and orderly fashion with all church belongings intact, returning all keys and removing all personal possessions no later than the date agreed upon. Any out of the ordinary repairs or cleaning shall be the responsibility of the departing person.
- I will authorize and notify the Board of Pensions, using "Service Change" Form ENR-110 or Board of Pension "Service Termination for Traditional Program Members: Form ENR-303, or any other updated change forms.

NOTE: Concerns or complaints regarding any of these issues shall be directed to the COL for resolution. If resolution is not reached, the matter shall be forwarded to the Stated Clerk of Presbytery. The Stated Clerk shall invite two or more members of COL to meet with the person alleged to have been in violation. Should they find the complaints valid, and should the practice

continue, the matter may be brought before the entire COL and subject to censure according to the “Rules of Discipline.”

AGREEMENT of the SESSION

On behalf of the congregation, the session shall serve as a guide by:

- Assuring the members of the congregation respect the terms of the Covenant as outlined.
- Interpreting the terms of the Covenant of Closure to the congregation. They shall clarify and help members understand the scope of the change in relationship that occurs when their Minister of the Word and Sacrament or Commissioned Pastor (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elder) is no longer in place. This may be particularly true when former leadership is elected to an Emeritus role. A person in that role is not exempted in any way from the terms of this Covenant.
- Instructing the congregation to not involve itself in the continuing ministry of the departed pastor.
- Assuring that any written and signed agreement is incorporated in the Session Minutes.
- Authorizing and notifying the appropriate entity to terminate benefit contributions paid out by the church as part of a former compensation and benefits package. If Board of Pensions (BOP), this will include “Service Change” Form ENR-110 or BOP “Service Termination for Traditional Program Members” Form ENR-301, or any other updated change forms. A copy will be made for the departing pastoral leader and we will be responsible for mailing or faxing completed forms to Board of Pensions.

AGREEMENT of the PRESBYTERY COMMISSION ON LEADERSHIP

On behalf of the Presbytery, the Commission on Leadership shall:

- Meet with and interpret the Covenant of Closure and its purpose to the Minister of the Word and Sacrament or Commissioned Pastor (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elder) prior to their departure as well as with the Session of the particular church.
- Be the Presbytery’s agent in reminding all parties of the principles agreed to in the Covenant of Closure. In the event any continued failure to live up to these principles is reported, compliance with the principles of the Covenant shall be enforced, as necessary.
- Be ready to assist any pastoral leader or Session struggling to understand or to adapt to this change of relationship.
- Be responsible for assuring all necessary signatures are received and copies of the completed Pastoral Dissolution Agreement and Covenant of Closure are distributed as follows:
 - Original copies in the appropriate pastoral leader’s file in the Presbytery Office
 - A copy to the departing Pastoral Leader
 - A copy to the Clerk of Session of the appropriate church

- A copy in the Church's file in the Presbytery Office

SIGNATURES:

_____ Date: _____
Departing Pastoral Leader
Minister of the Word and Sacrament or
Commissioned Pastor (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elder)

_____ Date: _____
Spouse (if applicable)

_____ Date: _____
Clerk of Session

_____ Date: _____
Commission on Leadership Chair or Designee

Please return to:

**The Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys
4055 Abbott Drive SE
Willmar, MN 56201**

**Phone: 320-235-7910
FAX: 320-235-7539**

SEVERANCE/TRANSITIONAL SUPPORT POLICY

The Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys

Approved by Committee on Ministry, December 4, 2015

Approved by the Presbytery, February 6, 2016

Generally installed relationships between Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and Commissioned Pastors (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elders) and the congregation are dissolved amicably and with a tone of celebration (and a measure of grief) as the pastor accepts a call to a new ministry or retires.

Other times, however, the relationship is dissolved under less than ideal circumstances due to budget constraints, elimination of a position, or the mission and ministries of a congregation is hampered by a continuing relationship.

The *Book of Order* provides the following guidelines on Dissolution of Pastoral Relationships:

G-2.0901 An installed pastoral relationship may be dissolved only by the presbytery. Whether the Minister of the Word and Sacrament, the congregation, or the presbytery initiates proceedings for dissolution of the relationship, there shall always be a meeting of the congregation to consider the matter and to consent, or decline to consent, to dissolution.

G-2.0902 A pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor may request the presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship. The minister must also state her or his intention to the session. The session shall call a congregational meeting to act upon the request and to make recommendations to presbytery. If the congregation does not concur, the presbytery shall hear from the congregation, through its elected commissioners, the reasons why the presbytery should not dissolve the pastoral relationship. If the congregation fails to appear, or if its reasons for retaining the relationship are judged insufficient, the request may be granted and the pastoral relationship dissolved.

G-2.0903 If any congregation desires the pastoral relationship to be dissolved, a procedure similar to G-2.0902, above, shall be followed. When a congregation requests the session to call a congregational meeting to dissolve its relationship with its pastor, the session shall call the meeting and request the presbytery to appoint a moderator for the meeting. If the pastor does not concur with the request to dissolve the relationship, the presbytery shall hear from him or her the reasons why the presbytery should not dissolve the relationship. If the pastor fails to appear, or if the reasons for maintaining the relationship are judged insufficient, the relationship may be dissolved.

G-2.0904 The presbytery may inquire into reported difficulties in a congregation and may dissolve the pastoral relationship if, after consultation with the minister, the session, and the congregation, it finds the church's mission under the Word imperatively demands it.

