



# A SURE FOUNDATION

resources for the relationship  
between pastors and congregations

Produced by Ministerial Excellence, Support & Authorization (MESA) Ministry Team, 2018  
United Church of Christ

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ethical codes</b>	<b>4</b>
○ UCC Ministerial Code	
○ Local Church in Relation to Its Pastor	
○ Behavioral Covenants for Congregations	
<b>pastoral relations committee</b>	<b>13</b>
○ Theological Grounding	
○ Committee Formation	
○ Best Practices	
○ Case Studies and Resources	
<b>assessment of ministry</b>	<b>22</b>
○ Theological Grounding	
○ How to Assess	
○ Relationship to Compensation	
○ Resources	
<b>social media guidelines</b>	<b>28</b>
○ Theological Grounding	
○ Expectations of Pastor's Online Presence	
○ Adult-Minor Relationships on Social Media	
○ Social Media Boundaries for Departure	
○ Resources	
<b>sabbatical leave</b>	<b>35</b>
○ Theological Grounding and Relational Value	
○ Policies and Best Practices	
○ Resources and Case Studies	
<b>ethical departure guidelines</b>	<b>43</b>
○ Theological Grounding	
○ Boundaries and Best Practices	
○ The Exit Interview	
○ Retired Ministers in the Congregation	

# INTRODUCTION

Dear pastors and congregations,

The Ministerial Excellence, Support & Authorization (MESA) Ministry Team of the UCC National Offices is pleased to share this resource with you: a collection of best practices for the relationship between pastors and congregations. Whether you are entering a new pastoral relationship with a congregation or seeking to deepen an existing relationship, these resources support the healthy ministries of both pastor and congregation. *A Sure Foundation* includes tools for Pastoral Relations Committees, ministry assessment and evaluation, social media guidelines, sabbatical resources, departure ethics, and more, along with recommended resources for additional guidance.

It is our hope that this resource be widely used by ministers serving in local churches as well as the leaders of those churches, striving together to be faithful in ministry. Many of these tools are best practices, not prescriptions for a single course of action. We encourage adaptations that fit your context while remaining consistent with this guidance and with the United Church of Christ's Manual on Ministry.

By encouraging healthy relationships between pastors and the congregations they serve, these resources also serve to support the relationship with the local Associations. While pastors are called and employed by congregations, their ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ is maintained through Associations, which communicate the expectations for professional development through Committees on Ministry. Congregations also hold their standing in the United Church of Christ through their Associations. Therefore these resources assume as foundational the covenantal obligations between ministers, congregations, and Associations.

Many individuals and congregations offered feedback for these resources, and we are grateful for their time, energy, and support of this project. We are also grateful for you and for your ministry on behalf of the United Church of Christ, and we hold you in prayer with faith.

The Ministerial Excellence, Support & Authorization Ministry Team

# ETHICAL CODES

## in this section

- UCC Ministerial Code (*Manual on Ministry*, 2018 edition)
- Local Church in Relation to Its Pastor (*Manual on Ministry*, 1986 edition)
- Behavioral Covenants for Congregations



## ucc ministerial code

*All persons with ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ are expected to abide by the UCC Ministerial Code.*

I acknowledge as the Church's sole Head, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior, and as kindred in Christ all who share in this confession. I will look to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Affirming that I have been called by God to be a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ and granted ministerial standing by the United Church of Christ, I agree to preach and teach the gospel, to administer the sacraments and rites of the Church with integrity, and to exercise pastoral care and leadership in covenant with others.

Relying on the grace of God, I...

### COVENANT WITH GOD TO:

- Lead a life worthy of the calling to which I have been called.
- Demonstrate a sincere yearning for connection with the triune God, expressed in prayer, worship, Bible study, retreat, and other spiritual practices.
- Affirm the importance of discernment in relationship to my call and, using the Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministers, will continue to discern the nature of my call in community.

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<sup>1</sup> Preamble to the United Church of Christ Constitution

- Grow in faith, knowledge, and the practice of ministry through intentional continuing education, study, and devotional life.
- Cultivate a culture of call by nurturing the gifts of others in the Church and joining their gifts with mine in seasons of change and continuity for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ and the health of the Church.
- Honor the diversity of God's creation and work for the unity of the body of Christ (John 17:21).
- Recognize the communal nature of God, ensuring that ministry does not happen in isolation.

#### COVENANT WITH SELF AND FAMILY TO:

- Attend to my physical well-being by adopting a healthy life style including diet, exercise, and rest, setting aside time for Sabbath and vacation.
- Steward my time, talents, and personal financial resources responsibly.
- Accept responsibility for all debts that I incur.
- Refrain from abusive behavior including abusive behavior toward others; the abuse of alcohol, drugs, or any other substance; to seek appropriate care for physical and mental health concerns; and to avoid addictive behaviors.
- Engage in sexually healthy and responsible behavior.
- Honor my family commitments, including my family's need for privacy and time together.
- Develop and maintain meaningful personal relationships outside of my ministry setting.

#### COVENANT WITH THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST TO:

- Actively participate in the covenantal life and work of all settings of the United Church of Christ.
- Adhere to all requirements for maintaining ministerial standing as set forth by my Association, and abide by the terms of my call agreements and covenants with energy and vitality.
- Seek the counsel of others, including Conference staff and/or the Association Committee on the Ministry, should divisive tensions threaten my relationship with those with whom I minister.
- Serve as an ambassador for the United Church of Christ, and participate in activities that strengthen its mission, vision and purpose.
- Advocate for fair standards of compensation for all ordained and lay employees of the Church, and honor the search and call process of the United Church of Christ.
- Seek to know, understand and respect the diversity of opinions and people within the United Church of Christ, affirming that all settings of the UCC speak to the church and not for it.
- Encourage and participate in the evaluation of my ministry, understanding and demonstrating that ministry is of and for the Church as it seeks to advance God's mission in the world.

#### COVENANT WITH MY MINISTRY SETTING TO:

- Preach and teach the gospel without fear or favor, regarding all persons with equal respect and concern, and undertaking to minister impartially.
- Honor all confidences shared with me; telling only those who need to know, what they need to know, when they need to know it.
- Steward church funds and property faithfully, while overseeing the administrative tasks of ministry with integrity.
- Speak the truth in love, not using my position, power, or authority to exploit any person nor using my position for unwarranted personal gain, including financial gain.
- Assess with care the implications of accepting gifts from congregation members.
- Not perform pastoral services within a congregation or for a member of a congregation, without the invitation of the current pastor of that congregation.
- Neither interfere with nor intrude upon the ministry of my successor upon my departure from a ministry setting; and to deal honorably with the record of my predecessor and successor.

#### COVENANT WITH ALL MINISTERS TO:

- Work cooperatively and collegially, with intercultural awareness.
  - Stand in mutual relationships with colleagues in ministry, offering and receiving counsel and support with intentionality.
  - Use technology and social media responsibly.
  - Act to prevent and to report known or suspected cases of physical or sexual abuse or neglect.
  - Attribute the sources of words and ideas that are not my own.
  - Accurately represent my professional qualifications, education, experience and affiliations, acknowledging the limitations of my office, abilities, skills and competencies, and making referrals when necessary and/or appropriate.
  - Maintain appropriate boundaries and practice self-differentiation in both my personal and professional life, including within the Local Church where I hold membership.
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## **the local church in relation to its pastor**

### **THE MINISTRY**

This local church recognizes itself as a part of the people of God and fulfills its purpose as it becomes a community for ministry and mission. We recognize our pastor as a person called by God who has attained particular skill and competence in leading our local church in fulfilling its mission and ministry.

We have called our pastor to preach and teach the gospel, to administer the sacraments and rites of the Church, and to exercise pastoral care and leadership. As we expect the pastor to be responsible in preaching and teaching the gospel and in administering the sacraments and rites, so will we be responsible for receiving and heeding the Word of God that comes through the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments and for responding to the pastoral care and leadership offered.

### **PARTNERSHIP IN MINISTRY**

We believe that the ministry and mission of the Church are given to all baptized Christians. We will nurture and join our gifts for ministry with those of the pastor in the Church and in the world.

In all matters pertaining to the life, organization, and mission of this local church, we will work cooperatively and collegially with the pastor. We recognize that our church and our pastor are part of the larger faith community that is the United Church of Christ, and we will be and will support our pastor in being responsible participants in our Association, the Conference, and the United Church of Christ.

We recognize that our church and our pastor are part of the Church Universal, and we will be and will support our pastor in being responsible participants in ecumenical activities in order to strengthen the unity, witness, and mission of the Church everywhere.

### **THE ETHICS OF MINISTRY**

We will regard all persons with equal respect and concern and will support and expect our pastor to undertake to minister impartially. We will not discriminate against any person, group or



organization on the basis of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, faith, nationality, ethnicity, marital status, or physical, mental, or emotional disability.

We recognize that we have called our pastor as the pastoral leader of this local church, and we will not invite other pastors to provide pastoral services within this church or to members of this church without our pastor's consent.

We recognize and respect that our pastor receives confidential and privileged communication. We will establish policies regarding baptism, communion, marriages, funerals, and the use of church facilities and personnel in consultation with our pastor and will honor them in our life as a local church.

