

Pastoral Relations: Supporting the Pastoral Relationship

November 2020



Pastoral Relations
Relations pastorales

The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada

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About This Resource

This resource expands on the policy found under section I. Pastoral Relations in *The Manual*. This resource is for ministry personnel and communities of faith once a pastoral relationship has been formed.

This resource contains

- policy and procedures that must be followed
- best practices that provide information, guidance, and advice on the recommended ways to live out mandatory policies and procedures, which you are encouraged (but not required) to follow

This resource is one in a series to guide the church in the area of pastoral relations. Other resources in this series are as follows:

- *Pastoral Relations: Policy for a Community of Faith*
- *Pastoral Relations: Guidelines for a Community of Faith Profile*
- *Pastoral Relations: Ministry Personnel*
- *Pastoral Relations: Guidelines for Search and Selection*
- *Pastoral Relations: Regional Council Liaisons*

As of January 2019, these resources, available on the [Handbooks](#) page of The United Church of Canada website, replace *Pastoral Relations: Engaging and Supporting* (March 2015).

For more information about pastoral relations, including whom to contact, please visit the [Pastoral Relations](#) page of the United Church website.

What Is Pastoral Relations Policy?

Ordered ministers and designated lay ministers while in paid accountable ministry positions are office holders within The United Church of Canada. While there may be elements similar to employment, the essential nature of the relationship is a covenant.

—Statement on Ministry in The United Church of Canada (2012)

The special status of ministry personnel requires the church to write policy that governs the paid accountable ministry relationship between ministry personnel and communities of faith. The policy that governs this relationship is pastoral relations policy.

Pastoral relations policy governs search, selection, calls, and appointments between ministry personnel and communities of faith within The United Church of Canada. Pastoral relations policy is set by the General Council and implemented cooperatively by communities of faith and regional councils.

Theological Rationale

We are each given particular gifts of the Spirit.
For the sake of the world,
 God calls all followers of Jesus to Christian ministry.
In the church,
 some are called to specific ministries of leadership,
 both lay and ordered;
 some witness to the good news;
 some uphold the art of worship;
 some comfort the grieving and guide the wandering;
 some build up the community of wisdom;
 some stand with the oppressed and work for justice.
To embody God's love in the world,
 the work of the church requires the ministry and discipleship
 of all believers

—A Song of Faith: A Statement of Faith of The United Church of Canada (2006)

A community of faith, like any community, changes.
When a minister comes into a community of faith
a covenant is made; a promise to walk together as God's people,
deepening our commitment to Jesus Christ
and growing closer to God.
God's covenant with us never changes,
but our covenants with one another do change.

—Adapted from the *Book of Worship*, United Church of Christ © 1986, United Church of Christ Office for Church Life and Leadership, New York, New York. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Policy, Procedures, and Practices

The policy sections below outline elements that must be followed. However, they do not provide a lot of guidance on how the mandatory pieces of the process must be done. The sections on best practices provide assistance and guidance on how the mandatory requirements of the policies and procedures can be met.

Remuneration of Ministry Personnel

The policies and procedures about the remuneration for ministry personnel may be found under Pastoral Relations in section I.2.1 of *The Manual*. This resource includes additional pastoral relations policies and procedures about manses that must be followed.

For more information on remuneration for ministry personnel, please see the following resources:

- *Financial Handbook for Congregations*
- *Minimum Salary and Allowances Schedule for Ministry Personnel* (revised annually)

Manse

There are some policies about the manse in *The Manual*, including the provision in the Basis of Union of the right of occupancy of the manse by ministry personnel serving in the pastoral charge (Basis of Union, 10.4.2). Also, if ministry personnel are in a part-time call or appointment, they receive full-time occupancy of the manse (*The Manual* I.2.1.4).

Additional policies

1. The manse must include basic appliances, fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, drapes, and rugs.
2. The manse must be unfurnished, unless exceptional circumstances require a furnished house. The regional council is responsible for designating the manse as furnished.
3. A furnished manse may become unfurnished at the convenience of the ministry personnel and pastoral charge. The regional council must be notified.
4. The ministry personnel must take reasonable care of the manse.
5. The normal heating cost paid by ministry personnel has increased to \$800 per year, with the pastoral charge responsible for any heating costs above this.
6. The normal heating cost amount will generally be based on the cost to heat a two-storey detached home (approximately 2,000 square feet) that is 40-50 years old and has a mid-efficiency gas furnace.

