

New Business

1. Update to Ministerial Ethics

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

ETHICS IN MINISTRY RELATIONS—2008¹

I. Introduction

In the Church of the Brethren we believe that all members of the body of Christ are responsible for self-discipline and growth and for the maintenance and strength of the body (1 Cor. 12:14-26). We also understand that when individuals are called forth and accept responsibilities for ministerial leadership,² they are...

- To exhibit, in relation to their spiritual calling, growth of training, skill, maturity, integrity, and commitment (1 Tim. 4:6-10).
- To exhibit spiritual, moral, and ethical values that are exemplary and challenging in the Christian community (Gal. 5:16, 22-26).
- To be accountable to one another in the body of Christ (Col. 3:12-13, 1 Pet. 5:2-4).

Recognizing the importance of articulating an ethical code of conduct, the church has established a code of ethics and polity, policies, and processes for dealing with complaints of ethical misconduct. Occasions do occur when there is brokenness or departure from the norms of the covenantal community and when ministerial leaders must be confronted regarding their accountability to one another and to the values, beliefs, and practices of the church.³

In 1988 a statement, "Ethics in Ministry Relations," was prepared by a special committee for Standing Committee, which offered beginning reflections on ministerial ethics and on the effectiveness of the church's current polity and structures for guiding and overseeing clergy in relation to ethical matters. The Standing Committee paper was rather general and addressed few specific ethical issues confronting clergy and other church leaders.

¹. This paper (if passed by the 2008 Annual Conference) replaces the 1996 "Ethics in Ministry Relations" paper and all previous ethics papers.

². The term "Ministerial Leadership" was introduced in the 1999 Ministerial Leadership Paper. A ministerial leader refers to any credentialed minister in the Church of the Brethren.

³. Introductory paragraphs are taken and revised for this document from the "Discipleship and Reconciliation" paper approved by the 1976 Annual Conference and amended by the 1977 Annual Conference.

A query from the Oregon/Washington District to the 1991 Annual Conference was adopted and a study committee was directed to develop a code of ethical principles for clergy in the Church of the Brethren and a process for dealing with complaints of ministerial sexual misconduct. In 1992 the study committee presented a revised and expanded paper to Annual Conference, which was adopted. While the paper specifically addressed the above issues, there was concern on the part of the Council of District Executives that the paper did not sufficiently deal with the risk and liability issues that can occur with ministerial sexual misconduct. In 1993, Standing Committee heard these concerns and took interim action clarifying the use of the paper and appointing a subcommittee to work with legal counsel to revise the paper.

The 1995 Standing Committee adopted the revised paper presented by the subcommittee as the interim statement and directed that it be taken to the delegate body in 1996. The paper was officially approved in 1996 with several amendments and has been used by the denomination and its districts since then.

This paper attempts to carry on and expand the previous work. What follows is...

II. A Theology of Ministerial Ethics

III. Code of Ethics for Ministerial Leadership⁴

IV. Process for Dealing with Complaints of Ethical Misconduct

V. Additional Recommendations

VI. Glossary of Terms

The "Theology of Ministerial Ethics" section is intended to undergird the integrity of the ministerial relationship with parishioners, clients, students, colleagues, and others who are served by ministerial leaders. Biblical insights into ministry, calling, expectations, and discipline for leadership are included.

The first Ethical Code for Ministers and Congregations appeared in the pastor's manual of 1940 and was also included in the 1946 edition. It was noted that the code in the 1946 manual was approved by the General Ministerial Board. The Manual of Worship and Polity published in 1953 and 1955 both contained an enlarged version of what appeared in the 1946 Minister's Manual. The minister's code dealt mainly with the conduct of the minister in congregational relationships, such as maintaining confidentiality, avoiding exerting influence in congregational decisions, maintaining good relationships with other church staff and pastors of other churches, and not interfering with ministerial affairs in a congregation after leaving it. The Code of Ethics contained in the Ethics in Ministerial Relations (1996) paper was based on what was included in the Pastor's Manual of 1978. It was revised and expanded, adding specific references to sexual conduct.

⁴ The 1999 Ministerial Leadership Paper defines "ministerial leadership" as licensed and ordained ministers, both salaried and self-supported, and designates nine categories for ordained ministers.

The Code of Ethics in this paper divides and expands the code into three categories: “Integrity of the Ministerial Life,” “Integrity of the Ministerial Call,” and “Integrity of the Ministerial Relationship.” “I” language is used to declare the individual’s conviction that the Code of Ethics is a statement the minister will agree to and follow as part of accepting the call to ministry. Furthermore, though the focus of this paper is on ministerial leaders, it is hoped that all called and elected leaders of the church will embrace the Code of Ethics as a call to accountability. It is recommended that this Code of Ethics be adopted by all Church of the Brethren agencies and institutions.

The fourth section of the paper, “Process for Dealing with Complaints of Ethical Misconduct,” is intended to demonstrate the church’s commitment to the integrity of ministerial relationships and to justice, fairness, and compassion for all those involved in cases of complaints of misconduct. It describes the church’s way of responding to complaints of misconduct. When those who are called into ministry experience brokenness or adopt behavior patterns that prevent effective leadership, they must be confronted regarding their accountability. It underscores the importance of responding immediately to complaints and providing assistance to aggrieved persons, as well as to ministers, congregations, and others who are affected.

The fifth section of the paper outlines additional recommendations for Annual Conference delegates, individuals, congregations, ministerial leaders, districts, the Council of District Executives, Bethany Theological Seminary and the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, and the Office of Ministry of the Church of the Brethren General Board.

The final section of the paper is a glossary of terms.

II. A THEOLOGY OF MINISTERIAL ETHICS

A. Our Ministry to the World

We in the Church of the Brethren regard believers’ baptism into Christ Jesus, an outward sign of our inner experience before the community of faith, to be enrollment into ministry. The synoptic Gospel stories of Jesus’ baptism are the foundation on which this is built. According to these accounts, Jesus launched his mission immediately following his baptism and subsequent testing in the wilderness. Being baptized with the baptism of our Lord implies that we, too, are being commissioned into ministry. We have entered into a covenant relationship with God. While baptism symbolizes much for the believer, our richest understanding includes the conviction that baptism is the believer’s covenant to ministry.

