**PRESBYTERY OF SAN GABRIEL**

**STANDARDS FOR ETHICAL BEHAVIOR**

**OF NON-PASTOR TEACHING ELDERS AND LEADERS**

**1/7/15 Draft**

**PREFACE**

The relationship between a pastor and congregation is often deeply personal, built on an accumulation of shared transitional and transformational times in personal and corporate lives. It has evolved through teaching, preaching, sacraments, weddings, funerals, presence in times of crisis, praying with and for members, counseling, and shared leadership. The pastor has encouraged people in worship, equipped them for tasks, helped bring forth gifts, and prepared them for mission. During these times in most cases trust, confidence, admiration, affection, fondness, respect, and love have grown. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) supports healthy relationships between pastor and congregation, which requires others in positions of influence to respect the covenant relationship that has been established with the current pastor.

When the relationship between a pastor and a congregation ends for any reason, it marks the beginning of a period of high emotions, uncertainty, and excitement for both the pastor and the congregation. In the months and years that follow, the congregation will evaluate its ministry and seek new leadership. This is a particularly important time in the life of the congregation and it requires appropriate distance from the past pastor so that the congregation can embrace its future. Likewise, that time is important for the former pastor to embrace a new stage in his or her life whether that is retirement, a new call, a new vocation, or a period of Sabbath from the practice of ministry. When congregations and former pastors do not keep appropriate distance from each other, it impedes the ability of both to accept the guidance of the Holy Spirit in this new stage of their lives.

Because there are multiple educational institutions and church-related retirement communities within its boundaries, San Gabriel Presbytery is greatly blessed by the presence of theological academics and retired church leaders in our congregations. Because they are often held in great esteem by congregation members due to education or current or former positions of leadership, it is important for those in influential positions to show affirmative support for the covenant relationship between pastor and congregation.

While there is no document that can cover every circumstance, this document provides guidance for members and congregations of San Gabriel Presbytery to maintain clear role definition of leadership within our churches. It is a local application of PC(U.S.A.) polity as it pertains to pastoral relationships.

**TO WHOM THESE STANDARDS APPLY**

**• Pastors**

For the purposes of this document, the term “pastor” applies to any Teaching Elder or Commissioned Ruling Elder who has been authorized to serve in an installed or temporary pastoral relationship.

When a pastoral relationship is dissolved, all former pastors, whether they are teaching elders who served in installed or temporary positions or commissioned ruling elders, are expected to abide by a Boundaries Covenant out of respect for their ordination vow to “be governed by our church’s polity, and abide by its discipline… and be a friend among your colleagues in ministry” (W-4.4003e).

**• Pastor Emeritus(a)**

When a pastor retires, a congregation may choose to honor that pastor with the title “Pastor Emeritus(a).” This is an honorary title only, and does not offer any authorization for service or influence on the ministry of the congregation. A Pastor Emeritus(a) cannot be compensated by the church, and is expected to abide by the standards for ethical separation. Any work with the former church is contingent on the invitation of the moderator of session and with the approval of the session and Presbytery Committee on Ministry. It is suggested that the title “Pastor Emeritus(a)” not be considered for at least one year after the pastor’s retirement, and the session shall obtain the approval of the Presbytery Committee on Ministry before proceeding.

**• Parish Associates**

A Parish Associate is a teaching elder who agrees to work with a church in a limited capacity, upon the invitation of the moderator of session and with the approval of the session and the Presbytery Committee on Ministry. This relationship is dissolved when a new moderator of session is appointed, unless the new moderator extends a new invitation. The parish associate may or may not be financially compensated, is not subject to the presbytery minimum, and is not to be considered a pastor of the church but will be a support to the pastor. However, the parish associate is bound by the same ethical guidelines as a pastor, including separation ethics touched on in G-2.0905 and expanded on by presbytery policy.

**• Church Leaders**

In this document, the term “Church Leaders” refers to persons who carry unusual influence within a congregation, such as honorably retired pastors, academics with training in theology or ecclesiology, and family members of former pastors. Whether these individuals are teaching or ruling elders, and whether or not they attempt to exert influence, it is advised that these church leaders understand the impact of their opinions and behavior on the relationship between pastor and the congregation in which they are active. As members of a congregation, or teaching elders active in the ministry of a particular congregation, they are expected to abide by the same ethical standards and affirmations that are set for all members of the congregation. If they hold specific leadership responsibilities, those responsibilities should be subject to reaffirmation by the new moderator of session, as for a parish associate.

