



Church of the Brethren

MANUAL OF ORGANIZATION AND POLITY

February 2023

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Annual Conference
Church of the Brethren
1451 Dundee Avenue
Elgin, Illinois 60120
www.brethren.org/ac

CHAPTER 5

THE MINISTRY

The implementation of denominational statements on the ministry is managed by the Church of the Brethren's Office of Ministry.

This chapter of the *Manual of Organization and Polity* consists of two sections, each of which is a polity statement that has been adopted by Annual Conference.

I. MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP POLITY¹

This paper contains the polity and procedures for calling and credentialing of ministerial leadership for the Church of the Brethren. The polity included here is a revision and replacement of the 1999 Ministerial Leadership Paper and all previous polity documents, including denominational polity on Lay Speakers. This paper affirms consistency with all other Annual Conference statements related to ministerial leadership.

A. PREAMBLE

1. Background

Leadership that is called out, well trained and appropriately educated is a vital part of the life of the church. We have experienced a variety of ways of calling leadership throughout our history as Brethren. In particular, we have long been in conversation about the meaning and value of the call to ordained ministry. Every decade of the 20th century heard a call for a common understanding of what it is that ordination means for our life together. We continue to hear that call.

The most recent revisions of ministerial leadership polity came in 1985 and 1999, as well as a document on Plural Non-Salaried Ministry in 1998. In 1985, Annual Conference adopted a wide-ranging paper that included scriptural, historical and theological explanations of credentialed ministry in the Brethren tradition. In 1999, Annual Conference adopted a new polity paper that addressed leadership needs expressed by district executives. This document is a response to feedback and reflection from district executives and others involved in implementing the current polity. It is an attempt to combine the biblical, historical and theological sources of a Brethren understanding of ministerial leadership with the necessary and particular expectations and procedures of credentialing ministerial leaders today.

2. “For Such a Time as This:” Communities of Call, Support, and Accountability

More recently, as our congregations and districts face times of great transition, a variety of issues have been raised about how we conceive ministry in the Church of the Brethren. There is a deep desire to instill a culture of call within the church and to develop intentional discernment

¹ 2014 Minutes, “Revision to Ministerial Leadership Polity,” 224-250. As its opening paragraph states, this document replaced the 1999 Ministerial Leadership Paper and all previous polity documents, including denominational polity on Lay Speakers. It also integrates the 1998 “Polity for Free Ministry” into this document and therefore replaces previous polity about plural non-salaried ministry – see 2014 Minutes, “Revision to Ministerial Leadership Polity,” 221.

processes as individuals explore a call to ministry within the context of the community of faith. In addition, ministers need encouragement for building and maintaining healthy support networks throughout the life of ministry. Issues range from logistical questions about how to ensure well-trained ministerial leaders to theological questions of what it means to be a credentialed, set-apart minister. In addition to these structural and theological questions, we are also painfully aware that our ministers themselves are struggling mightily. Loneliness and isolation have become a serious issue for ministerial leaders, and this pain needs attention for both the health of our individual brothers and sisters as well as the health of the denomination.

In the face of such transition and in the context of life and faith today, there is a contextual and cultural imperative for the church to take seriously the need for well-trained, well-formed ministerial leaders. This paper incorporates expectations that value and respect both the depth and breadth of our ministry training programs.

3. Current Rationale

This paper is intended to address many of these pressing questions, offering both a history and theology of ministerial leadership in the Church of the Brethren as well as a consistent polity for calling, training, credentialing and sustaining ministerial leaders. It is an attempt to balance the diverse needs for ministerial leadership across the denomination with the urgent call for healthy, supportive systems of accountability for our ministerial leaders themselves.