Leaves

Ministry personnel are to arrange all leaves with the Ministry and Personnel Committee of the community of faith and the regional council. For bereavement leave, compassionate leave, study leave, and other leaves of absence, there are no additional policies or procedures beyond those in *The Manual* at section 1.2.3.

Medical Leave

The Restorative Care Plan is for ministry personnel (and lay employees) who require a short-term medical leave from their positions. Ministry personnel can access the Restorative Care Plan by contacting regional council staff. For details, see the [Restorative Care Plan Roadmap](#) at The United Church of Canada Benefits Centre (see the Benefits Administration section of the Document Library).

Maternity Leave

Maternity leave benefits are available to ministry personnel in communities of faith operated by the United Church. The United Church of Canada is committed to supporting its ministry personnel in their work and family life. The church recognizes the unique circumstances related to pregnancy and provides leave for expectant mothers.

Policy

1. Ministry personnel must inform in writing the community of faith they are serving of their request for maternity leave at least four weeks in advance of the date of their leave, unless there is a valid reason why such notice cannot be given. Upon receipt of a written request, maternity leave without pay commencing before, on, or after the birth of their child will be granted. The period of the maternity leave will be subject to the maximums set out by the applicable government insurance plans (i.e., Canadian Employment Insurance Plan, Quebec Parental Insurance Plan).
2. The community of faith may require the ministry personnel to provide a medical certificate certifying the ministry personnel's pregnancy.
3. If the ministry personnel have not yet begun maternity leave and their newborn child is hospitalized, or if the ministry personnel have begun maternity leave and then return to work while their newborn child is hospitalized, the maternity leave can be extended, at the request of the ministry personnel, for every week the child is in the hospital, for up to 52 weeks following the week of the child's birth.
4. Maternity leave granted under this policy shall be counted as "service" for purposes of salary and benefits calculations.
5. The ministry personnel may elect to continue pension contributions and group insurance plans during the period of the maternity leave. If they elect to continue, the community of faith will pay its share of the benefits contributions during the period of the maternity leave. If the ministry personnel choose to suspend making these contributions, coverage will be suspended until the ministry personnel returns to work and contributions recommence.

6. For ministry personnel whose appointment has a fixed end date, the maternity leave will end on the date the ministry personnel's appointment is completed, if the end date is prior to the conclusion of the period set out by the applicable government insurance plan.
7. Expectant mothers are entitled to time off with pay to attend prenatal checkups.
8. The ministry personnel shall provide a minimum of four weeks' notice in writing to the community of faith before their return to work.

Policy for Partner's Leave

Any ministry personnel whose spouse or common-law partner has given birth to a child is entitled to five days of special leave with pay and benefits for needs directly related to the birth of the child. This leave is normally taken within the first week of the child's birth. This provision does not apply to blended families where the child is the biological or adoptive offspring of one of the partners of the new union.

Procedures: Maternity Leave Top-Up Payments

Ministry personnel on maternity leave will receive top-up payments, payable by the community of faith on a monthly basis while ministry personnel are on maternity leave, provided that the community of faith is presented with proof that the ministry personnel are in receipt of maternity benefits under a government insurance plan. These top-up payments will be provided regardless of the choices that are made in connection to receiving benefits from a government insurance plan.

The top-up payment will consist of the following:

- a) income continuation of 95 percent of their weekly salary, if they are subject to a qualifying period of one week before receiving government insurance plan benefits;
- b) a payment of 40 percent of their weekly salary for a period of 15 weeks; and
- c) an income supplement in the form of an automobile allowance, calculated at 40 percent of the monthly average of the last six months of travel reimbursement paid to the ministry personnel, immediately preceding the commencement of the maternity leave. This allowance is paid monthly to the ministry personnel on maternity leave.

The community of faith will continue to provide the ministry personnel with basic telephone service during the period of maternity leave.