We respect the privacy of the pastor's family and the family's right to time together without interruption.

We do not expect the pastor's family to assume roles of leadership or levels of involvement beyond the family's wishes.

We recognize that conflict or tension between our pastor and the local church can arise. Should divisive tensions threaten our life together, we will seek the counsel of the Conference or Association Minister or the Association Committee on the Ministry.

## COMMITMENTS IN MINISTRY

We recognize the many and diverse expectations we have of our pastor, and we will offer our support through prayer, encouragement, and partnership in the ministry of this church.

We recognize our responsibility to provide our pastor with adequate compensation and fringe benefits. We will make these decisions in consultation with our pastor and in light of the compensation guidelines established by our Conference. We will provide for an annual review of compensation that considers effectiveness, cost of living, ministerial competence, and years of service.

We recognize our pastor's need for physical and spiritual renewal, and we will provide adequate time and resources for study, devotion, leisure, vacation, and sabbatical.

Relying on the grace of God, we will lead lives worthy of the calling to which we have been called.



## **behavioral covenants for congregations**

### **THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING**

God calls us into holy relationship with one another, sharing our joys and sorrows, building each other up in truth and love, and exhorting us to forgive and seek forgiveness. The Bible is full of passages and stories that speak to these values, particularly in a congregational context. In particular, Matthew 18 and Ephesians 4:15 are commonly cited to outline the importance of honest, direct communication within a congregation. How people treat one another within the church reflects on how people tend to treat others outside the walls of the church.

Much of the time, congregants treat each other with kindness and grace, observing boundaries of appropriate behavior and striving to respond to conflict faithfully. Such graces include the importance of telling one's own truth and listening respectfully to others' truths, holding confidences appropriately, assuming good intent, seeking reconciliation directly from one who has hurt another, and approaching matters in a spirit of prayer. Sometimes, however, certain behaviors undercut the values the congregation professes to hold, such as gossip, slander, "parking lot" conversations that denigrate decisions made or those who made them, and inappropriate comments to or about one another (including pastoral leadership or the wider church).

### **OVERVIEW**

Behavioral Covenants provide the opportunity for a congregation to name its best values around communication and conflict. These covenants work best when they are rooted in the core values and mission of the congregation, and when members have the opportunity to participate in the covenant's creation and periodic renewal. The true power of a Behavioral Covenant, however, comes from the congregation's willingness to hold each other accountable to that covenant. When someone acts contrary to the Behavioral Covenant, church leadership must be willing to refer back to this shared document, to say, "This behavior is not appropriate," and to mutually create a plan for reconciliation.

Behavioral Covenants describe norms for interpersonal behavior, outlining respectful face-to-face conduct, appropriate conduct via email or social media, and norms for physical contact. All physical contact within the church must be respectful, consensual, and mutually welcome. The

use of demeaning, sexually inappropriate, or unwelcome language or physical contact, regardless of to whom it is directed, is inappropriate.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, Behavioral Covenants help congregations develop tools for working through challenging decisions by placing the common good of the community at the forefront, rather than prioritizing an individual's "wants" in any given situation. A Behavioral Covenant that prioritizes the health and vitality of the community will prioritize those needs, even when that means making difficult decisions. The goal is not for everyone to be happy but for everyone to be able to have a voice in decisions that affect the congregation.

From time to time, a congregation may need to develop a Behavioral Covenant that is specific to one individual within the congregation. This may be because of legal requirements (such as a registered sex offender who wants to join the church), previous conduct (such as abusive speech or conduct towards the pastor or others in the church), or for other reasons. These individualized Behavioral Covenants should be consistent with the congregation's Behavioral Covenant and tailored to the specific needs of the situation. Association or Conference staff should be a resource in the development of such a resource.

## SAMPLES

The Discernment Travelogue's "Rules of the Road"<sup>3</sup> provide a faithful roadmap for the creation of such a document, as well as some excellent samples of what to include in a Behavioral Covenant:

- Be fully present, extending and presuming welcome to and from others.
- Listen generously and suspend judgment about another's story. Hold stories with care and respect.
- Author your own story and share your own gifts.
- Wonder. Welcome discomfort. Love the questions.
- Be mindful and respectful of time.
- Practice hospitality and inclusion, especially when diverse cultures meet. There are many excellent methods for discernment but not all of them model intercultural awareness; therefore be discerning about discernment together: appreciate many ways of hearing God together.
- Believe that it is possible to emerge from our time together refreshed, surprised, and less burdened than when we came.

<sup>2</sup> The Insurance Board's Safe Conduct Workbench describes sexual harassment in detail and this resource may be helpful as congregations consider incorporating sexual harassment materials into their Behavioral Covenant; it is available here: [http://www.insuranceboard.org/safety\\_solutions/safe\\_conduct\\_workbench.aspx](http://www.insuranceboard.org/safety_solutions/safe_conduct_workbench.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> The Discernment Travelogue is available here: <https://www.uccresources.com/products/a-discernment-travelogue?variant=17675334660> and is also available in Spanish and Samoan.

Some congregations use Eric Law's Respectful Communications Guidelines<sup>4</sup> as a model:

- R – take **Responsibility** for what you say and feel without blaming others
- E – use **Empathetic** listening
- S – be **Sensitive** to differences in communication/cultural styles
- P – **Ponder** what you hear and feel before you speak
- E – **Examine** your own assumptions and perceptions
- C – keep **Confidentiality**
- T – **Tolerate** ambiguity because we are not here to debate. There are no “winners” or “losers.”

One congregation modeled its Behavioral Covenant on scripture; it is shared here with permission:

*“Love your neighbor as you love yourself” (Matthew 22:39).* As we walk together in all God's ways made known or to be made known to us, we seek to discern and do what is best for our church as a whole, not what may be best for individuals or factions (Philippians 2:4). We recognize that conflict and disagreement are normal and natural. We welcome a wide variety of voices and ideas when they are expressed in a way that reflects God's love.

As followers of Jesus Christ we promise to respect each other at all times in the following ways:

- We will approach all things in prayer. (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- We will speak from our own personal experience. (1 Corinthians 3:16)
- We will speak face-to-face, honestly and without rancor when there is disagreement. (Ephesians 4:15)
- We will listen with an open and non-judgmental mind and try as hard to understand as to be understood. (Proverbs 4:7)
- If we are unable to effectively communicate with each other, we will ask a third party to be present to assist us. (Matthew 18:16)
- We will support the final outcome of the decision-making process. (1 Corinthians 1:10)
- As forgiven people, we will choose to forgive one another. (Luke 11:4) In the spirit of Jesus, and with God's help, we will show respect and love in all we do as we journey together.

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<sup>4</sup> These guidelines are found here: <http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/respectful-communication-guidelines/> and are also available in Spanish, French, Chinese, and Korean.

Another congregation calls its Behavioral Covenant a “Covenant for Christian Communication.” It too is shared with permission:

As people called to follow our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we acknowledge His teaching in Matthew 18:15-17, 21-22 and the Holy Spirit’s leadership in Ephesians 4:15 concerning communication. As a Christian congregation in covenant with Christ as the Head of the Church, we accept responsibility to make God’s teaching our watchwords.

- When we hear something that raises concerns for us, we shall first make every effort to speak directly, one-to-one with the person involved. A deacon or the pastor(s) may be asked to coach us in advance, or to be present to witness communication as Jesus specifies at step two of the Matthew 18 process. If talking one-to-one or with one or two others fails, then concerns may be referred to the relevant group in the church or as a last resort to the whole congregation.
- In order to speak truth in love, we shall speak for ourselves using “I” statements, not claim to represent others or use accusatory “you” statements.
- When difficult subjects need to be named, we shall pray for all concerned and seek guidance of the diaconate and/or pastor(s) for help in speaking truth in love.
- We accept that understanding and respecting each other does *not* necessarily mean agreeing with each other.
- We affirm that the Holy Spirit may speak through any of us, so that all of us deserve a respectful hearing, even though congregational decisions are made by majority vote.
- While all people are welcome in Christian communities, behavior that is unchristian (for example: threatening, taunting, demeaning harassing or attacking) conflicts with Christ’s teaching and will not be tolerated.

While these covenants primarily focus on verbal behavior and listening, it is important to include commitments to abide by other guidelines established by the congregation, including Safe Conduct policies.

Congregations that use their Behavioral Covenants faithfully still experience conflict and disagreement, but they respond to those situations with a guideline that models respect, care, and Christian concern for the well-being of the entire body.

# PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

## in this section

- Theological Grounding
- Committee Formation
- Best Practices
- Resources and Case Studies



## theological grounding

The pastoral office and other positions of staff leadership exist to build up the congregation as part of the Body of Christ and to equip the saints for the mission of the church:

*And these gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of Christ, to become mature, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)*

Ministers are called to embody and encourage the faith of the Church and its members. This call is lived out in relationship, whether clergy serve as pastors or chaplains, whether they are chairing committees or baptizing babies, whether they are meeting with colleagues or with counselees. The particular relationship between a pastor and congregants should be tended deliberately, so that the ministries of both pastor and congregation complement each other and further God's grace in the world. As with any relationship, it must be respected and nurtured to grow in healthy and productive ways. For this reason, a Pastoral Relations Committee exists in a congregation to advise, assist, and promote the growth of this vital relationship. The health of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation is not an end in itself but serves the ministry of the congregation as a whole.