**• Congregations**

Congregations are asked, when a pastor is installed, to affirm the pastoral relationship. Whether or not the pastoral service is installed or temporary, it is appropriate to act in a manner consistent with these affirmations, including to “listen to the word he (she) preaches, welcome his (her) pastoral care, and honor his (her) authority as he (she) seeks to honor and obey Jesus Christ our Lord.” (W-4.4006b(3))

When a pastoral relationship is dissolved, the session of a congregation is expected to formulate a Boundaries Covenant with the departing pastor, and to help teach the congregation to abide by it out of respect for the former pastor, his or her new call (or retirement), and the new pastor of the congregation and the promises that the congregation makes to that new pastor “to respect his (her) decisions, and to follow as he (she) guides.” (W-4.4006b(2))

**• Presbytery**

The Presbytery has the responsibility to be “Pastor, Counselor, and Advisor to Teaching Elders and Congregations” (G-3.0307), which includes nurturing healthy relationships between current pastor and congregation, and to help teaching elders to transition to new places of ministry or rest. Whenever a pastoral relationship is dissolved, the Presbytery through its Committee on Ministry will work with departing pastor and session to develop a Boundaries Covenant, and encourage all parties to live within the terms of that covenant. When other church leaders form significant relationships with a particular congregation, the Presbytery may also encourage the adoption of a Boundaries Covenant to make clear the nature of that relationship as it relates to the congregation’s covenant relationship with its pastor.

**• Removal by the Presbytery**

If a pastor is removed by the presbytery, or renounced jurisdiction while under investigation, that pastor shall not be invited to return without the approval of the Committee on Ministry.

**• Other Relationships**

While the Committee on Ministry does not require a Boundaries Covenant for persons serving congregations in other capacities, (e.g., youth ministry directors, Christian Educators, organists, etc), it commends this document to congregations as a way to have a discussion about separation ethics when those individuals leave their employ.

**PC(U.S.A.) POLITY**

Recognizing the difficulty that a continuing relationship between a former pastor and a congregation can cause, the Book of Order stipulates the following:

G‐2.0905 Officiate by Invitation Only

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.

Additionally, the 210th General Assembly approved the document “Standards for Ethical

Conduct for Ordained Officers in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),” which the Committee on Ministry commends to all deacons and elders (ruling or teaching) for study. There is a version for all members of a congregation, and another for paid and volunteer staff. In the Standards for Ordained Officers, items 14 through 17 apply to the relationship between congregations, former pastors, and current pastors:

I will conduct my ministry so that nothing need be hidden from a governing body or colleagues in ministry. Therefore I will:

14. Deal honorably with the record of my predecessor and upon leaving a ministry or office speak and act in ways that support the ministry of my successor;

15. Participate in the life of a ministry setting I left or from which I have retired only as directed by presbytery;

16. Provide pastoral services for a congregation I previously served only as directed by the presbytery and provide pastoral services to members of other congregations only with the consent of their pastors; and

17. Consult with the Committee on Ministry in the presbytery of my residence regarding my involvement in any ministry setting during my retirement.

When a former pastor is making an uninvited impact on the life and work of his or her former congregation and its current pastor, it is the responsibility of the presbytery to intervene for the sake of “promoting the peace and harmony of congregations and inquiring into the sources of congregational discord.” (G-3.0301c) If the former pastor persists in this disapproved work, the presbytery may administer discipline through the processes outlined in the Book of Order (G-2.0509) remembering that discipline is “for building up the body of Christ, not for destroying it, for redeeming, not for punishing.” (D-1.0102)

**BOUNDARIES COVENANT**

The Committee on Ministry recognizes that each congregation and pastor face different circumstances, so some flexibility is required in order to encourage the health of the presbytery and the congregations and teaching elders under its care. Therefore, the Committee requires that departing pastors and sessions develop a Boundaries Covenant to order their lives after the relationship is dissolved. See a template for this Boundaries Covenant which is attached. The Boundaries Covenant has some parts that are non-negotiable and some that will be negotiated by the session and the departing pastor, with the advice and approval of the Committee on Ministry. The Boundaries Covenant will be kept on file at the Presbytery office and will be given to any temporary or installed pastors who serve the congregation after that point for so long as it is relevant to the life and ministry of the congregation.

If a church leader takes on a substantive relationship with a particular congregation, the session may develop a Boundaries Covenant with that church leader, to make clear the roles of church leader and pastor in the life of the church. A template Boundaries Covenant for Church Leaders is attached.

If a church continues to depend on or engage with a former pastor or church leader acting in a manner inconsistent with these standards, the Committee on Ministry will intervene for counsel, and may consider the church not ready to call or maintain a pastoral relationship.

**Non-Negotiable Elements**

• Officiate by Invitation Only

The former pastor will not provide pastoral services to members of their former congregations except as invited to do so by the current moderator of session. The moderator of session may withdraw an invitation previously given by a past moderator or pre‐arranged in the Boundaries Covenant.

