Relying on “A Sure Foundation,” our UCC resource for minister and congregational relationships, we hold to the simple truth that “Every ministry has a beginning and an end.” Healthy boundaries are an important part of each step along a minister’s pastoral journey; and this is no less true at retirement. Departing pastors take their leave, trusting that God will continue to be present in the people and places of their former ministry; and the continuing community of members begins to live into a new future together.

Saying good-bye to an outgoing minister and hello to a new leader isn’t just a mere formality. This work is holy practice for all the greetings and goodbyes that people experience. At every departure, there is a mixture of emotions, including grief. Ministers do well to attend to their own grief in this time, even as they let go of their responsibility to attend to the needs of their former ministry settings.

The grief of goodbye and the excitement of new beginnings is no less a part of the transition for a Conference Minister than for any other authorized minister or setting. In many ways, the transition can be even more complicated, as the retired conference minister continues to serve with peer groups, wider church involvement, and continuing education, while still maintaining appropriate boundaries to foster healthy and self-differentiated ministry in retirement.

KO Recommendations
The Conference Council of the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference, in consultation with retiring Conference Minister Edith Guffey, the pastors of the local church where the CM is a member, and the Committee on Ministry, have therefore developed the following guidelines for healthy departure after her December 31, 2021 end date, adapted from the language of “A Sure Foundation: Ethical Departure Guidelines.”

To the best of her ability, while continuing to live, worship, and hold her membership in the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference of the United Church of Christ, the retiring Conference Minister will observe a no-contact boundary with all authorized ministers in KO, and all members of KO Congregations, for at least two years. An extremely small number of relationships exist, in which the primary relationship is that of friend or work colleague, rather than Conference Minister. In this handful of relationships, Edith will continue to find friendship, support, and an outlet for ministerial collegiality.

Local Church Membership
While the Conference Minister is not the pastor of the local church where she holds her membership, it is still difficult for local church members, who dearly love and appreciate Edith, not to think of her as “their” CM. The local church relationship is unavoidably complex in a sacred way. However, for Plymouth UCC in Lawrence to fully
welcome a new CM in our Conference, Edith feels it is best for them and for her, to move her church membership to another local church in KO. Once she settles on a new congregation for membership (within six months of her retirement), her participation there will be limited and infrequent for the first two years, as a result of anticipated travel, and to continue contributing to the development of healthy departure boundaries.

Social Media
Recommendations about relationships through social media are mixed, even according to “A Sure Foundation;” and range from a complete erasure of all known contacts, to a continued but mindful use of social media. Moreover, the use of and types of social media are in constant flux. Therefore, at this time, we have outlined the following expectations for the next two years:
• Edith will “unfollow” all UCC churches and specialized ministries in KO;
• Edith will unfollow or “snooze” individuals who are authorized ministers or members of local churches;
• Edith will continue to follow individuals with whom she interacts in non-KO organizations and ministries in Kansas. She will steer conversations away from KO and local church topics.
• In general, Edith will keep a lower profile on social media, not reacting to or commenting on posts of churches, ministers, and laypersons in KO.
See also “What can we do to help?” below.

Rites and Passages of Life
It is common practice to ask former pastors not to attend or participate in the baptisms, weddings, funerals, or other life passages and rites of former parishioners. However, the case of a Conference Minister is somewhat different. A CM is not the pastor of every lay person in the Conference; a CM is a member of a local church and should be able to participate at some level in the worshipping life of that church; and a CM is a college to other authorized ministers. While healthy boundaries are essential, opportunities to celebrate and to grieve are also part of healthy experiences with life’s transitions. The former CM will be circumspect and use the utmost discretion in any participation in these life events: checking in with the local church pastor and COM ahead of time; arriving late and leaving early; and not speaking at or leading any such event. More broadly speaking, Edith has always maintained a practice of checking in with local church pastors before arriving at a church event or worship service; and she will continue this approach as applicable into the future, indefinitely.

Expectations of Authorized Ministers
All authorized ministers are expected in attendance at the annual meeting of the Conference. However, given the particular importance of supporting the leadership of the incoming Conference Minister, the former CM will be excused from participation in Annual Meeting for 2022 and 2023. Participation in 2024 will be revisited with the COM at that time.
Boundary training is another expectation of authorized ministers, even in retirement (until “exempt” status is sought). The former CM will pursue her next required boundary training through the offering of another Conference outside of KO, and submit a certificate of completion to the KO registrar for COM-A.

Wider Church Roles
As an authorized minister, a retired CM will continue to find other ways to serve in the wider church. This may include membership on various UCC boards and committees; contracted or interim service with other Conferences; and service with local, state, and national organizations that are not specifically church-related (such as PFLAG). If any conflict arises with these roles, in which activities within the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference present a specific concern, the former CM will hand off specific oversight or leadership to others as applicable.

Local Community Roles
As an engaged resident of Lawrence, Edith will encounter and work alongside people she knows from the KO Conference, including individuals from Plymouth Congregational Church. She cannot be expected to remove herself from these situations without giving up vital parts of community life. She will steer conversations away from KO and local church topics when those occasions arise.

What can we do to help?
As authorized ministers and church members, the very best way we can support both our outgoing and incoming Conference Ministers, is to give Edith space. Resist the urge to reach out to her. “Snooze” her or “unfollow” her on your Facebook feed, at least for the next two years. Don’t call, email, text, or write, even if you think it’s just to share a note of thanks or encouragement. These small contacts make it harder for a pastor to create space and move on. By not contacting Edith, we are doing the best thing we can to help her. Let Edith reach out to you first, when she is ready — which may even be more than two years. As hard as this may sound for us, it will be even harder for Edith. As much as we will miss her, she will miss so many different aspects of her work and relationships with KO. Meanwhile, we can turn our energy for the care of collegial relationships to one another, and to our new Conference Minister.

Should any questions arise about these boundaries, the first point of contact should be the Committee on Ministry. At the time of this writing, the Rev. Gage Church, co-chair of COM-A, is the primary contact person for matters regarding the former Conference Minister’s retirement and status.

Approved by KO Conference Council, Nov. 13, 2021