

### ¶ 353. *Voluntary Leave of Absence*

1. Provisional, associate, or members in full connection of the annual conference who for sufficient reason choose to temporarily take leave from their ministerial appointment may request in writing with a copy to the bishop and their district superintendent a voluntary leave through the Board of Ordained Ministry. This leave is granted or renewed by vote of the clergy members in full connection upon recommendation by the Board of Ordained Ministry.

2. A voluntary leave of absence may be taken for a variety of reasons:

- a) Personal Leave—A relationship that is granted to clergy who self-determine for personal reasons that they are temporarily unable or unwilling to continue in a ministry appointment.
- b) Family Leave—A relationship that 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.
- c) Transitional Leave—A leave granted for up to twelve months with approval of the bishop and the Board of Ordained Ministry executive committee to provisional and associate members and full clergy members in good standing who are temporarily between appointments.

A transitional leave of absence may be granted for the following reasons:

- 1) A provisional or full member deacon needs to seek and secure an appointable primary position—compensated or nonsalaried.
- (2) A provisional or full member elder, or an associate member needs to transition from an extension ministry to another appointment, or from a local church appointment to an extension ministry appointment.

During transitional leave, the clergyperson shall provide quarterly substantiation of his or her effort to obtain such an appointable position to the bishop and to the Board of Ordained Ministry executive committee.

3. Written request for a voluntary leave of absence, with the exception of transitional leave, should be made at least ninety days prior to the annual conference session giving specific reasons for the request. Representatives of the annual conference Board of Ordained Ministry may interview the clergy member to determine sufficient cause. Personal leave and family leave shall be approved annually upon written request of the clergy member and personal or family leave shall not be granted for more than five years in succession, except by a two-thirds vote of the clergy members in full connection. Transitional leave shall not be renewed beyond a twelve-month period. Voluntary leave shall be counted as a part of the eight-year limit for provisional members (¶ 327).

4. Between sessions of the annual conference, voluntary leave of absence may be granted or terminated by the executive committee of the Board of Ordained Ministry after consultation with and approval by the bishop and district superintendents. This interim action shall be subject to the approval of the clergy session of the annual conference at its next session.

5. Should there be active complaints or charges, a request for voluntary leave of absence shall not be permitted until those complaints or charges have been resolved.

6. Clergy on voluntary leave of absence shall have no claim on the conference funds.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, where the conference has made certain elections under applicable benefit plans that require continued participation by clergy on voluntary leaves of absence, the clergy shall continue to participate in such plans. They may participate in the conference health program through their own contributions, if applicable. However, in exceptional circumstances, on recommendation of the bishop and district superintendents, salary and/or other benefits, subject to the terms of the applicable benefit plans, may be granted to a clergy member, if applicable, by vote of the clergy session of members in full connection with the annual conference. In an interim between sessions of the annual conference, by vote of the bishop, cabinet, and executive committee of the Board of Ordained Ministry, salary and/or benefits, subject to the terms of the applicable benefit plans, may be granted, if applicable.

7. Clergypersons on voluntary leave shall be eligible for membership on annual conference committees, commissions, or boards. They may vote for other clergy delegates to General or jurisdictional conferences and may be elected to serve as delegates themselves.

8. After consultation and with the written consent of the pastor in charge, and with the approval of the district superintendent and the staff-parish relations committee of a local church, clergy members shall designate a charge conference within the bounds of the annual conference to which they shall relate and submit an annual report. They shall report all marriages performed, baptisms administered, funerals conducted and other ministerial activities to the charge conference, pastor in charge, and Board of Ordained Ministry. The exercise of this ministry shall be limited to the charge conference in which their membership is held and with the written permission of the pastor in charge unless special permission is granted by the bishop of the conference where membership is held. With the permission of the bishop of the conference where membership is held, under the supervision of the district superintendent, the clergy member may preach, teach, perform marriages, and, if holding sacramental privileges, administer the sacraments outside of the charge where membership is held.

9. Those on voluntary leave of absence shall be held amenable to the annual conference for their conduct and the performance of their ministry. In case of failure to report to the Board of Ordained Ministry, the provisions for administrative location (§ 359) may be invoked.

10. Clergy members on voluntary leave of absence may, with the permission of the bishop and with the approval of the United Methodist Endorsing Agency, continue to hold an existing reserve commission as an armed forces chaplain, but may not voluntarily serve on extended active duty.

11. When an end to voluntary leave of absence is requested, except for transitional leave, it shall be by written request at least six months prior to the session of annual conference. The Board of Ordained Ministry shall review the circumstances surrounding the granting of the leave for the purpose of determining whether those circumstances have been alleviated or resolved. When the board has determined that the circumstances of the voluntary leave have not been alleviated or

resolved and the request is denied, the board will inform the person of the remaining options, which include: a) remaining on voluntary leave of absence; b) taking honorable location; c) being recommended to the bishop and district superintendents to be placed on involuntary leave, administrative location, or involuntary retirement, using the fair process of ¶ 361.2; or d) such other action as deemed appropriate.

12. When clergy members on voluntary leave of absence do not request an annual extension of the leave of absence during the five-year period or do not indicate willingness to receive an appointment at the end of the five-year period, following documented efforts to make contact with the clergyperson, the provisions of administrative location (¶ 359) may be invoked.

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