

United Church of Christ  
**SEARCH AND CALL**

A Pilgrimage through  
Transitions and New Beginnings

**SECTION ONE**

**A PASTORAL VACANCY:**

**Guidelines for the Departing Pastor  
and the Governing Board**

*“What then is Apollos? What is Paul?  
Servants in whom you came to believe,  
as the Lord assigned to each.  
I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”  
I Corinthians 3:5-6*

## SECTION ONE

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### **FOR A DEPARTING PASTOR: REFLECTIONS ON GRACIOUS LEAVE-TAKING**

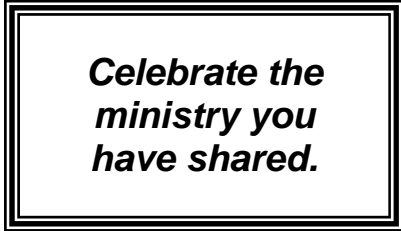
Every pastor is aware that ministry builds on the work of those who have come before. And every pastor who resigns from a church carries hopes and dreams that the congregation will thrive after she or he leaves. Departing from a church with the knowledge that the members can and will continue a strong ministry in the name of Jesus Christ is indeed the mark of a successful pastorate.

As you move through the process of resigning from the pastoral position and preparing to leave the church, you will have many opportunities to celebrate the richness of the ministry you and your people have shared; you no doubt will also experience a range of intense emotions as you move through the leave-taking journey. You may also come to realize—in a new way—that living out your calling from God means living with grief, loss, sadness, deep joy, and incredible satisfaction. In the midst of the process of separating from people you have come to know and love, you may find it helpful to pause and reflect on Paul’s words, *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”*

Remembering the past is an essential part of the life of every church while enslavement to the past is a primary indication of stagnation. Both pastor and people have a responsibility to make certain that the church is truly free to act when the members begin to select an interim pastor and then move toward a search process. Farewell celebrations and closure events are much more than “polite activities.” If a pastoral departure is handled well by both pastor and church leaders, the range of emotions expressed will be appropriate, and the past will be celebrated in a way that avoids the tendency to idolatry. The church will remain strong as it freely moves into God’s future.

## Announcing a Resignation

The transition time will be smoother if most members of the congregation receive information about their pastor's departure at the same time. A pastor who has agreed to accept the offer of a new call will usually consult with the president of the congregation and one or two other key lay leaders during the time leading up to the official resignation. Many clergy prepare a carefully written resignation letter and have it ready to put in the mail when they return from a candidating weekend in the new parish setting. A letter that is prayerfully drafted will set the tone for the following weeks of closure; the letter should contain an expression of genuine gratitude, an acknowledgement of the many emotions involved in such a transition, and an explanation of the ethical issues related to your departure. Experienced pastors have discovered that sending an all-church mailing is preferable to an unexpected announcement on Sunday morning; obviously a resignation letter should be followed with some appropriate words from the pulpit on the following Sunday.



## Pastoral Ethics

The personal relationships established within a parish setting sometimes make it difficult for both pastor and people to remember that the role is a professional one governed by a professional code of ethics. And that code of ethics mandates that the professional relationship cease at the end of the term of service in a church. As a pastor, you have an ethical obligation not to *"intrude upon the ministry of my successor."* Intrusion includes performing pastoral services (funerals, weddings, baptisms) as well as conversing with members about church life or decisions the church is considering.

(See **Resource #1**, *The Ordained Minister's Code*.)

Another statement in the Minister's Code of Ethics can sometimes cause confusion for you, as a former pastor, as well as for members of the church. The Code says, *"I will not perform pastoral services within a parish or for a member of a parish without the consent of the pastor of that parish."* This statement offers a helpful "openness" in situations where such an invitation is appropriate; for instance, the guideline gives a pastor permission to invite another clergyperson to assist in the wedding or funeral service for a member of that clergyperson's family.

However, a few pastors—reluctant to sever professional ties with their former congregations—have used these words to encourage inappropriate requests from their former parishioners. An unfortunate but all too common scenario:

- the father of a parishioner dies;
- the parishioner immediately calls the former pastor;
- the parishioner then calls the current pastor (or interim) and says, *"Dad died last night. Rev. Jones says that he is available to take part in the funeral IF you invite him."*



The awkwardness of the situation is obvious, and the former pastor's behavior puts the current pastor in an untenable position; after all, the current pastor will not want to enter into a serious conversation about pastoral boundaries and clergy ethics in the context of a family's grief.

**Clearly you, as the former pastor, have the responsibility to decline graciously and firmly when such a call is received.** A clear and firm response will also prevent others from expecting "special treatment." To respond in any other way, to assume that a former pastor can perform a particular pastoral role "as a friend," would appear to be favoritism. In those rare situations where the current pastor takes the initiative to extend an invitation to you, then you and that pastor may want to examine the question of whether the particular circumstances would, in any way, be precedent-setting.

Initial clarification of these ethical expectations begins with your first conversations about resignation—whether it is a conversation with the president of the congregation, a discussion with the governing board, a statement from the pulpit, or a paragraph in a resignation letter. Clarity is essential. It is then the responsibility of lay leaders to continually reinforce your statements so that church members understand the inappropriateness of making "special requests."



