

**EXIT INTERVIEW FORM
for Pastors**

In order to facilitate care and consistency in the life of the church, we request that you share concerns, counsel, perspective, guidance, troublesome issues or, in general, ideas which may help our perception of your ministry and possible future directions for the church.

A. Issues to Be Discussed About This Pastoral Call:

1. Strengths and/or weaknesses which surfaced during your pastoral leadership:
2. Concerns you wish to share:
3. Relevant history of this church which may help the COM discover positive and/or negative patterns which tend to repeat themselves in each pastorate:
4. Your recommendations for directing the future ministry of this congregation:
5. Any other information you wish to share:

B. Issues of Concern re. the Departing Pastor

1. The COM interviewing team reminds the departing pastor that no pastor may return to perform pastoral functions without written invitation of the local session and moderator, and without notifying the COM moderator.
2. Arrangements to fulfill all financial obligations must be made before a minister leaves the Presbytery. The interviewing team needs to insure that the pastor's financial obligations are in order and current.

C. The COM interviewing team should send written copies of the official exit interview to the PNK office (General Presbyter) and the COM moderator.

Exit interview conducted at _____ (location) on
_____ (date).

Exit Interview Team:

Section 4 Relationships with congregations searching for pastoral leadership

Exit interviews

Exit interviews with the departing church professional and with the session are extremely helpful. These interviews help all parties begin to disengage and begin the process of moving forward into the future. This is true whether the person leaving the congregation is an interim pastor who has served the church for a year or so, or a long-term installed pastor who is leaving after many years of service.

Sometimes COMs or sessions decide that an exit interview “isn’t really necessary” or that “we know what the departing pastor will say.” However, exit interviews are almost always helpful for the departing church professional, the congregation, and the COM. In fact, COMs might want to consider encouraging a session to have an exit interview with any departing staff person.

Exit interview models

Exit interview with the departing pastor or departing interim pastor

The liaison or team of persons from the COM should conduct an exit interview with the departing pastor soon after the pastor announces his/her departure. The exit interview helps provide closure for the pastor and family. It also provides information that may be helpful to the COM as it works with the congregation during its search.

1. Ask the pastor to talk about things she/he feels good about their work with the congregation.
2. Ask about barriers to effective ministry. These barriers might be in the congregation, or community, or the pastor.
3. Ask about the relationship between the pastor and session.
4. Ask about advice they might give to the next pastor.
5. Talk about appropriate and inappropriate contact with the congregation after the pastor, associate pastor or other staff person has left. This is important. It is especially important if the pastor is staying in town or moving to a nearby location. The Book of Order says “Former pastors, associate pastors, and ministers who do not have a pastoral relationship with the particular church as defined in this chapter may officiate at services for members of the church, or at services within its properties, only upon invitation from the moderator of the session or, in case of the inability to contact the moderator, from the clerk of session (G-14.0630 Officiate by Invitation Only).”

Exit interview with the session

It is best to conduct the exit interview with the session after the pastoral relationship has been dissolved. The interview helps the congregation begin to disengage from the pastor. The Moderator of session appointed by presbytery should be present for this interview.

1. Discuss positive growth in the life of the congregation during the pastor’s time with the congregation.
2. Discuss any difficulties there might have been in the relationship between the pastor and session/congregation.
3. Discuss ways the session might build a strong relationship with the next pastor.
4. Discuss appropriate and inappropriate contact with the congregation after the pastor has left. This is important. See (5) above.

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5. Plan ways the session might lead the congregation to disengage with the former pastor, associate or other staff person.
6. Give a brief overview of the call process.
7. Begin discussion about maintaining regular worship and congregational life during the transition and search for new pastoral leadership.
8. Discuss the benefits of the session appointing a transition team consisting of session members and significant members of the congregation.

Ethics for departing pastors

With the session and COM representative the pastor should prepare a carefully worded announcement for the congregation. The statement should draw a clear distinction between honoring the friendships that will continue beyond the end of the pastoral relationship, and performing official pastoral functions or being involved in the future ministerial life of the congregation.

The departing pastor bears the primary responsibility for helping members of the congregation he or she formerly served understand that it is no longer appropriate for the former pastor to officiate at services for them. It is especially important and helpful for the departing pastor to take the responsibility for saying a clear and loving “no” to such invitations without putting the responsibility for the decision on the interim pastor or the new pastor serving the congregation.

A former pastor and his or her family should seek a new congregation in which to worship, even if they are staying in the same community in retirement or as the pastor begins another kind of service. This is essential during the transition time between installed pastors. However, former pastors should be cautious about assuming that they can return to the former congregation as soon as a new pastor is called. In order to support the formation of a strong bond between the new pastor and the congregation, a former pastor should wait an appropriate amount of time before re-entering the congregation formerly served, and then only after a careful conversation with the new pastor about her or his wishes in this matter.

A former pastor of a congregation is wise to avoid conversations about what has happened in the church after her or his departure. Under no circumstances should the former pastor indicate to church members disapproval or disappointment about the decisions or leadership of the interim pastor or the new installed pastor. The former pastor will inevitably have only partial information about any event or decision within the congregation he or she used to serve. In any case, for the former pastor to comment negatively about the current leadership of the church is unhelpful and inappropriate. The greatest tribute to the leadership of the former pastor is a congregation that continues to thrive with a new pastor.

Finding temporary leadership

The session is responsible for providing regular worship and other services for the congregation. During the time between the departure of the installed pastor and the arrival of the interim pastor, the session will take a much more active part in every aspect of the leadership of the congregation. Among other responsibilities, the session finds guest preachers and pastors able to provide emergency pastoral care. Most presbyteries maintain a pulpit supply list of ministers and Commissioned Lay Pastors willing to conduct worship services and provide pastoral care on a temporary basis.