Ministry During the Interim Time

Working Guidelines
For
United Church of Christ Committees on the Ministry

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Parish Life and Leadership Ministry
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A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ
MINISTRY DURING THE INTERIM TIME

WORKING GUIDELINES

FOR

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

COMMITTEES ON THE MINISTRY

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INTRODUCTION

In the United Church of Christ, Interim Ministry is the ministry provided to a local church or other ministry setting during a pastoral vacancy.

Ministry During the Interim Time (Working Guidelines for United Church of Christ Committees on the Ministry) is intended to clarify the authorization issues that arise out of the unique and distinctive nature of interim ministry in the United Church of Christ. These Guidelines are intended as a companion to Manual on Ministry. The commentary addresses the following:

➢ Interim Ministry and Standing in the United Church of Christ
➢ The Nature and Tasks of Ministry During the Interim Time
➢ Three Forms of Interim Ministry
➢ The Ecclesiastical Call to Interim Ministry
➢ Expectations of Interim Ministers
➢ The Normative Practice of Interim Ministry
➢ Calling Bodies in Relation to Interim Ministers
➢ Support and Accountability of Interim Ministers
In order to maintain standing in the United Church of Christ, all ordained ministers (including ordained ministerial partners) must either have a valid call to ministry, receive a leave of absence, or be retired. For persons who are currently engaged in active ministry, association Committees on the Ministry have recognized a variety of calls as valid (i.e. local church pastor, seminary faculty, military chaplain, pastoral counselor, conference staff).

Interim ministry may be recognized as a valid call in the United Church of Christ; it has a number of characteristics that make it a distinctive ministry, set apart from other ministries. Such unique ministry has a number of authorization issues that require clarity within the United Church of Christ.

- Not all persons who serve in interim capacities are called to interim ministry, such as retired ministers or persons who are themselves seeking a settled position in the United Church of Christ. These “occasional” interim ministers are not reliant upon their interim service in order to maintain standing.

- Interim ministers, on the other hand, are reliant upon an ecclesiastical call to retain authorization. Theirs is an itinerant ministry in which they move from place to place in order to carry out the ministry to which they are called.

- For most United Church of Christ ministers, their calling body [A calling body is an organization or institution – a local church, Conference, pastoral counseling center, etc., – which seeks the services of an ordained, commissioned, or licensed minister of the United Church of Christ.] and the church where they hold membership are one and the same. While some interim ministers may be called to interim ministry by the church where they hold membership, in most cases their calling body is not the church where local church membership is held. Many interim ministers are called by their calling bodies to provide direct ministry to a succession of local congregations and ministry settings. Interim ministry in the United Church of Christ is moving toward four way covenants between the interim ministers, the local churches where they hold membership, the associations where they hold authorization, and their calling bodies.

THE NATURE AND TASKS OF INTERIM MINISTRY

Interim ministry is the ministry provided to a local church or other ministry setting during a pastoral vacancy.

Every change of pastoral leadership presents a unique opportunity for the local congregation (or other calling body) to assess its mission, consider its strengths and weaknesses, and search for a new pastoral leader in cooperation with its association and conference.

The duration of interim ministry is, by definition, a limited one; limited by agreement between conference/association staff, the local congregation and the interim minister. It is understood that all pastoral/professional relationships with the interim minister will terminate when the settled ministry begins.

Interim ministry may be characterized by the special functions and tasks required when churches are in transition. In addition to the ongoing needs of the congregation for pastoral leadership there is a significant transition to be managed. Many issues may present themselves when a change of pastors occurs. How well these issues are addressed will significantly impact the next settled pastorate. Some of the tasks during the interim time may include:
➢ Coming to Terms with History

The congregation needs to complete its closure with the departed pastor, working through its feelings of loss, hurt, relief, anger, guilt, etc. Gaining perspective on its past, both immediate and longer range, will help the congregation prepare for the future. This challenge is all the more crucial when there has been a long pastorate, an involuntary departure, or a conflict within the congregation. The resolution of such dynamics will greatly enhance the success of the new pastorate.

➢ Discovering a New Identity

Over time, congregations change as they respond to various pastoral leaders, experience changes in their world context, and modifications in their internal circumstances. The interim time provides a unique opportunity for congregational self-study leading to a focusing of the congregation's present reality.

➢ Allowing Needed Leadership Change

A change of pastoral leadership often precipitates changes in the lay leadership as well. Former leaders may take a less active role while new persons become more involved. Many congregations address their internal leadership needs during the interim time.

