

Extension of a congregational placement beyond the tenth year

POLICY | Sydney Central Coast Presbytery | 2018.02

POLICY DRAFTS		
To Sydney Central Coast Presbytery	ADOPTED as Presbytery policy	21.02.2018
Sydney Central Coast Presbytery	UPDATED	Jan 2019

Contents

INTRODUCTION: Uniting Church Thinking on Ministry Placement	2
Why a ten-year limit?	2
Oversight and discernment during a ministry placement.....	2
Extending a placement beyond ten years.....	3
Why seek an extension?.....	4
Extensions beyond the tenth year in Sydney Central Coast Presbytery	4
POLICY on Extension of a congregational placement	6
APPENDIX 1 Regulations on placements (extracts) from the Regulations of the UCA	11



INTRODUCTION:

Uniting Church Thinking on Ministry Placement

At the time of church Union in the 1970s, the three denominations had different polities on the nature and duration of placements. Presbyterian and Congregational ministers served at the call of their Council of Elders or Congregation, sometimes spending their entire ministry with a single congregation. Methodists, on the other hand, were regularly moved to new circuits by the 'episcopal' discernment of the Conference, and overall had much shorter tenures. A consistent polity was needed, and the Uniting Church Regulations codified the agreement reached by the three uniting Churches.

A congregational ministry placement should last for at least three years in the case of the first placement of an ordinand, at least five years in the case of an experienced minister of the Word or Deacon, and continue for up to ten years. Some placements may be time-limited for various reasons. A time limit must be clearly specified in the Terms of Placement.

In the fifth year of placement (or third year of an ordinand placement), each minister is expected to submit an updated Ministry Leadership Profile to the Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC) and begin to attend to the possibility of a new placement, through the agency of the Placements Committee (ACOMP, the *Advisory Committee on Ministerial Placements*). Ministry Placements in the Uniting Church will normally end after 10 years, if they have not already concluded (Reg. 2.7.3.a).

Why a ten-year limit?

The ten-year limit was adopted as a sensible compromise for the Uniting Church. Ministries can be too short or too long. In practice, it seems that six to ten years has proved to be about right on average. This timeframe has the advantage of both renewing the mission direction of a congregation and balancing ministry families' needs for stability at certain times of life with a minister's need for renewal. It also facilitates a regular movement of ministers with different sorts of experience across the whole Synod.

This last point is very important. Ministry is a gift of God to the whole church. But ministry formation is a costly process for the Synod, which needs and reasonably expects an adequate degree of fluidity in its pool of available ministers. Ministers gain experience in one place which should be shared with others. Even experiences such as disappointment, disagreement or failure can be vital learnings to bring into a new placement.

At present the church faces a persistent difficulty addressing the flow of 'urban drift' from rural centres and towns to cities. Ministry agents are concentrated in metropolitan Presbyteries, and less ready to offer their wisdom, experience and gifting in the country. Likewise, ministers in larger, more stable placements are reluctant to move to smaller, newer, edgier or struggling places, where their experience may well mean a turnaround for a congregation to move to a new stage of life. The ten-year placement limit helps to free up the church's ministry resources to find fresh expression in a new context.

Ministers who are listed as eligible to accept a call shall ensure that an up-to-date ministerial profile, prepared according to Assembly guidelines, is lodged with the secretary of the Placements Committee.

Reg. 2.6.2 (e)

The ten-year placement limit helps to free up the church's ministry resources to find fresh expression in a new context.

Oversight and discernment during a ministry placement

During each placement, the Presbytery should conduct regular [Vital Ministry](#) appraisals with each minister, as well as [Life and Witness consultations](#) with the congregation, seeking to ensure that the minister and placement are still in an effective missional covenant relationship with each

other and accountable to the Presbytery and wider church. (Different consultation processes may apply to chaplaincies and other non-congregational placements, which are not explicitly covered by the Regulations.) At times the minister and congregation will be asked directly, ‘Do you believe that God is still calling you to this particular ministry, or is it time to begin discerning God’s call afresh?’

