



A SURE FOUNDATION

resources for the relationship
between pastors and congregations

ETHICAL DEPARTURE GUIDELINES

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theological grounding

Every ministry has a beginning and an end. Moses and Elijah concluded their earthly ministries, entrusting their authority to others and believing that God would provide other leaders who could carry on the work of ministry and leadership to that community. Jesus ministered as an itinerant, always moving from place to place; in Mark 1:38 he says, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came to do.” Paul planted many churches and empowered other leaders to shepherd those communities after his departure; while his letters to those communities were filled with teaching, they also contained encouragement for those churches to listen to their current leaders. Even Jesus endowed the Church with the power to act in his name when he left earth following his ascension. Similarly, when pastors conclude their ministry in a setting, they depart in faith that Jesus’ words at the end of the Gospel of Matthew are true for them and for the congregations they depart: “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” This allows departing pastors to take their leave, trusting that God will continue to take care of those whom the pastor has served. This trust in God is especially essential at the time of departure, when the reality of the new boundaries becomes real and the temptations to cross those boundaries increase.

These departure guidelines are meant to facilitate a faithful leave-taking on the part of the pastor, freeing everyone to live into a new future as ministries move in new directions separate from each other.



boundaries and best practices

It is the expectation that, upon departure, a pastor will not return to serve that congregation or its congregants in a pastoral capacity. For a minimum of one to three years, a departing pastor will observe a no-contact boundary with congregants, thus helping congregants observe the same. This boundary enables the pastor to fulfill UCC Ministerial Code in support of their former church's relationship-building with a new pastor. Re-establishing contact is only appropriate after negotiation with the new pastor, potentially in dialogue with a wider church representative.

A departing pastor develops an overall departure plan that is ethically aligned with the UCC Ministerial Code and fulfills Committee on Ministry requirements, and by which they covenant to abide. This plan is detailed to include the pastor's boundaries with the congregation, with the community, and in social media. It is communicated clearly to the congregation prior to departure.

EXPECTATIONS FOR CHURCH PASTORS

Boundaries with the congregation:

- The departing pastor will leave with grace, expressing gratitude for the time of shared ministry and encouraging the congregation to bond with its next pastor.
- The pastor will state clearly that they will no longer be available to the congregation or affiliated persons for weddings, baptisms, funerals, church activities, pastoral care, etc., and then the pastor will keep this commitment.
- The pastor will say “goodbye” – through an exit interview, through worship¹ – and then practice saying “hello” to their new ministry setting or to their new reality of retirement.

Boundaries with the community:

- The pastor will inform hospitals, nursing homes, and other care facilities that they will no longer be available for Bible study, worship services, or other pastoral duties following their departure date.
- The pastor will inform area funeral homes that they will no longer be available for funerals or memorial services following their departure date. They will encourage funeral directors to direct requests to the new pastor of the congregation.
- When the pastor's responsibilities have included specialized duties (Minister of Music or Minister of Social Justice, e.g.), the pastor will inform organizations with whom they have partnered in this role that they will no longer be available for this partnership, and encourage those settings to invite the incoming pastor's participation.

¹ The UCC *Book of Worship* has a Liturgy for Departure that begins on page 252.

- The pastor will inform any other places where they have done general community ministry (city council meetings, civic clubs, ecumenical groups, etc.) that they will no longer be able to offer pastoral services (such as guest preaching, opening/closing prayers, musical leadership) following their departure date, and encourage those settings to invite the incoming pastor's participation.
- It is recommended that the pastor resign from any area community board of director positions held by virtue of their position as a pastor in that community.