➢ Reaffirming Connections with the United Church of Christ

A change of pastoral leadership is a time when the local congregation may see its relationship with the wider church in a more focused way, becoming more open to the denomination's resources and advice related to the self-study and search and call process. An opportunity exists to strengthen the congregation's identity as part of the United Church of Christ.

➢ Commitment to New Directions in Ministry

As the interim period progresses the congregation becomes more ready to move forward under new leadership, furthering a mission which is emerging from its self-study and its understanding of its opportunities for service and witness. The congregation becomes eager to embrace new initiatives in partnership with its new ministerial leader.

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THREE FORMS OF MINISTRY DURING THE INTERIM TIME

When local congregations address the need of ministry during the interim time, they typically choose from several approaches.

➢ Transition

A Transition (Intentional Interim) Minister provides for the worship life of the congregation, supplies basic pastoral care and leadership, and helps guide a church through the unique complexities, challenges and opportunities inherent in this interim time, by working to create an atmosphere that brings about and/or sustains congregational health while allowing time for the search and call process to unfold in a non-anxious and intentional manner.

Bringing about successful transition ministry during the Interim Ministry time requires clearly developed understandings and statements outlining mutual expectations, purpose and direction between the congregation, the conference/association staff and the transition minister.
Transition ministry is a specialized ministry that brings specific skills and experience to help a congregation deal with instances such as conflict, breach of ethics, an unusually long pastorate or when the previously called minister remains a part of the congregation and/or community after retirement.

The Transition Minister sees this form of specialized ministry as his/her vocation, has specialized training and experience.

➢ Sustaining

A Sustaining (Interim) Minister, like a Transition Minister, provides for the worship life of the congregation and works with committees and board. By providing full ministerial service, s/he frees up the lay leadership to focus on its congregational profile and other search-related activities.

The Sustaining Minister may or may not see this form of specialized ministry as his/her vocation. While s/he may or may not have benefit of specialized training, such persons often make excellent use of vast life experience as well as inherent skills and abilities, seeking to keep the congregation focused on the unique opportunities and challenges of the time of transition.

➢ Supply

An Interim Supply Minister, as distinct from a pulpit supply minister, fills a vital role as one who provides some, but not necessarily all, of the essentials of pastoral and worship life during the time of transition.

Whether the person providing pastoral services in the interim time is designated as a Transition, Sustaining, or Interim Supply, she/he is expected to maintain a close working relationship with Conference and Association staff, and full accountability to the United Church of Christ’s expectations of its interim ministers.

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THE ECCLESIASTICAL CALL TO INTERIM MINISTRY

Many persons authorized for ministry in the United Church of Christ will not have experienced the call to interim ministry. Some are called to a vocation as transitional ministers, moving from one congregation to the next in this specialized form of ministry. Others will provide interim service from time to time as interim supply or sustaining ministers without seeking a call to this specific form of ministry.

➢ The Calling Body and the Setting of Ministry

For most calls to ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ, the calling body is the setting where ministry occurs. For those doing ministry during the interim time, the calling body may be the association in which the person holds standing, a local congregation where the person holds membership or a conference seeking to provide interim ministers for its congregations.

In any case, the calling body is typically separate from the position where the interim minister
is employed. There are both practical and ethical reasons for this.

- By its very nature, interim ministry is for "in-between times". Its purpose is to provide a transition from one settled minister to another. The roles of an interim minister and a settled minister may become confused when the calling body and interim ministry setting are the same.

- An interim minister may change position often. A calling body separate from the interim ministry setting provides continuity for the Interim. The call remains intact even while interim employment changes.

- A separate and ongoing calling body provides a means of nurture and accountability for the interim minister. This may be achieved through regular reports to and/or periodic meetings with the calling body, communication when employment changes, etc.

- **Source of Compensation**

  The calling body is not necessarily responsible for compensating the interim minister, as that remains the primary responsibility of each ministry setting where the person is employed. However, there are possibilities for aiding the interim in areas such as administering an escrow account to be used during times when the person is in between positions or for continuing education. The calling body may also serve to administer health and pension benefits, providing continuity for billing and other purposes with the United Church of Christ Pension Boards. For example, the calling body might receive pension contributions and health insurance premiums from the employers and forward those to the Pension Boards on behalf of the minister.

- **Responsibility of Calling Body**

  The calling body has a pastoral responsibility to provide spiritual, emotional and educational support for the interim minister. A calling body can support the person by providing an address for communications from the wider church, particularly when the person is between interims or serving beyond the bounds of the association. The calling body might also provide a home base from which to establish collegial relationships among interim ministers and others in ministry.