As a departing pastor, you might consider including one of the following statements in your resignation letter and in newsletter articles:

*“ . . . My final Sunday with you will be October 23, and at that time we will join together in releasing one another from the vows and commitments we made 16 years ago at my installation. You will be asked, ‘**Do you, the members and friends of St. Paul’s church, release Alan Redstone from the duties of pastor?**’ One of the questions addressed to me will be, ‘**Do you, Alan Redstone, release this local church from turning to you and depending on you?**’ These vows of release remind us that our bond within the Church of Jesus Christ will never change, but the nature of our bond will indeed undergo significant change; the vows mean that I will no longer be performing pastoral services for you, nor leading any worship services, nor discussing any church matters with you. The vows mean that you will not expect me to perform such services nor make such requests of me.”*

OR

*“ . . . The purpose of the upcoming interim time is to enable you, the members, to separate from me, your pastor of the past decade. Be open to that interim time so you will then be ready to accept and welcome a new minister with the kind of excitement you showed when you welcomed me. Nothing will give me greater joy than to know that you are continuing your wonderful ministry in this place. However, for our separation to happen—as tempting as it might be to make an exception—I want you to understand that I cannot and will not officiate at any weddings, or funerals, or baptisms . . . ”*

OR

*“ . . . While our mutual love and affection remain, the professional relationship of pastor and parishioner must end. I will no longer be your pastoral advisor or spiritual advisor. Nor will I officiate at Sunday services, weddings, funerals, or baptisms.”*

In order to reinforce the ethical guidelines, departing pastors should also contact local funeral directors and inform them of the resignation date, making clear that you should not be contacted to officiate at funerals. There may also be other community institutions that called upon you for pastoral services (fire/police departments); the retirement or resignation should be addressed with them as well, perhaps accompanied by a brief letter explaining the plans of the congregation or (if possible) offering information about the interim pastor.

### **The Challenge of “Successor Conversations”**

The church members have come to rely on you for sound advice; in particular they may automatically turn to you with questions about the interim selection process or the UCC Search and Call process. If the church staff includes other ordained ministers, you may face specific questions about their status. It is inappropriate for a departing pastor to engage in any conversations about the future roles of other staff members or to suggest interim names. Whenever you receive inquiries related to the church’s future, it is most helpful for you to refer church members to the president/moderator of the congregation--emphasizing that this lay leader has been in close contact with the Conference/Association staff person.

***What will be most needed—in those weeks following your resignation—is your reassuring presence and your expression of confidence in the denominational process.***

What will be most needed—in those weeks following your resignation—is your reassuring presence and your expression of confidence in the denominational processes; those comments will reduce anxiety among the members and will encourage them to develop trust in the United Church of Christ as represented by the Conference/Association staff person.

Later, when the search for a new leader is underway, it is essential that you not exert influence on that search process. When the Search Committee begins work on the Local Church Profile, they may well ask you to serve as one of their telephone references; if so, it is entirely appropriate for you to respond to the questions you may receive from candidates. It is obviously not appropriate for you to comment on individual members of the church, and it is not appropriate for you to pass on to the Search Committee your impressions of the individuals who phoned you.

## **Resigning Under Difficult Circumstances**

Some resignations occur under circumstances that are sad, disappointing, tension-filled, and angering. You may feel attacked because of a negative evaluation process. You and the church may have made unwise decisions, leading to a deteriorating relationship between pastor and people. Your own pastoral misconduct or poor judgment may have led to the abrupt ending of your present ministry. You may have discovered that unresolved conflicts from previous pastorates have made your pastoral ministry almost impossible. Numerous factors, often interrelated, can contribute to the conclusion that you must leave because there is a need for a change of pastoral leadership. Leaving a church under such circumstances is one of the most difficult challenges you, as a pastor, will ever face. Writing a resignation letter in these situations is challenging and sometimes overwhelming, and you will want to consult closely with the staff person from your Conference/Association.

It is important to be as positive as possible while frankly and honestly “naming” the challenges that led to the separation. “To name but not to blame” creates an environment that may help the congregation move into a healthier place in the future; and the graciousness of your letter will enable you to experience emotional and spiritual strength during your departure process.

Chapter Four of Paul’s Second Letter to the Church in Corinth contains verses that may be helpful in your own prayerful reflections on the difficulties you have faced in a particular ministry. When Paul wrote, “*We . . . are perplexed but not driven to despair. . .*” (II Corinthians 4:8), he had no way of knowing how much his words might help future pastors and teachers “*not lose heart.*”

Some pastors have found it useful to incorporate a few of Paul’s words into the body of a resignation letter.

*“ . . . Since it is by God’s mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart . . . ” (II Corinthians 4:1)*

*“For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (II Corinthians 4:6)*



*“But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.” (II Corinthians 4:7)*

*“So we do not lose heart . . . because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.” (II Corinthians 16:18)*

## **The Retiring Pastor Who Remains in the Community**

Is it wise for you to remain in the community where you ministered? NO

Is it sometimes necessary? YES

It is simply not wise—for a host of reasons—for retiring pastors to remain in the community where they ministered; rather, pastors are encouraged to make long-range plans that will involve relocating to another community. However, there are sometimes circumstances that make it impossible for the retiree and spouse/partner to relocate. If you plan to remain in the area, you should consult as early as possible with designated UCC staff, the Committee on Ministry, and the president of the congregation. Talking with clergy friends and recently retired pastors will be essential as you think through the potential challenges and complications of your situation. Ideally you should make it clear long before retirement that you will become an active participant in another congregation. When involvement in another UCC church is impossible because of geographic limitations, some pastors may choose to participate in a congregation of another denomination.

It should be noted that special sensitivity is required on the part of the congregation, the pastor, and the pastor's family if the pastor has family members in the community (adult children, grandchildren) who will continue to be active in the church.