Congregations and leaders should expect that conflict will occur. There is a difference, however, between healthy conflict that productively addresses values, expectations, and priorities, and unhealthy conflict that creates and multiplies divisions. When the pastor and congregation do not share clarity about the values, expectations, and priorities for ministry, unhealthy conflict occurs.

Additional Biblical texts offer insight about the health of the pastor-church relationship. Explore Acts 15, Romans 15:1-6, Galatians 6, and 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24 for a few examples.



## **committee formation**

The Pastoral Relations Committee is a standing committee in a congregation, with the purpose of supporting a healthy relationship between the pastor and congregants in order to enhance the effectiveness of the church's ministry. The committee serves in two primary ways:

- as an advisory group to the pastor: sharing ideas, dreams, expectations, and concerns of the congregation with the pastor;
- as a support group for the pastor's leadership: interpreting roles, functions, boundaries, opportunities, and needs of the pastor to the congregation.

The goal of a Pastoral Relations Committee is to promote faithful, shared ministry between the pastor and the congregation.

The committee works in a context of confidentiality, support, care, and honesty with the pastor, while promoting healthy communication in the congregation as a whole. A Pastoral Relations Committee is an appropriate and confidential place for the pastor to test possible goals for the congregation's life, to receive support for their professional development, to reflect on their overall well-being in ministry, to listen to feedback and strategize potential responses. This committee also provides a means for the congregation to express its care for the pastor by advocating for appropriate compensation and encouraging times for relaxation, exercise, vacation, spiritual development, and personal relationships outside of the congregation. Particularly when the pastor serves in a part-time and/or bivocational capacity, this committee helps both the pastor and the congregation set and maintain appropriate expectations about the scope of work. A Pastoral Relations Committee is not an appropriate place to circumvent church processes of decision-making, for committee members to relay anonymous complaints, for individual members to lobby for or enact their own ambitions for church life, or to empanel an adversarial group opposed to the pastor's leadership. Finally, while the Pastoral Relations Committee encourages assessment of the shared ministry between the pastor and the congregation, they do not lead the process of pastoral evaluations.<sup>5</sup>

Depending on the size of the congregation, a group of three to seven individuals is appropriate for this committee. More important than committee size, however, is the composition and character of committee members so that the Pastoral Relations Committee is able to build and maintain relationships of trust within itself, between committee members and the pastor, and between the committee and the congregation. Therefore, both the pastor and the congregation

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<sup>5</sup> Information about ministry assessment can be found in the section "Assessment of Ministry."

should have input into the committee's formation. In many contexts, the pastor and the governing body each share a slate of names from which the composition of the Pastoral Relations Committee may be chosen by mutual agreement. It is recommended that the search committee serve as the Pastoral Relations Committee for the first year of a new pastorate. When a congregation is served by multiple pastors, each pastor should have their own Pastoral Relations Committee. Members of the congregation's governing body should not serve on the Pastoral Relations Committee.

When selecting persons to serve on the Pastoral Relations Committee, the following skills and attributes should be considered:

- Christian character that has earned the respect of the congregation and the pastor;
- demonstrated discernment and prayerfulness;
- Integrity and trustworthiness;
- demonstrated maturity and patience;
- vital interest in the life and mission of the church;
- ability to maintain confidentiality;
- ability to appreciate differing points of view and to reconcile differences;
- ability to engage questions of authority, covenant, and accountability with wisdom and care;
- willingness and availability to support both the congregation and the pastor through this committee role.

What other things should be considered when selecting persons to serve on the Pastoral Relations Committee? Some Biblical texts that may help guide a nominating committee's discernment include Galatians 5:22-23 and Ephesians 4:1-16.



## **best practices**

Pastoral Relations Committees should meet at least quarterly, and more frequently if needed or requested. The pastor must be present for all meetings of the Pastoral Relations Committee. Meetings should include time for prayer and reflection, check-in on well-being, topics of pastoral concern or need, and “big picture” examination of patterns and habits across the church's life. The format for meetings may vary, and sometimes a particular topic is useful to focus a meeting. A meeting might reflect on the UCC Ministerial Code or the Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministers, for example. It might explore case studies or use the “Five S's” (Successes, Surprises, Satisfactions, Solutions, and Sorrows) for reflection. It might review the



“Local Church in Relation to Its Pastor” document or discuss a book related to congregational leadership. Additional topics might include:

- best practices for communication between the pastor and members of the staff;
- reevaluation of the pastor’s scope of work and adjusting the congregation’s expectations for the pastor’s reasonable set of responsibilities within their allotted hours (e.g. part-time or full-time);
- encouragement of the pastor’s participation in denominational and community activities;
- plans for pastoral coverage and worship leadership during a vacation or sabbatical;
- strategies to address conflict in the congregation;
- discussion of the pastor’s compensation and benefits, for the committee to advocate to the governing body when annual budgets are developed.

An agenda for a meeting of the Pastoral Relations Committee might be outlined like this:

1. Opening Prayer and Reflection. This conversation can be led by any member of the committee to set the meeting’s tone and invite a Spirit-filled expectation for the time together.
2. Personal Check-ins. All members are asked to share. Prompting questions might be: “What do you bring with you into this gathering? What is hindering you from being fully present? What do you need to set aside during this time?”
3. Recommitment to the Committee’s Role. If this group meets infrequently, it is appropriate to reiterate what the group is and is not. If the congregation uses a Behavioral Covenant, this is a place to remind participants of that covenant, too.
4. Timely Matters of Pastoral Concern. The pastor may share updates on such personal or congregational concerns as appropriate. The rest of the committee may also share observations of concerns or needs of the congregation.
5. “Big Picture” Reflection. This is an intentional time for the committee to reflect and learn together as congregational leaders, perhaps brainstorming opportunities for the pastor’s professional growth or for the congregation’s renewed vitality, or discussing case studies to help untangle tricky dynamics within the congregation, or culling over the congregation’s history to understand its behavior patterns, or another topic. Conversation questions might include: “In what areas do we (the pastor or the committee or the church) feel ill-equipped for a particular aspect of the congregation’s current life? What patterns of church behavior seem to recur every year ... every five years ... every ten years? How do we handle these patterns when they emerge? Which one of the Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministers excites us as a potential area for our whole church’s faith formation?”
6. Moving Forward. Review any commitments made during the time together and outline any necessary next steps before the next meeting.
7. Closing Prayer.

Conflict in a congregation is inevitable. Often that conflict focuses on a concern or a complaint that someone has involving the pastor. Matthew 18:15-20 provides a healthy format for addressing such concerns, encouraging direct communication between the complainant and the pastor (or the person at whom the complaint is directed), broadening the communication circle as needed to include more witnesses and wisdom in addressing the conflict.

When a congregant raises a concern to a member of the Pastoral Relations Committee about the pastor:

1. Encourage the person to speak to the pastor directly. It may be appropriate for a committee member to join that conversation as a non-anxious facilitator or holy witness, saying for example: “Would it help if I were present when you brought this concern to the pastor?”
  - *Caution:* Make every effort to avoid triangulation.
  - *Options:* If they have already spoken to the pastor but are dissatisfied, encourage them to continue talking directly with the pastor or to consider other positive responses and what might be needed for forgiveness.
  - *Next steps:* If the person can’t or won’t speak to the pastor, and the issue seems important, then move to Step 2.
2. Have the person put their concerns in writing, date and sign it.
  - *Caution:* Avoid anonymous communications.
  - *Options:* If they decline, tell them you cannot relay anonymous concerns to the committee.
  - *Next steps:* Convey the written, signed concern to the Pastoral Relations Committee. The church member should receive a written acknowledgement: “We received your concern and will discuss it at our next meeting on \_\_\_\_\_.”
3. At the Pastoral Relations Committee meeting (including the pastor), decide if:
  - *Options:* The concern has merit and deserves further attention, or the concern has no merit and deserves no further action.
  - *Next steps:* If not, thank the church member for their input and advise them that the Committee will remain aware of the situation. Consider doing so in writing.
  - *Next steps:* Legitimate concerns are discussed by the committee (always with the pastor present). Together, decide on a course of action and follow it. If this concern relates to job performance, it is appropriate to involve the Personnel Committee or governing body at this point.
4. The Pastoral Relations Committee should only receive letters from individuals, not petitions from groups. When there is a need to test the entire congregation’s perspective regarding a concern, the committee should not conduct polls or surveys. Instead remind the congregation (through newsletter, bulletin, etc.) of the names and faces of the Pastoral Relations Committee members and encourage congregants to speak with them.

