

Handbook for Candidates

**Seeking Standing as
Commissioned or Ordained Ministers
in the
Northwest Regional Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)**



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Handbook for Candidates Seeking Standing as Commissioned or Ordained Ministers in the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

I. Introduction:

Preamble: “Within the universal Body of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is identifiable by its testimony, tradition, name, institutions and relationships. Across national boundaries, this church expresses itself in covenantal relationships in congregations, Regions, and General ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), bound by God’s covenant of love. Each expression is characterized by its integrity, self-governance, authority, rights, and responsibilities, yet they relate to each other in a covenantal manner, to the end that all expressions will seek God’s will and be faithful to God’s mission.” – from paragraph 2 of The Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), revised. 2005.

The ministry of Christ is entrusted to all the people of God. By virtue of baptism, we are each called to servant ministry lived out in covenant community. Within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) we look to the words of I Peter to remind us that in Christ, we are each members of “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God’s own possession.”

Within the wider body of the faithful however, we have also recognized that some are called to particular orders and forms of ministry. This handbook is designed to be a resource for those who are seeking Commissioning or Ordination within the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It is intended to be used alongside the Theological Foundations for the Ordering of Ministry in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). General understandings of particular orders of ministry are described within the foundations document. Specific procedures and requirements for the Northwest Region are detailed in this handbook.

II. Called to Ministry:

Within the ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) there are two recognized classifications of ministry: commissioned (formerly licensed) and ordained.

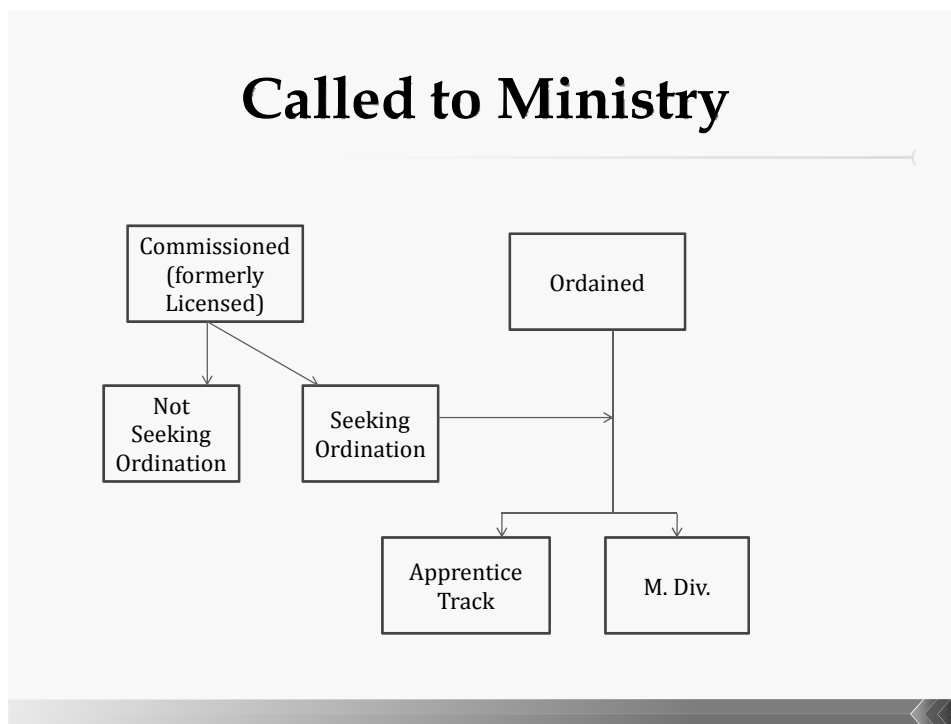
Commissioned Ministry refers to non-ordained ministers who are authorized by the Regional Commission on Ministry to offer ministry in a particular place for a specified period of time. There are two categories of commissioned ministers: not seeking ordination and seeking ordination. Commissioned ministers are granted standing within the region they are serving only for as long as they are serving in that particular place and ministry. Standing is not automatically transferred when moving to another

region. Commissioned ministers are not automatically given access to the Search and Call system beyond the region in which they are serving.

Ordained Ministry refers to those whom the Church has confirmed through prayers invoking the Holy Spirit and the laying on of hands through the act of ordination. “Ordination is a rite of the Church Universal. While ordination is normally done by a particular denomination, and standing is limited to a particular communion, the intention is that no one is ever ordained into a particular denomination or tradition, certainly not into the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Those ordained are representative ministers of the Church Universal: one, holy, catholic and apostolic.” (Theological Foundations, p. 13)

There are two paths to ordination: the apprentice track and the seminary track. Ordained ministers are granted standing within the region they are serving as long as they maintain the requirements for standing. Standing is transferred when moving to another region, although regions require documentation of standing from the prior region. Ordained ministers with standing have full access to the Search and Call System.

An outline of the relationship between the categories of ministry is included below and the steps required for each category of ministry are described in detail in the following pages.



All candidates for ministry, whether commissioned or ordained, will be expected to demonstrate evidence of the Personal Qualifications for Ministry. All candidates for ordination, whether apprentice or seminary will be required to demonstrate proficiency in the 16 Ministerial Areas of Practice. Please see Appendix I for a listing of the Personal Qualifications for Ministry and the Ministerial Areas of Practice.

The sexual orientation of candidates will not be a barrier to ordination or commissioning.