As the retiring pastor, you clearly have the ethical responsibility to sever the pastoral relationship and to make absolutely clear your support for the new ministry. It is particularly important that you not engage in conversation about the work of the transition period, the work of the interim pastor, the overall search process, or the selection of the newly called pastor. In smaller communities where residents are likely to run into one another in informal settings, it may take "practice" on the part of parishioners, the retired pastor, and the pastor's family members for this norm to be established.

***The retiring pastor clearly has the ethical responsibility to sever the pastoral relationship and to make absolutely clear his/her support for the new ministry.***

Even for retired clergy who exhibit the best of boundaries, your very presence in the community may hold back the potential growth of the members and the ministry of your successor. It helps to remember that the congregation must be truly free to discern its own future mission and ministry. You help create openness for the work of God's Spirit by stepping back as much as possible, thus relieving the parishioners of the worry that their decisions will somehow offend their beloved former pastor.

There have been rare situations where the retiree and spouse/partner have successfully removed themselves from all contact with the church for a lengthy period of time and then have been able to gracefully make the transition back in the new role of "church member." Consideration of this possibility requires strong boundary commitments on the

part of all parties. And such a step should not be explored during the interim period or during the early stages of a new pastor's ministry.

## **FOR THE GOVERNING BOARD: REFLECTIONS ON NEW RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Sharing Information with the Congregation**

As elected leaders, one of your first tasks will be that of sharing information with the congregation. A sample letter to the church members will be found in **Resource #2**. Frequent communications with members of the church will provide reassurance that there are "no secrets" and that the United Church of Christ has many helpful resources for churches in your situation. Throughout the transition time, you will find that close contact with your UCC staff person is essential.

### **Exit Interview: A Time for Mutual Reflection**

An Exit Interview offers a time for debriefing, for recounting highlights of the pastor's ministry, for stating the pastor's hopes for the church, and for clarifying the relationship the pastor will have with the local church after she or he has left. The Exit Interview provides an opportunity for mutual reflection: members reflect upon and articulate their experience of the ministry of the exiting pastor, and the pastor reflects upon and articulates her/his experience of ministry with the congregation. It is a time for laughter, reminiscences, tears, prayers for one another, acknowledgement of points of confusion in church life, and discussion of ethical issues; the interview is an essential step toward overall closure of the pastoral ministry.

***The Exit Interview is  
neither an evaluation  
nor a time to  
emphasize negative  
experiences.***

The Exit Interview is neither an evaluation nor a time for either party to emphasize negative experiences. Rather, the interview is a time of sharing framed by the remembrance that the ministry of the church is grounded in Jesus Christ and not in particular pastors or lay leaders. The Resource Section includes three sample designs to assist you in your preparation for an Exit Interview. (**Resources #3, 4, and 5**) The three designs include a variety of questions, and your church leaders will want to select the ones that are most appropriate for your situation.

One question that should be included in the Exit Interview—regardless of the resource chosen—is the following: *“How will your future relationship with our church and the pastors who follow you conform to the principles of The Ordained Minister’s Code?”* That Code includes the following ethical precepts:

**I will not, upon my termination and departure from a ministry position, interfere with or intrude upon the ministry of my successor.**

**I will not perform pastoral services within a parish or for a member of a parish without the consent of the pastor of that parish.**

**I will deal honorably with the record of my predecessor and successor.**

The governing board may or may not be part of the actual Exit Interview; however, the board is responsible for making certain that the interview is scheduled. Your UCC staff person will inform you about common practices in your Conference or Association. Sometimes a subgroup of the governing board participates; in other settings the responsibility rests with the Personnel Committee or the Pastoral Relations Committee. Your church may have had experience with previous interviews, and that precedent may be helpful in your decision-making about participants.

The person who facilitates the Exit Interview may be the Conference/Association Minister, a member of the Association Committee on Ministry, or a lay leader from a neighboring church. Common practices in your local church or Conference/Association will also determine how the written summary of the interview is shared—whether with the interim pastor, the Search Committee for the future pastor, and/or other UCC settings including the Committee on Ministry.

In some Conferences/Associations it is also the custom for the Committee on Ministry to conduct an Exit Interview with each departing pastor. While this interview is not the responsibility of the local church, it is sometimes customary for one or more key lay leaders to be invited to share in that interview process.

### **Church Records**

The governing board should designate a person to work closely with the pastor in reviewing church records and assembling as much helpful information as possible. (See **Resource #6** for an Exit Checklist.) The Pastoral Care Committee/Deacons will also want to be involved in a conversation with the pastor about continuity of pastoral care for those who are homebound or residing in care facilities.

Each pastor accumulates files and material that are “church files” as well as those that are “personal files.” It can be a challenge to separate material that belongs to the pastor from material and resources that should remain with and for the church. While each new minister will bring unique perspectives and expectations relating to worship, the orders of service for weekly worship as well as for special seasons and events—Communion Sundays, Reception of New Members, Baptisms, Advent, Christmas, Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost—provide a valuable context for understanding the worship history and practices of the congregation. Copies of such orders of service should be retained in the church files while personal notes related to those services as well as sermons and prayers are clearly the property of the pastor. Likewise notes related to church members who receive pastoral visits at home or in care facilities can be an important resource for the next pastor (e.g. individual’s history with the congregation, frequency of pastoral visits, whether the person prefers to receive communion, other spiritual needs) while personal notes about confidential conversations with a parishioner should not be saved.

***The governing board should designate a person to work closely with the pastor in reviewing church records and assembling as much helpful information as possible.***

Along with the organizing of files and records goes the cleaning out of the church office, the removal of the pastor’s personal files from the church computer, the return of church credit cards, and the return of church keys. It can be very difficult for both the pastor and parishioners if the moving of personal items continues after the closure date.

