

# Ministry During the Interim Time

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Working Guidelines  
For  
United Church of Christ  
Committees on the Ministry

Third Draft

5/23/03

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May 2003

Parish Life and Leadership Ministry  
Local Church Ministries  
A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ

# Ministry During the Interim Time

## Working Guidelines For United Church of Christ Committees on the Ministry

Third Draft  
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### INTRODUCTION

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In the United Church of Christ, Interim Ministry is the ministry provided to a local church or other ministry setting during a pastoral vacancy.

*Ministry During the Interim Time (Working Guidelines for United Church of Christ Committees on the Ministry)* is intended to clarify the authorization issues that arise out of the unique and distinctive nature of interim ministry in the United Church of Christ. These Guidelines are intended as a companion to Manual on Ministry. The commentary addresses the following:

- **Interim Ministry and Standing in the United Church of Christ**
- **The Nature and Tasks of Ministry During the Interim Time**
- **Three Forms of Interim Ministry**
- **The Ecclesiastical Call to Interim Ministry**
- **Expectations of Interim Ministers**
- **The Normative Practice of Interim Ministry**
- **Calling Bodies in Relation to Interim Ministers**
- **Support and Accountability of Interim Ministers**

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**INTERIM MINISTRY AND STANDING**

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**IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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In order to maintain standing in the United Church of Christ, all ordained ministers (including ordained ministerial partners) must either have a valid call to ministry, receive a leave of absence, or be retired. For persons who are currently engaged in active ministry, association Committees on the Ministry have recognized a variety of calls as valid (i.e. local church pastor, seminary faculty, military chaplain, pastoral counselor, conference staff).

Interim ministry may be recognized as a valid call in the United Church of Christ; it has a number of characteristics that make it a distinctive ministry, set apart from other ministries. Such unique ministry has a number of authorization issues that require clarity within the United Church of Christ.

- Not all persons who serve in interim capacities are called to interim ministry, such as retired ministers or persons who are themselves seeking a settled position in the United Church of Christ. These “occasional” interim ministers are not reliant upon their interim service in order to maintain standing.
- Interim ministers, on the other hand, are reliant upon an ecclesiastical call to retain authorization. There is an itinerant ministry in which they move from place to place in order to carry out the ministry to which they are called.
- For most United Church of Christ ministers, their calling body [*A calling body is an organization or institution – a local church, Conference, pastoral counseling center, etc.. – which seeks the services of an ordained, commissioned, or licensed minister of the United Church of Christ.*] and the church where they hold membership are one and the same. While some interim ministers may be called to interim ministry by the church where they hold membership, in most cases their calling body is not the church where local church membership is held. Many interim ministers are called by their calling bodies to provide direct ministry to a succession of local congregations and ministry settings. Interim ministry in the United Church of Christ is moving toward four way covenants between the interim ministers, the local churches where they hold membership, the associations where they hold authorization, and their calling bodies.

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**THE NATURE AND TASKS OF INTERIM MINISTRY**

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Interim ministry is the ministry provided to a local church or other ministry setting during a pastoral vacancy.

Every change of pastoral leadership presents a unique opportunity for the local congregation (or other calling body) to assess its mission, consider its strengths and weaknesses, and search for a new pastoral leader in cooperation with its association and conference.

The duration of interim ministry is, by definition, a limited one; limited by agreement between conference/association staff, the local congregation and the interim minister. It is understood that all pastoral/professional relationships with the interim minister will terminate when the settled ministry begins.

Interim ministry may be characterized by the special functions and tasks required when churches are in transition. In addition to the ongoing needs of the congregation for pastoral leadership there is a significant transition to be managed. Many issues may present themselves when a change of pastors occurs. How well these issues are addressed will significantly impact the next settled pastorate. Some of the tasks during the interim time may include:

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➤ **Coming to Terms with History**

The congregation needs to complete its closure with the departed pastor, working through its feelings of loss, hurt, relief, anger, guilt, etc. Gaining perspective on its past, both immediate and longer range, will help the congregation prepare for the future. This challenge is all the more crucial when there has been a long pastorate, an involuntary departure, or a conflict within the congregation. The resolution of such dynamics will greatly enhance the success of the new pastorate.