• Compensation Ceases

The former pastor shall not continue to receive compensation from the congregation, whether salary, use of church property, or reimbursements except those negotiated as part of a severance agreement that has been approved by the Committee on Ministry.

• No Relationship with the PNC

The former pastor shall not be involved in the call process for a new pastor in any way. This includes, but is not limited to, influencing the election of a PNC, commenting on the mission study, or making recommendations on particular candidates.

• Discourage Membership Transfers

If the former pastor has taken a new call near the former congregation, he or she will not attempt to recruit members from the former congregation and will encourage any who inquire about moving their membership to remain committed to their current congregation.

• Contribute to Positive Collegial Relationships

Whether a former pastor or an active church leader, several points in the Ethical Standards of Behavior call for a leader to refrain from destructive gossip, to honor the sacred trust of relationships in the church, and to be judicious in the exercise of power that he or she holds.

**Negotiable Elements**

• Period of Separation

It is recommended that former pastors and their family find a new church community, and to adhere to a period of no contact of any kind with the congregation for a period of time after the call is dissolved. This period lasts at least 1 year after a new pastoral relationship is established; it should be noted that it can take over a year before a new pastor is called, so this period may last several years. In any case, the former pastor is encouraged to consult with the moderator of session before reengaging with the congregation in any way.

• Return for Pre‐Arranged Services

There may be an impending service that will take place after the date of dissolution for which the former pastor was already planned to lead. Some individuals express their desire to have the former pastor lead their memorial service. After the relationship is dissolved, the former pastor is expected to gently decline any requests to lead. If there is a compelling reason for the former pastor to participate, the former pastor should consult with the current moderator of session rather than send the church member to ask the current pastor’s permission (as this places on the current pastor the burden of seeming inhospitable).

• Community Relations

A pastor is often seen as a pastor to people beyond the membership of the congregation. This may take on many forms, whether it is presiding at weddings and funerals of non‐members, participating in the leadership of local ministries or providing counseling to members of the community at‐large. Factors that should be considered in possibly allowing the former pastor to participate in community events include the extent that these activities are connected to the ministry of the congregation, and how much is it personal projects of the pastor. If the former pastor’s involvement is brought to a close, it is recommended that the event coordinators be notified. The name of the church should be used only with permission of the session, regardless of what individual—pastor or non-pastoral leader—is participating.

• Family of Former Pastor

Are any of the pastor’s family members also members of the congregation? This is a sensitive issue, but family members of the former pastor may exert influence—or perpetuate ministry approaches of the former pastor—more strongly, not having been trained in boundary ethics. It may be optimal for the future relationships of the congregation for the family members to take a leave from the church for at least a year after a new pastoral relationship has been established, and not to take a leadership position unless the current pastor invites them to. The Presbytery leadership, and neighboring congregations, is encouraged to actively offer support to the former pastor’s family as needed. If the family of the former pastor continues to play a significant role in the leadership of the church, the Presbytery Committee on Ministry may surmise that the congregation is not ready to call a new pastor.

• Friendships with Former Pastor

The former pastor may have friendships with certain members of the congregation that continue after the pastoral relationship has been dissolved. This may cause some concern among congregation members, as some will be invited to continue a relationship while others will not. The former pastor needs to take the responsibility to limit any social interactions from straying into comments about the life of the church.

• Social Media

New forms of media have enabled new forms of ministry; they have also complicated separation ethics as former pastors can more easily continue to provide pastoral services or guidance to members of their congregations using electronic communications. Some questions to consider include:

— To what extent have blogs, social media, text/instant messages, email and other electronic means been a part of the ministry of the former pastor?

— What needs to change to help the congregation turn away from their former pastor and towards their new one? This may include “defriending” former church members on one’s Facebook page.

• Severance

When a pastor leaves a congregation there are some final compensation issues to be negotiated including the use of accrued vacation time, the disposition of church property (laptop, books, cell phone, vestments, etc.), and the use of a manse beyond the date of dissolution, etc. In the event that the dissolution of the call was not initiated by the pastor, the Presbytery will often require an agreement that includes the continuation of compensation for a defined period of time while the pastor seeks a new call.

• Reaffirmation of Leadership Responsibilities

Leadership roles of parish associates and other church leaders shall be dissolved when one pastor leaves, but may be reaffirmed by the new moderator of session. If the new moderator does not reaffirm that leadership role, church leaders are bound to respect the decision, or find another place to use their gifts.

**COMMUNICATING THESE STANDARDS TO THE CONGREGATION**

It is best if multiple parties explain these Standards for Ethical Behavior to the congregation, and the Boundaries Covenant, so that the document can be fully understood and does not appear to come from only one source. Upon notice that a pastoral relationship will be dissolved, the Presbytery will meet with the session to talk about next steps and include the Boundaries Covenant as part of that discussion. The session should share the contents of that discussion with the congregation at or before the meeting to dissolve the pastoral relationship. It is also particularly important for the departing pastor or church leader to speak in support of these ethics with the congregation and to publicly share the contents of the Boundaries Covenant.