### **Financial Matters and Benefits**

The governing board will also designate someone (usually a member of the church committee that is responsible for financial matters) to work closely with the departing pastor to make certain the UCC Pension Boards receive proper notification of the resignation and the formal departure date. The pastor is responsible for making certain that arrangements for continuity of health insurance coverage are in place. In circumstances where the quarterly health insurance premium has been prepaid, it is often suggested that the new calling body reimburse the former calling body for the portion of the insurance that is needed during the transition.

### **Parsonage**

If the church owns a parsonage, the Property Committee or other appropriate body will be involved in meeting with the current pastor to discuss a timetable for vacating the home. While some transition pastors may have need of a parsonage, others will not. Until the interim selection process has been completed, no steps should be taken to

begin major repairs that would make it impossible for the interim to occupy the home. In interim situations where the parsonage will be vacant, some churches choose to rent the home after discussing the property tax implications with city/town officials.

### **Farewell Events**

The church will plan one or more farewell events to express gratitude to the departing pastor and to celebrate the ministry they have shared together. Some churches prefer to schedule a celebration dinner while others organize a reception following the final Sunday of worship; presentation of a remembrance scrapbook, as well as a church-wide collection of funds for one or more farewell gifts, are customary practices. As the governing board publicizes these activities, it is important to remember to extend invitations to other pastors in the area, community leaders, and members of the Conference/Association staff.

### **Liturgy of Farewell**

The farewell service in UCC Book of Worship offers pastor and people an opportunity to express gratitude to one another, ask forgiveness for mistakes, acknowledge the change in the professional role of the minister, and offer prayers for one another. It is a profoundly moving experience and should be included in the pastor's final service of worship. An officer from the Conference/Association is the person customarily invited to oversee the closure vows. (See **Resource # 7**, *Liturgy of Farewell from the UCC Book of Worship*.)



### **Pastor Emeritus or Emerita Designation**

At the time of a pastoral retirement, there are likely to be questions about designating the retiring pastor a "pastor emeritus" (male) or "pastor emerita" (female.) The Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team recommends that this decision be made at an appropriate time AFTER a new pastor has been called. The conferring of this honorary title celebrates the lifetime of ministry the retired pastor has performed. The honor is never automatic but is conferred on someone whose ministry has been one of distinguished service. "Pastor Emeritus/a" is not a functional title; it does not mean that the pastor will continue to serve in any ministerial function in the congregation. If your church is considering this action, developing a brief and very clear description of the honor will be helpful in preventing boundary and role confusion for the former pastor, the current pastor, and the parishioners.

**Resource #8** contains detailed information about this designation as well as the suggested process for conferring it. **Resource #8** also contains suggested language that could be incorporated into a worship service when the honor is conferred.

**Resource #9** is a sample liturgical service of recognition for a pastor emeritus/a.

The title of pastor emeritus/a is never appropriate for a pastor who resigns from a church and plans to continue in active ministry.

Note: All scripture passages are taken from The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible

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**RESOURCES**

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I Corinthians 3:5-6*



**The Ordained Ministry**

I believe that God calls the whole Church and every member to participate in and extend the ministry of Jesus Christ; that the privilege of witnessing to the gospel in Church and society belongs to every baptized Christian; that God empowers the ministry of the Church and its members by the Holy Spirit; that the Church nurtures faith, evokes gifts, and equips its members for service; and that God calls certain of the Church's members to various forms of ministry in and on behalf of the church.

I have been called by God to be a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ and ordained by the United Church of Christ to preach and teach the gospel, to administer the sacraments and rites of the Church, and to exercise pastoral care and leadership.

I will seek to witness to the ministry of Jesus Christ.

I will preach and teach the gospel without fear or favor. I will speak the truth in love.

I will administer the sacraments and rites of the Church with integrity.

I will diligently perform the work of ministry which I have agreed to perform.

**Partnership in Ministry**

I will nurture and offer my gifts for ministry to the Church. I will seek to call forth and nurture the gifts of others in the Church and join their gifts with mine for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ and the health of the Church.

I will seek to understand, support and interpret the diverse ministries of the Church and its members as carried out throughout the world. I will stand with those who risk personal well being because of actions taken in response to their Christian convictions.

I will work cooperatively and collegially with those whom I serve in the particular ministry to which I have been called.

I will stand in a supportive relationship with my colleagues in ordained, commissioned, and licensed ministry, offering and receiving counsel and support in times of need.

I will be an advocate for fair standards of compensation for all ordained and lay employees of the church, particularly in the place where I serve.

I will be a responsible participant in the life and work of my Association, Conference, and the United Church of Christ.

I will be a responsible representative of the Church Universal and participate in those activities which strengthen its unity, witness and mission.

I will seek the counsel of the Conference or Association Minister or the Association Committee on the Ministry should divisive tensions threaten my relationship with those with whom I minister.

### **The Ethics of Ministry**

I will regard all persons with equal respect and concern and undertake to minister impartially.

I will honor all confidences shared with me.

I will not use my position, power, or authority to exploit any person.

I will not use my position for personal financial gain, nor will I misuse the finances of the institution which I serve.

I will not perform pastoral services within a parish or for a member of a parish without the consent of the pastor of that parish.

I will deal honorably with the record of my predecessor and successor.

I will not, upon my termination and departure from a ministry position, interfere with nor intrude upon the ministry of my successor.

### **Growth in Ministry**

I will encourage and participate in the regular evaluation of my ministry.

I will seek to grow in faith, knowledge and the practice of ministry through intentional continuing education, study and devotional life.

I will cooperate with my Association in the periodic review of my ordained ministerial standing.