➤ **Discovering a New Identity**

Over time, congregations change as they respond to various pastoral leaders, experience changes in their world context, and modifications in their internal circumstances. The interim time provides a unique opportunity for congregational self-study leading to a focusing of the congregation's present reality.

➤ **Allowing Needed Leadership Change**

A change of pastoral leadership often precipitates changes in the lay leadership as well. Former leaders may take a less active role while new persons become more involved. Many congregations address their internal leadership needs during the interim time.

➤ **Reaffirming Connections with the United Church of Christ**

A change of pastoral leadership is a time when the local congregation may see its relationship with the wider church in a more focused way, becoming more open to the denomination's resources and advice related to the self-study and search and call process. An opportunity exists to strengthen the congregation's identity as part of the United Church of Christ.

➤ **Commitment to New Directions in Ministry**

As the interim period progresses the congregation becomes more ready to move forward under new leadership, furthering a mission which is emerging from its self-study and its understanding of its opportunities for service and witness. The congregation becomes eager to embrace new initiatives in partnership with its new ministerial leader.

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**THREE FORMS OF MINISTRY DURING THE  
INTERIM TIME**

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When local congregations address the need of ministry during the interim time, they typically choose from several approaches.

➤ **Transition**

A Transition (Intentional Interim) Minister provides for the worship life of the congregation, supplies basic pastoral care and leadership, and helps guide a church through the unique complexities, challenges and opportunities inherent in this interim time, by working to create an atmosphere that brings about and/or sustains congregational health while allowing time for the search and call process to unfold in a non-anxious and intentional manner.

Bringing about successful transition ministry during the Interim Ministry time requires clearly developed understandings and statements outlining mutual expectations, purpose and direction between the congregation, the conference/association staff and the transition minister.

139  
140 Transition ministry is a specialized ministry that brings specific skills and experience to help a  
141 congregation deal with instances such as conflict, breach of ethics, an unusually long  
142 pastorate or when the previously called minister remains a part of the congregation and/or  
143 community after retirement.

144  
145 The Transition Minister sees this form of specialized ministry as his/her vocation, has  
146 specialized training and experience.

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149 ➤ **Sustaining**

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151 A Sustaining (Interim) Minister, like a Transition Minister, provides for the worship life of the  
152 congregation and works with committees and board. By providing full ministerial service,  
153 s/he frees up the lay leadership to focus on its congregational profile and other search-related  
154 activities.

155  
156 The Sustaining Minister may or may not see this form of specialized ministry as his/her  
157 vocation. While s/he may or may not have benefit of specialized training, such persons often  
158 make excellent use of vast life experience as well as inherent skills and abilities, seeking to  
159 keep the congregation focused on the unique opportunities and challenges of the time of  
160 transition.

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163 ➤ **Supply**

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165 An Interim Supply Minister, as distinct from a pulpit supply minister, fills a vital role as one who  
166 provides some, but not necessarily all, of the essentials of pastoral and worship life during the  
167 time of transition.

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170 Whether the person providing pastoral services in the interim time is designated as a Transition,  
171 Sustaining, or Interim Supply, she/he is expected to maintain a close working relationship with  
172 Conference and Association staff, and full accountability to the United Church of Christ's expectations  
173 of its interim ministers.

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**THE ECCLESIASTICAL CALL TO  
INTERIM MINISTRY**

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180 Many persons authorized for ministry in the United Church of Christ will not have experienced the call  
181 to interim ministry. Some are called to a vocation as transitional ministers, moving from one  
182 congregation to the next in this specialized form of ministry. Others will provide interim service from  
183 time to time as interim supply or sustaining ministers without seeking a call to this specific form of  
184 ministry.

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187 ➤ **The Calling Body and the Setting of Ministry**

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189 For most calls to ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ, the calling body is  
190 the setting where ministry occurs. For those doing ministry during the interim time, the calling  
191 body may be the association in which the person holds standing, a local congregation where  
192 the person holds membership or a conference seeking to provide interim ministers for its  
193 congregations.