On the pastor’s last Sunday, the Committee on Ministry encourages the congregation to include a liturgical dismissal of the pastor that acknowledges his or her service to the congregation and the agreed upon separation ethics. Both the *Book of Occasional Services* and *Saying Goodbye: A Time of Growth for Congregations and Pastors* by Edward A. White include some resources for that purpose. A representative of the Presbytery is often present on the pastor’s last Sunday and will say a few words about separation ethics at that time; if a representative is unable to attend, a letter to the congregation may be sent instead.

It is important for the leaders of the church to understand the purposes for these standards of behavior, as often the requests to bend these standards occur long after the former pastor has departed. Churches that believe their culture does not allow for these standards might be reminded that concerns have been raised by pastors in many such cultures.

In summary, some underlying reasons for complying with these standards include:

* The continuing presence of the former pastor may impede the congregation’s ability to bond with a new pastor, and to consider new ideas and ministries.
* Continued requests from the former congregation fails to release the obligations of a pastor, and prevents the former pastor from moving on to his or her next phase of ministry. If any requests are accepted, the former pastor is put in the uncomfortable position of choosing which requests are accepted and which ones are not.
* Clinging to past relationships constrain the movement of the Holy Spirit to bring new opportunities into the life of the church and the lives of the former and current pastors. Thus, the continued dependence on a former pastor, or on specific church leaders with unusual influence, may signal that a church is not yet ready to begin the next phase of ministry with a new pastor.
* The Constitution of the PC(U.S.A.), and the Standards of Ethical Behavior, support the authority of the current pastor, and find it unethical for others to challenge that authority based on personal relationships or positions of perceived power.
* The health of the Presbytery—and the collegial relationships between pastors and churches—is encouraged by the maintenance of proper boundaries and clear leadership roles.

**SAN GABRIEL PRESBYTERY**

BOUNDARIES COVENANT FOR FORMER PASTORAL LEADERS

This covenant will order the future relationship between \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (hereafter referred to as “the pastor”) and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (hereafter referred to as “the church”) who both understand and accept the terms of this covenant and commit themselves to abiding by them as a way of encouraging the health and ministry of both the pastor and the congregation when the pastoral relationship is dissolved as of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

As of the date stated, the pastor and the congregation covenant together that

* The pastor will cease all pastoral duties and will only perform pastoral services to the congregation at the invitation of the current moderator of session;
* The congregation will end compensation to the pastor except any negotiated severance;
* The pastor will not attempt to influence the search for a new pastor or the future ministry of the church;
* The pastor will not recruit members of the congregation to join him or her in his or her new call;
* Any future contact between the pastor and members of the congregation will be as friends and not as pastor and parishioner.

Period of Separation:

Return for Pre-Arranged Services:

Community Relations:

Family:

Friends:

Social Media:

Severance:

In signing, the parties indicate a commitment to abide by the above covenant and that they have received, understand, and will abide by the Standards for Ethical Behavior of San Gabriel Presbytery.

Clerk of Session Date

Departing Pastor Date

Moderator of COM Date

**SAN GABRIEL PRESBYTERY**

BOUNDARIES COVENANT FOR NON-PASTORAL LEADERS

This covenant will order the relationship between \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (hereafter referred to as “the leader”) and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (hereafter referred to as “the church”) who both understand and accept the terms of this covenant and commit themselves to abiding by them as a way of encouraging the health and ministry of both the pastor and the congregation. In this document “leader” or “church leader” refers to an individual with unusual influence, due to education or current or former leadership positions in the church.

As of the date stated below, the leader and the session covenant together that

* The leader will play a leadership role with the church, under supervision of the pastor and session as outlined below;
* The leader will respect and support the authority of the pastor, as the pastor “seeks to honor and obey Jesus Christ our Lord” (W-4.4006b(3));
* The leader’s area of expertise is respected and received by the pastor and congregation;
* If the pastor’s relationship with the congregation is dissolved, the church leader will cease all specific ministry leadership roles, unless the current moderator of session invites the leader;
* If the church leader is involved in visible leadership roles, the leader will utilize the name of the church in community events with permission of the session.

Effective Dates: from to

Leadership Role and Areas of Expertise:

Responsibilities:

Community Relations:

In signing, the parties indicate a commitment to abide by the above covenant and that they have received, understand, and will abide by the separation ethics policy of San Gabriel Presbytery.

Clerk of Session Date

Leader Date

Moderator of Session Date