Best Practices

Sometimes ministry personnel and community of faith treasurers find maternity leave top-up payment details confusing. A helpful online tool for calculating them can be found on the [Budgeting Tools for Treasurers](#) page.

Ministry personnel residing in a manse retain their right of occupancy of the manse during their maternity leave.

Parental Leave

Parental leave benefits are available to ministry personnel in a community of faith operated by the United Church. The United Church of Canada is committed to supporting its ministry personnel in their work and family life. The church recognizes the unique circumstances related to new parenthood and provides leave for new parents.

For the purposes of this policy, the definition of “child” is a person who has not yet reached the age of majority in the province/territory in which the ministry personnel resides.

Policy

1. Parental leave benefits are available to biological and adoptive parents while caring for a newborn or newly adopted child. Parental leave benefits for biological parents are payable from the date of the child’s birth and for adoptive parents from the date of the child’s placement in the home.
2. The ministry personnel shall inform the community of faith in writing of their request for parental leave at least four weeks in advance of the date of the commencement of the leave, unless there is a valid reason why such notice cannot be given.
3. The ministry personnel will be granted parental leave without pay for a single period according to the applicable government insurance plan limits. The period of parental leave is to be taken within the 52-week period beginning on the date the child is born or on the date the child comes into the care of the ministry personnel.
4. At the request of the ministry personnel, parental leave can be taken in two periods of consecutive weeks. Also, at the request of the ministry personnel, the commencement of parental leave may be deferred from the originally scheduled commencement date.
5. The ministry personnel may be required to submit to the community of faith a certificate of the birth of the newborn child or proof of receiving custody of the adoptive child prior to the commencement of parental leave.
6. If the child of the ministry personnel is hospitalized within the period of parental leave defined above and the ministry personnel have either not yet proceeded on parental leave or have begun parental leave and then have returned to work, the period of parental leave specified in the original leave request may be extended. This extension will be equal to that portion of the period of the child’s hospitalization during which the ministry personnel were not on parental leave and will end not later than 104 weeks after the day on which the infant child was born or on which the child came into the ministry personnel’s care.
7. Parental leave granted under this policy is counted as “service” for purposes of salary and benefits calculations.
8. The ministry personnel may elect to continue pension contributions and group insurance plans during the period of the parental leave. If the ministry personnel elect to continue, the ministry personnel and the community of faith will each pay their shares of the benefits contributions during the period of the parental leave. If the ministry personnel choose to suspend making these contributions, coverage will be suspended until the ministry personnel return to work.

9. For ministry personnel whose appointment has a fixed end date, the parental leave will end on the date the ministry personnel's appointment is completed, if the end date is prior to the conclusion of the period set out by the applicable government insurance plan.
10. If both parents are ministry personnel within The United Church of Canada, both parents may take a period of parental leave provided that the total period of the leave taken by both parents does not exceed the maximum leave period provided under the applicable government insurance plan.
11. The ministry personnel shall provide a minimum of four weeks' notice in writing to the community of faith before their return to work.
12. This policy does not apply to newly blended families where the child is the biological or adoptive child of one of the partners of the new union.

Policy for Partner's Leave

Any ministry personnel who is the spouse or common-law partner of a person on parental leave is entitled to five days of special leave with full pay and benefits for needs directly related to the adoption of a child. This leave is normally taken within the first week of the child's placement in the home. This provision does not apply to blended families where the child is the biological or adoptive child of one of the partners of the new union.

Procedures: Parental Leave Top-Up Payments

Ministry personnel on parental leave will receive top-up payments, payable by the community of faith on a monthly basis, for a portion of the leave period while the ministry personnel is on parental leave, provided that the community of faith is presented with proof that the ministry personnel is in receipt of parental benefits under a government insurance plan. These top-up payments will be provided regardless of the choices that are made in connection to receiving benefits from a government insurance plan.

The top-up payment will consist of the following:

- a) income continuation of 95 percent of the ministry personnel's weekly salary, if the ministry personnel is subject to a qualifying period of one week before receiving government insurance plan benefits;
- b) a payment of 40 percent of their weekly salary for a period of 9 weeks (10 weeks, if no qualifying period is required) from the commencement of the parental leave; and
- c) an income supplement in the form of an automobile allowance, calculated at 40 percent of the monthly average of the last six months of travel reimbursement paid to the ministry personnel immediately preceding the commencement of the parental leave or, where applicable, the ministry personnel's immediately preceding maternity leave. This allowance is paid monthly to the ministry personnel on parental leave while the ministry personnel is receiving payments under paragraphs a) or b) above.

