



# Retiring Well

## A Helpful Guide for Pastors of the Michigan District, LCMS

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## GUIDELINES AND ETHICS FOR RETIRING PASTORS IN THE LCMS

### Introduction:

As we currently face a record number of pastors arriving at the age and opportunity for retirement, a need for some basic guidelines seems necessary as many of the customs and habits understood and practiced by previous generations are often ignored. Understanding that realities like the economy, good health, longevity of life, etc., also play a role, these guidelines are offered to help maintain the *“unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace”* (Ephesians 4:3).

Retirement is normally a well-earned time of transitioning into new forms of ministry that can be just as rewarding and fulfilling as earlier ones. While “forced” retirement does indeed happen from time to time, this is often the exception and should be dealt with through ecclesiastical supervision. However, no matter what, clear boundaries need to be understood, both from the pastor retiring and the congregation from which he is retiring.

### Announcement and Transition

When a pastor determines that he will retire, he should help prepare the congregation—spiritually, mentally, and physically—for the transition and inform them of what to expect once the transition has been made. Normally, the pastor should wait to formally announce his retirement until 6 months before, although he may indicate it to the leadership sooner. If announced too early there is a danger of a “lame duck” mentality that could form, preventing meaningful ministry from occurring. Waiting too long and announcing only a month or weeks prior leaves a congregation ill-prepared to meet the challenges ahead.

The District President should be invited to share with the church’s leadership, and then with the entire congregation, what to expect with the retirement of their former pastor and what the appropriate parameters will be of any continuing relationship with the retiring pastor. At this point, the District President would also outline the future process for calling a new pastor, proper timing, interim ministry, etc. This should never come from the retiring pastor. It is best that he instruct his people to not do anything until they have spoken with the District President.

When people have not been informed, or their concerns heard, they often put demands on the former pastor without knowing or understanding the ethical boundaries for the well-being of the total congregation. They also may make poor decisions regarding the future of the parish. Good knowledge can assist everyone in maintaining friendship ties while carefully severing pastoral ones and planning for the future. It also allows for mourning the loss while celebrating what has been meaningful in the past, and looking to the future.

Congregations must be taught the appropriate boundaries so as not to place a retired pastor in an awkward position. Any effort to involve a former pastor, retired pastor, or other minister of Word and Sacrament in any issues between members and the current pastor will only confuse the situation and make matters worse. It will also put the former pastor, retired pastor, or other minister of Word and Sacrament in an untenable ethical situation. While members of congregations are encouraged to avoid putting a pastor in such a position, it remains the responsibility of the pastor to maintain the appropriate boundaries.

Retirement does involve change, and that can be as exciting and freeing as the choices available. However, it does mean letting go of the former, to trust God into the future. His Word in Jeremiah 29:11 also applies to the pastor: *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* What is yet in store can be a rich time of ministry and personal adjustment to a lessened schedule. Each cycle of ministry brings its own rewards. Trusting God to lead you forward without holding onto the past is important.

## **Roster Status**

A retired pastor is on the roster of the District in which he was last under call or in which he resides. The retired pastor remains accountable to the District President where rostered. It is understood that a retired pastor must be a member in good standing of an LCMS congregation in order to remain on the roster of ordained ministers and remains subject to the same standards for ordained ministers of the church.

## **Guidelines**

With more retiring pastors owning homes within the community of their last pastorate, careful attention must be given to the church's well-being and that of the new pastor called to serve that church. With this concern in mind, the Council of Presidents of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod sets forth the following as ethical guidelines for retiring pastors:

