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## **Rosedale Network of Churches Guidelines for Retirement from Pastoral Responsibilities**

The transfer of pastoral responsibilities can be a traumatic experience in the life of a congregation and of the leaders involved. The purpose of this document is to identify points of question and detail which should be clarified in times of transition and to present guidelines for consideration by the retiring pastor, associated leaders, and the congregation.

“Retirement” is used in this document to refer primarily to retirement because of age. However, many of the provisions in this paper are applicable to other settings of termination. Though slanted for pastors with indefinite length of term, the paper generally is applicable to cases of definite term also. The application of this paper includes pastors, associate pastors, and deacons. The term “minister” is used inclusively to include the various roles.

Procedures and arrangements for transition of pastoral leadership vary a great deal from denomination to denomination, from conference to conference, and from congregation to congregation. In some cases, the pastor is not responsible to give leadership in selecting replacement, while in other cases he is.

This document assumes that in many cases the retiring pastor will continue to be a part of the community and congregation in which he pastored. Where this is not the case, some points in the document do not apply.

This document is concerned with procedure and detail. But the importance of prayer and the need to seek God’s will must not be forgotten.

### **PREPARING FOR TRANSITION**

Anticipation and preparation for transition of pastoral leadership in a congregation involves the following considerations:

1. Recognition of the reality of aging.
2. Development and discipling of younger potential leadership.
3. Sensitivity to the congregational situation and effectiveness of current leadership.
4. Awareness of the Rosedale Network constitutional provision: “Because of possible declining efficiency, at the approximate age of 65 or 70, ordained brethren are requested to arrange for their pastoral responsibilities to be given to younger men who are faithful to the Scriptures and are able to carry on the work.” – Article IV, Section 8.
5. Awareness of the availability of assistance from outside the congregation in the process of choosing new leadership. Examples of such resources are experienced Rosedale Network ministers of other congregations and the Rosedale Network office and Executive Board.
6. Anticipation and planning for a time of retirement a few years in advance.

7. Establishing a definite point of retirement at least one year in advance.
8. Sharing information on plans and processes with the congregational leadership and the congregation.
9. Identification of responsibility in finding and selecting a successor.

The approach of the pastor being responsible to give leadership to the selection of his successor seems most consistent with the Rosedale Network constitution. However, it is also appropriate for a bishop or an overseer who is not the senior pastor to give leadership in the matter.

#### **DETAILS OF TRANSITION – MEMO OF UNDERSTANDING**

A Memo of Understanding (MOU) should be developed which states in writing the responsibilities and the relationship of the retiring minister and his successor. If the retiring minister is not going to carry any pastoral responsibilities in the congregation, the MOU should say so. The involvement of the church's leadership team is vital in developing and writing the MOU.

The MOU should clarify the following:

1. **Status of the Retiring Minister:** Is the retiring senior pastor going to be a member of the pastoral team (i.e. associate pastor) after his successor has been installed? If so, for how long? Is he expected to attend congregational and area ministers' meetings regularly, by invitation only, or not at all?
2. **Pulpit Ministry:** Is the retiring pastor expected to preach by a regular schedule or only upon request of his successor? If by schedule, what is that schedule initially and how are changes in that schedule to be determined?
3. **Counseling Ministry:** Is the retiring pastor expected to accept or decline requests for counseling after his successor has been installed? It is generally considered appropriate that the retiring pastor be free to engage in counseling church members. He should exercise care, however, in referring members to the pastor when questions of church administration and discipline are involved.
4. **Officiating or Assisting in Weddings and Funerals:** How should the retired minister respond to requests for participation in a wedding or a funeral service? Is he free to accept, or should he refer his request to his successor or the leadership team?
5. **Official Records:** The official records of the congregation should be handed over to the successor. Exceptions to this guideline include personal papers such as sermon notes, personal notations related to church activities, and materials that cannot be passed on with integrity because of a violation of confidentiality.
6. **Temporary Absence:** The retiring pastor should consider absenting himself from the church and community temporarily immediately after the point of transition. This could be a time of service elsewhere or of vacation and could include absence from church services and other congregational meetings for a designated period of time immediately following the transition in order to encourage bonding between the new leader and the congregation.

## **AFTER THE TRANSITION**

If the retired minister continues to reside in the geographical area of the congregation he pastored, his presence in the congregation should be a source of encouragement to his successor. He should avoid offering any damaging criticism and should take great care in handling criticism of his successor which others may offer.

The new pastor contributes to the success of the transition. He should assume active leadership as called and assigned while also respecting the precedents of values and practices lodged in the congregation, thus avoiding unnecessary stress in the church's life.

The new pastor should relate to his predecessor with sensitivity to possible trauma in the experience of transition and should avail himself of his counsel. If the predecessor is local and available, he should be included in the ministries of the church as deemed appropriate according to the arrangements of the transition, the expectations of the congregation, and his readiness to participate.

## **PASTORAL TRANSITION CHECKLIST**

This checklist accompanies the "Guidelines for Retirement from Pastoral Responsibilities" and is intended to serve as a reminder to the leadership team of the specific responsibilities to be carried out in the transition process. It also serves to break down the tasks in a way that can be easily assigned to appropriate parties.

1. \_\_\_\_ Establish a definite point of retirement.
2. \_\_\_\_ Identify who is responsible to lead the process of searching for a successor.
3. \_\_\_\_ Establish a plan and procedures for sharing transition information with the congregation.
4. \_\_\_\_ Establish a plan for drafting, discussing, and ratifying a Memo of Understanding.

In regards to the Memo of Understanding:

5. \_\_\_\_ Define the status of the retiring minister and expectations in terms of:
  - a. \_\_\_\_ continuing membership on the pastoral team
  - b. \_\_\_\_ attendance at meetings
  - c. \_\_\_\_ pulpit ministry
  - d. \_\_\_\_ counseling ministry
  - e. \_\_\_\_ officiating at weddings and funerals
  - f. \_\_\_\_ Handing over official records
  - g. \_\_\_\_ Temporary absence immediately after transition
  - h. \_\_\_\_ handling criticism heard by retiree against successor and vice versa