Vital Ministry is designed to be a positive appraisal of each minister every two years. Even if consultations happen less frequently, a similar timeline will usually unfold. For example:

- After her first two years, a minister might reflect that she has now had time to get to know the community and its context, start a few new programs or projects, get the people moving on some mission plan or opportunity, and be looking forward to the next two or three years of activity.
- After four years, she will be asked to reflect on the fruit that is being borne. What is working? What didn’t work? Why? What will you try next? What resources do you need? But as the five-year ‘minimum’ mark is now approaching, she might also be challenged: is this placement really using your gifts, or are you feeling called (pulled OR pushed) in a different direction? At this time this is an open question as she will soon be listed as ‘eligible to accept another placement’ (Reg. 2.6.2), though it is probably not a pressing one if the placement shows strong ‘vitality’.
- The same questions should be raised more concretely in Vital Ministry at the sixth year. At eight years the ViM team should seriously explore the minister’s vision for the future. *“Your time here will soon be drawing to a close, with maybe a year or 18 months at most. Have you received any profiles from ACOMP? What is making you curious? The Church is now asking you, in accordance with our mutual understanding of God’s call and covenant, to make yourself available to a new community. Where will your experience, your professional development, your changing family situation, and your passion for ministry and mission, lead you? Now is the time to explore God’s call afresh.”*

It is an important part of our ministerial covenant with the church that we take this process seriously, understanding that the call of God is always mediated through the people of God. Engaging fully and accountably in church processes and responding seriously when invited to meet with a JNC may test our current call and lead to a fresh awareness of the mission of God for a congregation or minister. Refusing to participate in that process may not be so much a sign of faithful perseverance as of wilful tone-deafness to the voice of the Spirit.

Extending a placement beyond ten years

Sometimes, however, it may be reasonable and faithful to seek to extend a placement beyond the tenth year. A specific Regulation covers this process ([Reg. 2.6.8](#)).

In the wisdom of the wider church, a ministry beyond ten years’ duration is seen as an exception to the norm

While the Regulation does not suggest specific reasons to seek an extension, or offer any reason to reject one, it presupposes congregational growth in mission and development, and the minister’s welfare and vocation. An extension requires broad consultation (the Placements Committee represents the needs and views of the whole Synod) and a serious sense of agreement across the church (Congregation, Church Council, Minister, Presbytery).

Congregational leaders and ministers should be aware that in the wisdom of the wider church, a ministry beyond ten years’ duration is seen as an exception to the norm, requiring particular discernment to ensure that such an extension is in the best interests of the placement, the minister, and the wider church.

Why seek an extension?

There are many genuine reasons why a ministry could profitably be extended. The missional health of the placement is the principal issue, though family and personal needs may also be important considerations. Some examples include:

- a need for continuity of ministry through a period of change, disruption or renewal, where the minister is part of the solution, not the problem; the completion of a significant mission project; radical structural change
- coincidental change of several related placements (e.g. where a team or collegiate ministry has been operating; in a rural Presbytery or a local region where coincidental conclusions of ministry represent a serious depletion of resources)
- the missional reality that certain types of congregation benefit from longer tenures of a visionary leader; large regional churches or effective parish missions may fit this category (and large churches will almost always be able to support their argument with relevant hard metrics on their church life and growth)
- a restructuring of ministry deployment within a Zone or region of the Presbytery needing ministry with a productive history and local knowledge
- a minister's shared role in resourcing the wider needs of the Presbytery alongside congregational responsibilities
- health and wellbeing issues for the minister or a family member may require compassionate consideration for a period of time
- an impending retirement; completion of children's high school studies; or other extraordinary family exigencies which need to be treated sensitively
- congregational life and witness is flourishing under a particular minister and disruption would mean a net loss to this congregation with no commensurate gain to the wider church.

In other words, for these or other reasons, together the Church can discern that this minister is still in effective ministry in the right place at the right time; or at the very least, is in need of personal support for a time and the congregation is willing and able to give it.

Extensions beyond the tenth year in Sydney Central Coast Presbytery

Sydney Central Coast Presbytery members should recognise that we are a privileged Presbytery. We inhabit a beautiful and wealthy part of Australia, with access to the best resources the nation can offer. Our churches and other services are numerous and relatively well-resourced. School and social opportunities, jobs for partners, health and other services are readily available. We offer placements for a very high number of ministry agents relative to most other Presbyteries, even though many congregations may have fewer members.

Sydney Central Coast Presbytery needs to remind itself that an effective minister extended beyond the tenth year is effectively 'borrowed' from the often scantier resources of the wider church, even when the minister is likely to provide excellent missional outcomes for their SCCP congregation. Congregations with an extended placement are 'privileged' compared to other churches, avoiding the struggle of a period of vacancy and transition. The

SCCP IS...

a catalyst for growing generous, inclusive & courageous churches

We Value...