In affirming the covenantal ministry of all baptized believers, we remember that we are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9). As such, we are under love’s directive: “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received” (1 Pet. 4:10).

Effective ministry demonstrates good stewardship of our gifts. The varied gifts described in Ephesians 4 come from Christ for enhancing the church's ability to accomplish its mission (Eph. 4:11-13). Good stewardship leads the believer/minister to exercise these gifts in service to God. We have become covenanted members of Christ's incarnate, living body, God's agent to save creation. We live under the covenant sealed in baptism to minister to serve God with our whole lives.

From our earliest beginnings, sisters and brothers have sought to live as Jesus' faithful disciples, guided by the conviction that whatever we do to others we do to Christ and therefore to God (Matt. 25:40, 42-43). This is symbolically acted out by the community of faith at the love feast, where we recall that we are ministers sent to serve as Christ served (John 13:15-17). In the act of washing one another's feet, we both serve and are served. As we eat the common meal together, we participate as brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. In the service of the bread, we recall our covenant with Christ to be his body, broken for others. In the service of the cup, we renew our covenant of love and ministry to God and God's children everywhere.

We recognize that initiation into ministry and discipleship by baptism are not so much an appointment to elevated position and prestige as they are an invitation to obedient faithfulness. It is a call to so rely on Christ that we model a lifestyle pointing to God. "Whoever says, 'I abide in him,' ought to walk just as he walked" (1 John 2:6). Because of our relationship with Christ, we are called to live by the highest ethical standards. "As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct" (1 Pet. 1:15).

Our covenant is not only with God, but with each other in the body of Christ. The covenantal nature of our relationship with God and with each other is particularly applicable to ethics. We stand in direct violation of our covenant with God and each other when our actions betray trust or intentionally violate the person of a sister or brother. We are one and are therefore "members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). We are members of Christ's body, called to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice" so that "we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another" (Rom. 12:1, 5).

Being part of the body of Christ necessitates ethical behavior not only with other Christians, but with people outside the church. As Christ's ambassadors, we are sent to reconcile the world to God in Christ (2 Cor. 5:19-20). We subvert the cause of the Christ we serve when we exploit or betray the trust of people outside the church. We are called to live lives worthy of the covenant granted us by God's good grace. In this way we bear witness to God, who is self-giving love (1 John 4:14-16).

God calls all members, especially those in leadership, to live by the high standards upheld in the Scriptures. In various Annual Conference statements over the last few decades, the Church of the Brethren has spelled out how it understood these standards.

B. Called to Leadership

To help us achieve the ministries of our calling and covenant, we accept that God has granted leadership gifts to certain individuals. We have recognized these persons by calling them to guiding roles in the church. In Schwarzenau, seven of our tradition cast lots to see who would baptize Alexander Mack, whom the others called to baptize them in turn. Our congregations have nurtured various forms of specialized leadership, including self-supported pastors, salaried pastors, and chaplains. We call to ministerial leadership those who show themselves able to discern the mind of Christ in the context of our lives and who have skills to encourage us to faithfulness.

While no arbitrary rank is held by our leaders, pastors and other credentialed leaders are worthy of respect and attentiveness by virtue of the confidence placed in them. “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing—for that would be harmful to you” (Heb. 13:17). This scripture should in no way be interpreted to justify submission to unethical conduct by a church leader. Rather, the Bible links respect for leaders with their lifestyle, role, and gifts. Many leaders may feel uncomfortable being role models; yet such modeling has been part of the expectation for church leaders since biblical times.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith (Heb. 13:7).

I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:1c-3).

Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us (Tit. 2:7-8).

C. Unique Roles Have Unique Expectations

We expect some things from our leaders that are not necessarily applicable to all members. Scripture alludes to this reality when it says, “Do your best to present

yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Although ethical standards are universally applied to all Christians, spiritual leaders have a higher degree of accountability for maintaining the ethical norms than apply to all believers. When a ministerial leader breaks the bonds of trust and accountability, it does harm to the body of Christ.

The Old Testament suggests that, while God calls all people to live with high moral standards, additional responsibility is placed upon persons in leadership roles. The responsibility of leaders was difficult and demanding, for unfaithful leaders brought danger to all Israel. We recall how the leaders of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms disregarded God in their hearts. The results for Israel and Judah were chaos and exile.

The degrees of expectation set forth in Israel’s story appear again in the New Testament. During Jesus’ life, many people followed him while some sought an apprenticed relationship with him. Upon his death/resurrection and the formation of the church, only a few were church leaders and fewer still were apostles. The faith of the leaders greatly affected the shape of faith and life in the larger church. The whole community suffers when a false spirit is in the hearts of ministerial leaders.

The biblical witness invites us to understand that standards for leadership in the church are important.

The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop (ministerial leader) desires a noble task. Bishops must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, nor quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. They must manage their own households well, keeping their children submissive and respectful in every way—for if someone does not know how to manage their own household, how can they take care of God’s church? They must not be a recent convert, or they may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, they must be well thought of by outsiders, so that they may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:1-9).

The Church of the Brethren has consistently affirmed a similar expectation for all our ministerial leaders. These affirmations have included calls for accountability in ethical behavior.

While this is the ideal, we recognize the difficulty in living in full accord with these standards; we have all “fallen short” of God’s ideal, yet maintain usefulness solely by the grace of God.

D. Ethics of Discipline

Realizing that the biblical ideal is not always maintained, the church needs to

have in place a procedure for calling leaders to accountability. We must use great care in approaching any member whose behavior has been called into question. “My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness” (Gal. 6:1). Through any proceedings designed to deal with unethical behavior, we must exercise compassion as well as judgment.

Ethical misconduct requires serious response. Each situation is different and will require careful examination and discernment. Some actions may prohibit reinstatement into ministerial leadership, even though a person may be forgiven and restored to the body of Christ. In other situations, under circumstances of full repentance a person might be restored to a position of ministerial leadership (2 Tim. 2:21).

- In situations where complaints are substantiated, consequences will be determined by the nature and seriousness of the misconduct.
- In situations where complaints are unsubstantiated, care will be given to issues of full exoneration and restorative justice for the ministerial leader.

E. Congregational Ethics

Our statement of theology began by recalling our conviction that all baptized believers are ministers. Ministerial ethics, therefore, are related to congregational ethics. Scripture is persistent in its expectations for appropriate support of leadership.

