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Clergy Misconduct Policy Procedures for Dealing with Accusation of Misconduct Against Clergy with Standing

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Northern Lights Region
Commission on Ministry

PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH ACCUSATION OF MISCONDUCT AGAINST CLERGY WITH STANDING

I. INTRODUCTION

Within the ministry of the whole people of God there has always been a representative ministry called of God and authorized by the church. While the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) recognizes and celebrates the “priesthood of all believers,” we also have recognized and set apart those with particular gifts for ministry and entrusted them with representative authority. With this trust comes responsibility. Religious leadership demands a high level of integrity. Religious leaders are charged not only with the tasks of preaching, teaching, and leading, but also with the care and nurture of the congregation. When that trust and responsibility is violated by crossing sexual boundaries with congregants, staff, or others under their leadership or care, or when it is violated by egregious violations of the Ministerial Code of Ethics, the church has the responsibility to respond faithfully in order to address the violating behavior, demonstrate care for the victims, and maintain the faithfulness and integrity of the whole church.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Northern Lights Region, herein referred to as NLR, has affirmed that we are called to provide healthy boundary training for clergy and guidance to congregations and pastors in times of transition and trouble. Micah 6:8 calls us “to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.” We believe that this scripture frames an appropriate response for dealing with accusations of sexual misconduct and other ethical violations among clergy with standing.

To do justice: We are called to respond in ways that take seriously the accusations and pain expressed by the complainant, while not rushing to judgment against the accused. Our response calls us to outline and model a process that responds to accusations quickly, thoroughly, and with integrity, holds persons accountable for their behavior and actions, and offers the possibility of building true community based on mutual accountability and trust.

To love kindness: We are called to respond with pastoral care and concern for all parties involved: the complainant, the accused, the families, and affected congregations. We are called to walk gently through the process recognizing the extreme vulnerability of each

44 person and the sacred trust which we have been given. We are called to offer, through the
45 process, opportunities for healing and wholeness.

46
47 ***To walk humbly with God:*** We are called to recognize that we are humans, created in
48 God’s image but with human imperfections and flaws. We approach this process with
49 courage and conviction that injustice must be confronted with humility. We recognize
50 that we “all sin and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and we prayerfully and
51 intentionally seek God’s guidance throughout.

52
53 Though the Commission on Ministry recognizes that the potential for misconduct is not
54 confined to clergy alone and that the church has a responsibility to address complaints
55 against all who operate on the church’s behalf including volunteers and lay leaders, the
56 scope of these procedures is limited to those authorized to offer ministry, whether
57 commissioned or ordained, on behalf of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
58 specifically within the NLR.

59
60 The following policy outlines the procedures for use by the Regional Minister and
61 Commission on Ministry of the NLR on behalf of the Regional Church as they seek to
62 respond holistically and faithfully to situations where the fitness of a person for
63 authorized ministry in the NLR is called into question due to accusations of sexual
64 misconduct or egregious violations of the Ministerial Code of Ethics.

65 66 **II. HISTORY**

67
68 In July 2019, the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
69 approved the formation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Northern
70 Lights Region. Both former regions, Northwest and Montana, value high standards of
71 professional ethics. Included in concerns about professional ethics is clergy misconduct
72 that fails to maintain healthy boundaries in ministerial relationships.

73
74 In 2020, the Commission on Ministry appointed a Task Group to review the former
75 regional policies and develop a policy for the newly formed NLR.

76 77 **III. DEFINITION OF CLERGY MISCONDUCT**

78
79 Clergy misconduct occurs when any person in a ministerial role of leadership or pastoral
80 counseling engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant (beyond
81 the bounds of marriage or domestic partnerships), client, employee, student, lay volunteer
82 or staff member or commits egregious violations of the Ministerial Code of Ethics (e.g.
83 embezzlement, fraud, misuse of power within the context of ministry, etc.).

84
85 **Sexual misconduct** refers to a range of behaviors which include the use of sexuality by
86 the authority figure as a means of physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual abuse.