III. Commissioned Ministry

“Common criteria of commissioned ministry: In order to be commissioned ministers persons must:

- a. Be baptized members of a Disciples congregation in the commissioning region and serving in a congregationally, regionally or generally recognized call;
- b. Be recommended for commissioning by a recognized congregation or congregations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), including the one in which his/her membership is held;
- c. Meet with the Regional Commission ... and
- d. Comply with any other expectations of the region.” (Theological Foundations, p. 17)

IV. Commissioned Minister (Not Seeking Ordination)

Outline of process:

1. Gather documents and submit to regional office:
 - a) Letter from the candidate to the regional minister requesting commissioning, including situation and need.
 - b) Official transcripts from all post-high-school education and resume outlining work experience
 - c) Completion of Ministerial Standing Form. (found online at www.disciplesnw.org)
 - d) Letters of recommendations from:
 - i) Minister of congregation in which he/she holds membership (or moderator/board chairperson if candidate is serving as minister), including description of need and situation for which commissioning is required.
 - ii) Minister/moderator of congregation served (if different from above) including description of need and situation for which commissioning is required.
 - iii) Two additional letters of recommendation from persons familiar with the candidate's ministry.
 - e) Two-three page spiritual autobiography

- f) Written paragraph on each of first nine Personal Qualifications for Ministry indicating how these qualifications are manifest in the life and practice of the candidate. (See Appendix I)
2. Initial Meeting with the Commission on Ministry. The commission will determine whether to continue the commissioning process. The commission will consult with the appropriate national pastor/leader of racial/ethnic communities when considering a person of color.
 3. If decision is to continue, the candidate will be considered to be “under care” with the commission and the commission will outline next steps to include at least the following:
 - a) Completion of Ministerial Profile including required background check
 - b) Boundary training as outlined in regional requirements for maintaining standing
 - c) Engage in a period of mentoring with an established minister with standing within the region. Mentor to be assigned by the Commission on Ministry.
 - d) May include additional courses of study and/or psychological and vocational evaluation or other steps as deemed necessary.
 4. Second meeting with Commission on Ministry at which point the commission may do one of the following:
 - a) Determine to commission the candidate
 - b) Determine commissioning is not appropriate at this time
 - c) Decide to continue the candidate in a period of study and mentoring and schedule a next interview at a later date.
 5. If commissioned, the candidate will be notified. A certificate will be issued with the request that it be presented by the regional minister or a representative of the region during a commissioning service in the congregation. The commissioned minister will be granted ministerial standing in the region and will be conveyed to the office of search and call of the denomination.
 6. An annual review is required for renewal of commission.

V. Commissioned Minister (Seeking Ordination)

Outline of Process

1. Gather documents and submit to regional office as listed in Section IV. Commissioned Minister (Not Seeking Ordination)

2. In addition, include letter requesting candidacy for ordination and describe how candidate intends to fulfill the competency requirements for the 16 Ministerial Areas of Practice (see Appendix I) either through pursuing a Master of Divinity degree at an Association of Theological Schools accredited seminary or through the apprentice track to ordination. If through the apprentice track, please include extenuating reasons why pursuing an M. Div. is not feasible or practical.
3. Initial Meeting with the Commission on Ministry. The commission will determine whether to continue the commissioning process and which track to ordination (M. Div. or apprentice) is most appropriate. The commission will consult with the appropriate national pastor/leader of racial/ethnic communities when considering a person of color.
4. If the decision is made to continue, an in-care team will be assigned and the process will be followed as laid out in the ordained ministry section of the handbook.
5. The in-care team will also be responsible for developing an individual plan to continue preparations for commissioned ministry while moving forward in the ordination process.
6. A second meeting with the Commission on Ministry will be held to determine commissioning and to evaluate progress towards ordination.
7. If commissioned, the candidate will be notified. A certificate will be issued with the request that it be presented by the regional minister or a representative of the region during a commissioning service in the congregation. The commissioned minister will be granted ministerial standing in the region and that will be conveyed to the Office of Search and Call of the denomination.
8. An annual review is required for renewal of commission.

VI. Ordained Ministry

“By ordination, the church recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit in calling particular persons to creative and imaginative servanthood in Christ; accepts their ministry in and for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and for the whole body of Christ; covenants to undergird the ministry; and grants authority to perform that ministry as a representative of the church. Ordained ministers are baptized members of a Disciples congregation. In accepting ordination, the minister covenants to obey God by caring for the church, offering gifts of mind, body and spirit to that service agreeing to fulfill the functions of a minister, and adhering to the *Ministerial Code of Ethics* of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)” (Theological Foundations, p. 19)

There are two educational tracks in preparation for ordination:

Apprentice Track: The candidate will demonstrate competency in the 16 Areas of Ministerial Practice by completing a program outlined by the Commission on Ministry and will include at least 250 contact hours of study.

Seminary Track: The candidate will demonstrate competency in the 16 Areas of Ministerial Practice by securing a Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent from a theological school accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada or its equivalent.

Candidates for ordination are expected to follow the seminary track unless the Commission on Ministry, in consultation with the candidate, determines that economic, linguistic, vocational or familial circumstances make the apprentice track more appropriate.

Outline of the Process: Both apprentice and seminary track candidates will follow the same process.