Boundaries with social media²:

- Prior to departure, the pastor will transfer administrator duties for church-related social media spaces and accounts, remove their own administrator status, and share password information to someone else in the congregation who in turn changes the passwords and takes over administrator duties.
- Though difficult, it is recommended as a best practice for the departing pastor to unfriend/unfollow all congregants and others with whom they've had a pastoral relationship, although there may be situations where using restricted lists is appropriate.³ In making this change to limit their online interactions with former congregants, pastors prioritize the needs of the congregation and incoming ministerial leadership over their own desires to maintain relationships (or the desires of congregants to stay in contact). Pastors must be consistent with all congregants – either unfriend/unfollow everyone from the congregation or move everyone to a restricted list – and they should convey this policy to their congregation as part of their departure plan so there is no confusion.
- Following the end date of their contract, call, or covenant with the congregation, pastors must refrain from providing pastoral care through digital communication. Continuing to provide pastoral care through social media interferes with the ministry of one's successor and is a violation of the UCC Ministerial Code.
- Following a period of 1-3 years, pastors may discern whether they will begin to accept friend requests of former congregants and/or choose to change their privacy settings. They should not initiate friend/follow requests with former congregants, and they must continue to refrain from providing pastoral care to former congregants.

Boundaries with the next ministry setting:

- The pastor focuses on getting to know the new ministry setting.
- If the pastor's new ministry is in another congregation, the pastor transfers their church membership and ministerial standing to the new congregation and Association as soon as possible.

² This section includes information from the Connecticut Conference's resource, "Internet Safety Guidelines," which is available here: <http://www.ctucc.org/internetsafetguidelines>

³ Adam Cleaveland makes compelling arguments for both options here: <https://alban.org/archive/pastoral-transitions-in-the-age-of-social-media/>

- If the pastor's new ministry is in a non-church setting (such as a chaplaincy position), the former pastor still changes their church membership. When such a change is not practical or possible, the former pastor still maintains a no-contact boundary with the congregation for a period of 1-3 years, typically until the new pastor has been installed for at least 1 year.
- If the pastor's new ministry potentially includes contact with their former congregation as an element of their new role (such as a judicatory position), then the new ministry setting, the Committee on Ministry, and the congregation negotiate ways to navigate this interaction appropriately. When possible, it is best for another staff person to offer appropriate leadership to the former congregation.
- Similarly, if the pastor's new ministry is with a congregation in the same Association as the former congregation, the departed pastor and the new pastor are encouraged to have a conversation, facilitated by the Committee on Ministry, regarding boundaries. (Examples may include: if former congregants attend worship in the pastor's new congregation, the pastor encourages them to continue their relationship with the former congregation. When the new pastor is installed, the former pastor should send representatives from their new congregation but should exercise restraint in discerning whether to attend personally. When Association events are held at the former congregation, the former pastor and current pastor should discuss appropriate roles for the former pastors – including no role.)
- If the pastor's new ministry includes a particular public platform (e.g. academic and publishing ministries), through which the public presence of the minister could impede the former congregation's bonding with its new pastor, the departing pastor should seek wisdom from the Committee on Ministry to mitigate the impact on the former congregation as best as possible.

A testimony: One minister recently shared her experience of removing people from her friends list on Facebook. "It was an emotional time to sit down and 'unfriend' members of the congregation. I found myself saying little prayers for them and in gratitude for the gifts they had shared over the past several years. I had communicated ahead of time that I would be unfriending them until at least one year after their next settled pastor was installed. I did not know at the time that my process of unfriending would evolve into an exercise of farewell and processing of grief. I wonder about the effect it would have to share plans for that kind of ritual with the congregation ahead of time?"

EXPECTATIONS FOR MINISTERS IN SPECIALIZED SETTINGS

When a minister departs or retires from a specialized ministry setting (that is, a ministry that isn't based in a congregation, such as chaplaincy or academics), the boundaries outlined above are still held as best practices, although it is important to note several nuances.

Boundaries with ministry setting:

- Similar to a pastor departing from congregations, a minister departing from a specialized ministry will inform the setting that they will be unavailable for pastoral care, preaching, Bible study or lectures, and special services (funerals, weddings, baptisms, etc.).

Boundaries with community:

- The departing minister should not represent the ministry setting in any context following the departure date, e.g. a hospital chaplain may not represent their former employer at a health care conference or a retired denominational officer may not represent the denomination at an ecumenical gathering. Exceptions may be made if an invitation to such an event comes at the express invitation of the person currently in the role.
- Especially in judicatory, academic and publishing ministries, in which the experience gained in a former ministry contributes to the public platform of the minister, the public presence of the departing minister can impede or overshadow the next minister's use of that role's public platform. The wisdom of a Committee on Ministry should be sought in determining whether and for how long a period of absence from public platforms (e.g. preaching, lecturing) may be appropriate following the minister's departure.