4. Responsibility for Ministerial Credentialing

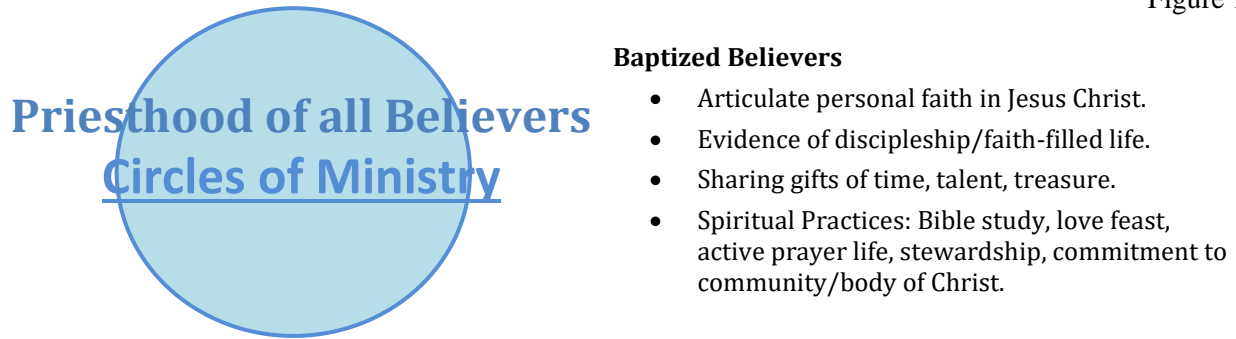
Annual Conference charges district boards with the authority and responsibility for the credentialing of ministerial leadership for the Church of the Brethren. District boards, ministry commissions, and staff are indispensable for the implementation of any polity of ministerial leadership, but especially so as we move into new ways of calling, credentialing and supporting our leaders. Bethany Theological Seminary, the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership and the Brethren Higher Education Association play vital roles in training ministerial leaders for work in the Church. During the extended process of creating this new polity, the Church of the Brethren Office of Ministry has sought to be in conversation with all of these bodies. In addition to the work of the Ministry Advisory Council and the Council of District Executives, this paper has been formed in consultation with the Mission and Ministry Board, the Annual Conference Officers, other denominational staff, and as many other Brethren constituencies as possible. In truth, calling forth leadership is the responsibility of the whole church, and we work together at every juncture to make this happen.

B. INTRODUCTION

1. Ministry of the Body

Our life together as Brethren has long reflected a strong agreement with the concept of the priesthood of all believers: every sister or brother baptized into faith enters into the ministry of the Church. Ministerial leadership, then, begins with every member and grows out of strong congregational leadership. Deacons, trustees, Sunday school teachers and countless others offer their time, talents, and selves to keep congregations healthy and vital.

Figure 1



2. Called Out and Set Apart

From this large circle of baptized believers and leadership within a community, we also call out what we have referred to as “set apart” leaders: men and women whose gifts, abilities, and identities we observe as being particularly suited for ministry and church leadership. These are the sisters and brothers among us to whom we entrust our common life of faith. We expect them to remind us that “our life, as theirs, comes from God” (1985 Annual Conference Statement, “Calling and Ordination”).

3. Circles of Ministry

This polity outlines several “circles” of ministry, all emerging from the larger circle of the priesthood of all baptized believers.



Figure 2

a. The Calling Circle

A “calling circle,” the first step toward a circle of credentialed ministry, is called forth from the larger circle of community and includes representatives from an individual’s congregation, district, and calling cohort (a special small group focused on discernment during the time of calling and preparation). The calling circle ensures that individuals engaged in the processes of discernment and training are surrounded by sisters and brothers who covenant to share in support and accountability throughout the calling, training and credentialing processes.

b. The Ministry Circle

The Ministry Circle consists of three smaller circles: the Licensed Minister Circle, the Commissioned Minister Circle, and the Ordained Minister Circle. Each of these circles, called forth from the context of the larger circle of the priesthood of all believers, is designed to call and equip leaders for a particular kind of ministry. The Licensed Minister circle offers a restricted and limited recognition for leaders in the midst of their ongoing discernment, training, and preparation for a credentialed circle of ministry. The Commissioned Minister circle is designed for leaders called to one specific ministry in one specific congregation. The Ordained Minister circle is intended for ministers called to a broader ministry that may span multiple congregations or ministry settings over the course of their lives of service.

c. The Covenant Circle

Like the Calling Circle, the Covenant Circle exists to ensure that ministerial leaders are accompanied throughout their life of ministry. Ministerial leaders who choose to join a Covenant Circle offer support and accountability to one another. A Covenant Circle may meet for continued learning, Bible study, or simple sharing and fellowship. Covenant circle participants will commit to going above and beyond the basic requirements for commissioning and ordination. They will invite others to join them on a journey of excellence, pay particular attention to calling and mentoring others on the journey, join colleagues for annual continuing education events, and covenant to serve the church as spiritual leaders.