88 **Sexual exploitation** includes, but is not limited to: harassment by means of sexually
89 suggestive remarks, threats, or unwanted physical contact: sexually intimate relations
90 including, but not limited to, intercourse when the relations have arisen out of the clergy
91 person’s role as pastor, counselor or authority figure in the church.
92

93 **Sexual abuse, harassment, and/or misconduct** can take many forms, including but not
94 limited to:

- 95 • **Written:** sexually suggestive or obscene letters, emails, texts, notes, invitations.
- 96 • **Verbal:** sexually suggestive or obscene comments, jokes, propositions; derogatory
97 remarks based on the gender or sexual orientation of another person.
- 98 • **Visual:** displaying sexually suggestive pictures or posters, leering, or staring at
99 another person’s body.
- 100 • **Physical:** intentional and unnecessary touching of another person’s body:
101 touching one’s own body in a sexual manner in the presence of a constituent or
102 client.
103

104 Clergy are expected to be faithful to the commitments they make as marriage or domestic
105 partners. Relationships between a clergy person and a consenting adult beyond the
106 bounds of marriage or domestic partnerships may rise to the level of clergy sexual
107 misconduct in some instances. Clergy should refer to the document, “A Guideline for
108 Amorous Relationships” and the Ministerial Code of Ethics to explore the appropriate
109 and ethical parameters of such relationships.
110

111 The authorized minister is responsible for maintaining professional boundaries,
112 irrespective of the behavior of other persons. Ministers with standing in the NLR are
113 accountable to the Region and congregations to faithfully fulfill the vows they made upon
114 ordination, or commissioning.
115

116 **IV. TREATMENT OF ACCUSATIONS/CONFIDENTIALITY/INTEGRITY OF** 117 **DUE PROCESS**

118 **A. The Response Team**

119 The Commission on Ministry will appoint a Response Team composed of six (6)
120 members and will designate one of the members to serve as chairperson. No member of
121 the Response Team may be a currently serving member of the Commission on Ministry.
122 Each member will serve a six-year term, with two members rotating on every two years.
123 Members would be eligible to serve a second six-year term. Care will be taken in the
124 selection of the Response Team to ensure the inclusion of persons with the highest
125 integrity. Where possible and reasonable members will include those with trauma
126 informed care training, and have representation across age, ethnic, gender, and
127 geographical boundaries.
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130 The Response Team will meet annually to ensure all members of the Response Team
131

132 receive training in the proper execution of their duties.

133
134 The Regional Minister will appoint a pastoral support person to serve as chaplain to the
135 Response Team, in the event of a complaint resulting in an investigation. This person will
136 not be involved in the investigation or recommendation.

137
138 At the close of each investigation, the Response Team and the Commission on Ministry
139 will engage in a period of review of the process and suggest revisions if needed.

140
141 **B. The Object of the Process**

142
143 The overarching goal of the process is to provide a just, prompt, and faithful response to
144 an accusation of clergy misconduct. Therefore, the person making an accusation, as well
145 as the accused, is to be treated with respect. All accusations are to be taken seriously and
146 are not to be dismissed without response and investigation.

147
148 When a person the church has granted ministerial standing to has their fitness for the
149 pastoral role called into question, it is the responsibility of the Regional Church, through
150 its Commission on Ministry, to uphold the integrity of the church and its ministries by
151 instituting the procedures for reviewing those persons with standing against whom
152 accusations have been made.

153
154 As soon as an accusation complaint is made, prompt response is essential, with a goal of
155 initiating the process within 10 days.

156
157 Once a review has begun, it is essential that members of the Response Team, the
158 Commission on Ministry, and the regional staff uphold the strict principles of
159 confidentiality. All persons, including members of the Response Team, the accused and
160 the complainant, witness interviewees, and Commission on Ministry members, should
161 agree to refrain from discussing any written or verbal material concerning the case
162 outside of those authorized to deal with it including the Response Team, Commission on
163 Ministry, the Regional Minister, legal counsel for the region and pastoral, therapeutic, or
164 legal assistance for the accused or complainant

165
166 Both the complainant and the accused are to be treated with sensitivity and respect. Due
167 to the painful nature of making an accusation or complaint of sexual misconduct, or of
168 being accused of such behavior, every effort must be made to avoid statements or actions
169 which impugn the integrity of either party during the investigative procedures. It is
170 essential to assure all parties that the accusation will be treated seriously, and they will be
171 treated with respect.

