

Order for Reaffirming the Covenant Between Pastor and Congregation Upon Return of A Pastor From Service As A Chaplain

Introduction

Association Representative: Beloved, occasionally in the life of our church we are afforded the opportunity to welcome a pastor back to [his/her] congregation following an extended period of active service as a chaplain. Today we rejoice in the return of your pastor from [his/her] [deployment to/service in] [location]. We believe it is fitting to recognize this occasion by reaffirming the covenant relationship between [Pastor], the [Name] Association and the [Name] United Church of Christ.

(The returning pastor and other participants are invited to come forward.)

Reaffirmation of the Covenant

Association Representative to returning pastor: [Name], on behalf of the [Name] Association of the United Church of Christ, I welcome your return to us. We look forward to your continuing ministry among us. As you return, I want to assure you of our prayers and our continuing care. I reaffirm the Association's covenant with you and with the [Name] United Church of Christ.

Moderator/Elder to returning pastor: [Name], on behalf of [Name] United Church of Christ, I welcome you home. While you were away we held you in our hearts and uplifted you in our prayers. We give thanks to God for your safe return. We are grateful to have you as our pastor again.

Association Representative to congregation: Realizing that your lives and [Pastor]'s have been changed by what you each have experienced during your separation, it is normal to go through a time of readjustment. Will you commit yourselves to work with your pastor to renew your covenant relationship?

Response by the congregation:

[Pastor], we pledge to you our support, patience, understanding and, when necessary, our forgiveness. And we ask for yours in return.

We acknowledge that our church's ministry is a shared endeavor. God has called us and gifted us to share this ministry with you. We reaffirm our commitment to this mutual ministry; and we pray that God's Spirit will abide with us, so we may do God's will and humbly walk together in God's ways.

Association Representative to returning pastor: [Name], you have heard these words of support. Do you reaffirm your covenant with this congregation? Will you once again faithfully preach the Gospel and administer the rites and sacraments to them? Will you offer them your love, prayers, compassion and care? Will you seek to be patient, understanding and forgiving?

Pastor: I will, with God's help.

Changing of Stoles

Replacing the stole worn as a chaplain with a stole normally worn as the church's pastor serves as a tangible symbol the chaplain has completed [his/her] active duty mission and is resuming pastoral duties with the congregation.

A representative from the chaplain's branch of service may be invited to participate in this part of the service. If no military representative is available, a veteran from the congregation may assist.

Military Representative (facing the chaplain):

Chaplain [Name], now that you have completed your active duty assignment, it is fitting that you be relieved of your duties. We appreciate your faithful ministry to service members of [name of command/unit] and their families. We are indebted to [Spouse's Name/your family] for [his/her/their] support during your [deployment/service]. And we are truly grateful to this congregation for the sacrifices they made to enable you to serve.

As I remove this stole, symbolic of your ministry as a chaplain, you are released from your active duty responsibilities. Thank you for your service.

(The Moderator or Elder then places the pastoral stole upon the pastor.)

Moderator/Elder: [Pastor], I place this stole upon you as the symbol of your pastoral office and as a reminder of your covenant with this congregation.

Pastor: I gratefully receive this stole and resume my ministry with this congregation.

Prayer of Blessing

Association Representative: Let us pray.

Gracious God, as the covenant between [Pastor] and [Name] United Church of Christ has been reaffirmed this day, we pray that you would renew and bless their relationship. Pour out your Spirit upon pastor and people. Bless the gifts you have given them, that together they may faithfully proclaim, by word and deed, the Good News of your love and grace in this community and beyond. And to you, gracious God, be all honor and glory, now and forever.

All: Amen.

A hymn may be sung as participants return to their seats.