### **Commitments to Self and Family**

I will live a life which honors my commitments to my family.

I will honor my need for time for physical and spiritual renewal, recreation and vacation.

I will honor my family's need for privacy and time together.

I will be a responsible steward of my personal and family finances. I will honor and accept responsibility for all debts which I incur.

I will attend to my physical well being and avoid abusive behaviors and abusive use of substances.

Relying on the grace of God, I will lead a life worthy of the calling to which I have been called.

**SAMPLE LETTER TO CONGREGATION**  
**FOLLOWING THE RESIGNATION OF THE PASTOR**

Resource 2

Dear members and friends of St. Paul's Church,

Our congregation's traditional practice of "calling" a pastor affirms the active presence of God's Spirit in the search process. We prayerfully seek a pastor with particular gifts and skills while recognizing that candidates are also engaged in a Spirit-led discernment process. Thus our church enters into a covenant with a new pastor always knowing that God may sometimes call that pastor to a new ministry setting.

In the days that have elapsed since Rev. Janet Chandler mailed us her resignation letter, we have been keenly aware of God's new calling for her even as we have experienced a profound sense of loss. It is not easy to think about ending a Spirit-filled eight year ministry. These next two months together will be a precious time, and we will inform you soon about our plans for special events to celebrate Janet's ministry.

The members of your governing board/council have already been approached by some of you with the haunting question, "*Our pastor is leaving . . . what will we do?*" We want to assure you that we have already been in touch with our Conference/Association minister, Rev. Jackson Parker. We will schedule a special meeting of our governing board later this month to hear directly from him about UCC procedures during a time of pastoral transition. He suggested that we share with you this brief overview:

- 1. We will select an interim pastor to provide continuity in worship, pastoral care, and program/staff oversight. Rev. Parker will advise us on this process; he has assured us that he has several excellent candidates available who offer the specialized skills needed during a transition time. This pastor will not be a candidate for the "settled" position.*
- 2. After the interim pastor is in place, we will initiate a search process for a new pastor in accordance with our bylaws. We will invite all of you to be part of a self-study that will identify our church's pastoral needs. And we will develop a church profile for our potential candidates.*
- 3. Our Conference office will advertise our vacancy among UCC clergy all across the country. Our search committee will read ministerial profiles, screen candidates, conduct interviews, check references, and eventually select a candidate who will be recommended to the entire congregation.*

We send this letter so you will know that we are taking steps to think about our future. We will keep you informed on a regular basis. For now, let us express our gratitude to God for Janet's ministry and enter into a time of celebration with her and her family. Please keep them in your prayers even as you know from experience that she will be praying for us.

In Christ's name,

The St. Paul's Governing Board



## **INTRODUCTION TO EXIT INTERVIEWS:**

### **RESOURCES #3, #4, and #5**

*Resources #3, #4, and #5* are sample interviews designed for use in a wide variety of situations.

With its focus on blessings, the first one may be most appropriate for a church where the relationship between pastor and people has been very positive.

The second one includes some references to both positive and challenging experiences between pastor and people.

The third might be most helpful in a difficult situation.

It will be important to identify the participants and questions most appropriate to your church setting. You may decide to choose one of the three sample interviews or combine elements of all three into a totally new document.



**EXIT INTERVIEW ONE**

**Resource 3**

**Recommended Participants:**

In this model two members of the Committee on Ministry and the Conference staff person conduct the interview. They first meet alone with the pastor, then together with the pastor and governing board, and finally with the governing board alone.

**Pastor (30 minutes):**

1. Who blessed your ministry here? Tell us a story of when you felt blessed.
2. Tell us one or two of your best experiences of ministry here.
3. What do you value about this congregation?
4. If you had three wishes for this congregation, what would they be?

**Council and Pastor Together (30 minutes):**

1. Tell us a story about the best worship experience you had together.
2. Tell us a story about a time at \_\_\_\_\_ Church that you were aware of God's presence.
3. What do you value about the time you were in ministry together here?
4. If you had three wishes about your remaining time together, what would they be?

**Council (30 minutes):**

1. How were you blessed by the pastor's ministry here? Tell a story of when you felt blessed by Pastor \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Tell us one or two of your best experiences of Pastor \_\_\_\_\_'s ministry.
3. What do you value about Pastor \_\_\_\_\_?
4. If you had three wishes for Pastor \_\_\_\_\_, what would they be?

Name of Pastor \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Church \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participants \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*(Adapted, Michigan Conference)*



## **EXIT INTERVIEW TWO**

## **Resource 4**

### **Recommended Participants**

In this model there are three participants: the president of the governing board, a person selected by the governing board, and a person chosen by the departing pastor.

### **Questions for the Pastor**

1. Describe your first meeting with this congregation and share some of your first impressions.
2. What was the biggest surprise or difference between your first impression and the church you have come to know?
3. In what ways has the congregation grown and changed as a faith community?
4. In what ways has the congregation grown and changed in mission and ministry?
5. What do you see as this congregation's greatest strength? The congregation's most significant "growing edge"?
6. Was there something you hoped to accomplish while you were serving this congregation that you didn't? Why?
7. What prayers or blessings would you ask God to grant for the congregation's future ministry?

### **Questions for the church members**

1. Describe the setting when you first met the pastor and share some of your first impressions.
2. What was the biggest surprise or difference between your first impression and the pastor you have come to know?
3. In what ways has the pastor grown and changed spiritually while serving this congregation?
4. What do you see as this pastor's greatest strength? The pastor's most significant "growing edge"?
5. Was there something you hoped would be accomplished while this pastor served this congregation that didn't happen? Why?
6. In what ways has the pastor grown and changed as a pastoral leader while serving this congregation?
7. What prayers or blessings would you ask God to grant for your pastor's future ministry?

