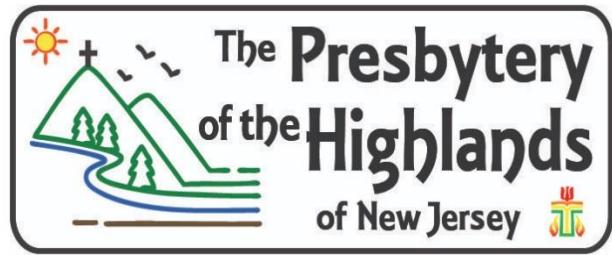


RETIRED  
MINISTERS/RETIREMENT Policy  
Presbytery of the Highlands of  
New Jersey



"I said, 'Let days speak, and many years teach wisdom.'" (Job 32:7)

*The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance for the Commission on Ministry (COM) in its interactions with the presbytery's retired members, as well as retired members from other presbyteries who may be serving in post-retirement roles within the presbytery's congregations. It also outlines the protocols, requirements, and procedures for retiring and retired pastors within the presbytery.*

### **Retirement - First Steps**

When a minister is within 5 to 7 years of retirement, they should attend the Board of Pensions retirement workshops. The schedule for these workshops can be found on the Board of Pensions website.

When a minister decides to set a retirement date, the following steps shall be taken:

- Before announcing their retirement to the congregation or validated ministry, the minister shall connect with the Commission on Ministry (COM) to begin the process and seek guidance on the next steps.
- Contact the Board of Pensions to obtain information and paperwork regarding retirement benefits.
- Once the minister is ready to announce their retirement date, they shall call a session meeting to begin the dissolution process. The retiring minister shall follow the same dissolution process as any pastor leaving a congregation.

### **Retirement Designation**

When a pastor member gives notification and request of retirement status to the Presbytery, the Presbytery may officially designate the member as retired according to the Book of Order using the ecclesiastical code of Retired Pastor (299) (G-2.0503c).

Retirement through the Board of Pensions does not automatically grant a pastor the retired (299) designation from the Presbytery. To receive this designation, a pastor must formally notify the Presbytery and request retirement status. The Presbytery may only confer the retired (299) designation after receiving and processing this request.

Prior to July 2023, the Book of Order routinely conferred the title "Honorably Retired" to retiring Presbytery members, noting that this designation did not signify exceptional achievement.

Since July 2023, the Book of Order only mentions the title designation "retired" for pastors (G- 2.053c). However, after pastor notification and request for retirement is made to the Presbytery, the Presbytery may officially designate the member as "Honorably Retired" (HR).

"Honorably Retired" (HR) may continue to be granted to retiring pastors by the Presbytery of the Highlands and/or the Commission on Ministry, retroactive from July 2023, unless a disciplinary ruling is in effect or becomes in effect after retirement, precluding such a title designation.

Ministers designated as retired (299) by the presbytery will remain listed as such in the national directory of PCUSA ministers, even if they later engage in paid post-retirement service, in accordance with Board of Pensions Administrative Rule 801, "Post-Retirement Service."

### **Recognition of Retirement**

The Commission on Ministry (COM) will acknowledge the ministry and service of retiring pastors and offer an opportunity to celebrate their retirement among their peers as a part of the Presbytery. This special moment may be held during a Presbytery meeting or in a dedicated event arranged by the COM specifically to honor retiring pastors.

### **Presbytery Membership After Retirement**

Retired ministers typically belong to the presbytery within whose geographic bounds they reside. However, they may request membership in another presbytery or remain with the presbytery from which they retired, even if they live outside its bounds. Retired ministers from other presbyteries who wish to join the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey will be examined in the same manner as other ministers seeking membership in the Presbytery.

### **The Continuing Call**

God's call to ministry is life-long. Retirement is a new phase of God's continuing call. Retired ministers continue to be members of presbytery (G-2.0503), exercising voice and vote in presbytery meetings, although their attendance at meetings is not mandatory and they do not need to request to be excused from presbytery meetings. They may serve on presbytery committees, commissions, and other work groups. In consultation with the Commission on Ministry, they may serve congregations as temporary pulpit supply or as session moderators. They may be

elected to presbytery office (moderator, vice- moderator, stated clerk, treasurer) or as commissioners to Synod or General Assembly.

### **Boundary Training Requirements**

All minister members of the Presbytery of Highlands are required to participate in boundary training which includes pastoral ethics and anti-harassment training every 3 years. Retired members of the presbytery are not exempt from this requirement. Retired pastors over the age of 80 will be exempt from this requirement provided they are not actively participating in providing pastoral services such as regular preaching, parish associate, on the pulpit supply list, serving on a Presbytery, Synod or GA committee or team, or other active congregational or pastoral activities. Exemptions may be granted because of health or other reasons that keep the pastor from actively engaging in ministry.

