

Resolution to Create United Methodists of Upper New York Parental Leave Policy

WHEREAS, Scripture calls us to provide care for each other as members of Christ's family ("But if someone doesn't provide for their own family, and especially for a member of their household, they have denied the faith." 1 Timothy 5:8, CEB); and

WHEREAS, The World Health Organization and the International Labor Organization advocate for at least 18 weeks of paid maternity leave¹; and

WHEREAS, The 2016 United Methodist *Book of Discipline* states, "Maternity or paternity leave, not to exceed one-fourth of a year, will be available and shall be granted by the bishop and the cabinet, and the executive committee of the Board of Ordained Ministry to any local pastor, provisional member, associate member, or clergy member in full connection who so requests it at the birth or arrival of a child into the home for purposes of adoption."²; and

WHEREAS, the parental leave policy as written in the 2016 United Methodist *Book of Discipline* only guarantees paid leave for eight weeks, has been considered open to interpretation, and has not always applied equitably across the connection, since "one-fourth of year"³ is thirteen weeks; and

WHEREAS, the East Ohio, Western North Carolina, and Western Pennsylvania Annual Conferences have adopted policies maintaining compensation for thirteen weeks and assisting local congregations in paying for coverage during the leave; and

WHEREAS, supporting clergy families lives up to our calling to welcome all generations as Christ welcomes children (Matthew 19:14, Mark 10:15, Luke 18:16); and

WHEREAS, the failure to ensure just and equitable parental leave for all our clergy families is a manifestation of the spiritual forces of wickedness we are called to renounce, the evil powers of this world we are called to reject, and the sin of which we are called to repent by virtue of our baptism into the Church of Jesus Christ

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the United Methodists of Upper New York do lament that, in requiring parental leave last no longer than 13 weeks, our United Methodist denomination fails

¹ Maternity Protection, Compliance with International Labor Standards.

<https://www.who.int/data/nutrition/nlis/info/maternity-protection-compliance-with-international-labour-standards>

² The 2016 United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, ¶ 355.

³ The 2016 United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, ¶ 355.

to live up to the conventions and recommendations established by the World Health Organization and International Labour Standards, which calls for parental leave to not be less than 18 weeks; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the United Methodists of Upper New York do hereby publicly repent of and confess our collective sin of failing to ensure equitable parental leave policies for clergy families; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the United Methodists of Upper New York support work being done by the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women to advocate for legislative change in future General Conferences to bring our denominational requirements in line with the conventions and recommendations provided by the World Health Organization; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the United Methodists of Upper New York adopt the Parental Leave Policy and Procedure, included as an appendix to this resolution, effective following the adjournment of the 2024 Session of the Upper New York Annual Conference; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the United Methodists of Upper New York direct the Conference communications team to publish this Parental Leave Policy on the Annual Conference website and the clergy support policies document; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the United Methodists of Upper New York invite the Cabinet to share this Parental Leave Policy, in its totality, with the chairs of Staff/Parish Relations Committees of local congregations in our Annual Conference no later than July 1, 2024; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the United Methodists of Upper New York invite the Cabinet to communicate this change in policy as they preside over Charge Conference sessions in 2024 or ensure that the Presiding Elder communicates this change in policy as they preside over Charge Conference sessions in 2024; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the United Methodists of Upper New York support work being done by our Annual Conference boards, teams and agencies; local churches and extension ministries; and General Church Boards and Agencies to advocate for and establish just universal paid parental leave policies in all sectors of our society.

Respectfully Submitted,

The United Methodists of Upper New York Commission on the Status and Role of Women

APPENDIX

United Methodists of Upper New York Parental Leave Policy

Statement of Purpose

The United Methodists of Upper New York supports families, and advocates for parental leave for all persons welcoming a child into their home, both clergy and lay. We seek to mirror standards set forth in the New York State Paid Family Leave Act. As such, every congregation and ministry setting in our Annual Conference is covered in a group Paid Family Leave insurance policy that provides funding for twelve weeks of paid parental leave. Therefore, we encourage all parents who are welcoming a child into their home—whether by birth, adoption, or foster placement—to make full use of parental leave policies. The United Methodists of Upper New York have developed this policy in order to assist clergy families and lay church employees, local churches, District Superintendents, and the Annual Conference in caring for family and advocating for parental leave in the church and beyond the church.

