

Sample Resignation

John S. Williams

In November of 1999 I began serving as the Western Area Minister for the ABCCR. This change in ministry did not necessitate relocating my family as we had bought our own home in Garden City. I thought it was important to be very clear about how my relationship with the congregation would change, so use of the Covenant and Code of Ethics seemed the most natural way to say what needed to be said. A copy of a half page insert was included in the bulletin on my last Sunday. I was also dealing with another issue at the time. The Ministry Assistant at the church, who serves in the areas of Worship and Christian Education, spent 20 years in Southern Baptist life. To some in the congregation, he has always been just a little "suspect." With my leaving, some were expressing concern that he would wield undue influence and try to move the church toward SBC. It was a ridiculous concern, for Phil is a committed American Baptist. Nonetheless, I wanted to at least mention the fact that he also had subscribed to the Covenant and Code of Ethics. The following is a transcript of my closing words on my last Sunday as pastor of First Baptist Church, Garden City, KS. I hope it is helpful.

I have been thinking about this moment for several weeks, now. And it has been difficult for me to think about it for very long periods of time. The final benediction, the final word I can offer as your pastor...it doesn't come easily.

I included something in the bulletin this morning to help me say some of the things I feel I need to say. The Covenant and Code of Ethics for Ministerial Leaders is something I have tried to take very seriously throughout my pastoral ministry. I agreed to and signed this document many years ago because I believe pastors need to be guided by a professional Code of Ethics in order to help churches and other church leaders know and understand how and why I will relate to them in certain ways. I have subscribed to this Code of Ethics, and so has Phil, and I would anticipate so would your next pastor. It offers many things worthy of reflection and consideration in guiding the conduct of pastors and other clergy types in our relationships with the community, the church, and each other.

I wanted today to call your attention to the fourth paragraph on the backside of the Code of Ethics which says: "I will, upon my resignation or retirement, sever my professional church leadership relations with my former constituents, and will not make professional contacts in the field of another ministerial leader without his/her request and/or consent." ...I don't have a robe or mantle to symbolize my role as pastor. There is no collar I can take off, no badge I can remove to symbolically portray the conclusion of this pastoral ministry. ...But I do have some keys (remove church keys from pocket and place them on the communion table). ...In laying down these keys I am saying that I surrender the incredible privilege you and God have given me to have access to your hearts and lives as your pastor. I can relate to you in that role no longer; not because I don't want to or because I don't love you, but because it would violate this Code of Ethics and it would make it more difficult for you to enter into the new pastoral relationship that God is preparing for you.

The unique element we are adding to this leadership change is the fact that my family and I are staying here and will continue to be a part of this community and church. So we will have to work harder to keep this new relationship healthy....

Today, and for the past ten years, I have been your pastor...
Tomorrow I will be your Area Minister...
But always...I will be your friend and your brother in Christ.

Let us pray...