172
173 The process which the NLR has adopted must be followed faithfully, step by step, with
174 just treatment for all involved.

175

176 C. Investigation Process

177
178 1. Making a Complaint

- 179 a. **Direct complaint from victim:** If a person believes they have been the
180 victim of clergy misconduct by a minister with standing in the NLR, they
181 shall make a formal complaint by contacting either the Regional Minister
182 or the chairperson of the Commission on Ministry. The person making the
183 complaint will be asked to submit their complaint in writing. The written
184 complaint will be the basis for action.¹
- 185 b. **Direct complaint from witness:** If a person witnesses an act of clergy
186 misconduct by a minister with standing in the NLR, they shall make a
187 formal complaint by contacting either the Regional Minister or the
188 chairperson of the Commission on Ministry. The person making the
189 complaint will be asked to submit their complaint in writing. The written
190 complaint will be the basis for action.
- 191 c. **Third Party Complaint:** If information is received third hand, the
192 Regional Minister and/or Commission on Ministry chairperson will
193 attempt to confirm the information and request a written statement of the
194 charges. Unsubstantiated rumors will not be acted upon.
- 195 d. **Pastoral Colleague:** If a clergy person is contacted about allegations
196 against another clergy person, it is their responsibility to refer the
197 complainant to the Regional Minister or Commission on Ministry
198 chairperson and offer to accompany the complainant. If a clergy person
199 has first-hand knowledge of a boundary violation by a colleague, (what
200 they have seen or heard), then the clergy person can and should make a
201 direct complaint from a witness report to the Regional Minister and/or
202 Commission on Ministry chairperson (see b. above).
- 203 e. **Allegation against the Regional Minister:** A misconduct complaint
204 against the Regional Minister shall be made to the chairperson of the
205 Commission on Ministry. In that event, the chairperson of the Commission
206 on Ministry will contact the chairperson of the General Commission on
207 Ministry. Complaints against the Regional Minister are referred to and
208 investigated by the General Commission on Ministry.
- 209 f. **Allegation against a Minister on Regional Staff (not Regional**
210 **Minister):** A misconduct complaint against a member of the Regional
211 Staff who is also a minister with standing in the NLR shall be made to the
212 chairperson of the Commission on Ministry or to the Regional Minister.
213 The process for investigation will proceed as outlined for other ministers
214 with standing and the Regional Board will be notified in the same way that
215 the local congregational board would be notified.

1 If the minister does not have standing with the NLR, the complaint may be forwarded to the appropriate judicatory body if one exists. The NLR may assist in the investigation of the complaint at the request of the other governing body.

216 g. The Commission on Ministry itself can also initiate an investigation when
217 the commission has identified a cause for question and/or concern that
218 needs further exploration. The Commission, without accusation, would
219 identify the concern in writing and the Response team may be appointed to
220 investigate thoroughly to determine the veracity of the concern.
221

222 2. Receiving the Complaint:

- 223 a. Once a complaint has been received in writing by either the Regional
224 Minister or the chairperson of the Commission on Ministry an
225 investigation will be initiated.
- 226 b. If the disclosure involves an allegation of misconduct towards a child or a
227 person incapable of speaking for themselves, the Regional Minister and/or
228 Commission on Ministry chairperson will immediately report to law
229 enforcement. The Region should cooperate with any criminal investigation
230 and the timing of the initiation of the Region's formal investigation
231 process should give deference to the process of the governmental agency.
- 232 c. **Responsibilities of the Regional Minister:** Throughout the process of
233 responding to an accusation of misconduct, the role of the Regional
234 Minister is to administrate the process and implement any disciplinary
235 action; within this process and for the persons involved, the Regional
236 Minister role of "pastor to pastors" is set aside. Upon receiving
237 information about an accusation complaint of clergy misconduct, pastoral
238 and procedural work needs to be assigned and begun immediately.
239