1. It is recommended, upon retirement, that a pastor sever all pastoral ties with those previously served in the local parish. This includes weddings, funerals, pastoral calls and visits, and especially giving advice and counsel, and in any way continuing the previous pastoral relationships. This also involves attending church functions and services until an agreement can be made with the new pastor. The retired pastor should have little to no contact with the ministry, nor should he serve it in any capacity, either professionally or as a volunteer, because of the sphere of influence he still has. Continuing ties of friendship is one thing; pastoral ties is another. He is no longer the pastor of this parish.
2. It is prudent for a retired pastor that he consider not remaining a member of the congregation served at the time of retirement. Transferring one's membership to another congregation is very helpful to aid the successor pastor to assume pastoral leadership more readily. It also provides an opportunity for the retired pastor to enter fully into the life of a different congregation with clarity about the pastor's retired role. One area of potential service for the retired pastor is interim (pastoral vacancy) ministry (or, with training, Transitional Interim Ministry). Many retired pastors provide valuable and needed ministry to congregations in time of transition following the resignation of a pastor. This is a way to honor our Lord and continue serving His Church.
3. If remaining within the community last served, the retiring pastor ought not attend the church previously served for a period of at least one year following the retirement. Visits following that period will be at the invitation of the interim minister or the new pastor. Participation in baptisms, weddings, and funerals should be by invitation of the interim minister or new pastor. Persons not associated with the church should be encouraged to form a relationship with the church and its interim minister or new pastor.
4. Once the new pastor is in place, the relationship between the new pastor and the former pastor with the church he formerly served can be worked out. If a satisfactory and workable mutual agreement cannot be reached between them, they may wish to consult with the District President.
5. It is imperative that members avoid discussing issues concerning the congregation, the current pastor, the staff, the Circuit, or any other aspect of congregational life with a former pastor or other ordained minister, or even members worshipping within the congregation. Such discussions are likely to be perceived as soliciting advice or counsel on church matters. It is in his best interest and for the health and welfare of the church, as well as the Kingdom, that a former pastor distance himself from the congregation and that other ministers not usurp the relationship between the current pastoral leadership and the congregation.
6. When a former pastor is named Pastor Emeritus, it needs to be understood by the former pastor and the congregation that this is an honorary title and does not imply or include any pastoral duties or responsibilities. The retiring pastor should always support and guard well the role of the new pastor.

7. It is disruptive for a pastor to succeed himself as interim minister of the church immediately served. Upon retirement, the pastor will sever all pastoral ties with the former congregation. This allows for the church to call an interim minister to serve as a bridge between the former pastor and the calling of a new one, and to assist the congregation in its grieving process. A violation of this is a breach of ministerial ethics and may potentially interfere in someone's divine call.

8. Whenever a pastor is to remain within the community of a church just served, his relationship to that church, its interim minister, and its newly called pastor shall be evaluated with the well-being of that church in mind. What evolves as a working relationship must give first priority to the needs of the church. Individuals' needs are important but must not take priority. The relationship of former pastor, interim minister, and new pastor must reflect the needs of the church.

9. This helpful article, "How Not to Handle a Pastoral Succession", while from the Southern Baptist perspective, addresses both the outgoing and incoming pastor issues that are often seen. [www.crossway.org/articles/how-not-to-handle-a-pastoral-succession](http://www.crossway.org/articles/how-not-to-handle-a-pastoral-succession)

## CHECKLIST – WHEN A PASTOR IS PLANNING TO RETIRE

When planning to retire, a pastor needs to address issues in the following four (4) realms: Social Security (S.S.), Concordia Retirement Plan, LCMS roster status, and the congregation/ministry being served.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Set a specific date for your retirement. Do not tell the congregation that you plan to retire “in about a year or so.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ Inform the congregation, in writing, of the date of your retirement. Under normal circumstances, three (3) to six (6) months’ notice is sufficient time for the congregation to plan for your departure and the ensuing vacancy. If there are extenuating circumstances, a longer time period can be given to allow the congregation to prepare for the calling of a new pastor. Send a copy of your letter to the congregation to the District President.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If you are eligible to receive Concordia Retirement Plan benefits, contact Concordia Plan Services at least three (3) to five (5) months before your retirement date to ensure enough time to receive and complete the required retirement application.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If you are eligible to apply for S.S. benefits, contact the Social Security Administration at least two (2) months prior to the date when you want to begin receiving those benefits.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Apply for Emeritus Status by contacting the District President or his Executive Assistant. This is required in bylaws of the Synod (Bylaws 2.11.2 – 2.11.2.1) to remain on the clergy roster of the Synod.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Allow the congregation to “mourn” your retirement.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Allow the congregation to give thanks to God for your ministry by hosting a retirement event for you and your family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If you are named Pastor Emeritus by the congregation you have served, recognize that this is an honorary title and that it does not imply or include any pastoral duties or responsibilities. See the sample resolution in the supporting document section of this document.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Bring closure to your ministry.
  - + Announce publicly and repeatedly that you will no longer be the pastor of the congregation.
  - + Make sure that all official records are up-to-date.
  - + Develop a transition plan for the church, determining who needs to know what you know, and transmit that information to them so that life in the congregation can continue smoothly without you.
  - + Start cleaning out your office as soon as you announce your retirement. There is so much that you will need to sort through and do and the time flies by faster than you can imagine. You should not plan on going back to the office after you retire to finish cleaning things up. When you walk out the door on the day you retire, you should be totally done and all of your belongings should be out of the church.
  - + Make sure that you have something to do IMMEDIATELY to fill your time after your final day in office. That may be taking a trip, working on your house, pursuing a hobby, etc. The point is, PLAN NOW for what you are going to be doing the morning you wake up retired.
  - + Prepare for potential loneliness to set in. The chances are the phone calls will stop, the emails will stop, and no one will call to say “hi” or to ask how you are doing, not even your former staff

members. Life and ministry in the congregation moves on for everyone else—without you. Be prepared for that to take place.