The Session or Minister of the Word and Sacrament/Commissioned Pastor (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elder) will contact the presbytery's Committee on Congregational Nurture for assistance during this time. The Committee on Congregational Nurture can ask the Presbytery Response Team to assist in negotiating and preparing a written agreement to be presented to the congregation, pastoral and presbytery for their approval.

As clergypersons do not have access to unemployment payments, a fair severance/transitional support agreement is appropriate. The agreement shall include at minimum the following:

1. Termination date
2. A minimum of two months of current salary, housing allowance, full of Board of Pensions and SECA payments beyond the termination date. Sessions are encouraged to provide additional compensation based on their budget and benevolence. If the pastoral leader receives part-time or full-time employment during this time, the financial obligations of the congregation will be reduced or terminated accordingly. Accumulated study leave time and vacation time not used prior to the termination date shall be forfeited. Professional expenses, mileage and continuing education funds are discontinued upon the termination date.
3. If a manse is provided, sessions are encouraged to extend the stay. An inspection of the manse is advised prior to the pastoral leader's leaving.
4. The Minister of the Word and Sacrament/Commissioned Pastor (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elder) will remove his/her possessions from the church and/or manse on the termination date or as provided in the agreement. All financial obligations to the church will be paid in full upon the end of the severance period.
5. The session and Minister of the Word and Sacrament/Commissioned Pastor (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elder) shall sign the Presbytery's Covenant of Understanding for Separation.
6. Upon signing the agreement, the Minister of the Word and Sacrament/Commissioned Ruling Elder waives all rights to demand and/or secure a civil court and/or a jury trial. with respect to adjudication of the matters contained in this Severance Agreement, in matters that pertain to his/her ministry in the Congregation, and/or the negotiations that have led up to this agreement.

The Termination Agreement must be approved by the congregation and is subject to approval by the presbytery through the Commission on Leadership.

EXIT INTERVIEWS

Commission on Leadership Action (July 14, 2016):

COL VOTED to add the following about Exit interviews to the COL Manual:

At the conclusion of a Pastor's or Commissioned Pastor (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elder)'s ministry with a congregation of this presbytery, the Commission on Leadership will arrange for Exit Interviews to take place, separately, with both the Pastor/Commissioned Pastor (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elder) and the session. The interviews will be conducted by two individuals, one of whom must be an active member of the Commission on Leadership. The second person may be a Ruling Elder or Minister of the Word and Sacrament co-opted by the commission for this purpose.

Following the interviews, those conducting the Exit Interviews will submit written summary reports of each interview to the Commission on Leadership, the session of the congregation or congregations, and the Pastor/Commissioned Pastor (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elder). Additionally, these summary reports shall be placed in the pastor's/Commissioned Pastor (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elder)'s file, as well as the congregation's file at the presbytery office.

If there is particular information that the Pastor/Commissioned Pastor (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elder) does not wish to share with the session, or that the session does not wish shared with the pastor/Commissioned Pastor (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elder), this information shall be left out of those summary reports. If there is information which the either party does not want to share with each other this information will be left out of the report which each other receives.

Suggested questions for an Exit Interview of the Pastor/Commissioned Pastor (also known as Commissioned Ruling Elder):

1. Personal:
 - a. What did you find most personally satisfying during your time with this congregation?
 - b. What were your greatest frustrations?
 - c. What, if anything would you "do over" if you could?
 - d. In what ways has this experience contributed to your faith journey?
 - e. What are your personal hopes and dreams for the future?

2. The Church
 - a. What did you find to be the church's strengths?
 - b. What did you find to be the church's roadblocks in meeting their goals?
 - c. What were the gaps between what you expected to find here and what you actually experienced? (If appropriate, use follow-up questions . . .)
 - d. What could have mitigated these gaps?
 - e. In your opinion, what is God's calling for this church at this time?
 - f. What could the Presbytery do to support this church?

3. Future Pastoral Leadership
 - a. What major skills and experience do you see as important for future pastoral leadership?
 - b. What one piece of advice would you give a new pastor?

4. Other questions:
 - a. Is there any unfinished business that needs to be attended to?
 - b. Is there anything else you want the Commission on Leadership to know?
 - c. What last details need attention?
 - d. What do you need so that you reach an appropriate closure to your service?

Suggested questions for an Exit Interview of the Session:

These questions are designed to open the dialogue with session members. Those conducting the interview will need to be alert to other appropriate questions that may need to be asked.

1. Session/Congregational Performance (Listen for the pastor's influence upon the life and ministry of the church.)
 - a. How are you experiencing God's work in your congregation right now?
 - b. Of this congregation's most recent accomplishments, of what are you most proud . . . and what were the major reasons these accomplishments got done?
 - c. In your recent pastor, what had you hoped would get accomplished that did not . . . and what got in the way of getting it/them done?
 - d. What is God calling your church to be at this time?

2. Pastor Performance (Listen for ways to strengthen the call process/PNC performance, etc.)
 - a. In what ways did Pastor/Rev. _____ meet your expectations during his/her pastorate?
 - b. In what ways did s/he not meet your expectations? (*If appropriate, then follow up with . . .*) What were the factors that created any gaps between performance and expectations?

3. Future Pastor
 - a. Where do you want your new pastor to lead _____ Presbyterian Church in the short term ---- long term?
 - b. What qualities, personality traits and experience in a new pastor would be a good match for _____ Presbyterian Church? Talk about why these are important.

4. Presbytery Support
 - a. How can this presbytery be of the greatest assistance to your church during the pastoral transition?
 - b. What could be have done differently in recent years to be more effective in our support?
 - c. What details need immediate attention as your pastor is leaving?