

**POLICY #26 OF THE COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY
PRESBYTERY OF SUSQUEHANNA VALLEY**

GUIDELINES FOR MINISTERIAL ETHICS

Ministerial ethics for the most part have been unwritten. These guidelines are recommended for the purpose of maintaining a high standard for the professional ministry.

1. Services for Members of Another Church: When a minister is called upon to officiate at a wedding, funeral, or baptism for families who are not members of his/her congregation. He/she should ascertain whether they are members of another congregation or denomination. They should be urged to procure the services or their own pastor. If the persons are members of a Presbyterian Church, the minister should consult with that pastor in advance of his/her services and explain the circumstances.
2. Local Membership Transfers: When persons desire to change their church affiliation within the same community, the receiving pastor should encourage those persons to communicate their desire to the pastor where they currently hold membership. This communication is designed first to encourage the transferring persons to consider seriously the change, and second, to remove possible misunderstandings between the pastors involved.
3. Calling on Members of Neighboring Churches: The pastor's first responsibility is to the congregation he/she serves, and he/she should concentrate calling on the members of that congregation in home or hospital. The minister does not normally call on one who is a member of another congregation; however, if a pastor is requested to make a courtesy call on a non-member, the non-member's pastor ought to be informed of the nature of the call.
4. Multiple Staff Relationships: In staff relationships, as in all intra-church relationships, the objective is to work together with a spirit of cooperation in nurturing the whole church. The pastor has primary responsibility for establishing a harmonious relationship. To this end, all pastors should be

understanding toward one another, respect the competence of each, offer constructive suggestions to one another, forgive misunderstandings, and be tolerant of differences of opinion and style of ministry. A staff member should not aspire to succeed any other person on the staff. Innuendo and gossip should be strictly avoided. Staff members should be encouraged to speak openly and frankly about their differences and problems to the individual(s) with whom they differ and to the session's personnel committee. Loyal support between members of the staff is a tremendous help toward building a good esprit de corps. As members of the staff do their work with enthusiasm and confidence in each other, a stronger team ministry results. If a person is working on a staff as an associate and feels unable to manage relationships with other staff members in a creative and effective manner, then he/she should consult with the presbytery executive and the Committee on Ministry for possible assistance in resolving the conflict.

5. When a Minister Leaves a Parish: When the relationship between the minister and the congregation is dissolved, that minister shall announce to the congregation that he/she will no longer be the pastor and, therefore, not available for pastoral services. a former pastor may be called upon for services only when unusual circumstances exist. Such an invitation should come only from the present pastor or from the session. It is understood that the former pastor will not conduct such services, but will only assist the pastor as requested in such services, as baptisms, weddings, or funerals. (See G 14.0606)

6. The Interim Pastor: The purpose of an interim pastor is to serve congregation until a new pastor is called. To this end, the interim pastor shall help to prepare the congregation for a new pastor.

7. A Minister's Successor: When a pastor is called to another parish or retires, he/she should exercise due care not to influence by direction or indirection, by spoken or written word, the selection of a successor or the policies of the congregation and session. The pastor should be discreet when and if visiting a former parish. In most cases it would be appropriate to pay his/her respects to the successor. Frequent visits to one's former parish should be avoided

8. The Minister's Predecessor: The successor also has the responsibility to be courteous to his/her predecessor. The years may have built up loyalties that are strong, and though a predecessor may do everything possible to discourage a family from seeking his/her services, it may be an act of grace in certain instances for the successor to consider inviting the family's former pastor. The wise pastor will observe that such an attitude may do more to move people to accept his her own ministry than would resistance and "standing for one's rights" as the new pastor.

9. Other Ministers: All ministers who fall into the category of General Assembly's listing of "other ministers" should respect the position of the parish pastors regarding all ministerial functions within the community. Weddings, funerals, and baptisms should not be accepted by ministers-without-charge unless an invitation has been offered by the pastor of the church involved. Ministers-without-charge may administer the sacraments only at the request of the local pastor or session or by permission of the presbytery. Ministers-without-charge ordinarily should not counsel with nor advise former members concerning problems in their churches, but should encourage them to seek other counsel of their pastors or the Committee on Ministry.

10. Privileged Clergy Communication: It is a spiritual and professional duty of clergy to hold in confidence matters revealed to them in their counseling, caring, and confessional ministries. Each party in a relationship between ministers and those persons they see in their capacity as spiritual advisors has a responsibility to hold in confidence conversation between them. Therefore, the privilege of confidentiality rests with both the clergy and the party or parties involved. Clergy shall not divulge such privileged communication in a legal proceeding even if the party or parties waive their privilege. Although there may be extraordinary circumstances in which the ethical imperatives of disclosing certain matters takes priority over the ethical imperative of maintaining confidence, the minister must decide regarding such disclosure according to the circumstances and the dictates of the minister's conscience.