\_\_\_\_\_ Good pastoral practice dictates that you do what you can to make sure that your successor is accepted by the members of the congregation and effective in his ministry.

\_\_\_\_\_ If possible, join a sister congregation. If distance prohibits this or it is impractical for some other reason, you should establish a ministry covenant with the congregation prior to your retirement. The covenant should set strict boundaries for you to remain in the congregation. The document should be signed and dated by you and the chairman of the congregation. It should be reviewed, modified if necessary, signed, and dated on an annual basis.

\_\_\_\_\_ If you remain in the congregation, you should be absent for at least a year after you retire, especially after the new pastor arrives.

\_\_\_\_\_ Be firm in maintaining appropriate boundaries.

- + Upon retirement, sever all pastoral ties with those you have previously served as the pastor of the congregation.
- + Refuse to triangulate the new pastor in any way.
- + Refuse to conduct or participate in any official acts.
- + Refuse to hold an office in the congregation or serve on any boards or committees.
- + Refuse to counsel members of the congregation.
- + Refuse to teach any classes in the congregation.
- + Refuse to attend any meetings, including those held in the parking lot.
- + Refuse to serve as the vacancy pastor during the call process.
- + Refuse to preach in the congregation.
- + Refuse to serve as the visitation pastor of the congregation.
- + Refuse to participate in any way in the call process.
- + Don't tell members, "I'll be happy to do this if the new pastor says it's okay."
- + Only consider doing something in the congregation if the request is initiated by the new pastor.
- + Don't say anything publicly or privately which would undermine the ministry of the new pastor.

\_\_\_\_\_ If you are the Circuit Visitor, ask the District President to appoint someone else to handle the call process in the congregation.

\_\_\_\_\_ If your wife is involved in the life of the congregation (e.g., organist, secretary, chair of the women's group, etc.), she should resign those positions.

\_\_\_\_\_ If the retiring pastor has grown children who are in leadership positions in the congregation, he should discuss with them the wisdom and challenges of their future involvement in the congregation once a new pastor arrives.

## **GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING A MINISTRY COVENANT WITH FORMER PASTORS**

*(See Sample Ministry Covenant in the Support Document Section)*

Any pastor ending his service to a congregation for any reason should be strongly encouraged not to retain membership or continue to attend at that congregation.

If a pastor ending his service to a congregation for any reason desires to retain his membership there or to continue to attend, and the congregational leadership is amenable, the following guidelines are encouraged.

### I. Introducing the Ministry Covenant

The goal of this document is to assist the former pastor, representatives of the congregation, and the new pastor to form a covenant agreement describing how they will support one another. While the needs of the former pastor and spouse are important, the well-being of the congregation and the relationship with their new pastor is the priority. A healthy relationship with a former pastor can be a wonderful asset to the congregation and future ministry if all parties are able to work together in trust and love.

If a covenant agreement is set in place prior to the arrival of the new pastor, it is to be reviewed within two months of the arrival of the new pastor. Thereafter having an annual conversation and renewal of the covenant will give opportunity for the body of Christ to be edified.

### II. Components of a Ministry Covenant

#### *1. Thanksgiving*

A statement giving thanks for the ministry of the former pastor and spouse.

#### *2. Our intentions for the immediate future*

A. A statement from the pastor and spouse that describes their plans for church involvement until the new pastor arrives.

B. A statement from the congregation leaders and (when he arrives) the new pastor, identifying specific ways they will support the former pastor and his wife spiritually and relationally

#### *3. How we live out our agreement given certain situations*

A. A statement clearly stating that all parties recognize that the former pastor is no longer pastor to the congregation

B. A statement describing how all parties to the covenant will handle requests for pastoral service from the former pastor

C. A statement about attendance at weddings, funerals, baptisms when the former pastor and spouse are specifically invited during the initial transition time

D. A statement about the role of the spouse of the former pastor within the congregation

E. A statement about the pastor and spouse's relationship with personal friends within the congregation

F. A statement about emergency situations causing the covenant agreement to be set aside for a time

#### 4. *Covenant Renewal*

- A. A statement describing involvement of former pastor and spouse within the congregation based on their interest and needs of the congregation
  
- B. A statement of how all parties to the covenant handle requests being made by congregation members to the former pastor
  
- C. A statement describing the former pastor's involvement in congregation decisions especially if he disagrees with the direction
  
- D. Identify how the covenant will be evaluated, by whom, and when

#### 5. *Ecclesiastical Supervision*

A copy of the Ministry Covenant shall be forwarded to the office of the District President for his signature.