Name of Pastor \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Church \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participants \_\_\_\_\_

*(Adapted, Penn Central Conference)*



**EXIT INTERVIEW THREE**

**Resource 5**

**Recommended Participants:**

This model is designed for reflection from a slightly larger group of church members. The pastor and a small group of lay leaders (selected from the governing board, and/or Deacons, and/or Pastoral Relations Committee) complete the first six questions ahead of time. The lay leaders also complete question seven, and the pastor question eight. A meeting of those persons is then convened to review the seven questions; it is suggested that the meeting be moderated by someone from outside the local church community.

1. What was the church like when the pastor arrived – strengths and challenges?
2. What are some of your most joyful memories of this time? What will you remember about this church ten years from now?
3. During this ministry, what do you think were the most significant accomplishments of the congregation? Of what can the congregation be especially proud?
4. Does this church have Safe Church Policies and Procedures? If No, was any effort made to work on Safe Church issues during the pastor’s tenure?
5. What are some of the things that you feel are being left undone?
6. What are the main challenges facing this church? What might be the obstacles that are preventing the members from achieving their full potential as a congregation?
7. Are there particular affirmations to offer the pastor?
8. Are there particular affirmations to offer the church?
9. Other comments?

Name of Pastor \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Church \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participants \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*(Adapted, Central Association, Massachusetts Conference)*



**FOR THE DEPARTING PASTOR:**  
**CHECKLIST OF MATERIALS AND INFORMATION**

**Resource 6**

The departing pastor should review this checklist and make certain that the information is available in print form and/or on the church computer. If there is a church office, the information may be left in the pastor's desk or in a specified location on the church computer. In small churches, the information should be entrusted to a designated lay leader.

Current Lists (each with name, address, phone, email address)

- members (active and inactive)
- "friends of the church" who participate actively
- church officers, members of the governing board, and members of all committees
- staff
- church school teachers, youth leaders
- prospective members
- pastoral care list: nursing home residents, home-bound, recent serious illness or bereavement

Important Information

- names and contact information for those who provide services to the church (plumber, electrician, attorney, insurance representative, fuel delivery, snow removal, yard care, computer and copier repair, phone, internet access.)
- instructions for equipment
- names, addresses, phone numbers for area hospitals, nursing homes, and

funeral homes; contact person to secure hospital credentials

- affiliations with other organizations; agencies to whom referrals can be made
- schedule of regular church meetings
- schedule of pastoral responsibilities beyond Sunday morning (i.e. regular nursing home services, etc.)
- upcoming dates for major events: local church, Association, Conference
- upcoming dates for ecumenical clergy groups

Policies

- use of church building
- pastor's discretionary fund
- financial "checks and balances"
- membership
- baptisms
- weddings and receptions
- funerals
- communion practices

Important Documents

- church Constitution and By-laws
- current budget and financial information
- recent newsletters
- recent orders of service/Sunday bulletins
- church history, if available
- annual reports from recent years
- reports of goal-setting, visioning work/projected projects
- Conference or Association directory
- maps, community directory



## **LITURGY OF FAREWELL FROM BOOK OF WORSHIP**

Resource 7

*This order may be used alone. When it is incorporated into a Service of Word and Sacrament or a Service of the Word, it may follow the sermon.*

### **ORDER FOR TIMES OF PASSAGE: FAREWELL**

#### **GREETING**

##### **LEADER**

Our church family is constantly changing.  
People come and go.  
Babies are born.  
Children grow up.  
People commit themselves to one another.  
Loved ones and friends among us come to the end of their lives.  
Individuals move into our community and church life.  
Others leave us, moving away to new places, new experiences, and new opportunities.  
It is important and right that we recognize these times of passage, of endings and beginnings.  
Today we share the time of farewell with *a friend/friends* who *is/are* leaving.

#### **REMEMBRANCE AND RECOGNITION**

*An opportunity may be given for the recognition that it is in the midst of the congregation of God's people that Christians gather at significant times of passage in their lives. The member(s) of the local church leaving the community are invited to come forward. Others who have been closely involved may be invited to join them.*

*The pastor or another representative of the local church and one or two friends may speak of the occasion being observed and share brief stories reminding the congregation of the gifts and contributions of the person(s) leaving. The person(s) being recognized may speak of the significance of the church for their faith and life.*

#### **GIVING AND SHARING SYMBOLS**

*Symbols may be given to those leaving and to the church, with appropriate words of appreciation and thanks.*

*If an authorized minister is leaving, family and friends may return to their places in the congregation, and other representatives who will participate in the ending of the authorized ministry may come forward.*

## **ENDING AN AUTHORIZED MINISTRY**

### **RECOGNITION OF THE END**

*A representative of the covenantal partners - the local church, Association, or Conference - may lead in these or other appropriate words.*

LEADER

On \_\_\_\_ (date) this local church called \_\_\_\_ (name) to serve as \_\_\_\_ (position).

AUTHORIZED MINISTER

I thank \_\_\_\_ (church name), its members and friends, for the love, kindness,  
and support shown me these last \_\_\_\_ (number of years) years.

I ask forgiveness for the mistakes I have made.

I am grateful for the ways my leadership has been accepted.

As I leave, I carry with me all that I have learned here.

PEOPLE

**We receive your thankfulness, offer forgiveness, and accept that you now leave to minister elsewhere.**

**We express our gratitude for your time among us.**

**We ask your forgiveness for our mistakes.**

**Your influence on our faith and faithfulness will not leave us at your departure.**

AUTHORIZED MINISTER

I forgive you and accept your gratitude, trusting that our time together and our parting are pleasing to God.

