

The United Church of Canada Living Skies Regional Council Pastoral Relations Commission: Voluntary Associate Minister

This document outlines the policy regarding Voluntary Associate Ministers (VAMs) in Living Skies Regional Council.

PREAMBLE

As per section I.2.5.3 of *The Manual (2023)*, any ministry personnel who are not called or appointed to a community of faith may only carry out the functions of ministry in the United Church if:

- a) they have a formal association with a community of faith, are acting on behalf of that community of faith, and have the approval of the community of faith's governing body; or
- b) they have been appointed to a community of faith to exercise the functions of ministry associated with it.

The "functions of ministry in the United Church" include, but are not limited to, pulpit supply, presiding at the sacraments, funerals, weddings, leading educational events on behalf of a community of faith (i.e. confirmation classes, study groups, etc.), and pastoral care on behalf of a community of faith. Therefore, this section of the Manual applies to all ministry personnel within the boundaries of Living Skies Regional Council who are either retired or between calls or appointments and wish to engage in the "functions of ministry" within the bounds of Living Skies Regional Council at the invitation of a community of faith.

DEFINITION

A Voluntary Associate Minister (VAM) is an ordained, diaconal, or designated lay minister* in The United Church of Canada who is retired or between calls or appointments, is in good standing within the regional council, and has a formal association with a community of faith.

A VAM can be in association with any community of faith, regardless of whether or not there is an appointed or called ministry personnel in place with the community of faith. A community of faith must request approval of the designation of a VAM by completing the VAM application form and forwarding it to the Pastoral Relations Commission for their approval.

A person can only have one VAM designation at any one time. A VAM can exercise the functions of ministry for any community of faith within the bounds of Living Skies Regional Council and is not limited to only doing so for the community of faith with which they are in formal association. To exercise the functions of ministry in another Regional Council, the VAM would need to consult the guidelines for that jurisdiction.

A VAM from another regional council of the United Church of Canada is eligible to perform the functions of ministry within the bounds of Living Skies Regional Council upon consultation with the Pastoral Relations Minister.

MEMBERSHIP

Voluntary Associate Minister membership is based on their stream of ministry. Voluntary Associate status shall be seen as equivalent to any appointment or call in terms of membership and discipline.

THE PROCESS

Anyone eligible to be a VAM may apply through the appropriate community of faith by filling out the form found on the Living Skies Regional Council website. All parts of the form must be completed, including the signatures of the Community of Faith Secretary of the governing body and the Voluntary Associate Minister.

The completed form will be sent to the Living Skies Regional Council Pastoral Relations Commission for consideration and approval. This includes confirmation of current mandatory training (racial justice and boundaries), and a current annual declaration that has been filed on ChurchHub.

Once the request has been approved by the Pastoral Relations Commission, Living Skies Regional Council Pastoral Relations Minister will retain a copy and provide one to each of the community of faith Secretary of the governing body and the Voluntary Associate Minister.

If the request is not approved, Living Skies Regional Council Pastoral Relations Minister will contact all parties.

By signing the Voluntary Associate Minister application form all parties are agreeing to the following:

1. Ministry functions performed come under the oversight and discipline of the Office of Vocation which includes completing mandatory training and annual declaration of a satisfactory police records check. A reminder that adherence to the Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice is critical in maintaining healthy boundaries.
2. The Voluntary Associate Minister may carry out any of the functions of ministry for the community of faith they are in formal association with, including but not limited to weddings, funerals, pulpit supply, educational events, and administering the sacraments.
3. The Voluntary Associate Minister may carry out any of the functions of ministry for any other community of faith in the Living Skies Regional Council that requests their services, including but not limited to weddings, funerals, pulpit supply, educational events, and administering the sacraments.
4. A Voluntary Associate Minister is not a Paid Accountable Ministry position and therefore is not on call for performing the functions of ministry for the community of faith with whom they are in formal association. They are also not required to attend meetings of the governing body or the Ministry & Personnel Committee of said community of faith, unless both parties desire so.
5. The Voluntary Associate Minister will work cooperatively with the community of faith for whom they are carrying out the functions of ministry. If there is a called or appointed ministry personnel in said community of faith, then the VAM can only perform the functions of ministry in consultation with or the approval of the said ministry personnel.
6. The Voluntary Associate Minister is entitled to appropriate compensation, including travel allowance, for performing any of the functions of ministry.
7. Since a Voluntary Associate Minister is not a paid accountable ministry position, there is no requirement of monetary compensation (honoraria, stipend, or travel allowance) by the community of faith to their VAM. However, if the VAM performs any of the functions of

ministry for that community of faith they are entitled to appropriate compensation for performing those functions (as per item 4. above).

- 8. The Voluntary Associate Minister will submit an annual report to the community of faith that they are in formal association with. This report outlines the functions of ministry that they have performed in the previous year, including functions of ministry performed in other communities of faith. A sample form is available; this report may be included in the annual report of the community of faith or may involve an annual conversation as an alternative, especially if there are no accountable activities to report.
- 9. The approval of this application includes the granting of the licence to administer the sacraments, as applicable.
- 10. The approval of this application includes maintaining the applicant’s name on the Regional Council’s list of ministry personnel approved to perform marriages if desired.
- 11. VAM status does NOT require an annual renewal but continues to be in effect until one of the following takes place:
 - (a) If a Voluntary Associate Minister enters into a call with a community of faith; or
 - (b) If a Voluntary Associate Minister enters into an appointment longer than six months; or
 - (c) If either the community of faith or the Voluntary Associate Minister chooses to end the formal association by ordinarily giving 3 months notice in a written letter to the other party; or
 - (d) The Voluntary Associate Minister is no longer in good standing in the United Church of Canada as determined by the Office of Vocation.

When Voluntary Associate Minister status ends both the community of faith and the VAM need to communicate this to the Pastoral Relations Commission through email or a written letter.

+++++

* Within the bounds of Living Skies Regional Council, lay people who retire while serving as Designated Lay Ministers are referred to as Retired Designated Lay Ministers for the purposes of this policy.