- *Caution:* It is helpful for committee members to keep a discreet list of who approaches them. This will assist in determining if the concern is widespread or limited to a few individuals.
5. The pastor may have legitimate concerns regarding specific individuals. These concerns should be addressed and treated with the equal consideration as concerns about the pastor are addressed.
  6. Occasionally, there may be concerns about the pastor that relate to potential misconduct. While every effort should be made to encourage direct communication between the pastor and those who are raising this concern in the practices outlined above, matters of pastoral misconduct should be referred to the Committee on Ministry, as fitness for ministry is determined by that body.
  7. Similarly, there occasionally may be concerns about the congregation or a conflict within it that would merit the assistance and/or participation of the Committee on Ministry in a Situational Support Consultation. In such cases, the Pastoral Relations Committee, Pastor, and governing body would ideally reach out to the Committee on Ministry for such assistance.

A Pastoral Relations Committee, if tended with prayer and wisdom, can have a profound impact on the shared ministry of a pastor and congregation.



## case studies and resources

### CASE STUDY #1

The new pastor has begun at St. John's UCC. He accepted the  $\frac{3}{4}$  time position knowing that the congregation had previously been served by a full-time pastor, and the search committee and church leadership shared with great clarity the scope of work with the new minister and the congregation. One day, two neighbors who are members of the church begin talking about the new minister. Ned says, "I can't believe that new pastor hasn't been here to see me yet! He started over two months ago. I think I'm going to complain to the Council President. How busy can he be – I see him riding his bike through the neighborhood all the time!" That afternoon, Ned's neighbor is talking to his daughter, who is also a member at St. John. "What do we pay this pastor for, anyway?" the neighbor asks. "I don't think he's doing a very good job and Ned is feeling totally abandoned." Still later, the daughter shares the news about the new pastor with her husband over the dinner table. "Why does the Conference always send us the worst clergy? This guy isn't even doing his job and everyone is angry!"

Questions to consider:

- When a minister's job description is less than full-time, what expectations around visitation may need to change on the part of the congregation? What expectations about other responsibilities may also need to change?
- What is important in your congregation about pastoral visitation? What is its purpose?
- How would the church prioritize visitation among the following: a first-time visitor, a member who is hospitalized, a member who is in a nursing home, a member who regularly attends worship, a member who rarely attends worship but is healthy, an unchurched member of the community who has reached out for help?
- How do you feel about pastoral visitation – would you want to meet the minister at your home by appointment, have coffee or a meal outside the home, have the pastor drop by unannounced?
- How can communication about disappointments and hurts be shared with the minister?

## CASE STUDY #2

“Why is the pastor always out of town?” the church member asked the Council President. “It seems like she has been gone for half a month, usually on ‘Conference business.’ We pay her to be OUR pastor, but the Conference is taking her away from us! It’s not enough that they ask us for money, but now they want our pastor’s time, too. It’s too much!” When asked at the next Council meeting about her availability, the pastor reported that in the last month she has been out of town several days: three were for a Conference Board retreat, two were for personal trips for which she did not need to give an account, one was for a pastoral visit to a congregant in a specialty hospital a few hours away, and two were for a continuing education experience.

Questions to consider:

- How do you expect your pastor to be available to church members and others? In what ways (in the office, by telephone, via email, through social media, etc.)?
- Do you expect your pastor to keep office hours? How long? How often? For what purpose?
- Do you expect your pastor to be available via telephone at any and all times?
- What are your expectations for your pastor’s service and leadership in the wider church or world?
- When your pastor is out of town, how do you plan to be in touch? When is it appropriate to be in touch? Who should contact the pastor during these times?

## CASE STUDY #3

Changes to the worship service nearly always provoke some sort of response. “You’d never know this was a United Church of Christ church with that liturgy!” “We’ve never done it that

way before and it just feels wrong!” “Since when do our kids take Communion?” “Why are we always singing songs we don’t know? The former pastor never made us do that!”

Questions to consider:

- How are worship changes introduced in your congregation?
- What is the minister’s role in this change? What is the role of others in the church?
- How might such changes be introduced most effectively in your congregation?
- Is there a board or committee that works with worship planning?
- Which worship customs seem “sacred” to you? What might merely be “comfortable” or “familiar”? Where are you most willing to experiment?

#### CASE STUDY #4

It is Holy Week, and there are four additional services at church, including an ecumenical Easter Sunrise service thirty minutes away. It has been a challenging Lenten season, with a study series on deep matters, higher-than-usual numbers of illness and injury among the congregation, and the abrupt resignation of the choir director. Additionally, a beloved octogenarian congregant died and their funeral was held on Tuesday. A child from the church was hurt in a car accident over the weekend, has injuries that are life-altering, and is in the ICU of a children’s hospital that is an hour away. Pastor Anaya has been masterful and incredibly faithful in her leadership, but there is no denying the toll this season has taken on her and everyone in the church.

Questions to consider:

- How should the pastor prioritize the pressing needs of the congregation right now?
- What roles do the lay members of the congregation have to play in: visiting the sick and grieving, offering leadership for the study series or additional worship services, supporting the choir and music program of the church, anything else the church is going through?
- What can the Pastoral Relations Committee ask or do to offer support to the pastor right now?
- After Easter, how can the Pastoral Relations Committee offer support to the pastor?

#### TIP SHEET FOR PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEES<sup>6</sup>

Effective Pastoral Relations Committees:

- meet regularly and often
- use meeting time well (agenda, identified topics, focused conversations)
- establish partnership with the pastor (maintain “we’re in this together” attitude)
- provide clear expectations (within committee, to the congregation, and with the pastor)

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<sup>6</sup> Based on resources from the Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

**Ineffective Pastoral Relations Committees:**

- only conduct annual evaluations (withhold regular feedback, neglect concerns that need timely attention, measure ministry solely by numbers such as salary and membership growth)
- allow too little time and care (unwilling to take time to listen, to care, to work)
- behave unfairly (share unevaluated and/or anonymous concerns, give all sources of complaint equal credibility)

**What Pastoral Relations Committees Most Need from Pastors:**

- receptivity (willingness to listen, openness to improvement and ideas)
- cooperation (effort to understand identified concerns, genuine attempt to make changes)
- open communication (candid assessment of church life, clear articulation of pastor's vision for ministry, information on needs and issues of congregation)

**What Pastors Most Need from Pastoral Relations Committees:**

- honest feedback (affirmation of strengths, constructive criticism, thoughtful and candid observation, information filters)
- personal care and support (advocate for minister's benefits and well-being, encourage respect/boundaries for family life)
- communication with congregation (education about pastoral role and scope of work, feedback from and to congregation)

# ASSESSMENT OF MINISTRY

## **in this section**

- Theological Grounding
  - How to Evaluate
  - Relationship to Compensation
  - Resources
- 



## **theological grounding**

Because ministry never happens in isolation, and because effective ministry is responsive both to the Spirit’s prompting and to the needs of the congregation, regular assessment of ministry is a critical element to developing and maintaining healthy, thriving congregations and healthy, growing leaders. “Give instruction to the wise, and they will become wiser still; teach the righteous and they will gain in learning” (Proverbs 9:9).

Assessment provides opportunities for the congregation to deepen their awareness of the ways God is at work within their communities, see the fruits of the Spirit that have been nurtured over time, and to celebrate the faithful leadership of the pastor and other leaders. Without ongoing assessment, congregations often give in to the temptation to listen to the loudest voices.

To speak of “pastoral evaluation” is to examine only one portion of the ministry that takes place in and on behalf of a congregation. “Pastoral evaluation” is necessarily incomplete, because the pastor’s ministry does not happen in isolation. It involves the ministry of the congregation: its pastoral leadership, its non-pastoral staff, lay leadership, members and regular participants, community partners, and other settings of the United Church of Christ. The most effective ministry assessments explore all facets of a congregation’s life and provide honest feedback in order to improve it.

Effective assessment of ministry is rooted in the congregation’s theological understandings of ministry, leadership, and covenant. Regular and consistent assessment should be woven into the practices of the congregation to identify areas of strength and needed growth for ministry projects, programs, and personnel. Establishing regular habits of assessment also helps to lower anxiety about “being put under the microscope” and sets the tone for continuous improvement.

The goal of assessing ministry is to gather insight that can shape plans for the pastor and the congregation – individually and together – to thrive and be responsive to the Spirit’s movement among them. The formality of these practices and the type of feedback gathered will vary based on the size and context of the congregation, as well as the goals and priorities of each church program or job description.

Assessment should not be conducted at moments of great tension in the congregation or when problems with the pastor’s leadership emerge. In such times, the Pastoral Relations Committee and the pastor must find ways to facilitate honest dialogue with the congregation toward the goal of healthy ministry. Additionally, the Conference/Association staff and local Committee on Ministry can assist congregations and clergy in times of conflict or crisis.

In order to facilitate effective ministry assessment, the following items must be in place as part of the congregation’s foundation for evaluation:

- appropriate job descriptions for all staff and volunteer positions: when job responsibilities and annual goals are clear, work can be focused effectively and faithful execution of those positions can be assessed objectively;
- a signed call agreement<sup>7</sup> for the pastor and signed employment contracts for other staff<sup>8</sup>: clear understanding of the scope of work for each employed person helps those persons set goals and helps the congregation hold reasonable expectations for what work can be accomplished in the allotted weekly time;
- the pastor’s three-way covenant with the congregation and Association: expectations and commitments of the relationships between pastor, congregation, and Association should be an explicit part of ministry assessment;<sup>9</sup>
- specific goals for the ministry of the congregation, affirmed by congregational leadership: these goals should be grounded in the congregation’s mission and vision statements, which reflect periodic discernment of priorities by the whole church.

