



EQUIPPING FOR... **ELDERSHIP**

When a Minister Retires

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It is often the case, when a minister retires, that the congregation will gather to mark the occasion. A suitably decorated cake may be cut, gifts given, tears shed and amusing stories told. In the spirit of Matthew 25:21, the church gives thanks for the good and faithful service of a life dedicated to the ministry of Word and Sacraments.

There is no mandatory retirement age for ministers. Each minister, under the care and guidance of a presbytery, must determine the right time to step away from called ministry. As part of this discernment, there are a number of matters that ought to be considered. (See Book of Forms sections 245 and 245.1.) Some of those matters are outlined here.

- 1.** Whether listed on the constituent roll of a presbytery or the appendix to the roll, a minister must seek permission from the presbytery to retire. This is because it is the presbytery's responsibility to settle ministers in pastoral charges and to dissolve the pastoral tie when they leave. The retirement request must be in writing and should include a proposed retirement date.
- 2.** A presbytery should send a representative to visit with the minister to discuss the request. This is an opportunity to ensure the minister is clear on the implications of retirement before the retirement is approved. For example:
 - A.** A retired minister is not eligible to accept a call to a pastoral charge. The minister is, however, eligible to be appointed by a presbytery to stated supply or an interim ministry position. If the stated supply or interim ministry is 50% time (22.5 hours a week) or more, the minister is placed on the constituent roll of the presbytery with all the privileges and responsibilities that accompany constituent membership.
 - B.** A minister cannot un-retire. Once the retirement has been approved by presbytery and the Pension and Benefits Board, there is no going back to called ministry. The minister cannot make further contributions to the pension plan and once a pension has begun to be paid it cannot be stopped.
 - C.** If it is not already there, a minister's name will be placed on the appendix to the presbytery's roll. While the minister may still attend presbytery meetings and speak to issues before the court, a retiree may not vote.
 - D.** At the time of retirement, the minister must choose whether or not to go on the retiree Health and Dental plan. If the minister chooses not to join the retiree plan at the date of retirement, s/he cannot later decide to join the plan. The minister may withdraw from the retiree plan at any time.
- 3.** If the minister is still prepared to retire, the presbytery will proceed with the steps that need to take place.
 - A.** The congregation will be invited to the presbytery meeting at which the retirement

request will be considered. Usually, the session will name two or three people to speak about the retirement on behalf of the congregation.

- B.** If the minister's request is granted, the presbytery will ensure that an application to retire has been sent to the Pension and Benefits Board. The board prefers a three to four month notice. A retirement date is approved by the presbytery.
 - C.** The presbytery should conduct an exit interview with the minister and the session to discuss the immediate needs of the minister and pastoral charge. This conversation can also address the pastoral charge's short- and long-term ministry plans.
 - D.** The presbytery will arrange for the pastoral charge to be declared vacant. Please see Book of Forms, Appendix A-25.
 - E.** The presbytery will appoint an interim moderator. The interim moderator will serve as a link between the pastoral charge and the presbytery. The interim moderator's work will include moderating session meetings and guiding the search process once it has been determined that the pastoral charge is ready to search for a new minister.
- 4.** The minister should include any unused vacation days when calculating the proposed retirement date. Ministers are entitled to at least five vacation weeks annually. If, for example, a minister is called

to a pastoral charge effective September 1, the minister may take vacation days any time from September 1 to the following August 31. If a minister retires half way through that year, the minister is entitled to half the vacation weeks. In such a case, it would be reasonable to "round up" the 2.5 weeks to 3.

- 5.** Questions about unused Continuing Education Allowance funds are addressed in the Continuing Education Regulations. The regulations are available online at presbyterian.ca.
- 6.** Retiring ministers should be aware of a Declaratory Act approved by the church at the 2015 General Assembly. A Declaratory Act is an affirmation of what the denomination understands the law of the church to be regarding a particular matter. In this case, the subject of the act is how the law of the church applies to retiring ministers. Primarily, the statement confirms that, to receive a church pension, a minister must retire. See Acts and Proceedings 2014, p. 268-269 for more information.
- 7.** Retiring from a pastoral charge is not always easy. Ministers pour a great deal of their lives into a pastoral charge. Walking away from such a profound relationship can leave a minister feeling unfulfilled. Occasionally a retired minister will interfere in the life of their former congregation. Similarly, members and adherents who love and respect a minister can have a difficult time saying goodbye. They may be tempted to ask the departed minister to come back and preside over weddings, baptisms or funerals. It is essential for the retired minister, sessions and congregations to remember that when a minister retires, the pastoral tie between the minister and pastoral charge is dissolved. Many retired ministers generously separate themselves from previous charges in order to let the next minister become established – returning only occasionally at the invitation of the session for a specific reason. Some, usually after a period of absence, are able to slip easily and helpfully into the life of a former congregation. All of us must strive for the peace and harmony of the church.