C. HISTORY AND THEOLOGY OF ORDINATION IN THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

Ordination in the Church of the Brethren has always been a particular calling or naming of gifts, and has always been understood in relation to the calling community.

1. Biblical Theological Perspective

The Church of the Brethren views ministry in the light of a belief in the “priesthood of all believers.” The Old Testament proclaims that at Mount Sinai the entire people of Israel were called to be a “priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). The New Testament adapts this language to the community of faith who are now followers of Jesus (1 Peter 2:9), emphasizing again what came to be known as a “priesthood of all believers.” All who belong to God in Christ are priests, participating through baptism in Jesus’ calling and through the Spirit to be God’s presence in the world. This priesthood of all believers is basic to our understanding of ministry. Membership in Jesus Christ is enrollment into the ministry of the priesthood of all believers.

The Bible does not institute one pattern for ministry, nor does it establish what we know today as “ordained” or “set-apart” ministry. It is clear, however, that there were people in leadership, and individuals fulfilled particular roles in God’s service on behalf of God’s people. There were a variety of forms of leadership within the communities of both Israel and the church.

It is evident in the Old Testament that God’s call came to many individuals, both men and women. These chosen ones fulfilled a variety of leadership roles in the society: prophets and poets, judges and other officials, singers and musicians, scribes and historians, artisans and craftsmen, priests and Levites, and kings and queens. While many of these functions could be passed down within a family, others were not bound to heredity. Indeed, God’s call often came unexpectedly to those on the margins, to the humble and dependent on God, and to those who would hear the voice of God calling them to something beyond themselves for the good of the people.

In the New Testament, men and women gathered around Jesus, becoming disciples. After the

resurrection and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, Jesus' fearful followers became transformed into the church (Acts 2; 4). Since this very early stage in the development of Christianity, it has been understood that being baptized in Jesus Christ means that God's Spirit calls all those who are baptized to be Jesus' disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; John 3:5; Acts 2:37-42; Romans 6:1-4; 8:1-30; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:23-28; 1 Peter 3:21).

As in the Old Testament, the New Testament witnesses to a plurality of leadership and roles that are fluid, allowing for specialized ministry in particular contexts without a uniformity of structure. In the New Testament, we do not see a pattern in local congregations of a single bishop or pastor, which is perhaps the "normal" or "traditional" structure most familiar in our time. This pattern is a later development, originating in the second century. In the New Testament, leadership roles were held by women and men. While some texts seem to limit women's participation due to specific circumstances within particular local communities at that time (1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:8-15), others indicate that women actively served in roles involving vocal and prophetic leadership (Acts 2:17-18; Acts 21:8-9; Romans 16; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16).

The New Testament uses several terms for roles or positions of leadership within local congregations. Some serve as elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17; 21:17-18; 1 Timothy 5:17-19; Titus 1:5-6; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1-5), others as deacons (Romans 16:1; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13), some as "overseers" or "bishops" or "pastors" (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:7-9), others as traveling preachers or evangelists (Acts 21:8-10; 1 Timothy 4:11-16; 2 Timothy 4:5; 2 John 10-11; 3 John 5-8), and prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1). Some leaders served in local communities without apparently moving from place to place in order to minister (Acts 16:40; 20:17; Romans 16:6, 12, 15, 23; Philippians 4:2-3; Colossians 4:15; 2 Timothy 4:20; Titus 1:5; Philemon 1-2). Others, like Paul, traveled extensively, began congregations in many locations, and continued to nurture them through visits or letters. For example, Timothy, Titus, and Phoebe each traveled extensively to provide leadership and mediate conflicts in collaboration with Paul (Romans 16:1-3; Corinthians 16:10; 2 Corinthians 2:12-13; 7:5-7; Galatians 2:1; Philippians 2:19). Prisca (also called Priscilla) and her husband Aquila had the distinction of hosting house churches in three different cities: Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome (Acts 18:1-4, 18-21; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:3-5). Whether exercised in one congregation or many, these varied leadership roles are "gifts" from God to the church so that "some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11).

