

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 Ethics¹ and/or Personal Qualifications for the Order of Ministry², 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 a 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 person and the sacred trust which we have been given. We are called to offer, through the process, opportunities for healing and wholeness.

¹ https://cdn.disciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/06162227/Ministerial_Code_of_Ethics-english-1.pdf

² <https://northernlightsdisciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Section-5-Part-2.-B-Personal-Qualificationsf-for-the-Order-of-Ministry-Summary.pdf>

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

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

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

II. HISTORY

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

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

In 2023, the Commission on Ministry reviewed and updated the policy to better define certain steps and definitions.

III. DEFINITION OF CLERGY MISCONDUCT

Clergy misconduct occurs when any person in a ministerial role of leadership or pastoral counseling commits egregious violations of the Ministerial Code of Ethics and/or Personal Qualifications for the Order of Ministry (e.g., sexual contact or sexualized behavior, fraud, embezzlement, misuse of power within the context of ministry, failure to lead and serve with integrity, breach of trust with the congregation or clients they are serving, etc.).

Sexual misconduct refers to a range of behaviors which include the use of sexuality by the authority figure as a means of physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual abuse. **Clergy sexual misconduct** occurs when any person in a ministerial role of leadership or pastoral counseling engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant (beyond

the bounds of marriage or domestic partnerships), client, employee, student, lay volunteer, or staff member.

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

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

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

Clergy are expected to be faithful to the commitments they make as marriage or domestic partners. Relationships between a clergyperson and a consenting adult beyond the bounds of marriage or domestic partnerships may rise to the level of clergy sexual misconduct in some instances. Clergy should refer to the document "A Guideline for Amorous Relationships" (Northern Lights COM Handbook, Section 7 Part 5)³ and the Ministerial Code of Ethics (Northern Lights COM Handbook, Section 7 Part 4)⁴ to explore the appropriate and ethical parameters of such relationships.

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

IV. TREATMENT OF ACCUSATIONS/CONFIDENTIALITY/INTEGRITY OF DUE PROCESS

A. The Response Team

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

³ <https://northernlightsdisciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Section-7-Part-5-Guideline-for-Amorous-Relationships-February-2026.pdf>

⁴ https://northernlightsdisciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Ministerial_Code_of_Ethics-english.pdf

The Response Team will meet annually to ensure all members of the Response Team receive training in the proper execution of their duties.

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

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

B. The Object of the Process

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

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

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

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

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

All notes and documents related to the investigation will be kept in a sealed file in the Regional Office.

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

C. Investigation Process

1. Making a Complaint

- a. **Direct complaint from victim:** If a person believes they have been the victim of clergy misconduct by a minister with standing in the NLR, they shall make a formal complaint by contacting either the Regional Minister or the chairperson of the Commission on Ministry. The person making the complaint will be asked to submit their complaint in writing. The written complaint will be the basis for action.⁵
- b. **Direct complaint from witness:** If a person witnesses an act of clergy misconduct by a minister with standing in the NLR, they shall make a formal complaint by contacting either the Regional Minister or the chairperson of the Commission on Ministry. The person making the complaint will be asked to submit their complaint in writing. The written complaint will be the basis for action.
- c. **Third Party Complaint:** If information is received thirdhand, the Regional Minister and/or Commission on Ministry chairperson will attempt to confirm the information and request a written statement of the charges. Unsubstantiated rumors will not be acted upon.
- d. **Pastoral Colleague:** If a clergyperson is contacted about allegations against another clergyperson, it is their responsibility to refer the complainant to the Regional Minister or Commission on Ministry chairperson and offer to accompany the complainant. If a clergyperson has firsthand knowledge of a boundary violation by a colleague (what they have seen or heard), then the clergyperson can and should make a direct complaint from a witness report to the Regional Minister and/or Commission on Ministry chairperson (see b. above).
- e. **Allegation against the Regional Minister:** A misconduct complaint against the Regional Minister shall be made to the chairperson of the Commission on Ministry. In that event, the chairperson of the Commission on Ministry will contact the chairperson of the General Commission on Ministry. Complaints against the Regional Minister are referred to and investigated by the General Commission on Ministry.
- f. **Allegation against a Minister on Regional Staff (not Regional Minister):** A misconduct complaint against a member of the Regional Staff who is also a minister with standing in the NLR shall be made to the chairperson of the Commission on Ministry or to the Regional Minister. The process for investigation will proceed as outlined for other ministers with standing and the Regional Board will be notified in the same way that the local congregational board would be notified.

⁵ If the minister does not have standing in 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.

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233 g. The Commission on Ministry itself can also initiate an investigation when
234 the commission has identified a cause for question and/or concern that
235 needs further exploration. The Commission, without accusation, would
236 identify the concern in writing and the Response Team may be appointed
237 to investigate thoroughly to determine the veracity of the concern.
238

239 **2. Receiving the Complaint**

- 240 a. Once a complaint has been received in writing by either the Regional
241 Minister or the chairperson of the Commission on Ministry an
242 investigation will be initiated.
243
244 b. If the disclosure involves an allegation of misconduct towards a child or a
245 person incapable of speaking for themselves, the Regional Minister and/or
246 Commission on Ministry chairperson will immediately report to law
247 enforcement. The Region should cooperate with any criminal investigation
248 and the timing of the initiation of the Region's formal investigation
249 process should give deference to the process of the governmental agency.
250
251 c. **Responsibilities of the Regional Minister:** Throughout the process of
252 responding to an accusation of misconduct, the role of the Regional
253 Minister is to administrate the process and implement any disciplinary
254 action; within this process and for the persons involved, the Regional
255 Minister role of "pastor to pastors" is set aside. Upon receiving
256 information about an accusation complaint of clergy misconduct, pastoral
257 and procedural work needs to be assigned and begun immediately.
258

