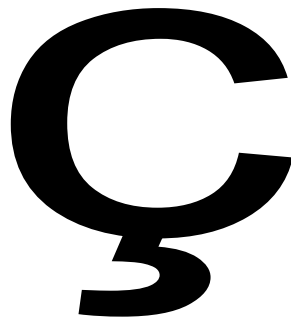


# **CLOSING A PASTORAL MINISTRY**



**A Document of  
The General Commission  
on Ministry**

distributed by  
Office of Search and Call  
Disciples Home Missions  
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

# CLOSING A PASTORAL MINISTRY

~Navigating the Transitions~

## A Booklet of Ethical Considerations and Support Resources

Greetings to you clergy and congregation as you prepare to close your shared ministry!

Times of transition are moments which hold high potential for opportunities to witness to God's ongoing compassion and love. These transitions include retirement, dismissal and clergy accepting a new call. As one prepares to close a ministry there are many ways to express pastoral leadership and concern. This Booklet is only a beginning point, you will also want to take advantage of the help and support of your Regional office and staff.

As you near the time of closure, this is the time to rejoice and celebrate the growth which has occurred throughout the ministry which is now coming to a close. It is also important for you to deal with grief and any unresolved issues. It is best for both the congregation and the pastor to deal with these issues openly. In the course of any ministry there will have been times of error, both on the part of the pastor and the congregation. Though these may not be something that can be corrected, they can be acknowledged and forgiveness can be offered and received. The exit interview is an excellent way to deal with issues of closure.

For those who are closing a ministry and are moving into retirement or non-congregational ministry, there are many decisions to make concerning one's continuing involvement with the congregation. Our traditional ethical guideline has been to separate from the congregation for a period of at least one year after the arrival of the new minister. This guideline may not be appropriate for all situations, especially in light of changing family demographics. Many pastors now own their homes and do not wish to sell. Many clergy spouses are employed outside the home and wish to continue that employment. Needs of family and dependents may also be a factor. As the expectations and needs of the incoming pastors will vary, and as the level of interest in involvement by the outgoing pastor will likewise vary, the enclosed covenant (initiated through the guidance of your Regional Minister), will be a helpful tool. It enables clear and open communication about expectations concerning the level of activity and participation of the outgoing pastor.

For those who are closing a ministry and do not plan to continue in active ministry, it is important to remember that ending employment in ministry settings does not nullify ordination. One's call to ministry can be expressed in many ways. The ending of one expression opens the way for creative new expressions of one's calling.

May God's spirit guide you.

## The General Commission on Ministry

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In this Booklet:

*Ministerial Transition Guideline*

*Exit Checklist*

*Exit Interview Guidelines*

*Sample Farewell Liturgy*

*Sample Farewell Litanies*

*Sample Covenant of Closure*

*Sample Covenant with the Interim Minister*

*Sample Interim Farewell Liturgy*

*Sample Covenant for a New Ministry When the Previous Minister is Remaining in the Community*

Revised, February 2003

# MINISTERIAL TRANSITION GUIDELINE

The time of transition from the outgoing minister to the interim to the incoming minister is a time of great opportunity to witness to mutually supportive collegiality among clergy. We speak words of cooperation, compassion and dedication to the overall church. Our actions speak even louder. It is a credit to the clergy and congregations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that almost all ministerial transitions are healthy ones.

The transition grid (pp. 5-7) is specifically prepared for transitions in congregational ministry, but the basic concerns of avoiding abrupt departures, facilitating closure and enabling the ministry to continue smoothly are applicable to all ministry forms. Even within the congregational transitions there are many variations. It is recognized also that transitions do not always progress in clear and distinct steps but that there are often overlaps in the process. Adapt this guideline to fit your particular situation.

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## 1. The Closure

It is vitally important, even in the midst of preparing to move and planning for the future, that the need for closure by the congregation and minister be addressed. A healthy departure allows for evaluation, celebration, grief work, forgiveness, and preparation for the continuing pastoral care of the congregation, the departing minister and his/her family.