1. Gather documents and submit to the regional office:
 - a) Letter from candidate to regional minister requesting consideration for ordination including brief description of history and sense of call to ministry. If requesting to follow the apprentice track, include reasons why the apprentice track would be most appropriate including limitations that would prevent the candidate from pursuing a Master of Divinity degree.
 - b) Official transcripts from all post-high-school education and resume outlining work experience
 - c) Completion of Ministerial Standing Form. (found online at www.disciplesnw.org)
 - d) Letters of recommendations from:
 - i) Minister of congregation in which he/she holds membership (or moderator/board chairperson if candidate is serving as minister)
 - ii) Moderator/board chairperson supporting consideration for ordination.
 - iii) Two additional letters of recommendation from persons familiar with the candidate's ministry.
 - e) Two-three page spiritual autobiography

- f) Written paragraph on each of first nine Personal Qualifications for Ministry indicating how these qualifications are manifest in the life and practice of the candidate. (See Appendix I)
2. Initial Meeting with the Commission on Ministry: The commission will determine whether to accept candidate “under care” and to develop a timeline/process for completing ordination requirements. The commission will also, in conversation with the candidate, determine the appropriate track towards ordination. The commission will consult with the appropriate national pastor/leader of racial/ethnic communities whenever considering a racial/ethnic applicant.
3. Formation of In-Care Committee: The Commission on Ministry will appoint an in-care committee to walk with the candidate during the ordination process. The in-care committee will be comprised of:
 - a) A member of the Commission on Ministry who will serve as chairperson of the committee
 - b) A second member of the Commission on Ministry if possible.
 - c) A mentor assigned by the Commission on Ministry. Usually this person will be the pastor of the sponsoring congregation but another mentor may be appointed if circumstances dictate.
 - d) Two elders from the sponsoring congregation
 - e) One elder from another Disciples congregation
 - f) Additional members may be included at the request of the commission or the candidate. (i.e. ecumenical representative, seminary professor, etc.)
 - g) Regional minister (ex-officio)
4. The in-care committee will meet with the candidate to review the 16 Ministerial Areas of Practice and Personal Qualifications for Ministry and develop an educational plan to meet the competency requirements for each area. Generally, the in-care committee will meet twice a year with the candidate. The mentor will meet monthly with the candidate to provide ongoing support and encouragement. The in-care committee chairperson and mentor will be asked to provide annual reports to the Commission on Ministry.
5. When the in-care committee determines that the candidate is nearing completion of the educational plan and that competencies are being met, the candidate will be asked to write a 15-20 page Theology of Ministry paper describing her/his understanding of theology, the nature and

mission of the church and the role of the professional ministry. This paper will be reviewed and discussed with the in-care committee and when approved, submitted to the Commission on Ministry for final approval.

6. Meeting with the Commission on Ministry: When the in-care committee is satisfied that the personal qualifications and ministerial areas of practice competencies are met, and have approved the Theology of Ministry paper, the committee will recommend approval of ordination to the full Commission on Ministry. The candidate will be invited to meet with the commission. Prior to that meeting the candidate will gather and submit to the regional office:
 - a) Theology of Ministry paper
 - b) Final transcripts from seminary or course of study (if apprentice track)
 - c) Letters of reference from:
 - i) Pastor of sponsoring congregation
 - ii) Moderator or board chairperson of sponsoring congregation
 - iii) Seminary professor or instructor from education course (if apprentice track)
 - iv) Two other people who have recent knowledge of candidate's ministerial experience and gifts
 - d) Completion of Ministerial Profile including background check
 - e) Completion of regionally approved boundary training class
 - f) Other documents as requested by the Commission on Ministry.

7. If approval for ordination is granted by the Commission on Ministry, the in-care committee will become the ordination committee and work with the candidate to schedule and plan the ordination service. The planning committee will use the service provided by the region though it may be adapted. The regional minister or the regional minister's designee will preside at the ordination service.

VII. Ministerial Standing

The description of ministerial standing is found in the Theological Foundations document on page 24f.

A. Requirements for Ongoing Standing in the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

1. Performing faithfully the duties of a minister as authorized by commissioning or ordination, either in an occupation recognized by the church as ministerial in purpose or in a service recognized by the church as ministerial in purpose.
2. Participating regularly in programs of study, growth and renewal.
3. Maintaining relations with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), including participating membership in a recognized congregation in the community of residence where feasible.
4. Adheres to the Ministerial Code of Ethics of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
5. Continues to meet the personal qualifications for ministry
6. Completes the annual Ministerial Standing Form as requested by the Commission on Ministry
7. Adheres to the Northwest Regional Sexual Ethics Training Policy (see Appendix II)

Note for Retired Ministers: Please note the requirements for ongoing standing as listed in the Theological Foundations document, p. 27f. There are two categories of retired ministers: inactive and active. Active-retired ministers are required to meet the requirements listed above including adhering to the Sexual Ethics Training Policy (see Appendix II).

B. United Church of Christ Ministers Seeking Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

“Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing is recognition granted to an ordained minister with standing in the United Church of Christ who has been called to an ordained ministry setting in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)” – Theological Foundations, p. 30.

