



Pastoral Ethics: Pastors Relating to Previously Served Parishes

When a pastor accepts a call to a congregation, a sacred covenant is established between the pastor and the people of God in that place. In order for ministry to be strong and effective, the covenant needs to be strengthened and nurtured until God calls that pastor to another sector of ministry. When a pastor resigns a call, the covenant ends.

How does a pastor relate appropriately to members of a congregation where one has previously served? We offer the following guidelines so that good choices can be made which do not negatively affect the ministry of the people of God.

1. It is your responsibility as a former pastor to decline invitations to conduct pastoral acts (baptisms, weddings, funerals, hospital visits, etc.) in any former parish. It is important that you do not pass the burden of such decisions back to the pastor who currently holds that call nor to elected congregational leaders. As professional people, we commit ourselves to act responsibly in these matters. For the sake of the church and the ongoing ministry of the congregation, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." When we do that, our relating to members of previous parishes can be used by God to build up the body of Christ.
2. It is your responsibility as a former pastor to be supportive of your successor (even when that is difficult to do). It is your responsibility to sever pastoral ties with your former congregation.
3. While the above statements are addressed to pastors, spouses of pastors must consider the same factors and also respect the recommendations made above. Spouses share a pastoral identity and, as a result, can become hindrances as easily as a pastor can.

Adopted by the Southwestern Minnesota Synod Council, January 18, 1997.

Adopted by the Southwestern Minnesota Synod Board for Ministry, October 1996 (based on a policy adopted by the South Dakota Synod Support to Ministry Board - March 1995)

Pastors and congregational leaders should also be aware of the following provision of the Synod Constitution:

S14.14 Ordained ministers shall respect the integrity of the ministry of the congregations which they do not serve and shall not exercise ministerial functions therein unless invited to do so by the pastor, or if there is no duly called pastor, then by the interim pastor in consultation with the Congregation Council.