The close relationships that develop during one's ministry with a congregation make the process of professional separation and establishing a new relationship challenging. Clergy who have practiced the pattern of giving careful pastoral attention to the well-being of the congregation sometimes find it difficult to let go. It helps if the decision to resign can be delayed until one is certain of God's call to a new ministry or until one is genuinely comfortable with the concept of retirement. Though some circumstances (such as health or family requirements) might necessitate making a departure before one is completely comfortable with the decision, still the ongoing spiritual health of the congregation must be everyone's primary concern. Certainly the spiritual and emotional needs of the minister are also important, but the minister's calling is to serve the church, not to be served. Thus the outgoing minister does not seek to influence the search and call process, makes a clean break with the congregation, and does not attempt to continue participating in pastoral functions such as celebrating weddings and funerals, or making pastoral hospital visits and calls unless asked to do so by the current minister. For their part, the interim minister and incoming minister commit to honoring the ministries of those who previously served the congregation.

One's pastoral compassion can best be expressed in doing everything possible to make the transition smooth and efficient. Compiling the items in the *Exit Checklist* is an excellent way to empower one's successor for the continuation of pastoral care and administration. Your Regional Minister can facilitate the *Exit Interview* that helps the church achieve important perspectives about where they have been and where they are headed. It also is an excellent opportunity to honestly acknowledge mistakes, offer and receive forgiveness, and work through some of the natural grief that comes with ending the uniquely close pastoral ties which have developed.

Establishing and complying with the *Covenant of Closure* will communicate clearly that one ministry has come to a close and that everyone is committed to the establishment of an effective new ministry. Participating in the *Farewell Liturgy* and the farewell celebration are visible ways for the community to say goodbye and to achieve healthy closure. These celebratory processes are especially important in situations where there has been conflict. The need for forgiveness, healing, and acknowledgment of the positive aspects of the ministry are important steps in the transition.

## **2. The Interim/Transition**

Effective interim/transitional ministry calls for specific skills. More and more ministers are recognizing the benefit of taking the training offered by the Interim Ministry Network (IMN) before becoming involved in interim/transitional ministries. A growing number of clergy feel their primary calling is to interim/transitional ministry and have taken advantage of advanced training in that field. There are many resources already available for the interim/transitional period through the IMN. As the interim/transition process begins, it will be important to establish a clear contract. Your Regional Minister and the IMN can give you guidance in those mechanics. The spiritual aspect of the interim/transitional ministry can be enhanced by beginning it with a liturgy such as the enclosed *Covenant for the Interim Minister*.

Interim/transitional ministries vary greatly in length and focus. Because separation of the interim/transitional minister from the congregation at the end of the interim/transition period is almost always clearly defined in the interim contract, the *Covenant of Closure* has not been included in this section. If the interim/transition has been especially long or intense however, it may be important to establish such a separation covenant after all. Your Regional Minister can be an important resource as a facilitator for the *Exit Checklist* as it is updated and the *Exit Interview* that offers opportunity for the interim/transitional minister to share insights from a different perspective than has been previously shared. The *Interim Farewell Liturgy* and the farewell celebration offer an opportunity to express gratitude and achieve closure with the interim/transitional minister.

This process may be adapted depending on the particular circumstances of the interim/transitional period. However, it should be remembered that within the unique relationship of pastor and congregation, close ties form very quickly. The need for a caring and intentional process of departure should not be underestimated.

## **3. The New Ministry**

Since this resource is aimed at healthy conclusions of ministries, it does not attempt to give thorough guidance on the Search and Call process. Your Regional Minister will be able to provide forms for the Letter of Call and other pertinent documents. What is included in this resource is help for establishing *A Covenant for a New Ministry*. This tool is helpful when the outgoing minister is remaining in the community and wishes to be involved with the congregation. This may happen at times of retirement or when a minister leaves a congregation to begin chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, teaching, or some other non-congregational ministry.

This resource can also be a helpful tool if a former minister returns to the community and resumes membership in the congregation.

All situations are different and no document could anticipate all the complex variations that will present themselves. The following considerations are offered to guide the forming of the *Covenant for a New Ministry*:

- ◆ The ability of the congregation to form a trust relationship with the current minister and to move forward in its spiritual journey is of highest concern. Weddings, funerals, visits and communication at times of crisis, illness, or joy are often the most powerful opportunities for forging and nurturing the pastoral trust relationship.
  
