



Ordained Ministerial Standing - **EXEMPT** in the Southwest Conference

From the 2018 UCC Manual on Ministry: see *attached Excerpts*

The Committee on Church and Ministry-A reviews and grants approval of applications for Exempt Standing from clergy with standing in the Southwest Conference, and those seeking to transfer in. Exempt Standing is new as of 2018 for those who discern it is time to end their public practice of ministry, yet remain in good ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ.

- **WHO DECIDES WHEN A MINISTER APPLIES FOR EXEMPT STANDING?** Usually it is the minister him/her/themselves. At best, it is done in consultation and discernment with family, friends, church, and one's own pastor or Conference ministers. Most ministers can easily identify when in their lives the practice of authorized ministry began, with all its preparation and formation. However, after what are often many years of living one's vocation, the authorized practice of ministry usually becomes so deeply embedded in both one's spiritual calling and personal identity, it is extremely difficult to distinguish the public role from the person, and to discern when it is time to step away from the public role.
- **WHAT IS EXEMPT STANDING? (*Some specifics which may or may not be outlined in MOM*)**
 - ✓ The UCC, in its multiple streams of history, has valued well-educated, well-prepared clergy who are expected to abide by covenants of accountability and ethics, for the welfare of themselves, families, and the congregations they serve. Most of those covenants, education and preparation have historically been focused on the beginning and active years of professional ministry. Exempt is newly designated standing that seeks to continue those values when a minister discerns it is time to end a public ministry, or is unable to continue active ministry for some reason, recognizing that vocational calling is often life-long.
 - ✓ A minister with Exempt Standing can function as an active member of a local congregation, but relinquishes performing acts of public ministry (preaching, officiating at rites and sacraments, serving on Conference committees). It is highly encouraged that they consult with the current authorized minister as to their involvement and leadership within the life of their local church. On very occasional special events, such as family weddings, funerals or baptisms, an Exempt Minister may share in the leadership of the rite or sacrament in the presence of an active authorized minister who is the primary officiant. With these restrictions, the minister is essentially relieved of the responsibility to keep current on boundary and racial justice trainings, continuing education, and involvement in required Conference activities. (This is similar to other highly credentialed professions such the fields of medicine, finance, education and law, whose professionals must maintain certain regular credentialing and accountability in order to practice).
 - ✓ A minister with Exempt Standing who has been named Pastor Emeritus in a previously served congregation may continue in that role *in name only*, not with any official pastoral responsibilities designated. Consideration may be given to any of the parameters outlined in the above paragraph if the minister is still a member of the church.

- ✓ Exempt Standing is intended to be a permanent decision. However, life circumstances do change. An Exempt minister can petition COCAM-A for a reinstatement of their active standing if the need and ability arise. The minister will be required to do any of the accountability requirements to be considered current for active standing.
- ✓ Exempt standing is the only ordained ministerial standing that a minister may keep in the association/conference of their choosing. For Active standing (employed or retired) and Leave of Absence standing, the minister must retain their standing in the association/conference where their church membership and ministry resides.
- **WHAT EXEMPT STANDING IS NOT:**
 - ✓ **It is not a termination of one's standing as a UCC minister.** It is the appropriate way for one to continue authorized standing even if one is unable or is ready to conclude the public practice of ministry and the requirements for active standing.
 - ✓ **It is not a dishonoring or diminishing of one's life-long service to the UCC.** Again, it is the appropriate way to conclude a professional ministry yet stay connected with integrity to one's spiritual identity and the core values of our denomination.
 - ✓ **It is not a disciplinary action by the Conference.** It is a choice and application by the minister. If a minister continues to practice ministry but does not comply with the accountability practices required for active ministry, COCAM-A is required to have some conversation with the minister as to their 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, COCAM-A will then have to opt for *the disciplinary action* of terminating their authorized standing with bias until they choose to comply.
 - ✓ **It is not completely free from requirements or covenants.** Ministers with Exempt Standing, while free from regular, ongoing accountability requirements such as Boundary and Anti-Racism trainings, and continuing education, Exempt ministers still covenant to uphold the ***Ministerial Code of Ethics***. They are also expected to be ***intentional and communicative with their local church and pastors*** as to their participation in the life of the church as they are able, so as to be a help and not a hindrance to the authorized minister. They are required, if able and necessary, to participate in the accountability processes of ***situational support consultations and fitness reviews***. They also are expected to continue the ***Annual Information Reviews*** as long as possible.

The decision to apply for Exempt Standing can be a time of sacred reflection, gratitude and celebration. Upon receiving and approval of an Exempt Standing application, COCAM-A will notify the minister's local church of membership and pastor and offer worship resources for celebrating and honoring the minister's years of active ministry now concluding.

***You are responsible for maintaining your own standing.
If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact:***

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