Outline of Process:

1. Gather the following documents and submit to the regional office:
 - a) Letter to the regional minister requesting ordained ministerial partner standing
 - b) Letter from the United Church of Christ minister’s conference indicating ordination and standing with the UCC

- c) Copy of most recent UCC profile
 - d) Official transcript or document indicating completion of a Disciples history/polity course (if one has been completed)
2. Meet with the regional minister
 3. Completion of Disciples history/polity course or approved course of study
 4. Meet with the Commission on Ministry (or subgroup appointed by the commission)
 5. Once knowledge of and appreciation for the history, polity and practices of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has been demonstrated, the ordained ministerial partner will be granted access to the Search and Call system.
 6. Ordained ministerial partner standing is granted only after securing a call in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) by applying to the region in which the minister's calling body is located.
 7. Ordained ministerial partner standing is reviewed annually by the region.
 8. The ordained ministerial partner is required to maintain all the requirements for maintaining standing as outlined above including adhering to the Northwest Regional Sexual Ethic Training Policy.

C. Persons Ordained in Other Denominations seeking Standing

Outline of Process:

1. Gather and submit the following to the regional office
 - a) Proof of ordination (copy of certificate or letter from congregation that ordained minister)
 - b) Official transcripts from college and seminary
 - c) Two letters of reference from people who have witnessed the candidate's ministry
 - d) Two-three page spiritual autobiography
 - e) Paragraph on each of the first nine Personal Qualifications for Ministry and how they are manifested in minister's life. (see Appendix I)
 - f) Letter explaining why minister desires to affiliate with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

2. Meeting with the Commission on Ministry: The commission will meet to determine minister's intent in seeking standing and to outline other requirements for granting standing. The commission will consult with the appropriate national pastor/leader of racial/ethnic communities whenever considering a racial/ethnic applicant.
3. Following the meeting, provisional standing may be granted after:
 - a) Consultation with appropriate officials of the denomination or congregation from which the candidate transfers.
 - b) Completion of Ministerial Profile including background check
 - c) Completion of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) history/polity course.
4. Provisional standing may be lifted and regular standing granted after the minister demonstrates:
 - a) Membership in a recognized congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
 - b) Demonstrated knowledge and appreciation for the history, polity and practices of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
 - c) Fulfillment of the prerequisites and preparation for the Order of Ministry, including demonstrating competency in the 16 Ministerial Areas of Practice
 - d) One-year minimum service under the supervision and mentoring of a Disciples of Christ minister with standing.
 - e) Manifesting the personal qualifications for the Order of Ministry (see Appendix I)
 - f) Commitment to adhere to the Ministerial Code of Ethics of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
 - g) Completion of boundary training as required by the Sexual Ethics Training Policy. (see Appendix II)

D. Reinstatement of Standing

Standing may be reviewed with the possibility of terminating or suspending standing at the initiation of the minister or the Commission on Ministry. (see pages 28f of Theological Foundations document).

Ordinarily, persons ordained to the Order of Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will retain that ordination for the rest of their lives. Ministerial standing, however, incurs obligations for both the ordained minister and the church, which require periodic review and adjustment. Commissions on the ministry are called to perform this review.

A decision to affirm or deny reinstatement of standing to any individual must come after careful and prayerful consideration of the qualifications and motivation of the person seeking ministry in the Disciples' tradition. The regional Commission on Ministry must work within the instructions and procedures of the region, as well as the Theological Foundations and Policies and Criteria for the Ordering of Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

The original termination of standing of the individual by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) needs to be examined by the commission. Copies of records pertinent to prior standing should be obtained from the individual's permanent file with the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) or another region and from the Office of Search and Call of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This information should tell the commission about the candidate's schooling, past ministry, why standing was withdrawn or what happened in the minister's life or work that caused the lapse in standing. Confidentiality, of course, will be observed.

Standing may be reinstated "to a minister whose standing has been terminated or suspended by another region or the General Commission on Ministry only upon the recommendation of the terminating or suspending body." (Theological Foundations, p. 29)

Outline of Process:

1. The minister seeking reinstatement of standing will submit a letter to the regional minister and the Commission on Ministry requesting reinstatement. Include in the letter reasons for termination of standing and how those circumstances have changed.
2. The minister will show active membership and participation in a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation within the region.
3. Meeting with the Commission: The minister will be asked to meet with the commission to discuss reasons for termination and reinstatement of standing.
4. The commission may request additional documentation or steps towards reinstatement based on the reasons for termination, including at least completion of Ministerial Profile and background check and completion of Sexual Ethics Training Course.

Approved by the NWRCC Commission on Ministry, June 25, 2011
Affirmed by the NWRCC Regional Board August 5, 2011

Appendix I

Personal Qualifications for the Order of Ministry (including the 16 Ministerial Areas of Practice)

(from Theological Foundations and Policies and Criteria for the Ordering of Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ))

The church expects to find within the women and men it receives into the order of ministry:

1. Faith in Jesus Christ, commitment to a life of Christian discipleship and nurturing spiritual practices;
2. A sense of call to the ministry affirmed by the church;
3. An understanding of pastoral identity;
4. Capacity to engage in theological reflection;
5. Strong moral character and personal integrity;
6. Commitment to spiritual, physical and emotional wellness sufficient for healthy ministry;
7. Care and compassion for all people with appropriate relational skills;
8. Responsible personal financial management;
9. Wise and generous stewardship in the use of God's gifts;
10. Skills and abilities necessary for the rigorous, pastoral tasks of ministry (as demonstrated in meeting the 16 Ministerial Areas of Practice)
 - a. **Biblical Knowledge:** Be rooted and grounded in scripture and able to interpret and apply the scriptures in ways that are appropriate to original and contemporary contexts.
 - b. **Church Administration and Planning:** Be able to practice the principles of good administration, planning and implementing short and long-range goals to enhance Congregational life in collaboration with teams and committees.
 - c. **Communication:** Be an effective communicator and be able to facilitate effective communication within and on behalf of the church.
 - d. **Cross Cultural and Anti-Racism Experience:** Be sensitive to the different manifestations of racism and prejudice in the culture and be committed to confronting and overcoming them.
 - e. **Ecumenism:** Exhibit a commitment to working with other Christians and denominations and with other faiths in programs of common witness and service, and to articulating the vision of the ecumenical and global church as a starting place for mission.