The World Health Organization and the International Labor Organization advocate for *at least* 18 weeks of paid maternity leave,⁴ and The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* allows for *up to* 13 weeks of maternity and paternity leave for clergy families.⁵ The necessity for robust access to paid parental leave transcends bodily recovery from a birth. It allows for invaluable time for parents to bond and form integral relationships with the new child. In many cases, a birthing parent will be granted a period of short-term disability by their medical provider after a birth. Parental leave given through this policy shall not be construed as overlapping with any short term disability status given to a birthing parent after a birth. Likewise, this policy shall not impact other uses of Paid Family Leave, such as an employee experiencing any qualifying exigency related to a spouse, domestic partner, child or parent on active military duty.

This policy applies to any local pastor, provisional member, associate member, or clergy member in full connection who is appointed to 25% time or more to a local congregation or annual conference-funded extension ministry, including, but not limited to, campus ministries, Wesley Foundations, camp and retreat ministries, and conference staff, hereinafter referred to as “clergy” or “clergy person.” This policy shall also apply to any lay employee of the Upper New York Annual Conference, its extension ministries, or of a congregation within the Upper New York Annual Conference boundaries who works 20 or more hours a week, or has worked for at least 175 hours, hereinafter referred to as “laity” or “lay employees”. Lamentably, due to realities of our group paid family leave insurance coverage, parents working in the same ministry context may not be granted simultaneous paid parental leave.

⁴ Maternity Protection, Compliance with International Labor Standards.

<https://www.who.int/data/nutrition/nlis/info/maternity-protection-compliance-with-international-labour-standards>

⁵ The 2016 United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, ¶ 355.

While the policy uses language of church appointments, this policy also applies to clergy appointed to conference-funded extension ministries, including but not limited to conference and district positions, and camping ministries. Clergy appointed to non-conference-funded extension ministries are encouraged to adapt similar policies for their settings.

Book of Discipline Foundations

¶ 355. *Maternity or Paternity Leave*—Maternity or paternity leave, not to exceed one-fourth of a year, will be available and shall be granted by the bishop and the cabinet, and the executive committee of the Board of Ordained Ministry to any local pastor, provisional member, associate member, or clergy member in full connection who so requests it at the birth or arrival of a child into the home for purposes of adoption.

1. Persons desiring maternity or paternity leave should file their request with the committee on pastor-parish relations after consulting with the district superintendent at least ninety days prior to its beginning to allow adequate pastoral care for the churches involved to be developed.
2. During the leave, the clergy member's annual conference relations will remain unchanged, and the health and welfare benefit plans will remain in force.
3. A maternity or paternity leave of up to one-quarter of a year will be considered as an uninterrupted appointment for pension purposes.
4. Compensation will be maintained for no less than the first eight weeks of leave.
5. During the leave time, pastoral responsibility for the church or churches involved will be handled through consultation with the committee on pastor-parish relations of the local church(es) and the district superintendent.
6. Special arrangements shall be made for district superintendents, bishops, and those under special appointment.

Policy for Births, Adoptions, and Foster Placement for Clergy

1. All clergy in the Upper New York Annual Conference who are expecting the birth or adoption of a child are eligible for Parental Leave (maternity or paternity leave in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2016*, ¶ 355). This policy applies to all clergy, regardless of their part-time or full-time status. Parental leave is guaranteed to all clergy who request it within the guidelines of this policy.
2. Clergy are encouraged to begin communication with their DS as soon as they are able to publicly share the anticipation of a child's arrival. Families giving birth are encouraged to begin planning as soon as they are public about their pregnancy. Adoptive parents are encouraged to make a plan as soon as they are approved for adoption/foster parenting.

