

- **Exempt Standing.** Ordination is understood as lifelong, however there may come a time when the public ministry of an Ordained Minister comes to a close, at which point an Ordained Minister may apply to their Committee on Ministry for Exempt Standing, covenanting to no longer perform acts of public ministry.³⁹ Exempt Standing includes an ongoing commitment to the covenantal relationship between the Ordained Minister and the Committee on Ministry, with relief granted to the minister from certain obligations of standing. This commitment is articulated through an Exempt Standing covenant.⁴⁰ In general, Exempt Standing releases Ordained Ministers from requirements such as boundary training and continuing education; ministers who hold Exempt Standing continue to be responsible for faithfully embodying the UCC Ministerial Code and are obligated to processes of oversight.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Leave of Absence is a ministerial standing for Ordained Ministers experiencing a prolonged life season when they are neither seeking nor engaged in professional ministry. Such a season might include family leave to care for a new child or an aging parent, study leave to begin an academic program, vocational discernment when a person reassesses their professional path, sick leave following a serious accident or health crisis, or other reasons. During such a season, Leave of Absence modifies the expectations for the ecclesial relationship between the Ordained Minister and their Association, in order to make room for life changes and/or vocational discernment.⁴¹

An Ordained Minister requests Leave of Absence in writing to the Committee on Ministry where they hold ministerial standing. In

³⁹ An Ordained Minister with Exempt Standing who has been celebrated by a Local Church with the title Pastor Emeritus may continue as Pastor Emeritus in title only, honoring their Exempt Standing by taking no active ministerial leadership role in that Local Church.

⁴⁰ See Section 3 for a sample Exempt Standing covenant.

⁴¹ Leave of Absence is not appropriate to Fitness Reviews or other Committee on Ministry accountability processes.

conversation with the Committee, expectations for the duration of Leave of Absence are outlined, including:

- the Ordained Minister’s continued responsibility for or temporary reprieve from standing requirements such as boundary training and continuing education;
- the Ordained Minister’s ongoing relationship with their Local Church of membership;
- the Ordained Minister’s authorization (or not) to provide pulpit supply, celebrate sacraments, officiate weddings and funerals, etc. during Leave of Absence;
- the agreed-upon method for renewing Leave of Absence annually (up to five years) and the next steps for both the Ordained Minister and the Committee on Ministry when Leave of Absence expires.

An Ordained Minister on Leave of Absence meets annually with the Committee on Ministry, and the Ordained Minister’s and Association’s mutual commitment to processes of oversight continue during the Leave of Absence. At the conclusion of a Leave of Absence, the Ordained Minister may request in writing to the Committee that they return to active Ordained Ministerial Standing or that they resign their standing. Prior to returning the minister to Ordained Ministerial Standing, the Committee ensures that the minister is current with (or has plans to become current within one year with) all standing requirements of the Association.

If a Committee on Ministry learns of circumstances in an Ordained Minister’s life or career for which Leave of Absence might be appropriate to provide a season of respite or reflection, the Committee may invite the minister into dialogue about the option of Leave of Absence. It is inappropriate for a Committee on Ministry to use or impose Leave of Absence as a penalty; Leave of Absence cannot serve the same purposes as program of growth related to a Fitness Review.

Leave of Absence is a ministerial standing, not to be confused with leave from employment or suspension of standing. Leave of Absence is a particular ecclesial relationship, granted by a Committee on Ministry during an Ordained Minister’s prolonged absence from active ministry, so the minister can make room for life changes and/or vocational discernment. Leave from employment is determined by an employer for reasons that may include but are not limited to administrative, short- or long-term disability, family needs, etc.