Retirement and Continued Ministry

Session Starter

Prayer:

God of time and space, you are the creator of this day. We join the psalmist in praying that we rejoice and are glad in it. We give thanks that even when we are faced with challenges and heavy responsibilities, you are our ever-present help. Bless us as we meet now with the assurance that we are your people doing your work. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Introduction: Book of Forms 245.1

Where it is desired, following retirement, to continue the services in the present or another pastoral charge, the presbytery, under the authority of section 213.2, may make arrangements mutually acceptable to the presbytery concerned, after consultation with the pastoral charge and the minister.

Scripture: Luke 5:15-16 NRSV

But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray.

A Brief Commentary:

Every now and then Jesus would retreat. He needed to step back from the pressing, adoring, expectant, demanding crowd so that he could rest, reflect and pray.

Reflection:

Like Jesus, most of us need to step out of the daily rush and responsibilities for spiritual, emotional and physical recuperation. That may take the shape of a lunch break, a day off, a vacation, a leave of absence or even retirement.

For ministers of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, retirement means leaving behind called ministry. It does not, however, mean ministry must stop altogether.

Some ministers welcome the transition from the pulpit to the pew. They enjoy supporting the called minister and participating in the life of a congregation



in a more limited and focused way. Some are invited to formalize their relationship with a congregation by becoming a Minister in Association as described in Book of Forms, Appendix I. Some are elected to serve as ruling elders.

Other ministers feel compelled to continue leading a pastoral charge more fully.

Book of Forms section 245 deals with minister retirement. Subsection 245.1 indicates that a retired minister may continue serving his or her present pastoral charge, or a new pastoral charge, as a stated supply minister. This must be by presbytery appointment after consulting with the minister and pastoral charge. Each stated supply appointment is for one year and is renewable.

Retired ministers with the necessary skills may be appointed to provide interim ministry to a pastoral charge, mostly likely in another pastoral charge than the one from which they retired. Interim ministry is explained in Book of Forms 213.3. Briefly, it is a presbytery appointment for up to two years and is designed to meet intentional goals within a specified time.

Of course retired ministers may also provide pulpit supply, serve as interim moderators and on committees at the various levels of the church.

Follow up:

What might be the advantages and disadvantages of having a retired minister serve your congregation in some way?

What's on your mind?

What's the difference between Stated Supply and Interim Ministry?

Eventually, every congregation must bid farewell to their minister. The minister might be called to another pastoral charge, resign to pursue further education or to take up another vocation. Ministers retire. In rare cases, a ministry comes to an end for health reasons or as the result of disciplinary measures. However the pastoral charge finds itself without a called minister, the presbytery will appoint an interim moderator to help plan for the future.

Occasional Supply:

If the pastoral charge is ready to call to a minister, the interim moderator will be directed by the presbytery to moderate session meetings, help organize and advise a search committee, and arrange for pulpit supply until the new minister is called. Pulpit supply, also known as occasional supply, refers to having individuals lead worship and preach Sunday by Sunday. The interim moderator may also be able to offer limited pastoral care or arrange for others to be on standby for pastoral emergencies.

If a presbytery determines a pastoral charge is not yet ready to call a minister, the following are two options available during a vacancy.

Stated Supply:

The *Calling a Minister* handbook (available in hardcopy and at presbyterian.ca) describes stated supply as "... the appointment by the presbytery of an ordained minister of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for a specified period of time not to exceed 12 months." The time limit creates an annual opportunity for the pastoral charge to call its own minister. Preserving this right to call is an important principle. As the stated supply appointment nears its anniversary, the presbytery, in consultation with the session, can decide if the pastoral charge is ready

to search for a minister or if the stated supply arrangement should be continued.

Stated supply is intended to be a sustaining ministry. Ordinarily that means the minister provides worship leadership and other pastoral duties as determined by the session and the presbytery. See Book of forms 213.2 and the *Calling a Minister* handbook.

Interim Ministry:

A presbytery may identify specific work a pastoral charge needs to accomplish before it will be deemed ready to call a minister. In that case, the presbytery may appoint an interim minister with specific goals to be completed within a timeline as approved by the presbytery and the session. Ordained ministers in good standing of denominations represented in the Ecumenical Shared Ministry Handbook (Presbyterian, Anglican, United, Lutheran – see Book of Forms 200.13 – 200.13.4) may be appointed as interim ministers.

Interim ministry is meant to achieve its goals within two years. See Book of forms 213.3 and the *Calling a Minister* handbook for more details.

Stated supply and interim ministry may be full-time or part-time appointments. Assuming the minister is Presbyterian, the minister will be placed on the presbytery's constituent roll if the appointment is for 50% time (22.5 hours per week) or more. Being on the constituent roll primarily means the minister is not only permitted to participate in presbytery discussions but also to vote on presbytery decisions.

The presbytery may appoint an interim moderator to oversee the work of stated supply and interim ministers.