But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work (1Thess. 5:12-13).

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor (or compensation), especially those who labor in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves to be paid” (1 Tim. 5:17-18).

Your leaders . . . are keeping watch over your souls. . . . Let them do this with joy and not with sighing—for that would be harmful to you (Heb. 13:17).

Congregations and individual members are called to support, uphold, and strengthen ministerial leaders. Additional guidance may be found in the Congregational Ethics Paper (1996).

III. CODE OF ETHICS FOR MINISTERIAL LEADERS

We believe that we have been called by God, through the church, to the set-apart ministry in the Church of the Brethren. It is our calling and our function to lead and facilitate the church in its mission to obey and serve Christ and to witness to the good news of the gospel. We are committed to fulfilling the trust the church has placed in us by maintaining a high standard of Christian conviction, by sincerity of purpose, by nurturing and sharing our gifts, and by integrity of our character. We are dedicated to upholding the dignity and worth of every person who seeks or is reached by our care and proclamation. In order to uphold our standards we, as ministers in the Church of the Brethren, together and individually covenant to live out the following:

Integrity of the Ministerial Life

- A. I will be true to the Judeo-Christian scriptures in my preaching, teaching, and manner of living.
- B. I will be true to Christian convictions as revealed in the Bible and interpreted, taught to, and nurtured in me by the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- C. I will live with integrity, upholding my commitments to God, to others, and to the church.
- D. I will exercise a lifestyle consistent with the teachings of Jesus, giving serious attention to Annual Conference statements.
- E. I will assume responsibility for my physical and emotional health and for my spiritual growth and enrichment. I will strive to maintain reasonable expectations for myself and not allow others' unreasonable expectations to endanger my well-being.
- F. I will treat members of my family with Christian love and respect.
- G. I will treat my congregation and parishioners with Christian love and respect.
- H. I will be a good steward of all of my resources, managing them to live within my income.

Integrity of the Ministerial Call

- I. I will support the basic beliefs and practices of the Church of the Brethren as determined by Annual Conference.
- J. I will respect the privacy of individuals and will not divulge information obtained in confidence without expressed permission. When an individual is a danger to self or others, however, I will take appropriate action, even when this breaks confidentiality.
- K. I will report all cases of suspected child abuse. I will be knowledgeable of and act in accordance with the mandated reporting requirements of professionals within my state.
- L. I will not exchange or tolerate scandalous, malicious, or inaccurate information concerning others.
- M. I will give credit for all sources quoted or extensively paraphrased in sermons and prepared papers. I will honor all copyrights.

- N. I acknowledge that education is a lifelong process, and will seek out opportunities to continue to grow spiritually and in ministry skills.
- O. I will honor the ministry of clergy colleagues in our denomination and in the larger Christian community, striving to work with them in a collegial manner. I will not proselytize⁵ people from other churches. I will only perform ministerial services, such as weddings, funerals, baptisms, anointings, pastoral counseling, and critical pastoral care, in another congregation at the request of the current pastor and that build up the ministry and mission of the body of Christ in that place.
- P. I will honor the ministry of pastors in my former parishes. It is inappropriate to be involved in the pastoral ministry of a congregation after leaving it or upon retirement, or to perform ministerial services, or to cultivate such relationships with former parishioners, if it hinders the ministry of the congregation and pastor.⁶ I will only perform ministerial services, such as weddings, funerals, baptisms, anointing, pastoral counseling, and critical pastoral care, in a former congregation at the request of the current pastor.
- Q. Whenever serving in another category of ministerial leadership (i.e., chaplain, professor, denominational leader, retired, etc.) than pastoral/congregational ministry, I will honor the ministry of my pastor and congregation by being aware of my informal authority. I will not exert undue influence in the internal workings of my congregation.
- R. In the event of a complaint against me, I will participate in the denominational process for dealing with complaints of ministerial misconduct.

Integrity of the Ministerial Relationship (Fiduciary Responsibility)⁷

- S. I will not misuse the trust placed in me and the unique power inherent in my role by exploiting in any way those who seek my help or care.
- T. I will not use my office or authority to apply influence upon a parishioner or others in order to secure bequests, gifts, loans, or financial gain that would personally benefit me.
- U. I will not expect nor seek financial favors or gratuities because of my position.
- V. I will be responsible and honest in the management of all resources and funds entrusted to my care in the course of my employment.
- W. I will not enter into “dual relationships” with parishioners that result in a “conflict of interest” that could personally benefit me.⁸
- X. I will not engage in pastoral counseling that extends beyond the limits of my training and experience. I will use appropriate consulting and referral services.

⁵ See Glossary of Terms for definition

⁶ See Guidelines Ministerial Service and Membership in a Former Parish, Office of Ministry, 2008

⁷ See Glossary of Terms for definition

⁸ See Glossary of Terms for definition

- Y. It is unethical to take advantage of the vulnerability of any person by causing that person to engage in sexual activity or conduct with me. I will not engage in sexual activity with any person other than my spouse. Such behavior would be especially egregious within the church or ministry agency I serve.
- Z. I will not engage in any form of child abuse-sexual, physical, or emotional.

IV. PROCESS FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS OF MINISTERIAL MISCONDUCT

This section outlines the process recommended for dealing with situations involving clergy ethical misconduct. Any ethical violation of the ministerial relationship is destructive to the body of Christ. A violation of the “Integrity of Ministerial Relationship (Fiduciary Responsibility),” including sexual misconduct, causes enormous harm to individuals, families, and communities of faith, and is a betrayal of the sacred trust between ministerial leaders and their parishioners.

It must be stressed that this is a procedure to be conducted within the confines of the church’s structure and polity. It is an ecclesiastical, not legal, procedure outlining the way in which ministerial leaders are held accountable to the church in matters related to ethical misconduct.

We are bound by our commitment to justice, fairness, and compassion for all concerned, as well as by our desire to live in keeping with the spirit and teachings of the New Testament. These values call us to respond to complaints of ministerial misconduct. We are concerned about upholding the integrity of our church’s witness and ministry. Awareness of ministerial misconduct helps us to do so. Therefore, we take seriously all reports of this nature.

Our church also protects the rights of those accused of misconduct. Our willingness to respond immediately to complaints and to provide assistance to aggrieved persons is not to be construed as a “conviction” or judgment of accused persons. The process calls for a support system to be in place for the accused as well as the aggrieved.

