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In Support of Ordained Ministry Series  
PLANNING FOR RETIREMENT  
Office for Church Life and Leadership

## LEAVING YOUR CURRENT PLACE OF MINISTRY

When the time comes to leave the local church you are serving, here are suggestions on sharing your decision:

- Be clear about your intended date of retirement.
- Inform the conference minister of your retirement plans.
- Discuss with your family your plans for informing the church of your leave-taking.
- Follow the constitutional or other formal procedures for informing the local church membership, except with family members and intimate friends.
- Encourage and enjoy a time of celebration. Allow your church family to plan a festive occasion to offer thanksgiving for your ministry among them.
- Regardless of your relationship to and feelings about the church and its members, do not express feelings that could be divisive to the church.
- Avoid, if possible, a lengthy period between the announcement of your retirement and the actual retirement. Provide adequate time for the church to plan for your leaving, but no more than one year.

During the time of transition you should do the following:

- Keep in regular contact with the local church leadership and the conference staff throughout the transition.
- Graciously accept expressions of appreciation. Allow members to wish you well in meaningful ways.
- Be alert to your emotional needs and the emotional needs of those close to you. Take time to be with your family members and close friends as they deal with their feelings about leaving.

- Review your personal ministerial record book or discuss with a trusted colleague the history of your ministry as a way of affirming its richness. Find appropriate settings to share important memories.
- Ask an appropriate group within the church such as the pastoral relations committee, the council, or the search committee to conduct an exit interview with you. This is a time for recounting some of the highlights of your ministry and for reflecting on your ministry from a broader context. Do not hesitate to request assistance from the conference/association staff about this process.
- Avoid temptations to offer advice about the search process for your successor. Let the conference staff give total oversight to the search process.
- Make certain that the appropriate committee prepares the following for your successor:
  1. A packet of recent church records such as the most recent minutes of committee meetings, the budget, and worship attendance records.
  2. A description of church programs, including schedules and traditions.
  3. Information about ongoing and unfinished church business.
  4. Lists of community resources.
  5. Information helpful in getting settled such as the names of doctors and child-care services.
  6. A roster of pastors in the area.
- Ask several pastors in the area to welcome your successor.
- Indicate clearly to the church membership that you will no longer be the minister, that your successor is responsible for the oversight and implementation of all ministries of the church, and that you will not be available for these responsibilities.
- Speak supportively of your successor to the church members.
- Decide where your ordained ministerial standing will be held.
- Begin to look for ways your gifts and interests can be of continuing service in your association and conference.

## A Time for Lasts by Bruce G. Epperly, Katherine Gould Epperly

A pastor contemplating retirement has a personal and professional history. In many ways a minister's retirement is the reverse image of her or his first congregational call. Decades earlier, he or she walked to the pulpit with fear and trembling, about to preach her or his first sermon without the safety net of the seminary community or a field education supervisor. Now, hundreds of sermons and worship services later, when he or she walks to the pulpit for the last time as a full-time congregational pastor, he or she is filled with a different type of fear and trembling, the fear of letting go of a personal identity and theological practice that have defined her or his life for decades. While few pastors at retirement miss board meetings and budget sessions, the quotidian practices that structured her or his life day by day and month by month are what pastors often miss the most.

All transitions require saying goodbye, but some farewells are heart wrenching. When an elderly widow, whom a retiring pastor has visited week after week for more than a decade, asks, "Will you come back again next week to see me?" even the most self-differentiated and intentional pastor is tempted to reply, "Of course, I'll be back next week." When a pastor celebrates his last nursing home service and announces that he won't be back again, the anguished looks from the residents are heartbreaking.

The caretaking and wisdom-giving void that follows these pastoral lasts is accompanied by a wide variety of feelings: For some, the feeling of relief at never having to chair another church session meeting or endure the petty conflicts of the church board triumphs over the void and its related grief. Others experience a new freedom at not having to prepare or deliver another sermon. Yet, for most pastors, the feelings of loss and ambivalence are tremendous because, despite the challenges of ministry, most pastors see a close relationship between what has been described as "soul and role." They do not simply *do* ministry, they *are* ministers 24/7. Their vocation is a matter of character, lifestyle, and self-definition, even if they have healthy family lives, relationships outside the church, and interests outside ministry. Healthy preretirement pastors remind themselves that their choice to respond to God's call to a lifetime of ministry has enabled God to be present in their lives and the lives of their congregants in unique and surprising ways, and they remember that God is still calling them toward faithful discipleship, albeit in yet unknown forms beyond congregational ministry.

Faith and vocation are profoundly defined and shaped by relationships. With retirement from full-time ministry, most pastors note that their relational world suddenly shrinks. Happily, phone calls no longer disturb family meals. But, sadly, days and weeks may go by without a phone call from persons who were once former colleagues or congregants. With no church office filled with congregational staff and volunteers to go to each morning, recent retirees often make visits to the coffee shop or corner restaurant to fill their days. As one suburban pastor noted, "My husband and I decided to retire in the home where we'd lived for two decades. Our children and grandchildren all lived within half an hour of home and the church we'd served for twenty years. I'm glad to be near family, but it's painful to remain so near my old congregation. Sometimes it hurts to see former parishioners sharing lunch with the interim pastor at places that we once shared meals. As I pick up an afternoon coffee at Starbucks, I encounter my successor, former colleagues, and former parishioners, and while I'm tempted to sit down beside them, I know I have to wave and take my coffee on the road. I've had to let go of a congregation when I moved to another, but leaving my job and not having to go to another is heart wrenching. It's difficult even to find a place to eat where I won't encounter someone from the church." With retirement from full-time congregational ministry, one pathway of life comes to an end, and developing new pathways and possibilities takes considerable effort.

The "lasts" of ministry's winter season reminds us of the importance of work in shaping our personal identity prior to retirement and after it. According to students of the psychology of retirement, a person's work serves

a variety of psychological and structural functions in her or his life, including a sense of personal worth and accomplishment, relationships and friendships, prestige and recognition, novelty and creativity, service to the larger community, and the passing of time. From a holistic perspective on ministerial vocation in which being and doing are intimately related, the high degree of unsettledness pastors experience as they contemplate their retirement is normal, especially during the first months following their departure from full-time ministry. Even pastors well-versed in boundary training are tempted to quite innocently violate boundaries in order to hang on to some sense of their old identity. There are great temptations to drop in at the office on the way to the market or stop by the women's or men's fellowship group during its monthly meeting in the social hall. But after a few minutes of mutual awkwardness, the retired pastor and his former colleagues and parishioners know that it is time to go. As one recently retired United Church of Christ pastor noted, "It's a humbling and somewhat alienating experience to know that you no longer belong in a place where you were once the center of action and the primary actor. More than that, your presence in the area may be seen by judicatory officials and the new pastor as an intrusion, undermining the authority of your successor. When judicatory officials ask how I'm doing, I feel the underlying message is 'Are you behaving yourself? Are you staying away from the church?'"

Like a flowing stream, life goes on, and our accomplishments, at best, become the foundation upon which other pastors will build in their ministerial adventure. Even those pastors who have prepared well for retirement may experience some wistfulness as they admit that life is progressing well in the office and in the congregation now that they are gone.

"For everything there is a season." Transformation from which new life springs is bought at the price of abandonment of old routines and letting go of old ways of self-definition. The leaves must fall from the tree to create mulch to support springtime's renewal of life. Springtime's new blooms eventually rise but not without the death of the old self and its habitual patterns. In such transitional moments, a pastor's calling is to claim *kairos* time amid the fifty or more unstructured hours of *chronos* time that once defined each week's tasks. What initially seems like a void in the few weeks following retirement may shortly thereafter become the womb of new possibilities for those who awaken to new pathways of spirituality, vocation, and relationship. What the psalmist described as numbering our days will mean embracing the joy of new adventures and new talents, rather than simply passing time in preoccupation with the past.

In Madeleine L'Engle's *A Ring of Endless Light*, Grandfather Austin, a retired Episcopalian priest who is now debilitated and facing immanent death, notes that at this time of his life his vocation is simply to pray for the world. When pastors retire, they do not lose their pastoral identity or their calling to serve God, but their vocation is transformed. Their calling is to discern what new creation God is beckoning them toward now that they no longer have the role of public religious figure. Just as a person's earlier callings have many possible shapes, so, too, God's call in retirement encompasses many paths and possibilities in one's particular time and place.

Adapted from [Four Seasons of Ministry: Gathering a Harvest of Righteousness](#) by Bruce G. Epperly and Katherine Gould Epperly, copyright © 2008 by the Alban Institute. All rights reserved.

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## THE ORDAINED MINISTER'S CODE

### 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 that 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, the Conference, and the United Church of Christ.

I will be a responsible representative of the Church Universal and participate in those activities that 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 that 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 that 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 that 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.



## Ethical Guidelines for Ministers Departing from Congregations

The departure of a minister from a congregation can be an emotional experience for both the minister and the parishioners. Whether because of retirement or a new call, fitness concerns or a decreasing “fit” between minister and congregation, a breadth of emotions will occur during the transition. It is the responsibility of the departing minister to set appropriate boundaries with their former congregation and parishioners, in order to facilitate the church’s ability to build a positive relationship with its new minister. This process also enables the minister to move into a new ministry setting or into retirement with a sense of release and clearness. This is in keeping with the Ministerial Code of Ethics for Ordained, Commissioned, and Licensed Ministers.

