



Severing & Dissolving Church and Pastoral Relationships

The Regional Synod of Mid-America offers these guidelines as suggestions to all those within the bounds of our classes when conflict arises between pastors and churches. Let us “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). When conflict arises we implore those involved to follow the guidance of Jesus in Matthew 18:15-22. If, after consultation with the appropriate leaders of classes, a pastoral relationship must be ended and dissolved, we suggest these guidelines for severing that relationship.

1. Create an application for the dissolution of a pastoral relationship following the form found in the *Appendix to the Book of Church Order of the Reformed Church in America*, #8 (also contained within this document).
2. Establish a written covenant of separation between the church and the pastor (a sample is contained within this document).
3. Determine if payments to the retirement account of the pastor are up-to-date and have been fully paid. If not, the church must make these payments. If arrears are later found to exist that are the responsibility of church, the church will fulfill these obligations. A sample Declarations Statement is included in this guide.
4. Establish a fair severance agreement signed by both the consistory and the pastor and approved by the appropriate classis entity (a severance guideline is included in this document).

The following are samples and guidelines for use by churches, pastors, and classes.

Application for the Dissolution of a Pastoral Relationship

To the Classis of _____:

This certifies that the undersigned was present by request at a meeting of the consistory of the _____ Church of _____ on the _____ day of _____, and superintended the proceedings thereof. It was resolved at that meeting that an application be made to the Classis of _____ for a dissolution of the pastoral relationship between the Rev. _____ and said church effective _____, 20____. The Rev. _____ concurred in that application.

_____ Minister of Classis

dated: _____, 20____.

**Appendix to the Book of Church Order of the Reformed Church in America, #8.*

Covenant of Separation

This covenant of separation will guide the future relationship between:

_____ (minister)

and

_____ (church)

It is designed to strengthen the process of separation from any further pastoral responsibilities beginning on _____. It is important that members and friends of _____ Church understand and accept the terms of this covenant in order that relationships with new staff develop in positive ways. The covenant is mutually agreed upon by _____ and the consistory.

As of _____ (date), _____ (minister) will relinquish all pastoral and administrative duties as pastor and will no longer function as a part of the pastoral team of _____ (church).

_____ (minister) is determined to be supportive of the future pastoral and lay leadership of _____ Church.

_____ (minister) will not receive negative comments or participate in any conversation or activity which might undermine any program or person.

Any future contacts which may occur between the _____ (minister) and the congregation will be as friends and not in a pastor - parishioner relationship. The _____ (minister) will not participate in weddings, funerals, or baptisms, nor engage in any hospital or pastoral visitation, unless requested through the consistory or executive committee, so that the new pastoral relationship may develop.

This covenant is offered to the people of _____ (church) for the sole purpose of strengthening the mission and ministry in the future. It grows out of deep gratitude for the special relationship that develops between pastor and people.

Signature - Vice President of Consistory Date: _____

Signature - Pastor Date: _____

Declarations Statement

A statement will be made by the pastor as to the current status of retirement and insurance payments and of any obligations that are due him/her. If there are obligations due to the church from the pastor, a similar statement will be made.

I, _____, declare that all retirement and other benefits are current and accurate except as follows (if none, write "None"):

Signature of Pastor

Date _____

I, _____, declare all financial obligations owed to the church have been fulfilled and/or are otherwise non-existent.

Signature of Pastor

Date _____

Note: If this statement cannot be made, then a document showing how the debt will be repaid shall be attached.

A statement will be made by the consistory as to the current status of retirement account payments and of any obligation that is due.

The consistory of _____ declares and affirms that the terms of the Call and the subsequent revisions to that Call have been fulfilled by the consistory to the best of its knowledge. The consistory affirms that if, in the future, the retirement fund contributions that were the responsibility of this Call are discovered to be underfunded, the consistory will fulfill that obligation.

Signature of Clerk

Date

Severance Agreement

Effective _____ (date), by action of the

Consistory of _____ (church), the pastoral leadership and services of

_____ (minister) will terminate and the following financial obligations of the church for the pastor and his/her family will commence. During this time, the pastor and family will be encouraged to seek other employment, seek counseling, or other appropriate help.

For a period of not longer than six (6) months, the pastor shall receive full compensation including salary, housing allowance, or parsonage use, utilities, and pension payments. (NOTE:) A housing allowance may be substituted for parsonage use if the parsonage is to be vacated immediately. The church will assume no moving costs incurred by the pastor.

After six (6) months the church will have no further financial obligations. All further costs will be the responsibility of the pastor.

The severance pay standards listed above will be binding only so long as:

The recipient of the severance pay is subordinate to the classis.

The recipient is not employed on a full time basis.

The recipient has not been found guilty of any alleged improprieties or moral wrong.

All of the above must allow for full compliance with sections of the Book of Church Order governing due process and the removal of a pastor.

Since this document is intended to be an equitable and fair agreement, it is strongly recommended that discussions/negotiations include the pastor, a designated church representative and a classis representative.

Prayers for the healing and uplifting of all parties are encouraged. Prayers for the departing pastor and his/her family should especially be encouraged by the consistory. A smooth and efficient transition should be a high priority, using the resources of the classis and the regional synod as needed. A farewell event to express both appreciation and, grieving should be held to bring closure to the pastor's involvement with the church.

Minister: _____ (date)

Clerk of Consistory: _____ (date)

Classis Representative: _____ (date)