- ◆ Generally, the longer the previous pastorate lasted and the deeper the trust relationship which existed, the bigger the challenge for congregations to build trust with the incoming minister and to perceive that person as their pastor. This is the reason former ministers are encouraged to separate themselves from the congregation during the interim/transitional period and for one year after the arrival of the new minister.
  
- ◆ One's ordination and call to ministry do not end with retirement nor with the change to a non-congregational ministry. In many situations, a former minister can be a wonderful colleague and a great asset to the current minister.
  
- ◆ The new minister and lay leadership together can best determine whether the situation is one in which a former minister can be successfully reintegrated into a congregation. Your Regional Minister may be called upon to help establish the *Covenant for a New Ministry*. The pastoral relations committee or a similar group from the congregation should also be included in the formation of the covenant.
  
- ◆ When the former minister visibly and vocally supports the current minister, steadfastly refusing to do anything that would weaken undermine the current pastoral trust relationship, and when the new minister affirms the gifts of the former minister and finds opportunities for the appropriate expression of those gifts, the whole church benefits and learns to cherish mutual respect and cooperation.

# 1. The Closure

<b>OUTGOING MINISTER</b>	<b>CONGREGATION</b>	<b>REGIONAL MINISTER/STAFF</b>	<b>INTERIM/ transitional MINISTER</b>	<b>INCOMING MINISTER</b>
When contemplating resigning, contacts Regional Minister Does not resign until sure	When pastor resigns contacts Regional Minister	Is in communication with outgoing minister and congregation		
Does not participate in selection or work of search committee	Selects search committee	Commissions, orients and/or dedicates search committee		
Compiles items listed in <i>Exit Checklist</i> *	Helps compile items listed in <i>Exit Checklist</i> *	Helps compile items listed in <i>Exit Checklist</i> *		
Does not influence call of interim minister	Calls interim minister and establishes contract	Provides names/data of interim candidates	Accepts call and establishes contract	
Participates in <i>Exit Interview</i> *	Participates in <i>Exit Interview</i> *	Facilitates (and may conduct) <i>Exit Interview</i> *		
Identifies and cares for celebration, grief, other concerns and works with congregation to establish mutual expectations for activities following closure of the ministry	Identifies and cares for celebration, grief, other concerns and works with outgoing minister to establish mutual expectations for activities following closure of the ministry	Gives pastoral care for closure process		
Participates in <i>Farewell Liturgy</i> *	Participates in <i>Farewell Liturgy</i> *			
Participates in farewell celebration	Organizes farewell celebration			
Establishes and complies with <i>Covenant of Closure</i> *	Establishes and complies with <i>Covenant of Closure</i> *	Helps to establish <i>Covenant of Closure</i> * as requested		

*\*Sample and/or guidelines for this are enclosed in this booklet*

## 2. The Interim

OUTGOING MINISTER	CONGREGATION	REGIONAL MINISTER/STAFF	INTERIM/ transitional MINISTER	INCOMING MINISTER
		Documents changes in Standing of outgoing minister, as applicable		
Does not attend or participate with congregation in any way during the interim period	Does not invite outgoing minister to preside at weddings, funerals, baptisms, etc.	Watches for opportunities to use skills and gifts of outgoing minister, if remaining in Region	Resources material for vision and growth of congregation	
	Establishes and complies with contract for interim ministry	Helps to establish the contract for interim ministry as requested	Establishes and complies with contract for interim ministry	
Does not influence call of incoming minister	Calls incoming minister		Is not a candidate for and does not influence call of incoming minister	Accepts call
	Helps compile items listed in <i>Exit Checklist*</i>	Helps compile items listed in <i>Exit Checklist*</i>	Compiles items listed in <i>Exit Checklist*</i>	
	Participates in <i>Exit Interview*</i>	Helps with <i>Exit Interview*</i> if requested	Participates in <i>Exit Interview*</i>	
	Participates in <i>Interim Farewell Liturgy*</i>		Participates in <i>Interim Farewell Liturgy*</i>	
	Organizes and participates in farewell celebration for interim minister		Participates in farewell celebration	

