
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR ADMINISTRATION OF
ORDAINED MINISTERIAL STANDING
LIVING WATERS ASSOCIATION, NEBRASKA CONFERENCE

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INTRODUCTION

In the history of the Church and in the confidence of God’s call upon the lives of some persons to be set apart by the laying on of hands “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12), the commitment of an Ordained Minister to God in Jesus Christ and to the Church is prescribed and held accountable by the relationship of Ordained Ministerial Standing. Ordained Ministerial Standing is the formal ecclesial relationship by which an Ordained Minister may represent the United Church of Christ to the Body of Christ and to the wider world. Through Ordained Ministerial Standing, the Ordained Minister demonstrates commitment to view their ministry as part of the whole ministry of the United Church of Christ and, in turn, the United Church of Christ (through the Association) commits to an Ordained Minister and claims their ministry as its own. An Association through its Committee on Ministry¹ grants and holds Ministerial Standing; an Ordained Minister maintains Standing in the Association where the Ordained Minister keeps their Local Church membership. Ministerial Standing

¹ The Living Waters Association’s Church and Ministry Committee (C&M) is a form of a Committee on Ministry in the United Church of Christ. For the purposes of this document, the general term “Committee on Ministry” is understood to mean the Church and Ministry Committee of the Living Waters Association. For simplicity, this document also refers a Committee on Ministry (and therefore the Church and Ministry Committee) as “the Committee.”

may be held in only one Association at a time. For Ordained Ministers serving as settled or designated Local Church pastors, membership belongs in the congregation they are pastoring and Standing belongs in the Association of that Local Church. For Ordained Ministers serving in specialized settings, interim ministries, or ministries that are not geographically bound, Ministerial Standing is held by the Association where the Ordained Minister has a Local Church membership.²

LOCAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND ASSOCIATION STANDING

Ordained Ministerial Standing must be transferred between Associations when an Ordained Minister moves Local Church membership across Association boundaries, regardless of whether the Minister has a new call, is on Leave of Absence, or is actively seeking a call. An Ordained Minister who is undergoing a Fitness Review is not allowed by the United Church of Christ to transfer Ministerial Standing. Upon the outcome of a Fitness Review, an Ordained Minister who is censured with a Program of Growth, suspended, or terminated is similarly not allowed by the United Church of Christ to transfer Ministerial Standing until the Program of Growth is complete and Ministerial Standing reaffirmed.

Because all Ordained Ministers must have active membership and participation in a UCC Local Church to maintain their Standing, it is the expectation that all Ordained Ministers will hold Standing in that Local Church's Association. The Living Waters Association recognizes that the 2018 Manual on Ministry states that Exempt Standing is the only form of Ministerial Standing in which Local Church membership can be held outside of the Association where Standing is located. However, the Living Waters Association, alongside other Associations throughout the United Church of Christ, has discerned that all Ordained Ministers with Exempt Standing residing outside of the Association will be required to transfer their Standing to the Association of the Local Church near where they now reside so that covenantal oversight and support may be provided by a closer Association.

Ordained Ministers with Exempt Standing in other Associations who now reside and have membership in a Local Church of the Living Waters Association are strongly encouraged to transfer Standing to the Association so that connection, support, relationship, and covenantal accountability can best be offered.

MUTUAL RELATIONSHIPS AND MINISTERIAL STANDING (ACTIVE)

Ordained Ministerial Standing is a mutual relationship with defined systems of support and accountability that the Ordained Minister and Association engage together. This relationship promotes an Ordained Minister's ongoing development in the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers and their faithful adherence to the UCC Ministerial Code.³

All Ordained Ministers are expected to

- Maintain UCC Local Church Membership.
- Adhere to the UCC Ministerial Code.
- Participate in oversight with the Committee on Ministry.
- Complete and submit the "Annual Information Review" yearly.

² Manual on Ministry, United Church of Christ, 2018, pg 51.

³ Manual on Ministry, 2018, pg 52.

- Participate in Vocational Support (such as a Situational Support Consultation or Fitness Review) when requested by the Committee.
- Participate in the life of the Association and Conference.
- Maintain or transfer their Ministerial Standing in the Association in which their Local Church Membership is held unless prohibited by current oversight of a committee.
- Complete continuing education requirements as outlined by Association policy.
- Complete and maintain boundary training requirements as outlined by Association policy.

Please note that “retired” is a word with financial and employment connotations; it is not an ecclesial term and it is not a form of ecclesiastical Standing in the United Church of Christ. Ministers who identify as “retired” might be employed or not, might be drawing an annuity or not; however, all Ministers must still adhere to the requirements of Ordained Ministerial Standing (Active) as set forth by their Association’s Committee, unless they have requested and been granted Exempt Standing.