Because every case is different, the intent of the process outlined below is to establish guidelines for district personnel and others who deal with complaints of ministerial misconduct. The intent is not to create legal rights or legal relationships. While all parties involved are almost always best served by adhering closely to agreed-upon guidelines, we recognize that there are times when the church may need to vary from the recommended process. Therefore under certain rare circumstances a district executive/minister in consultation with the district board chair and the ministry commission may prayerfully discern whether to handle a complaint directly. At such times the process shall be managed by the district executive/minister in consultation with appropriate district leadership and the coordinator of district ministries and/or the executive director of ministry.

This process is also commended to camps, districts, and the denominational agencies for use with their credentialed staffs. In addition, other church-related agencies, such as colleges and retirement homes, may wish to follow the process if the need arises to deal with complaints of ethical misconduct by Church of the Brethren ministers on their faculty or staff. We recognize that such institutions have their own personnel policies for use in employment practices, while this process applies specifically to ministerial credentialing. The authority and responsibility for ministerial credentialing in all instances belongs to the district board and the district ministry commission or equivalent body.

Prompt response to any claim of ministerial misconduct is imperative, regardless of when the alleged incident occurred. The incident may have occurred years earlier; guilt and repression can delay the act of reporting. Efforts should be made to protect the integrity of all parties involved, including the congregation. Equally important is the need for careful follow-up of any accusations of misconduct, as well as concern about the possibility of false accusations.

Where it is determined that ethical misconduct has occurred, efforts to respond should take into account the need for long-range healing for victims, offenders, and their families; the life and ministry of the affected congregation; and, where possible, the hope for reconciliation and restoration.

Complaints of ministerial misconduct involving children, substantiated or not, should be of special concern. Each district should have clarity about its states' laws within the district relative to reporting child abuse. In addition, some states have laws related to the abuse of vulnerable adults; these laws should also be known and followed. (See Section V. "Recommendations for Further Information.")

Appropriate district personnel should be prepared to receive complaints. The district executive/minister, ministry commission chair, and commission members; all members of the assessment team and the ethics committee; and any others designated to receive and process complaints should understand the dynamics of ministerial misconduct. In addition, information about procedures for making a complaint and about how the district will respond should be clearly stated and well-publicized to congregations and individuals in the district. (See Section V. "Recommendations for Further Information.")

It is the responsibility of the district executive/minister and ministry commission chair to receive a complaint and together to initiate the process for dealing with the complaint. The ministry commission should name two alternates to ensure that there is at least one man and one woman to receive a complaint and to have someone available in case of absence or conflict of interest of the district executive/minister and/or ministry commission chair.

Insofar as possible, response will be made to every complaint of ministerial misconduct. It is difficult and sometimes impossible, however, to follow through on anonymous complaints. Such complaints will not be ignored, but the person receiving the complaint will encourage the person making the complaint to identify him/herself and/or the alleged victim.

It is essential that confidentiality be maintained at all times. Careful and full documentation should be maintained throughout the process.

A. Roles and Responsibilities

The Congregation

The congregation is the community of faith in which love of God and love of neighbor are exercised in worship and in relationships. It calls/employs a pastor or ministry team when needed. In consultation with the district executive/minister, the congregation selects a person who is properly credentialed and whose educational qualifications, faith, and aptness to teach, preach, provide pastoral care, and administer has set him/her apart for this responsibility. The congregation and pastor or ministry team work together to carry out the ministry of the congregation. The district provides guidance and support to the congregation, to the pastor or ministry team, and to other staff employed by the congregation.

The District Board⁹

Denominational polity assigns authority for the credentialing of ministerial leadership to the district board. This includes the licensing and ordination of ministers. From time to time, the district board may delegate authority to various officers, commissions, and committees to act on its behalf. The district board delegates authority to the ethics committee to make decisions related to misconduct of the ministerial leader. When the ethics committee recommends termination of a license, it is approved by the district ministry commission and reported to the district board. When the ethics committee recommends termination of ordination or termination with the possibility of reinstatement, the district board makes the final decision. Overseeing the process for an ethics case will consume a great deal of the time and energy of the district executive/minister, and other district leaders may have to take on additional responsibilities during this time.

The Ministry Commission¹⁰

On behalf of the district board, the ministry commission, or its appointed committee, gives counsel and guidance in matters related to ministerial leadership in the district.

⁹. See Glossary of Terms

¹⁰. See Glossary of Terms

The commission, in consultation with the district executive/minister and with the approval of the district board, appoints an assessment team and, in consultation with the district executive/minister and with the approval of the district board, also appoints an ethics committee. It is suggested that different people comprise the assessment team and the ethics committee. The ministry commission chair may serve on the ethics committee. The ministry commission will see that both the assessment team and the ethics committee receive regular training in ministerial ethics and the process. This training will be repeated at least every three years.

Qualities desired for service on an ethics committee and assessment team include listening skills, maturity of faith and character, ability to maintain confidences, sensitivity to people, objectivity, courage to face the issues and confront individuals, and a willingness to become familiar with Church of the Brethren polity and practices. One or more individuals with expertise in understanding human behavior, such as pastoral counselors, social workers, psychologists, or family therapists, should be included. In addition, there should be a balance of men and women.

The Assessment Team

The assessment team consists of two or three people (at least one man and one woman) plus the district executive/minister. Under the auspices of the district ministry commission, the assessment team will participate in regular training on ministerial ethics and the process. It determines whether there is at least reasonable cause to believe that ministerial misconduct has occurred. The assessment team appraises and evaluates complaints and has the authority to bring a recommendation to the ethics committee of a) a negotiated settlement mutually agreeable to all parties, b) no reasonable cause, or c) reasonable cause¹¹ to pursue a full-scale, formal complaint. Any member of the assessment team who cannot be fair for any reason, or whose participation may give rise to the appearance of unfairness, should excuse himself/herself from the committee, be excused by the majority vote of the other committee members, or be removed by the district executive/minister or designated alternate.