Three other tools are invaluable when evaluating ministry.

1. *The Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministers in the United Church of Christ* are a discernment tool for ministerial preparation and professional growth.<sup>10</sup> Using the Marks with the *Marks Assessment Rubric* or *Journaling the Journey* can generate rich conversation in the evaluation of the pastor and the congregation’s ministry overall. For example, the staff and

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<sup>7</sup> A sample call agreement is available at: [http://www.ucc.org/ministers\\_regional-ministers](http://www.ucc.org/ministers_regional-ministers).

<sup>8</sup> The Insurance Board resource, “Your Church: Employer and Small Business,” can be found at: [https://www.insuranceboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Your\\_Church\\_ERandSmallBusiness\\_2012\\_12\\_10.pdf](https://www.insuranceboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Your_Church_ERandSmallBusiness_2012_12_10.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> A sample three-way covenant can be found here: [http://www.ucc.org/ministers\\_regional-ministers](http://www.ucc.org/ministers_regional-ministers).

<sup>10</sup> Portions of the Marks positively correlate with congregational vitality. The full report can be found here: <http://uccfiles.com/pdf/UCC-Congregational-Vitality-and-Ministerial-Excellence-Report.pdf>.



governing body of the congregation might choose two or three of the Marks to integrate into their goals for the coming year, and then reflect on those Marks throughout the year and during the annual assessment process.

2. The *UCC Ministerial Code* is the professional behavior standard for those who hold ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ, to which they are held accountable through their Associations. This ethical code reminds ministers of their call and covenantal responsibilities to God, self, family and the Church. Regular review of the UCC Ministerial Code can help a pastor and a congregation pay attention to each other's overall well-being and boundaries, to respond quickly to poor habits in ministry, and to set annual goals for holistic health and growth. Discerning what parts of the Code are most appropriate is best done in partnership between the pastors, church leadership, other staff, and key volunteers.
3. *The Local Church in Relation to Its Pastor* is an older resource (from the 1986 Manual on Ministry) to remind congregations of their ethical and covenantal commitments, particularly as it relates to their partnerships with pastors. Reflecting on the congregation's programs, activities, life cycles, and wider church involvement through the lens of *The Local Church in Relation to Its Pastor* can illuminate the assessment of the congregation's ministry and help to inspire annual goals.

The goal of assessing ministry is to affirm ministry and to discern ways for it to thrive. Regular assessment is critical to understand how the church and its leaders are living out their call from God. Done effectively, assessment celebrates areas of ministry vitality, discerns areas in which ministry needs attention, and strengthens the mutual ministry of the pastor and the church.



## how to assess

The Personnel Committee, in partnership with the congregation's governing body should plan, lead and interpret the formal assessment process.<sup>11</sup> While the Pastoral Relations Committee does not lead the assessment process, it should encourage church leadership to practice regular assessment of the ministry of the pastor and congregation. The process includes participation by staff, volunteers, lay leaders, and at times the full congregation. There must be opportunities for

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<sup>11</sup> When a congregation does not have a Personnel Committee, the governing body (Council, Consistory, etc.) takes on the planning, leading, and interpretation of the assessment process.

assessment by those being assessed (self-assessment), by supervisors/supervisees, by participants in ministry programs, and others as needed. Remember that the ministry of the whole church is being assessed, not only the performance of staff and volunteers.

Outcomes of the assessment process should be shared appropriately with all involved – staff, governing body, appropriate volunteers, and the Pastoral Relations Committee – so that the whole community can discern how and where to put its time and attention in the coming year.

Different kinds of feedback serve different purposes in the process of assessment. Personnel Committees and governing bodies should determine which kinds of feedback are needed and useful for different aspects of the church's ministry. The following types of feedback are all appropriate ways of gathering information for the purpose of reviewing and growing ministry.

**Descriptive feedback** invites people to describe their experience of some aspect of church life. *Describe your experience with X. How often does X happen? How has the minister prepared for/contributed to X? How has the congregation prepared for/contributed to X?*

**Formative evaluation** invites conversation about the improvement in performance. *Where has growth happened in the past year in this ministry? Where have we seen excellence displayed? What changes can be made to aid X in advancing the overall mission of the congregation?*

**Post-event evaluation** can provide immediate feedback that leaders can incorporate into their future planning of events and projects. A simple, three-question evaluation at the end of a meeting or event can gather the feedback needed: *What worked well? What could be improved or done differently next time? What insights did you gain?* Post-event evaluation also helps to develop a culture of continuous improvement.

**Feed-forward** is a process that invites participants to reflect on past situations and behavior as a way to imagine and plan for future situations. Once a meeting, event, or other situation has taken place and its outcomes realized, conversation turns to the future. *How do you want to handle X in the future? How do you determine what stories best support your message? What changes do we need to make for our ministries to be as robust and faithful as possible?*

**Evaluative feedback** is most effective to assess objective, concrete tasks of ministry (such as the congregation's financial management systems, its implementation of Safe Conduct policies, its building maintenance, etc.). Ethical conduct in relation to the UCC Ministerial Code can also be assessed using evaluative feedback. *How have we adhered to our Safe Conduct policies? Has our pastor lived and ministered in accordance with the UCC Ministerial Code? Have we implemented financial procedures to safeguard against theft or mismanagement?*

**Summative evaluation** bears a strong resemblance to evaluative feedback, although its emphasis focuses on job descriptions and/or goals that have been clearly outlined. *Is this staff person doing work consistent with their position description? Are the programs of our faith formation ministry consistent with our goals for spiritual growth? Is the altar guild or worship team completing their assigned tasks?*

If the answers to questions related to **evaluative feedback** or **summative evaluation** are “No,” additional follow-up is needed. *Are other tasks, expectations, or priorities preventing certain work from being done? Is it hard to find volunteers for a particular ministry?* In other words, evaluative feedback and summative evaluation are not sufficient by themselves; they require descriptive feedback and formative evaluation to paint a fuller picture of ministry.

Since the goal of ministry assessment is to improve the practice of ministry and to increase vitality in the congregation, it is essential for the assessment process to model healthy communication practices. Feedback (written or verbal) should never be anonymous, it should provide personal reflection (e.g. “I have experienced...” not “some people say...”), and all participants should engage in speaking their truth and listening to others speak their truths. As feedback is received, pastors, staff, and volunteers have a right to know who offered feedback when it is relevant to their work or area of programming. Not all persons need to read or hear every piece of feedback.

Feedback is designed to affirm ministry by identifying strengths of programs and pastors, events and volunteers, and to encourage a shared commitment to growth and vitality. Negative feedback and constructive criticism are important to hear and consider, although they should not dominate the assessment process unnecessarily. To catastrophize two areas of concern to the exclusion of ten things going well can damage the congregation, the pastor, and the relationship between the two. If it is genuinely impossible to affirm several areas of ministry in the congregation or with the pastor, consultation with Association/Conference staff and the Committee on Ministry is appropriate.



## **relationship to compensation**

A holistic understanding of ministry assessment, encompassing the life of the entire congregation as well as the pastoral leadership, makes clear that the aim of assessments is not to inform

compensation decisions but to shape the shared ministry of pastor and congregation. Connecting assessment processes only or foremost to compensation is not recommended. Pastors and staff should be paid fairly and justly for the work they do, with attention to conference compensation guidelines and local costs of living, and adjustments that correspond to increased or decreased responsibilities, trusting in the congregation's ability to meet its financial commitments.

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## resources

*Be the Church* is an assessment tool to aid congregations as they seek to embody the values of the United Church of Christ. A *Be the Church* planning guide with assessment resources can be found at <http://www.ucc.org/bethechurch>.

*Discernment Travelogue*, available through UCC Resources.

*Evaluating Ministry* by Jill M. Hudson (Rowman and Littlefield; Lanham, MD: 1992).

*When Better Isn't Enough: Evaluation Tools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church* by Jill M. Hudson (Rowman and Littlefield; Lanham, MD: 2004).

*Supervising and Supporting Ministry Staff* by Kevin E. Lawson and Mick Boersma (Rowman and Littlefield; Lanham, MD: 2017).

*Completing the Circle* by David McMahill (Rowman and Littlefield; Lanham, MD: 2003).

*User-Friendly Evaluation: Improving the Work of Pastors, Programs and Laity*, by Jeff Woods (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers; Lanham, MD: 1995).

# SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

## **in this section**

- Theological Grounding
  - Expectations of Pastor’s Online Presence
  - Adult-Minor Relationships on Social Media
  - Boundaries for Departure
  - Resources
- 



## **theological grounding**

The United Church of Christ professes a belief in God who is defined by relationship in the Trinity, who values interconnectedness and calls us to relationships of health and wholeness. The United Church of Christ affirms and values the covenants that exist between God and creation, among family members and communities, and between ministers and those with whom they minister. Those covenants help us to participate in relationships that are rooted in integrity, wholeness, and care, to the glory of God.