Boundaries in social media:

- The minister will adhere to all policies of their employer regarding social media boundaries.
- Prior to departure from a setting, a minister will pass along all administrator duties for all ministry-related social media accounts and spaces, remove their own administrator status from those accounts, and share password information with someone else in the ministry setting who in turn changes the passwords and takes over administrator duties.
- A minister who has served in a pastoral role in a specialized setting will discern whether to unfriend/unfollow those to whom the minister has provided counsel and care, or to move them to a more restricted list. The minister must refrain from providing pastoral care or seeking out continued relationships through digital communication with those persons who were in the minister's care.
- A minister who has served in a pastoral role should decline to discuss the state or events of their former ministry setting with all persons, instead encouraging others to speak with new leaders in the ministry setting.

Regardless of exceptions that may be made and nuances that may be relevant to distinct ministries, boundaries for a minister's departure should be discussed with their Committee on Ministry so that it can support and hold accountable the minister during a season of change.

EXPECTATIONS FOR RETIRING CLERGY

When a clergyperson retires from a congregational or specialized ministry, the UCC Ministerial Code is still be adhered to and the boundaries outlined above are to be honored. A retired minister refrains from providing pastoral care or seeking out continued relationship with those formerly in their care, and transfers their church membership (and ministerial standing, if appropriate) upon retirement. These boundaries encourage the clergyperson to build relationships in a new community and to acclimate to retirement.

Even in instances and locations where retired clergy remain in the community they have served (including, at times, retaining church membership in their former congregations due to a lack of local UCC churches), a retired minister should not participate in the life of a congregation from which they have retired for a period of 1-3 years, determined in conversation with the Committee on Ministry and the incoming pastor. This boundary includes funerals, weddings, and baptisms for congregants and the wider community alike.

When a pastor retires and is given the honorary title “Pastor Emeritus/Emerita,” such a title is a recognition of exceptional ministry setting and a sign of the congregation’s high regard. In many cases, a Pastor Emeritus/Emerita title is honorary and confers no pastoral responsibilities or expectations. In some contexts, the role of a retired pastor or a Pastor Emerita/Emeritus includes particular importance and responsibility. The role of a Pastor Emerita/Emeritus and any related expectations should be named explicitly and reviewed at regular intervals. Congregations are healthiest when they practice a clear understanding of the boundaries in all instances.

Mindful that retired clergy are still called by God, the retiring minister and the Committee on Ministry may and should explore opportunities for peer groups, wider church involvement, and continuing education that affirms retired ministers’ ongoing call while maintain appropriate boundaries to foster healthy and self-differentiated ministry in retirement.

SUMMARY

Maintaining healthy boundaries is an important part of every minister’s vocation. Appropriate boundaries at the time of departure help model life-giving ways to say “good-bye” to one another, as well as provide opportunities for congregations to be able to say “hello” to new pastoral leadership. This work is holy practice for all the greetings and goodbyes that people experience. At every departure, there is a mixture of emotions, including grief. Ministers do well to attend to their own grief in this time, even as they let go of their responsibility to attend to the needs of their former ministry settings.



the exit interview

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

The end of ministry inevitably raises all sorts of emotions for the pastor as well as the congregation. Times of separation can be painful, but they are also necessary for continued flourishing. In Genesis 13, Abram and Lot made a decision to go separate ways when their herders and flocks experienced strife. They named the truth of their present experience, negotiated a graceful departure from one another, and offered a blessing to each other.

Similarly, an exit interview provides the opportunity to those who have shared in ministry together to share one last time about the learnings, the blessings, and the challenges they have experienced during a season of ministry. Using Ephesians 4:15 as a model, pastor and congregation speak the truth in love to each other, participating in a facilitated conversation that offers time to reflect on how God has been at work in their common life, sharing their hopes and dreams for each other in the future, and reiterating the departure plan. Such conversations are not always easy, but the exit interview provides a container to hold shared stories, hopes, and deep feelings. In this way, a congregation and its departing pastor can grow more deeply into Christ as they tell their own truths, hear the truths of each other, and find a way to bless each other as their shared ministry ends.