The Ethics Committee

The ethics committee consists of three to five people with a balance of gender and ethnicity plus the district executive/minister. Under the auspices of the district ministry commission, the ethics committee will participate in regular training on ministerial ethics and the process. The ethics committee receives recommendations from the assessment team. When the recommendation is to pursue a formal complaint, it conducts a review meeting and makes decisions about the disposition of cases, except in instances concerning termination of ordination or license. Where termination is recommended, final decisions must be made by the district board or ministry commission as stated in denominational polity. It is also responsible for follow-up, moni-

¹¹. See Glossary of Terms

toring progress toward resolution for all parties involved, and establishing an end point for the case. With the exception of any delegated follow-up procedures, the ethics committee's findings and recommendations constitute the church's official resolution of the case. Any member of the ethics committee who cannot be fair for any reason, or whose participation may give rise to the appearance of unfairness, should excuse himself/herself from the committee, be excused by the majority vote of the other committee members, or be removed by the district executive/minister or designated alternate.

The District Executive/Minister

The district executive/minister or designated alternate receives complaints, works with the ministry commission chair to activate the assessment team and ethics committee, and manages and coordinates the process. Since one person cannot care for pastoral, ecclesiastical, and legal concerns, the district executive/minister should solicit assistance from qualified persons to ensure that all parties involved have the opportunity to receive appropriate pastoral care from the outset. The district executive/minister also arranges for adequate record-keeping and documentation, including the keeping of a log of important telephone calls and meetings pertaining to the complaint from the first time it is shared. He/she also ensures that all affected parties are kept informed, particularly in terms of their roles, responsibilities, and options within the proceedings. It is recommended that the district board chair, the executive director of ministry, and the coordinator of district ministries be kept informed as the case develops. The district executive/minister attends meetings of both the assessment team and the ethics committee. He/she ensures that follow-up occurs.

Legal Counsel

Even though this is the church's process, parties involved are likely to consult with attorneys. The role of any attorney must be clearly defined and communicated. The aggrieved, the accused, and/or the district may request to have counsel present at the meetings, including the meeting where the complaint is reviewed. While such requests will be received, it is the prerogative of the ethics committee, in consultation with the district executive/minister, to allow or disallow the presence of any attorney. If attorneys are present, it is recommended that they participate in the role of supporter, friend, or advocate. In any of these roles, attorneys have none of the rights and privileges accorded to attorneys in the secular courts. If either the accused or the aggrieved threatens a lawsuit against the church or each other, the district's attorney should be notified of this threat so that he/she may protect the legal interests of the district by, for example, notifying the district's insurer of the threat.

B. Using the Process

Making a Complaint

Anyone with a concern about possible ministerial misconduct can make a preliminary phone call to the district executive/minister. Without giving a name, the person may describe the concern in general. Sharing one's name gives more credibility to the complaint and facilitates the process. The district executive/minister will explain how

the district responds to such a complaint. (If the complaint is against the district executive/minister, the complaint should go directly to the ministry commission chair or designated alternate. In this case, the executive director of ministry should be notified immediately for consultation and assistance in giving oversight to the process.) Anyone who has knowledge of possible ethical misconduct by ministers can make a complaint in several ways, including . . .

1. Calling the district executive/minister, ministry commission chair, or designated alternate. The names of these people are available through the district office. A caller need not give his/her name.
2. Writing a letter marked “personal and confidential” to the district executive/minister, ministry commission chair, or designated alternate. The letter should indicate by what means the writer expects a response to be given (by phone, by letter, in an arranged meeting).
3. Making an appointment to meet with the district executive/minister, ministry commission chair, or designated alternate.

Anonymous, third party, or e-mail complaints will be considered seriously, but will be given careful scrutiny to determine whether the complaint is authentic and merits further follow-up. If follow-up is merited and there is no “aggrieved” party or there is a third party on behalf of the “aggrieved” (the congregation, a friend, a colleague, etc.), the district executive/minister and the district ministry commission evaluate and assess at what point in the process to begin.

Responding to a Complaint

The district executive/minister and the ministry commission chair together consider the information given in the complaint to initially determine whether there are enough verifiable facts to proceed. Once this is determined, the district executive/minister and the ministry commission chair activate the assessment team and alert the district ministry commission that the assessment team has been activated. If the nature of the complaint involves suspected child abuse, the local child protection agency should be notified immediately.

In addition the following persons should be informed...

1. The district board chair.
2. The executive director of ministry and/or the coordinator of district ministries of the Office of Ministry.
3. The board chair and moderator of the accused’s congregation or ministry agency. The district executive/minister works with the congregation’s leadership to consider carefully if, when, what, and how to tell the congregation. In some cases, it may be in the best interest of all parties for the congregation to grant the accused a leave of absence with pay and without prejudice of ministerial standing until the matter is resolved.
4. The accused’s employer, when the accused is not serving in a pastoral setting. The district executive/minister works collegially with the employing agency, carefully weighing the timing and/or appropriateness of sharing the information.
5. The district’s legal counsel and liability insurance carrier.

The district executive/minister has the authority and responsibility to act in the best interests of all parties in situations where there is the potential for criminal charges to be filed. If criminal charges have been or are filed, the church's process may need to be suspended pending the outcome of the criminal proceedings. The district's attorney should be consulted.

C. The Work of the Assessment Team

The assessment team determines whether there is at least reasonable cause to believe that ministerial misconduct has occurred. The assessment team appraises and evaluates complaints by holding separate closed and confidential meetings with the aggrieved and accused and gathers pertinent information and documentation to determine whether to proceed with a recommendation to the ethics committee. The assessment team has the authority to bring a recommendation to the ethics committee of a) a negotiated settlement mutually agreeable to all parties, b) no reasonable cause, or c) reasonable cause to pursue a full-scale, formal complaint.

The Initial Meeting of the Assessment Team with the Aggrieved

The aggrieved is invited to meet with the assessment team as soon as possible after the initial report of the grievance. He/she should be invited to bring an advocate or support person to the initial meeting and to any subsequent meetings during the process.

The purposes of the initial meeting with the aggrieved are to . . .

1. Hear the aggrieved's story as both the first step in pastoral care and the first step in an appraisal and evaluation of the complaint.
2. Determine the extent to which the aggrieved is willing to participate in formal proceedings. The assessment team should request that a clear and concise written statement be provided by the aggrieved as soon as possible. While a statement prepared and signed by the aggrieved is preferred, if the aggrieved person is not willing or able to place his/her complaint in writing, he/she may sign or initial the district executive/minister's written summary of the meeting.

