

Clergy Voluntary Leave of Absence Policy

For provisional, associate, and full members of the annual conference, serving under full-time appointment is the norm. Special authorization must be given for serving less than full-time and also for taking leave of absence from a clergy appointment. This policy contains the procedures for requesting a voluntary leave of absence (exit) and the procedures for returning to appointed ministry after a leave of absence (re-entry). Our procedures flesh out the policy outlined in ¶354 of the Book of Discipline.

A clergy person may request a voluntary leave of absence for a variety of reasons: a) personal leave; b) family leave; or c) transitional leave.

Personal Leave is granted to clergy who self-determine for personal reasons that they are temporarily unable or unwilling to continue in a ministry appointment.

Family Leave is granted to clergy who, because of an immediate family member's need for full-time care, are temporarily unable to continue in a ministry appointment.

Transitional Leave is granted for up to twelve months for clergy who are temporarily between appointments.

Clergy Medical Leave is addressed in a separate policy.

Voluntary leave of absence is not an option should there be active complaints or charges against that clergy until those complaints or charges have been resolved (¶354.5).

First Steps

1. Any clergy seeking a voluntary leave of absence shall meet with their District Superintendent. A second DS or Elder may participate as conference representatives. This meeting is intended to be an intentional expression of pastoral concern and supervision. The clergy person's Superintendent will explain the following process to the clergy person as he or she makes his/her decision to take a voluntary leave of absence. This process is the Annual Conference's intentional effort to be as helpful as possible to the clergy as he or she confronts the circumstances that necessitated the request for the leave of absence. The clergy's District Superintendent will write a letter to document this process in the weeks following the decision to take a voluntary leave of absence. A copy of this letter will be sent to the clergy, sent to the Chair of Conference Relations, and filed in the clergy person's personnel file in the district office.
2. The clergy will write a letter to the Board of Ordained Ministry requesting a voluntary leave of absence. This letter should offer detailed reasons for the requested personal leave, family leave, or transitional leave. Copies of this letter should be sent to the Bishop and the clergy person's District Superintendent (¶354.1).

Exit Interview (Going on leave)

3. The Book of Discipline, ¶ 354.3, states that representatives of the Board of Ordained Ministry may conduct an interview to determine if sufficient cause exists to recommend granting the leave of absence. It is the South Georgia Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry's policy that all clergy seeking a voluntary leave of absence will interview first with a Triad consisting of the Conference Relations Committee Chair (or designee), a District Superintendent who relates to the Board, and the Conference Pastoral Counselor. This interview may occur in conjunction with a regularly scheduled Board of Ordained Ministry meeting or at some other time. Ideally, the interview with the Triad will occur as soon after the initial request is filed with the Board of Ordained Ministry as practical.
4. It is the desire of this Triad to understand, clarify and document the reasons leading to the request for a leave of absence. The Triad will encourage the clergy to develop an action plan for dealing with these circumstances in a redemptive manner. Triad members may suggest resources that may assist the clergy in working through the presenting issues. The information gathered in this interview will be added to the clergy's file with the Board of Ordained Ministry, and a copy will be placed in the clergy's personnel file maintained by their District Superintendent.
5. The Triad will report to the Conference Relations Committee members who will make a recommendation to the full Board of Ordained Ministry regarding the requested leave of absence.

The clergy may be asked to meet with the Conference Relations Committee to assist that body in making a determination about its recommendation to the Board of Ordained Ministry.

Transition Interview (Re-entry)

6. The Book of Discipline, 2012, ¶ 354.11 states that a clergy must make a written request to reenter from voluntary leave of absence at least six months prior to the Annual Conference session. If /when a clergy feels he or she is ready to re-enter the effective relationship, he or she should set up an appointment with the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry. An interview will be scheduled with a Triad composed of the Conference Relations Committee Chair or designee, a District Superintendent who relates to the Board of Ordained Ministry, and the Conference Pastoral Counselor. This appointment will be called the "Transition Interview."
7. The clergy should be prepared to describe in detail how the circumstances surrounding the leave of absence have been alleviated or resolved. The Triad will review the clergy's file prior to the transition interview to gain a more complete understanding of the original circumstances.

Conference Relations Committee Interview

8. The Conference Relations Committee may meet with the clergy person based on the recommendation made by the Triad, or upon request of the clergy person. Committee members will receive a briefing from the Triad. The Committee's task is to determine if the circumstances that led to the leave of absence have been satisfactorily resolved so the clergy can resume an unimpeded ministry. Upon completion of its deliberations, the Committee may make one of the following recommendations (¶ 354.11):
 - A. To recommend the clergy's return to effective relationship to the full Board of Ordained Ministry.
 - B. To recommend the clergy remain on voluntary leave of absence until the issues are more fully resolved.
 - C. To recommend the clergy for honorable location.
 - D. To recommend to the Bishop and District Superintendents that the clergy be placed on involuntary leave of absence, administrative location or involuntary retirement.

Final Recommendations

9. The recommendation of the Conference Relations Committee will be considered by the full Board of Ordained Ministry. If the Board of Ordained Ministry determines to deny the request for a return to effective ministry, the clergy will be informed of the remaining options specified above and in ¶ 354.11.