240 The Regional Minister shall follow these steps in responding to the
241 complaint:

- 242 i. If the complaint was not received in writing, the Regional Minister
243 shall request a written statement from the complainant.
- 244 ii. The Regional Minister shall offer both the complainant and
245 accused the option of having a "companion" to provide support
246 throughout the process. (See description listed under VI. A.
247 below.)
- 248 iii. The Regional Minister shall notify legal counsel and the Regional
249 Insurance Company that a complaint has been received.
- 250 iv. The Regional Minister shall notify the chairperson of the
251 Commission on Ministry as soon as possible to initiate the
252 investigation process.
- 253 v. Once the written complaint is received, the Regional Minister shall
254 notify the accused and provide a copy of the complaint and name
255 of complainant. The accused and complainant will be advised not
256 to have contact with one another throughout the investigation. In
257 special circumstances, the name of the complainant may be
258 withheld from the accused in the initial stages of the investigation.
259 (e.g. when retaliation is possible)

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- d. **Responsibilities of the Chair of the Commission on Ministry:** It is imperative that the chairperson act quickly to begin the investigation process by following these steps:
 - i. Assign two members of the Response Team to serve as the Investigative Team who shall make separate initial in-person contacts with the complainant and the accused. When the Investigative Team is assigned, a target date should be set for the Investigative Team to report back to the full Response Team.
 - ii. The chairperson or his/her designee must keep all affected parties informed of the process, particularly in terms of their role, responsibility, and options within the process. If a decision is made to continue with the investigation process, the chairperson must make sure the complainant and the accused have written copies of the procedure that will be used.
 - iii. A log must be kept of all phone contacts and meetings pertaining to the accusation from this time forward. The investigation process is outlined below.

278 **3. Initial Meeting with the Complainant**

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280 As soon as possible, arrangements should be made to interview the complainant at
281 some length. If possible, this interview should take place in person. In all
282 instances, the two-person Investigative Team, should be present during this
283 interview.
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- 285
- a. The purpose of the initial meeting is to:
 - i. be an expression of the pastoral concern of the church,
 - ii. provide information about how accusations are filed, the procedure for review of ministers, the jurisdiction of the regional church in terms of maintaining or withdrawing ministerial standing, and the distinction between this ecclesiastical jurisdiction and the civil and criminal jurisdictions,
 - iii. clarify the details of the complaint and determine if other involved parties should be interviewed, and
 - iv. determine the extent to which the complainant is willing to participate in review proceedings. Ask the person to provide a written complaint which can be used by the Response Team as it determines the appropriate course for further action. (This may already have been received by the Regional Minister.)

 - b. Immediately following the meeting, the Investigative Team will prepare a written summary of the meeting. The complainant should have an opportunity to comment, in writing, on the summary of the meeting. This summary, and the complainant's comments on the summary, become part
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304 of the records of the Response Team.
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306 After the initial interview with the complainant, the Investigative Team will
307 prepare a written statement for the Response Team. The Response Team will
308 meet to determine whether there is sufficient cause to continue the investigation.
309 The Response Team will report their recommendation to the Regional Minister
310 and the Commission on Ministry chairperson. Based on the recommendation, the
311 Regional Minister and the chairperson of the Commission on Ministry will
312 determine if there is sufficient cause to continue the investigation. If a decision is
313 made to continue the investigation, the chairperson of the Commission on
314 Ministry will inform the full Commission on Ministry that an investigation is
315 underway without including details of the investigation.
316

317 Should the complainant decide not to pursue the formal complaint process, the
318 Commission on Ministry may continue its investigation if it has discovered
319 sufficient information to suggest misconduct has occurred. In that case, additional
320 interviews may be required and shall be conducted by the Investigative Team.
321

322 **4. Meeting with the Accused** 323

324 Once a determination to investigate has been established, an interview with the
325 accused will be scheduled with the two-person Investigative Team as soon as
326 possible. It is advisable to have the same persons meet with the complainant and
327 the accused. If possible, the meeting should take place in person.
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- 329 a. The purpose of the initial meeting is to:
- 330 i. be an expression of the pastoral concern of the church,
 - 331 ii. provide information about how accusations are filed, the procedure
332 for review of ministers, the jurisdiction of the regional church in
333 terms of maintaining or withdrawing ministerial standing, and the
334 distinction between this ecclesiastical jurisdiction and civil and
335 criminal jurisdictions, and
 - 336 iii. provide a copy of the complaint and an opportunity for the accused
337 person to respond to the complaint. The accused will be required to
338 submit a written response to the complaint. The Response Team
339 can use such a written response as it determines the appropriate
340 courses of action.
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- 342 b. Immediately following the meeting, the Investigative Team will prepare a
343 written summary of the meeting. The person against whom a charge has
344 been made should have an opportunity to comment, in writing, on the
345 summary of the meeting. This summary, and the accused person's written
346 comment on the summary, become part of the records of the Response
347 Team.

