



Exempt Standing in Pennsylvania Southeast Conference

EXEMPT STANDING – UCC Manual on Ministry, pages 56-57

“Retired” is a word with financial and employment connotations; it is not an ecclesial word and it is not a form of ecclesiastical standing in the United Church of Christ. A minister who identifies as “retired” might be employed or not, might be drawing an annuity or not; however, a retired minister must still adhere to the requirements of Ordained Ministerial Standing as set forth by their Association’s Committee on Ministry, unless they have requested and been granted Exempt Standing. Similarly, an Ordained Minister does not have to be a person of retirement age to discern an end of their public ministry and to request Exempt Standing.

--MOM, p.56

Exempt Standing is a ministerial standing for Ordained Ministers who continue to affirm their ordination and commitment to the United Church of Christ, but who choose to no longer (or are no longer able to) engage in public ministry and do not plan to reengage public ministry in the future.

--MOM, p.56

Introduction to PSEC’s Exempt Standing

Ministry often becomes so deeply embedded in one’s spiritual calling and personal identity, it is difficult if not impossible to distinguish the public role from the person. Stepping away from the public role has been, until recently, a relatively uncomplicated process where an active pastor moved into a time of freedom (retirement) and could practice ministry (or not) with all of rights earned over years of faithful service *without* the ongoing responsibilities and requirements of ordained ministry that have been instituted over the last twenty years. These changes are new to some pastors who retired previous to their implementation, but they are essential to the wellbeing of the church, our pastors and people and are, therefore, not negotiable. They have evolved for several reasons.

Religious institutions that were once trusted to hold their leaders accountable are now regularly scrutinized for their oversight (or lack thereof) of those leaders. Civil authorities have begun making requirements of clergy (like Mandated Reporter Training and corresponding criminal background checks) that at one time were viewed as an infringement on First Amendment rights. And as more clergy come to ministry from other vocations that have stringent professional requirements, they bring the insights and benefits of continual training and oversight. As a result, religious institutions have increased their education, certification, and reporting requirements for ordained pastors bestowed the authority of the church. That is the right thing to do. But it does create a burden (and often comes as an unwelcome surprise) for pastors who have enjoyed the freedom that has traditionally come at the end of one’s active ministry. To alleviate that burden, the UCC created Exempt standing.

A. WHAT IS EXEMPT STANDING?

1. The UCC has traditionally valued well-educated, well-prepared clergy which has evolved to include covenants of accountability that ensure the wellness of the pastor and the people they serve. Most of those covenants are focused on the beginning and active years of ministry. All of them recognize that ordination is life-long. “Exempt” is a ministry standing that continues these values when a minister is ready to end active ministry or is unable to continue.

PSEC EXEMPT STANDING DOCUMENT

2. A minister with Exempt Standing is an active member of a local congregation but stops performing *regular acts* of public ministry (for example, preaching every Sunday, and/or officiating at monthly rites and sacraments). There are occasions, like family weddings, funerals or baptisms, when an Exempt Minister can preside at the rite or sacrament. (If the family is affiliated with a local church the Exempt Minister would preside in close partnership with the called pastor at the church). With these limitations, the exempt minister is relieved of the responsibility to keep current on boundary and diversity trainings, continuing education, and involvement in required Association and Conference activities.
3. Exempt Standing is intended to be a lasting decision. However, life circumstances do change. An Exempt minister can petition for reinstatement of their active standing. The minister will be obliged to complete all of the accountability requirements to be considered current for Active standing.
4. Exempt standing is the only ordained ministerial standing that a minister may keep in the Association/Conference of their choosing. For Active standing and Leave of Absence standing, the minister must retain his/her standing in the Association where he/she is practicing ministry.

B. WHAT EXEMPT STANDING IS NOT:

1. It is not a loss of one's standing as a UCC minister. It is the appropriate way for one to continue authorized ordained standing even if one is unable or is ready to conclude the public practice of ministry and the requirements for active ministry standing.
2. It is not a dishonoring or diminishing of one's faithful service to the UCC. Again, it is the appropriate way to conclude ministry yet stay connected with integrity to one's spiritual and ordination identity and the core values of the UCC.
3. It is not a disciplinary action by the Association or Conference. It is a choice by the Minister. If a Minister continues to practice ministry but does not comply with the accountability practices required for active ministry, the Association COM is required to have conversation with the Minister as to his/her intentions. If the Minister cannot or will not agree to follow-through on their accountability responsibilities, they may choose then without bias or consequence to apply for Exempt standing, or to voluntarily relinquish their Ministerial standing. If they don't choose either of those, yet persist in practicing public ministry, the COM will then have to opt for the disciplinary action of terminating their authorized standing with bias until they choose to abide by all covenantal requirements.
4. It is not completely free from requirements or covenants. Ministers with Exempt Standing still covenant to uphold the Ministerial Code of Ethics. They are also expected to be intentional about their participation in the life of the local church as they are able. They are required, if necessary, to participate in the accountability processes of situational support consultations and fitness reviews. They also are expected to complete their Association's Annual Information Review for as long as possible.

C. WHO DECIDES WHEN A MINISTER APPLIES FOR EXEMPT STANDING?

The minister in conversation with family and ministry colleagues.