Follow-up to the Initial Meeting with the Aggrieved

Promptly after the initial meeting, the district executive/minister facilitates the preparation of a factual written summary of the meeting. The assessment team considers the possible need for gathering additional information and carries out any further appraisal and evaluation in a confidential manner.

Initial Meeting with the Accused

The goal, at this point, is to create a situation with the greatest potential for learning the truth.

The purposes of the initial meeting with the accused are to . . .

1. Notify the person that an accusation has been made and is being taken seriously.
2. Share the nature of the complaint. The complaint is shared verbally at this time with the accused.

3. Provide an opportunity for the accused to respond to the accusation.
4. Invite the accused to prepare a written response to the accusation. Such a written response becomes part of the confidential record of the case.
5. Express the pastoral concern of the team and the church for the accused and offer through the district executive/minister the opportunity for the accused to receive ongoing pastoral care by someone who is not involved in the case. It is important to clarify that the district executive/minister cannot provide this pastoral care.

Follow-up to the Initial Meeting with the Accused

Immediately following the initial meeting, the district executive/minister facilitates preparation of a factual written summary of the meeting.

Assessment Team Follow-up to Both Initial Meetings

After careful appraisal and evaluation of the information received in relation to the complaint, the assessment team comes to agreement on its recommendation and prepares a written document to be presented to the ethics committee.

1. The recommendation may be to accept a negotiated settlement.
If so, the assessment team, in consultation with the district executive/minister, prepares a written statement explaining the case, the nature of the negotiations, and the agreements supported by the aggrieved and the accused. The statement is placed in the minister's permanent file. The recommendation is reported to the district ministry commission.
2. The recommendation may be that there is no reasonable cause to believe that misconduct occurred.
If so, the assessment team, in consultation with the district executive/minister, facilitates preparation of a statement to the ethics committee explaining the case (the nature of the complaints, the appraisal and evaluation that occurred, the determination that no reasonable cause was found, and other appropriate supporting information). As much as possible, the statement should be written in such a way as to protect the minister from prejudice related to this experience in future employment. The statement is placed in the minister's permanent file. The minister has the prerogative of preparing a personal statement to be made part of his/her permanent file. The recommendation should be reported to the district ministry commission and the board chair and/or moderator of the congregation or ministry agency.
3. The recommendation may be that there is at least reasonable cause to believe that misconduct may have occurred. Working together, the district executive/minister and the assessment team shall . . .
 - a. Prepare the formal complaint for presentation to the ethics committee. The formal complaint is a statement of the alleged offense. It is to be accompanied by any written statements of the aggrieved and accused, the summary statements of each of the initial meetings, and any other relevant documentation.

- b. Contact the aggrieved and the accused to inform them that a formal complaint will be brought and that they will be provided with relevant materials prior to the ethics committee meeting to review the complaint. They should receive copies of the formal complaint and all supporting materials.

D. The Work of the Ethics Committee

The ethics committee receives recommendations from the assessment team. When the recommendation is to pursue a formal complaint, it conducts a review meeting and makes decisions about the disposition of cases according to polity.

The ethics committee receives the assessment team's statement, reviews all information gathered to that point, and decides on the procedures to be followed to resolve the complaint.

If a meeting to review the complaint is deemed necessary, the ethics committee, in consultation with all parties, sets the date. Attention should be given to whether or not all parties should be in the same location.

The aggrieved and the accused are informed about the meeting procedure and their right to present their statements and supporting materials.

Decisions should be made about who should attend the meeting. The meeting might include the assessment team, accused, aggrieved, their support persons, and legal counsel acting as support persons.

The committee may obtain information or documents pertaining to the situation and may interview persons who are knowledgeable about details of the complaint. All information obtained from these meetings is held in strictest confidence.

1. *The Review Meeting*

The ethics committee is responsible for the character and conduct of the meeting. Every attempt should be made to ensure that the process is fair, impartial, and confidential. In preparation for the meeting, any person involved is allowed to seek whatever counsel is appropriate, including legal counsel. The following outline is offered as a guideline for conducting the meeting:

- a. Gathering and introduction of participants.
- b. Invoking God's presence through scripture and prayer. Romans 12:1-3 is suggested.
- c. Explanation of purpose and process for the meeting.
- d. Reading of the complaint.
- e. Presentation of information and statements from individuals supporting the complaint.
- f. Presentation of information and statements from individuals refuting the complaint.
- g. Time for silent reflection.

- h. Time for ethics committee to ask questions for clarification.
- i. Opportunity for those making the complaint to respond.
- j. Opportunity for those refuting the complaint to respond.
- k. Time for silent reflection.
- l. Time for ethics committee to ask questions for clarification.
- m. Closing comments by those making the complaint.
- n. Closing comments by those refuting the complaint.
- o. Prayer for continuing guidance and comfort for those involved in this situation and for those who are given the responsibility to come to a decision.
- p. Executive session of the ethics committee. Deliberations and discussions are informal and not recorded or transcribed, with careful consideration given to the material presented. The committee's findings and recommendations, however, must be put into writing.

2. *Follow-up to the Meeting*

Following the meeting, the ethics committee carefully reviews and evaluates the information obtained in the review meeting. The ethics committee comes to agreement on its recommendations. It then promptly prepares a written report of its actions and recommendations. This report and all other documentation should be gathered into a permanent record of the case. Possible actions include

...

- a. Full exoneration.

A statement is placed in the minister's permanent file explaining what occurred. The district executive/minister and others, as appropriate, should meet with congregational leaders to determine how information will be shared with the congregation and to plan steps to restore confidence in pastoral leadership.

- b. Exoneration, but with censure for poor judgment.
- c. Substantiation of charges.

The ethics committee will substantiate the complaint if it determines that it is "more likely than not" that the charges are true.¹² Disciplinary action should reflect as much as possible the misconduct and circumstances of each particular case. Possible actions include one or more of the following:

- 1) Substantiation of charges with warning. Care should be given for outlining steps for appropriate counseling, mentoring, or restorative action.
- 2) Termination of ordination with possibility of reinstatement and continuing covenanted relationship with the ministry commission. The termination of ordination is for a period of time in order to implement a program to underscore the seriousness of the offense and to provide an opportunity for rehabilitation. Termination of ordination with the possibility of reinstatement must be approved by the district board. This action terminates the individual's ministerial privileges.