Parental leave must be requested at least 90 days in advance of the anticipated beginning of the leave, in accordance with the *2016 Book of Discipline*.

3. Parental leave shall be encouraged and permitted for 13 weeks with full pay and will not affect the clergy person's pension, health benefits, and appointment status.
4. Churches will maintain their regular compensation for clergy on leave for the duration of the leave.
5. The DS will consult with the clergy person to arrange coverage for the duration of leave.
6. The Annual Conference will provide local churches with partial funding for compensation related to pastoral coverage and pulpit supply, in consultation with the clergy person(s)' and the SPPRC. The first twelve weeks of parental leave will be covered, up to the amount required by the New York State Paid Family Leave Act, and paid for by the Insurance provider selected and funded by the Board of Pensions and Health Benefits. The clergy person and church shall be responsible for completing and submitting the insurance carrier's paperwork, with assistance from Annual Conference personnel as required. Required insurance forms are in the RESOURCES section of our Annual Conference website and in the "Clergy Support Policies" document.
7. Parental leave may be taken consecutively or nonconsecutively, full or part time, according to the needs of the family. Clergy may take intermittent paid family leave in full-day increments. The number of Sundays off will correspond at least one-to-one with the number of weeks of paid parental leave. All parental leave must be taken within 12 months of the placement or birth of the child(ren).
8. Parental leave is not vacation. The use of parental leave does not affect the clergy person's use of their annual vacation granted in the Annual Conference Rules.
9. Churches will make reasonable accommodations for breastfeeding and pumping parents, as well as for the feeding of infants. This should include private space, access to an outlet, and time/space to feed according to the infant's needs.
10. Clergy in the Annual Conference will support and promote parental leave, including by providing pastoral care coverage if asked and needed, in accordance with their schedule.
11. The Annual Conference will support clergy on parental leave by excusing or making alternate arrangements for their district and conference duties. This includes the annual conference session, charge conference, district and conference committees, and residency requirements.
12. Foster care providers and adoptive parents may be able to take some of their Paid Family Leave *before the actual placement* of a foster child or arrival of the adoptive child if an absence from work is required for the placement or arrival to proceed.

Policy for Births, Adoptions, and Foster Placement for Lay Employees

1. All laity employed by the Upper New York Annual Conference, any of its extension ministries, or any of the congregations within its boundaries who are expecting the birth or adoption of a child are eligible for Parental Leave. This policy applies to all lay

employees who work 20 or more hours a week, or who have worked for at least 175 hours. Parental leave is guaranteed to all lay employees who request it within the guidelines of this policy.

2. Lay employees are encouraged to begin communication with their supervisors as soon as they are able to publicly share the anticipation of a child's arrival. Families giving birth are encouraged to begin planning as soon as they are public about their pregnancy. Adoptive parents are encouraged to make a plan as soon as they are approved for adoption/foster parenting. Parental leave must be requested at least 90 days in advance of the anticipated beginning of the leave, mirroring requirements for clergy in accordance with the 2016 Book of Discipline.
3. Parental leave shall be encouraged and permitted for 13 weeks with full pay and will not affect any benefits granted to the lay employee.
4. Churches will maintain their regular compensation for lay employees on leave for the duration of the leave.
5. The lay employee(s)' supervisor will consult with the lay employee to arrange any coverage of the lay employee(s)' responsibilities for the duration of leave.
6. Funding for the first twelve weeks of any compensation-related coverage of the lay employee(s)' responsibilities during parental leave will be provided to the employer in the amount required by the New York State Paid Family Leave Act and paid for by the insurance provider selected and funded by the Board of Pensions and Health Benefits. It shall be the responsibility of the lay employee and church to complete and submit paperwork provided by the insurance carrier, with assistance from their supervisor and/or Annual Conference personnel as required. Required insurance forms are located in the RESOURCES section of the Annual Conference website.
7. The lay employee(s)' supervisor shall seek out funding sources for any compensation-related coverage of the lay employee(s)' thirteenth week of leave and approved by the respective funding source(s)' governance policies.
8. Parental leave may be taken consecutively or nonconsecutively, full or part time, according to the needs of the family. Lay employees may take intermittent paid family leave in full-day increments. If the lay employee(s)' regular job responsibilities include day-specific obligations on a weekly basis for which coverage must be found, the number of those days off will correspond at least one-to-one with the number of weeks of paid parental leave. All parental leave must be taken within 12 months of the placement or birth of the child(ren).
9. Parental leave is not vacation. The use of parental leave does not affect the lay employee(s)' use of any annual vacation given by their employer.
10. Employment settings will make reasonable accommodations for breastfeeding and pumping parents, as well as for the feeding of infants. This should include private space, access to an outlet, and time/space to feed according to the infant's needs.
11. Foster care providers may be able to take Paid Family Leave before the actual placement of a foster child if an absence from work is required for the placement to proceed.