- **Accountability**

  In evaluating the call to interim ministry, it is the responsibility of the Committee on the Ministry to affirm that there is a valid and genuine calling body and that the individual minister is not acting alone or in isolation. In evaluating the validity of calling bodies, the Committee on the Ministry may want to consider the following criteria:

  - The organization is a recognized ecclesiastical body with an identifiable organizational structure, governance, and leadership.
  
  - The organization must be willing to recognize and affirm the individual's personal sense of call to interim ministry.
  
  - The organization must be willing and able to provide oversight for the ministry of the particular individual.
  
  - The organization must be committed to participate as a full partner in the covenant with the individual, the association, and the local church where the individual is a member.
Expectations of Interim Ministers

Associations must determine that a person meets all of the normal criteria before granting standing to a United Church of Christ ordained minister (including interim ministers). These criteria, spelled out in Manual on Ministry (MOM, 2001 – Section 3, page 30).

- **Membership in a Local Church of the United Church of Christ**

  In order to hold standing in the United Church of Christ, all ordained ministers (including interim ministers) must have membership in a Local Church of the United Church of Christ.

- **A Sense of Personal Calling Confirmed by a Valid Calling Body**

  All ordained ministers (including interim ministers) in the United Church of Christ have a sense of personal calling to ministry by the Holy Spirit which is affirmed by the wider church. In addition, those seeking a call as an interim minister will have a personal sense of call to that specialized ministry and be able to articulate the nature of that call.

  In extending a call to interim ministry, the calling body acts on behalf of the wider church to confirm God's call in this individual's life. The Committee on the Ministry considers both the personal call and the ecclesiastical call in making the determination to grant ordained ministerial standing.

- **Seeking a Call as an Authorized Minister in the United Church of Christ**

  Candidates seeking to be called as interim ministers must demonstrate that they are authorized (or eligible to be authorized) for ministry in the United Church of Christ. Those who are so authorized include: persons with ordained ministerial standing, ordained ministerial partners who are qualified to seek a call in the United Church of Christ, persons with Privilege of Call, certain seminarians and candidates for ordination, and persons approved for ordination pending receipt of a call. These are all persons who upon receipt of a call may apply for and be granted ordained ministerial standing or ordained ministerial partner standing.

  In particular circumstances a Committee on the Ministry may license a person to serve as an interim minister while a church seeks new pastoral leadership.

- **Demonstration of Considerable Knowledge, Skills and Qualities of Interim Ministry: the Distinctive Expectations of Transition Ministry**

  Transition ministry requires specialized training and skills related to ministry during times of transition. Training and skill in church dynamics, conflict management, empowerment of the laity, and an understanding of systems and the dynamics of change are also helpful in equipping a person for this ministry.

  A Transition Minister must be able to quickly establish a high level of trust, have good entry and exit skills, and have a good sense of self-differentiation. In addition, interims benefit from a leadership style that is open and adaptable to the faith and traditions within a variety of local churches, and a style that relies upon the gifts, skills and leadership capabilities found within each local setting.

  An individual seeking an ecclesiastical call into interim ministry as a Transition Minister will typically be able to demonstrate the requisite knowledge, skills, and qualities for this
specialized ministry. Completion of an Interim Ministry Network Basic Course or other formal training program and letters of reference from persons who can attest to the candidate’s abilities and qualities will be expected. In addition, a person’s prior experience in pastoral ministry, service as an interim minister or life experience may help a calling body determine the skill level and competency of this individual for a call.

While these expectations clearly apply to Transition Ministers, those individuals serving as Sustaining and Interim Supply ministers will also be encouraged to equip themselves in the same way.

THE NORMATIVE PRACTICE OF INTERIM MINISTRY

In addition to the ethical standards in the Ordained, Commissioned and Licensed Minister's Codes, there are unique standards that guide the conduct of interim ministers. These norms reflect the values and traditional practices of interim ministry in the United Church of Christ.

- **Limited Involvement in the Search Process**

  Any interim involvement in the search process of a congregation must be clearly established with conference/association staff and explained to the search committee, prior to the involvement.

  Interims are often trained and skilled in helping the committee and congregation through a self study and evaluation process that contributes to the preparation of the Local Church Profile. Any work the interim does with the committee, concludes before the search committee begins considering ministerial profiles. *The boundaries need to be clearly established by the conference/association staff person and interim minister — and then explained to the search committee.*

  *The interim minister should not influence the search process in any way.* Names of candidates are to remain confidential within the search committee and are not to be shared with the interim minister. The interim minister must guard against being drawn into discussions that may lead to the divulging of names or offering opinions regarding specific candidates for the settled position.