It is the expectation that “[u]pon departure, [a] pastor will not return to serve congregation nor serve members of the congregation in a pastoral capacity. For a minimum of one year up to three years, a minister will observe a no-contact boundary with congregants and will teach congregants to observe the same. This enables the past minister to fulfill the ministerial code of ethics, in support of the congregation’s relationship-building with a new minister. Re-establishing contact is only after negotiation with the new minister, potentially in dialogue with a wider church representative.”<sup>1</sup>

In conversation with the local Committee on Ministry, a minister should develop an overall “departure ethics plan” that is in accord with the Code of Ethics and by which they covenant to abide following the departure. This plan should be specific and address the minister’s boundaries with the congregation, with the wider community, and with social media, parts of which are addressed below. The plan should be communicated clearly to lay leaders and the congregation.

The minister should also use the guidance from the resource “The Minister’s Exit Tasks,” found on page 56 of the *Conference User Guide: UCC Search and Call Tools*, available here: <http://uccfiles.com/pdf/User-Guide.pdf>.

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<sup>1</sup> From *A Brief Dictionary of Pastoral Positions*, developed by the Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization (MESA) Ministry Team with judicatory staff, 12/2014.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRANSITIONS

### 1. Church Boundaries:

- a) The departing minister should strive to leave with grace, expressing gratitude for the time of shared ministry and encouraging the congregation to bond with its next minister.
- b) The minister should 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 minister should follow through on this commitment.
- c) The minister should say “goodbye” – through an exit interview, through worship<sup>2</sup> – and then practice saying “hello” to their new ministry setting or to their new reality of retirement.

### 2. Community Boundaries:

- a) The authorized minister should inform nursing homes or other care facilities that they will not be available for Bible study, worship services, or other pastoral duties following their departure date.
- b) The authorized minister should inform area funeral homes that they will no longer be available for funerals or memorial services following their departure date. They should request that funeral directors direct requests to the new pastor of the congregation.
- c) When the authorized minister’s portfolio has included specialized duties (e.g. Minister of Music, Minister of Social Justice, etc.), the authorized minister should inform organizations with whom the minister has partnered that they will no longer be available for this partnership, and encourage those settings to invite the incoming minister’s participation.
- d) The authorized minister should inform any other places where they have provided general community ministry (City Council meetings, Rotary Club, Planned Parenthood, ecumenical worship partnerships, etc.) that they will not be available 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 minister’s participation.
- e) It is recommended that the minister resign from any community board or leadership positions held by virtue of their position in the congregation.

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<sup>2</sup> The UCC *Book of Worship* has a Liturgy for Departure that begins on page 252.

### 3. Social Media Boundaries<sup>3</sup>:

- 1) Prior to departure, the authorized minister should pass along administrator duties, remove their own administrator status, and share password information with someone else in the congregation for all ministry-related pages, groups and accounts.
- 2) Authorized ministers should discern carefully whether they will unfriend/unfollow parishioners and others with whom they've had a pastoral relationship or move them to a more restricted list.<sup>4</sup> Ministers should prioritize the needs of the ministry setting and whoever will follow in ministerial leadership over their own desires to maintain those relationships (or the desires of parishioners to stay in contact). Ministers should also be consistent: the practice should be to either unfriend/unfollow everyone from that setting, or move them all to a restricted list. Authorized ministers should communicate this policy to the congregation so that there is no confusion.
- 3) Authorized ministers must refrain from providing pastoral care through digital communication after the end date of their contract/call/covenant with their community of faith. Continuing to provide pastoral care through social media interferes with the ministry of one's successor and is a violation of the Minister's Code of Ethics.
- 4) Following a period of 1-3 years, authorized ministers should discern whether they will change their privacy settings and/or begin to accept friend requests of former parishioners.
- 5) Ministers should not initiate friend/follow requests, and they must continue to refrain from providing pastoral care through digital communication to former parishioners.

### 4. Boundaries in the next ministry setting:

- a) The minister should spend their time getting to know the new ministry setting in depth.
- b) The minister should transfer their local church membership and their ministerial standing to the new ministry setting as soon as possible.

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<sup>3</sup> This section comes from the MESA resource "Social Media and Boundaries for Authorized Ministers," and includes information from the Connecticut Conference's resource, "Internet Safety Guidelines," which is available here: <http://www.ctucc.org/resources/online-safety-guidelines.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Adam Cleaveland makes compelling arguments for both options here: <https://alban.org/archive/pastoral-transitions-in-the-age-of-social-media/>



- c) If the minister's next ministry setting will potentially put the minister in continued contact with the local church (such as a judicatory position in the same conference), the conference and the local church must discuss how to navigate this appropriately. When possible, it is best for another staff person to offer appropriate leadership to the former ministry setting.
- d) Similarly, if the minister goes to serve in a new congregation within the same association, the departed minister and the new minister are encouraged to have some conversation, facilitated by the Committee on Ministry, regarding continued ecclesial boundaries. Examples may include the following: If members from the former church show up to worship in the new ministry setting, the authorized minister should encourage them to continue their relationship in the former ministry setting. When the new minister is installed, the former minister should send representatives from their new setting, but should exercise care and restraint in discerning whether to attend personally. When there are association events (including worship services) at the former congregation, the former minister and the current minister should discern appropriate roles for the former minister (including perhaps no role).

## **BEST PRACTICES IN RETIREMENT**

When a minister retires from a ministry setting, the boundaries outlined above are still expected. A retired minister should transfer their church membership (and ministerial standing, if appropriate) upon their departure from a congregation at the point of retirement. This will facilitate the retired minister's ability to build relationships in a new community and in a new role.

Recognizing that some retired clergy remain in the communities they have served prior to their retirement, it nevertheless remains the best practice for the minister to not participate in the life of the church for a period of 1-3 years, determined in conversation with the local Committee on Ministry and the incoming minister. It should be understood by the retiring minister and the congregation that "not participate" is comprehensive, including such events as funerals, wedding, and baptisms for parishioners, for persons with informal connections to the congregation, and for the wider community.

Mindful that retired ministers are still called by God, the retiring minister should be in touch with the Committee on Ministry to explore what peer groups are available for retired clergy in the area to help them live into their calling in retirement and to continue to live healthy, robust, and self-differentiated lives.

When a pastor retires and is given the honorary title “Pastor Emeritus/a,” 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 departed minister. The role of a “Pastor Emeritus/a” and any attendant expectations should be named explicitly and renegotiated at regular intervals. In many cases, a “Pastor Emeritus/a” title is honorary and confers no pastoral responsibilities or expectations, although in some cultural contexts, the role of a retired minister is understood in different and very specific ways. Sensitivity to the cultural norms of a community as well as healthy boundaries should be attended to in these situations.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MINISTERS IN SPECIALIZED SETTINGS**

When an authorized minister departs or retires from ministry in a specialized ministry setting, the boundaries outlined above are still held as best practices, although it is important to note several nuances.

- 1) **Boundaries with Ministry Setting:** Similar to an authorized minister departing from a congregation, a minister departing from a specialized ministry setting should inform the setting that they will be unavailable for pastoral care, Bible study, special services (funerals, weddings, baptisms, etc.), preaching, and teaching.
- 2) **Boundaries with Community:**
  - a) The departing minister should not represent the ministry setting in any context following the departure date, e.g. a hospital chaplain representing their former employer at a health care conference or a retired national officer representing the denomination at an ecumenical gathering.
  - b) Especially in judicatory, academic, and publishing ministries, in which the wisdom and experience gained in one setting contributes to the public voice and platform of a particular minister, the counsel of the minister’s Committee on Ministry should be sought

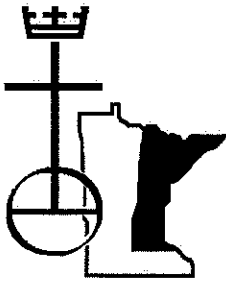


in determining whether and for how long a period of absence from public speaking (e.g. preaching, lecturing) following a minister's departure or retirement from such a ministry may be appropriate.

3) Boundaries in Social Media:

- a) Prior to departure, a minister should pass along all administrator duties and passwords for all ministry-related social media pages.
- b) An authorized minister who has served in a pastoral role in a specialized setting should 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.
- c) A minister who has not served in a pastoral role should likewise take care not to seek out continued relationships with those who were related to the former ministry setting, and 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 ministry settings, boundaries for a minister's departure or transition should be discussed with a Committee on Ministry so that the overseeing body can support and hold accountable the authorized minister during a season of change. We again encourage the minister to make use of the guidance from the resource "The Minister's Exit Tasks," found on page 56 of the Conference User Guide: UCC Search and Call Tools, available here: <http://uccfiles.com/pdf/User-Guide.pdf>.