12. These standards shall be construed as the minimum standards for parental leave for lay employees of the Upper New York Annual Conference, its extension ministries, or congregations within its boundaries. If an employer desires and is able to provide more opportunity for leave, this policy shall not prevent them from doing so.

Upper New York Annual Conference Parental Leave Procedures

Clergyperson(s)' Responsibilities & Action Steps:

1. Clergy are encouraged to begin planning for Parental Leave as soon as possible. Think through the logistics and needs of your family, ensuring that you consider what will best serve your family. Parental Leave may be taken for up to 13 weeks for birth or adoption, consecutively or nonconsecutively, full or part time, in full days, and must be taken within 12 months of the birth/arrival of a child.
2. Talk with your District Superintendent before sharing the news with your Local Church.
3. Share your plans for Parental Leave with your SPRC.
4. Submit a formal Parental Leave request at least 90 days in advance of the projected start date of leave to the District Superintendent, Episcopal Office, and the Board of Ministry Conference Relations Registrar.
5. If needed or desired, the District Superintendent will meet with the SPPRC to discuss the Parental Leave Policy, benefits, and needs of the congregation.
6. Complete and submit paperwork provided by the Paid Family Leave insurance carrier that is found on the Annual Conference website.
7. Work with the SPPRC to determine the local church resources and needs during the leave. Request funding by submitting a budget for the expenses of pastoral coverage during leave to the District Superintendent.
8. Arrange pastoral coverage, including pulpit supply, for the duration of your leave. The District Superintendent is available to assist you if desired.
9. Communicate your Parental Leave plans to the SPPRC, District Superintendent, and Local Church/ministry setting.
10. As the child's arrival date nears, ensure all notes and pastoral coverage plans are in place and have been communicated to all involved.
11. Set appropriate boundaries with Local Church leadership as to your needs during leave. Think about if you wish to be contacted during your leave, and under what circumstances. Communicate your boundaries clearly, and ensure that the Local Church/ministry setting understands your availability during leave. (Think about how or if you will respond when a parishioner calls you. What about if there is a funeral? What will happen to emails that are sent during your leave?) Ensure that communication is kind and clear so that all know what to expect.

12. As the child's arrival date nears, it may be helpful to have back up pastoral coverage and worship services ready, in case of unanticipated circumstances. Consider developing a lay-led service or two and equipping members to be prepared in the event they need to lead without you.
13. When your child arrives and your leave begins, inform your District Superintendent and SPPRC.
14. Take full advantage of the Parental Leave benefits offered to you, for the benefit of your family.