*\*Sample and/or guidelines for this are enclosed in this booklet*

# 3. The New Ministry

OUTGOING MINISTER	CONGREGATION	REGIONAL MINISTER/STAFF	INTERIM/ transitional MINISTER	INCOMING MINISTER
Seeks to enable the success of their successor	Installs and welcomes incoming minister	Installs and welcomes incoming minister		Helps plan installation and is Installed
Establishes and complies with <i>Covenant for a New Ministry</i> * if remaining in or returning to community	Establishes and complies with <i>Covenant for a new Ministry</i> * if outgoing minister is remaining in or returning to community	Can be a helpful resource in establishing <i>Covenant for a New Ministry...</i> *	Does not provide any kind of pastoral service after concluding interim ministry	Establishes and complies with <i>Covenant for a New Ministry...</i> * if outgoing minister is remaining in or returning to the community

*\*Sample and/or guidelines for this are enclosed in this booklet*



# EXIT CHECKLIST

## *For pastors leaving a church*

**T**his is a list of items which will be very helpful to the congregation and incoming interim/transitional or installed minister. There may be some items that do not apply or items not on this list that would be appropriate in your setting.

- \_\_\_ A complete and up to date membership list of total and participating membership. This database should include records of membership, attendance, baptisms, marriages, births, funerals, and transfers in and out. It should also include names of children.
- \_\_\_ The current mailing lists, clearly identified as to their content and usage.
- \_\_\_ A list of military personnel from the congregation.
- \_\_\_ A list of college students from the congregation.
- \_\_\_ A list of shut-ins for whom the congregation is responsible.
- \_\_\_ A list of prospective members with some notation as to their status and interest.
- \_\_\_ A list of the current officers and members of the committees of the congregation and a list of officers from recent years.
- \_\_\_ A list of the church school teachers, active and inactive.
- \_\_\_ A roster of the congregation's children and youth--listed by age or church school class.
- \_\_\_ A list of organizations and officers.
- \_\_\_ Notes on affiliations of the congregation with community, state, and national organizations.
- \_\_\_ A schedule of regular and special meetings of the congregation.
- \_\_\_ A full year church calendar of regular events.
- \_\_\_ Notes on special Sundays and important traditions observed in the congregation.
- \_\_\_ Sample worship bulletins, notes on how regular worship services are typically planned, as well as how and when the bulletin is prepared.
- \_\_\_ A list of upcoming programs and projects, special and ongoing, in effect or planned. These should have notations about contact persons and location of pertinent information.

- \_\_\_ A list of situations that need follow-up, such as:
  - Counseling
  - Anticipated or planned baptisms
  - Scheduled weddings
  - Reception of new members
  - Crises
  - Pastoral care issues
  - People needing continued help (*food, clothing, housing, etc.*)
  
- \_\_\_ The congregation's constitution and by-laws, governing policies and personnel policies.
  
- \_\_\_ Names of staff or personnel, their job descriptions and location of past performance evaluations.
  
- \_\_\_ A current financial report and budget.
  
- \_\_\_ A list of community agencies to which referrals may be made.
  
- \_\_\_ Information on location of hospitals and parking requirements.
  
- \_\_\_ Information on local clergy associations and ecumenical groups.
  
- \_\_\_ A list of goals, both short-range and long-range, which the church has accepted, and their status.
  
- \_\_\_ Members of the prayer chain or other prayer groups.
  
- \_\_\_ Sample letters currently being sent to Sunday morning visitors, new members, etc.
  
- \_\_\_ Copies of several recent newsletters and notes on the process of its production.
  
- \_\_\_ Up-to-date files for various services and vendors (e.g. legal, property, auditing, supplies)
  
- \_\_\_ A complete set of Church keys, clearly marked or with a list identifying each key and what it is used for.
  
- \_\_\_ Information on other items that the pastor knows about which would be essential for a smooth transition.