- **Not A Candidate for the Settled Position**

  *The professional and ethical norm throughout the United Church of Christ is that those doing interim ministry are not candidates for the settled position.* This should be clearly stated in the interim call agreement between the church and the interim minister, so it can be agreed to and signed by all parties.

  The rationale for the interim not becoming a candidate for the settled position includes the following:

  - An interim’s candidacy compromises the principles of parity and open access to opportunities by denying unknown candidates with comparable skills the chance to be seriously considered by the search committee. Because the congregation knows the interim in ways it cannot know other candidates, the interim has an unfair advantage over others. This is in tension with the Search and Call process of the United Church of Christ as expressed and set forth in the *United Church of Christ Constitution and*
A serious breach of ministerial ethics occurs if an interim takes advantage of the interim role to position himself or herself as a candidate for the settled position. Such behavior demonstrates significant disregard for the Search and Call processes of the United Church of Christ, a lack of respect for ministerial colleagues who may be candidates for the position and a breach of The Ordained Minister’s Code of Ethics. A Fitness Review may result from such behavior.

All parties to the interim call agreement understand and assume an interim rather than a settled call in the beginning of the relationship. When the interim is called to provide ministry in the interim time there is a written agreement among the church, the interim, and the conference or association representative that this will be an interim relationship rather than settled call. As part of this agreement, all parties understand that the interim will not be considered as a candidate. All parties also agree that a genuine and good faith effort will be made to undertake a search for a settled minister.

An interim minister’s candidacy may subvert the importance of matching the candidate’s gifts for ministry with the ministerial needs of the church. The ministerial needs of the church during the interim period are significantly different than they are during the settled pastorate. Calling one with significant gifts for interim ministry to the settled position may result in a mismatch of gifts and ministerial needs.

If a determination is made by the covenantal partners (conference staff, association committee on the ministry, local church) that a pastoral vacancy does not exist (such as during illness or a sabbatical), then other ways to meet the leadership needs of the congregation may be considered. This is not interim ministry. Other labels, such as “acting”, “temporary”, “designated”, etc. may be used.

There are, however, rare occasions during an interim ministry when a sincere effort to conduct a search for a settled minister has been made and in the opinion of conference staff and the Committee on the Ministry it is not likely that continued effort will lead to a call. When this is the case and when both the local church and the interim minister agree to reconsider their relationship, it may be in the best interests of all involved to make an exception to the normative practice.

If the interim is to be considered as a candidate for the settled position, it is important that the Committee on the Ministry have established policies and procedures to consider such an exception. These procedures should include:

- the circumstances when an exception might be considered (i.e. that further searching is not likely to be successful),
- the parties to be involved in discerning the necessity or advisability of making an exception (i.e. conference staff, the local church, the minister, and the Committee on the Ministry),
- the impact of the exception on the Search and Call Process, United Church of Christ polity and practice of ministry, and the nature of interim ministry (i.e. serious reflection.

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1 Any Ordained Minister or Ordained Ministerial Partner may confer with the Conference Minister concerning a pastoral vacancy. At the Ordained Minister’s request or at the request of the Ordained Ministerial Partner, his or her name shall be submitted by the Conference Minister for consideration by the committee of any Local Church where there is a pastoral vacancy.
Limited Length of Interim Service

The length of time an interim serves a local church may vary, depending on the situation of the church and the progress of the search process. The interim minister is to encourage the church to work diligently through the search process and not allow the process to slow down because of the positive feelings toward the interim minister. The interim minister must not seek to extend the interim time for the sake of his or her own employment needs.

Non Interference in the Ministry of the Settled Minister

As with the departure of a called minister from a local church, when an interim minister completes her or his ministry the congregation should have been encouraged to set healthy boundaries. Although the interim may remain in close geographical proximity, the interim must separate from the congregation and perform no further pastoral functions. In order to facilitate the congregation’s bonding with the new settled leadership, the interim should refrain from visiting the congregation or any of its members (for a minimum of one year) or participating in any events unless specifically invited to do so by the Diaconate (or other appropriate board) in consultation with the settled minister.

 Churches in Relation to All Forms of Interim Ministry

Just as the normative practices of interim ministry apply to all interims, the standards and norms for interim churches in relation to ministers are applicable as these churches relate to all forms of interim ministry: transition, sustaining and supply.

Compensation

All authorized ministers should be compensated according to conference guidelines. Interim ministers should be compensated at a level commensurate with the compensation of the previous settled pastor. For churches that have been paying below such conference guidelines, compensating an interim at a higher level may be the opportunity for the church to begin moving closer to what it will need to consider for the next called pastor. In some cases an interim minister may be compensated at a higher rate than the previous minister because of the particular skills and scope of the ministry position she or he is asked to fulfill during the interim period.