Generous hospitality
inclusive Christianity
active discipleship
cross-culturalism
courageous mission
transformative leadership
collaborative ministry
accountable stewardship

*Mission, Vision, Values:
SCCP Strategic Plan
2017-20*

congregation feels secure through pastoral familiarity and missional continuity. The minister's family remains undisturbed. The minister by default has become a 'senior minister' within the Presbytery, with strong local and regional networks and at least a decade of Presbytery experience and corporate memory.

If SCCP is to live up to its core values of generosity, mission and stewardship, we will together set the highest standards and expectations upon the ministers and congregations in the bounds. The Presbytery's ministry cohort belongs to the whole Synod, so any extension needs to be discerned equitably and with transparency and be missionally accountable. Every extension application should name clear and measurable goals for its full duration; be responsibly engaged with all Presbytery processes; and proactively offer some additional value to the Presbytery or wider church.

POLICY on Extension of a congregational placement

1. The Rules

All parties should read and work within:

- a. the Guiding Principles of this Presbytery Policy and its process Template;
- b. the Regulations concerning placements (Section 2 of the [Regulations of the UCA](#), especially 2.6.2 and 2.6.8);
- c. the [National Handbook of Procedures for the Placement of Ministers](#) (as interpreted by the Placements Committee of the Synod).

2. Guiding Principles

- a. Sydney Central Coast Presbytery (SCCP) agrees with the whole Uniting Church that a congregational tenure of up to ten years is in most cases a satisfactory period of ministry placement. SCCP will consider applications for extension beyond the tenth year as exceptional to the norm. The recommendation of an extension should not be taken for granted.
- b. In our [mission, vision and values](#) the SCCP intends to enhance the wellbeing of the whole church, not only the congregations and mission centres within the bounds. 'Generous hospitality, courageous mission and accountable stewardship' mean we will not attempt to hoard our ministry resources at the expense of the wider church.
- c. The Presbytery recognises that in some cases there will be strong missional and pastoral reasons to extend a placement beyond the tenth year, and will support those extensions using thorough and transparent consultation and discernment processes.
- d. Presbytery Vital Ministry and Life and Witness consultations will consider mission and ministry planning, but responsibility for seeking an extension normally lies with the congregation and minister.
- e. During a period of extension, the Presbytery will, by negotiation with the placement and minister, expect more of the minister and congregation in their responsibilities towards the wider church, thus sharing the benefit of the privilege of extended placement.
- f. We note the very specific discernment requirements of Reg. 2.6.8 (a): an extension depends upon the agreement of three parties (congregation, minister and Presbytery) through several Councils of the church (Church Council, Congregational meeting, and Presbytery) and the acknowledgement of the Synod Placements committee. In other words, conciliar wisdom applies to this matter. Consensus is not sought, but a high level of agreement will be required.
- g. Where an extension of placement is sought or recommended primarily for compassionate reasons, the Presbytery Standing Committee may vary the discernment process and requirements upon ministers and congregations.

3. Responsibilities of the Minister

- a. All ministers are expected to update their [Ministry Leadership Profile](#) for PRC and ACOMP during the third year of a minister's first placement and the fifth year of a subsequent placement (Reg. 2.6.2). It is in the minister's interest to review this profile regularly, eg. biennially with Vital Ministry consultations.
- b. The minister should be proactive in the eighth year of ministry in reminding the PRC to schedule a Vital Ministry consultation early in that year. If the minister is aware of personal reasons for an extension (such as a child's final school year or a retirement plan) he or she should discuss this at the earliest moment with the PRC.
- c. An application for extension will be considered by PRC only if the following preconditions are met:
 - i. the minister has lodged an up-to-date Ministry Profile with ACOMP more than six months prior to seeking an extension;
 - ii. the minister has regularly lodged an Annual Report with the PRC;
 - iii. the minister is compliant and current with required professional standards including Ethical Ministry, Continuing Education and Professional Supervision and has taken an adequate amount of Annual Leave;
 - iv. the minister has participated willingly and constructively in the responsibilities of a minister as outlined in her or his TOP and other agreed requirements (including Presbytery and Zone mission and ministry activities, and attending to profiles sent from ACOMP);
 - v. the minister has worked with the congregation to lodge the application in a timely manner (4.c below).