# EXIT INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

- I. The exit interview is conducted by or involves the pastoral relations committee, the search committee and/or the board of elders. In some cases it may be facilitated or conducted by the Regional Minister.
  - A. It offers a chance to exchange gifts of insight between the outgoing minister and the congregation.
  - B. It can start the process of closure and identify items which need attention at the close of the ministry.
  - C. It offers a chance to examine the future relationship between the congregation and the outgoing minister.
  
- II. Here are some possible questions for the interview. Share them beforehand with those to be involved.
  - A. These questions are for the pastor:
    1. What are some of the things that attracted you to this congregation?
    2. Did you encounter any surprises after you came here?
    3. **What are some of the strengths of our congregation?**
    4. **What are some of the things we might improve?**
    5. What are some of the things you have felt best about?
    6. Are there any suggestions you might share about new goals we might consider?
    7. In what ways do you perceive us as being different now from when you came?
    8. **Are there special pastoral concerns or points of grief?**
    9. **Share with us your future plans and relationships to this congregation.**
    10. Is there anything else you wish to share?
  
  - B. These questions are for the committee or group:
    1. What were some of the expectations you had at the beginning of this pastorate?
    2. Were there any surprises?
    3. **What are some of the strengths of the pastor?**
    4. **Are there any things that might be improved?**
    5. What are some of the things you have felt best about?
    6. In what way is the minister different from when he/she came?
    7. **Are there any special concerns or grief?**
    8. Is there anything else you wish to share?
  
- III. Here are some other considerations.
  - A. Open and close the time together with prayer.
  - B. Pertinent information from the meeting may need to be communicated to the Regional Minister and the search committee if they are not present.
  - C. **Note:** If you spend fifteen minutes on each question the interview will take over three hours. You may wish to deal only with the questions printed in bold.

**WORSHIP RESOURCES**

**AND**

**SAMPLE COVENANTS**

# SAMPLE FAREWELL LITURGY

*To be used at the conclusion of the final worship service before the departure of the minister. You are encouraged to adapt this to reflect the particular circumstances of your church and departing minister.*

## Introduction

Leader: Our church family is constantly changing. Babies are born. Children grow up. People commit themselves to one another. Loved ones and friends among us come to the end of their lives. Individuals move into our community and church life. Others leave us, moving away to new places, new experiences, and new opportunities. It is important and right that we recognize these times of passage, of endings and beginnings. Today we share the time of farewell with \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of pastor*) who is leaving.

## Ending a Ministry

Leader: On \_\_\_\_\_ (*date*), this congregation called \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of pastor*) to serve as pastor.

Minister: I thank \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of congregation*), it's members and friends for the love, kindness, and support shown me these last \_\_\_\_\_ (*number*) years. I am grateful for the ways my leadership has been accepted and for the good things we have been able to accomplish together. I ask forgiveness for any mistakes I have made. As I leave, I carry with me all that I have learned here.

**All: We receive your gratitude, offer forgiveness, and accept the fact that you now leave to minister elsewhere. We express our gratitude for your time among us. We too ask your forgiveness for any mistakes we have made. Your influence on our faith and faithfulness will not leave us at your departure.**

Minister: I accept your gratitude, and forgive you, trusting that our time together and our parting are pleasing to God.

## Vows of Release

Leader: Do you, the members and friends of \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of congregation*), release \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of pastor*) from the duties of pastor?

**All: We do, with the help of God.**

Leader: Do you offer your encouragement for \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of pastor*)'s \_\_\_\_\_ (*future ministry*) \_\_\_\_\_?

**-OR-**

Leader: Do you offer your encouragement for  (name of pastor) 's ministry as it unfolds in new ways?

**All: We do, with the help of God.**

Leader: Do you  (name of pastor )  release this congregation from turning to you and depending on you as pastor?

Minister: I do, with the help of God.

Leader: Do you offer your encouragement for the continued ministry here and for the relationship this congregation will develop with another who will come to serve after you?

Minister: I do, with the help of God.

## Prayer

Leader: Let us pray. O God, for remembered times when we, together, have shared the life of faith, we express our sincere gratitude. We thank you for the moments we have shared with  ( name of pastor )  in worship, in learning, in service, and in Christian living. We pray that she/he will be aware of your Spirit's guidance as he/she moves to a new place in the name of Jesus the Savior.