Ordained Ministerial Standing includes voting privileges in the Association and Conference where the Ordained Minister holds Standing. All individuals with Ministerial Standing in the United Church of Christ are obligated to meet the requirements of Standing and to engage the processes of support and accountability even when a Three- or Four-Way Covenant is not engaged, regardless of whether they are employed, professionally retired, or between calls.

Any Minister holding Dual Standing, Privilege of Call, or Ordained Ministerial Partner is required to adhere to the requirements of this category of Ministerial Standing.

ADDITIONAL STANDINGS FOR LIFE’S VOCATIONAL SEASONS

During vocational seasons when an Ordained Minister steps away intentionally from public ministry, Ordained Ministerial Standing may be categorized in one of two ways, as determined by mutual discernment between the Minister and the Committee, with different implications for oversight and transferability.

MUTUAL RELATIONSHIPS AND MINISTERIAL STANDING (LEAVE OF ABSENCE)

Leave of Absence is a type of Ministerial Standing for an Ordained Minister who is neither seeking nor engaged in professional ministry for a prolonged season. Reasons to request Leave of Absence are diverse, such as vocational discernment or major life event. Leave of Absence may be transferred between Associations. Responsibilities and permitted ministerial functions during Leave of Absence are established in conversation with the Committee where Ministerial Standing is held but may not negate the Ordained Minister’s or Association’s commitments of oversight. Leave of Absence temporarily modifies the expectations for the ecclesial relationship between the Ordained Minister and their Association in order to make room for life changes and/or vocational discernment. Leave of Absence should not exceed 5 years. Leave of Absence is not to be confused with administrative leave, which is an employment-related decision made by a calling body to remove someone from an employment context or contract for a duration of time.

The Minister requesting Leave of Absence must first complete an application and then submit it to the Committee on Ministry. The information will be reviewed by the Committee and the conditions of the Leave of Absence will be determined. The Minister, the Committee, and Church of Local Membership

then create and sign a Covenant of Mutual Accountability which will be entered in the Minister's file. The Minister's Covenant outlines the expectations of the Minister, Association, and Local Church during Leave of Absence.

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

MUTUAL RELATIONSHIPS AND MINISTERIAL STANDING (EXEMPT STANDING)

Exempt Standing is a Ministerial Standing for Ordained Ministers who continue to affirm their ordination and commitment to the United Church of Christ, but who choose to no longer (or are no longer able to) engage in public ministry and do not plan to reengage in public ministry in the future. This choice may be the result of vocational discernment as an Ordained Minister ends their ministry career and wider church engagement, the result of a significant change in health that ends their capacity for representative servant leadership on behalf of the United Church of Christ, or the result of other reasons.

Having discerned the need or readiness to set aside the public mantle of ministry, an Ordained Minister requests Exempt Standing and the release from the ongoing requirements of Ordained Ministerial Standing. The request for Exempt Standing should be considered with prayerful discernment by the Committee on Ministry alongside the Ordained Minister, as the granting of Exempt Standing is considered to be enduring—not a temporary season in one's career.

If the Ordained Minister and the Committee discern together that Exempt Standing is appropriate, then the Minister's Exempt Standing application will be finalized as well as an Exempt Standing Covenant of Mutual Accountability created.

All Ordained Ministers with Exempt Standing are expected to

- Complete an Exempt Standing Application.
- Complete an Exempt Standing Covenant with the Association and Local Church wherein membership is held.
- Maintain Local Church membership.
- Adhere to the UCC Ministerial Code.
- Participate in oversight with the Committee on Ministry.
- Complete and submit the "Annual Information Review" yearly, unless excused by the Committee
- Participate in Vocational Support (such as a Situational Support Consultation or Fitness Review) when requested by the Committee.
- Maintain or transfer Ministerial Standing in the Association in which their Local Church membership is held unless prohibited by current oversight of a Committee on Ministry.

Although rare, reinstatement to Ordained Ministerial Standing may be requested by an Ordained Minister who has been granted Exempt Standing. Before reinstating Ordained Ministerial Standing, the Committee seeks evidence of the Ordained Minister's current adherence to the requirements of Ordained Ministerial Standing (such as up-to-date boundary training, continuing education, and cultural diversity training), and engages the Ordained Minister in discernment conversations regarding the Minister's desire to return to public ministry. The Committee may grant or deny the request for reinstatement.