A synonym for “pastor” is “parson,” from the same root as “person.” Spiritually grounded pastors understand themselves as embodying whole, authentic and integrated personhood, and strive to be the same person online that they are in other spaces. Guidelines for social media consumption and participation mirror a minister’s personal rule for life and are in concert with the UCC Ministerial Code. While the Code is specific to those with ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ, they have value for all persons who have paid or volunteer roles in congregations as well as the wider church, particularly if they minister to children and youth.

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## **expectations of a pastor’s online presence**

Social media is a form of communication used for connection, relationship, conversation, advocacy, evangelism, debate, news and information, and a means of seeking and offering

support. It may not be everyone's preferred form of communication, but it is an important method, and it is expected that most ministers can and will utilize social media in their ministries in ways that enhance ministry, enrich lives, and reflect individual and organizational values.

At the same time, the 24/7 "always on" nature of social media creates expectations about the accessibility of ministers, what news and information they receive via social media, and what constitutes confidential spaces. Some of those expectations may be reasonable; many, however, are implicit and will need to be named in order to evaluate their appropriateness for any particular ministry setting.

Pastors must consider the boundary implications of their use of social media. What weight is given to the words shared by a pastor? What authority is assumed, and how can that authority best be stewarded? What care is needed to avoid or minimize any harmful use of power by the authorized minister on social media, even if unintentional? Who controls the information shared on social media? Whose story is it to tell, and when or how is it appropriate to share beyond its original audience? Do congregational policies regarding transparency provide for periodic review of the pastor's social media interactions, to ensure both confidentiality and appropriate behaviors?

Questions of confidentiality must be weighed against mandated reporting requirements and liability considerations. While decisions regarding disclosure of information shared on social media should not be made solely on legal or liability bases, neither can these considerations be ignored. Social media is not considered a private space, and nothing revealed on social media can be construed as confidential.

#### Guidance for Pastors:

- Pastors as professionals strive to balance authenticity with appropriateness on social media, and maintain healthy boundaries around one's personal and professional spheres. A pastor must exercise care in sharing and speaking on social media, even on personal accounts.
- When and where available, pastors are encouraged to consider creating a personal and a professional account to maintain appropriate boundaries with members of congregations or other members of communities of faith.
- Pastors should have a cohesive and consistent strategy for managing friend/follow requests from congregants and communicate that strategy to the congregation.
- Pastors must remember that social media is not confidential space. Even in "closed" groups or private communications, it is possible for information to be copied and shared in other spaces. Pastors should assume that anything they share on social media may be shared by others, no matter their use of privacy settings.
- At the same time, pastors cannot assume that personal information shared about or by others on social media is public knowledge that can be freely shared by the pastor.

- Those who seek religious or spiritual advice from pastors online (via email, social media, etc.) must be informed that their communication is not confidential. Use of digital communication nullifies confidentiality.
- Before posting online, pastors should consider whether social media is an appropriate place for the message, and whether they would convey this same message in face-to-face conversation with the congregant. Pastors should avoid posting vague messages that invite rumor or speculation.
- A pastor is often considered the voice of the church, and social media content from the pastor may be viewed as church policy or as representing a church position.
- Pastors who manage or co-administrate church-related social media sites must maintain a current list of the pages, groups, forums, and accounts associated with the church, along with passwords and the names of all administrators. This list must be accessible to another member of the church staff or governing body.



### **adult-minor relationships on social media<sup>12</sup>**

- Youth groups thrive with church-sponsored “closed” but not “hidden” groups in digital spaces. These groups include both youth and adult administrators, and only those known to the group are permitted access to those groups.
- The youth group establishes covenants for its online spaces that govern: what is appropriate and inappropriate content to be placed and displayed in the online group for a youth group; whether or not their social networking site groups are open to parents of current members; and when and how to remove former youth members and adult leaders of youth groups who have aged out or left the group.
- With regard to a congregation’s Safe Conduct policies<sup>13</sup>, online space should be regulated in similar ways to other church space: there must be more than one adult who administers church-related sites, closed groups, listservs, etc.; adults must minimize private, one-on-one conversations with youth; church leadership should periodically monitor the social media interactions of the adult leaders with minors.
- Any inappropriate material that is not covered by mandatory reporting laws should be deleted from the social networking group or site. Any material that is covered by mandatory

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from the Connecticut Conference’s Internet Safety Guidelines, available at <http://www.ctucc.org/internetsafetyguidelines>.

<sup>13</sup> Safe Conduct policies can be found here: <https://www.insuranceboard.org/safety-resources/safeconduct-workbench/>

reporting laws is reported to a pastor or staff member, documented for church records, and then deleted from the social networking group or site.

- Any content that details inappropriate behavior by minors (outside of the bounds of the established covenant) during a church sponsored event or activity is addressed by pastors, other youth workers and parents.
- Parents should be informed that content appearing in youth social media spaces that are not sponsored by the church are not within the purview of pastors, staff, or other leaders. Pastors and youth workers may not participate in any youth social media space that is not sponsored by the church.
- Adults, including pastors, should not initiate “friend”/follow requests on social media to minors and should exercise discretion in accepting/reciprocating such requests.
- When and where available, pastors and other youth workers may choose to create separate personal and professional profiles on networking sites. Pastors are accountable for what is shared in all accounts, personal and professional.
- Pastors and other youth workers (employed or volunteer) who choose to accept friend/follow requests from minors or youth must use all applicable privacy settings to shield youth from age-inappropriate content that may exist within the pastor’s or youth worker’s profile.
- All youth and adults must be informed that communication sent digitally (email, social media, etc.) is not confidential and may be reported or shared with others if necessary.
- Pastors who work directly with youth are encouraged to establish church-sponsored digital communication groups to maintain contact with youth members. Such groups should include other adult leaders (employed, volunteer, or parents).
- Adults should refrain from initiating one-on-one video chats with youth, and if initiated by youth, include another person, preferably an adult, when possible.
- All transcripts of online text chats, video chats, blogs, or video blogs must be saved when possible.
- Pastors and youth workers must consider the content and nature of any post that will be read by or visible to youth. Pastors and youth workers (employed and volunteer) are often considered the voice of the church, and all such content may be viewed as church policy or as a church opinion.
- The United Church of Christ’s Office of General Counsel advises against posting online any pictures that include identifying features (such as faces) of minor children. Pastors and youth workers may only post non-identifying pictures of minor children on church-related social media with written permission of the family. Pastors and youth workers may not post identifying images of minor children on their personal social media pages.
- Pictures or video may only be shared with the express permission of the owner of the image (the copyright holder) to use the image.





## boundaries for departure <sup>14</sup>

Prior to their departure from a congregation they've served, pastors should create and share a social media transition plan as part of overall ministry transition, and execute that plan as part of their departure from the church.

This plan should take into account the following recommendations:

- 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.

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<sup>14</sup> Includes information from the Connecticut Conference's resource, "Internet Safety Guidelines," available here: <http://www.ctucc.org/internetsafetyguidelines>

<sup>15</sup> Adam Cleaveland makes compelling arguments for both options here: <https://alban.org/archive/pastoral-transitions-in-the-age-of-social-media/>



## resources

### SAMPLE PHOTO/VIDEO/AUDIO RELEASE

I grant *[congregation/organization]* the right and a license to reproduce and publish for worldwide electronic and print distribution the identity and/or image of me or my child and, at its sole discretion, to share these names and images with others included, but not limited to, for use in *[congregation/organization]*'s publications and displays, the online news magazine of *[congregation/organization]*, the email newsletter of *[congregation/organization]*, print newsletters and other publications, *[congregation/organization]*'s website and/or other electronic and print forms of media.

I hereby waive any right to inspect or approve the finished photographs or printed or electronic matter that may be used in conjunction with them now or in the future, whether that use is known to me or unknown, and I waive any privacy and publicity interests which me or my child may have in our identities or such images.

I hereby agree to release, defend, and hold harmless *[congregation/organization]* from and against any claims, damages or liabilities arising from or related to the use of the names or images covered by this agreement.

Please check the paragraph below which is applicable to your present situation:

\_\_\_\_\_ I am 18 years of age or older and I am competent to contract in my own name. I have read this authorization and release before signing below, and I fully understand the contents, meaning and impact of this release. I understand that I am free to address any specific questions regarding this release by submitting those questions in writing prior to signing, and I agree that my failure to do so will be interpreted as a free and knowledgeable acceptance of the terms of this release.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am the parent or legal guardian of the below-named child. I have read this authorization and release before signing below, and I fully understand the contents, meaning and impact of this release. I understand that I am free to address any specific questions regarding this release by submitting those questions in writing prior to signing, and I agree that my failure to do so will be interpreted as a free and knowledgeable acceptance of the terms of this release.

*Name (printed, signed, dated) and Address*

*Name (printed, signed, dated) of parent/legal guardian*

## SAMPLE PHOTO PERMISSIONS

The owner/copyright holder of the attached photographs/images grants permission and a license to [congregation/organization] to reproduce the photographs/images, in whole or in part, in its displays, publications, web pages, or elsewhere and in any form or medium for an unlimited period of time. I hereby waive any right to inspect or approve of the finished product using such images, and I understand that the photographs/images will not be returned to me. I affirm that the photographs/images attached are original on my part and that I am the sole owner/copyright holder of the material, and that neither the materials nor the permission granted hereby infringe upon the rights of any others.