**All: God, whose everlasting love for all is trustworthy, help each of us to trust the future which rests in your care. The time we were together in your name saw our laughter and tears, our hopes and disappointments. Guide us as we hold these cherished memories but move in new directions, until that time to come when we are completely one with you and with each other, in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.**

## Hymn of Thanksgiving

## Closing

Leader: As a keepsake to remember us, we invite you to accept this candle and light it in your next place of ministry. Remember that God's light always burns within you. Go now, surrounded by our love and led by the promises of God, the presence of Jesus Christ, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*\*Portions of this liturgy were adapted from the Book of Worship, United Church of Christ (Office for Church Life and Leadership, 1986) Used with permission.*

Additional liturgical resources for the closure of a ministry can be found on pages 219- 221 of *Chalice Worship* (St. Louis, Chalice Press, 1997)

See also hymns and readings in *Chalice Hymnal*, especially pages 450 - 465.

## A LITANY OF THANKS & FAREWELL

Leader: We are all called by God to offer our unique works and gifts.

**Congregation: But some are called to lead in very special ways.**

Leader: We are all called by God to speak the truths of faith.

**Congregation: But some are called to preach to the community with words of compassion and justice.**

Leader: We are all called by God to comfort those who hurt.

**Congregation: But some are called to share in the pain and suffering of the entire flock.** Leader:

We are now called to raise our voices in thanks for a shepherd in our midst.

**Congregation: One who has led us, preached God's word, shared our suffering and our joy.**

Leader: Years of education, prayer, personal preparation and reflection brought (*name*) to us.

**Congregation: For this, caring God, we are thankful.**

Leader: Countless hours, countless tears, countless moments of laughter have filled us through *her/his* faithful leadership.

**Congregation: For this, gracious God, we are thankful.**

Leader: (*Name*), *her/his* partner in life, has given of *herself/himself* for our faith and growth.

**Congregation: For this, steadfast God, we are thankful.**

Leader: As *she/he* has been our faithful pastor, now we fill *her/him* with our prayers and support as *she/he* enters a new phase of *her/his* life.

**Congregation: That we might continue to hold *him/her* up in the Spirit through all of *her/his* journeys.**

**All: For your servant, our shepherd, leader and friend, we are thankful. Amen.**

*This litany was written by Laura Hobgood-Oster for Round Rock Christian Church, Round Rock, Texas.  
Used with permission.*

## A FAREWELL LITANY

*(To be used in the final service before the departure of the minister. Also appropriate for use when an Interim/Transitional minister is departing. May be used at any point in worship but particularly appropriate for a time immediately preceding communion at the conclusion of the last worship service.)*

Member: As we come to the Table, we call to mind all those who have been welcomed at this feast. To this Table many have come with sorrow to share with the One who bears all our grief. And to this Table many have come with joys which can best be shared at a family meal, where all are gathered as brothers and sisters of Christ and children of one Parent.

Today, we have come to the completion of ministry in this place of our pastor/minister (name of pastor/minister). In the midst of the gathered people of \_\_\_\_\_ Christian Church, we take these moments to officially mark what is coming to an end. In these moments, we release our pastor/minister to \_\_\_\_\_ (name of new congregation/a new ministry/a new phase of her/his life), even as we are nourished for the journey by Christ's body and blood.

Board Chair *(Or Chair of the Search Committee who called the minister, or Chair of Elders)*:

On (date), this congregation called (name of pastor) to serve as our pastor. Now, (length of time) later, we acknowledge the completion of her/his service.

Pastor: Over these (months or years), you have called me pastor/minister as I have preached the Good News, provided pastoral care, participated in meetings and continued to grow. Now it is time for our paths to separate.

Member: Thank you for the ways in which your life has mingled with our lives. We give you thanks for your leadership, for your care, and for your influence. We ask forgiveness for the mistakes we have made. And we send you from this place affirming we are not alone.

