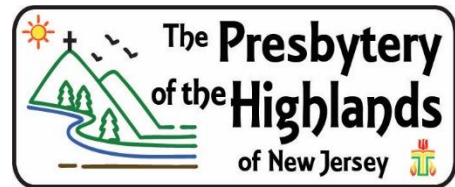


HONORABLY RETIRED MINISTERS
Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey

“I said, ‘Let days speak, and many years teach wisdom.’” (Job 32:7)



“Upon request of a member of presbytery, the presbytery may designate the member honorably retired because of age or physical or mental disability.”
(Book of Order, G-2.0503c)

Beyond allowing presbyteries to designate members as Honorably Retired (HR), the Book of Order offers presbyteries considerable freedom in how they manage the HR category of membership. The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance for the Committee on Ministry in relating to the presbytery’s HR members, as well as to HR members of other presbyteries who may be engaged in post-retirement service in one of the presbytery’s congregations.

HR status is granted by vote of the presbytery, not by action of the Board of Pensions. Although HR status typically coincides with the commencement of retirement benefits, the two are not directly related. When a minister determines that he/she is ready to set a retirement date he/she should connect with the Committee on Ministry to start the process of dissolving the relationship with the congregation. Ministers not serving in a congregation should also communicate with the COM with the date that he/she will complete their ministry so they can be enrolled as Honorably Retired (HR)

Those enrolled by the presbytery as HR will continue to be listed as such in the national directory of PCUSA ministers, even if they subsequently engage in paid post-retirement service.

HR ministers, normally, belong to the presbytery within whose bounds they reside, although they may request membership within another presbytery or stay with the presbytery in which they retired from and live outside its bounds. HR members of other presbyteries who ask to become members of the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey will be examined in the same manner as other ministers coming into the Presbytery.

The Continuing Call

God’s call to ministry is life-long. Retirement is a new phase of God’s continuing call. Retired ministers continue to be members of presbytery, exercising voice and vote in presbytery meetings, although their attendance at meetings is not mandatory and they do not need to request to be excused from presbytery meetings. They may serve on presbytery committees, commissions, and other work groups. In consultation with the Committee on Ministry, they may serve congregations as temporary pulpit supply or as

session moderators. They may be elected to presbytery office (moderator, vice-moderator, stated clerk, treasurer) or as commissioners to Synod or General Assembly.

Within the post-retirement service guidelines of the PC(USA) Board of Pensions, HR ministers may choose to accept post-retirement employment with congregations or with other agencies. This should be arranged in consultation with the Committee on Ministry. It should be noted that the Board of Pensions places stringent restrictions on post-retirement service in the congregation most recently served before retirement (please see Board of Pensions Administrative Rule 801, "Post-Retirement Service.")

Pastoral Care

Because retired ministers continue to be members of the presbytery and not of a local congregation, the presbytery has responsibility to provide pastoral care and support to them through life's transitions and crises (G-3.0301b; G-3.0307). The Committee on Ministry will develop such structures and programs as are necessary to extend this supportive care.

"Honorably Retired"

The adjective "honorably" in the phrase "honorably retired" is analogous to the military's use of the word "honorable" in granting an honorable discharge. It is a designation routinely granted to presbytery members in good standing and does not signify exceptional achievement.

The Committee on Ministry shall offer to all ministers in good standing the opportunity to mark their retirement in a community recognition and celebration, typically during a presbytery meeting. HR status is granted by presbytery vote whether this public celebration takes place.

Should HR ministers subsequently transfer to another presbytery — as is generally advisable if they permanently move to a new residence beyond the bounds of this presbytery — their HR status is transferred along with them.

Pastor Emeritus

Sometimes congregations wish to honor a retiring pastor with the designation "Pastor Emeritus." Such a title is honorific and carries no responsibilities or privileges. Congregations should not grant such a title without first consulting with the presbytery's Committee on Ministry.

Honorably Retired or Member At Large?

The Book of Order reserves HR status for those retired "because of age or physical or mental disability" (G-2.0503c). The Book of Order has no recommended retirement age,

the Board of Pensions does consider age 55 to be the earliest time when retirement benefits may commence and considers age 65 to be full retirement age for pension purposes. The Board requires members to terminate their employment with the church or agency where they have been working.

It is inappropriate for ministers under age 55 who are not permanently disabled to be given HR status. Those younger than 55 who wish to leave ministry employment for a time should consult with the Committee on Ministry about being moved to Member At Large (MAL) status and report to the Committee on Ministry annually, in order to keep their MAL status in effect. HR ministers are not required to report to COM concerning their status.

The COM will recommend to the presbytery that ministers younger than 65 only be granted HR status if they are starting to receive pension benefits at the same time.

For those who qualify for permanent disability income, either through the Board of Pensions or through Social Security, or both, it is possible for the presbytery to grant HR status at an earlier age.

Retirement Ethics and the Former Congregation

In 1948, the PCUSA General Assembly described the continuing status of a minister's ordination following retirement. "The retirement of a minister does not affect in any way [the minister's] status as a minister or deprive [the minister] of any of the functions of [the] office. [The minister] has still the right to preach, to administer the sacraments, to represent the presbytery as a Commissioner in the higher judicatories of the Church, and to exercise other functions of the ministry, to the same extent as in [the minister's] active ministry." ("Status of Retired Ministers," General Assembly Minutes, 1948, 119-120.)

As members of the presbytery, HR ministers perform ministerial roles under the guidance of the presbytery.

Following retirement from congregational ministry, it is essential that former pastors establish healthy boundaries, disengaging from ALL congregational life and function of the congregations they have served. It is strongly recommended for pastors' spouses to do so as well. This is to provide sufficient space for the new pastoral relationship to become firmly established and to bond with the congregation.

The Book of Order's ethical standard, "Officiate by Invitation Only" (G-2.0905), applies to retired ministers, just as it does to ministers in active service: "...former pastors and associate pastors shall not provide pastoral services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the moderator of the session."

Out of consideration for the next pastors and the life of the congregation, it is critical that former pastors politely and unconditionally decline all such invitations that come directly from church members.

It is not appropriate at any time for former pastors to respond to church members by saying they would “be willing, pending an official invitation”. Rather, they shall decline and then let the new pastor or session moderator take the initiative if that person is so inclined.

The General Assembly’s Standards of Ethical Conduct require ministers to live by the following affirmations: “I will...

- ...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;
 - ...participate in the life of a ministry setting I left or from which I have retired only as directed by presbytery;
 - ...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
 - ...consult with the Committee on Ministry in the presbytery of my residence regarding my involvement in any ministry setting during my retirement.”
- (Standards of Ethical Conduct II, 14-17)

Retirement Ethics and the New Congregation

Retired ministers are encouraged to become actively involved in a congregation other than their former congregations. In doing so, they shall exercise the same sort of discretion and explicit public support to the pastor or associate pastor of that congregation as they would offer to a pastor or associate pastor of a congregation they have formerly served. They shall refrain from offering pastoral care to members of that or any other congregation, except as the pastor may invite them to do so.

Among the greatest services retired ministers can perform for the congregation where they are worshipping is to do everything they can to support the pastoral leadership.

Honorably Retired Ministers of Other Presbyteries

HR members of other presbyteries may express interest in serving a congregation of this presbytery as post-retirement employment, as defined by the Board of Pensions. In that case, the Committee on Ministry shall ordinarily require the minister to apply to be transferred to this presbytery as an HR member, although there may be special circumstances that dictate that temporary membership in this presbytery is preferable.