

IMPLEMENTING GUIDELINES FOR THE REGION STAFF For the Review Process

(Note: the steps referred to below are the steps of "A Process for Review of Ministerial Standing")

The role of Region staff in the review process is complicated by the various roles which may need to be played. Region staff are appropriately charged with the responsibility to facilitate the process, working with the Department of Ministry to insure that the process is followed, with proper notice being given and records being kept. Region staff are appropriately concerned about the spiritual health and vitality of the person in question and the pastoral care of that person (and his or her spouse and family, if any), as well as concerned about insuring that the process is fair to the person. Region staff are also appropriately concerned about the spiritual health and vitality of the church in which the person has been serving, as well as about the wider church family. At some point these roles may be in conflict and great care must be taken to insure that each of these needs is being met. This may necessitate the delegation of some specific tasks or roles. Sometimes this may mean that Region staff may have to excuse themselves from the decision making process of the Department.

Step One of the Process -- Written Allegations: Making sure that the written allegations are precise, clear, and related to the given categories is vital to the whole process. When allegations are vague or imprecise it is unfair to the person in question, and is far more difficult for the Department of Ministry to come to appropriate decisions. Therefore, Region staff will need to work with the Chair of the Department in this process. (It should be remembered that the allegations need to be specific enough for action as well as to informative enough for the Department to act at the time of the preliminary exploration. At the preliminary exploration, the allegations themselves will have to stand alone as the persons making the allegations will not be present.)

This step of the process may necessitate working with Region staff, other professional church leaders, or people from the church. Sometimes a member of the Department of Ministry or a member of the Region staff will need to be among those making the allegations. When this occurs, there must be a clear delineation of responsibility so that it is clear who is working with the Department, who is working with those making allegations, and who is seeking to provide pastoral care to the person in question. When it is necessary for a Region staff person or a member of the Department of Ministry to be among those making the allegation(s) he or she should not be a part of the deliberating or decision-making process of the Department of Ministry.

The Region Staff may need to assure that the persons making the allegations and the person about whom allegations are made receive copies of the region's process for review of ministerial standing and the appropriate "guidelines."

Step Two of the Process -- Pastoral Intervention: Although it is hoped that other parts of the church may take this concern seriously, Region staff are to be sure that someone other than themselves are providing pastoral care.

Step Three of the Process -- Informing the Person of the Allegations: Working with the Department Chair, Region staff must insure that proper notice is given to the person in question. This shall include a copy of "A Process for Review of Ministerial Standing," a copy of the written allegations, a copy of the "Guidelines for the Minister in Question," and an invitation to meet with the Department of Ministry for the preliminary exploration.

There should be both a formal and a personal element to this notice which contains an official and a pastoral dimension. The formal notice should be sent by certified mail (and the receipts preserved for the record).

Because of the litigious nature of our society, careful records must be kept of the process. This includes official minutes of all meetings, copies of all correspondence, receipts for mailings, etc. Care must be taken to assure that these records are confidentially maintained and preserved. Because of the provisions for documentation being provided in the event of a request for reinstatement, the records need to be preserved for an extended period of time (as long as that request is possible).

Step Four of the Process -- Preliminary Exploration: As staff to the Department, the Region staff may be in the best position to insure that the various elements of the preliminary exploration are present. As staff to the Department it may be helpful to remind them that this is an informal process in which they are not being asked to "decide about recognition of ordination." As pastoral support for the person in question, it is important to insure that the person receives fair treatment. If this preliminary exploration becomes adversarial, the potential for some of the possible courses of actions is reduced.

Step Five of the process -- Review Hearing Notice: It is important that the Region staff assure that proper and full notice of the hearing is given and that adequate records are kept.

Step Six of the Process -- the Review Hearing: The review hearing is a church matter and not a criminal or civil proceeding. The goal is to seek reconciliation and healing, as well as justice. This may be a difficult concept for all persons to grasp.

The underlying principle of the civil and criminal court system is that truth is best found in the adversarial arena. This means that both sides work very hard to defeat the other side on the assumption that truth is stronger. Within the church, we seek to uphold the "spiritual health and vitality of the church" (the whole church, the person in question, his or her accusers, and the wider church.) Thus, the beginning assumption is not "truth-through-adversarial-combat;" rather, we begin with the assumption of a process which is fair to all sides and seeks reconciliation. Beginning with assumptions about relationships (rather than abstract "truth"), the church process outlined resembles more closely a debate process than a courtroom setting.

One of the important tasks of Regions staff is to make sure that the nature of the review hearing is understood by all. This may mean that the Region staff will make sure that the person in question has a friend or advocate at the hearing. The role of the advocate is to insure that the process is fair, and that the possibility of reconciliation and healing is kept alive. If the person in question does not have an advocate, Region staff may work to assure that such is available. (The Ministers Council might be an appropriate body to appoint an advocate.)

In working with the Department as it deliberates on its decision, it may be helpful to take note of the suggested statements listed in the Implementing Guidelines for the Department of Ministry ("No, the charge is unfounded, etc."). These are intended to suggest some possible ways of wording an eventual decision that is in accord with this process. There are some careful distinctions which need to be studied to be understood. You may need to help the people serving on the Department to understand those distinctions.

Adopted by the National Commission on the Ministry, January 18, 1991

Revised: January 21, 1993

* Edited by the Ministerial Leadership Commission, March 15, 1995

Step Eight of the Process -- Appeal: In the event of an appeal, to either the Executive Committee of the Region Board or the Executive Committee of the Ministerial Leadership Commission, the Region staff shall assure that the appellate body has all the appropriate documentation. It is important to note that the process allows for one appeal which shall be final. The appeal to the Executive Committee of the Ministerial Leadership Commission is only in the event that the Executive Committee of the Region Board fails to act within ninety (90) days.

Step Nine of the Process -- Pastoral Follow-up: The Region staff needs to assure that the person against whom allegations were made and the local congregation receive pastoral care.

Step Ten of the Process -- Reinstatement: In the event of a person seeking to have the recognition of his or her ordination reinstated, the Region staff shall supply the Department of Ministry, in that Region or any other, with all of the appropriate documentation. This means that appropriate records must be kept for an extended period of time (as long as that request is possible).

*Effective January 1, 1994, the National Commission on the Ministry was renamed the Ministerial Leadership Commission.

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