District Superintendent and Conference Responsibilities & Action Steps:

1. District Superintendents will support clergy and encourage the full use of the Parental Leave Policy.
2. If desired, District Superintendents will meet with the SPPRC to discuss the Parental Leave Policy, Foster Care Placement Policy, benefits, and needs of the congregation, for birth, adoption, or foster care placement.
3. District Superintendents will receive Parental Leave coverage budgets from Local Churches/ministry settings and will ensure that funding is provided in accordance with the Parental Leave policy.
4. District Superintendents will remain in consultation with the clergy as pastoral coverage is arranged. If desired, the District Superintendent will assist the clergyperson in finding appropriate coverage.
5. District Superintendents will encourage good boundaries during Parental Leave. District Superintendents will not require clergy to attend charge conference, district conference, or related duties during their parental leave.
6. District Superintendents will help interpret and support the need for space and time for grieving for clergy families experiencing pregnancy or infancy loss or at the end of a foster placement. District Superintendents will be in consultation with clergy and the SPPRC to arrange this time. This time will not affect a clergy person's annual vacation.
7. The Annual Conference will support and promote Parental Leave and will advocate for paid Parental Leave in all aspects of society.
8. The BOM, Cabinet, the Conference Commission on Equitable Compensation, and COSROW will review and update the Parental Leave policy at least quadrennially.
9. During the appointment process, no assumptions should be made about the desires of future parents. The clergyperson(s)' District Superintendent should be in conversation with them about potential appointment changes. These conversations should affirm the professional dignity and sacred worth of clergy parents/families.

Responsibilities & Action Steps for Lay Employees:

1. Laity are encouraged to begin planning for Parental Leave as soon as possible. Think through the logistics and needs of your family, ensuring that you consider what will best serve your family. Parental Leave may be taken for up to 13 weeks for birth or adoption, consecutively or nonconsecutively, full or part time, in full days, and must be taken within 12 months of the birth/arrival of a child.
2. Talk with your supervisor before sharing the news with others in your ministry setting.
3. Share your plans for Parental Leave with your supervisor.
4. Submit a formal Parental Leave request at least 90 days in advance of the projected start date of leave to your supervisor.
5. Work with your supervisor to determine the resources and needs during your leave.
6. Complete and submit paperwork provided by the Paid Family Leave insurance provider as found on the Annual Conference website.
7. Work with your supervisor to arrange for coverage for the duration of your leave. Request funding by submitting a budget for the expenses of compensation-related coverage during leave to your supervisor.
8. Communicate your Parental Leave plans to your supervisor and those in your ministry context.
9. As the child's arrival date nears, ensure all coverage plans are in place and have been communicated to all involved.
10. Work with your supervisor to set appropriate boundaries with those in your ministry context as to your needs during leave. Think about if you wish to be contacted during your leave, and under what circumstances. Communicate your boundaries clearly, and ensure that the Local Church/ministry setting understands your availability during leave. Ensure that communication is kind and clear so that all know what to expect.
11. As the child's arrival date nears, it may be helpful to have contingencies ready, in case of unanticipated circumstances..
12. When your child arrives and your leave begins, inform your supervisor.
13. Take full advantage of the Parental Leave benefits offered to you, for the benefit of your family.

Responsibilities & Action Steps for Supervisors and Ministry Contexts of Lay Employees:

1. Supervisors will support lay employees and encourage the full use of the Parental Leave Policy.
2. If desired, supervisors will meet with appropriate bodies in the ministry context to discuss the Parental Leave Policy, Foster Care Placement Policy, benefits, and needs of the congregation, for birth, adoption, or foster care placement.

3. Supervisors seek out funding sources, collaborating with others in the ministry context as appropriate, for any unbudgeted expenses related to the lay employee(s)' thirteenth week of parental leave.
4. Supervisors will remain in consultation with the lay employee as coverage is arranged. If desired, the supervisor will assist the lay employees in finding appropriate coverage.
5. Supervisors will model and encourage good boundaries during Parental Leave for the ministry context. Supervisors will not require lay employees to attend ministry-related meetings or events during their leave.
6. Supervisors will help interpret and support the need for space and time for grieving for clergy families experiencing pregnancy or infancy loss or at the end of a foster placement. Supervisors will be in consultation with the lay employee and the employer to arrange this time. This time will not affect a lay employee's annual vacation.
7. The ministry context will support and promote Parental Leave and will advocate for paid Parental Leave in all aspects of society.