EASTERN ASSOCIATION OF THE  
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***Common practices regarding the relationship of ordained, commissioned,  
and/or licensed ministers to former parishes***

The United Church of Christ is a church of covenants. Among our greatest strengths are the covenants we make with one another about our life together. These covenants are stated in many different ways and places, including the Constitutions and By-Laws of the national United Church of Christ, Conferences, Associations, and local churches, in the UCC Manual on Ministry, and in the services of ordination, commissioning, or licensing, and services of installation. ***Ordained, commissioned, and licensed ministers are expected to represent and embody well the covenants that make us who we are.***

Regarding the issue of the relationship of authorized ministers to former parishes, there are several sections of the Ordained Minister's Code (In the UCC Manual on Ministry, pp. 20-21) that provide the foundation for the practices commonly observed throughout the church. These include:

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



In addition, in the Manual on Ministry's chapter, "The Local Church in Relation to its Pastor" (pp. 26-27), a section on "Ethics in Ministry" says, "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."

This ethic is usually reiterated during services of closure when departing pastors declare that they "release this church from turning to her/him for pastoral services." We have found that such closure is extremely important in helping a congregation prepare appropriately to receive and affirm new pastoral leadership. ***Closure needs to be clear and unambiguous.***

### ***Frequently asked questions:***

#### ***1. Why do we have this ethic? What is the problem with a former pastor being asked to do pastoral services for members or family members of a former parish?***

When a former pastor returns for pastoral services, this runs a significant risk of sending a confusing signal to the congregation that this pastor has not really brought closure to her/his pastoral relationship to the congregation. In addition, there is a great risk that returning for one person or one family will be felt as favoritism being shown by the pastor, in direct violation of the code of ministering impartially. Further, when a former pastor returns, there is a great risk of interfering with the developing relationship between the congregation and its new pastor. While it certainly is true that a pastor of many years will know members of the congregation better than the new pastor, a new pastor never has a chance even to begin building relationships if the congregation

continues to turn to a former pastor for pastoral services and the former pastor allows and encourages this.

**2. *Is it all right for a former pastor to return if the current pastor gives her/his permission?***

This can be a tricky matter. Once in awhile, the current pastor becomes aware of a compelling reason to invite the participation of a former pastor, and these invitations may be extended when in the judgement of the current pastor there are needs of both the family and of the church that may be met by such an invitation. Former pastors, when asked directly by a member or family member of a former parish are expected to respond something like this: "Thanks, I am genuinely honored to be asked, but as a matter of professional ethics I do not return to a former parish for pastoral services." They are **not** expected to say, "Yes, I'd love to but you'll have to ask the current pastor (or the moderator, or the Association Minister) for permission." Such a response puts the current pastor in a no-win situation and is an indication that the former pastor is not willing to take responsibility for embodying the professional ethics commonly observed by ordained, commissioned, and licensed ministers.

**3. *What if the church is in a genuine in-between time (i.e., there isn't an interim minister or installed minister in place when a need arises or when planning needs to begin (such as for a wedding)?***

Usually churches have made some arrangement for pastoral services even in the in-between times. If so, that person should be contacted first. If the next pastor has been called (or is the recommended candidate of a search committee, soon to be called) but

has not yet arrived and no one else is officially on duty, the new person should be given the opportunity to respond. Sometimes a newly-called-but-not-yet-on-duty pastor will invite the assistance of a former pastor in such circumstances. Another frequently-used option is to invite help from a pastor from another nearby church or from a local chaplain or pastoral counselor.

***4. What if the event requiring pastoral services is not going to happen in the church building (i.e., a baptism at the seashore...)?***

The issue is not where but who. If the pastoral services are being provided for members or family members of the pastor's former parish, the same concerns apply. If a former pastor performs a baptism at the seashore for members or family members of a former parish, the risk is great that this will send a signal to the congregation that this former pastor has not really brought closure to his/her ministry in that congregation, which then opens the door for more invitations to the former pastor—or sets the stage for the considerable unhappiness that occurs when some invitations are accepted and others turned down.

There are, of course, endless numbers of scenarios involving former pastors and former parishioners where the usual covenants may blur. For example, a college student goes off to college and discovers that the pastor of her home church back in New Jersey is now the pastor of the church next door to her college. She becomes an Associate Member of this church, and now her former pastor is also her present, on-site pastor. When she decides to get married, she asks to be married in the college church by her former pastor who is also her present pastor even though there is a new pastor back home.

**5. *What about former pastors continuing in friendships with former parishioners?***

If former pastors remain in the church they once served (which occasionally happens in small communities where there may be no other good options for a church for the former pastor and that pastor's family), former pastors who wish to maintain a friendship with former parishioners would be well-advised to observe some boundaries in the relationship: (1) they don't talk about the church in any way that even remotely might be interpreted as criticism or second-guessing the current pastor; and (2) they do not perform pastoral functions for friends who are still members of the pastor's former parish. In fact, they should take great care not to behave in a way that even looks like pastoral activity, such as calling on friends who may be ill. Although the pastor may believe that, "I am just making this call as a friend, not as a pastor," calling in homes, hospitals, or nursing homes has most of the appearances of a pastoral activity and will be regarded as such by many in the congregation.

**6. *What about family members of a former pastor who may wish to remain as members of the church after the pastor has moved on?***

This happens a lot—the pastor's children grow up and decide to settle in the community where they grew up even after the pastor moves on. Or when a pastor dies and his/her family chooses to remain in the same community. When this happens, these remaining family members almost always experience change in their own role and "place" in the congregation. Sometimes that change is welcome, but sometimes it can be troubling to the family members. Sometimes it is also troubling to family members to watch another pastor lead the congregation and receive the attention that

was once directed to the former pastor. In such cases, where there are other compatible churches available, it may be best for everyone for family members of the former pastor to plant new roots in another congregation.

When family members remain in a congregation, there may be times when a former pastor will come to a church event not as a former pastor but as a parent or grandparent, spouse or partner. When such occasions arise, the courteous practice is for the former pastor to contact the current pastor so that together the past and present pastors may find the most comfortable way for the former pastor to be present for special events where a family member is involved.

***7. What if a former pastor stays in the community and sets up a private counseling practice? Is it all right for her/him to counsel former parishioners?***

This is generally a risky thing to do. The net effect is that the former pastor is still functioning in a pastoral role with former parishioners, and closure of those relationships has not really happened. Pastors we know of who have tried to do this generally report that it has not worked very well.

***8. What about lay workers who have served in a ministry position but who are not ordained, licensed, or commissioned?***

Virtually all of the same ethical guidelines apply to lay workers who have served in a ministry position.

***9. What about when a church wishes to honor a former pastor by granting him/her the title of "Pastor Emeritus"?***

Many churches have honored a former pastor, especially one who has retired, by

granting the title, "Pastor Emeritus". It is a way a church can express its love for a pastor at the time of her/his leaving. It does not mean that the retired pastor continues in a pastoral relationship with that church.

**10. *What about when a church wants to have a continuing relationship with a former pastor?***

Sometimes when a pastor retires and continues in the community where her/his former parish is located, churches ask if that pastor can continue to serve in some way. Using the freedom of our polity, churches have sometimes entered into covenants with retired pastors for continuing service. While these are done with the best of intentions, nevertheless all the concerns about relationships between former pastors and former churches stated in this document need to be considered before a church enters into such a relationship. If a church is contemplating a covenant relationship with a former pastor, the leadership is urged to contact its Association Minister or Conference Minister and/or the Chair of the Association Church and Ministry Committee for guidance. *The best gift a church can give to a former pastor is to form strong pastoral bonds with the new pastor, so that the church has a healthy future. This gives the former pastor the deep satisfaction of knowing that her/his service there has continued to bear fruit.*

\*\*\*\*\*

There are countless circumstances where the usual covenants blur, where there may not be clear and easy answers. In all such occasions, common courtesy and careful attention by the pastors or former lay staff involved to the fundamental ethics of ministry will produce an amicable outcome.

\*\*\*\*\*

**This document is not intended to be a new policy but rather a teaching document to help clarify and interpret ethical understandings outlined in the**



**United Church of Christ Manual on Ministry and expressed in the vows taken at the time of ordination. The perspectives in this document arise from experience with difficult situations that often emerge when appropriate boundaries between former pastors and former parishes are not carefully observed.**

Fifth draft, September 4, 2002  
Sixth draft, April 9, 2003

sentative of the association and/or conference participate in the service. If the authorized minister has served in another organization on behalf of the local church, it is also appropriate to have a representative of that organization participate in the service.

### OUTLINE

*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.*

Greeting  
Remembrance and Recognition  
Giving and Sharing Symbols

Ending an Authorized Ministry  
Recognition of the End  
Vows of Release  
Witness of the Association/Conference

Prayer  
Hymn of Thanksgiving  
Benediction

*A Service of Word and Sacrament or a Service of the Word may continue.*

### 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.*

*If the person leaving is not an authorized minister who has been serving in or on behalf of the church, the service continues with the prayer on page 258.*

### 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 \_\_\_\_\_ position \_\_\_\_\_?

from the duties of \_\_\_\_\_?

position

PEOPLE

We do, with the help of God.

☐ *for use when called to another position*

☐ *for use when retiring or not yet called to another position*

LEADER

Do you offer your

encouragement for her/his ministry soon to begin

as \_\_\_\_\_ position \_\_\_\_\_?

of \_\_\_\_\_ location of ministry \_\_\_\_\_?

PEOPLE

We do, with the help of God.