The community of faith will continue to provide the ministry personnel with basic telephone service during the period of parental leave.

Best Practices

Sometimes ministry personnel and community of faith treasurers find parental leave top-up payment details confusing. A helpful online tool for calculating them can be found on the [Budgeting Tools for Treasurers](#) page.

Ministry personnel residing in a manse retain their right of occupancy of the manse during their parental leave.

Sabbatical Leave

The essence of sabbatical is rooted in the biblical practice of the Sabbath day described in the creation story. Jesus kept this practice when he took time in his ministry for renewal. He often went away to pray and reflect in silence and meditation “on mountain tops and by lakesides.” The daily practice of ministry may involve the pressure of many tasks compressed into too few hours, leaving little opportunity for reflective, prayerful time. In the context of ministry, sabbatical time is for learning through reflection, revitalization, and recreation. It is, therefore, personal and individual in nature. It may include study, spiritual retreat, and rest and will probably be a blend of all of these.

When ministry personnel take a sabbatical, communities of faith benefit from the opportunity to reflect on their mission and ministry and experience different gifts of lay leadership. The sabbatical offers the community of faith a minister who returns with new energy and clarity about the tasks at hand.

Policy

1. The United Church of Canada policy stipulates that every pastoral charge provide a paid sabbatical of at least three months to members of the order of ministry and recognized designated lay ministers of The United Church of Canada who have completed at least five years of service in one call or appointment.
2. Provision for a sabbatical is to be included in the terms of the call or appointment.
3. The sabbatical is in addition to the minister’s vacation time and regular study leave for the year in which the sabbatical is taken.
4. Sabbatical leave may be taken in conjunction with the vacation time, continuing education, or additional unpaid leave of absence.
5. Ministry personnel must submit notice of their intent to take a sabbatical to the Ministry and Personnel Committee of the pastoral charge at least 12 months before the projected start of the sabbatical.
6. The timing of the sabbatical must be developed in consultation with the Ministry and Personnel Committee and approved by the governing body of the pastoral charge.
7. The regional council must be notified by the pastoral charge of the ministry personnel’s intent to take sabbatical time no later than six months before the start of the sabbatical.
8. The Office of Vocation is also notified by the ministry personnel of their intent to take sabbatical time no later than six months before the start of the sabbatical.
9. The regional council will determine whether a pastoral charge supervisor should be appointed during the period of the sabbatical leave.

10. Ministry personnel must submit a detailed proposal to the Ministry and Personnel Committee at least three months before the start of the sabbatical. This proposal should outline the ministry personnel's plans during the period of renewal, including the nature of the study or experience being proposed and the goals of the sabbatical, which must be related to the practice of ministry. While a plan is essential, the sabbatical should not be so tightly structured that the Spirit has no freedom to lead and reveal. This plan must be approved by the Ministry and Personnel Committee and reported to the governing body for information.
11. After the sabbatical, the ministry personnel must provide brief written and/or oral reports to the Ministry and Personnel Committee and to the governing body.
12. Ministry personnel taking a sabbatical and the pastoral charge are expected to continue their pastoral relationship for at least one year following the conclusion of the sabbatical.
13. During the sabbatical time, the pastoral charge pays the ministry personnel's regular salary (including providing the use of a manse, if applicable) and makes the regular payments to The United Church of Canada for health and pension plans, the Employee Assistance Program, and Canada Pension Plan and Employment Insurance, as of the day before the start of the sabbatical.
14. Ministry personnel working less than 40 hours per week are entitled to all of the terms of the three-month sabbatical policy. During the sabbatical time, the pastoral charge pays the ministry personnel, who is working less than 40 hours, their salary and makes the regular payments to The United Church of Canada for health and pension plans, the Employee Assistance Program, and Canada Pension Plan and Employment Insurance, as of the day before the start of the sabbatical.
15. In those cases where the ministry personnel normally receive travel expense reimbursement for the use of a vehicle on church business, while on sabbatical they receive an income supplement of 40 percent of the average monthly travel claim based on the six months before the sabbatical. It is to be paid monthly and declared by the pastoral charge as taxable income.