WHEN REQUIREMENTS FOR STANDING ARE NOT MET

PROCESSES FOR NOTIFICATION, SUSPENSION, TERMINATION

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ORDINATION AND STANDING

It is understood in the United Church of Christ that a spiritual call to ministry comes from God. This divine call cannot be removed or altered. Nevertheless, Standing within a particular Association, or Conference acting as an Association, indicates authorization for ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. Ministerial Standing is a privilege and not a right in the United Church of Christ.

Standing is a designation that denotes that one is practicing true covenant with the Wider Church and has met the requirements and expectations of the body that has granted the privilege of Standing. Thus, Standing can be removed if one is no longer practicing true covenant and is no longer in compliance with the requirements for maintaining Standing set forth by the Committee. These requirements and expectations best encourage the Minister's fitness for the ministry that God has called them toward.

Because we belong to God, we belong to one another. Because we belong to one another and to God, we are accountable to our covenantal relationships on earth as in heaven. The covenantal relationships between parts of the Body of Christ are characterized by mutuality, transparency, accountability, and a desire to represent Christ together. These characteristics are particularly essential to—and are to be practiced with prayerful intentionality by—those who are authorized to hold Standing and those who are entrusted with authorizing Ministers on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

Oversight by a Committee on Ministry, such as the Church and Ministry Committee, on behalf of the Association—with processes of support and accountability—is fundamental to all types of Ministerial Standing in covenant. Oversight serves to strengthen covenantal relationships, to provide relational support for those with Ministerial Standing as well as their ministry settings, to affirm or assess Standing, and to promote ongoing discernment of and suitability for continued ministerial authorization. The underlying goal of all forms of oversight is to support ministerial excellence throughout the United Church of Christ.

Persons with Ministerial Standing in the United Church of Christ are obligated to participate in an Association's processes of support and accountability in order to maintain Standing.⁴

PROCESS FOR NOTIFICATION

In the event that an Authorized Minister chooses not to fulfill the requirements to maintain Ministerial Standing or overlooks the request for such, the Committee will send a Certified letter and an email (if applicable) to the last known address of the Authorized Minister and their calling bodies.

The letter shall

- Indicate the requirements for Ministerial Standing.
- Indicate a date by which the requirements must be met.
- Provide an explanation that if the requirements are not met by that date, the Committee will suspend the Authorized Minister's Ministerial Standing.

⁴ Manual on Ministry, 2018, pg. 119.

PROCESS FOR SUSPENSION

In the event that an Authorized Minister makes the choice not to fulfill the requirements to maintain Ministerial Standing by the date set forth by the Committee, the Committee continues the process and votes to suspend the Authorized Minister's Standing. This decision is recorded in the Minister's file as well as the UCC's DataHub.

An important note about suspension: if Ministerial Standing is suspended, it is expected that they will refrain from all ministry-related activities, including service on Conference-wide committees or pulpit supply.⁵

At the time that an Authorized Minister's Standing is suspended, the Committee notifies both the Authorized Minister and their calling body of the decision, as well as any Association or Conference groups on which the Minister serves.

The letter should also clarify that for the duration of a suspension, the Minister may not represent themselves as serving on behalf of the United Church of Christ, and the Minister may not circulate a UCC Ministerial Profile.

The notification letter shall

- Specify what suspension of Ministerial Standing means.
- Indicate the requirements for Ministerial Standing.
- Indicate a date by which the requirements must be met.
- Provide an explanation that if the requirements are not met by that date, the Committee will terminate the Authorized Minister's Ministerial Standing.

If a suspended Minister completes the indicated requirements for renewal of Standing within the specified time frame, the suspension is lifted, and Authorization for Ministerial Standing is made active again. The end of the suspension is recorded in the Minister's file as well as the UCC's DataHub. Also, notification of the reinstatement of Ministerial Standing will be sent to the previously notified parties.

PROCESS FOR TERMINATION OF STANDING

In the event that an Authorized Minister has had their Standing suspended and makes the choice not to fulfill the requirements to maintain Ministerial Standing by the final date set forth by the Committee, the Committee votes to terminate the Authorized Minister's Standing.

After Standing is terminated, the Minister and their calling body, and all Association and Conference committees in which the individual serves are notified. This decision is recorded in the Minister's file as well as the UCC's DataHub.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS RELATING TO THIS PROCESS, CONTACT THE UCC CONFERENCE OFFICE TO BE CONNECTED WITH THE LIVING WATERS CHURCH AND MINISTRY COMMITTEE AND THE ASSOCIATE CONFERENCE MINISTER WHO WORKS WITH THE C&M. THIS POLICY WAS ADOPTED BY LIVING WATERS ON SEPTEMBER 26, 2020.

⁵ Manual on Ministry, 2018, pg. 121.