LEADER

Do you offer your encouragement for her/his 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 ASSOCIATION/ CONFERENCE

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

## REPRESENTATIVE

On behalf of the \_\_\_\_\_ association/ conference 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 times 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

## 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

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.

when we are completely one with you and with each other, in the name of Jesus Christ we pray.  
Amen.

## HYMN OF THANKSGIVING

## 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.*



## SAYING GOODBYE PROPERLY

An important step in leaving your congregation, whether to serve another congregation or to retire, is clearing the air of unhealthy expectations. The congregation needs a clear symbol from you that the new minister will truly be their pastor. This means no further pastoral services should be expected from you. The clergyperson has to stand firm in this portion of the ministerial code of ethics, since many members will not stop to consider the implications of a returning pastor.

Enclosed is a sample letter from one of our UCC pastors that you may feel free to use as a guideline for your own farewell letter. It clearly sets the limits of the relationship while giving thanks for the years spent together.

### SAMPLE LETTER

As the time for my retirement as Pastor of (Church Name) approaches, I am filled with rich memories and some reflections.

My overwhelming feeling is one of gratitude for (number) special fulfilling years. My enthusiasm for the ministry of this church has never waned. I have felt the constant challenge that strives for vital worship, the nurture and growth of the congregation, and a desire to be on the growing edge of meeting the human as well as the spiritual needs of our community.

What remains with me is the faithfulness of our commitment, your friendship, and your Christian love, shown in countless ways.

But, as Paul said, "My time to go has come." After (date), I will no longer be the Pastor of (Church). That transition is to be recognized and declared on (Date) during the service of closure.

In a sense, leaving this special relationship is a little death to so much that has given my life meaning and in which I have been invested. But Christians know that the rhythm of our faith includes death and resurrection. I leave with so many happy memories.

(My spouse and I) are living not too far away, so we welcome the fact that there will be occasions where we will see you from time to time. I will no longer be available for pastoral services (such as weddings, funerals, baptisms, or counseling) to this congregation. That will be hard for me, but pastoral ethics rightly require that a retiring pastor step out of the way and that new leadership be welcomed and recognized as pastor.

I have every confidence that (Church Name) is to have a great future of service in Christ's name, with some exciting adventures and challenges. As you welcome the Interim Pastor and then the new minister, I ask that you give them your full acceptance and support, so that together (Church Name) may have the full strength and unity that make ministry effective.

Thank you for all that you have been to me and are. God bless you.





# Is “Stay Away” the Only Way?: How Former Pastors Relate to Congregations They Previously Served

by Trish Towle Greeves

A colleague once told me about interviewing some years ago for a campus ministry position. His eligibility was expressly predicated on his not talking to any of the clergy who had previously served in that position.

Another colleague recalls a seminary professor’s admonition to students that when called to a parish, they should not be in touch with their predecessors—to avoid any preconceived notions about the setting and parishioners they would soon be encountering.

My friend Paul still regrets not attending the funeral of his lifetime mentor because it was being held at a congregation Paul had once served as pastor.

Congregational members have shared with me their tendency to not mention events related to former pastors in front of the current pastor, sensing that such conversation would not be welcome.

In a *Christian Century* “Faith Matters” column, M. Craig Barnes expresses his conviction that we must always relate to former parishioners as “pastor, not friend.”<sup>1</sup>

In his book *Saying Goodbye: A Time of Growth for Congregations and Pastors*, Alban Institute consultant and author Ed White cautions that continuing contact between former pastors and congregations inhibits the congregation’s grief work, encourages “futile grappling with ghosts,” promotes rivalries among members, diverts energy outside the congregation when it is most needed within the community, confuses commitment to new leadership, and “keeps the current minister on the defensive and places her or him in the awkward position of interloper.”<sup>2</sup>

In light of such examples, I have wondered whether by emphasizing what former clergy are not to do, we are causing:

1. Unnecessary pain from the complete rupture of relationships between former pastors and parishioners
2. Loss of collegiality between former and successor pastors
3. Loss of goodwill and sense of well-being by preventing a continuing but transformed relationship between congregations and former pastors
4. Unnecessary ambiguity and secrecy when former pastors do maintain contact with some former parishioners

As part of a doctor of ministry thesis project, I designed a research project to explore if, when, why, and how a visible relationship between former pastors and congregations can or should exist. I researched success and satisfaction with pastoral transitions in congregations from the perspectives of members, former pastors, interim pastors, and successor pastors. Using a web-based tool, I created

between former and successor pastors, the public engagement of former pastors with congregations they previously served, friendships between former pastors and congregational members, and adherence to professional boundaries.

All mainline denominations have similar ethics pertaining to the relationship between pastors and congregations they previously served. These guidelines require the pastor to terminate all pastoral services, refrain from interfering in the life of the parish or the ministry of the successor, honor the record of one's predecessors and successors, and exercise caution regarding contact with former parishioners.

These boundaries are rightly designed to foster a successful transition, particularly to assist the congregation in accepting new pastoral leadership and to ensure its readiness and commitment to move into the future. The importance of keeping these boundaries was recognized by all 78 survey respondents. After a well-celebrated ministry and specific closure date, a former pastor should, in their words, "move on," "stay away," "give room," "not linger," "make a clean break," "stay out of church's hair," "remove [oneself] physically and emotionally," and so forth. Interim and successor pastor tributes to predecessors who did this well further underscore how important these boundaries are.

On the other hand, the survey highlighted a desire for some sort of continuing relationship between congregations and former pastors. A significant number of comments pertained to this need. The following chart summarizes the common positive and negative arguments concerning ongoing relationships between congregations and former pastors.

Clearly, no consensus exists concerning ongoing relationships with former pastors that would fit all pastoral transitions. However, in the absence of unethical conduct and assuming a voluntary departure, and in spite of legitimate fears of the slippery slope, my analysis of statistical and anecdotal data from the surveys suggests five areas of continuity between former pastors and congregations can be affirmed: (1) maintenance of institutional memory and goodwill; (2) occasional visits for services and special events; (3) shared times of bereavement; (4) collegiality between former and successor pastors; (5) continuing friendships with some congregational members.

### **Maintenance of Institutional Memory and Goodwill**

Former pastors are part of a congregation's history. Often pictures of them hang on a wall somewhere in the church. Their pastorates are noted when the congregation's histories are updated.

Congregational newsletters include updates in a former pastor's personal or professional life, such as a new call or a significant health issue. When one former pastor was called to a conference ministry position, the congregation where he had served many years before incorporated his most frequently used benediction into the Sunday worship service and prayed for his success on the day he was being installed in another part of the country.

When I was diagnosed with cancer and about to have surgery to remove a kidney, I made a coffee date with my successor, who was then beginning the sixth year of her pastorate following my sixteen-year tenure. She included a note about the surgery in the next congregational newsletter. I was subsequently showered with cards and notes of love, concern, and good wishes, which gave me great pleasure and support.

Beyond the essential tasks for a successful pastoral transition—letting go, building new relationships, and setting new directions, an enduring bond of affection and good will remains between pastors and parishioners who have sojourned together, sharing life's deepest questions, sorrows, hopes, and joys.

Former pastors are typically invited to participate in special occasions such as anniversaries, building dedications, and reunions. These events celebrate the ongoing life of a congregation within a larger framework that transcends any particular pastorate. The presence of former pastors or members of their families representing many years of a congregation's pastoral leadership embodies the hymn refrain:

Forward through the ages in unbroken line,  
Move the faithful spirits at the call divine.<sup>3</sup>

The most frequent services attended by former pastors, according to the Pastoral Transitions Survey, were funerals, followed by an occasional visit to a Sunday service, and then weddings. The average number of times former pastors appeared for any reason in a congregation they had previously served was slightly over two a year. This figure did not distinguish between former pastors who had retired and those who were working in another setting. Eighty percent of former pastors said they were present once a year or less often. One or two visits a year for any reason appeared to be beneficial for all concerned.

### Shared Times of Bereavement

A clear exception to the "clean-breakstay-away" policy that was mentioned in the survey by respondents from all role perspectives concerned the death of longtime members in the congregation. A representative sample of survey respondents' own words conveys this sentiment:

A successor pastor wrote, "I would re-look at rules in place (i.e., no showing up for funerals, etc., for a few years) and re-write them to include the option of occasionally doing that.... [To not do so] seems non-compassionate."

One interim wrote that she "never draws a line with the former pastor when there is a death of a church member and encourages the former pastor's presence at the memorial service if he/ she desires to be present."

One successor pastor shared about the growth in her own awareness when she at first discouraged her predecessor from attending the funeral of a beloved patriarch of the church. "After talking to a colleague who was an experienced interim, I called the former pastor back and invited him to come. This was a good decision all around."

A former pastor wrote, "I would like to see the guidelines for transitions have a more nuanced understanding about some of the complicated situations that can arise. There was, for example, the death of a church member when the church had no interim pastor; inviting the former pastor to preside would have been comforting to the family and not have compromised the overall transition."

An interim pastor wrote, "I believe that any future involvement is not best achieved by a rigid rule. At times of family stress, such as funerals that occur during the interim period, many families express a desire for some contact with the former pastor, and I believe it is appropriate for me to reach out to the former pastor on behalf of the family to set up some appropriate involvement."

