

Expectations and Ethics for Those Providing Pulpit Supply

Effective November 9, 2017

Welcome to the Flint River Presbytery Pulpit Supply list. We are grateful to have your worship leadership services available within the bounds of our presbytery. Those serving on our pulpit supply list come from a wide variety of denominational backgrounds and have different types of worship leadership training, so we hope the following information will help equip everyone to faithfully lead worship to the glory of God in an authentic and Spirit-filled way.

Expectations for the Congregation and Pulpit Supply

What you can expect from the congregation ahead of time:

- A copy of a recent bulletin (or other appropriate document), to provide you with a clear overview of the usual order of service;
- A clear list of the parts of the service you will lead;
- A clear list of the parts of the service you should plan;
- The deadline for bulletin information;
- The name and contact information of a member who will be there on the day you provide supply;
- The date and time of the worship service for which you will provide supply; and
- The amount of the compensation for supply provided by the congregation.

What you should expect to provide the congregation ahead of time:

- The information requested from you for the bulletin by the due date;
- Any specific or unusual needs or requests you may have (for example: if you will require the use of accessible entrances, restrooms, etc., if you have dietary restrictions which may inhibit your ability to perform or partake of the sacrament of communion with the traditional elements of wheat bread and grape juice or grape wine, etc.);
- The full name in which you wish the compensation check to be made out;
- The mileage you expect to travel to and from the church building, if it exceeds 50 miles round trip;
- Any clarifying questions you may have about what is expected of you in the worship service, or your participation in any congregational events before or after worship (such as Sunday school, a church fellowship dinner, a congregational meeting, etc.); and

- The time at which you plan to arrive before the worship service, and a way to get in touch with you, should something unexpected occur between your last communication and the date of the service.

What you can expect from the congregation on the date of the worship service:

- The church building open by the time at which you stated you plan to arrive;
- Greeting by a church member who is expecting you, and can show you both where you may prepare and the worship space, before the service;
- A quiet space in which to prepare to lead worship;
- A bulletin (if used), or other appropriate material which the congregation will use to follow the order of the service;
- A time to meet briefly with any other worship leaders before the time of the service; and
- A check for the compensation and any mileage you may be owed.

What you should expect to provide on the date of the worship service:

- A respectful and timely arrival;
- Prepared, authentic, Spirit-led worship leadership for each of the portions of worship you have been asked to lead;
- Gracious flexibility for yourself and the congregation as you all embrace the unfamiliar quality inherent in a pulpit supply experience; and
- A grateful attitude for the opportunity to be present with and lead worship for the congregation.

Ethical Guidelines

Please be mindful of the authority inherent in your position of leadership, and use it wisely. Careful stewardship of this authority is vital to the health of the congregation and your relationship with Flint River Presbytery. You should understand that in our Presbyterian tradition and polity, the session, not the pastor, is the primary decision-making body for the congregation. With this information in mind, please adhere to the following ethical guidelines:

It is appropriate to share about yourself, your family, and your other work or interests during your worship leadership, however it is inappropriate to do any of the following:

- Use the pulpit supply opportunity as an opportunity to advertise for any businesses, non-profits, or other organizations without prior approval from the session of the congregation;

- Ask for a special offering from the congregation for any reason or purpose without prior approval from the session of the congregation;
- Seek to recruit participation in, or help with, any event or organization without prior approval of the session;
- The one exception to the above items is Flint River Presbytery organizations, events, groups or mission opportunities. For example, it would be inappropriate to advertise for your nephew's new catering business or ask for help with a Rotary Club service project (without prior approval from the session), but it would be appropriate to share with the congregation information about the up-coming Flint River Presbytery Celebration of Faith event.
- When in doubt, ask ahead of time. The person coordinating with you about providing supply should be able to answer or forward to the appropriate person any questions you may have.

