



## VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATE MINISTER (VAM) POLICY

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### Definition

A Voluntary Associate Minister (VAM) is a

- i) recognized ordered minister, in good standing, in The United Church of Canada who is retired or between appointments;
- ii) a lay person retired from Designated Lay Ministry, in good standing

who has entered into an agreement with a community of faith and its incumbent minister in order to continue to share in mutually agreed upon areas of ministry, and to build healthy boundaries.

Ministry personnel and lay persons retired from Designated Lay Ministers share in the life of a community of faith in a different way than lay people without ministry experience. Becoming a Voluntary Associate Minister is more than an honorific, it is an acknowledgement of the responsibilities for healthy boundaries and clarifying of what gifts of ministry will be shared.

Designation as a Voluntary Associate Minister is centred in the right and responsibilities of relationship. It flows out of a relationship formed with the community of faith and is established through conversation with the community of faith's governing body and incumbent ministry personnel. This conversation leads to a mutual understanding of

- a) Agreed upon gifts of ministry to be shared (e.g. pastoral care, worship leadership, small group ministry)
- b) Agreed upon understandings of healthy boundaries and limitations around the sharing of gifts of ministry.

At times a Voluntary Associate Minister may be looking for involvement in a community of faith and at other times they may seek designation as a VAM in order to fulfill the Manual requirements (Manual section 1.2.5.3) of a "formal association" in order to provide the functions of ministry outside of a pastoral relationship, for example, to provide pulpit supply in other churches. Regardless, becoming a VAM is built upon a relationship with the community of faith and incumbent ministry personnel.

### Membership

Voluntary Associate Ministers are members of the Regional Council and not of the community of faith with which they are associated. Voluntary Associate Ministry status shall be seen as equivalent to any appointment in terms of membership and discipline. The exception to this is for a lay person retired from Designated Lay Ministry.

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### The Process

- 1) An ordered minister, or a lay person retired from Designated Lay Ministry, may enter into an agreement with a community of faith and its incumbent minister to serve as a Voluntary Associate Minister. This process is rooted in the commitments of being in a relationship.
- 2) The person contacts a community of faith governing body and incumbent ministry personnel requesting to be designated as a Voluntary Associate Minister.
- 3) A conversation about mutually agreed upon gifts to be shared, limitations, and building healthy relationships takes place between the governing body, the incumbent minister, and the minister seeking to be designated as a VAM.
- 4) When the mutual agreements are formed, *The Voluntary Associate Minister (VAM) Appointment Form* must be completed, approved by the governing body, and sent to the Minister, Pastoral Relations, at [MCottrell@united-church.ca](mailto:MCottrell@united-church.ca).
- 5) The request is reviewed by the Human Resources Commission and the community of faith will be informed of its decision.

### Special notes

- For Indigenous Communities of Faith this form is also sent to the Office of Vocation Minister for the Indigenous Church. This is in respect to “Calls to Action” by the [Caretakers of the Indigenous Church](#), specifically the section, page 4, “Concerning an Office of Vocation.” This also provides opportunities for further conversation and relationship building.
- If the request is to be named a Voluntary Associate Minister in a community of faith in which the applicant has previously served, a written covenanting agreement must be completed between the VAM and the incumbent ministry personnel. This agreement will outline in detail the agreed upon areas of ministry sharing and boundaries to be kept. It is also recommended that all parties discuss the “Disengaging” section, page 19, of the handbook “[Pastoral Relations: Ministry Personnel](#)” Please contact the Minister, Pastoral Relations at [MCottrell@united-church.ca](mailto:MCottrell@united-church.ca) for more information.
- Ministry personnel at any stage of the remedial process are not eligible to apply to be designated as a VAM. Any application will be put on hold until the remedial process is complete.

## Appendix: The Manual (2024) Requirements

<https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/2024-01/the-manual-2024.pdf>

### 1.2.5.3 Functions of Ministry—Outside Pastoral Relationship

At any time that ministry personnel are not called or appointed to a community of faith, they may carry out the functions of ministry in the United Church only if

- a) they have a formal association with a community of faith, are acting on behalf of that community of faith, and have the approval of the community of faith's governing body; or

*An example of a "formal association" with a pastoral charge would be where the minister has been designated as a "voluntary associate minister" or "honorary associate minister" by the community of faith or its governing body.*



- b) they have been appointed to a paid accountable ministry and/or other ministry recognized by a regional council.