One of several congregation members who expressed similar sentiments wrote that it seemed "appropriate and helpful for former ministers to attend funerals." Another respondent wrote of her disappointment when her dearly loved pastor of some twenty years did not attend her husband's funeral.

defined by the conference, and in some instances, I think these are too strong. I would want her to have been free to come when beloved members have died.”

This wide consensus drawn from unsolicited comments was striking. It convinces me that this is an important area that needs to be thoughtfully considered, particularly by successor pastors who best know under what circumstances the former pastor’s presence would be called for and who are the appropriate initiators of such an invitation.

### **Collegiality between Former and Successor Pastors**

At least 50 percent of all clergy respondents were very satisfied with their working relationship with the other pastor involved in the transition, and at least

95 percent of the interim and successor pastors were at least okay with that relationship. A few former pastors, however, recalled much better relationships with their predecessors in previous transitions and had hoped for that kind of relationship with their successors and former congregations when they themselves left.

I computed a former/successor engagement score based on the type and frequency of contacts between former and successor pastors to look more closely at these relationships. The average score for former pastors and successor pastors was nearly three times the average score for interim pastors, perhaps because there is more time for the longer-term pastors to develop a relationship.

For former pastors, there was a strong correlation between the former/successor relationship score and their overall satisfaction with the transition. For interim pastors, there was a very small correlation between the former/successor relationship score and their overall satisfaction with the transition. For successor pastors, there was a small negative correlation between the former/successor relationship score and overall satisfaction with the transition. Although it is important to remember that correlation suggests some kind of relationship or influence but in no way proves cause, the former/successor relationship is clearly more important to former pastors than it is to interim or successor pastors.

When asked if there were specific courtesies or actions performed by their colleague—predecessor or successor—that the respondent would recommend to other pastors, successor pastors most appreciated:

- The former pastor’s support for the successor’s ministry, demonstrated in actions such as leaving a file, making introductions to people, conveying a public attitude of approval, offering advice when asked, serving as a consultant when needed, and being clear about plans and intentions
- Maintaining good boundaries by not interfering, refusing requests for pastoral services, and calling ahead of time when coming to the congregation
- Former pastor appreciated actions such as these:
  - Being called about deaths of long-time members and staff
  - Experiencing some collaboration in the transition process and having the opportunity to offer clarification and support to their successor
  - Being invited and welcomed on occasion to participate in an event at their former congregation

..

As highlighted by the numerous responses to Barnes's "Pastor, Not Friend" column, continuing friendships is a dicey issue. Responses to the Pastoral Transitions Survey suggest that pastors are commonly friends with former parishioners. The average former pastor has about six close friends from her former parish. These appear to be a natural extension of friendships developed during a pastorate and do not seem to be a problem for either congregational member or successor pastor respondents, as long as the former pastor's new role is understood and good boundaries are maintained regarding the current life and leadership of the congregation.

Although only former pastors were asked about continuing friendships, a number of comments by other respondents reflected general acceptance of these relationships. Contrary to the wisdom I have inherited and much of the literature I reviewed, congregational members in this survey did not seem to resent the fact that their former minister occasionally sees other members as friends. They seem to take that for granted. One member who was "highly satisfied" with the transition wrote:

I have not had any engagement with the former pastors in my church setting, although I have seen one of them in other settings and have heard about her life from people who were better friends with her than I was. These communications were entirely private and appropriate, as this former pastor is well aware and schooled in boundary issues.

Another member respondent who is friends with a former pastor of her congregation wrote, "I do have an ongoing relationship with the former pastor but never discuss the current pastor." The most memorable comment from all the surveys was, "Whenever asked about the congregation, the former pastor always responds, 'Isn't it a beautiful day?'"

Successor pastors also did not seem to experience stress about these relationships, as noted by this suburban pastor: "The first long-term pastor ... remained somewhat in contact with a few members of the church. This was not deleterious to the ministry of the church." An interim pastor commented, "There may be some communication from a long distance but not in any way that is interfering in the life of the congregation."

All such acceptance evaporates when the former pastor does not scrupulously maintain pastoral-transition boundaries. Unbounded personal relationships with former members can cause great harm to congregations and successor ministries, which is, I suspect, why a more cut-and-dried, "no contacts" interpretation of the guidelines is tempting.

So how do we respond to the friends-with-former-members quandary? It depends. It depends on the health and maturity of the pastor and those with whom she or he is engaged, and how well the necessary boundaries are understood and followed by all concerned. It depends on the nature, history, conduct, and focus of the friendship, and the member-friend's relationship and commitment to the congregation and its new leader. Such friendships can probably never be without risk and misunderstandings. Attempting to follow a blanket "no contacts" policy, however, also involves losses, costs, and pain for all concerned.

## Final Words

Every pastoral transition involves a unique history, present circumstances, and personalities. Although policies and procedures are essential for effective planning, administration, and training, they need to be thoughtfully, not blindly, applied. Openness and clear communications build trust, reduce anxiety, and engender support. Triangulated inquiring, sharing, and advocacy are deadly.

Professional competence and personal self-awareness are critical for successful pastoral transitions. Stated conversely, no number of wise policies, good intentions, and careful preparations can protect a



unstable participants. This reality underscores the importance of denominational screening and monitoring of authorized ministers in the congregation and the promotion of healthy behaviors in every aspect of congregational life, including the relationship between former pastors and congregations.

## Notes

1. M. Craig Barnes, "Pastor, Not Friend," Faith Matters, *The Christian Century*, January 9, 2013, [www.christiancentury.org/article/2012-12/pastor-not-friend](http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2012-12/pastor-not-friend).
2. Edward A. White. *Saying Goodbye: A Time of Growth for Congregations and Pastors* (Washington DC: Alban Institute, 1990), 98-99.
3. Frederick Lucian Hosmer, "Forward Through the Ages," *The United Methodist Hymnal*, #555.

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## **What's Next? From Ralph and Carol**

We want to thank you for all your kind words as we announced our retirement. We love this congregation and we are grateful for each of you. "But, what's next?" you may ask. In part the answer is, an amazing future! On the way to that there will be many emotions, lots of hard work, and the presence and power of God to guide, help and strengthen us all.

You are a strong congregation with people who have many and varied gifts. The leaders during this time are skilled and experienced. We have great confidence in each of you.

Another answer to that "What's next?" question is that for these eight months we go forward with our worship and work. We mourn and laugh, we succeed and fail, we trust and doubt, we work and rest, we continue to work together to make our lives, families, church and community better places where the love, justice and peace of God shine through.

Some of the work the congregation will be doing involves selecting what's called an Interim Pastor to minister to and with you during this transition time. Interim Pastors are trained in the process of change. During the time that the Interim Pastor is here, a Search Committee of people representing various aspects of the congregation will guide the process of looking for what is sometimes called the "Settled Pastor" or the "Long-term Pastor." In addition to the strong lay leadership here at FCC, the Wisconsin Conference U.C.C. Conference Minister, Franz Rigert, will be supporting and helping with the process, and help is also available from the N.A.C.C.C. (National Association of Congregational Christian Churches.)

"What's next?" also includes understanding how our relationships with you will be changing. We'll be writing articles and sharing in worship more details about what this means, including sharing with you Ethical Guidelines from the Northeast Association we will be using to guide us. Meanwhile, we hope you will feel free to ask us or any of the leadership team questions you may have. And - meanwhile - let us continue celebrating the past, looking to the future and cherishing the present. God is indeed good and will be with you and us, every step of the way!

2/2015

## **What's Next? Episode 2 From Ralph and Carol**

First of all, thank you for all your kind words, hugs, sharing tears and prayers since we announced our retirement! We are marvelously blessed!

*Previously on ~~Downton Abbey~~. . . er, we mean What's Next? We ended our article in February's Tidings this way: "What's next?" also includes understanding how our relationships with you will be changing. We'll be writing articles and sharing in worship more details about what this means, including sharing with you Ethical Guidelines from the Northeast Association we will be using to guide us. So let us continue celebrating the past, looking to the future and cherishing the present. God is indeed good and will be with you and us, every step of the way!*

Now for more information!

Picture yourself in your primary care physician's office waiting to see your new doctor because your previous doctor of 27 years retired. The new doctor comes in and behind her sneaks in your previous doctor who proceeds to stand in the corner of the room and from time to time make suggestions to the new doctor about your care. In fact, your retired doctor even offers to do the procedure your new doctor is recommending. Awkward? Yes! In appropriate? Certainly. Unethical? For sure!

It can be hard to understand why the ethical guidelines we are given to follow say: *When a clergy person has concluded ministry with a congregation, that person is no longer authorized to preform pastoral services for members of the former congregation. To do so is a violation of ministerial ethics and*

*can damage the integrity, growth, and health of the local church.* But these guidelines have been thoughtfully and prayerfully developed through much experience. We will be sharing more in the future. And you can read the full document at our church's website under the Ethical Guidelines link. There are also hard copies in the church office. Please help yourself.

We know each of you (and we, too!) want nothing but God's best for the future of the ministries of this church. So as difficult as some of the changes might be for all of us, let us look to the future with hope in God's powerful, loving, dependable and creative Spirit to guide and support us!

If you have questions, please contact us, or your Moderator, Cathy Wille. And may we all make the most of this time of transition, remembering that, "Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end." (attributed to Seneca the Younger and used in the song *Closing Time*).