Signature of Former Pastor and Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Vacancy/Interim/Settled Pastor: \_\_\_\_\_

Representative of Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_

District President: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Proposed Renewal Date (within 12 months): \_\_\_\_\_

#### III. Notes on the Covenant

*Parties to the Covenant* – The working principle behind a covenant is this: a covenant manages agreement. The decision to put a covenant agreement in place is a proactive decision to honor the relationship between all parties. The key parties include:

- The new pastor of the congregation
- The members of the congregation (represented by the leaders)
- The former pastor and spouse

While representatives of the congregation represent the congregation in putting the covenant in place and administering the details of the covenant, the congregation needs to be informed about the rationale behind the covenant (whatever is appropriate for the larger congregation to know).

*Key Aspects of the Covenant Relationship* – If the pastor and spouse are remaining in the congregation, it is important that all parties agree to participate and honor the covenant relationship. That would include:

- Agreement to use the covenant to define the relationship
- Periodic evaluation and renewal of the covenant relationship
- Appropriate changes made to the covenant on the basis of changing circumstances (such as the calling of a new pastor)
- Use of spiritual tools (prayer, confession and absolution, God's Word, etc.) in shaping the relationship, especially during challenging times
- Celebration of the covenant relationship at time of successful completion of the covenant with the pastors, spouses, and leaders of the congregation.

## HELPFUL LINKS AND RESOURCES

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION – SSA  
800.772.1213 (TTY 800.325.0778)  
[www.ssa.gov/](http://www.ssa.gov/)  
[www.ssa.gov/retirement/](http://www.ssa.gov/retirement/)

CONCORDIA PLAN SERVICES – CPS  
888.927.7526 or 314.965.7580  
[www.concordiaplans.org/](http://www.concordiaplans.org/)  
[www.concordiaplans.org/members/pre-retirement](http://www.concordiaplans.org/members/pre-retirement)  
[www.concordiaplans.org/members/pre-retirement/ready-to-retire](http://www.concordiaplans.org/members/pre-retirement/ready-to-retire)

### DISTRICT PRESIDENT'S OFFICE CONTACTS

Rev. David A. Davis  
[david.davis@michigandistrict.org](mailto:david.davis@michigandistrict.org)

Laurie Brown  
[laurie.brown@michigandistrict.org](mailto:laurie.brown@michigandistrict.org)

Martha Wohlfeil  
[martha.wohlfeil@michigandistrict.org](mailto:martha.wohlfeil@michigandistrict.org)

### DISTRICT FACILITATORS

Rev. Randy Johnson  
[randy.johnson@michigandistrict.org](mailto:randy.johnson@michigandistrict.org)

Rev. Mark Brandt  
[mark.brandt@michigandistrict.org](mailto:mark.brandt@michigandistrict.org)

Rev. Daniel Meckes  
[dan.meckes@michigandistrict.org](mailto:dan.meckes@michigandistrict.org)

## Application for Inactive Status Form and Annual Reporting Form

These forms are now on Synod's LISN Website. Here are the instructions on where to find them and how to fill them out:

1. Go to *lcw.lcms.org* in your internet browser.
2. Log in using your LCW username and password, which you created for Lutheran Annual updates.
  - a. Having trouble? Click the "Need help logging in?" button to recover your username and/or password. Contact info for LCMS Rosters, Statistics, and Research is also listed on the page.
  - b. If you have never logged in and do not have your temporary username and password, contact LCMS Rosters, Statistics, and Research for help.
3. Once logged in, you should see a blue "Recommended Forms" button at the bottom of your dashboard page. Click that button to go to see recommended forms.
4. If you do not see the "Recommended Forms" button, find "Forms" in the left-side menu and click on it. You can also click on "View/Edit All Forms" from the dashboard page.
5. Across the top of the page, you will see a grey sliding bar with buttons for your PIF, SET, Application for Inactive Status, and Annual Reporting – Emeritus Status form. Click on the Application for Inactive Status form and then click "Edit Form" below.
6. Fill in all of the fields in the form.
7. You can type your name for your digital signature.
8. When you enter the date, please make sure to click the "Set" button to the right of the date. If you do not "set" it, the date will not save.
9. Once you have completed the form, click the blue "Complete Review" button at the lower right corner of the form. Review your changes, and then click the blue "Submit + Close" button to fully submit your form.
10. Repeat steps 6–9 for the Annual Reporting Form.

