



Guidelines for Election of Pastor Emerita/Emeritus Policy 2021

The retiring of a revered and/or long-term pastor is a time of many emotions and transitions within the life of a congregation. How to say good-bye, how to honor and how to move on are important issues for the continued health of the congregation.

One opportunity to honor a retiring pastor is to confer the status of pastor emeritus/emerita. The following guidelines, approved by the Commission on Ministry (COM), provide congregations of our Presbytery with a healthy and uniform process for granting emerita/emertus status to retiring pastors. Congregations are encouraged to think about other appropriate and personal ways to honor their retiring clergy.

“When any pastor or associate pastor retires, and the congregation is moved with affection and gratitude to continue an association in an honorary relationship, it may, at a regularly called congregational meeting, elect him or her as pastor emeritus or emerita, with or without honorarium, but with not pastoral authority or duty. This action shall be taken only after consultation with the Commission on Ministry of the presbytery concerning the wisdom of this relationship for the peace of the church. This action shall be subject to the approval of the presbytery, and may take effect upon the formal dissolution of the pastoral or associate pastoral relationship or anytime thereafter.” (*Book of Order* G-14.0605)

The *Book of Order* makes it quite plain that the conferring of the emeritus/emerita title is to be taken in consultation with the Commission on Ministry. Therefore, the first step in this process is for the Session to contact the Commission on Ministry through their COM cluster. This is a consultative process, not merely one seeking approval; as such it may make multiple months to clear the COM cluster as well as the full COM. Thus the process must be undertaken with sufficient time for all parts of the COM to take appropriate action prior to the congregational meeting to establish the pastor emeritus/emerita relationship. During this consultation time the total life and health of the congregation and new pastor will be considered together in making this decision.

When can a session approach the Commission on Ministry?

A congregation should ordinarily wait a minimum of one year to approach the Commission on Ministry about conferring pastor emeritus/emerita status. The Commission on Ministry recommends waiting three years. Exceptions to this time limit would be made when necessary, such as ill health of the retiring pastor.

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Why the waiting period?

Experience has taught us that it is often only after the pastor leaves that leadership and affection can be properly evaluated. Electing a person immediately upon her/his retirement is often viewed as routine. This unfortunately trivializes the COM consultation process and diminishes the true honorary status of the emerita/emeritus status.

Who is eligible for pastor emeritus/emera status?

Both pastors and associate pastors are eligible upon their retirement. Since this is an honorary relationship built upon gratitude and affection of a congregation for their pastor, the COM normally anticipates a pastoral tenure of 10 years for consideration of pastor emerita/emeritus status. We understand that the above is more restrictive than the *Book of Order* and intend it to be so. Each presbytery is able to set its own guidelines, which may be more restrictive, but may not be more permissive than the *Book of Order*.

In entering into consultation with the COM, Sessions are reminded that the designation pastor emerita/emeritus is an honorary relationship “with no pastoral authority or duty” (BoO). It is the responsibility of the Session and the pastor emeritus/emera to be absolutely clear on this matter and to clearly make this known to the congregation at large.

This then leads some practical questions:

Is it appropriate for the name of the pastor emeritus/emera to be listed in the bulletin, letterhead, or masthead of the church?

No. Since the position is honorary, “with nor pastoral authority or duty,” to list them along with the active staff of the congregation can and often does communicate that it is appropriate to continue pastoral expectations of the pastor emeritus/emera. It is appropriate to have a plaque designating the pastor emeritus/emera.

Can a congregation have more than one pastor emeritus/emera?

Yes.

Does the pastor emeritus/emera relationship change the responsibility of the individual to follow the ethics guidelines for retired pastors?

Absolutely not. The guidelines for retired pastors are to be followed by all pastors. If anything, the pastor emerita/emeritus has increased responsibility to follow and interpret the ethics guidelines to the members of the congregation who may misunderstand the relationship and assume a continuing pastoral relationship.

Once the COM and presbytery have given their blessing and a congregation has, at a duly called congregational meeting, elected their former pastor or associate pastor as emeritus/emera the congregation would be wise to arrange for a worship service to

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celebrate the election of this honorary relationship. This service may be a simple prayer and blessing during a reception or a large-scale festive celebration. Congregations know best how to celebrate this event. At this celebration it is wise to remind all in attendance that the designation pastor emerita/emeritus is an honorary relationship and one that implies no pastoral authority or duty.

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