3/2015

## FROM RALPH AND CAROL EPISODE 3

We, along with all of you, are looking ahead to the future with questions about our personal lives and questions about FCC. We have been thinking about the role courage plays in times of transition in our individual lives and in our shared life. We found this poem to be helpful. We hope you do too.

### **Courage**

Courage is the strength to stand up  
When it's easier to fall down and lose hold.

It is the conviction to explore new horizons  
When it's easier to believe what we've been told.

Courage is the desire to maintain our integrity  
When it's easier to look the other way.

It is feeling happy and alive, and moving forward  
When it's easier to feel sorry for ourselves and stay.

Courage is the will to shape our world  
When it's easier to let someone else do it for us.

It is the recognition that none of us are perfect  
When it's easier to criticize others and fuss.

Courage is the power to step forward and lead  
When it's easier to follow the crowd; their pleas resound.

It is the spirit that places you on top of the mountain  
When it's easier to never leave the ground.

The foundation of courage is solid,  
The rock that doesn't roll.

Courage is the freedom  
Of our mind, body, and soul! [Author Unknown]

So with courage and hope, let us continue celebrating the past, looking to the future and cherishing the

present. God is indeed good and will be with you and us, every step of the way! Take courage!

## **We're Transitioning...**

As most everyone now knows, our beloved Ralph & Carol are retiring in September. A BIG change for FCC, for sure. Finding an interim pastor, and later a settled, or permanent pastor (or co-pastors) will be a long, arduous, but thoughtful process – one during which we will seek your input and keep you apprised every step of the way. Here's the progress we've made so far.

You may have noticed colored boxes around the church asking you to express what qualities you wish to see in our Interim Pastor and our next permanent pastor. We thank those of you who have taken the time to let us know what's important to you! Those desired qualities have been passed on to the Leadership Team who will make sure we will get the best match for the Interim Pastor.

On February 12 a number of folks, including representatives from Ministry Council, the various ministry groups, and other interested parties, met for a potluck and informal meet & greet with Rev. Franz Rigert, the UCC-Wisconsin Conference minister who will be working with us as staff support during this transition process.

Following a light dinner, Franz explained the process upon which we are embarking and what kind of support he and the Wisconsin Conference are able to offer. Among the topics he discussed were the fact that anxiety is normal and to be expected during this time; and why we will select an interim clergy first.

While the entire process of finding a new pastor(s) could last 12-18 months, the selection of an interim will happen more quickly. Still, the length of time this process takes allows us plenty of time to pause and reflect, to write a church profile, review applications and conduct interviews. There currently is a small pool of available interim pastors, but because of our dual affiliation with both the National Association of Continuing Congregational Churches and the United Church of Christ, it is possible we may receive pastor profiles from outside of UCC. Franz will screen those for us but selection committees will receive all profiles to vet through themselves during this serious and meticulous nationwide search.

Franz answered many questions during his time with us that evening and gave those present a general feeling of security and hopefulness, despite this being a rather anxious time.

Those attending then created a list of the qualities they would like to see in the people making up the Interim Pastor Selection Committee. In the weeks that followed a committee has been selected and at its March meeting the Ministry Council approved the following committee persons: Stan Ziblut, Cathy Wille, Rebecca Robe, Len Tews, Mike Ford and Zoe Bossert.

A Transitions Task Force has also been developed, made up of Sarah Jaschob, Cathy Wille, Lorie Yaste-Zajicek, Pat Blades, Cheryl Hentz, Kay Sanders and Dennis Kavanaugh. These folks will be serving in a number of capacities during this transition period, including planning a farewell for Ralph & Carol, planning a reception for the Interim and Settled pastor(s), once selected, serving as liaison for staff and church members who have concerns or questions, and maintaining regular communication to members and friends, as the process continues.

Ralph and Carol will also be continuing to keep us abreast of what happening with regular updates in Tidings. They have already begun to “step back” a bit on some areas of ministry in order to provide some of the beginning stages of the transition process that will take place more fully in September. One area in which they are stepping back a bit is administration, however, please rest assured that worship leadership,

pastoral care and supporting the Leadership Team remain priorities for their time and energy.

We want to keep you in the loop at every turn and will let you know what's happening as there are things to report. If we don't report something in a given month, it's not that we're not working hard during this process; it's just that there's nothing significant to share with you. In the meantime, if you have questions or concerns, you are welcome to contact the church office and you will be directed to the proper person.

To quote a beloved classic hymn — “The church's one foundation, is Jesus Christ her Lord...” During this time of transition and all that goes with it, know that with Jesus Christ as our foundation, we have the strength and ability to get through this process; and with the foundation that Ralph & Carol have also so beautifully and devotedly laid, we are equipped to work cohesively as the church family we are and will come out stronger and better prepared to face the future here at FCC.

4/2015

## **Transition Questions**

By Cathy Wille

As I sit contemplating “transitions” at the FCC Women's Retreat, I have become acutely aware of how hard it is to focus during times of change. I am also reminded by the questions that have come to me regarding FCC's transition time, that it is hard to remember all the details and the answers to things that are happening during this transition time. The most frequently asked questions of me and of Carol and Ralph, concern the “Separation Ethics”. The information regarding that document has been shared with us and is found on our website and there still are a lot of questions about what it is and what it means. And, probably, because all the transition information is a lot to take in and it is hard to focus, it appears some of us didn't see or maybe didn't understand what that document means to us as members of FCC.

People ask, “are these guidelines for real?” Yes they are. Carol and Ralph have reflected on the need for these guidelines so eloquently in a previous newsletter. The more recent questions people ask concern the ways they could get around these guidelines: What if we chose to get married in the park rather than in FCC's sanctuary, can Carol and Ralph marry us? No. What if we have our funeral at the funeral home can we invite Carol and Ralph to perform the ceremony? No.

I decided to share with you a perspective not as a fellow parishioner, but as part of a clergy family who has been on the other side of this issue. When Art left our previous church, as pastor, people would call and ask us the same questions. Every time Art had to say “no” it broke his heart. His head said “no” because it is the right thing to say, but you need to know that his heart wanted to say “yes”. He loved his parishioners as Carol and Ralph love all of you.

So, it is important for you to know, that if you love Carol and Ralph, you will not ask these questions of them, because I'm sure, like other pastors put in this position, every time someone asks these “but, if” questions, and Carol and Ralph have to say “no” it breaks their hearts.

### **A Note from Ralph and Carol**

We thank Cathy Wille for this thoughtful article related to this time of transition.

5/2015

## **More Transition Questions**

By Ralph and Carol



As people have been learning about the Separation Ethics for our retirement, some of you have been asking about funerals. As you know, we will not be “coming back” to perform Pastoral functions after September 15. Some of you have been wondering and worrying about a loved one’s funeral, or your own funeral. You may wonder, “How can the interim pastor possibly know us well enough to conduct a personal funeral or memorial service?”

We understand the concern, as the service at the time of death is a time when people need and deserve good pastoral care. And it can be very helpful if the pastor leading that service and comforting family and friends knows the family well.

There was, as you know, a time when **we** were new at FCC, and did not know people for whom we conducted funeral services. We needed to spend careful time and attention getting to know the family and talking to friends of the one who has died. We expect the Interim and Settled Pastors will know this. And it might be helpful for you to know that even when we have known the deceased for many years, in preparing for the service we do not rely only on our personal knowledge. We meet with loved ones to hear their stories, to ask what sort of service – what tone, what content – they would want. We encourage members of the family to speak at the service, and if they are not comfortable doing that we speak on their behalf, reflecting what they have told us about their loved one.

There are some traditions where funeral services can be very impersonal. That is not the case in our tradition. Just as we have sought to make these important times both spiritual and personal, so too will the clergy who come to serve you in the coming months and years. They will care for you by learning about your loved one who has passed by talking with you, just as we have done.

Then too, you can always write down instructions about your service – its location, what you want included (or excluded!), the tone of the service, music, readings and people you would invite to speak – information to be shared with the pastor leading the service. You can have that planning placed on file at the church, and/or give it to a trusted person to keep until it is needed. Forms for this purpose are available from the church’s website homepage under the “Get Involved” tab or by calling Cynthia Hunt in the church office.

While we understand that the leadership, structure and tone of the service, and especially the eulogy, are important, what in the end will matter most is the family of the deceased caring for each other through that difficult time. That encouraging, comforting love of family and friends will happen, no matter who is conducting the service.

6/2015

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about FCC Transition**

Here are some of the most-asked questions of the Transition Task Force and staff surrounding the upcoming retirement of co-pastors Ralph and Carol DiBiasio-Snyder. If you have a question, please look here first to see if it has already been asked by someone else and answered. If it has, we hope the answer sufficiently answers your question. If not, or if you have some other question not listed here, please contact Sarah Jaschob, facilitator and chair of the Transition Task Force (Sjaschob@gmail.com), and we will get an answer for you.

**Q.** Once retired, are Ralph and/or Carol allowed to perform weddings for church members or others affiliated with FCC, if they take place somewhere other than FCC?

