

## BEST PRACTICES FOR LEAVE OF ABSENCE

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE** is a form of “ministerial standing for an Ordained Minister experiencing a prolonged life season when they are neither seeking nor engaged in professional ministry. Such a season might include family leave to care for a new child or an aging parent, study leave to begin an academic program, vocational discernment when an individual reassesses their professional path, sick leave following a serious accident or health crisis, or other reasons.”<sup>1</sup> As a form of ministerial standing, Leave of Absence may be transferred between Associations.

Given the variety of circumstances occasioning a Leave of Absence, it is appropriate for the Ordained Minister and the Committee on Ministry to negotiate the specific terms of the leave using the Leave of Absence Covenant as a guide, and to review those commitments annually. Among the factors to be considered: the continued responsibility or temporary reprieve from standing requirements; authorization (or not) to provide pulpit supply, celebrate sacraments, officiate weddings or funerals; participation on boards or committees related to ministry; and any other relevant consideration. While the Committee on Ministry is encouraged to let the Ordained Minister take the lead on this, sharing their capacity and desire regarding the terms of a Leave of Absence, this is balanced alongside the Committee on Ministry’s appropriate need for continued oversight of the Ordained Minister.

An Ordained Minister on a Leave of Absence is still subject to the oversight of a Committee on Ministry, and at a minimum is required to do the following:

- maintain an active membership in a UCC congregation;
- be responsive to communication from the Association and Conference, including completing the Annual Information Review Form.
- attend the annual meeting of the Association and Conference when possible; and
- communicate at least annually with the Committee on Ministry regarding the Leave of Absence.

At their annual check-in with the Committee on Ministry, ministers on a leave of Absence should communicate about the functions of ministry they have been involved in during this Leave and their plans for returning to ministry (if known).

Leave of Absence is not indicated for someone actively seeking a call, particularly in the first few months of a search. If an individual is in active search for more than one year, a pastoral conversation with the Ordained Minister and the Committee on Ministry is appropriate, to offer continued vocational support for the individual.

Leave of Absence is not appropriate to use to prevent or as a part of a Fitness Review or other accountability process, nor does it serve the same purpose as a program of growth related to a Fitness Review or other oversight process. Finally, Leave of Absence is distinct

from and not related to a ministry setting's decision to place an Ordained Minister on administrative leave from employment for any reason.

A minister with Ordained Ministerial Standing requests a Leave of Absence in writing to the Committee on Ministry where they hold ministerial standing. In conversation with the Committee, expectations for the duration of the Leave of Absence are outlined, including:

- The Ordained Minister's continued responsibility for or temporary leave from such standing requirements as boundary training, continuing education, or diversity/anti-racism training;
- The Ordained Minister's ongoing relationship with their Local Church of membership;
- The Ordained Minister's authorization (or not) to provide pulpit supply, preside over Sacraments, officiate at weddings and funerals, etc.
- The agreed-upon method for renewing Leave of Absence annually (up to five years) and the next steps for both the Ordained Minister and the Committee on Ministry when Leave of Absence comes to an end.

An Ordained Minister on a Leave of Absence meets annually with the Committee on Ministry, and the Ordained Minister and Association's commitments of oversight continue while on a Leave of Absence. At the conclusion of the Leave of Absence the Ordained Minister may request in writing to the Committee that they return to active ministerial standing in order to seek a call or resign standing without bias.