It is appropriate to provide some pastoral care while providing pulpit supply on the date of the worship service, however, all pastoral concerns should be forwarded to the primary pastoral care provider for the congregation, unless someone specifically requests that the concern he/she has shared remains confidential. It is always appropriate to hold on prayer those people, concerns and joys, you encounter while providing pulpit supply. It is inappropriate to do any of the following:

- Begin to meet regularly outside of the worship time for the congregation with a parishioner to provide pastoral counseling or other pastoral support without prior notification to, and the blessing of, the primary pastoral care provider;
- Solicit the opportunity to officiate the wedding, baptism or funeral/memorial service of a parishioner and/or his/her family member or friend; and
- Offer to refer a parishioner to a professional counselor, therapist, psychiatrist, psychologist, spiritual director, or other mental health or spiritual care provider without first discussing the need for a referral and the proposed referred professional with the primary pastoral care provider.
- In the case that someone directly, and of their own instigation, requests any of the services above, please respond compassionately, while still respecting the boundaries of your role as pulpit supply. Whenever possible, work with other congregation leaders, such as session members, deacons, and the primary pastoral care provider, to ensure parishioners receive the support and care they need.

In our denomination, Communion and Baptism are sacraments which, according to the Book of Order (our governing document), “shall be presided over by a minister of the word and sacrament, for reasons of order.” The session, the governing body of the congregation, must approve the celebration of the sacraments. Therefore, it is appropriate to encourage those who are not baptized, if they are feeling so led, to seek a meeting with the congregation’s session regarding preparation for, and receipt of, the sacrament of baptism. It is also appropriate to encourage people to prepare for and partake of the sacrament of communion as often as the sacrament is offered in the worshiping life of the congregation. It is inappropriate to do any of the following:

- Offer or agree to baptize someone during the worship service in which you will be providing pulpit supply, either before or during the service, unless the baptism has been approved by the session and the session has invited you to preside over the sacrament; and
- Preside over the sacrament of communion, or insist on its inclusion in the worship liturgy, unless the session has approved the administration of the sacrament of communion prior to the worship service, and has invited you to preside over the sacrament.
- If you have received an invitation to preside over the sacrament of communion, but are not Presbyterian by affiliation or training, you may wish to request a full copy of the liturgy usually used by the congregation and the regular worship leader(s) when they celebrate the sacrament. This document should serve as your blueprint for the liturgy you use to preside at the table. Please note that if you are not an ordained minister of the word and sacrament in the PCUSA, or an ordained pastor in a denomination with whom we have a communion agreement, the session should petition the Committee on Ministry of Flint River Presbytery for permission for you to perform the sacrament when you provide pulpit supply.

There may be times when, for personal reasons, you wish to more actively seek pulpit supply opportunities. It is always appropriate to follow up with your contact person(s) for a congregation with a thank you for the opportunity to provide pulpit supply, or to send a thank you note intended for the session and/or entire congregation. It is also appropriate to occasionally remind your contact person(s) of your continued availability. However, it is inappropriate to do any of the following:

- Actively solicit pulpit supply opportunities for specific dates;
- Assume or presume that since you have provided pulpit supply before, you will be asked again, or regardless of your relationship with a specific congregation, have a “right of first refusal” arrangement with that particular congregation; and
- Actively solicit pulpit supply opportunities from members of the congregation who are not responsible for securing pulpit supply.

- Congregation leaders have a wide variety of reasons and motivations for seeking particular voices to fill the pulpit. The fact that a congregation asks a variety of people to fill the pulpit should not be taken as a personal reflection on you as a person or your performance when last providing pulpit supply. Please respect the wisdom of the congregation leaders as they seek to provide what is necessary for the worship of the congregation.

Leading worship is a joy and a responsibility entrusted to you by Flint River Presbytery, and the congregations which shall invite you to provide pulpit supply. We are grateful to you for sharing your gifts, your time, and your witness with the congregations within our bounds.

We pray that the Holy Spirit may be present with you each time you prepare for and lead worship in one of our member congregations. May your interactions bring glory to God, and may we all work together as the body of Christ on earth.