*Name (printed, signed, dated) and Address*  
*Name (printed, signed, dated) of parent/legal guardian*

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Much has been adapted or informed by the Connecticut Conference's "Internet Safety Guidelines:" <http://www.ctucc.org/internetsafetyguidelines>. These guidelines also include recommendations for digital covenants and online publishing/posting.

The Southern CA-Nevada Conference has created some excellent resources for social media boundary training for authorized ministers. Those resources are not online, but the Conference has generously shared them with all who have requested them. Contact the staff at: [www.scncucc.org](http://www.scncucc.org).

The Insurance Board has a SafeConduct™ Policy and Procedure Template: [http://www.insuranceboard.org/safety\\_solutions/safe\\_conduct\\_workbench.aspx](http://www.insuranceboard.org/safety_solutions/safe_conduct_workbench.aspx) (click "Policy Template"). Pages 54-57 in particular provide helpful guidance for congregational policies and codes of conduct for social media.

Church Law and Tax Report has a five-part series on communication policies for youth ministry programs: <http://www.churchlawandtax.com/blog/2014/april/does-your-youth-ministry-have-communication-policy.html> (see all the links to the 5-part series).

Adam Cleaveland, "Pastoral Transitions in the Age of Social Media": <https://alban.org/archive/pastoral-transitions-in-the-age-of-social-media/>

# SABBATICAL LEAVE

## in this section

- Theological Grounding and Relational Value
  - Policies and Best Practices
  - Case Studies and Resources
- 



## theological grounding and relational value

Sabbath is a gift from God, because rest is as important as work for the health of all of creation. The seventh day was consecrated as a day of rest, and God ordered all of creation to cease from work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). God commanded the people to let the land lie fallow every seven years and replenish itself (Leviticus 25:1-5). Jesus frequently left his followers and his disciples to pray by himself, spending time reflecting on his call, listening to God’s voice, and receiving strength and direction for his ongoing ministry.

Rooted in these Biblical commands for Sabbath, a sabbatical is a significant time of rest, renewal and refreshment for pastors.<sup>16</sup> For pastors, the sabbatical is time to nourish their relationship with God, recommit to their call, and provide renewed vision and focus for ministry. A sabbatical is not a vacation, but it does provide time away from the daily work of ministry. Sabbatical leave may include study or a project, but its first goal is reconnecting with one’s sense of vocation through rest, reflection, and prayer.

Pastor Roy M. Oswald, formerly of the Alban Institute, has written and lectured extensively on many aspects of congregational life and pastoral ministry. He provides several reasons as to why a congregation should want its pastor to have a sabbatical leave<sup>17</sup>:

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<sup>16</sup> Although this resource is geared toward sabbatical leave for pastors, congregations are encouraged to offer sabbatical leave to all program staff.

<sup>17</sup> Oswald, Roy. “Why You Should Give Your Pastor a Sabbatical.” (VHS/DVD with leader’s guide) Alban Institute, 2001.

## A sabbatical...

**Encourages longer pastorates.** Congregations have difficulty realizing long-term goals without having long-term pastorates. Providing a sabbatical leave is one proven strategy for encouraging longer service to congregations and other ministry settings.

**Refocuses ministry.** A pastor needs an astounding array of skills to be effective in the congregation, especially as local church ministry changes rapidly. A sabbatical offers an opportunity for ministers to learn from others, to sharpen their skills, and to return to the congregation with new ideas and a new vitality for leadership.

**Contributes to a pastor's spiritual growth.** Being intentional about personal spiritual growth is difficult when a minister is constantly involved in the spiritual lives of others. If a pastor is to provide dynamic leadership, ongoing spiritual nurture, and rich preaching and worship leadership, they will need extended time for spiritual development.

**Prevents burnout.** People in “helping professions” can burn out, in part because of that constant, intimate involvement with the emotional burdens of others. Burned-out pastors, over time, will demonstrate its key characteristics: exhaustion, cynicism, disillusionment, depression, and self-depreciation. A regular schedule of sabbaticals can help to prevent burnout to the good of both the minister and the congregation.

**Establish new patterns for work and self-care.** Pastors are constantly encouraged to overextend in a vocation that is never “done,” yet when pastors overextend, they undermine one of their most important gifts in ministry: vitality. A sabbatical provides time for clergy to take a break from the pressure to overextend and to establish new work habits and self-care routines.

**Promotes congregational self-sufficiency.** Congregations that become overly dependent on their pastors lose the opportunity to exercise their own gifts and leadership. Effective congregations practice a good balance between the pastor and the congregation in leadership. Granting a sabbatical leave is a great opportunity for stretch and experiment with their God-given gifts in the church's life. When a minister or program staff person returns from sabbatical leave, the congregation will also have a much better understanding of how the whole church can participate in meeting the needs of the congregation.



## policies and best practices

Sabbaticals take a variety of forms. Many include educational development, such as a language study, intercultural immersion, or advanced coursework on a particular topic. Travel is often a valuable part of the sabbatical experience; ministers may take a pilgrimage to Iona, walk the Camino de Santiago, visit the great museums of Europe, or do a language immersion in Costa Rica or China. Still others revolve around themes that the pastor and church have discerned together to do separately, such as exploring common prayer practices, deepening a connection to the earth, or engaging creative practices of art, music, dance, and literature.

Practically, sabbaticals work best when pastors plan to begin the sabbatical with a period of decompression and end the sabbatical with a week or two preparing for reentry into ministry's daily routine. The period of decompression might simply include a week or two of time with no agendas or alarm clocks, while the latter might include focused review of the sabbatical in preparation for sharing those reflections with the congregation.

A sabbatical is also an opportunity for the congregation, which benefits from a season of rest and reflection and reconnection with God's call for the church's ministry. During the pastor's sabbatical leave, the congregation naturally becomes more aware of its patterns of care for one another, its program cycles, and its worship life. A sabbatical is not an opportunity to change those things unilaterally in the pastor's absence, or to make decisions that the pastor and congregation have been unwilling or unable to do together. Significant decisions or changes should not be made during the sabbatical season unless agreed in advance.

A sabbatical leave is ideally negotiated at the time of call; the UCC Sample Call Agreement provides clear language for sabbatical leave.<sup>18</sup> It calls for a three-month sabbatical after every five years of full-time ministry in the congregation (or two months sabbatical leave after seven years of part-time ministry in the church). During the sabbatical, the church pays the pastor full salary and all benefits. Church leadership should communicate the value and importance of a sabbatical to the congregation throughout the sabbatical planning period and during the sabbatical itself.

At least one year prior to the sabbatical year, the pastor should share a general sense of their plans for the sabbatical with the governing body for its input and affirmation. Once these plans are finalized, they should be communicated to the whole church. The pastor and the governing

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<sup>18</sup> The Sample Call Agreement can be found here: [http://www.ucc.org/ministers\\_regional-ministers](http://www.ucc.org/ministers_regional-ministers)

body plan for pastoral care coverage, worship leadership, and other responsibilities during the sabbatical period. Some churches call a sabbatical pastor; some churches rely on lay leadership to provide worship leadership and pastoral care; some churches use supply preachers; many churches do some combination of all of these.

Occasionally, during the sabbatical period, the pastor may choose to “return” briefly for a significant event: *e.g.* at a wedding that was set well in advance of the sabbatical or a significant anniversary celebration or annual meeting. This brief return should be understood as part of the sabbatical plan so that there is no confusion or concern. Likewise, it should be clarified in advance whether the minister will attend or officiate at any funerals during the sabbatical.

During the year when the sabbatical is taken, the pastor still receives their full allotment of vacation. The pastor and governing body may negotiate whether any of that vacation time can be added to the sabbatical time in order to extend its length. Pastors are encouraged take their full allotment of continuing education within the same year as the sabbatical, either as part of the sabbatical itself or to develop their ministry skills at another time during the year. If it is appropriate, the governing body might approve the use of the pastor’s continuing education budget toward sabbatical costs.

When the sabbatical ends, the pastor and the congregation share their learnings from the sabbatical. Through conversations, written reports, meals, and congregational meetings, the congregation and the pastor reconnect and hear the ways God has been at work in one another’s lives. Many congregations offer a grateful farewell to their supply/sabbatical pastor (if they had one) and a celebratory “welcome back” to their pastor through a special event such as worship or a shared meal. Unless by prior agreement, the minister is expected to continue as pastor and teacher for at least one year following their return from sabbatical.

## THE CONGREGATION DURING THE SABBATICAL

Many times a congregation asks, “Who takes care of things while our pastor is on sabbatical?” The answer depends greatly on the context of the ministry setting, the sabbatical plan itself, and the needs of the congregation. Some congregations view the sabbatical time as a time of rest and renewal for the community as a whole, downscaling their programmatic responsibilities. Some congregations actively participate in the sabbatical by focusing on the same themes that the minister is exploring while on sabbatical.

In many congregations of all sizes, a sabbatical or supply pastor may be hired. The sabbatical or supply pastor may do all or most of the duties of the pastor, or may only fulfill certain aspects of the pastoral role. This person may work full or part-time. They may be retired, in between calls,

or part of a clergy exchange with an international ecumenical partner. At a minimum, most sabbatical pastors preach and provide some pastoral care to address immediate needs.