An exit interview takes place close to the time of a pastor's departure from a congregation. The purpose of this interview is to facilitate the congregation's best future ministry and the growth of the departing pastor's ministry. It is designed to share helpful information about their mutual ministry, to speak openly and honestly about accomplishments, challenges, unfinished business, and to bring some closure to this important relationship. Representatives of the Committee on Ministry serve as hosts for this candid conversation, inviting everyone to the table, setting the agenda, and seeking to nurture faithful conversation and spiritual growth among those who gather.

Every exit interview asks the same essential set of questions: What was good about our time together? What was hard about our time together? What are the issues, challenges, and opportunities before this congregation right now? The answers to these questions provide valuable insight for the minister, congregation, and Committee on Ministry about their shared covenantal relationships, even as the minister and congregation move in new directions.

One of several formats may be used, depending on the current relationship between pastor and congregation, the situation surrounding the transition, or other factors. Generally, two members

of the Committee on Ministry facilitate the conversation. One of those Committee on Ministry members might take responsibility for coordinating the exit interview's logistics, while the other member takes time for an additional one-on-one conversation with the departing pastor. For the exit interview, the pastor and representatives of the church leadership (moderator/president/chair of the board, PRC member, etc.) are invited to attend and participate. In most situations, all the parties meet together for conversation. Significant conflict may make it advisable to meet separately as well.

The exit interview also provides an opportunity for the Committee on Ministry to clarify expectations for the pastor's ethical boundaries in departure, to inquire about the congregation's plans to celebrate their shared ministry with the departing pastor, and to make the congregation and minister aware of resources available to them in the time of transition.

SUGGESTED EXIT INTERVIEW AGENDA

1. Welcome and Introductions. The Committee on Ministry representatives welcome everyone to the meeting and shares in general terms the work of the Committee on Ministry, which includes exit interviews for clergy and congregations and the ongoing care of all covenantal relationships within the association. All gathered offer short introductions, sharing their role and involvement in the congregation.
2. Opening Prayer.
3. Share the Purpose of Exit Interview. Exit interviews are conducted for the benefit of the congregation and the departing pastor. Reassure those gathered that this is not a fault-finding mission, but an attempt to learn from this time what God has done and is doing in their midst.
4. Introduce the Process. A series of questions will be asked. All will be given an opportunity to speak as they desire. One of the Committee on Ministry members will take notes, and those notes will be shared with the Committee on Ministry as a whole, as well as with the departing pastor and the ministry setting. The information is treated with care by the COM, with a copy of the notes also included in the congregation's file and the minister's file. Encourage open, honest conversation.
5. Interview Questions and Conversation. The Committee on Ministry should choose from among these questions what is most important to know and learn from the pastor and the congregation in the time of transition. Different sorts of departures will call for different emphases or priorities. It is not expected that all of these questions will be asked. Where there has been faithful and effective ministry that has not been marked by divisive conflict, focusing on strengths and blessings may be fruitful. Where a departure is abrupt, unplanned or as the result of divisive conflict, addressing that conflict and exploring healthy ways to move forward will take priority, although no matter the reason for departure, an exit interview is an opportunity to be honest, to name strengths and challenges, and to move forward in faith.

Sample questions for the pastor:

- How did you sense God's call to pastor in this place?
- What do you value about this congregation?
- What are some of the strengths of this congregation?
- What surprises did you encounter after you came here?
- What are some of the things you have felt best about in your time here? Tell us one or two of your best experiences of ministry here.
- What do believe are the most important strategic achievements you have made in your time at this church?
- In what ways do you perceive the congregation being different now from when you came? How have you seen the congregation's ministry evolve over your tenure?
- What important goals do you believe you have not achieved? Why?
- What, if any, regrets do you have as you leave this church? Are there special pastoral concerns or points of grief at this time of departure?
- How has your time here contributed to your personal and ministry growth and development? What lessons and experiences from this church will you take into your next ministry?
- Who blessed your ministry here? Share about a time when you felt blessed.
- How has your family experienced your time in this congregation?
- In what ways has your sense of call to ministry been either reinforced or challenged by your experience with this congregation?
- What are your hopes for this congregation as they move forward? What are your hopes for yourself as you move forward?
- In your opinion, how is this congregation likely to help its own best intentions? How is the congregation likely to hinder its own best intentions?
- Are there any policies, procedures, or structures that the church could implement to maximize the effectiveness of your successors?
- As you leave, what would you like to communicate to:
 - those with formal authority in this church?
 - the other holders of power within this church?
 - the congregation as a whole?
- What losses have you experienced in this transition to another ministry or role? What consolations have you experienced?
- Share with us your future plans regarding relationships to this congregation. How will the closure of your ministry happen?
- What additional feedback or reflections on your ministry here would you like to give us as you conclude?

