

**Salem Presbytery –Advisory Guidelines for Congregations  
Regarding Dual Relationships and Potential Conflicts of  
Interest Church Members, Officers, Pastor’s Family: as Paid  
Staff**

If your congregation employs a church member for a paid position, or possibly employs a family member of the Pastoral staff, the congregation will be dealing with the issues of dual relationships and potential conflicts of interest. When these boundary issues are crossed and a pastor’s family member, or a church member, is employed, or holds an official volunteer position (e.g. Elder, Deacon, Clerk of Session, Treasurer, committee chair) and is also an employee, there are significant risks if conflict arises. With built-in conflicts of interest or dual relationships (employees who are members of the pastor’s family, or church members as employees) it is extremely difficult for the congregational “system” to handle the issues objectively, so it is recommended that should issues arise, an outside group from COM would be called in to mediate. Should termination of the employee result (who is a member of pastor’s family or a church member) then that person is at significant risk for experiencing a loss of their church “family,” e.g. if the pastor’s spouse has been an employee and is terminated or resigns under pressure, it will be extremely difficult to find congregational care without embracing the risk of becoming involved in a perceived “partisan” issue – choosing “sides” – supporters and detractors being labeled. The session should have in advance a plan in place for pastoral care and support.

There also need to be clear ethical guidelines (see the PCUSA “Standards of Ethical Conduct”) <http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/publications/ethical-conduct.pdf> if employees such as described above are in circumstances where there is a conflict of interest. These guidelines should also apply to church members involved in contracts or business transactions with the church of which they are a member. These financial/business issues are more specifically addressed in the “Salem Presbytery Advisory Guidelines: Congregational Business and Ethical Practices.” The Commission on Ministry wants to be sure a congregation has thoroughly exercised wise discernment in the necessary balancing of roles and responsibilities that are highlighted, but not limited to:

1. **Elected roles in the church.** As a staff person, to serve on the session or in an elected position places them in a more influential position than other staff, supervisors, or even the pastors. In particular, serving on the session, an employee/member might be asked to make decisions that influence the personnel, budgeting, salaries, and evaluations of other staff, which would create a conflict of interest. Discussing these potential conflicts of interest beforehand with those affected is advised so a consensus is reached on how to navigate such challenges in a healthy manner.
2. **Support of leadership.** Strict confidentiality is to be maintained regarding members’ privacy and privileged communications. Staff employees are considered part of the leadership and implementation of the leadership decisions of the church. Whereas church members may disagree with decisions of the church leadership, employees are expected to support and abide by decisions of the session and leadership of the church. Session members themselves agree that although they may discuss and debate in the course of a meeting, when they leave the meeting they will support and abide by the decisions of the majority. As employees of the church, under the supervision of the Pastor/Head of Staff, it is the staff’s role to support the directions and leadership of the church.
3. **Conflict with church members and staff.** Church employees may from time to time have conflicts with church members and/or other staff members, or find themselves caught in the middle of a conflict between church members and/or staff members. Matthew 18 encourages us to go directly to those involved and seek reconciliation. If that is ineffective, they should seek a neutral third party to facilitate communication and reconciliation. If that is ineffective, they should seek first their direct supervisor, or the Pastor/Head of Staff to

facilitate reconciliation.

If the employee is a family member of the Pastor, they will need to ask the personnel committee or someone from the Presbytery to provide an objective intervention. At no time are employees to discuss with other church members matters relating to conflicts with other staff, church members, or Pastoral leadership. The leadership of the church should provide the help to resolve the conflicts. Involving other members of the church in the disputes undermines the ability of the leadership to resolve the issue.

4. **Pastoral care needs versus supervisory needs.** Within the dual relationship of being a church member (or member of the Pastor's family) and an employee it is important to note there is also a dual relationship for the pastor. The pastor must at the same time be a compassionate pastor, aware of the needs and feelings of members, but also an employer/supervisor, who is charged with the stewardship of the church's resources and employees. As a supervisor, the pastor may be asked to discipline, correct, or reprimand the staff employee. If it is difficult or impossible to provide care at the same time as disciplinary supervision, then pastoral care should be sought and provided by a pastor from within the Presbytery of Salem.
5. **Boundary Issues for church members as employees.** It is a common boundary issue for church members who are employees to be asked to do something work-related when they are in attendance as a church member at a worship service, or family night supper. The session should help set up appropriate boundaries for employees who are members so that they may have no role other than church member during the hours they are not officially working for the church. The pastor/head of staff will work with employees to develop communication opportunities and skills to help educate members as to appropriate roles and boundaries during non-working hours for church members who are also paid staff.
6. **Termination of Employment** In the event of a termination, the session's expectations are as follows: The former employee will not participate in gossip or discussions of any conflicts with other members of the church, as this may cause division within the church itself, and short-circuits the ability of the leadership to address and resolve issues.

**Summary:** It is a challenge to be a member of a church, or a member of the pastor's family, and also be an employee of the church. It is difficult to work for the church and also see the church as a place where one's needs are heard and met. Overall the intent of this resource guide is to help articulate the expectations and challenges of being either a church member or member of the pastor's family, and also a church employee. Because of the risks, it is always advisable to get consultation from the Presbytery, and to seek the guidance of the Commission on Ministry Task force on Policy, Compensation, Mediation and Church Officer Development at the first sign of any escalating conflict, or intractable behaviors or significant deterioration in relationships. It is always a significant risk when hiring church members or members of the pastor's family. This does not mean that they may not be considered when they provide exceptional qualifications and skills needed for the position. A heightened awareness and continual preventative "maintenance" for such relationships will always be required.