- f. **Education and Leader Development:** Know the foundations of Christian education and the principles of leader development. Show competency in teaching children, youth, and adults, including lay leaders and staff.
- g. **Ethics:** Be able to help parishioners think critically about the relationship of their faith to issues of justice, ethics and morality
- h. **Evangelism:** Be able to motivate Congregational members to share their faith through word and action.
- i. **Mission of the Church in the World:** Be able to understand and articulate the centrality of the call to mission given by Jesus Christ and the prophets. Be able to empower congregations to engage in mission from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth.
- j. **Pastoral Care:** Be able to engage other persons with empathy and assess situations and relationships with the compassion of Christ, with sensitivity to culture and context. Be able to convey the healing power of God to those who suffer.
- k. **Proclamation of the Word:** Know the practice and theory of Christian preaching. Be able to proclaim the Word of God, share the Good News of Jesus Christ, and help Congregational members apply their faith to daily life.
- l. **Spiritual Development:** Establish and maintain spiritual disciplines that lead to personal growth and help others develop a rich spiritual life.
- m. **Stewardship:** Be able to develop and encourage healthy stewards who recognize and share generously God's abundant gifts for all creation.
- n. **Theology:** Be able to articulate a coherent view of God's nature and activity in relation to the Christian tradition, to critically engage human situations from a perspective of faith, and to help persons recognize theological issues in their daily lives.
- o. **Understanding of Heritage:** Have knowledge of and appreciation for the history and thought of Christianity and of the history, structure, practices, and ethos of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
- p. **Worship:** Know the purpose and elements of Christian worship. Have the ability to plan and lead meaningful worship by working with the worship team, musicians, and Congregational members.

Appendix II

Sexual Ethics Training Policy Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Announced in October of 2009 and beginning in 2010, every ordained and licensed minister is required to take six hours of training related to clergy sexual and ethical boundaries every three years. As we live into this new policy there is a grace period of two years: the training must be completed by the end of 2011.

If a licensed or ordained minister with standing does not complete this training as required, their licensing/standing will be removed, not for cause, until he/she completes the training.

Every minister receiving licensing/standing in the NWRCC will complete the training within two years and every three years thereafter. In-care seminary students wishing to be ordained are encouraged to take the training during their last year of seminary.

If a minister transfers from another region and completed the boundary training within the calendar year in the other region, that training will fulfill this requirement. If not, the minister is required to complete the training within two years and every three years thereafter. An alternative to the NWRCC-sponsored training course is for a minister to take the training offered by a member of Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC).

Retired ministers who wish to function in any ministerial capacity are required to participate in this training.

Appendix III

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.

Scripture attests to the importance of naming and addressing violations of trust by those in leadership positions. In II Samuel 12 the prophet Nathan is sent to confront King David over his behavior with Bathsheba and Uriah. In telling the story of the rich man who wrongfully steals the poor man’s only sheep, Nathan vividly condemns David for using his kingly power in ways that violate those under his care. When David fails to see his own behavior reflected in the story, Nathan reveals his condemnation clearly by saying, “You are the man.” Likewise in Luke 17:1-4 Jesus commands the church to rebuke “another disciple who sins”, but also commands that there be an avenue for forgiveness if true repentance is offered, We understand repentance to include justice, accountability, and healing.

In every age the church has struggled to understand faithful response and act accordingly. Unfortunately when confronted with questionable pastoral behavior the church has historically responded in a range of ways, representing many points on a spectrum, from valuing the collegia of the clergy at any cost thus ignoring or minimizing inappropriate behavior on one end, to virtually presuming guilt by accusation on the other. We now are called to define faithful response for our time, a response that takes seriously the pain and injustice experienced by victims of abuse and others caught up in the situation and also leaves open the possibility of true healing and wholeness for all affected parties. This document reflects our understanding for our time.

The Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has affirmed through our mission statement that we are called “to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.” (Micah 6:8). 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 but not rush 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.

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, but with humility and recognition 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.

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. Procedures for those complaints are outlined in parallel documents. 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 Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

The following policy outlines the procedures for use by the regional minister and Commission on Ministry of the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) 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 Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is called into question due to accusations of sexual misconduct.

II. HISTORY

High standards of professional ethics have long been valued by the Northwest Regional Christian Church. Included in concerns about professional ethics is clergy misconduct that fails to maintain healthy boundaries in ministerial relationships. For this reason, the Region has historically spoken about the issue in a formal resolution and established policies and procedures for addressing concerns.

