



**Wisconsin Conference
United Church of Christ**

Shedding Light on Clergy Exempt Standing and Supporting Clergy Roles

About four years ago I was sitting in the living room of Revs. Carol and Ralph DiBiasio-Snyder drinking a cup of Ralph's remarkable coffee and listening to a group of retired UCC clergy. The purpose of our gathering was to discuss a proposed clergy status called Omega Standing. The idea for this standing came from the working group for the new UCC Manual On Ministry. Nobody was getting on board with the name Omega because some clergy thought it implied clergy with one foot in the grave, which was not the intent of the working group. While not a catchy term, the name Omega has been changed to Exempt Standing.

This new standing emerged because of new realities about the longevity of human life and newly established and enforceable requirements for UCC clergy to continue in good standing with the denomination. Years of clergy misconduct had been exposed in churches across denominations and faith traditions so the UCC took steps to insure the safety and health of those served by our pastors. Oversight by committees on ministry and accountability of clergy has been elevated out of concern for vulnerable people. The new Manual on Ministry makes explicit the need for ongoing required trainings to ensure that clergy understand the necessity of good boundaries, current information, implicit bias training, etc.

These realities also resulted in the creation of Exempt Standing, the recognition that some retired clergy would no longer be actively involved in public ministry and would therefore not need to meet the training requirements to maintain good standing with the UCC.

According to the Manual on Ministry, "The choice to claim Exempt Standing may be the result of vocational discernment as an Ordained Minister ends

their ministry career and wider church engagement, the result of a significant change in health that ends their capacity for representative servant leadership on behalf of the United Church of Christ, or the result of other reasons” (pg. 56). Exempt Standing includes setting aside engagement with public ministry and releases a minister from ongoing requirements for standing. Each year as clergy fill out the annual information review form there is the opportunity to consider changing one’s standing; those considering such a change can consult with their Committee on Ministry and/or Conference staff. For example: Exempt Standing is not relinquishing one’s ordination; it is instead a covenantal statement between the UCC and an ordained minister regarding public ministry. Exempt Standing is not the same as being retired. Retirement is an employment decision that may or may not include ending all forms of public ministry, including public ministry within one’s own family, paid or unpaid (preaching, teaching, presiding over the sacraments, funerals, weddings, etc.).

After completing the Wisconsin Conference boundary training program, provided online by Convergence, retired clergy expressed concerns about the relevance of the training for them. The Commission on Ministry boundary training task force doesn’t want this requirement to be an obstacle to retired clergy continuing in their roles. The Commission is appreciative of this feedback and is actively seeking a more relevant training to meet the needs of our valued group of retired clergy. During this time of increasing need in local churches as well as increased stress on local clergy we are committed to supporting healthy ministry and the wellbeing of our pastors.

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