194  
195 In any case, the calling body is typically separate from the position where the interim minister

196 is employed. There are both practical and ethical reasons for this.  
197

- 198 ○ By its very nature, interim ministry is for "in-between times". Its purpose is to provide a  
199 transition from one settled minister to another. The roles of an interim minister and a  
200 settled minister may become confused when the calling body and interim ministry  
201 setting are the same.  
202
- 203 ○ An interim minister may change position often. A calling body separate from the  
204 interim ministry setting provides continuity for the Interim. The call remains intact even  
205 while interim employment changes.  
206
- 207 ○ A separate and ongoing calling body provides a means of nurture and accountability  
208 for the interim minister. This may be achieved through regular reports to and/or  
209 periodic meetings with the calling body, communication when employment changes,  
210 etc.  
211

212  
213 ➤ **Source of Compensation**  
214

215 The calling body is not necessarily responsible for compensating the interim minister, as that  
216 remains the primary responsibility of each ministry setting where the person is employed.  
217 However, there are possibilities for aiding the interim in areas such as administering an  
218 escrow account to be used during times when the person is in between positions or for  
219 continuing education. The calling body may also serve to administer health and pension  
220 benefits, providing continuity for billing and other purposes with the United Church of Christ  
221 Pension Boards. For example, the calling body might receive pension contributions and health  
222 insurance premiums from the employers and forward those to the Pension Boards on behalf  
223 of the minister.  
224

225 ➤ **Responsibility of Calling Body**  
226

227 The calling body has a pastoral responsibility to provide spiritual, emotional and educational  
228 support for the interim minister. A calling body can support the person by providing an  
229 address for communications from the wider church, particularly when the person is between  
230 interims or serving beyond the bounds of the association. The calling body might also provide  
231 a home base from which to establish collegial relationships among interim ministers and  
232 others in ministry.  
233

234 ➤ **Accountability**  
235

236 In evaluating the call to interim ministry, it is the responsibility of the Committee on the  
237 Ministry to affirm that there is a valid and genuine calling body and that the individual minister  
238 is not acting alone or in isolation. In evaluating the validity of calling bodies, the Committee on  
239 the Ministry may want to consider the following criteria:

- 240 ○ The organization is a recognized ecclesiastical body with an identifiable  
241 organizational structure, governance, and leadership.  
242
- 243 ○ The organization must be willing to recognize and affirm the individual's personal  
244 sense of call to interim ministry.  
245
- 246 ○ The organization must be willing and able to provide oversight for the ministry of the  
247 particular individual.  
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- 249 ○ The organization must be committed to participate as a full partner in the covenant  
250 with the individual, the association, and the local church where the individual is a  
251 member.  
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## EXPECTATIONS OF INTERIM MINISTERS

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Associations must determine that a person meets all of the normal criteria before granting standing to a United Church of Christ ordained minister (including interim ministers). These criteria, spelled out in *Manual on Ministry* (MOM, 2001 – Section 3, page 30).

➤ **Membership in a Local Church of the United Church of Christ**

In order to hold standing in the United Church of Christ, all ordained ministers (including interim ministers) must have membership in a Local Church of the United Church of Christ.

➤ **A Sense of Personal Calling Confirmed by a Valid Calling Body**

All ordained ministers (including interim ministers) in the United Church of Christ have a sense of personal calling to ministry by the Holy Spirit which is affirmed by the wider church. In addition, those seeking a call as an interim minister will have a personal sense of call to that specialized ministry and be able to articulate the nature of that call.

In extending a call to interim ministry, the calling body acts on behalf of the wider church to confirm God's call in this individual's life. The Committee on the Ministry considers both the personal call and the ecclesiastical call in making the determination to grant ordained ministerial standing.

➤ **Seeking a Call as an Authorized Minister in the United Church of Christ**

Candidates seeking to be called as interim ministers must demonstrate that they are authorized (or eligible to be authorized) for ministry in the United Church of Christ. Those who are so authorized include: persons with ordained ministerial standing, ordained ministerial partners who are qualified to seek a call in the United Church of Christ, persons with Privilege of Call, certain seminarians and candidates for ordination, and persons approved for ordination pending receipt of a call. These are all persons who upon receipt of a call may apply for and be granted ordained ministerial standing or ordained ministerial partner standing.

In particular circumstances a Committee on the Ministry may license a person to serve as an interim minister while a church seeks new pastoral leadership.