Congregation: *(or choir or solo)* **We are Not Our Own** #689, Chalice Hymnal  
Verses 1-5 (or 1,2 and 5) ending with, "And if love's encounters lead us on a way uncertain and unknown, all the saints with prayer surround us: We are not alone."

Pastor: I give thanks to God for the prayers which will surround me, and for the sustenance provided from this Table of love, even as I complete my ministry with you at Christian Church. In keeping with the love of Christ represented here, I forgive you the mistakes you made, and ask your forgiveness for mistakes I have made.

Board Chair: As we prepare to break the bread and drink the cup of the new covenant of Christ which binds us together even as we remember Jesus pouring out the cup for the forgiveness of many, will you, the congregation, forgive, release (name of pastor) as your pastor, and bless him/her for the journey which is ahead?

**All: Yes, we forgive, release and bless you. We rejoice in the ways we have been blessed by this ministry, and pray God's rich blessing on you and on this congregation as we part.**

Pastor: And I forgive, release and bless you, rejoicing in the ways I (and my family) have been blessed in our ministry. May God continue to sustain and encourage you in the days ahead, even as we part.

Elders: Let us pray.  
*(Pick up the normal pattern of the communion service, inviting the elder(s) to pray in thanksgiving for the love of Christ that is shown in these elements.)*

*Written by Linda McKiernan-Allen, Interim minister, Central Christian Church, Anderson Indiana. Used with permission.*



# Covenant of Closure

## MINISTER

1. I will separate myself from participation in the life of the congregation from which I am resigning or retiring during the interim/transitional period and for at least one year after the arrival of the new pastor.
2. I will be a true and loyal friend to my former congregation and to its minister by not making pastoral calls, hospital calls, or counseling with members, not presiding at weddings or funerals of former parishioners, and by declining all offices, positions and responsibilities in this, my former congregation, **except at the invitation of the current minister.**
3. I will confer only with the Regional Minister or the current minister of this congregation about any problems I perceive in the congregation, and not discuss them with members of the congregation or others.
4. I will communicate with the Regional Minister should confusion, conflict or other differences arise between myself and this congregation.
5. If at the end of one year after the arrival of the new pastor I wish to participate in this congregation, I will communicate such interests to the Regional Minister who will facilitate discussion of this possibility with the congregation and its pastor. If such participation is deemed appropriate, a “Covenant for a New Ministry When the Previous Minister is Remaining in the Community”\* will be established.
6. I reaffirm my vows as an ordained/licensed minister. Relying on the grace of God I also reaffirm my commitment to the “Ministerial Code of Ethics” of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

SIGNED

## CONGREGATION

1. We accept that our former minister will separate *him/herself* from participation in the life of this congregation during the interim/transitional period and for at least one year after the arrival of the new pastor.
2. We will be true and loyal friends to our former minister by not asking *him/her* to make pastoral calls, hospital calls or to counsel with members. We will not ask *him/her* to preside at weddings or funerals of parishioners nor will we offer positions, offices and responsibilities in this congregation, **except at the invitation of the current minister.**
3. We will confer only with the Regional Minister or the current minister of this congregation about any problems we perceive in the congregation, and not discuss them with the former minister(s).
4. *We will communicate with the Regional Minister should confusion, conflict or other differences arise between the former minister and this congregation.*
5. If one year after the arrival of the new minister we wish our former minister to participate in this congregation, we will communicate such interests to the Regional Minister who will facilitate discussion of this possibility with the congregation and its new minister. If such participation is deemed appropriate, a “Covenant for a New Ministry When the Previous Minister is Remaining in the Community”\* will be established.
6. Relying on the grace of God, we reaffirm our commitment to the “Congregational Code of Ethics” of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

\_\_\_\_\_  
Outgoing Minister

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Officer of the Congregation

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness for the Region

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

# SAMPLE COVENANT FOR THE INTERIM MINISTRY

*This liturgy is led by an appropriate officer of the congregation.*

Leader: We gather today to covenant with           (name of interim minister)           who has been chosen to serve           (name of congregation)           as our interim minister. We have asked her/him to provide leadership during this time of transition, to help us maintain the health of the congregation, to work on specific areas that will help us grow and prepare us to call and work with a new pastor.

