

GUIDELINES FOR APPROPRIATE CONDUCT BY CURRENT AND FORMER PASTORS

*Produced jointly by the Cabinets and Boards of Ordained Ministry,
Greater Northwest Area, United Methodist Church*

In the Greater Northwest Area, we serve as colleagues in a covenant community. We all wrestle with the complexity of pastoral relationships and friendships with parishioners that require us to be sensitive and clear, especially during a change of appointment. We know some communities find it difficult to disengage from their former pastors. The behavior guidelines included here are for the health of pastors and congregations.

Consequences, even in retirement, in regard to this policy are based on the 2016 UMC Discipline, Par. 2702.1 (f) where clergy may be charged and tried for “relationships and/or behavior that undermines the ministry of another pastor.”

1. Honor the work or lifestyle of a predecessor, successor or other ministers with statements that do not disparage.
2. Practice the same ministerial code of ethics with pastors and congregations of other denominations as would be expected in the United Methodist Church.
3. Perform no pastoral functions in any church or charge to which the minister is not appointed, except at the request and under the direction of the pastor in charge.
4. Upon leaving the appointment, including retirement, sever all pastoral relationships with the parish, recognizing that all future weddings, baptisms, communions, counseling, visitations and funerals should be fulfilled by the successor pastor, unless an unusual situation exists and is approved by the successor pastor. To be clear: When you receive a request from a former parishioner, you will always refer them, without comment, to their current pastor. You will only agree to any involvement after the appointed pastor invites you to participate.
5. For the health and welfare of the church, it is important that the former pastor and family, when they will be residing in the same community following serving as pastor, find another church to attend. The former pastor’s continued presence in the life of the church almost always hinders the congregation and the incoming pastor in developing the necessary relationship for successful ministry. This can be a difficult and painful event for the former pastor and family. However, considering the needs of the church, the best interests of all involved are better served by the former pastor and family participating in another church. Reconsideration of this may happen after a minimum of one year absence in consultation with the District Superintendent and current pastor.
6. The former pastor shall avoid all conversation and communication with church members about a new pastor, as well as problems and issues regarding the former church. If approached, the former pastor needs to tactfully explain that ethics do not permit such a discussion.
7. Continued personal relationships and social media connection with congregants do not assist in the health and welfare of the local church, and are therefore discouraged. Exceptions to any ongoing

relationships and regular contact with former parishioners need to be openly shared and negotiated with the current pastor and District Superintendent.

8. Before leaving, the exiting pastor will clearly communicate from the pulpit, in writing and on social media that they will no longer be able to function in any pastoral way with the congregation.
9. An exiting pastor shall not be present or participate in worship, events or church groups for a minimum of one year. Immediate family members are discouraged from this as well. In the case of any exceptions, a written agreement will be reached by the District Superintendent and both clergy. In longer appointments, the District Superintendent can require a longer period of absence.

The currently appointed pastor is also expected to be sensitive, gracious and appropriately inclusive of former pastors.

Church name _____

Staff Parish Signature & Date

Exiting Pastor Signature & Date

Entering Pastor Signature & Date

District Superintendent Signature & Date
