

Disengaging from a Pastoral Relationship: Best Practices and Guidelines for Communities of Faith & Ministers

Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Region – Pastoral Relations Committee

A pastoral relationship between a Minister and a Community of Faith can end for many different reasons – maybe a Minister has accepted a call elsewhere; maybe circumstances have changed and the Minister and Community of Faith have decided together that it is time to part ways; maybe the Minister is retiring.

Whatever the reason for the end of this Pastoral Relationship, it is important to end well – this is so that the Community of Faith is able to form a strong pastoral relationship with their new Minister (and, if the former Minister is moving to a new Community of Faith, to allow the former Minister to form a strong pastoral relationship with their new Community of Faith).

There are things that are required by *The Manual* when a Pastoral Relationship ends, and things that are considered “best practices” to allow new Pastoral Relationships to form. The information in this document comes from *The Manual* (2021) and from the handbook, *Pastoral Relations: Supporting the Pastoral Relationship* (2019). This document does not include information about the formal steps required to request a change in pastoral relations.

For Communities of Faith

- Your former Minister is not allowed to preside at baptisms, communion services, weddings, or funerals in your Community of Faith – they are required to pass this request on to your new minister (*Manual*, I.2.5.4). This is in place to allow you to build a good Pastoral Relationship with your new Minister. It may be a difficult thing for your former Minister to say “no” – after all, they likely still care deeply for you and your church – and so you can avoid putting your former Minister in an awkward situation by not making these sorts of requests.
- It is strongly recommended that your former Minister not attend your Community of Faith for at least one year. This is not a punishment – again, this is to allow your Community of Faith to build a Pastoral Relationship with your new Minister, and to allow your new Minister to be settled into the life of the church.
- Many Ministers are connected with people in the church through social media – this is a world that former generations didn’t have to navigate! When leaving a Community of Faith, it is strongly recommended that a Minister unfriend/unfollow people in the Community of Faith for at least one year. Many Ministers offer pastoral care over social media, and so removing this connection at the end of a Pastoral Relationship helps to remove the temptation to offer pastoral care in this way. If you notice that your former Minister has unfriended you, this isn’t because they don’t care for you – it is to allow the people in your church to build a new Pastoral Relationship with your new Minister. Beyond the one-year point, it will be at your former Minister’s discretion how they wish to engage with people in your Community of Faith on social media – each Minister may decide differently.
- In the same way that you had a covenanting service when your Minister was called to your Community of Faith, it might be helpful to have a special worship service to mark the end of the covenant. This is an opportunity not only to show appreciation to your

Minister, but also to formally end their commitment to care for your Community of Faith, to clarify for everyone the expectations for moving forward, and to trust that God will be with you as you move forward to new Pastoral Relationship(s).

For Ministry Personnel

- *The Manual* requires that, if a member, adherent, or family of a Community of Faith where you previously served asks you to preside at a baptism, communion service, wedding, or funeral, you a) must refer the request to the Minister who is currently serving the Community of Faith under call or appointment; and b) may preside only with the approval of the Community of Faith's governing body. (*The Manual* I.2.5.4)
- It is strongly recommended that you don't attend the Community of Faith where you formerly served for at least one year. If you are planning to attend a Community of Faith where you previously served, it is important that you consult with the current Minister regarding expectations and the level of involvement that you are both comfortable with.
- If the current Minister invites you directly to be involved (e.g. preaching, serving on a committee), you will need to determine if this is appropriate – it is wise for former Ministry Personnel to stay out of policy or governance issues. Your presence could strengthen or hurt the health of the Community of Faith, therefore it is important that your presence be agreed upon with your colleague.
- If you served in a rural or isolated Community of Faith and remain living in the area, and there are not other United Church Communities of Faith that are accessible to you, you should contact Regional Council staff to facilitate a conversation with their current minister, to determine if you may worship there and to establish the terms of your new relationship.
- As you disengage from the community, you must refrain from offering pastoral care to the Community of Faith – this includes in-person visiting as well as through digital communication.
- Church Social Media accounts – you need to transfer administrator duties for all church-related social media accounts, remove yourself as an administrator, and ensure that the password is changed by the new administrator.
- It is strongly recommended that you unfriend/unfollow anyone in or connected to the Community of Faith you are leaving on all of your personal social media accounts; or, alternatively, move them to a "restricted list." This is difficult, as social media relationships often overlap between pastoral and personal; however it is important to put the needs of the Community of Faith and their incoming Minister ahead of your own personal needs. Make sure that you are consistent in applying your approach towards all members, and communicate your approach to the Community of Faith as part of your departure plan.
- Following a period of one year, you may discern how you will accept social media friend requests from former congregants (you should not initiate friend/follow requests with members/adherents of a Community of Faith you previously served).

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