Congregations of all sizes also choose to have lay leaders shoulder responsibility for certain tasks or roles during the sabbatical leave – whether a sabbatical/supply pastor is hired or not. These tasks may include visitation, worship leadership, and attending to other congregational needs.

In congregations with multiple clergy on staff, the congregation may choose to ask remaining clergy to pick up some or most of the responsibilities of the pastor on sabbatical rather than hiring a sabbatical/supply pastor. This can be a wonderful opportunity for the other clergy on staff to grow in new ways, although the additional responsibilities must be accompanied by the governing body's intentional consideration of which tasks those clergy may set down temporarily from their current job descriptions. Such changes in expectations need to be communicated clearly to the congregation before, during and after the sabbatical period. It's also recommended that additional compensation and vacation time be offered to those clergy who add responsibilities to their existing roles.

Congregations with multiple clergy should also set aside time for the staff and key lay leaders to meet together after the pastor's return to debrief staff concerns and renegotiate staff responsibilities. This process will need time and focused attention; if the purpose of a sabbatical is to renew, refresh, and refocus, then the patterns of teamwork will naturally shift following a sabbatical. In addition, in congregations with multiple clergy on staff, sabbaticals should be staggered to minimize disruption to the congregation, including a significant period of reintegration between different staff sabbaticals.

## ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS

Sabbaticals can be times of great joy and refreshment for the pastor and for the congregation, but they can also be challenging. Many pastors report that the hardest thing about sabbatical is letting go of their responsibilities and feeling guilt about what they “should” be doing. Likewise, many congregations miss their pastor during this time and may struggle to adapt to the temporary leadership change.

Mark Miller-McLemore writes, “Something hard to pin down occurs when the community's faith leader steps away. The symbolic power of the priestly role is a real part of any pastor's experience, even in less priestly traditions. Something real and powerful and meaningful attaches itself to the pastoral relationship, something partly personal and partly symbolic, something mysterious and holy. During a sabbatical, ‘it’ is missing, and it is missed. Further, congregational anxiety is less contained without the pastor at the center to model faithfulness in the face of fear.



The burden of added anxiety can mean sleepless nights for staff and lay leaders and can co-opt their agendas.”<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, whenever a minister takes a sabbatical, there are people left behind: the congregation, the minister’s family, or an associate pastor. These folk carry a heavier burden in the absence of the minister. Mark Miller-McLemore notes, “Envy, weariness and resentment are not noble responses, but they are predictable. The congregation should anticipate them and seek ways to respond with understanding.”<sup>20</sup>

Knowing these potential pitfalls can help congregational leaders prepare for them as a faith community before, during and after the sabbatical period. Clear understandings of the purpose of the sabbatical, rituals of separation and re-engagement, and open and honest communication can help minimize the potential negative outcomes of sabbatical. Following a sabbatical, the church and the minister can work together to discover new patterns of living and working together that are healthy and life-giving for the minister and the congregation. The Pastoral Relations Committee can assist in preparing for these possibilities and develop a plan for responding to them faithfully.

Congregations are urged to make full use of their Association or Conference staff in the preparation for sabbatical and once the minister returns. Conference and Association staff can assist in finding pastoral leadership during the sabbatical period, facilitate rituals of separation and re-entry, create space for everyone to give voice to their experiences, and help create healthy plans for the future. They can also help to mediate conflict or refer to consultants who can provide this sort of assistance.

## SABBATICAL STORIES

One congregation developed a clear renewal plan with their pastor focused on honoring the body, building community, and engaging the creative spirit. They hired a guest pastor (a recent seminary graduate) to plan and lead worship, provide pastoral care, supervise staff, and attend to other duties, invited guest preachers to speak and lead workshops on these themes, and took seriously their call to be in a season of renewal.

Another congregation blessed their pastor as he went to Westphalia, Germany, to immerse himself in the life of a church there involved in congregational renewal. Their Conference’s partnership with the church in Germany helped fund part of the sabbatical, and a part-time minister fulfilled some of the minister’s pastoral duties.

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<sup>19</sup> From Mark Miller-McLemore, “The Dark Side of Sabbatical,” found at: <https://www.faithandleadership.com/dark-side-sabbatical>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Yet another minister walked the Camino de Santiago during her sabbatical. When a family member died unexpectedly toward the end of the pilgrimage, the church worked with the minister to navigate both the conclusion of the sabbatical at a later time, and offered pastoral care and sensitivity during the most intense grieving period.

One minister reported that during his sabbatical, he “slept and slept and slept – it was amazing how exhausted I was.” This turned out to be a common experience.

## SUMMARY

Sabbaticals are times of refreshment, nourishment, and refocusing ministry for both a minister and a congregation. Diligent planning and clear communication can maximize the benefits of sabbaticals, all towards the goal of faithful ministry that changes lives.



## resources and case studies

### FUNDING A SABBATICAL

Funding for a sabbatical can happen in a variety of ways. Churches should set aside some portion of their annual budget toward a sabbatical fund, which can be used to pay for pastoral coverage during the sabbatical time and provide some additional resources for the pastor. The budget for the pastor’s continuing education may be applied to the sabbatical if the sabbatical plan includes a continuing education component. The pastor should also expect to contribute their own money toward the sabbatical.

Several organizations that offer sabbatical grants include:

- Lilly Endowment, Inc.  
As of 2017, the Lilly Endowment was offering renewal grants for pastors and congregations. “Eligible congregations will be able to apply for grants of up to \$50,000 each to support a renewal program for their pastor. Up to \$15,000 of the grant may be used for congregational expenses associated with the renewal program.” <http://www.cpx.cts.edu/renewal>  
<http://www.cpx.cts.edu/renewal/apply/national-program>

- The Louisville Institute  
As of 2017, the Louisville Institute offers a Pastoral Study Grant of up to \$15,000 to “pursue a pressing question related to Christian life, faith and ministry. Grants are available for study projects involving full or partial leave from job responsibilities.” <https://louisville-institute.org/programs-grants-and-fellowships/grants/>
- UCC Seminaries  
Some of the UCC-related seminaries offer a pastor-in-residence program. Some are stipended. Since these vary widely from school to school (and sometimes from year to year), interested candidates should contact the schools directly.
- The Bush Foundation  
The Bush Foundation in St. Paul has a “Leadership Fellows Program” for residents of Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, or one of the 23 Native nations that shares the same geographic area. They are “excited about and committed to supporting and developing leaders who are increasingly better equipped and networked to effectively lead change. These leaders think bigger and think differently about what is possible in their communities. Bush Fellows possess a vision for strengthening the common good within the region and are devoted to making that vision a reality.” Pastors are eligible, and the fellowships are up to \$100,000 to be used for 18-24 months. <http://www.bushfoundation.org/fellowships/bush-fellowship-program>
- UCC Partners in Service  
Long-term volunteer opportunities available through the United Church of Christ, including places to serve during sabbaticals. <http://www.ucc.org/partners-in-service>

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Bullock, A. Richard and Richard J. Bruesehoff. *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning*. Alban Institute, 2000.

Miller-McLemore, Mark. “The Dark Side of Sabbatical,” found at: <http://www.faithandleadership.com/content/the-dark-side-sabbatical>.

Oswald, Roy. “Why You Should Give Your Pastor a Sabbatical.” (VHS with leader’s guide) Alban Institute, 2001. *While this resource has not been updated to DVD, it has a wealth of information that is still cited in most other denominational resources.*

Sevier, Melissa Bane. *Journeying Toward Renewal: A Spiritual Companion for Pastoral Sabbaticals*. Alban Institute, 2002.

# ETHICAL DEPARTURE GUIDELINES

## **in this section**

- Theological Grounding
  - Boundaries and Best Practices
  - The Exit Interview
  - Retired Ministers in Congregations
  - Resources
- 



## **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.

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## 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 worship<sup>21</sup> – 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.

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<sup>21</sup> 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 media<sup>22</sup>:

- 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>22</sup> This section includes information from the Connecticut Conference's resource, "Internet Safety Guidelines," which is available here: <http://www.ctucc.org/internetsafetyguidelines>

<sup>23</sup> 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.”

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## **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 clergyperson 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.

The *[Association Name]* of the United Church of Christ covenants:

To *[Authorized Minister Name]*:

- All of the rights and responsibilities of an authorized minister in this Association.
- Clear communication of this Association's/Conference's requirements for good ministerial standing (including but not limited to boundary training and continuing education) and of any policies supplemental to the Manual on Ministry that have been established by this Association/Conference; those requirements are:

\_\_\_\_\_ (boundary training)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (continuing education)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (other)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (other)

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

- Belief in the local church as the locus for mission and ministry in the United Church of Christ and thankfulness for your support of *[Authorized Minister Name]* in their retirement;
- Appropriate support and oversight of all ministers in three- or four-way covenants with your congregation.

We trust in God's presence with us as we seek to be faithful to this covenant:

_____ Authorized Minister, Name	Date: _____
_____ President, Local Church, City/State	Date: _____
_____ Representative, Association UCC	Date: _____
Received by _____ Conference	Date: _____



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