Non Consideration of the Interim for the Settled Pastorate

It is imperative that the church understands from the beginning that the interim minister is not to be considered for the position of settled minister. This should be clearly stated in the interim covenant or letter of agreement between the church and the interim minister. The rationale for this has been stated in the previous comments.

As stated above, there may be those unusual circumstances that would lead conference, association, local church and interim minister to consider other options. Those situations would be rare and must be carefully talked through and understood by all parties.

Continue the Search Process
The interim minister gives pastoral leadership to the congregation while the church conducts a search for a settled pastor. Churches need to continue their search in a deliberate way that does not stall because people are comfortable with the interim minister. Many interim call agreements limit the time for which the interim is engaged to a renewable defined term as a way to urge the process to keep moving.

It is appropriate for some Committees on the Ministry to raise questions with both an interim minister and the church if the interim situation continues beyond a typical transition period for that type of congregation. The Manual on Ministry allows for such an intervention in the Situational Support Consultation (MOM, 2001 - Section 8, page 9).

**Support for and Accountability of Interim Ministers**

- **Support**

  An association in which interim ministry is conducted, whether or not it is not it is where the person holds standing, has a responsibility to provide support in the areas of:

  - Pastoral care
  - Fellowship with pastoral colleagues
  - Opportunities for networking and interpersonal support
  - Discernment and evaluative feedback.

  This is particularly important in helping interims acclimate themselves to new surroundings.

  Associations need to continue to act in an advocacy role for the individual and for the role of interim minister as well as resourcing for continuing education. Advocacy for individuals may include:

  - Compensation
  - Maintaining of contractual integrity
  - Opportunities for support consultations and interventions
  - Exit interview and assessment

  Advocacy for the role of interim may include:

  - Understand and promote the unique role, responsibilities and significance of interim ministry.
  - Deepen understanding within the association of the distinctive standards and goals of interim ministry.
  - Teach and interpret the importance of the transitional nature of the interim time between settled pastorates for congregations.

  Committees on Ministries are strongly encouraged to meet with interims at the beginning of their ministry within the association to not only inform the Committees on Ministry but to discern ways in which the association and the interim can be mutually available and supportive. All this requires ongoing communication between conference and association staffs with committees on ministry in both present association and association of origin should they be different.

- **Accountability**
Interim ministers remain accountable to the association where he or she has standing. Should accountability issues emerge, the concerns are addressed and dealt with according to established policies and procedures. The association, where standing is held, may need to seek information and cooperation with its counterpart in the oversight of authorized ministry when the interim is employed outside of the association or denomination. When such cooperation is sought, it is important to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each oversight body as well as the policies and procedures to be followed prior to the actual investigation and adjudication of the matter. The association where standing is held retains final jurisdiction over the interim minister’s authorization and standing.
THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST’S
EXPECTATIONS OF ITS INTERIM MINISTERS

Faith Affirmations

- Understands and affirms the Faith Affirmations found in the *Church’s Expectations of its Candidates for Ordination*
- Has a sense of call to interim ministry

Church Loyalty

- Understands and affirms the expectations for Church Loyalty found in the *Church’s Expectations of its Candidates for Ordination*
- Understands and affirms the Ordained Minister’s Code, particularly as it relates to interim ministry
- Is committed to guiding churches through their transition to seek and call a new minister
- Supports the church’s participation in the United Church of Christ search process while providing interim ministry service to that church and refrains from interfering or becoming involved in the church’s search
- Will not become a candidate for the settled position in any setting where interim ministry is provided
- Advocates for fair and just compensation for all UCC pastors, including interim ministers and those who will be the newly settled minister

Knowledge and Skills

- Has the Knowledge and Skills named in the *Church’s Expectations of its Candidates for Ordination*
- Has engaged in a disciplined study of and has acquired considerable knowledge and skill in interim ministry, including
  - understanding and appreciation for the nature of interim ministry
  - knowledge regarding the developmental tasks of churches in interim transition
  - skill for the performance of interim ministry

Personal Qualities

- Has the Personal Qualities found in the *Church’s Expectations of its Candidates for Ordination*
- Ability to quickly form and appropriately relinquish relationships
- Acknowledges and tends to self-care needs amidst the dynamic transitions inherent in interim ministry
- Possesses the capacity to thrive amidst constant change inherent in life as an interim minister
- Respects, honors, and adapts to the cultural milieus and traditions of a variety of local churches