These functions or gifts are not ends in themselves. Leadership exists within the church, both local and universal, in order "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12-13). The function of leadership is to promote and encourage believers to engage in ministries that edify, promote unity, and help us—with the Spirit's power and presence—to be molded into the image of Christ. This vision of ministry pushes us beyond ourselves to the service of others and to the work of the Kingdom of God, which transcends any particular congregation or denomination. Leadership exists as it serves the community, calling its members to the example set forth in Christ.

Scripture values knowledge and wisdom, not as marks of status over others, but as blessings that benefit all of God's people (Psalm 119; Proverbs 1:1-7; Ephesians 4:11-16; 5:15-20). Although the New Testament does not name formal educational requirements for leadership in the church, many passages speak to the importance of learning and teaching (e.g., Matthew 28:16-20; Romans 15:4; Philippians 1:9). The Greek word often translated "disciple" (*mathetes*) literally means "learner" or "student," suggesting that all followers of Jesus are called to be life-long learners. Disciplined learning is especially important for anyone who is called to teach others (James 3:1-4).

Whether leadership is local or trans-local, the call to leadership comes from the community. Three examples from the book of Acts illustrate this practice. First, the “whole community” selected the seven individuals to serve in the task of the distribution of food to the widows of the growing Christian community (Acts 6:1-6). These individuals were chosen as being “of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” to attend to a particular need in the Jerusalem church. Second, in response to the leading of the Spirit, when Paul and Barnabas are commissioned to what is traditionally known as their “first missionary journey,” the leadership of the church at Antioch laid hands on them (Acts 13:1-3). Third, the decision of the Jerusalem Council to include Gentiles with a few limited stipulations as part of the community of faith was communicated by letters carried out by two recognized leaders and prophets, Judas Barsabbas and Silas. This was done by “the apostles and elders with the consent of the whole church” (Acts 15:22-35). In each example, we see a proper “setting-apart” of individuals for particular tasks or ministries, resulting from a process of discernment by the community.

2. Historical Theological Perspective

Historically, ministerial leadership among the Brethren has been fluid and has adapted to changing circumstances. In Schwarzenau, Alexander Mack clearly assumed a “set apart” leadership role, as he baptized the seven other initial members. The earliest Brethren leaders held outside occupations while they carried out ministerial tasks. For example, Peter Becker was a weaver, Christopher Sauer was a printer, and John Kline was a farmer. Leery of the professionalized ministerial leadership they saw in other Christian denominations, Brethren did not provide a salary, but expected that the minister hold another occupation that would provide financial support. Eighteenth-century Brethren frequently identified ministerial leaders by their duties. Deacons, responsible for the material needs of the congregation and for the annual visit, came to be known as “visiting Brethren” while those that assumed preaching duties were commonly referred to as “laboring Brethren,” as they labored for the Gospel. References to elders also begin to appear in the eighteenth century.

In the nineteenth century, Brethren developed a three-fold ministry of first-degree ministers, second-degree ministers, and elders. First-degree ministers were undergoing trial to determine if they were indeed gifted for ministry. Second-degree ministers had the responsibility of overseeing congregations. Elders oversaw multiple congregations and were considered to be the most spiritually mature leadership. Elders provided counsel and direction for congregations and for the Brethren as a whole, as evidenced in their oversight of Annual Meeting. They held a key role in resolving congregational disputes and providing advice.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there were several key debates relating to ministerial leadership that have continued to have implications for Brethren. First was the issue of providing a salary for ministers. Brethren in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries believed that paying a minister was akin to selling the Gospel. They also expressed concern that if ministers received compensation for ministerial duties, they might water down the Gospel or become unwilling to speak the truth in love because their livelihood was dependent on regular congregational giving. In 1861, Annual Meeting expressed this perspective, “Resolved that we are opposed to a treasury for the exclusive benefit of the ministry, but that every church should encourage their ministers to be more active in their calling and also to support them in all cases of necessity.” Likewise, in 1890, Annual Meeting reiterated, “We think it wrong for churches to give, and brethren to receive a stipulated amount for preaching.” Despite this statement, in urban settings, congregations had begun to provide financial compensation for ministers. Philadelphia had the first salaried pastor before the end of the nineteenth century. Brethren in urban centers faced challenges as they attempted to maintain regular jobs and execute ministerial duties. The often more flexible schedule of rural farm life allowed for more travel and ministerial activities in certain seasons