¹². See Glossary of Terms

Elements of a program with the goal of reinstatement into ministerial leadership may include one or more of the following:

- a) Personal counseling/therapy by a professional approved by the committee or chosen by the minister from a referral list provided by the committee.
 - b) Voluntarily leaving ministerial service.
 - c) Payment or reimbursement of all or part of the costs of counseling/therapy for the aggrieved for a specified time period.
 - d) Career evaluation.
 - e) Early retirement.
 - f) Relevant educational experiences.
 - g) Peer support and supervision.
 - h) Leave of absence.
 - i) Other appropriate directives.
 - j) Once the program of restoration has been satisfactorily completed and an appropriate period of at least five to seven years has passed, reinstatement to ministerial leadership may be requested by the individual and may be granted by action of the district board.
- 3) Termination of ordination. This requires approval by the district board. In these cases, misconduct is so egregious that the person can be restored to the body but not restored to ministerial leadership.
 - 4) Termination of license. This requires action of the ministry commission or its designated representative. In these cases, misconduct is so egregious that the person can be restored to the body but not restored to ministerial leadership.

3. *Follow-up with the Accused*

The ethics committee is responsible for follow-up with the accused. Follow-up should include appropriate care and support of the minister and his/her family including opportunities for healing, reconciliation, and restoration into the body of Christ.

4. *Follow-up with the Aggrieved*

The ethics committee on behalf of the district board is responsible for initiating ways for the church to offer ongoing support and concern to the aggrieved for the purpose of healing and restoration.

5. *Follow-up with the Congregation*

The district executive/minister works with the leadership of the congregation to assess what is needed for healing, reconciliation, and restoration in the congregation.

E. Concluding Matters

Disclosure

The process of healing for individuals, the congregation, and the wider church is enhanced through appropriate disclosure of information. At each step in the process, determination needs to be made of who needs to know and how much information should be shared.

In cases in which charges are judged to be unsubstantiated or false, the district executive/minister, in consultation with the assessment team and the accused, decides how much information should be shared with the board chair and moderator and whether any information should be shared with its members. Depending on the individual circumstances, leadership needs to carefully weigh what, and how much, information will be disclosed. For example, if rumors are circulating, it may be helpful to state that the case has been investigated and a determination made.

In cases in which the assessment team finds that there is reasonable cause to believe misconduct occurred, disclosure at that point to at least the leadership of the congregation is almost always appropriate. The district executive/minister, with the assistance of the assessment team, will inform the board chair and/or moderator of the accused's congregation and make plans to meet the leadership to discuss notifying the congregation as a whole. At that meeting, those present assess the situation. If the accused is granted a leave of absence, the process for disclosure will be one of informing the congregation that a complaint of ethical misconduct has been made and explaining the process that is underway. The congregation should be made aware that congregational leadership will be kept informed as the case develops. Again, every effort should be made to ensure appropriate confidentiality for all parties involved.

Following the review meeting, the district executive/minister reports the results of the meeting to the congregational board chair and/or moderator. If the accused was exonerated, the decision needs to be made as to how much, if any, information is to be shared with the congregation. If complaints were substantiated, a plan of disclosure to the congregation should be established.

Experience has demonstrated that where disclosure is made to the congregation, the healing within the congregation is better realized, even though the initial trauma may be greater. Also, disclosure may help other victims of misconduct to be found. Disclosure should not involve revealing the identity of the aggrieved or facts that would make the aggrieved readily identifiable, unless he/she specifically requests to be identified.

Decisions as to how complaints or admissions of ethical misconduct by a minister should be disclosed to the congregation must be made on a case-by-case basis. Experience has shown the usefulness of sending letters to the membership, holding congregational meetings and educational forums, and involving professional counselors. It is important that shared information be as accurate and as factual as possible.

Decisions regarding disclosure to the wider church and the community should be made in consultation with the denominational office of ministry, communications, and congregational life ministries, following denominational guidelines.

Records

Statements about any complaints of misconduct are to be documented and recorded in the minister's personnel file. Such statements should include the facts relevant to the complaint and an explanation of how the complaint was resolved. If the complaint has been unsubstantiated, the statement may be removed from the minister's file after five years.

The district executive/minister maintains the records while an inquiry is in process, and such records shall be kept confidential. All records of cases, regardless of the outcome, are to be kept indefinitely and considered confidential.

Copies of the primary documents of a case are to be kept in the minister's permanent personnel file. When a decision is made for the ordination to be "terminated with the possibility of reinstatement," the personnel file stays in the district as long as the individual continues in "covenant relationship" with the ministry commission of the district, working at a program of reinstatement. If during that time, the individual moves to another district, joining a congregation there, the individual's personnel file should be transferred to the new district. When the minister's ordination is terminated, the personnel file is sent to the office of ministry.

The district executive/minister is responsible for the safe-keeping of the "detailed file" of the case. When the minister or district executive/minister leaves the district, appropriate determination should be made about the "detailed file" of the case, in consultation with the executive director of ministry. Other than the district executive/minister, no participants in the proceedings may make any of the written records available to others.

Sharing Information

For purposes of placement, the executive director of ministry and district executives/ministers who have information regarding complaints of ethical misconduct must provide it to colleagues as they are assisting search committees in arranging interviews. This includes the confidential summary of any complaint, the minister's statement(s), and a statement of the district's disposition of the complaint. If the complaint has been unsubstantiated, after five years the minister may omit any reference to a former complaint on the pastoral profile.

When a congregation's search committee indicates an interest in interviewing a candidate, decisions must be made about what is to be shared from the minister's personnel file. What is shared will depend on the circumstances. If the district executive/minister is unsure about what should be shared, the decision should be made in

consultation with other appropriate persons, such as the ministry commission chair or the executive director of ministry.

Appeal

The aggrieved, the accused, or the congregation through its official board has the right to appeal whether the process was followed and conducted fairly by the ethics committee or district board.

- In cases decided and implemented by the ethics committee, written appeal may be made to the executive committee of the district board within thirty (30) days of the ethics committee's action. The district board chair and/or moderator are responsible for overseeing the appeal process in consultation with the office of ministry. Executive committees shall handle all appeals within 45 days of receipt. In the meantime, the action will be implemented.
- In cases involving termination of license by the ministry commission or ordination by the district board, written appeal may be made to Standing Committee of Annual Conference within thirty (30) days of the district action. Annual Conference officers are responsible for overseeing the appeal process in consultation with the Office of Ministry and the denomination's risk management officer. Standing Committee will hear such appeals received forty-five (45) days prior to its next regularly scheduled meeting. If the appeal is received less than forty-five (45) days prior, it will be heard at a subsequent meeting of Standing Committee. In the meantime, the action will be implemented.

