



First Presbyterian Church

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The Membership
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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The longevity of a pastoral relationship in our Presbyterian system varies depending on several factors. Many times, pastors and congregation feel led by God's Holy Spirit to move forward in different directions and there is an amical parting of the ways. Sometimes irreconcilable differences arise which necessitate a parting of the ways which leave various depths of scars.

With rare exception is a ministry that lasts as long as the shared ministry of the Rev. Dr. Brant Copeland and the congregation of First Presbyterian Church of Tallahassee. Thirty-five years is a tremendous testament to the way God has blessed your ministry together.

Very soon, Brant will be retiring, which brings with it many changes in his and his family's life as well as within the life, work, and ministry of First Presbyterian Church. One chapter, filled with laughter, joy, tears, frustrations, and celebrations is coming to a close. A new, unwritten chapter is nearing its beginning.

When a pastor retires, especially after such a long, successful ministry, members of the congregation realize that pastor is more than likely the only pastor they have known. That pastor wedded people, baptized them and their children, buried their loved ones. As a result, the ties are strong.

At times desires to have the involvement of the retired pastor may be expressed, "Will you baptize my child/grandchild?" or "Will you bury my spouse/parent?" Such desires are quite normal – even expected – when a pastor remains in the area or resides relatively close by. This is a testament to the love and trust shared over the years.

While this is a testament to the relationship shared with the pastor, it poses a particular challenge as the new chapter of congregational life begins. The new pastor and congregation need to begin to establish fresh ties and relationships. For some in the congregation, forging this new relationship may feel like being disloyal to the retiring pastor. I can assure you it is not.

Our *Book of Order* may sound pretty harsh in its "directive" to pastors and congregations when a pastoral relationship comes to an end. It reads: "After the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, former pastors and associate pastors shall not provide their pastoral services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the moderator of session." (*Book of Order* G-2.0905)

This paragraph in the Book of Order was written, I am convinced, for two reasons: Not many, but some pastors continue to intrude in the life of a congregation after they are no longer a part of it. They have



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nurture discipleship, and meet the needs of God's people.*



difficulty letting go. And, secondly, because some congregation members have difficulty letting go of their retired pastor. If/when such circumstances are present, the new pastor has an extremely difficult time establishing a good working and pastoral relationship with the congregation.

Please notice that the directive does not lock the door to the former pastor's participation in matters of pastoral care. It may still happen. The main caveat is such participation is to be done at the invitation of the moderator, in your case, the new pastor.

You will also notice that the paragraph says nothing about *personal* relationships coming to an end. After 35 years there is no doubt many personal friendships have been made. Our denomination would not be so cruel or naïve as to mandate those come to an end.

What our denomination has put into place is appropriate boundaries to help allow a pastor to retire, as well as to allow for a new pastor to become established in the life of a congregation. This paragraph also provides a justification for intervention should the transition need outside assistance.

Thirty-five years of shared ministry is a wonderful tribute to Brant and the congregation. It is a tribute to the work of God's Holy Spirit among you. With Brant's retirement I can hear our Lord's words to Brant, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:21)

I can also hear our Lord saying to the congregation, "I know the plans I have for you. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11)

On a personal note, I have known Brant for over 20 years. He has taught me very good lessons (some of them painful). We have not always seen eye-to-eye on matters. But I have counted him among those whose integrity is strong, whose faith is enduring, whose ministry has impacted countless lives.

His retirement is not negating nor removing what I have learned from him. That will always be a part of who I am. With the arrival of Rev. Fox, the door will open for new lessons, new insights, and a new relationship with another colleague in ministry.

May God continue to bless you in your ministry. And, not to provide an oxymoron but a true offer, "I'm from the Presbytery, and I'm here to help."

Sursum Corda,



Rev. Mark R. Broadhead
Chair, Committee on Ministry
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