

**Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**  
Commission on Ministry

**PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH ACCUSATION OF MISCONDUCT AGAINST  
CLERGY WITH STANDING**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

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

Scripture attests to the importance of naming and addressing violations of trust by those in leadership positions. In 2Samuel 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 collegiums 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 Jan., 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

In 1997 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 composed of six (6) members and will designate one of the members to serve as chairperson. Each member will serve a 6 year term, with two members rotating on every two years. Members would be eligible to serve a second 6-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 towards 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 RM 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 or not there is sufficient cause to continue the investigation. The STF 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 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 at all possible, this interview should take place in person. It is strongly 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 5 of the 6 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. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> After receiving the report of the STF 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.

## **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 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 STF 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 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 Policies, Criteria and Procedures for the Order of Ministry 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.

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