### **VOWS OF RELEASE**

*All who are able may stand for these or similar words.*

LEADER *addressing the congregation*

Do you, the members and friends of \_\_\_\_ (local church) release \_\_\_\_ (name) from the duties of \_\_\_\_ (position)?

PEOPLE

**We do, with the help of God.**

*For use when called to another position:*

LEADER

Do you offer your encouragement for  
*his/her* ministry soon to begin as  
\_\_\_\_ (*position*) of \_\_\_\_ (*location of*  
*ministry*)?

PEOPLE

**We do, with the help of God.**

*For use when retiring or not yet called to  
another position:*

LEADER

Do you offer your encouragement for  
*his/her* ministry as it unfolds in new  
ways?

PEOPLE

**We do, with the help of God.**

LEADER *addressing the authorized minister*

Do you, \_\_\_\_\_ (*name*) release this local church from turning to you and  
depending on you?

AUTHORIZED MINISTER

I do, with the help of God.

LEADER

Do you offer your encouragement for the continued ministry here and on the  
relationship with another who will come to serve?

AUTHORIZED MINISTER

I do, with the help of God.

### **WITNESS OF THE CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION**

*Church officers may come forward. A representative of the Association or Conference  
addresses them, using these or similar words.*

REPRESENTATIVE

On behalf of the \_\_\_\_ (*Conference/Association*) and the United Church of Christ, I  
witness to the words spoken: words of thankfulness, forgiveness, and release.

The member churches of our Association and Conference hold each of you in  
prayer.

We pledge our support in the transitions signified in this service.

OFFICERS

Thanks be to God

### **PRAYER**

*All who are able may stand.*

LEADER

Let us pray.

-A-

LEADER

O God, we give thanks for remembered time when we, together, have shared the life of faith. We thank you for the moments we have shared with *this person/these people* in worship, in learning, in service. We pray that \_\_\_\_\_ *name(s)* will be aware of your Spirit's guidance as *he/she/they* move(s) to a *new and unknown place/new and unknown places*, in the name of Jesus the Savior.

PEOPLE

Amen

-B-

ALL

**God, whose everlasting love for all is trustworthy, help each of us to trust the future which rests in your care. The time we were together in your name saw our laughter and tears, our hopes and disappointments. Guide us as we hold these cherished memories but move in new directions, until that time to come when we are completely one with you and with each other, in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.**

## HYMN OF THANKGIVING

## BENEDICTION

LEADER

Go now, surrounded by our love and led by the promises of God, the presence of Jesus Christ, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*When the Order for Times of Passage is incorporated into a Service of Word and Sacrament or a Service of the Word, those who have gone forward to participate in this order may return to their places in the congregation and the service continues.*

Adapted from *Book of Worship* ©2002 by permission of the United Church of Christ, Local Church Ministries, Worship and Education Ministry Team.

**Introduction**

You are no doubt reading this Parish Life and Leadership document because you have some interest in learning more about the role and function of the *pastor emeritus/a*. Your church governing board may be thinking about conferring this status. You may be given this recognition. You may be a church lay leader or a pastor who is wrestling with a predicament that is taking place because of confusions about roles and responsibilities related to *pastor emeritus/a*.

The term “*Pastor Emeritus*” (male) or *Pastor Emerita* (female) is used by a local church of the United Church of Christ to honor a person whose lengthy ministry in that local church has been one of distinguished service. The designation recognizes an individual’s formal retirement. Conferring this status is an act of a local church and is an honor that the church may wish to consider following the pastor’s departure.

**Before Conferring**

It is important to know what the title means. The word “*Emeritus/a*” has to do with being retired from active service while retaining one’s title as an honor. The retaining of title is offered because of merit earned during the time of active service. The honor is never an automatic one but rather is a recognition of exceptional service.

When someone is a *pastor emeritus* or a *pastor emerita*, that person and the local church need to be aware of several important facts.

First, the person is receiving this very special honor because of the merit of service rendered. The previous ministry distinguished itself over a long period of time, usually a minimum of ten years. Both the person honored and the local church need to have a sense of the specifics of the exceptional service that warrants the awarding of this honor.

Second, the person and the local church need to know that the person so honored is formally retired. This is a very tender point that must be made absolutely clear. When someone has served a local church with distinction over a long period of time, it can be difficult for both the person and the local church to sever functional ties. When ignored or resisted, painful moments of confusion and resentment can surface and consequently undercut cherished memories and ongoing relationships. It is for these reasons that PLL suggests that this honor not be considered until the pastor has been retired for a considerable period of time, preferably after the interim period has been completed and a new pastor has begun her/his ministry.

Third, it is very helpful for a local church to have written guidelines regarding the title *pastor emeritus/a*. The guidelines will not outline “roles and functions” because the title is an honorary one and not a functional one. Rather, the guidelines will reflect on responsibilities of both the *pastor emeritus/a* and the church members. Clarity is essential before the recognition is conferred in order to avoid unnecessary awkwardness.

The following are suggestive of responsibilities involved in this honorary title:

1. The *pastor emeritus/a* and members are to hold in regard the health and vitality of the pastoral office and to do that by treating the present pastor (interim pastor or called pastor) as the pastor of that local church.
2. The local church may wish to include the name of the *pastor emeritus/a* on church stationary, the church web site, and other settings where such listing is appropriate.
3. The local church leadership, in consultation with the current minister, may wish to invite the retired pastor to play a specific role in particular church celebrations (such as anniversaries).
4. The local church will seek to inquire about and be concerned for the ongoing health and happiness of the *pastor emeritus/a* and will maintain contact to ensure ongoing concern and support.