### Questions about logging in to the LCW website?

- First, try to use the helps available via the "Need help logging in?" button at *lcw.lcms.org*.
- Then, contact LCMS Rosters, Statistics, and Research Services at *LCMS.RSRS@lcms.org* or 314.996.1366.

## TRANSITIONAL INTERIM MINISTRY

Visit: [www.lcmstim.org](http://www.lcmstim.org) for more information on transitional interim ministry.

**Transitional interim ministry** is a purposeful approach for transitions and challenges. Transitional interim ministry is designed to restore congregational health by offering a safe bridge between challenging times and the selection of the next resident pastor.

### The Benefits of Transitional Interim Ministry

- **Healing.** There are circumstances where congregations need assistance in developing an attitude of trust toward pastoral leadership.
- **Thorough resolution.** There are situations that simply take time to untangle. It is important to do what is necessary to reach understanding and closure.
- **New perspectives.** Transitional interim ministry allows a congregation to experience different approaches to ministry, and opens eyes to different kinds of pastoral leadership.
- **Setting a fresh course.** Transitional interim ministry slows down the call process, allowing the congregation time to make well-informed and deliberate decisions regarding the future course of the church.

### The Transitional Interim Ministry Advantage

Though both transitional interim ministers and vacancy pastors can provide clear benefits to congregations, listed are the distinct advantages of an transitional interim pastor who is trained to guide congregations through difficult transitions.

### Transitional Interim Minister

- Has special training and experience in effective transition facilitation.
- Sustains the ongoing programs and ministries.
- Helps make the transition time an ideal time for dramatic renewal. Can deal with past problems, creating stronger internal structure and vision.
- Preaches and conducts Bible class, usually every Sunday.
- Works to understand what is happening and ministers in a timely, sensitive, and relevant manner.
- Helps congregations and individuals handle their grief and sense of loss—especially in instances where there has been conflict, breach of trust, or long-term pastorate.
- Facilitates visioning for future mission and ministry.

### Knowing When Transitional Interim Ministry is Appropriate

If you are wondering whether transitional interim ministry would be a good solution for a specific congregation, ask yourself these questions:

- Are there circumstances that need to be sorted out prior to asking a new pastor to serve?
- Are there deeper issues that need resolving before extending a call?
- Is there a need to re-evaluate mission and ministry?

In conjunction with and under the supervision of the district president and the circuit visitor, transitional interim ministry gives a congregation the time and the tools necessary to begin moving forward in a healthy and united way. By helping to strengthen the congregation's identity and a sense of purpose, it enables the congregation to articulate its needs in the process of calling a pastor. This process, in turn, helps to define a desirable pastoral profile as the congregation moves to call a new pastor.

### **Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Transitional Interim Ministry**

How does one go about getting a transitional interim ministry pastor?

Contact the President's Office for information.

How long does a transitional interim ministry pastor serve a congregation?

This depends on many factors, but typically from one year to two years. The factors depend on the condition of the congregation, the depth of the challenge at hand, and congregational leadership. Length of interim ministry is one of the early conversations a congregation will have with a potential interim pastor. It should be noted, as a congregation prepares to receive its next resident pastor, that the length of the call is not as important as the health of the church.

Can I get the same benefits from a vacancy pastor as from a transitional interim minister?

A vacancy pastor does meet certain needs of congregations, but is not trained to provide ministry, insight, and guidance during the times of transition or crisis.

What is the process a church will go through?

There are five interactive areas of development (or focus points) a congregation will encounter during the transitional interim ministry process. [healthychurch.org/services/interim-ministry/](http://healthychurch.org/services/interim-ministry/)

1. Reviewing its historical heritage with honesty and transparency – Talking through the disputes, strengths and challenges, and the positives and negatives of past pastorates.
2. Growing through changes in leadership – During the interim, lay leadership often changes as leaders resign and opportunities open up to a wider pool of people. During the Transitional Interim Ministry period there is an opportunity to build on these internal shifts.
3. Defining its identity – During the interim, the congregation uses tools such as self-study and demographics to discern its identity.
4. Strengthening its relationship with the circuit, district, and synod – New channels of communication can open up, redefining the congregation's relationships with the larger church body.
5. Exploring new directions for ministry and mission – The window to the future is opened to allow the Holy Spirit to challenge a congregation to answer the question, "What is God calling us to do at this time and in this place?"