**A.** Unfortunately, no. Nor are they allowed under ethical guidelines to do funerals/memorial services, baptisms, or other kinds of pastoral duties or performing of Sacraments for FCC members or others affiliated with the church. By refraining from performing those kinds of services for us, they are allowing the interim and settled pastors to develop relationships with people in the church. Please understand that it is Ralph’s and Carol’s nature to want to say “yes” to these kinds of requests, but ethically they cannot do

that. So, please, because we all love them and don't want to make them uncomfortable or put them on the spot, do not ask them to perform any of these kinds of services.

**Q.** Are Ralph and Carol allowed to have any contact with people in the congregation outside of church?

**A.** Yes, if they choose to; and they will decide who they want to maintain contact with, and in which manner, once they retire. They just cannot discuss church business of any kind. But by all means, if you see them at places in the community, feel free to say hello and speak with them. Just don't discuss the church, please.

**Q.** What is the process for finding a new pastor?

**A.** It's a two-step process. The first step is finding and selecting an interim pastor. The Selection Committee that will make a recommendation of an Interim Pastor to the Ministry Council has been appointed and at work since April. They are in the process of receiving applications and preparing themselves for the interview process. The best possible scenario is for the Ministry Council to approve an appointment sometime in August and for the Interim to begin the Sunday after Ralph and Carol have preached their last Worship Service. The second step would be for church leadership to constitute a Search Committee for the settled (permanent) pastor(s). That process is similar to that of the Interim, however, will understandably take longer and be more involved. It could take as much as 18 months or so. It is also important to note that, while many churches, especially those within specific denominations, have pastors "called" and selected for them, we in UCC select our own. This is a task that the Ministry Council is currently undertaking.

**Q.** Why are we not working on both processes at the same time so the time frame doesn't have to be so drawn out?

**A.** We will learn things about ourselves as a congregation when Ralph and Carol leave and we will see things we might want to do a little differently, or things we might want to keep the same. It is good to have time to analyze all these things and to try doing both processes at the same time would shortchange us as a faith community. By giving us the necessary time to see who we are without Ralph and Carol we will know better the type of person or persons we want filling the settled pastor role.

**Q.** Will we have one pastor or a co-pastorship like we currently have?

**A.** It is hard to know at this point. We were extremely fortunate to have found such a wonderful team in Ralph and Carol that we could hire them as co-pastors. That situation also exists within other churches, too, but it is not the norm. The reality is we may only have one pastor when this process is completed, but no duties will be unfulfilled as a result. Remember, Ralph and Carol share the job that one pastor would normally so, as well as sharing the salary, benefits, etc.

**Q.** Are we paying Carol and Ralph until the end of December (the calendar year) and, if so, doesn't that mean we'll be paying them as well as an interim pastor?

**A.** Ralph and Carol's contract with the church will be complete in the middle of September and all pay and benefits will also terminate in September. So we will only be paying for one pastor's salary once Ralph and Carol leave, not theirs as well as an interim's.

**Q.** Why do we need to have an Interim?

**A.** Using the time in between hiring an interim and bringing in the Settled Pastor gives us in the

congregation time to grieve our loss and get to who it is we are without Ralph and Carol. It is likely we will learn something about ourselves without them and under the leadership of an interim; that will all help guide us to a permanent pastor.

**Q.** Can the interim be a settled pastor?

**A.** No. Interim Ministers have a code of ethics which states that they will not apply or agree to serve as the settled pastor. Additionally, the tasks for the two kinds of pastors are somewhat different, so they should be different pastors. Only in rare situations has an interim become the settled pastor.

**Q.** How long will the interim be here?

**A.** It is hard to say for certain, but we anticipate the interim pastor will be with us for approximately 1-and-a-half years.

**Q.** Who is on the Interim Search Committee?

**A.** The Interim Search Committee is comprised of a variety of people who belong to First Congregational Church. In naming committee members, we tried to find people of different ages, different life stories, different career paths, etc. Having a lot of diversity on the committee allows each person to bring their own skills, experiences and viewpoints to the table. Below please find the members and a little about each of them

**Michael Ford**

My name is Michael Ford and I have attended FCC with my wife Allyson, and sons Charlie (5) and John (3), since moving to Oshkosh about two years ago. I also currently serve on the FCC finance committee. My family and I are ecstatic we have found a church that is so welcoming, and dedicated to fostering the spiritual development of our young children.

**Len Tews**

I have been participating in the men's discussion group. I am a retired biology professor from UW-O and consider myself to be a liberal Christian.

**Cathy Wille**

I am pleased to have joined this wonderful congregation 10 years ago at the invitation of three members of the church. I have facilitated the Music Ministry Group and am presently serving as Moderator, High School Sunday School teacher with my husband, Art, and sing in the choir. I have served the United Church of Christ in various capacities at the local, Association, Conference and National level. I am honored to serve in this capacity to help ensure the future mission of our congregation.

**Stan Ziblut**

Taught for 18 years. Left teaching to enter the financial field. Retired Jan. 1 2015 from a financial planning firm I founded 30 years ago. My son, Steve, has taken over my clients as of Jan. 1. My wife, Barbara, and I joined First Congregational 8 years ago. We found First Congregational to be very receptive, and really felt that this congregation can rely on its own decision-making, rather than being dictated to by some powers from afar.

**Zoe Bossert**

My name is Zoe Bossert and I'm a sophomore at Oshkosh North High School. Outside of school I have a few jobs that include: Lifeguarding at the YMCA, waitressing at the EIUS Club and also volunteering at Mercy Medical Center. I also love singing in choir at school and with the Lawrence Girl Choir, along with the school musicals and plays. I am so happy to be part of the decision-making process of hiring an Interim

Minister, and hope that I can bring something new to the table.

### **Rebecca Robe**

My name is Rebecca Robe. I am employed for ThedaCare at Appleton Medical Center as an MRI technologist. I have been a member of FCC since 1995, and am the mom to two (wonderful) daughters--Kiera, 16, and Sianna, 11. We actively participate in the ministries FCC has to offer. I serve on the usher team, teach Sunday school rotations, and facilitate the flower delivery to our homebound members. I also served a term on the Fellowship committee. As a family we enjoy hosting coffee hour and serving as greeters. One of the things I appreciate about FCC is the many ways the youth are invited to be truly active in their faith community. Kiera will be confirmed soon, but has already been an active member of the church through the youth group activities, volunteering at Servapalooza, and summer mission trips. Sianna, too, has been active in youth group, service opportunities, angel choir, and has developed some wonderful friendships within the church, including several who are decades older than herself. I agreed to serve on this committee because I appreciate all the opportunities for personal growth FCC has provided my family and me. It is important to me that the legacy of FCC as a vibrant, open and affirming church that is focused on serving the community is carried into the future.

If your question has not been answered fully or you have a question that isn't here, please email your questions or concerns to Sarah, at [Sjaschob@gmail.com](mailto:Sjaschob@gmail.com). You're also invited to come to the summer listening sessions facilitated by Art and Cathy Wille. One session will be held in July and August.

7/2015

## **INTERIM SELECTION COMMITTEE MOVES FORWARD**

The Interim Selection Committee is now in the interviewing stage. We are pleased to have several candidates who are interested in serving our congregation. The interviews are taking place in the next several weeks. After we check references we will be making our decision and hope to bring the name of the candidate to the Ministry Council mid-August. We would ask that all members keep our committee members in your prayers as we discern who it is that will serve as our pastor on the next leg of our journey.

8/2015

### ***Dear Members and Friends of FCC,***

The Interim Selection Committee is pleased to announce that Rev. Dr. Jack Seville has agreed to serve as our interim until we are ready to call a settled pastor. The Ministry Council met on Sunday, August 21<sup>st</sup> and voted to accept the recommendation of the Interim Selection Committee. Rev. Dr. Jack Seville moved to Oshkosh in April of this year so that he and his wife, Fanny, can be closer to their children and grandchildren.

After his move here he left for several months to travel to Tennessee to be in a professional play about the Scope's Trial that was performed in the very courtroom in which the original trial took place. The play was completed at the end of July and he is now back to establish his life in his new home and community. He appeared in Oliver with his daughter and grandchild at the Grand Opera House in Oshkosh and will soon be appearing at the Grand in the play, "You Can't Take it With You" in which he plays the "ice man". So, he already has started to put down roots in the community.

The following information is taken from his professional profile and will help you to know a little about

Jack.

**My sense of being called by God and the church to authorized ministry:**

Since my ordination fifty-one years ago I have sought to carry forth as faithfully as I have been able ministry on behalf of the United Church of Christ that reflects the following: 1. Proclamation of the Gospel 2. Love and Acceptance of All God's People 3. Integrity/Honesty/Soundness of Thought 4. Openness to God's Spirit and Call to serve whenever with whomever I find myself in ministry. Perhaps this why, as I look back, I rejoice that I have been called to serve as: 1. Pastor and Teacher in four different United Churches of Christ settings 2. Adjunct Professor of New Testament in a UCC related Seminary 3. On Conference and National Staffs of the UCC 4. And even as Senior Interim Pastor in a Disciples of Christ congregation. I have always been open to the musings of God's Holy Spirit in my openness to ministry opportunities. So, even at my advanced age, I pray that if it be God's will, I would be able to serve as needed.

**My concept of covenant and how it informs the nature, purpose and polity (governance) of the United Church of Christ:**

Ministry is never a solo act. It is always in community with others. Covenants strengthen and uphold trust so that all those who serve (clergy, lay, ecumenical partners) may proceed in the confidence that what is decided and done is ultimately for the good of all and not at the will of some. Although our polity (governance) is always evolving as a Church, its nature and purpose is to protect and assure that we, as a Church, remain faithful as possible in the face of ever changing challenges.