(2023)

### 1.2.5.4 Request—Previous Pastoral Charge

If a ministry personnel is asked by a member or adherent (or their families) of a community of faith where they had previously served to preside at a baptism, communion service, wedding, or funeral, the ministry personnel

- a) must refer the request to the ministry personnel currently serving under call or appointment to that community of faith; and
- b) may preside only with the approval of the community of faith's governing body.

(2021)

**The Pastoral Relations: Ministry Personnel Handbook** is available at:

[https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/pastoral-relations\\_ministry-personnel-december-2019.pdf](https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/pastoral-relations_ministry-personnel-december-2019.pdf)

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### Instructions

1. Read the Voluntary Associate Minister (VAM) Policy and if you have any questions, please contact the Human Resources Commission. Signing the VAM Appointment Form means that you have read, understood, and will abide by the Voluntary Associate Minister (VAM) Policy.
2. Please print the form and fill in the appropriate fields. Please print legibly. Once completed, have the first three signatures affixed.
  - i) Secretary of Governing Body
  - ii) Incumbent Ministry Personnel
  - iii) Voluntary Associate Minister, Applicant
3. Once the signatures are affixed, scan the form and email as an attachment to the Regional Council office to: Micol Cottrell, Minister, Pastoral Relations at [MCottrell@united-church.ca](mailto:MCottrell@united-church.ca).
4. For Indigenous Communities of Faith please also send the form to Tim Hackborn, Office of Vocation, Minister for the Indigenous Church at [THackborn@united-church.ca](mailto:THackborn@united-church.ca).
5. Emailed submissions are preferred; however, you may mail a hard copy to:  
Micol Cottrell, Regional Council Office, Box 100, Carlisle ON L0R 1H0.
6. If the request is approved, an authorized representative of the Human Resources Commission will inform you.
7. If the request is not approved a member of the Human Resources Commission will contact all parties involved.
8. ChurchHub, Police Records Check and mandatory trainings:  
VAM applicants must be registered on [ChurchHub.ca](https://www.churchhub.ca) to determine current availability and compliance with The United Church of Canada Police Records Check policy and completion of mandatory trainings for ministry personnel.

### Mutual Agreed-to Statement

By signing the Voluntary Associate Minister form, the Voluntary Associate Minister and other parties are agreeing to the following:

1. The primary responsibility of every VAM and Community of Faith will be to support the incumbent minister and the governing body in establishing and maintaining a positive pastoral relationship.
2. Pastoral functions performed come under the oversight and discipline of the Office of Vocation. The exception is for lay persons retired from Designated Lay Ministry. In these cases, please contact the Minister, Pastoral Relations, Micol Cottrell at [MCottrell@united-church.ca](mailto:MCottrell@united-church.ca).
3. The Voluntary Associate Minister named in the agreement may receive honoraria for weddings, funerals and for presiding and/or preaching in regular worship. However, there is no expectation of honoraria, stipend or travel allowance from the community of faith to which they are accountable, for participating in the regular life of the community of faith.
4. When there is a change in a pastoral relationship within a community of faith, the Voluntary Associate Minister must reapply for their VAM status. The new minister has the option to approve or not approve the re-appointment of a Voluntary Associate Minister at the pastoral charge level.
5. If a Voluntary Associate Minister enters into a call at another community of faith, their VAM status shall come to an end. If a VAM enters into an appointment longer than six months their VAM status will also end. Please contact the Human Resources Commission in order to inform them of any of these changes.
6. Designation as a VAM does not mean that a community of faith is required to call upon the VAM to provide functions of ministry in the community of faith (e.g., pastoral care, pulpit supply, etc.) neither does it require the VAM to provide functions of ministry in the community of faith.



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### Signatures

Secretary of Governing Body	
Name (printed)	
Signature	
Email address	
Date	

Incumbent Ministry Personnel	
Name (printed)	
Signature	
Email address	
Date	

Voluntary Associate Minister	
Name (printed)	
Signature	
Email address	
Date	

Regional Council Representative	
Name (printed)	
Signature	
Email address	
Date	

*E.g., Chair of Human Resources, Meeting Secretary*