

Best Practices for Retirement in Living Skies Regional Council

“Circumstances alter cases.” “One size does not fit all”. That may be particularly true in Living Skies Regional Council where we have a lot of geography, some cities, some larger towns and some smaller, some tiny villages and often a great deal of distance between them. The Committee on Ministry Personnel Support is offering the following to address best practices for retirement, recognizing that location, circumstance, and other factors may affect the applicability of these practices in your case. When in doubt, please consult with the Pastoral Relations Minister.

As you prepare to retire, please make time to participate in the “Retiring with Grace” webinar, even if you are not currently due to update your boundaries training. While our pensions webinars are very helpful with the financial aspects of retirement, “Retiring with Grace” will help you consider the personal, spiritual and psychological aspects of retirement.

There are a number of ways of entering a pastoral relationship (call, appointment, collaborative ministry agreement are the most common examples). Regardless of the means of entry into a pastoral relationship, we recommend these best practices when the relationship ends.

If you are retiring in an urban area or in a town or village where other United Churches are within reasonable driving distance:

In order to allow the previous community of faith to move whole-heartedly into its new pastoral relationship, and in order to facilitate your full participation in the life of a community of faith, the best practice is to move permanently to a new community of faith. You might want to visit several before choosing one. Once settled in your new church home, you may want to consider asking the governing body to give you membership privileges under B.3.5.2 of *The Manual*. This will allow you to participate fully in the life of your new church home.

Once you are comfortably settled in your new church home, you may apply to become a VAM (Voluntary Associate Minister) for that community of faith. [See this link for the policy related to this process.](#) Becoming a VAM is the only path to maintaining your status as ministry personnel in good standing within The United Church of Canada. You may not perform any of the functions of ministry (worship leadership, sacraments, education, pastoral care, administration) unless you are a VAM. Your Pastoral Relations Minister can answer any questions you may have about this process.

What about visiting the previous community of faith where you were in a pastoral relationship? For the first few years, it is best to limit visits to rare and special occasions, such as church anniversaries or occasional funerals. Always check with the incumbent minister to make sure that they are comfortable with you visiting at that time.

If you are retiring and remaining in a remote location or a location where it is not feasible to drive to the nearest United Church:

There may be situations in which it is not possible for a departing minister to find a new community of faith. Sometimes the community where the church is located is so remote that it is not feasible for the minister to travel to be part of a new community of faith. Sometimes the partner/family of the departing minister is so deeply embedded in the life of that community of faith that it would be a hardship for them to find a new church home.

In such situations, it is recommended that the departing minister should have no interaction with that community of faith for a minimum of a year, even if their family continues to do so. They should not attend worship or congregational events. They should not provide pulpit supply or any other services to the community of faith or those associated with it. While this may feel like a hardship, there are a variety of on-line United Church worship opportunities, and collegial support, especially from other retirees, can be sought in a variety of ways. Often faith community and support can be found in working on committees of the Regional Council. If you have questions, please discuss these things with your Pastoral Relations Minister.

When you return to life in that community of Faith, it is well to monitor your participation in some particular areas of congregational life. Serving as a member of the governing body, Worship Committee or Ministry & Personnel Committee should be avoided.

If you are retiring from a community of faith that for financial or other reasons has no reasonable likelihood of calling a new minister:

Retiring is never an easy decision. It is particularly difficult if you have a sense that the community of faith you have served and loved will not be able to find a new minister. It is hard to say no when the needs are obvious, and there seem to be few options for meeting them. Working with the community of faith prior to your retirement may help it to find other options. Might they share ministry with another nearby community of faith or ecumenical partner? Are there people who might enter the Licensed Lay Worship Leaders program? Is there someone who might undertake the training to become a Sacraments Elder? Are there people whose caring nature might allow them, with some training from you, to become pastoral care visitors? You can be instrumental, prior to your retirement, in helping the community of faith discover its own gifts for ministry.

Please remember that the health of this community of faith is not your responsibility once you have retired. Working with a colleague or mentor to clarify what ministry you are and are not able or willing to undertake in retirement, discussing that with your Pastoral Relations Minister, and then being clear with the community of faith about what you can and cannot do for them will avoid disappointment and hurt feelings on all sides.

When you are retiring from a community of faith that is actively seeking a new minister:

It is extremely hard for a departing minister to sever ties with those with whom they have been in relationship, and this pain is equally true both for minister and for congregants

who have been close to that minister. However, it is the responsibility of the departing minister to set and maintain appropriate boundaries with the people of the previous community of faith. If you have a successor, be mindful of your ethical obligation to be supportive of the new minister and new pastoral relationship. It is not appropriate for the departing minister to do these things:

- Take part in or advise on any pastoral relations processes concerning the community of faith.
- Drop in to worship or other activities of the community of faith without prior consultation with and approval of the incumbent minister (when there is one).
- Maintain regular social contact with former parishioners.
- Offer pastoral care or services in any form to former parishioners.
- Offer advice on the functioning of the church to the new minister or governance bodies.
- Engage in any critique, however subtle, of the new minister.

We hope that the process of retirement is filled with blessings and a recognition of the faith-filled ministry that you have offered within the United Church of Canada throughout your years of leadership. We offer these Best Practices as part of the process of honouring that journey and supporting you into the future.