Support may be available to your congregation for visiting ministry personnel during a sabbatical leave. Search "sabbatical fund" at www.united-church.ca for details and an application form.

Best Practices for a Sabbatical Leave:

Because the provision for a sabbatical is included in the terms of the call or appointment, communities of faith can begin planning for a sabbatical at the beginning of a pastoral relationship. Some pastoral charges find it helpful to budget annually for the sabbatical, so that when the sabbatical begins after the fifth year of the pastoral relationship, the pastoral charge has some money saved to use towards supply ministry.

Similarly to other leaves, the pastoral charge continues to pay the telephone allowance during the sabbatical.

The appendix is a sample of a sabbatical information bulletin insert that can be shared to inform the congregation of important information in the lead-up to the sabbatical leave.

It is also helpful, after the sabbatical, for ministry personnel to share their sabbatical report with the Office of Vocation (via their Office of Vocation Minister). This allows the Office of Vocation to be aware of the learning that has occurred and to share other sabbatical ideas with ministry personnel.

Sabbatical Policy for Interim Ministers

Active interim ministers are entitled to sabbatical with the following terms:

- a) 54 months of service must be acquired over a period of eight years or less;
- b) the sabbatical is a maximum of three months in duration;
- c) the focus of the study is to be approved by the Credentialing Committee of the Office of Vocation before submission to the General Council Office;
- d) the leave is taken at a time when the interim ministry is not appointed to an interim ministry position, so that an interim appointment is not interrupted; and
- e) recipients of sabbatical leave agree to remain available for ministry for a period of one year.

The national Interim Ministry Sabbatical Fund covers salary and benefits for interim ministers taking sabbaticals, with the following terms:

- a) all pastoral charges who received the services of an interim minister are required, as a condition of appointment, to provide a payment of the equivalent of two weeks' salary per year, or pro-rated for service of less than a year, to the national Interim Ministry Sabbatical Fund; and
- b) applications are submitted to the Ministry and Employment Unit four months prior to the start of the proposed sabbatical.

Study Leave

There are no further policies about study leave outside of *The Manual* 1.2.3.4. However, there is further information about some of the best practices for study leave, as well as vacation, in *Ministry and Personnel Committees: Policy, Procedures, Practices*, which can be found on the [Handbooks](#) page.

Other Best Practices for Supporting the Pastoral Relationship

Support from the Regional Council

The regional council has the responsibility to support both communities of faith and ministry personnel. Part of this support involves the ability of either the community of faith or ministry personnel to reach out to the appropriate regional council body for advice about the pastoral relationship. Further details about the confidentiality of this consultation can be found in *The Manual* 1.2.5.1.

Disengaging to Support a New Pastoral Relationship

When a pastoral relationship has ended, it is important to disengage. While it can feel challenging, this is a healthy practice both for ministry personnel to form a new pastoral relationship with a new community of faith and for the community of faith to form a new pastoral relationship with new ministry personnel.

The Manual (1.2.5.4) states:

If a ministry personnel is asked by a member or adherent (or their families) of a community of faith where they had previously served to preside at a baptism, communion service, wedding, or funeral, the ministry personnel (a) must refer the request to a member of the order of ministry who is currently serving under call or appointment to that community of faith; and (b) may preside only with the approval of the community of faith's governing body.

If ministry personnel are not entering a new pastoral relationship and are planning to attend a community of faith they previously served, it is especially important that they consult with the incumbent minister concerning expectations and the level of involvement both parties would be comfortable with. A covenant agreement between former and current ministers is one strategy that could be used.

It is strongly recommended that former ministers do not attend the community of faith in which they have just served for a specific length of time, at least one year, to allow the new minister to be settled into the life of the church. It is a good idea to establish a covenant agreement and wait for the time period designated, along with an invitation from the incumbent minister, to return. It is also recommended that you review arrangements and understandings periodically as circumstances often change.