259 The Regional Minister shall follow these steps in responding to the
260 complaint:

- 261 i. If the complaint was not received in writing, the Regional Minister
262 shall request a written statement from the complainant.
263 ii. The Regional Minister shall offer both the complainant and
264 accused the option of having a "companion" to provide support
265 throughout the process. (See description listed under VI. A.
266 below.)
267 iii. The Regional Minister shall notify the chairperson of the
268 Commission on Ministry as soon as possible to initiate the
269 investigation process.
270 iv. The Regional Minister shall seek legal counsel if deemed
271 necessary by the Regional Minister and the Commission on
272 Ministry Chair.
273 v. The Regional Minister shall advise the Regional Insurance
274 Company that a complaint has been received.
275 vi. Once the written complaint is received, the Regional Minister shall
276 notify the accused and provide a copy of the complaint and name
277 of complainant. The accused and complainant will be advised not
278 to have contact with one another throughout the investigation. In
279 special circumstances, the name of the complainant may be

withheld from the accused in the initial stages of the investigation.
(e.g. when retaliation is possible)

- 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. The Chair will keep a log of all phone contacts and meetings pertaining to the accusation from this time forward. The investigation process is outlined below.

3. Initial Meeting with the Complainant

As soon as possible, arrangements should be made by the Investigative Team to interview the complainant at some length. If possible, this interview should take place in person. In all instances, the two-person Investigative Team shall be present during this interview.

- 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 of the records of the Response Team and regional files.

After the initial interview with the complainant, the Investigative Team will prepare a written statement for the Response Team. The Response Team will meet to determine whether there is sufficient cause to continue the investigation. The Response Team will report their recommendation to the Regional Minister and the Commission on Ministry chairperson. Based on the recommendation, the Regional Minister and the chairperson of the Commission on Ministry will determine if there is sufficient cause to continue the investigation. If a decision is made to continue the investigation, the chairperson of the Commission on Ministry will inform the full Commission on Ministry that an investigation is underway without including details of the investigation.

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

4. Meeting with the Accused

Once a determination to investigate has been established, an interview with the accused will be scheduled with the two-person Investigative Team as soon as possible. It is advisable to have the same persons meet with the complainant and the accused. If possible, the meeting should take place in person.

- 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 civil and criminal jurisdictions, and
 - iii. provide a copy of the complaint and an opportunity for the accused person to respond to the complaint. The accused will be required to submit a written response to the complaint. The Response Team can use such a written response as it determines the appropriate courses of action.
- b. Immediately following the meeting, the Investigative Team will prepare a written summary of the meeting. The person against whom a charge has been made should have an opportunity to comment, in writing, on the summary of the meeting. This summary, and the accused person's written comment on the summary, become part of the records of the Response Team.
- 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.

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 call 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, command 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 Office of Christian Vocation 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 Office of Christian Vocation at Disciples Home Missions. Notes and documents related to the investigation will be kept in a sealed file in the Regional Office.

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 Response Team may wish to engage a neutral expert to advise them 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., it is more likely that the behavior occurred than that it did not occur. A standard of “beyond a reasonable doubt” is not required. The standard in this policy 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. A copy of the report and findings will be issued to the complainant, the accused, and the Commission on Ministry chairperson. 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 meet to receive the recommendation(s) of the Response Team and they may invite responses from relevant parties as the Commission deems appropriate and helpful.

B. Possible Actions

IF THE COMPLAINT IS UNFOUNDED

1. Exoneration, standing unaffected

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

2. Exoneration with censure

If the charge is determined to be unfounded, but poor judgment was exhibited by the accused, a Letter of Censure may be written by the

Commission on Ministry to the accused and included in their permanent file at the Regional Office

IF THE COMPLAINT IS SUSTAINED

3. Standing retained with qualifications

The outcome of the review may suggest the need for the accused's growth and development via therapeutic or other professional interventions. The person would retain their standing for ministry and may have their profile circulated, although notice of the action would be shared with another region if qualifications were not met at the time of request for transfer of standing. Details would be included in the pastor's permanent file.

4. Temporary suspension of standing

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

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

The action to suspend is reported to the Office of Christian Vocation at Disciples Home Missions. Upon notification of such action, the Office of Christian Vocation 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 Office of Christian Vocation 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 Office of Christian Vocation at Disciples Home Missions. Upon notification of such action, the Office of Christian Vocation 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. FOLLOWUP

A. Pastoral Care Issues

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

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

Both the complainant and the accused will have the option of being provided a "companion" to offer support during the process. A companion may be present during initial and follow-up interviews to provide a second set of ears for the complainant and accused and to help navigate and comprehend the procedures for investigation. The companion will not be allowed to speak during the interviews unless asked specific questions nor to participate in drafting recommendations. The Regional Minister will work with the complainant and accused to secure suitable companions to walk alongside

during the investigation and deliberation. Because this proceeding is ecclesiastical rather than civil or legal in nature, legal representation is not appropriate or permitted.

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

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

B. Procedural Issues

The procedures for reinstatement of ministerial standing are outlined in the Handbook for Standing, Commissioning, Ordination in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Northern Lights Region. There are a variety of factors, however, which should receive careful attention before moving toward reinstatement. Authorization for reinstatement should follow a process of confession, repentance, and forgiveness, and should not take place until treatment and rehabilitation result in an informed judgment that the person again meets the church's requirement for fitness for ministry. While the Church is certainly called to practice forgiveness, it is not required to authorize persons for ministry who have demonstrated difficulty in upholding the integrity the pastoral role requires. The church's first responsibility is for the safety of its members, and it should take whatever action necessary to ensure that its leaders adhere to this policy.

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

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

Revisions approved by the Regional Board, NLR, 03/17/24