### **Post Retirement Service**

Within the post-retirement service guidelines of the PC(USA) Board of Pensions, retired ministers may choose to accept post-retirement employment with congregations or with other agencies. This should be arranged in consultation with the Commission on Ministry. It should be noted that the Board of Pensions places stringent restrictions on post- retirement service in the congregation most recently served before retirement (please see Board of Pensions Administrative Rule 801, "Post-Retirement Service.")

### **Pastoral Care**

Because retired ministers continue to be members of the presbytery and not of a local congregation, the presbytery has responsibility to provide pastoral care and support to them through life's transitions and crises (G-3.0301b; G-3.0307). The Committee on Ministry will develop such structures and programs as are necessary to extend this supportive care.

### **Retirement Age**

While the Book of Order has no recommended retirement age, the Board of Pensions does consider age 55 to be the earliest time when retirement benefits may commence and considers age 65 to be the full retirement age for pension purposes. *This is entirely distinct from the provisions of the United States Social Security Administration.*

The Board of Pensions requires members to terminate their employment with the church or agency where they have been working. (see Board of Pensions Administrative Rule 801, "Post- Retirement Service.")

It is inappropriate for ministers under age 55, who are not permanently disabled, to be given retirement status. Those younger than 55 who wish to leave ministry employment for a time shall consult with the Commission on Ministry about being moved to Member At Large (797) status and report to the Commission on Ministry annually, in order to keep their Member at Large status in effect.

Ministers younger than 65 only be granted retired (299) status if they are starting to receive pension benefits at the same time.

For those who qualify for permanent disability income, either through the Board of Pensions or through Social Security, or both, it is possible for the Presbytery to grant retired (299) status at an earlier age.

### **Retirement Ethics and the Former Congregation**

In 1948, the PC(USA) General Assembly described the continuing status of a minister's ordination following retirement. "The retirement of a minister does not affect in any way the minister's status as a minister or deprive [the minister] of any of the functions of the office. The minister has still the right to preach, to administer the sacraments, to represent the presbytery as a Commissioner in the higher judicatories of the Church, and to exercise other functions of the ministry, to the same extent as in the minister's active ministry." ("Status of Retired Ministers," General Assembly Minutes, 1948, 119- 120.)

As members of the presbytery, retired ministers perform ministerial roles under the guidance of the Presbytery.

Following retirement from congregational ministry, it is essential and required that former pastors establish healthy boundaries, disengaging from ALL congregational life and function of the congregations they have served. It is strongly recommended for pastors' spouses to do so as well. This is to provide sufficient space for the new pastoral relationship to become firmly established and to bond with the congregation.

The Book of Order's ethical standard, "Officiate by Invitation Only" (G-2.0905), applies to retired ministers, just as it does to ministers in active service: "...former pastors and associate pastors shall not provide pastoral services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the moderator of the session."

**Out of consideration for the next pastors and the life of the congregation, it is critical that former pastors politely and unconditionally decline all such invitations that come directly from church members.** *It is not appropriate at*

*any time for former pastors to respond to church members by saying they would "be willing, pending an official invitation". Rather, they shall decline and then let the new pastor or session moderator take the initiative if that person is so inclined.*

The General Assembly's Standards of Ethical Conduct require ministers to live by the following affirmations:

"I will...

...deal honorably with the record of my predecessor and upon leaving a ministry or office speak and act in ways that support the ministry of my successor.

...participate in the life of a ministry setting I left or from which I have retired only as directed by presbytery.

...provide pastoral services for a congregation I previously served only as directed by the presbytery and provide pastoral services to members of other congregations only with the consent of their pastors; and

...consult with the Committee on Ministry in the presbytery of my residence regarding my involvement in any ministry setting during my retirement."

(Standards of Ethical Conduct II, 14-17)

Minister members who retire or leave a congregation of the Presbytery of the Highlands SHALL sign a dissolution/separation covenant. The covenant reinforces the Ethical Standards and the Book of Order requirements.

Retired or former pastors also may not moderate session/congregational meetings or serve as interim, installed covenant supply or pulpit supply without permission of the Commission on Ministry.

### **Retirement Ethics and the New Congregation**

Retired ministers are encouraged to become actively involved in a congregation other than their former congregations. In doing so, they shall exercise the same sort of discretion and explicit public support to the pastor or associate pastor of that congregation as they would offer to a pastor or associate pastor of a congregation they have formerly served. They shall refrain from offering pastoral care to members of that or any other congregation, except as the pastor may invite them to do so.

Among the greatest services retired ministers can perform for the congregation where they are worshiping is to support the pastoral leadership.

### **Retired Ministers of Other Presbyteries**

Retired members of other presbyteries may express interest in serving a congregation of this presbytery as post-retirement employment, as defined by the

Board of Pensions. In that case, the Commission on Ministry shall ordinarily require the minister to apply to be transferred to this presbytery as a retired member, although there may be special circumstances that dictate that temporary membership in this presbytery is preferable.

Retired Pastor Policy - March 2025