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- c. **Possible Emergency Removal of Standing:** In cases involving alleged criminal misconduct, or in cases where the accused refuses to participate in the investigative process, the Commission on Ministry may deem it necessary to implement an Emergency Removal of Standing for the safety of all involved and to ensure that the criminal investigation is allowed to proceed without interference. The Emergency Removal of Standing would be treated as temporary (see V. B. 3.) or permanent (V. B. 4) based on advice from the involved governmental agency, the Region’s legal counsel, and the Regional Insurance Company. The Regional Minister and the Commission on Ministry would work with the congregation to ensure adequate pastoral and counseling resources are available.

5. Meeting with the Local Church

Most situations are ones in which the Region has a prior relationship with the local church and likely has participated in the installation of the pastor in question. Upon finding sufficient cause, it is important that the Regional Minister and the Chairperson of the Commission on Ministry arrange to meet with the leadership of the congregation which may include the Moderator/Chairperson of the Congregation/Board, Chairperson of Elders, Chairperson of the Pastoral Relations Committee or pastoral care group of the local church to:

- describe the complaint which has been filed,
- clarify that allegations are not to be judged as true or false until found to be so in due process of a review,
- determine the advisable course for continuation of pastoral responsibilities while the charges are being investigated,
- encourage consideration of placing the pastor on leave with salary and benefits during the investigation,
- express pastoral concern for the local church and determine what additional pastoral needs may be within the local church. Within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) it is clearly the responsibility of the congregation to call and dismiss its pastoral leadership. The Region encourages the congregation to place the pastor on administrative leave with pay while the charge is being investigated. Administrative leave with pay does not imply guilt on the part of the accused and creates space for the investigation to take place without undue influence from the accused.

Immediately following the visit with the local church, the Investigative Team will prepare a written summary of the meeting. This summary becomes part of the records of the Response Team. In the case of ministers with standing serving in settings other than the local church, careful consideration needs to be given to how to relate to the calling body.

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6. Pastoral Concerns

Determining how to act on the principle that one is "innocent until proven guilty" is complex with this kind of accusation. There is tension between the need to remove the accused from the ministry setting while the accusation is being investigated and the impact of such an action on the presumption of innocence. Some denominations' procedures are calling for "leave of absence from employment with pay without prejudice" to be sensitive to both needs. This document encourages congregations to provide for administrative leave with pay without prejudice in cases of complaints of clergy misconduct.

Many things stand in tension around the decision of continued investigation, including the clear need to assume someone innocent until proven guilty, while guarding against potentially damaging situations if an abusive minister remains in a leadership role during the process; a legal tension between denying someone who has not yet been found guilty of a charge the right to earn a livelihood and being negligent in putting parishioners and others at risk. These tensions, among other things, commend quick, thorough ecclesiastical action on the part of the region so the truth of the charges can be determined.

In situations where the accusations point to the victimization of minors or persons who cannot speak for themselves, the NLR Child Safety Policy requires that such matters be reported immediately to appropriate state and local authorities. Even before the charges have been proved or disproved, it is wise to give priority to the protection of children and those most vulnerable. This would require the removal of the minister from all responsibilities that bring them in contact with children or those most vulnerable. In this case, placing the accused on administrative leave with pay should be done immediately.

If the accused pastor resigns before the investigation process is complete, the investigation will continue until a determination is reached. That final determination will become a part of the pastor's permanent file in the Regional Office and be communicated to the appropriate parties including the pastor's congregation if exonerated, and the Ministers Directory Office at Disciples Home Missions if the charges are sustained.

If the accused pastor relinquishes standing before the investigation is complete, the investigation is halted. A note indicating that there was an ongoing process at the time of relinquishing standing will be placed in the minister's file and communicated to the Ministers Directory Office at Disciples Home Missions. Notes and documents related to the investigation will be kept in a sealed file in the Regional Office.

