

# **Dissolution of Conflicted Ministry**

## **Presbytery of New Covenant Committee on Ministry**

**[At the outset of this document, it is understood that "separation for cause" is handled by a different process and is not addressed by the following guidelines.]**

### **I. Theological and Reformed Statement of a Ministerial Call**

*The Church's ministry is a gift from Jesus Christ to the whole Church. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills, exercising his authority by the ministry of women and men for the establishment and extension of God's new creation. Christ's ministry is the foundation and standard for all ministry, the pattern of the one who came "not to be served but to serve" (Matthew 20:28). The basic form of ministry is the ministry of the whole people of God, from whose midst some are called to ordered ministries, to fulfill particular functions. Members and those in ordered ministry serve together under the mandate of Christ. (BO G-2.0101) The presbytery may inquire into reported difficulties in a congregation and may dissolve the pastoral relationship if, after consultation with the minister, the session, and the congregation, it finds the church's mission under the Word imperatively demands it. (BO G-2.0904)*

These guidelines from the Book of Order remind us that the call to a minister is a four-way covenant between God, the minister, the congregation and the presbytery. It is different from the hiring of a corporate executive or a football coach or a superintendent of a public school system. A call is when the congregation and minister individually discern, and the presbytery corporately confirms, that God is calling them to be together in ministry at a certain time and place to bear "*witness in word and work that in Christ the new creation has begun, and that God who creates life also frees those in bondage, makes all things new, and is still at work in the world.*" (BO F-1.0302d.), "*The Apostolicity of the Church*"). The measure of ministry for a minister and a congregation is faithfulness to the gospel (BO, Chapters F 1-3, G 4).

Change is part of what it is to be a minister and a congregation in the Reformed Tradition: "Reformed always reforming according to God's word." Therefore conflict will be part of the church today just as it was part of the church from the beginning of Paul's and Peter's conversations about who and what the church should be. It is imperative that people yearning to be faithful to God's common calling to ministry be able to deal with conflict in ways that are productive. The Biblical model for dealing with conflict is found in Matthew 18:15-16: "*If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens you have gained a brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.*" The biblical goal in dealing with conflict is the learning, reconciliation and growth that happen through communication. The minister, congregation and presbytery are **all partners with God in the mission of the church.** Therefore, it is incumbent that all work through the conflict together, faithfully fulfilling God's call to ministry in Jesus Christ.

*"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12). "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor. 12:26).*

## **II. MIS-MATCHED EXPECTATIONS IN MINISTRY**

Unfortunately, there will be times when all efforts to resolve a conflict will fail. The goal of the Committee on Ministry (COM) is to provide a fair and just process for those situations. In all cases, COM cannot be a neutral party when it enters a congregation because of difficulties, because COM represents the presbytery in these situations and has a stake in how the situation is resolved. COM represents the third part of the three-way partnership in a pastoral relationship. A triangle exists the moment COM agrees to enter the situation and it must be a healthy partner in the triangle. It is important to remember that COM representatives cannot change the people involved in the difficulty or control how they will act. COM representatives can be a non-anxious presence that coaches the other partners in the triangle, giving them an opportunity to change and, in doing so, reduce the strain in the relationship and heal its brokenness. COM representatives must be able to manage their own reactions to conflict and criticism. These are the only behaviors they will be able to control.

## **III. IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES**

When all efforts toward resolution are exhausted, and it appears impossible to resolve the differences:

- COM will make certain there is provision for pastoral care for the pastor if an involuntary or pressured dissolution is evident.
- The whole community (i.e., congregation, pastor, and the presbytery) and the process become the COM's focus. Representatives of COM are not a neutral party but have a stake in how the situation is resolved.
- COM will recommend persons who have requisite skills to facilitate discussions/mediation. Pastor may have advocate present.
- Dissolution will be negotiated, using COM document "Agreement Form for Dissolution of Pastoral Relationship." (This document follows minimum terms below.)
- Continued benefits shall include: (See minimum terms below)
- Once session, pastor and COM representative have agreed on the terms of dissolution, including appropriate continued benefits, the "Agreement Form for Dissolution of Pastoral Relationship" is sent to COM for their approval and presented to the congregation for their approval. COM approval is final, pending congregational approval; congregational approval is final, pending COM approval.

**Approved by COM 11/3/09**