## Circuit Visitor's Role in Assisting a Congregation Interested in a Transitional Interim Minister

1. When a congregation becomes vacant, one of the options that the District President may consider is that of transitional interim pastor. This is especially true if the congregation has experienced significant conflict. Additional issues that would give rise to consideration of a transitional interim pastor include but are not necessarily limited to the following:

- a. Following sexual misconduct by the former pastor or another staff member
- b. Following a long-term pastorate
- c. Following financial irregularities by the former pastor or staff member
- d. Following boundary violations by the former pastor; e.g. sexual, gambling, embezzlement, overbearing personality, etc.
- e. Retirement of a senior pastor in a large congregation with a multiple staff
- f. Alignment issues between church and school, which often are manifested in conflicted relationships between the pastoral and teaching staff or a silo mentality, where each exists independently of the other.

2. The District President should be notified when a congregation is considering a transitional interim pastor. The District President has a vested interest in making sure that the congregations under his supervision are healthy and functional. Because he is aware of the conflicted circumstances in the congregation, the District President may suggest that the congregation consider issuing a non-tenured call to an interim pastor.

3. A transitional interim pastor will guide the congregation through the following five developmental tasks:

- a. Coming to terms with the congregation's history
- b. Discovering a new congregational identity
- c. Managing congregational leadership shifts
- d. Renewing denominational linkage with the district and with the LCMS
- e. Commitment to a new future

4. There are seven other developmental tasks that a congregation also can work on during the in-between times:

- a. The necessity to rebuild the congregational "infrastructure"
- b. Evaluation of and removal of staff members if necessary
- c. Financial/stewardship issues
- d. Conflicts over issues or congregational agenda
- e. Interpersonal or intergroup conflicts
- f. Getting closure with the previous pastor
- g. Communication Improvement

5. The transitional interim pastor works closely with the District President, the Circuit Visitor, and the congregation to call a new pastor. The transitional interim pastor may work with the Call Committee. The transitional interim pastor is not eligible for the call. The transitional interim pastor does not name the next pastor. The transitional interim pastor does not attend call voters' meetings.

- a. The normal "non-tenured call" for a transitional interim is 18 months.
- b. Much like a vacancy pastor, a transitional interim pastor is usually not eligible for call consideration to the congregation where he has served as an interim.

6. Other considerations:

- a. The former pastor should consider not remaining a member of the congregation.
- b. The circuit visitor and the district president have a responsibility to walk with and support the transitional interim pastor in every appropriate way.

## SUPPORTING (SAMPLE) DOCUMENTS

A Ministry Covenant with Pastor (retiring pastor), Pastor (incoming pastor)  
and \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church

### Preamble

The LCMS Michigan District guidelines state:

*Any called worker ending his service to a congregation for any reason is strongly encouraged not to retain membership or continue to attend at that congregation.*

*If a called worker ending his/her service to a congregation for any reason desires to retain his/her membership there or to continue to attend, and the congregational leadership is amenable, the establishment of an agreement is highly encouraged.*

*The following guidelines may serve as a model for such an agreement.*

### I. The Purposes of a Ministry Covenant

This document describes how Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ (retiring), members and representatives of \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church, and Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ (incoming), will relate to each other, love, and support one another as brothers and sisters in Christ and servants of Christ. While the needs of Pastor and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ are important, the well-being of \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church and the relationship with Pastor and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ (incoming) is the priority. A healthy relationship with a former called worker can be a wonderful asset to the congregation and future ministry if all parties are able to work together in trust and love.

Pastor (incoming) \_\_\_\_\_ is aware of this covenant and has been invited to provide input to the final version. Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ Mission and Ministry Council will be invited to review this covenant on an annual basis.

### II. Our Ministry Covenant

#### A. Thanksgiving

We thank God for Pastor and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church has been blessed by their ## years of service.

The changes at \_\_\_\_\_ under Pastor's leadership are too numerous to list but include the establishment of \_\_\_\_\_, building of the Worship Center, the establishment of \_\_\_\_\_ Worship, the development of the current Governance Model along with policy guidelines, expanding the role of Elders, Stephen and Prayer Ministries, to name a few. He has guided us through two flood recoveries and the current pandemic.

Pastor has faithfully preached God’s Word, instructed us and equipped us for service and provided spiritual guidance. He has focused us on our responsibility of sharing with others, especially the sharing of “true riches in Jesus.” For this we are eternally grateful.

Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ has faithfully served along with Pastor, providing leadership to our worship services, leading \_\_\_\_\_, teaching Bible classes, and implementing and developing small group studies. She and Pastor have provided leadership in establishing numerous mission opportunities, overseas trips for members of the congregation, and leadership to outside groups, including \_\_\_\_\_.