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7. Evaluation of Investigation Information

A written report of the Investigative Team, including a chronology of investigation, will be the basis for recommended action by the Response Team. The Response Team will meet to determine their recommendations. At least 5 of the 6 team members must participate in this meeting. The recommendation should be based on two questions:

- Does the alleged conduct by the accused person represent misconduct as defined by the policy itself? This requires reviewing the policy and evaluating the situation within the context of the policy.
- If the alleged conduct is misconduct according to the policy, then is the complaint valid? In other words, does the Response Team believe this happened? The decision is based on the facts and information gathered from the investigation. The committee may wish to engage a neutral expert to advise the Response Team in the gathering of information and weighing the factual findings. Ultimately the Response Team must determine if the accusations of sexual harassment, sexual abuse, or other misconduct are supported by the evidence.

The standard for a determination that the evidence supports the complaint is based on a “preponderance of the evidence”, i.e. is it more likely that the behavior occurred than that it did not occur. A standard of “beyond a reasonable doubt” is not required. This standard considers the possibility of future professional misconduct by the accused and whether the person is fit for professional ministry. The first obligation of the Response Team is to protect those who are vulnerable to future misconduct.

The Response Team chairperson will prepare and present written recommendation(s) for the Commission on Ministry's action detailing the relation of the complaint to the policy and their determination as to whether the allegation is substantiated, unsubstantiated, or inconclusive. After receiving the report of the Response Team, a meeting with the full COM will be convened at the earliest possible time. Information and documentation will be made available to the COM prior to the meeting via secure means such as encrypted online documents which will be removed immediately following the meeting. The Commission on Ministry will then adjudicate and decide what action to take.

V. RESOLUTION AND APPEALS

A. Decision on Complaint

The Commission on Ministry will determine the action to be taken. Prior to determining the action, they will conduct a hearing to receive the recommendation(s) of the Response Team and they may invite responses from relevant parties as the Commission deems

480 appropriate and helpful.

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482 **B. Possible Actions**

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484 IF THE COMPLAINT IS UNFOUNDED

485 **1. Exoneration, standing unaffected**

486 If the charge is determined to be unfounded, the minister may be
487 exonerated, and no disciplinary action taken. When this is the outcome,
488 recognizing the harm that the accusation probably has caused, official
489 notice needs to be given and pastoral support provided to the minister and
490 their family as well as the congregation (or calling body). The exonerated
491 pastor should request how and where official notice is given.

492 **2. Exoneration with censure**

493 If the charge is determined to be unfounded, but poor judgment was
494 exhibited by the accused, a Letter of Censure may be written by the
495 Commission on Ministry to the accused and included in their permanent
496 file at the Regional Office

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498 IF THE COMPLAINT IS SUSTAINED

499 **3. Standing retained with qualifications**

500 The outcome of the review may suggest the need of the accused for
501 growth and development via therapeutic intervention or other professional
502 interventions. The person would retain their standing for ministry and may
503 have their profile circulated, although notice of the action would be sent to
504 other regions and would be included in the pastor's permanent file.

505
506 **4. Temporary suspension of standing**

507 The Commission on Ministry may issue a Temporary Suspension of
508 Standing. Temporary Suspension of Standing is for a period of time in
509 order to implement a program prescribed by the Region or to underscore
510 the seriousness of the offense.

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512 While suspended, the person is not authorized to perform the functions of
513 the ministry that would require standing. The action to suspend should
514 specify the conditions under which the suspension may be lifted. For
515 example, in order for the suspension to be lifted, the minister may be
516 required to suspend any activity as a minister of the Christian Church
517 (Disciples of Christ) for a designated period of time, take full
518 responsibility for the misconduct, apologize to the complainant, consult
519 with the Commission on Ministry to establish a specific plan for
520 rehabilitation and restoration to fitness for ministry, and show evidence
521 that they have altered their behavior and intentions. A report of the
522 findings, actions, and follow up will remain in the permanent record of the
523 pastor.

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The action to suspend is reported to the Ministers Directory Office at Disciples Home Missions. Upon notification of such action, the Ministers Directory Office at Disciples Home Missions will notify all relocation officers within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of the action.