The board, on behalf of the congregation has promised to share this ministry with him/her, to assume responsibility for leadership from within the congregation in order to carry out the activities and the programs of the church. May God who has given us the will to do these things also give us the grace and power to do them.

          (name of interim minister)          , do you commit yourself to this new trust and responsibility?

Interim minister: I do, with the help of God

Leader: Are you a candidate for the open position of pastor at           (name of congregation)          ?

Interim minister: I am not but I will serve this congregation in faithfulness until a new minister is called.

Leader: Members of           (name of congregation)          , will you support           (name of interim minister)           in this ministry?

Congregation: We will with the help of God.

Leader: Let us pray. God of all relationships, as we enter into this covenant with each other we pray that our time together may be one of healing and growth, a time to look at ourselves in a new light and to see a vision of who you want us to be. Help           (name of interim minister)           to love and care for us as we work together, and help us to love and care for her/him as well as for each other. Grant that together we may follow Jesus Christ. Amen.

**All: For now, we are partners in this portion of our journey together. This ministry is part of the whole ministry of Christ's Church.**

Leader:           (Name of interim minister)          , on behalf of the congregation I would like to extend to you the right hand of fellowship and welcome you to           (Name of congregation)          .

# SAMPLE INTERIM FAREWELL LITURGY

*This liturgy is led by an appropriate officer of the congregation.*

- Leader: The Christian life is not so much a destination as a journey. God travels with us always, and people join us along the way. There are times of welcoming fellow travelers, and there are times of bidding one another farewell. Today we share the time of farewell with \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of interim minister*) whose time with us as interim minister has come to its end.
- Interim minister: I thank \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of congregation*), its members and friends, for the love kindness and support shown me these last \_\_\_\_\_ (*number*) months. With joy I recall the many things we have been able to accomplish together, and with confidence in your future ministry I entrust our unfinished tasks to your care. I ask your understanding and forgiveness for any mistakes I have made and for expectations unmet. As I leave, I carry with me many memories of experiences we have shared together.
- Congregation: We receive your thankfulness, and we offer both our forgiveness for any failures and our gratitude for all accomplishments. We accept that your journey now leads you elsewhere. As we express our gratitude for your time among us we also ask your forgiveness for any shortcomings or lack of faith we may have shown. Your influence on our lives will not leave us even though you depart from us.
- Interim minister: I forgive you any failures and accept your gratitude, trusting that our time together and our parting are pleasing to God. As you experience the uncertainty of change and the insecurities of moving on, may you also experience the blessing of inner growth and the excitement of new beginnings. God's blessing be on you.

*SAMPLE*  
**COVENANT FOR A NEW MINISTRY**  
**WHEN THE PREVIOUS MINISTER IS**  
**REMAINING IN THE COMMUNITY**

*This covenant is to be adapted to fit each situation's  
circumstances in consultation with the Regional Minister*

1. Out of our mutual respect and our profound love for this congregation and its ministry in this community we will do everything we can to under gird the current pastoral trust relationship and will honor one another as befits fellow servants of Christ.
2. We understand that the former minister will participate in this congregation as a member, and do everything in his or her power to help the current minister to succeed.
3. We understand that the former minister will refrain from holding offices of leadership within the congregation.
4. We understand that if members of the congregation request the former minister to provide pastoral care or to preside at weddings or funerals, the former minister will decline and guide those making the request to the current minister.
5. We understand that if the current minister desires help with the care of the membership and makes an official request, the former minister is willing to help in the following way(s):  
[Carefully list the specific activities upon which you have agreed]
6. As minister and former minister, we will communicate with each other carefully to avoid any opportunity for confusion over expectations.
7. We will confer only with each other or with the Regional Minister about any problems we perceive with our understanding of these expectations. Specifically, we will avoid making any negative comments to the congregation members.
8. We reaffirm our commitment to the “Ministerial Code of Ethics” of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

<i>Current Minister</i>	<i>Date</i>
<i>Former Minister</i>	<i>Date</i>
<i>Witness for the Congregation</i>	<i>Date</i>
<i>Witness for the Region</i>	<i>Date</i>

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