A retirement celebration thanking Pastor and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ for their service is scheduled for DATE starting at TIME. For those wanting to give a retirement gift in recognition of Pastor’s service, gifts can be given at the reception or through \_\_\_\_\_ online giving. If giving online, please note that your contribution is for Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ retirement.

Please also join us for the celebration worship services on Sunday, DATE at TIME and TIME.

Blessings, \_\_\_\_\_ Chairman

## B. Plans and Intentions for the Immediate Future

1. Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ and I will end our church involvement and connections with \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church on Date/year. This is a difficult thing to do. We have been greatly blessed during our years here. The people of \_\_\_\_\_ have been a source of friendship, fellowship, encouragement, and support during these past \_\_\_ years. You have been gracious and understanding toward us, and we have sought to reflect that same grace and understanding toward all of you. But it is vitally important for us and for God’s people at \_\_\_\_\_ that we have a clear ending so that the new senior pastor can have a clear line of accountability and authority.

2. Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ will be installed as Senior Pastor on DATE. He will be the new senior pastor, and I will defer all decisions to him for the last three weeks of my ministry here. We will work together for a smooth transition. I will make myself available to Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ for any needed input or consultation. But I am committed to allowing him to steer the ship and take the lead as soon as possible.

3. Until that time, I will continue to serve faithfully and energetically as your senior pastor. I will not shirk my responsibilities, nor attempt a long down-hill coast to the finish line. There is important work to be done, and I am committed to serving well, and “running through the tape” at the end of this race.

4. But in order that we can make the transition to God’s next adventure of life and ministry, and so that you can have the best possible future with your new senior pastor, we commit ourselves to sever church relationships for a period of at least one year from my retirement date. We will retain friendships, and are willing to engage socially on occasion, *but these will be strictly personal and social in nature, no church talk.*

5. Ways to support Pastor and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ during their first year after Pastor's retirement. Because of how much we value Pastor and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_, as the leaders of \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church, we the Mission and Ministry Council and Pastoral staff desire to continue to support them in their first year of retirement and beyond. We invite all the people of \_\_\_\_\_ to join us in this support. To that end, we have prepared a list of things we are pledging to do, and we strongly encourage you to do as well.

- a. We want the Pastor and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ to have the ability to call for pastoral care as they may need it or for any other need they may have, be it spiritual or anything else.
- b. We pledge to pray for Pastor and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ both as a congregation and in our personal prayer lives.
- c. Members of \_\_\_\_\_ may socialize with Pastor and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_. If they turn down a social invitation, please do not take it personally. Your understanding will be a support to them.
- d. A big way that members of \_\_\_\_\_ can support Pastor and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ is by avoiding "church talk" with Pastor and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_. Please do not ask them what they think of anything and please do not volunteer what you think. This would place them in a difficult and awkward situation. A good way to support them is to not place them into such a position. Talk about the weather, sports, family, what they are doing with their time, etc., but not \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church.
- e. Please support them by sending notes of well wishes, encouragement, prayers and blessings, we miss y'all, etc. You can do this even in the summer or fall. They won't stop loving that kind of thing 3 weeks from now.
- f. We will support them by not inviting them to church events. Please understand that Pastor and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ will be stepping away from \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church for a period of one year. This is not because they don't love \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church and the people here. (Quite the opposite!) It is because the Michigan District strongly recommends this period for the new senior pastor to get acclimated. In fact, under the direction of the Michigan District, Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ (retiring pastor), Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ (incoming pastor) and the (council, board, etc.) of \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church have written and signed a ministry covenant that includes this one-year step-away period. We believe that it is the intention of \_\_\_\_\_ (retiring pastor and wife) to be worshipping, active members of \_\_\_\_\_ after this one-year period. You can support Pastor and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ by not inviting them to church events, understanding this one-year period, and not pressuring them to interrupt it.
- g. Part of the aforementioned ministry covenant, as directed by the Michigan District, includes the agreement that Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ will not perform pastoral functions. This includes baptisms, weddings, funerals, etc. You can support him by not putting him in the difficult position of turning down a request. He would have to turn down the request because of the agreement in the ministry covenant, not because he wouldn't want to do it. Your understanding would be a big support to him.

h. In summary:

- Please pray for Pastor and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_.
- Please feel free to socialize with them; they enjoy the members of \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church.
- Please understand if they decline social invitations.
- Please send cards, letters, and notes of encouragement and support. They are appreciated any-time.
- Please avoid “church talk” with them.
- Please do not ask Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ to perform pastoral functions.
- Thank you so much for your prayers, blessings and understanding!