If the person no longer has authorization for ministry, they are unable to have their profile circulated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for the designated period of time. If the Temporary Suspension is lifted, the Commission on Ministry will notify the Ministers Directory Office at Disciples Home Missions.

5. Termination of standing

If the charge is sustained, the Commission on Ministry can remove the person’s ministerial standing For Cause. The action to terminate ministerial standing For Cause is to be reported to the Ministers Directory Office at Disciples Home Missions. Upon notification of such action, the Ministers Directory Office at Disciples Home Missions will notify all relocation officers within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of the action. The person who has lost their Standing for Ministry is no longer able to have their profile circulated within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and it becomes part of the pastor’s permanent record.

C. Notification of Action

After a determination is complete, the Commission on Ministry chairperson will inform all affected parties in writing of the outcome.

D. Appeals Process

Either the complainant or the accused may file an appeal of the decision of the Commission on Ministry no later than 30 days after the decision if all of the following conditions are met: 1) the Commission on Ministry has been given authority to render a decision on behalf of the Region, 2) the decision rendered was adverse to the interests of the person, 3) the person believes the Commission on Ministry failed to follow the process and procedures adopted by the Region. An appeal should be made through the Executive Committee of the Regional Board and then to the Regional Board. Final appeal may be made to the General Commission on Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ.)

VI. FOLLOW UP

A. Pastoral Care Issues

568 Situations involving an alleged abuse of the pastoral role are difficult, painful, and stress
569 producing experiences for all involved. Great care should be taken to embody pastoral
570 concern for all parties. Pastoral care is essential from the moment there is awareness of an
571 accusation to a considerable period following the conclusion of the review process.
572 Experience shows it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the same person to carry
573 this role effectively with more than one of the parties. Furthermore, persons carrying the
574 pastoral supportive roles should not be responsible for organizing and overseeing the
575 disciplinary procedures. It is understood that persons providing pastoral care to either the
576 complainant or the accused will agree to maintain confidentiality.

577
578 Therefore, the Regional Minister will appoint separate clergy persons to offer pastoral
579 care to the complainant and to the accused if they do not already have pastoral support
580 persons in place. The Regional Minister or their designee will offer pastoral support to
581 the congregation.

582
583 Both the complainant and the accused will have the option of being provided a
584 “companion” to offer support during the process. A companion may be present during
585 initial and follow-up interviews to provide that second set of ears for the complainant and
586 accused and to help navigate and comprehend the procedures for investigation. The
587 companion will not be allowed to speak during the interviews unless asked specific
588 questions nor to participate in drafting recommendations. The Regional Minister will
589 work with the complainant and accused to secure suitable companions to walk alongside
590 during the investigation and deliberation. Because this proceeding is ecclesiastical rather
591 than civil or legal in nature, legal representation is not appropriate or permitted.

592
593 If the pastor leaves the congregation, it is recommended that the congregation receive an
594 Intentional Interim for the purpose of caring and leading the congregation back to a
595 period of health and wholeness.

596
597 In the event that the pastor does not leave the congregation, it is the recommendation that
598 the congregation’s Pastoral Relations Committee or the Elders, in conjunction with the
599 pastor, procure an outside consultant to lead the congregation in dealing with the
600 ramifications of the painful experience.

601 **B. Procedural Issues**

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603
604 The procedures for reinstatement of ministerial standing are outlined in the Handbook for
605 Standing, Commissioning, Ordination in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the
606 Northern Lights Region. There are a variety of factors, however, which should receive
607 careful attention before moving toward reinstatement. Authorization for reinstatement
608 should follow a process of confession, repentance, and forgiveness, and not until
609 treatment and rehabilitation result in an informed judgment that the person again meets
610 the church's requirement for fitness for ministry. While the Church is certainly called to
611 practice forgiveness, it is not required to authorize persons for ministry who have

612 demonstrated difficulty in upholding the integrity the pastoral role requires. The church's
613 first responsibility is for the safety of its members and it should take whatever action
614 necessary to ensure that its leaders adhere to this policy.

615

616

617 Approved by the Commission on Ministry, NLR, 09/12/2020

618 Affirmed by the Regional Board, NLR, 03/13/2021