Sample questions for the congregational leaders:

- What were some of the expectations you had at the beginning of this pastorate?
- What surprises have you encountered in the ministry of this pastor?
- What are some of the strengths of the pastor?
- Tell us a story about the best worship or other experience you had together. Tell us about a time during this pastor's tenure when you were aware of God's presence.
- What do you value about your ministry together during this time?
- What do you believe are the most important strategic achievements made during this time of ministry together? What do you believe are the highlights of this season in the congregation's life?
- How have you sensed God's call grow or change for the ministry of this congregation? How have you seen the ministry of this congregation evolve during this pastor's call?
- In what ways is the pastor different from when they first came?
- What important goals do you believe were not achieved? Why?
- What, if any, regrets do you have as the pastor leaves this church?
- Are there any special concerns or grief about this departure, or that need to be expressed at this time of departure?
- What are your hopes for the pastor as they move on from this setting?
- Are there any policies, procedures, or structures that the church could implement to maximize the effectiveness of future pastoral leaders?
- As they leave, what would you like to communicate to the pastor?
- What lessons and experiences from this pastor will you take into your next season of ministry?
- How will the closure of your mutual ministry happen? From what do you release this pastor at the time of departure? How will you communicate the expectations around the ethics of departure with the congregation?
- What other reflections on your shared ministry here would you like to give us?

Additional sample questions for all parties:

- What boundaries have you set for this time of transition?
- How will you celebrate your ministry together?
- What questions do you have regarding the transition process?
- Are there any questions or concerns that otherwise need to be addressed at this time?
- Do you know to whom to turn in the Conference for information about search and call?

6. Closing Prayer and Thanksgiving.

7. Follow-up. If additional information surfaces during the exit interview that would indicate the need for further action by the Committee on Ministry, including for a Situational Support Consultation or a possible Fitness Review, the representatives from the Committee on Ministry will consult with the rest of the Committee, and with Association or Conference Staff to determine next steps.

A testimony from a pastor who had an exit interview upon their departure from a congregation that included representatives from the congregation, the Committee on Ministry, and Conference staff: “My exit interview had two strongly positive elements to it. First, the act of debriefing our shared ministry helped to remind me and the congregation that while ministry is a calling and a personal vocation, it is also a professional workplace and a shared endeavor. So the exit interview helped to define the congregation in this context as a place of employment, not only a place where personal relationships developed. (That also helped to clarify the departure boundaries as a necessary practice.) The second thing I appreciated about the exit interview is that it helped to create an embodied witness to the covenant between the congregation and the wider church. The presence of Conference staff and COM representatives helped the church see in a different way how their actions don’t happen in a vacuum. We are all connected in the body of Christ, and the exit interview helped my church see that what they did or did not do during my time there – good and bad – didn’t just affect us, but it had an effect on the wider UCC. Further, it showed the church that we are visible, we are seen, we matter to the rest of the church. So while this was not a deeply spiritual experience, it was incredibly valuable.”



retired ministers in the congregation

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

Clergy who are receiving pensions or are not presently serving in a ministry context may consider themselves “retired.” Although “retired” is not a category of ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ, ordination in the United Church of Christ a lifelong vocation. Just as priests and prophets in the Bible served for a lifetime, retired clergy continue to be a gift to the Church. With retirement, their ministry and service take on new shapes and new meanings in this season of life and vocation. God continues to call them to live out their call in new ways, and they continue to need the discernment of their local congregation and the Association in this season of life.