➤ **Demonstration of Considerable Knowledge, Skills and Qualities of Interim Ministry: the Distinctive Expectations of Transition Ministry**

Transition ministry requires specialized training and skills related to ministry during times of transition. Training and skill in church dynamics, conflict management, empowerment of the laity, and an understanding of systems and the dynamics of change are also helpful in equipping a person for this ministry.

A Transition Minister must be able to quickly establish a high level of trust, have good entry and exit skills, and have a good sense of self-differentiation. In addition, interims benefit from a leadership style that is open and adaptable to the faith and traditions within a variety of local churches, and a style that relies upon the gifts, skills and leadership capabilities found within each local setting.

An individual seeking an ecclesiastical call into interim ministry as a Transition Minister will typically be able to demonstrate the requisite knowledge, skills, and qualities for this

305 specialized ministry. Completion of an Interim Ministry Network Basic Course or other formal  
306 training program and letters of reference from persons who can attest to the candidate's  
307 abilities and qualities will be expected. In addition, a person's prior experience in pastoral  
308 ministry, service as an interim minister or life experience may help a calling body determine  
309 the skill level and competency of this individual for a call.  
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311 While these expectations clearly apply to Transition Ministers, those individuals serving as  
312 Sustaining and Interim Supply ministers will also be encouraged to equip themselves in the  
313 same way.  
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317 **THE NORMATIVE PRACTICE OF**  
318 **INTERIM MINISTRY**

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320 In addition to the ethical standards in the Ordained, Commissioned and Licensed Minister's  
321 Codes, there are unique standards that guide the conduct of interim ministers. These norms  
322 reflect the values and traditional practices of interim ministry in the United Church of Christ.  
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325 ➤ **Limited Involvement in the Search Process**

326 Any interim involvement in the search process of a congregation must be clearly established  
327 with conference/association staff and explained to the search committee, prior to the  
328 involvement.  
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330 Interims are often trained and skilled in helping the committee and congregation through a self  
331 study and evaluation process that contributes to the preparation of the Local Church Profile.  
332 Any work the interim does with the committee, concludes before the search committee begins  
333 considering ministerial profiles. *The boundaries need to be clearly established by the*  
334 *conference/association staff person and interim minister – and then explained to the search*  
335 *committee.*  
336

337 *The interim minister should not influence the search process in any way.* Names of candidates  
338 are to remain confidential within the search committee and are not to be shared with the  
339 interim minister. The interim minister must guard against being drawn into discussions that  
340 may lead to the divulging of names or offering opinions regarding specific candidates for the  
341 settled position.  
342

343 ➤ **Not A Candidate for the Settled Position**

344 *The professional and ethical norm throughout the United Church of Christ is that those doing*  
345 *interim ministry are not candidates for the settled position.* This should be clearly stated in the  
346 interim call agreement between the church and the interim minister, so it can be agreed to and  
347 signed by all parties.  
348

349 The rationale for the interim not becoming a candidate for the settled position includes the  
350 following:

- 351 ○ An interim's candidacy compromises the principles of parity and open access to  
352 opportunities by denying unknown candidates with comparable skills the chance to be  
353 seriously considered by the search committee. Because the congregation knows the  
354 interim in ways it cannot know other candidates, the interim has an unfair advantage  
355 over others. This is in tension with the Search and Call process of the United Church  
356 of Christ as expressed and set forth in the *United Church of Christ Constitution and*

*Bylaws 1*

- A serious breach of ministerial ethics occurs if an interim takes advantage of the interim role to position himself or herself as a candidate for the settled position. Such behavior demonstrates significant disregard for the Search and Call processes of the United Church of Christ, a lack of respect for ministerial colleagues who may be candidates for the position and a breach of The Ordained Minister's Code of Ethics. A Fitness Review may result from such behavior.
- All parties to the interim call agreement understand and assume an interim rather than a settled call in the beginning of the relationship. When the interim is called to provide ministry in the interim time there is a written agreement among the church, the interim, and the conference or association representative that this will be an interim relationship rather than settled call. As part of this agreement, all parties understand that the interim will not be considered as a candidate. All parties also agree that a genuine and good faith effort will be made to undertake a search for a settled minister.
- An interim minister's candidacy may subvert the importance of matching the candidate's gifts for ministry with the ministerial needs of the church. The ministerial needs of the church during the interim period are significantly different than they are during the settled pastorate. Calling one with significant gifts for interim ministry to the settled position may result in a mismatch of gifts and ministerial needs.