than did a nine-to-five work schedule that was the norm in small towns and cities. Another factor in the rise of paid ministerial leadership was that some congregations in the west and south had difficulty obtaining ministerial leadership. Brethren periodicals, beginning with the Gospel Visitor in the 1850s, display requests for ministers to come from the east to these often lonely corners of Brethren establishment. In 1911, Annual Conference provided the first official approval of paid ministry. From that point forward, there was a transition from non-salaried free ministry to salaried pastoral ministry throughout the denomination. One of the implications of this shift was a sense that ministers belonged to the whole denomination, rather than to a particular congregation or even a specific region. If ministers were not tied to a particular job or location for their livelihood, then there was the presumption that they could move easily.

At the turn of the twentieth century, we begin to see another change. Throughout the first two hundred years of the church, most congregations had a plural ministry, or multiple ministers that served their congregation. Some congregations still had “preacher’s benches” that sat at the front of the meetinghouse for the ministers and elders, exemplifying that multiple persons would be involved in leadership. A group of ministers frequently worked together to care for a cluster of meetinghouses. However, with the turn to salaried and therefore a more professionalized mode of ministerial leadership, most congregations could only afford and came to expect that a single pastor would bear the responsibility for ministerial leadership.

A third important change that occurred from the late nineteenth to the twentieth century was the role of formal education for ministry. Early Brethren ministers operated under an apprenticeship model, whereby presiding elders and ministers would oversee younger ministers. Younger ministers would receive increased responsibility as they demonstrated an ability to complete their assigned duties, eventually progressing to the higher degrees of ministry. Congregations expected ministers to engage in rigorous personal Bible study and reading. There are abundant stories of elders, such as Peter Nead, rising every morning at 4:00 a.m. in order to read Scripture for several hours before setting out to do his daily work. Brethren had a strong suspicion that formal education might lead to errors, particularly in abandoning certain principles of Christian living, such as nonconformity. Brethren also feared that arrogance, rather than humility, would accompany formal education and a more professionalized ministry. In 1917, for the first time, Annual Conference established educational credentials for elders and ministers. These requirements consisted of a high school education as well as a two-year Bible course and a two-year reading course. This requirement could be met, however, after the person had already been elected to the ministry.

A fourth concern was the proper role of the community in ministerial discernment. Annual Meeting repeatedly asserted that it was the job of the community to identify gifts for ministry. In 1853, for example, Annual Meeting asserted that a person could not be promoted to the office of minister by the elder body alone, but rather had to have full approval of the congregation. It was not up to the individual, or even other ordained persons, but rather it was the role and responsibility of the community, the priesthood of all believers, to discern gifts for ministry. In the early-twentieth century, Brethren allowed that an individual could recognize his or her own call to ministry. Annual Conference instituted a process whereby the person would consult with an elder about the calling, undergo an examination process and then have the matter submitted to the congregation. It is important to note, however, that the individual cannot go it alone. The congregation still became involved in the discernment process and in assessing and recognizing the gifts of the individual.

Throughout the twentieth century, there were several changes in the terminology for ministers. First, the distinction between first- and second-degree ministers was dropped and the terminology of licensing and ordination was adopted. Then in 1955, Annual Conference changed the role of

presiding elder to Moderator. In 1967, Annual Conference discontinued the office of elder in denominational polity.

Another significant change in the twentieth century involved the full inclusion of women as part of the set-apart ministry. While exceptional women, such as Sarah Righter Major and Bertha Neher, assumed some of the tasks of ministerial leadership (particularly preaching) prior to the twentieth century, it was in 1922 that Annual Conference determined that women could receive a permanent license to preach and teach. In 1958, Annual Conference recognized the full ordination of women.