In the case of the incumbent minister's invitation for direct involvement (preaching, serving on a committee, etc.) the former minister will need to determine if it is appropriate. It is wise for former ministry personnel to stay out of policy or governance issues. Their presence in the faith community should be agreed upon with their colleague and their presence could strengthen or hurt the health of the community of faith. In situations where a minister has served in an isolated or rural pastoral charge, remains living in the area, and where there are no other United Church communities of faith easily accessible, the minister should contact regional council staff to facilitate a dialogue with the incumbent minister to determine if the former minister may worship there and to establish terms of the relationship.

A new development in the pastoral transition is how to disengage from social media and it is helpful for both ministry personnel and members of the community of faith to be aware of how healthy social media engagement can support or hinder a pastoral relationship. Some helpful best practices are outlined below¹:

- Prior to a departure, ministry personnel need to transfer administrator duties for church-related social media spaces and accounts, remove their own administrator status, and share password information with someone else in the community of faith, who will change the passwords and take over administrator duties.
- Though difficult, it is recommended as a best practice for the departing ministry personnel to unfriend/unfollow all members and others with whom they've had a pastoral relationship, although there may be situations where using restricted lists are appropriate.² In making this change to limit their online interactions with former faith community members, ministry personnel prioritize the needs of the community of faith and incoming ministry personnel over their own desires to maintain relationships (or the desires of members to stay in contact). Ministry personnel must be consistent with all members—either unfriend/unfollow everyone from the community of faith or move everyone to a restricted list—and they should convey this practice to the community of faith as part of your departure plan, so there is no confusion.
- Following the end of your pastoral relationship, ministry personnel must refrain from providing pastoral care through digital communication. Continuing to provide pastoral care through social media interferes with the ministry of their successor and interferes with the beginning of their new pastoral relationship.
- Following a period of one year, ministry personnel may discern whether they will begin to accept friend requests of former congregants and/or choose to change their privacy settings. They should not initiate friend/follow requests with members of a former community of faith.

¹ These are modified from The United Church of Christ, [A Sure Foundation: Resources for the Relationship between Pastors and Congregations—social media guidelines](#).

² Adam Cleaveland makes compelling arguments for both options in his *Alban Weekly* article "[Pastoral Transitions in the Age of Social Media](#)."

Appendix: Information Pamphlet

SABBATICAL 2019

(From _____ to _____)

What is a sabbatical?

A sabbatical (from the word *sabbath*) is time away from the regular routines of work for rest, renewal, and rebirth.

When will this happen?

Rev. _____ will be away on sabbatical for about 3 months. The sabbatical will begin on _____ and they'll return on _____. _____'s last Sunday leading worship before the sabbatical begins will be _____.

Why is the sabbatical happening?

The United Church of Canada has adopted a policy on sabbatical leaves, which is incorporated into a call or appointment to a pastoral charge. It is applicable to ministry personnel who have completed five or more years of service in the pastoral charge.

Sabbatical Policy

More information can be found in *Pastoral Relations: Supporting the Pastoral Relationship*.

Purpose

The biblical roots of Sabbath are foundational to the concept of sabbatical as a time of rest from the work of ministry. Sabbatical time is for learning through reflection, revitalization, and recreation.

Proposal

The Ministry and Personnel Committee is overseeing the sabbatical and has approved the following goals and plan for the sabbatical:

(list goals here)

What will happen during the sabbatical?

A) Worship

(add details about who is leading worship, if known)

B) Pastoral Care and Funerals

(add details here about pastoral care coverage)

C) Council/Board/Session Meetings

_____ Regional Council has named _____ of _____ United Church as Pastoral Charge Supervisor for the duration of the sabbatical leave. _____ will be present for all Council meetings.

D) *(add other details of concern or importance for your community of faith)*

Transitions

Leaving: On Sunday _____ during worship there will be a short blessing of the sabbatical leave.

Returning: _____ will be back to worship on _____ OR back in the office on _____. In _____ we'll schedule an opportunity to share experiences of the sabbatical.

What if you have more questions?

Please speak to a member of the Ministry and Personnel Committee:

(list them and their contact information here)

The sabbatical is seen as an opportunity to renew the energy and mission of both the minister and the congregation. Thanks to everyone for making this experience possible!!