### **A Suggested Process for this Designation**

The initiative for conferring this honor customarily begins with the church governing board. They should draw up a formal resolution outlining the specific highlights of the retired pastor's ministry; it will also be important to include in the text of the resolution a description of the pastor's distinctive qualities that members continue to hold in high regard. The resolution is then presented to a meeting of the congregation for its approval. Following that action, a date is set for the presentation.

### **Conferring the Recognition**

Conferring takes place within the worship life of that local church. There will likely be other celebrative activities, but the actual conferring is a ritual act.

At some point in the worship service, it is appropriate for an officer of the local church to invite the pastor emeritus/a to listen to words to the following effect:

*“Recognizing your pastoral leadership of this congregation since the year\_\_\_\_, we bestow upon you the honor of being known to us and to others as Pastor Emeritus (or Pastor Emerita) of this congregation.”*

*“We remember with regard . . . (and here specifics are named).”*

*“In conferring this honor, we join with you in a continued appreciation for the pastoral office. And though you will no longer actively serve as pastor, your . . . (name some qualities) . . . help us to regard you and the pastoral office you held in our midst.*

*“In conferring this honor, we pledge ourselves to continued concern for your health and happiness. We will hold you in our prayers and cherish the contributions you have made.”*

It is customary—and particularly meaningful—for the person who represents the United Church of Christ as a denomination to be invited to participate in the conferring of this honor.

A certificate related to *pastor emeritus/a* can be secured from Parish Life and Leadership. This certificate may be given to the person as a part of the act of conferring. The Conference/ Association registrar should be notified that the church has taken this action.

### **Maintaining the Honor Conferred**

The present pastor, the *pastor emeritus/a*, and church members have a role to play in maintaining the honor conferred.

The present pastor can initiate active participation of the *pastor emeritus/a* at special celebrations in the life of the church.

The *pastor emeritus/a* will understand that all invitations for pastoral services are referred to the present pastor.

The local church and its members can be helpful by staying in touch and actively caring for the *pastor emeritus/a and family*. They can also remain aware of potential difficulties and actively avoid inappropriate pressures to involve the *pastor emeritus/a* in the regular duties of the present pastor.



**SERVICE OF RECOGNITION FOR “PASTOR EMERITUS/A”**

**Resource 9**

**READING OF THE RESOLUTION**

President of Church Council

Rev. \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ Church, United Church of Christ, would like to honor you today for the many years of service here. You have been a distinguished leader and a faithful shepherd; our congregation has grown in our faith in Jesus Christ and has dramatically increased our mission and outreach because of your challenging ministry. The life of our Church is richer and fuller because we have had you living and working among us.

On \_\_\_\_\_, the Church Council voted unanimously, and the congregation subsequently agreed, to honor you with the title of “Pastor Emeritus” (“Pastor Emerita”). (Motion/resolution is read.)

**PRESENTATION OF THE PASTOR and THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE HONOR**

Would you please come forward?

Rev. \_\_\_\_\_, do you now accept this recognition to which you have been elected by the Church Council and the congregation of \_\_\_\_\_ Church, United Church of Christ and will you now receive the honorary title of “Pastor Emeritus/a”?

**THE RESPONSE BY THE PASTOR**

**THE RESPONSE OF THE CONGREGATION** (standing) led by President.

**We, the members and friends of \_\_\_\_\_ Church, rejoice in your acceptance of the title, “Pastor Emeritus/a”. We hold in high regard this special honor you have received. We pledge to you our continuing love, our constant care and our sustaining prayers through all of the days before us.** (congregation be seated)

**THE STATEMENT OF THE MEANING OF THIS RECOGNITION** (a church officer)

The conferring of this honor on you is a way of recognizing your distinguished service and also saying, “We love you”! You are indeed our beloved former pastor. The recognition carries with it no professional responsibilities, and nothing is to be required of you or expected of you by virtue of this honor. Rather, it is a visible and symbolic way of declaring to you, to the community, and the denomination this church’s esteem and honor.

**THE PRAYER OF RECOGNITION** Current Pastor

Almighty God, who governs all things in heaven and on earth by your wisdom, and has brought us to this high and holy moment of commitment and praise, we give you heartfelt thanks for the long and fruitful ministry of your servant, Rev. \_\_\_\_\_. For the

lessons we have learned from her/his faithful obedience to your will and way, for the caring and sharing, the living and loving by which she/he has enriched so many lives over the years, we are most grateful. Continue to bless, we pray, both her/him and \_\_\_\_\_ as they continue in their retirement. Amen

**THE DECLARATION AND PRESENTATION OF CERTIFICATE OF STANDING AS  
“PASTOR EMERITUS” (“PASTOR EMERITA”.)**

(By Association or Conference Representative)

(Read the Certificate and/or Plaque)

Rev. \_\_\_\_\_, by acclamation of this congregation accompanied by heartfelt applause of this Association and Conference, I hereby declare you “Pastor Emeritus/a” of \_\_\_\_\_ Church, United Church of Christ and present you with this Certificate/Plaque.

(Other gifts of the congregation may be given at this time.)

**THE RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP**

(While it is strongly recommended that this honor be conferred after the new pastor has been called, there may continue to be situations where a church wishes to confer the honor as part of the retiring pastor’s final Sunday service. If so, the preceding may be incorporated into the *Book of Worship* service for the “Ending of an Authorized Ministry.”)

*(Adapted, Fox Valley Association, Illinois Conference)*