The task of those hearing an appeal is not to repeat the deliberative process of the committee, but to review and evaluate whether or not the disciplinary process was properly carried out.

V. Additional Recommendations

A. To Annual Conference Delegates:

1. That Standing Committee delegates receive training within their districts in the process outlined in this paper to prepare for appeals that might come before them.
2. That congregational delegates ensure that this report receives attention and study within their congregations so that all members of the church are aware of the content and process of this paper.

B. To Individuals and Congregations:

1. That attention be given to providing spiritual and emotional support for ordained and licensed ministers. A mutually defined position description, ample salary, benefits, and continuing education and Sabbath rest opportunities are also critical.

2. That local church bodies charged with pastoral relations become familiar with this paper.
3. That congregations take measures to ensure a smooth transition when there is a change of pastors.
4. That individuals or congregations not use the process outlined in this paper as a tool to initiate termination of the pastor when there is no ethical misconduct.
5. That congregations be required to engage in a study of the Congregational Ethics paper prior to submitting a congregational profile, and at least once every five years during extended pastorates.

C. To Ministerial Leaders:

1. That ministerial leaders pay attention to their own well-being, including spiritual disciplines, self-care, lifelong learning, and developing networks of support beyond the ministry setting,
2. That ministerial leaders attend a mandatory training on ministerial ethics once every five years within the ordination renewal timetable.

D. To Districts:

1. That credentialing committees become familiar with this paper.
2. That candidates for ministry and ordained ministers coming from other denominations be required to study and affirm the Code of Ethics.
3. That credentialing committees require that each candidate sign the statement that he/she has not been involved with nor charged with ethical misconduct at any time, or that, if charged, has been cleared of such charges or has achieved reconciliation.
4. That districts provide training in ministerial ethics at least once every five years, within the ordination renewal period.
5. That the district ministry commission designate and provide training for the assessment team, ethics committee, ministry commission, district board, and Standing Committee delegates, a minimum of once every three years.
6. That district ministry commissions and ethics committees be provided adequate financial and personnel resources.

7. That districts consider establishing a revolving fund to provide counseling for victims abused by clergy, or provide for counseling by making competent therapists available to victims.

E. To the Council of District Executives:

1. That the council encourages districts to follow the procedures in this paper in order to provide consistency throughout the denomination.
2. That arrangements be made for careful training of their members so that they can skillfully counsel with individuals and congregations in the various aspects of ethics included in this paper, and so that they can guide inquiries and disciplinary processes toward eventual healing of brokenness.

F. To Bethany Theological Seminary and Other Clergy Training Programs:

1. That Bethany Theological Seminary offer training in ministerial ethics, including the material contained in this paper.
2. That the clergy training programs of the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership require full knowledge of this paper.

G. To the Ministry Office of the General Board:

1. That the Office of Ministry in cooperation with the Ministry Advisory Council of the Annual Conference and Council of District Executives take measures to ensure that there is greater consistency in requirements for credentialing and the ordination renewal process.
2. That copies of this paper, including appropriate translations, be made available to all Brethren-related institutions and agencies and, upon request, to any church member, church officer, employee, or volunteer.
3. That the Office of Ministry and the Council of District Executives work toward greater consistency in the utilization of the congregational ethics paper as part of the pastoral placement process.

VI. Glossary of Terms

Conflict of Interest:

A **conflict of interest** is a situation in which someone in a position of trust has competing professional or personal interests. Such competing interests can make it diffi-

cult to fulfill duties impartially. Even if there is no evidence of improper actions, a conflict of interest can create an appearance of impropriety that can undermine confidence in the ability of that person to use his/her position with proper ethics. A conflict of interest can exist even if no unethical or improper act results from it. This is seen as a “conflict of roles” where the interest of one’s self differs from that of others.

District Board

District Board is used consistently in this document to refer to the district’s leadership structure. Many districts now have leadership teams or use other terms to define this group.

Dual Relationship

A dual relationship is one in which a person attempts to fulfill two roles with the same person—for example, to have a professional and a personal relationship with the same person.

Examples of dual relationships in ministry:

- a minister who seeks financial advice from one of his/her parishioners who is a financial planner
- a minister who becomes a close family friend of a family in the congregation
- a minister whose child’s teacher is a member of the congregation
- a minister whose physician is a member of the congregation

Some dual relationships are inevitable, because a minister often lives, works, and socializes in the same community. The minister is responsible for monitoring dual relationships to maintain the integrity of the ministerial relationship and ensure that parishioners are not harmed.

Fiduciary Responsibility

“**Fiduciary**” means “held in trust for another”; its root is the Latin verb for “to trust,” the same root as the root of “faith.” It is a term that has traditionally been used legally to describe the responsibility of professionals to act in the best interests of their clients. A fiduciary responsibility for someone is a responsibility for safeguarding the interests and well-being of that person, for protecting that person and his/her interest against any danger, threat, or harm. See the Code of Ethics section on fiduciary responsibility for examples.

A fiduciary responsibility may derive from a contract or role. It has both a legal and an ethical dimension. Ministerial leaders have a fiduciary responsibility. This is both an ethical responsibility that derives from the ministerial role as well as a covenantal responsibility that derives from their ordination and hiring.

Ministry Commission

Ministry Commission is used consistently in this document to refer to the district's duly appointed committee charged with the responsibility for carrying out the calling and credentialing responsibilities of the district.

More Likely Than Not

This is a legal phrase defined as there being a better than 50-percent chance that the misconduct happened.

Proselytize

Proselytizing within the Christian community is to intentionally induce or cause someone to leave their current church in order to move their membership to one's own church.

Reasonable Cause to Believe

Reasonable cause to believe is to have knowledge of facts which, although not amounting to direct knowledge, would cause a reasonable person, knowing the same facts, to reasonably conclude the same thing.

Action of Annual Conference: Annual Conference approved, by a two-thirds majority, the Update to Ministry Ethics, including several amendments which have been incorporated in the text above.