The Regional Assembly in May, 1987, upon the recommendation of the Regional

Commission on Ministry, approved Resolution #87-01, "Regarding Sexual Ethics Policy". It affirmed that clergy sexual exploitation and/or misconduct will not be tolerated, established the regional minister as the primary person responsible for intervention, and made the Commission on Ministry responsible for developing and reviewing procedures to implement the policy:

Be it resolved that the following be the "Policy Statement on Sexual Ethics for Professional Ministry" for the Northwest Regional Christian Church:

Because the professional clergy person has the responsibility to exercise the power inherent in his/her position only in the authentic service of the constituent/client, and to not use the prerogatives of the position in any exploitation of the constituent/client, it shall be the policy of the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that sexual exploitation/misconduct in the professional-client relationship between the clergy and constituent/client is condemned and calls for intervention by the regional minister.

And, be it further Resolved that the Commission on the Ministry be responsible for developing procedures to implement this policy, and for an annual review of those procedures.

In 1992 a revised document on Sexual Ethics was adopted by the Commission on Ministry.

In January, 1997, the Commission on Ministry appointed a working group to review the Clergy Misconduct policy and process. Their recommendation was adopted by the Commission on Ministry. That document contains sections:

- Introduction
- Implementation Procedures
- Process for Alleged Pastoral Misconduct

The Commission on Ministry also developed and adopted a related document, "A Guideline for Amorous Relationships" in 1997 and revised it in 2009.

In 2009 the Commission on Ministry determined that it was time for a review of the existing policy and implementation procedures. A task group was appointed with that charge. After review, it was determined by the working group (1) that the existing policy based on Resolution #87-01 remains important and appropriate for our life together and (2) that a new procedure for handling issues of clergy sexual misconduct should be written, rather than revising existing documents. It is the intention that this document will replace all prior such procedure documents.

III. DEFINITION OF CLERGY MISCONDUCT

Clergy misconduct occurs when any person in a ministerial role of leadership or pastoral

counseling engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, lay volunteer or staff member or commits egregious violations of the Ministerial Code of Ethics (e.g. embezzlement, fraud, misuse of power within the context of ministry, 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. 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 clergy person 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" and to the Ministerial Code of Ethics to explore the appropriate and ethical parameters of such relationships.

The professional or authorized minister is responsible for maintaining professional boundaries, irrespective of the behavior of other persons. Ministers with Standing in the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) 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 Special Task Force

The Commission on Ministry will appoint a special task force comprised of six (6) members and will designate one of the members to serve as chairperson. 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. At least two of the six will be members of the Commission on Ministry. Care will be taken in the selection of the special task force to ensure the inclusion of persons with the highest integrity. Where possible and reasonable members will include those in the "helping professions," include at least one person who is a survivor of sexual abuse or misconduct, and have representation across age, ethnic, and geographical boundaries. The special task force will include three

members of each gender. All members of the STF will receive training in the proper execution of their duties.

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 has her or his 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.

Once a review has begun, it is essential to remind members of the special task force, the Commission on Ministry and the regional staff to uphold the strict principles of confidentiality. All persons, including members of the special task force, 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 special task force, Commission on Ministry, the regional minister, legal counsel for the region and pastoral, therapeutic, or legal assistance for the accused or complainant.

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

Both the complainant and the accused are to be treated at all times with sensitivity and respect. Due to the painful nature of making an accusation complaint of sexual 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 both parties that the accusation will be treated seriously and he or she will be treated with respect.

The process which the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) 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 he or she has been the victim of clergy misconduct by a minister with standing in the Northwest Regional Christian Church, or by a minister currently serving a Disciples congregation within the Northwest Regional Christian Church, he/she may 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.

- b. **Third Party Complaint:** In the event that information is received third hand, the regional minister and/or Commission on Ministry chairperson will attempt to confirm the information and request a written statement of the charges.
- c. **Pastoral Colleague:** If a clergy person is contacted about allegations against another clergy person, it is his/her responsibility to refer the complainant to the regional minister or Commission on Ministry chairperson and offer to accompany him/her. If a clergy person has first hand knowledge of a boundary violation by a colleague, (what he/she has seen or heard), then the clergy person can and should make a Third Party report to the regional minister and/or Commission on Ministry chairperson.
- d. **Allegation against the regional minister:** A misconduct complaint against the regional minister may be made to the chairperson of the Commission on Ministry. In that event, the chairperson of the Commission on Ministry should contact the chairperson of the General Commission on Ministry for advice, counsel, and oversight of the investigation process.

2. Receiving the Complaint:

- a. Once a complaint has been received in writing by either the regional minister or the chairperson of the Commission on Ministry an investigation will be initiated. An investigation by the Commission on Ministry into the alleged sexual misconduct of a minister can be activated by two main sources. The most common source will likely be the alleged victim or other complainant.
- b. An investigation can also be initiated by the Commission on Ministry itself when the commission has identified a cause for question and/or concern that needs further exploration. While the Commission on Ministry may not be in a position to accuse someone of a particular behavior, it is possible for the commission to name a concern, in writing, and then the special task force could investigate it thoroughly to determine its veracity.
- c. In the event that the disclosure involves an allegation of misconduct toward a child or a person incapable of speaking for him/herself, the regional minister and/or Commission on Ministry chairperson will immediately report to law enforcement; the Region should cooperate with the criminal investigation and the timing of the initiation of the Region's formal investigation process should give deference to the process of the governmental agency.
- d. **Responsibilities of the regional minister:** Throughout the process of responding to an accusation of misconduct, the role of the regional minister is one of administrator of the process and finally implementer of any disciplinary action; within this process and for the persons involved the regional minister role of "pastor to pastors" is set aside. Upon receiving

information about an accusation complaint of clergy misconduct, pastoral and procedural work needs to be assigned and begun immediately. The regional minister shall follow these steps in responding to the complaint:

- i. If the complaint was not received in writing, the regional minister shall request a written statement from the complainant.
 - ii. Shall offer both the complainant and accused the option of having a “companion” to provide support throughout the process. (See description listed under V.A. below)
 - iii. The regional minister shall notify legal counsel and the regional insurance company that a complaint has been received.
 - iv. The regional minister shall notify the chairperson of the Commission on Ministry as soon as possible to initiate the investigation process.
 - v. Once the written complaint is received, the regional minister shall notify the accused and provide a copy of the complaint and name of complainant.
- e. **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. Assigning two members of the special task force to serve as the response team who shall make an initial in-person contact with the complainant and the accused. The response team should include a man and a woman. When the response team is assigned, a target date should be set for the response team to report back to the full special task force.
 - 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 at this time to continue with the investigation process, the chairperson must make sure the complainant and the accused have written copies of the procedure which 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.

3. Initial Meeting with the Complainant

As soon as possible, arrangements should be made to interview the complainant at some length. If at all possible, this interview should take place in person. In all instances, two persons, a man and a woman, from the special task force, *the* response team, should be present during this interview.

- a. The purpose of the initial meeting is to:
 - Be an expression of the pastoral concern of the church;
 - 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;

- Clarify the details of the complaint and determine if other involved parties should be interviewed.
 - 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 special task force 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 response team will prepare a written summary of the meeting. The person filing the charge 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 special task force.

After the initial interview with the complainant, the response team will prepare a written statement for the special task force. The STF will meet to determine whether there is sufficient cause to continue the investigation. The STF will report its 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 may determine there is insufficient cause to continue the investigation. If, however, 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, but need not include details of the investigation.

Should the complainant decide not to pursue the formal complaint process, the Commission on Ministry may continue its investigation and action 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 response team.

4. Meeting with the Accused

As soon as possible following a determination to conduct an investigation, arrangements should be made to interview at some length the person accused. In all instances, two persons, a man and a woman, acting as the response team, should be present. If possible, this interview should take place in person. It is advisable to have the same persons who met with the complainant meet with the accused.

- a. The purpose of the initial meeting is to:
- Be an expression of the pastoral concern of the church;
 - 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;
 - Provide a copy of the complaint and an opportunity for the accused person to respond to the complaint. It is advisable that the accused prepare a written response to the complaint. Such a written response

can be used by the special task force as it determines the appropriate courses of action.

- b. Immediately following the meeting, the response 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 special task force.

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 of probable 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 may work with the congregation as it decides whether to place the pastor on leave with or without pay while the charge is being investigated.
- a. Immediately following the visit the chairperson of the Commission on Ministry will prepare a written summary of the meeting. This summary becomes part of the records of the special task force. 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

- a. 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" in an effort to be sensitive to both needs.

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.

- b. In situations where the accusations point to the victimization of minors or persons who cannot speak for themselves, the NWRCC 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 him/her in contact with children or those most vulnerable.
- c. In the event that the accused pastor resigns before the investigation process is complete, the investigation should continue until a determination is reached. That final determination should become a part of the pastor's permanent file and be communicated to the appropriate parties including the pastor's congregation if exonerated, and the Office of Search and Call if the charges are sustained.

7. Evaluation of Investigation Information

A written report of the response team, including a chronology of investigation, will be the basis for recommended action by the special task force. The special task force will meet to determine their recommendations. At least five of the six team members must participate in this meeting.

The recommendation should be based on two questions:

1. 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.
2. If the alleged conduct is misconduct according to the policy, then is the complaint valid? In other words, does the special task force believe this actually 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 special task force in the gathering of information and advise in weighing the factual findings. Ultimately the special task force must determine if the accusations of sexual harassment or 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 special task force is to protect those who are vulnerable to future misconduct.

The special task force chairperson will prepare 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. The Commission on Ministry will then adjudicate and decide what action to take.

IV. RESOLUTION AND APPEALS

A. Decision on Complaint

The Commission on Ministry will make a determination of the action to be taken. Prior to determining their actions they will conduct a hearing to receive the recommendation(s) of the special task force and they may invite responses from relevant parties as the Commission deems appropriate and helpful.¹

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 person and his/her family as well as the congregation. The innocent pastor should request how and where official notice is given.

IF THE COMPLAINT IS SUSTAINED

2. Standing retained with qualifications

The outcome of the review may suggest the need of the accused for growth and development via therapeutic intervention or other professional

¹ After receiving the report of the special task force a meeting with the full Commission on Ministry will be convened at the earliest possible time. Information and documentation will be made available to the Commission on Ministry prior to the meeting via secure means such as encrypted online documents which will be removed immediately following the meeting.

developments. The person would retain his/her standing for ministry and may have his/her profile circulated, although notice of the action would be sent to other regions and would be included in the pastor's permanent file.

3. Temporary Suspension of Standing

The special task force may recommend 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 he/she has altered his/her behavior and intentions. A report of the findings, actions, and follow up will remain in the permanent record of the pastor.

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

If the person no longer has authorization for ministry he/she is unable to have his/her profile circulated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for the designated period of time. If the temporary suspension has been lifted, the Commission on Ministry will notify the Office of Search and Call of the Disciples Home Missions of the lifting of the suspension.

