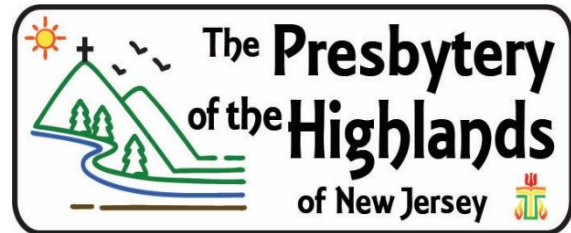


Involuntary Dissolution Policy Presbytery of the Highlands



The pastoral relationship in the PC (USA) is a three-way covenant between a pastor, a congregation and a presbytery. When a pastoral relationship is established, it is a time for celebration. But there inevitably comes a time that the pastoral relationship will be dissolved. Most commonly, it is the pastor who initiates the dissolution of the pastoral relationship by resigning, ordinarily to accept another pastoral call, to enter another form of labor, or to retire from professional ministry. Ideally, when that time comes, such dissolution happens amicably.

However, on occasion, the pastoral relationship is dissolved under less-than-ideal circumstances. There are occasions when either a congregation or presbytery initiates action to end a relationship with a particular pastor, with which the pastor may not immediately agree. Through counseling and assistance from the Committee on Ministry (COM), it is hoped that such dissolutions may become mutually agreed upon.

In all cases of Presbyterian pastoral relationships, it is the Presbytery through the COM that creates or dissolves a pastoral relationship. Moreover, the COM has responsibility for ongoing review and supervision of the relationship between a pastor and an employing congregation.

Principles for Dissolution:

- All conditions for dissolution shall be compatible with the provisions of the most current Book of Order and the policies of the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey
- The COM is commissioned by the Presbytery to approve aspects of pastoral relationships between pastors, Certified Christian Educators and Commissioned Ruling Elders and congregations. This includes dissolution and severance.
- All official matters regarding separation/termination of a pastor shall be documented in writing and shared with all three parties.
- An appropriate and regular process of review, evaluation, and (if necessary) mediation or conflict intervention shall precede the start of any process of dissolution in accordance with the Book of Order.
- The dissolution agreement shall include the specific arrangements for termination of pastoral service.
- Once COM has taken its action, all agreements are final. COM shall be responsible for monitoring the completion of the agreements.

Dissolution policy and guidelines concerning involuntary dissolution of pastoral relationships.

- The Committee on Ministry has final authority regarding the dissolution agreement.
- The dissolution severance agreement should be negotiated by the session, the pastor and COM representatives. In special circumstances an outside mediator might be considered. The session shall make the recommendation to the congregation only after consulting with the COM.
- The severance shall be a minimum of sixty days. A pastor's length of service to a congregation may be considered when negotiating terms of severance.
- In accordance with IRS rules, severance does not include reimbursable professional expenses or other allowance amount after the termination of service date.
- Study leave time and continuing education funds are not included in the severance package.
- Unused vacation time may be added to the severance amount calculated on a basis of one week per quarter for the calendar year.
- Leave of absence time and compensation provided by the church prior to the dissolution may be considered in determining the amount of severance. However, there will still be sixty days severance no matter how many weeks of leave of absence.
- Payments should usually be made according to the regular payroll schedule of the church.
- Normally, severance ceases when the pastor obtains future employment. However, if the pastor obtains employment that is not comparable to the former compensation, the church may consider making up the difference during the term of the severance package.
- A church must prove financial hardship for this policy to not apply.
- All agreements must have the following included:
 - The date of termination of service and the date of termination of salary/housing.
 - Severance will include cash salary, housing (or use of manse and utilities , if applicable), Board of Pension Benefits, and Social Security offset. The church shall be responsible for continuing coverage until the end of the agreement.
 - The severance will include an agreement for satisfying the conditions of any "loan" for purchase of a house or any other financial agreement between pastor and congregation.
 - A date for vacancy of manse and/or church office will be included.
 - Signatures of the clerk of session, the pastor and the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery or COM moderator.