4. Responsibilities of the Congregation

- a. Responsibility for seeking an extension normally lies with the congregation(s) and minister, not with the Presbytery. Application will be made by the Church Council to the Pastoral Relations Committee through the PRC secretary or chairperson.
- b. At any time, a conversation might be initiated between local church leaders and the minister, by either party, on the merits of seeking an extension. In the early stages of consideration, a reasonable level of confidentiality should be kept so as not to shape congregational expectations prematurely.
- c. This process takes a significant period of time. Planning, forming consultation teams, conducting and reporting on consultations may take more than six months, so the congregation must allow as much time as possible for consideration of an application.
 - i. Regulation 2.6.8(c) allows Presbytery to *decide* on an extension in the ninth or tenth year. However, if the Presbytery should decide *against* an extension in the middle of the tenth year, both minister and congregation could be disadvantaged in planning for a change of placement.
 - ii. For this reason, except in the case of emergent compassionate needs or subsequent applications for extension, applications should be received by the PRC secretary or chairperson anytime from after the Vital Ministry in the eighth year, up to the sixth month of the ninth year of the placement.
 - iii. For a second or subsequent extension, all parties will need to give as much consideration as possible to the sensitivity of time in this process, noting that an application received in the last moments of an existing extension will be difficult to process fairly (cf. [2.6.8.c](#)).

- d. At an early opportunity, congregational leaders and minister should discuss their thinking with the Presbytery Minister or Presbytery Development Officer, who will give advice, guide them to this policy and assist them through the steps.
- e. The congregation will participate in a form of consultation determined by the Life and Witness Committee, including such consultation with the Zone and neighbouring congregations and mission centres as is deemed necessary.
- f. Following the Template and in consultation with the PRC, the Church Council and Congregation will deliberate together and determine their intention to apply for an extension. Both councils need to record a 2/3 majority.
- g. An application for extension will be considered only if:
 - i. the congregation has followed and completed the **Presbytery Application Form** for seeking an extension beyond the tenth year;
 - ii. the congregation is fully compliant with all requirements of the Presbytery (as agreed with the congregation), including Zone engagement, financial accountability, risk and safety compliance and stewardship support for the wider church;
 - iii. consultation has taken place with neighbouring placements in the Zone as to the suitability of the extension for the mission of the Zone;
 - iv. the congregation has a Presbytery-endorsed mission plan which includes clear, missional objectives and expectations of the minister and congregation during any period of extension. This mission plan may be an outcome of the Life and Witness Consultation (4.e above).

5. Responsibilities of Presbytery Committees

- a. In considering an extension of placement, the Presbytery must consult with various parties on specific questions ([Reg. 2.6.8.d](#)). These consultations will need to be arranged in good time for due process and decisions to be made. They will typically include a Vital Ministry consultation with the minister (in the eighth year); a congregational Life and Witness or Mission Study adapted to the purpose; seeking the advice of the Placements Committee (ACOMP) before the Presbytery determination is made.
 - i. **Vital Ministry, Eighth Year** PRC will conduct a [Vital Ministry](#) consultation with ministers early in their eighth year in placement, during which plans for their next two years of ministry should be discussed (regardless of whether an extension is to be sought).
 - ii. **Life and Witness** The L&W Committee will determine the type of consultation and its terms of reference, considering the congregation's existing mission plans and how long ago the last consultation was held, and any other relevant information, and consult with the Business Committee.
 - iii. **Consulting the Placements Committee** ACOMP's business is to know the breadth of the ministry cohort in the Synod and the present and emerging needs of the church across its entire range. While ACOMP cannot 'overrule' a Presbytery in this matter, it represents a Council of the Church (i.e. the Synod) and its wisdom and knowledge of the wider church needs to be heard attentively and faithfully. PRC will seek the advice of ACOMP.

- b. There may be extraordinary circumstances in which the Presbytery itself discerns the need for an extension and takes the initiative in proposing this to the congregation and minister.
- c. Once the process has been followed and a local decision reached, an application is forwarded to the Pastoral Relations Committee. PRC will:
 - i. consider the application and any other relevant material;
 - ii. consult as necessary with the Life and Witness Committee, Standing Committee and Placements Committee;
 - iii. take any other steps it considers necessary to assist in discernment;
 - iv. make a recommendation to the Presbytery Standing Committee and communicate that recommendation to the minister and congregation. The PRC may recommend an extension of less than five years' duration (Reg. 2.6.8.b) and with subsequent conditions attached.
 - v. If the PRC recommends an extension, the Standing Committee will list the application on the agenda of the Presbytery Council. PRC will speak to the proposal at the Presbytery meeting and follow the discernment process for Presbytery deliberation and decision.
 - vi. If the PRC recommends to Standing Committee that an extension not be granted, it will on the advice of the SC initiate a pastoral process to work with the minister and congregation to seek the withdrawal of the application and identify another missional direction.
 - vii. The congregation may appeal the PRC's decision to the Presbytery Standing Committee.