Retired ministers have served faithfully for many years and now bless the church in new ways through their participation as members in local congregations. As such, they may serve on congregational boards or committees, volunteer for service on boards and committees in the wider church, and may share their gifts in their community. Even in retirement, clergy are accountable for their ministerial standing – including membership in a UCC congregation, participation in their Association’s requirements for standing, and adherence to the UCC Ministerial Code – and the Association’s commitments of ministerial oversight continue.

SUPPORTING THE RETIRED MINISTER

Retired ministers often have a special, if informal, role of authority within the congregation. Other members of the congregation look to them as leaders in a unique way. Many times, a retired minister is a blessing for the current pastor and the congregation, but occasionally, a retired minister oversteps their authority and undermines the ministry of the pastor of the congregation. This may include offering pastoral support to other members of the congregation, hearing or sharing in complaints about the pastor's leadership, sharing doubts publicly about the pastor's leadership ability or decisions, or offering unsolicited advice to the pastor. When conflicts arise within a congregation, retired ministers should defer to the leadership of their pastor. This does not mean that a retired minister may never disagree with their pastor, but it does mean that the retired minister is encouraged to find ways to share that disagreement that does not subvert the pastor's authority with the rest of the congregation.

Too, the current pastor has covenantal obligations to the retired ministers in the congregation: to provide pastoral care and support to the retiree, to support their ongoing vocational discernment, to provide appropriate avenues for the retired ministers to share their gifts as needed and desired, and to publicly recognize milestones in ministry.

These guidelines offer best practices for developing covenants between the congregation, the current pastor, and the retired minister. These covenants are reviewed and renegotiated whenever there is a change in pastoral leadership in the congregation, so that the incoming pastor has the opportunity to understand the norms of the community, the retired ministers within the congregation can welcome the new pastor, and the congregational leadership can reiterate their shared commitments and support of everyone involved.

The following describes some common scenarios involving retired clergy:

Retired minister transfers their membership to a new congregation:

In such cases, the retired minister acts as any other member of the congregation, taking care to offer public and private support of the pastor when requested. Retired ministers may preach or provide pastoral care at the invitation of the current pastor. If a retired clergy person is asked to provide pastoral care or liturgical leadership (such as funerals, weddings, or baptisms) by a member of the congregation, they refer the request to the current pastor. Retired ministers are entitled to the same level of pastoral care and support from the current pastor as all other members receive, and are encouraged to reach out to their pastor in times of sorrow and joy.

Retired minister remains within the congregation where they have served:

In general, this is not a recommended practice, but in circumstances where this happens due to a lack of other UCC churches in the area, the retired minister refrains from participation in the life of the congregation for at least 1-3 years following their retirement and/or at least one year after the new settled pastor has been called, determined in conversation with the Committee on Ministry and the incoming pastor. This boundary includes funerals, weddings, and baptisms for congregants and the wider community alike. Upon the retired pastor's return to the congregation, they take special care to offer public and private support to the pastor of the congregation when requested and refer all requests for liturgical leadership (such as for weddings, funerals, or baptisms) to the current pastor.

Retired minister moves into a nursing home or care facility:

In these situations, the retired minister will have a new relationship with the congregation that may be uncomfortable or challenging for them. Rather than being care-givers, many such retired ministers find themselves in need of more care. This may result in a variety of emotions and responses to which the current pastor should be sensitive. The current pastor and the congregation can provide appropriate pastoral care and attention to the retired minister who moves to a nursing home, finding ways to "bring the church to" the retired minister and continuing to share the news of the congregation with them. When the retired minister moves to a care facility far from the congregation, the congregation should find ways to tend to their member's need in creative ways, though letters, emails, phone calls, and visits when possible.

Many retired ministers are part of a congregation:

Congregations that have multiple retired ministers in their congregation tend to also have ways of incorporating these unique leaders in a variety of ways. It is important to remember that not all retired ministers in a congregation may want the same sort of relationship with the church. Some retired ministers may travel frequently, some may be homebound and unable to come to church, and some may wish to spend their retirement outside the church. Of course, some retired ministers may wish to actively support the ministry of the church and their pastor through: worship leadership and preaching (at the pastor's invitation); leading Faith Formation classes for adults, youth, or children; pastoral care teams such as Stephen Ministry; or mission and outreach work on behalf of the congregation. Some may wish to step back from all public aspects of pastoral leadership. All of these choices are good and holy.