If a determination is made by the covenantal partners (conference staff, association committee on the ministry, local church) that a pastoral vacancy does not exist (such as during illness or a sabbatical), then other ways to meet the leadership needs of the congregation may be considered. This is not interim ministry. Other labels, such as "acting", "temporary", "designated", etc. may be used.

There are, however, rare occasions during an interim ministry when a sincere effort to conduct a search for a settled minister has been made and in the opinion of conference staff and the Committee on the Ministry it is not likely that continued effort will lead to a call. When this is the case and when both the local church and the interim minister agree to reconsider their relationship, it may be in the best interests of all involved to make an exception to the normative practice.

If the interim is to be considered as a candidate for the settled position, it is important that the Committee on the Ministry have established policies and procedures to consider such an exception. These procedures should include:

- the circumstances when an exception might be considered (i.e. that further searching is not likely to be successful),
- the parties to be involved in discerning the necessity or advisability of making an exception (i.e. conference staff, the local church, the minister, and the Committee on the Ministry),
- the impact of the exception on the Search and Call Process, United Church of Christ polity and practice of ministry, and the nature of interim ministry (i.e. serious reflection

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<sup>1</sup> Any Ordained Minister or Ordained Ministerial Partner may confer with the Conference Minister concerning a pastoral vacancy. At the Ordained Minister's request or at the request of the Ordained Ministerial Partner, his or her name shall be submitted by the Conference Minister for consideration by the committee of any Local Church where there is a pastoral vacancy.

on the reasons for the normative practice named above).

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408 ➤ **Limited Length of Interim Service**

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410 The length of time an interim serves a local church may vary, depending on the situation of  
411 the church and the progress of the search process. The interim minister is to encourage the  
412 church to work diligently through the search process and not allow the process to slow down  
413 because of the positive feelings toward the interim minister. The interim minister must not  
414 seek to extend the interim time for the sake of his or her own employment needs.  
415

416 ➤ **Non Interference in the Ministry of the Settled Minister**

417  
418 As with the departure of a called minister from a local church, when an interim minister  
419 completes her or his ministry the congregation should have been encouraged to set healthy  
420 boundaries. Although the interim may remain in close geographical proximity, the interim  
421 must separate from the congregation and perform no further pastoral functions. In order to  
422 facilitate the congregation's bonding with the new settled leadership, the interim should refrain  
423 from visiting the congregation or any of its members (for a minimum of one year) or  
424 participating in any events unless specifically invited to do so by the Diaconate (or other  
425 appropriate board) in consultation with the settled minister.  
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428 **CHURCHES IN RELATION TO ALL FORMS OF**  
429 **INTERIM MINISTRY**

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430  
431 Just as the normative practices of interim ministry apply to all interims, the standards and  
432 norms for interim churches in relation to ministers are applicable as these churches relate to  
433 all forms of interim ministry: transition, sustaining and supply.  
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435 ➤ **Compensation**

436  
437 All authorized ministers should be compensated according to conference guidelines. Interim  
438 ministers should be compensated at a level commensurate with the compensation of the  
439 previous settled pastor. For churches that have been paying below such conference  
440 guidelines, compensating an interim at a higher level may be the opportunity for the church to  
441 begin moving closer to what it will need to consider for the next called pastor. In some cases  
442 an interim minister may be compensated at a higher rate than the previous minister because  
443 of the particular skills and scope of the ministry position she or he is asked to fulfill during the  
444 interim period.  
445

446 ➤ **Non Consideration of the Interim for the Settled Pastorate**

447  
448 It is imperative that the church understands from the beginning that the interim minister is not  
449 to be considered for the position of settled minister. This should be clearly stated in the interim  
450 covenant or letter of agreement between the church and the interim minister. The rationale for  
451 this has been stated in the previous comments.

452  
453 As stated above, there may be those unusual circumstances that would lead conference,  
454 association, local church and interim minister to consider other options. Those situations  
455 would be rare and must be carefully talked through and understood by all parties.  
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457 ➤ **Continue the Search Process**

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The interim minister gives pastoral leadership to the congregation while the church conducts a search for a settled pastor. Churches need to continue their search in a deliberate way that does not stall because people are comfortable with the interim minister. Many interim call agreements limit the time for which the interim is engaged to a renewable defined term as a way to urge the process to keep moving.