6. The Presbytery Council

- a. In a **closed session** of a full Presbytery Council Meeting:
 - i. the proposal will be submitted by the PRC with a written rationale in the general distribution of Presbytery papers and briefly speak to the proposal during the meeting;
 - ii. the minister and congregational representatives will be excluded from the Presbytery meeting during the deliberation process;
 - iii. Presbytery members may seek clarification of the process and discuss the wisdom of the recommendation;
 - iv. any debate about Policy must be restricted to a separate proposal to amend the Policy; the Policy may not be altered during the discussion of a particular application for extension;
 - v. the congregational representatives are requested to exclude themselves from voting on grounds of a conflict of interest and will not be counted among the voting members;
 - vi. the minister concerned in the application will waive his or her right to vote in this ballot, and in the votes of the congregation and Church Council, and will not be counted among the voting members present in the meeting.

- b. If an extension is granted by the Presbytery:
 - i. consequent expectations of the minister or placement may be required by the Standing Committee on the advice of the PRC or Life and Witness Committee, such as: an increased proportion of ministry time (>10%) to the Presbytery; the leading of a key Presbytery committee or Zone coordination; mentoring and supporting others in ministry; the congregation providing resources or oversight to a struggling neighbour congregation; or sharing resources with the wider church in some way;
 - ii. the Terms of Placement will be updated to include any new understandings reached for the extended placement, including goals and expectations;
 - iii. the Placements Committee is notified of the extension. (Note that there is no sequestered period as in the first years of placement; the minister remains open to further calls from the first day of an extension. It is the role of the PRC's representative to ACOMP to comment on the appropriateness of any proposed placement.)

APPENDIX 1

Regulations on placements (extracts) from the [Regulations of the UCA](#)

2.6 PLACEMENT AND APPOINTMENT

DESIGNATION OF MINISTERS

- 2.6.1 (a) Every Minister shall be designated as on active service, on leave of absence, retired, not available for placement or awaiting placement. [...]

ELIGIBILITY OF MINISTERS FOR CALL

- 2.6.2 (a) The secretary of the Placements Committee shall prepare and maintain a list of Ministers who are eligible to accept a call.
- (b) The list shall include the names of Ministers in the fifth and subsequent years of a placement (or, in the case of a first placement following ordination, the third or subsequent year).
- (c) A Minister in placement shall be eligible to accept another placement to become effective at any time after the completion of five years (or, in the case of a first placement after ordination, three years).
- (d) No approach shall be made except by the Placements Committee to any Minister whose name does not appear on the list. When a Congregation or other body wishes for special reasons to approach such a Minister, it shall request the Placements Committee (in the case of a Congregation, the request shall be made through its Presbytery), and the Placements Committee may at its discretion approach the Minister concerned after consultation with the Presbytery in the bounds of which the Minister is placed or with any other appropriate body. In the case of an approach to a Minister not listed which may result in an inter-Synod transfer, the prior consent of the Placements Committee of the other Synod shall be obtained.
- (e) Ministers who are listed as eligible to accept a call shall ensure that an up to-date ministerial profile, prepared according to Assembly guidelines, is lodged with the secretary of the Placements Committee.

... and much more: refer to the Regulations (2015), section 2.6 PLACEMENTS

EXTENSION OF CONGREGATION PLACEMENTS BEYOND THE TENTH YEAR

- 2.6.8 (a) (i) A placement in a Congregation may be extended by the Presbytery beyond the tenth year by agreement of the Minister, Youth Worker or Lay Pastor, Congregation and Presbytery.
- (ii) Any extension shall require a two-thirds majority by secret ballot of those **present** in each of the meetings of the Church Council, the Congregation and the Presbytery.
- (b) Such extensions may be for periods of up to five years at a time.
- (c) A decision to extend a placement may be made at any time during the ninth and tenth year of a placement, or, in the case of any subsequent extension, at any time during the last two years of the current extension.
- (d) When considering requests for extension the Presbytery shall:
- (i) consult with the Congregation, and give consideration to the continued growth in the mission and development of the Congregation;
- (ii) consult with the Minister, Youth Worker or Lay Pastor, and give consideration to the welfare and vocational growth of the minister; and
- (iii) seek advice from the Placements Committee.