**I am passionate about:**

I am passionate about preaching and teaching. Regardless of my call throughout my lifetime of service I have never lost sight of the responsibilities undertaken at my ordination. In today's post-modern Church preaching and teaching require sound use not only of written resources, but of technological aides and advances. Each generation is called to make the faith its own, but it has been my observation that each generation does so in ways that are unique and different than its predecessors. Hence, pastors and teachers must adapt to changing times and ways of expressing the core values of Christian faith and practice. I am passionate about study and writing, leading and performing. But, I am committed to seeking ways to strengthen relationships and build community. To do such, in today's church, requires patience and endurance.

**Reflect on the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ:**

As I reflect upon a lifetime of ministry I cannot help but acknowledge that God has shaped me as a minister by many means and through many persons. Some of the means have been the very settings to which I gave myself as I served. These challenged views I held of myself when entering ministry and led to my development and growth as a minister. The persons with whom I have had the good fortune to have worked with over the years have each been instrumental in forging the kind of person I grew to be as a pastor and teacher of the Church. I believe that all of this has led me to be very open to and accepting of others wherever I have been. I value the opportunity to have served in a seminary setting where I could teach students who were in preparation for ministry. I value the particular settings of churches I was called to serve (suburban new church start, inner city congregation, large suburban congregations). I was placed in conference settings in Dakotas where I worked with four nations of Native Americans and local churches in the United States and Canada. (He was also the interim Conference Minister in Wisconsin.) Through our UCC partnerships with Churches in Germany, it has been my joy to visit with and speak to gatherings of theologians across Germany. And, following 9/11, I served the UCC as a "Crisis Minister" for eight months, visiting clergy and laity in 60 congregations from Fredericksburg, VA to Fairfield, CT seeking to comfort those who lost loved ones in the attacks. All of these experiences have taught me the profound

truth that Carl Jung had inscribed over the doorway of his home, "Called or Not, God is Present." In each of these places I found myself basically unprepared to do and be what I thought I going to accomplish. But through my trust in God's presence I was open to be of service in Christ's name.

### **His Addition comments:**

I know I am an older generation pastor. I can hardly believe it has been over fifty years since I was ordained by the Potomac Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church in western Maryland. But, as my grandson of twelve years said to me recently, "Papa, you are not a typical seventy year old!" I have stayed young in mind and heart in so many ways. I sing and act in musical theater. I have written four novels. I enjoy music and drama so very much. And, I have been known for years as a preacher who can break into singing at any moment while delivering a homily (sermon). I love and enjoy all kinds of people and have been blessed with the privilege of serving in so many diverse and unique settings of the UCC.

### **His Closing Thoughts:**

"I have the freedom to believe as I believe,  
You have the freedom to praise your God above.  
We have the freedom to sing praise with one another or to stand alone in wonder at the mystery of love.  
For love is the beginning  
or the ending,  
the source of life,  
and all eternity,  
the answer to the everlasting question,  
The light that shines in you and me."

These words, from the musical, FRONT PAGE NEWS, which is a play about the famous Scopes Trial in Rhea County TN in 1925, summarize my approach to the interface of progressive and conservative religious expression today.

Jack has agreed to start his pastorate on Monday, October 12<sup>th</sup> and his first Sunday to lead worship will Oct. 18<sup>th</sup>. During the four weeks in between Carol's and Ralph's leaving Ginnie Scherer and retired and neighboring clergy will be providing pastoral care and the Worship Committee will secure leadership for worship for intervening Sundays.

9/2015

## **Transitional Ministry Today: Successful Strategies for Churches and Pastors**

The Interim Selection Committee is so pleased that Rev. Jack Seville accepted our invitation to serve as interim pastor. Our hope is as we learn to know him we will appreciate his many gifts, talents and welcoming personality. As we anticipate his start-up on October 12<sup>th</sup>, the Interim Selection Committee would like to share with you the Focus Points we had identified that will guide our time together with Jack.

Those Focus Points are as follows:

- **Heritage**      *Remember, recognize & articulate the defining stories of*      *the community of faith*
- **Mission**      *The mission focus invites the congregation to address the*      *ways its core values and*



*processes can be productively*

*and naturally extended into the future*

- **Connections** *Discovering all the relationships a faith community builds outside of itself. Who is our neighbor?*
- **Leadership** *Reviewing the membership needs and its ways of organizing and developing new and effective leadership.*
- **Future** *The mandate is not for change per se, but for an ongoing and future-oriented expression of the congregation's core values, re-vision of the congregation's historic purpose, re-interpreted and updated in light of current realities and circumstances, probably results not in a wholly "new direction" so much as a faithful response to a revitalized sense of mission.*

I would like to personally thank the Interim Selection Committee for their time and commitment to that they gave to this important process.: Zoe Bossert, Mike Ford, Rebecca Robe, Len Tews and Stan Ziblut. The committee would like to thank the congregation for their prayers, patience, trust and support for them as they discerned who it is that will lead us for the next 12-18 months. FCC congregation members are a blessing to each other, to the community and beyond.

10/2015

## Summary and Findings: Study of Retiring Clergy Who Stay Put

Rev. Rob MacDougall's Doctoral Thesis

For as many as thirty years the United Church of Christ has recognized that at least one third of retiring clergy express an interest in and plan to remain living in the community of their last pastorate. Though there has been a general, often explicit, instruction given to retiring clergy at the time of retirement that they need to “pack their bags and get out of town,” a significant number of them, especially those retiring from long term pastorates, are clear that the place where they have ministered is also their home and members of the church their dearest friends. There are stories reported describing difficulties for succeeding clergy when retired ministers interfere with the life of a church and its ministry after their retirement. After years of ministry some retired clergy find it difficult or refuse to stop functioning as the pastor of their former church, even as they have retired. These two realities, clergy who want to remain in the community and clergy who “won’t let go” gave rise to my study and questions: “Can clergy remain in the community of their last pastorate and not cross ethical boundaries? and, if they can, are there characteristics and/or decisions that contribute to a healthy transition from active pastor to retired pastor in the community?”

First of all let me just state that the results of my study indicate that **for some clergy it is possible to remain in their community and keep ethical boundaries**. This is not true for all clergy, some have great difficulty with this change in their life while being in the midst of their former parishioners. It is also true that some churches and successor pastors are unable let the retired pastor transition and it results in the retired pastor needing to move. My research shows that what becomes possible is not just dependent on the retired pastor, she/he is part of a system of relationships and personalities whose dynamics are never in the hands of one person. A good predictor regarding a retired minister's healthy retirement in the community of their last pastorate is the health of the church and the minister during the pastorate. If the church and minister had good boundaries, and if the church and minister functioned in clear and supportive ways, then the possibility of the church and retired clergy transforming their relationship after retirement has a greater chance of succeeding.

I have compiled some characteristics common to healthy transformations for retired clergy and also some characteristics common to failed transformations. I will list these below, but before I do it seems helpful to say that all of the transitions are complicated and filled with various levels of emotional stress. It is also helpful to recognize that transitions, healthy or failed have unique dimensions – in some cases friendships can be maintained, in some cases participation in the in the church of the last pastorate can happen, in some cases the retired clergy and the successor can actually support each other. While transitioning and transforming is not easy work, the covenantal theology of the United Church of Christ embraces the diversity of experiences and paths of all people, including that of retired clergy's relationships to their community of faith.

### **Characteristics Common To Healthy Retirements**

- A formal, written announcement of resignation and retirement presented to the leadership of the church between three and fifteen months prior to the retirement
- There was an ending of ministry liturgy during an all-church worship service
- There was an ending of ministry celebration for the congregation, larger church, community, friends and family
- There was a period of complete separation between the retired pastor and the church of no less than eight months
- The spouse of the retiring clergy person took a leave from the church for the same period as their wife/husband
- A clear understanding on the part of the pastor and church members that the retiring person was no longer available for sacramental and pastoral duties, and most importantly the retired person acted according to this understanding
- Friendships between the retired pastor and church members were separate from the pastoral role
- The retired pastor was consistently supportive of their successor's ministry
- The retired pastor did not comment on the life of the church in the community or with church members
- An interim pastor had been hired for at least twelve months
- After a period of separation the retired pastor did not involve her/himself in the church without consultation and blessing of their successor
- Members of the church were able to clearly state that disagreements in the church could be openly discussed, that new solutions to struggles and change could emerge through open discussion, that the church's identity and mission did not center on the pastor
- The retired pastor and successor had personal qualities of spiritual maturity and differentiation

### **Characteristics of Failed Transition**

- Less than three months of separation between the retired pastor and church contact
- Lack of clarity regarding the retired person not being available for sacramental and pastoral care
- The church lacking an identity and mission separate from the pastor
- Adversarial relationship between the retired pastor and the interim pastor

These were the characteristics identified in my study, obviously there are more characteristics that might be identified. These characteristics can inform guidelines for retirement ethics, but in themselves they do not constitute guidelines. The realities of clergy retirement indicate a need for the larger church to work toward developing steps that can support healthy retirements for all clergy.