Retired minister is bestowed the honorific "Pastor Emerita/Emeritus"

When a pastor retires and is given the honorary title "Pastor Emeritus/Emerita," it should be clear that such a title is in recognition of exceptional service in a ministry setting and a sign of that congregation's high regard for the retired minister. The role of a Pastor

Emerita/Emeritus and any attendant responsibilities or expectations should be named explicitly and negotiated at regular intervals. In many cases, a Pastor Emeritus/Emerita title is honorary and confers no pastoral responsibilities or expectations, although in some contexts, the role of a retired minister or a Pastor Emerita/Emeritus is understood in different and very specific ways. This may include ongoing pastoral responsibilities as negotiated in partnership with the current pastor and governing board of the church, including: preaching, pastoral care, or faith formation. Congregations do best when they are sensitive to the cultural norms of a community as well as attending to healthy boundaries in all situations.

SUMMARY

Regardless of the circumstances, all those who hold ministerial standing in the UCC, who are members of a congregation but not part of its pastoral staff, are obligated to respect the authority and leadership of their pastor, and to relate in a supportive way to the congregation. Likewise, all congregations with members who hold ministerial standing but do not that church in a pastoral capacity have obligations to tend to the spiritual needs of those ministers with the same concern they give to other members of the congregation. In this way, congregations can be richly blessed by the presence and participation of retired ministers in their midst.

Retirement does not end the relationship of support and accountability between a clergyperson and a Committee on Ministry, nor does it signify release from the UCC Ministerial Code. It signals a new phase in a minister's life and a new understanding of their vocation. With gratitude for their faithful service, the church invites retired ministers to live and serve faithfully a new ways.

RESOURCES AND SAMPLE COVENANTS

Called for Life: Finding Meaning in Retirement, Paul C. Clayton (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers; Lanham, MD: 2008).

The Graceful Exit: A Pastor's Journey from Good-bye to Hello, Mary C. Lindberg (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers; Lanham, MD: 2012).

The following sample three-way covenant between the retired minister, their congregation of membership, and their Association of standing may help guide and shape the conversation:

This Three-Way Covenant is established between an Authorized Minister who has retired, their Local Church of membership, and the United Church of Christ as represented by an Association or Conference. This relationship is known as a three-way covenant, with each party accountable to and for the others. The purpose of this covenant is three-fold:

1. to strengthen, support and sustain the ministries of all the partners that share in this covenant;
2. to encourage mutual participation and accountability of and for the life of each by the others;
3. to observe, nurture, celebrate, and call forth the ministry of the Authorized Minister.

[Authorized Minister Name], as an authorized minister of the United Church of Christ who is not serving as pastor of the congregation, covenants:

To *[Local Church Name]* United Church of Christ:

- Membership in good standing with *[Local Church Name]*, including financial support for the general ministries of this church and a commitment to earnest prayer for the well-being of this congregation and its ministry; public recognition of membership in this Body of Christ;
- The preaching and teaching of the Gospel, the exercise of pastoral functions, the administration of rites and sacraments of the Church only at the express invitation of the congregation's current pastor;
- Continued adherence to the UCC Ministerial Code and the Manual on Ministry;
- Faithfulness in supporting the pastor(s) of this congregation, publicly and privately.

To the *[Association/Conference Name]*:

- Participation in Association Annual Meetings, Ministerium gatherings, Conference Annual Meetings when possible;
- Adherence to oversight by the Association Committee on Ministry, including the annual Information Review and the triennial Periodic Vocational Discernment.

[Local Church Name] United Church of Christ, as the church of membership covenants:

To *[Authorized Minister Name]*:

- Gratitude for God's call to you in retirement;
- Prayers for your continued discernment of call;
- Pastoral care, support, and accountability as a member of this Local Church;
- Public recognition of *[Authorized Minister Name]* as a minister with standing in the United Church of Christ.

To the Association/Conference:

- Appropriate documentation of *[Authorized Minister Name]* as an authorized minister with ministerial standing;
- Fidelity to the covenants of mutual accountability as articulated in this document.

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