### **C. How We Live Out Our Agreement Given Certain Situations (Examples)**

#### **1. CONGREGATION:**

- a. As of DATE/YEAR, Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ will no longer be a called worker at \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church.
- b. Should the need arise for our pastoral care (severe sickness, death, other personal crisis), we will interface directly with Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ (incoming pastor) to determine the best way to receive pastoral care.

#### **2. RETIRING PASTOR:**

- a. We have been invited to one wedding and informed of one specific request for a funeral. We hope to attend the wedding but will have no official participation in the service. Should the previously-agreed-to funeral be requested, we will workout any necessary details of how to accommodate that request. Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ (incoming pastor) and the members of the Mission and Ministry Council are aware of this specific request and situation. I will make no such arrangements from this time forward.
- b. Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ and I will both retain personal friendships with congregational members. We may occasionally be part of social events at which several members of \_\_\_\_\_ are present. We will not, however, engage in conversations about the church, ministries, staff, or Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ (incoming pastor) (other than to agree that he is a tremendous blessing to the church and Kingdom of God!).
- c. I will not be involved in congregation decisions especially if I disagree with the direction of the congregation. I will no longer be pastor here and commend God’s people and this church to the care and leadership of Pastor \_\_\_\_\_.

### **D. Covenant Renewal**

1. Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ (incoming pastor) and the \_\_\_\_\_ Mission and Ministry Council will evaluate this covenant on an annual basis.
2. Should any updates to this covenant be established, all parties shall receive a copy.

### E. Ecclesiastical Supervision.

A copy of the Ministry Covenant shall be forwarded to the office of the District President for his signature.

### III. Signatures

Signature of Former Pastor and Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Vacancy/Interim/Settled Pastor: \_\_\_\_\_

Representative of Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_

District President: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Proposed Renewal Date (within 12 months): \_\_\_\_\_

### Notes on the Covenant

*Parties to the Covenant* - The working principle behind a covenant is this: a covenant manages agreement. The decision to put a covenant agreement in place is a proactive decision to honor the relationship between all parties. The key parties include:

- The new called worker of the congregation
- The members of the congregation (represented by the leaders)
- The former called worker and spouse

While representatives of the congregation represent the congregation in putting the covenant in place and administering the details of the covenant, the congregation needs to be informed about the rationale behind the covenant (whatever is appropriate for the larger congregation to know).

*Key Aspects of the Covenant Relationship* - If the former called worker and spouse are remaining in the congregation, it is important that all parties agree to participate and honor the covenant relationship. That would include:

- Agreement to use the covenant to define the relationship
- Periodic evaluation and renewal of the covenant relationship
- Appropriate changes made to the covenant based on changing circumstances (such as the calling of a new worker)
- Use of spiritual tools (prayer, confession and absolution, God's Word, etc.) in shaping the relationship, especially during challenging times.

**SAMPLE HONORARY TITLE FOR PASTOR \_\_\_\_\_**

WHEREAS, Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ has faithfully, effectively, and honorably served as an ordained minister in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod for \_\_\_\_\_ years, including \_\_\_\_\_ years at \_\_\_\_\_ congregation; AND

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod designates its retired ordained and commissioned ministers with emeritus status; AND

WHEREAS, Bestowal of the designation of emeritus status upon Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church (and School) may open opportunities for him to continue service to the church-at-large in his retirement; AND

WHEREAS, Bestowal of the designation of emeritus status neither grants nor implies any rights or privileges with regard to the exercise of the office of the ministry at \_\_\_\_\_; AND

WHEREAS, Bestowal of the designation of emeritus status in no way financially obligates \_\_\_\_\_ congregation; THEREFORE BE IT

RESOLVED, That \_\_\_\_\_ congregation express its gratitude to God and to Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ for his \_\_\_\_\_ years of faithful, effective and honorable ministry by bestowing upon Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ the honorary title of “Pastor Emeritus of \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church (and School);” AND BE IT FINALLY

RESOLVED, That all present this day at \_\_\_\_\_ congregational meeting rise and with grateful hearts for the blessings of Pastor \_\_\_\_\_ (and his wife, \_\_\_\_\_) to the ministry and life of \_\_\_\_\_ congregation join in singing the doxology.

Approved: (month, day, year)  
Congregational Meeting

\_\_\_\_\_, President



# Michigan District

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

*People of Hope ... Vigorously Making Known the Love of Christ*

## Compensation Guidelines for Guest Preacher / Lecturer

*Link to Compensation Guide*

[www.michigandistrict.org/resources/compensation-guide/](http://www.michigandistrict.org/resources/compensation-guide/)