It is appropriate for some Committees on the Ministry to raise questions with both an interim minister and the church if the interim situation continues beyond a typical transition period for that type of congregation, The Manual on Ministry allows for such an intervention in the Situational Support Consultation (MOM, 2001 - Section 8, page 9).

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## **SUPPORT FOR AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF INTERIM MINISTERS**

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### ➤ **Support**

An association in which interim ministry is conducted, whether or not it is not is where the person holds standing, has a responsibility to provide support in the areas of:

- Pastoral care
- Fellowship with pastoral colleagues
- Opportunities for networking and interpersonal support
- Discernment and evaluative feedback.

This is particularly important in helping interims acclimate themselves to new surroundings.

Associations need to continue to act in an advocacy role for the individual and for the role of interim minister as well as resourcing for continuing education. Advocacy for individuals may include:

- Compensation
- Maintaining of contractual integrity
- Opportunities for support consultations and interventions
- Exit interview and assessment

Advocacy for the role of interim may include:

- Understand and promote the unique role, responsibilities and significance of interim ministry.
- Deepen understanding within the association of the distinctive standards and goals of interim ministry.
- Teach and interpret the importance of the transitional nature of the interim time between settled pastorates for congregations.

Committees on Ministries are strongly encouraged to meet with interims at the beginning of their ministry within the association to not only inform the Committees on Ministry but to discern ways in which the association and the interim can be mutually available and supportive. All this requires ongoing communication between conference and association staffs with committees on ministry in both present association and association of origin should they be different.

### ➤ **Accountability**

513 Interim ministers remain accountable to the association where he or she has standing. Should  
514 accountability issues emerge, the concerns are addressed and dealt with according to  
515 established policies and procedures. The association, where standing is held, may need to  
516 seek information and cooperation with its counterpart in the oversight of authorized ministry  
517 when the interim is employed outside of the association or denomination. When such  
518 cooperation is sought, it is important to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each oversight  
519 body as well as the policies and procedures to be followed prior to the actual investigation and  
520 adjudication of the matter. The association where standing is held retains final jurisdiction over  
521 the interim minister's authorization and standing.  
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# THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST'S EXPECTATIONS OF ITS INTERIM MINISTERS

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## Faith Affirmations

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529 ➤ Understands and affirms the Faith Affirmations found in the *Church's Expectations of its Candidates*  
530 *for Ordination*

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532 ➤ Has a sense of call to interim ministry

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## Church Loyalty

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536 ➤ Understands and affirms the expectations for Church Loyalty found in the *Church's Expectations of its*  
537 *Candidates for Ordination*

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539 ➤ Understands and affirms the Ordained Minister's Code, particularly as it relates to interim ministry

540

541 ➤ Is committed to guiding churches through their transition to seek and call a new minister

542

543 ➤ Supports the church's participation in the United Church of Christ search process while providing  
544 interim ministry service to that church and refrains from interfering or becoming involved in the  
545 church's search

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547 ➤ Will not become a candidate for the settled position in any setting where interim ministry is provided

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549 ➤ Advocates for fair and just compensation for all UCC pastors, including interim ministers and those  
550 who will be the newly settled minister

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## Knowledge and Skills

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553 ➤ Has the Knowledge and Skills named in the *Church's Expectations of its Candidates for Ordination*

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555 ➤ Has engaged in a disciplined study of and has acquired considerable knowledge and skill in interim  
556 ministry, including

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558 ○ understanding and appreciation for the nature of interim ministry

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560 ○ knowledge regarding the developmental tasks of churches in interim transition

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## Personal Qualities

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563 ➤ Has the Personal Qualities found in the *Church's Expectations of its Candidates for Ordination*

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565 ➤ Ability to quickly form and appropriately relinquish relationships

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567 ➤ Acknowledges and tends to self-care needs amidst the dynamic transitions inherent in interim ministry

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569 ➤ Possesses the capacity to thrive amidst constant change inherent in life as an interim minister

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571 ➤ Respects, honors, and adapts to the cultural milieus and traditions of a variety of local churches

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