4. Termination of Standing

If the charge is sustained, the special task force can recommend to the Commission on Ministry that the person's ministerial standing be removed for cause. The action to terminate ministerial standing for cause is to be reported to the Office of Search and Call of the Disciples Home Missions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Upon notification of such action, the Office of Search and Call will notify all relocation officers within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of the action. The person who has lost his/her standing for ministry is no longer able to have his/her 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 of 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 may only be made if all of the above conditions are met. 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 Commission on Ministry of the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ.)

V. FOLLOW UP

A. Pastoral 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 of time 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 supportive 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 clergy persons 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 his/her 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 that 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 companion will be selected from among the regional companions if available in consultation with the regional minister. The regional minister will work with the complainant and accused to secure suitable companions to walk alongside during the investigation and deliberation.

In the event that 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 Handbook for In-Care Committees and Commission on Ministry on Standing, Commissioning and Ordination in the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). There are a variety of factors, however, which should receive careful attention before moving toward reinstatement. Authorization to the reinstated should follow a process of confession, repentance and forgiveness, and not 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 insure that its leaders adhere to this policy.

Acknowledgements: Resources used in creating this document included feedback from Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune, Faith Trust Institute; *Responding to Clergy Misconduct: A Handbook*, published by Faith Trust Institute, 2009; and a similar policy from the Christian Church in Michigan.

Approved by the Commission on Ministry, NWRCC, September. 17, 2010
Affirmed by the Regional Board, November 6, 2010

Appendix IV

A Guideline for Amorous Relationships

Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Drafted in April 1998, Revised in April 2009

Over the years, clergy have created for themselves varying standards regarding friendships with parishioners. Some friendships have become amorous relationships. A significant number of pastors have been united in marriage with persons from within their own congregations. Many of these relationships have proved sound and have endured.

The purpose of this document is to assist those who find themselves in this situation—to guide them on an ethical path. This difficult journey requires a high level of maturity for the two in relationship and for the community of faith to which they are related. It is advisable for the congregations of this region to establish commonly accepted standards for amorous relationships between ministers and people with whom they are in professional pastoral relationships. Included among the reasons requiring greater specificity are the escalating number of single persons entering parish ministry, the escalating number of divorced clergy continuing to serve in the same parish and a more sharply developed sense of pastoral ethics.

Such standards acknowledge that ministers inherently hold power over parishioners with whom they are in pastoral relationship. Amorous relationships between a pastor and parishioner who are each single must include the valid consent of both parties, if they are to be ethically sound.

For the purposes of this document, the word amorous is used to connote a romantic relationship between two persons. The Commission on Ministry believes that an amorous or romantic relationship is possible between a single pastor and a single parishioner provided certain standards are observed and honored. Some of those standards which must be met before such a relationship can be sanctioned are:

1. An ethical amorous relationship requires that each party be legally able to give consent. That is, each party must be legally free from any marital tie before entering into an amorous relationship. For example, it is inappropriate and ethically unprofessional for either party to pursue an amorous relationship before each party is legally divorced. It is also inappropriate and ethically unprofessional for a pastor to become involved with any parishioner where the two have been previously involved in a counseling or spiritual direction relationship. Any amorous relationship between an adult and a teenager is clearly irresponsible. Such a relationship is predatory behavior and is totally unacceptable in the life of the church.
2. Any amorous relationship which involves coercion — physical, emotional, spiritual or psychological — is an unethical relationship. Submission to an amorous relationship, either explicitly or implicitly, shall not be made a term or

condition of instruction, employment, pastoral care or participation in any church activity.

3. Persons entering into an amorous relationship should contemplate the potentially negative consequences throughout the life of the congregation, whether the relationship ultimately is sustained or terminated. The two parties should anticipate the impact upon individuals within the congregation and the congregation as a whole. Will the mission of the institution be compromised by the relationship? What potential harm may result? Is the relationship worth risking the well-being of this Body of Christ? Conflict leading to the loss of membership should be anticipated even when the matter is properly handled.

4. Persons engaging in amorous relationship must recognize and understand the inequity of power between pastor and parishioner, and take appropriate steps to bring the two parties into equal power to the degree that this is possible. Such steps may include the following:

- a. The best counsel is for a pastor who wishes to develop an amorous relationship to pursue it with one who is not a member of the parish s/he has been called to serve.
- b. If the pastor chooses to develop an amorous relationship with a person in the congregation s/he is serving, it is essential that the pastoral relationship be terminated and arrangements made for the lay person to establish a pastoral relationship with another clergy person.
- c. The intent of a pastor to develop a mutual amorous relationship with a parishioner should be reported to the regional minister, to the lay leader of the congregation, the chair of the elders, the pastoral relations committee and any other appropriate body of a particular congregation. The pastor and one of these bodies, with the guidance of the regional minister, should develop a methodology for announcing the relationship to the congregation-at-large at some appropriate time.
- d. When the pastor commits to an amorous relationship with a layperson, the layperson will resign any elected leadership roles for a minimum of one year and for such time as the congregation deems appropriate for the well-being of the community. It is assumed that non-elected roles of leadership would not necessarily be terminated.

When a pastor and member of the congregation enter an amorous relationship and when they exhibit concern for the well-being of the congregation and for themselves by honoring the foregoing counsel, they shall no longer be considered in professional pastoral relationship by Commission on Ministry and its definitions of inappropriate sexual conduct.

Adopted by the Commission on Ministry Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) September 26, 1997; revised, April 2009