Historically, Brethren have adapted ministerial leadership in order to accommodate the changing needs of congregations. When non-salaried ministry became a limitation in urban and more secluded settings, Brethren allowed for the possibility, although not the requirement, of salaried ministers. When women began to assume more pastoral congregational tasks, Brethren recognized their gifts through licensing and ordination. What is clear through all of these changes is that ministerial leadership for Brethren arises out of the communal context in an attempt to lead and meet the needs of these communities. Brethren have attempted to hold together the functions and duties that a person performs as minister along with what a person symbolizes as part of the ministerial office. Ministry is not a simple set of tasks to perform, but rather involves representing Christ within the community through multiple pastoral tasks, such as pastoral care, speaking the truth in love, proclaiming the Gospel, and administrative work. The set apart minister, both salaried and non-salaried, represents the priesthood of all believers and Brethren heritage and witness to the wider world.

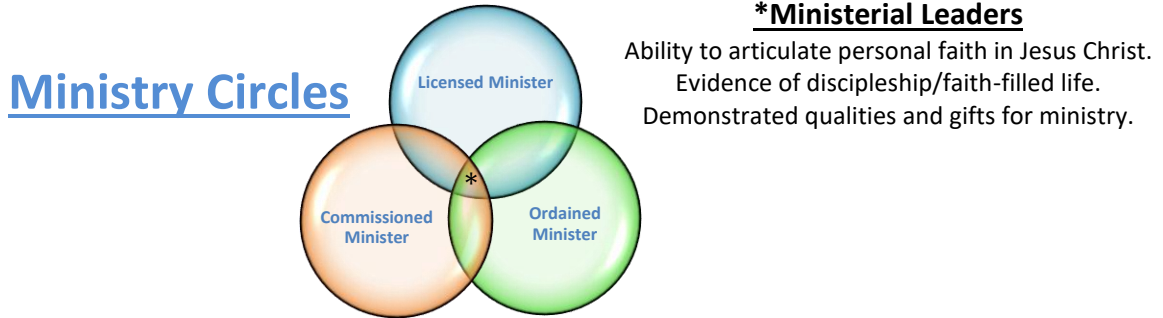
3. Ministry Circle Theological Perspective

This revised polity incorporates the historical notion of “degrees of ministry” into a new credentialing structure of “Ministry Circles.” Each of the ministry circles is designed to effectively form, equip and support ministers for a particular sort of ministry within the denomination. These ministry circles are intended to enable the church to call out more leadership, to include all in ministry (within the context of current polity), and to encourage individuals to take seriously the intentional discernment of their call within the gathered body of Christ.

The concept of circles of ministry begins and is embedded within the priesthood of all believers. Since the Church of the Brethren practices baptism as an enrollment into the ministry of the body of Christ, we view every baptized believer as a minister or “priest,” living out Christ’s call in the world. A calling into credentialed ministerial leadership, then, is a calling forth from the larger circle of the ministry of all.

This paper outlines three circles of ministry – the Licensed Minister circle, the Commissioned Minister circle, and the Ordained Minister circle. The process of calling forth, training and credentialing leadership into these circles is an important process and requires investment and cooperation from several bodies within the church: an individual, a congregation, a district, the denomination, and a spiritual companion group named the “calling cohort.”

Figure 3



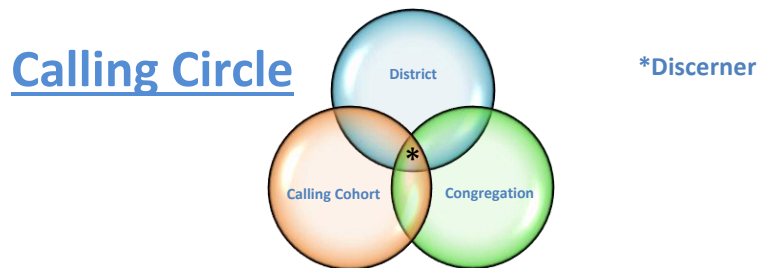
Annual Conference charges district boards with the responsibility for credentialing, and districts work closely with congregations in the calling process. This paper provides polity for the entire denomination, carried out through districts in partnerships with congregations and individual ministerial leaders. Credentialed ministers in the Church of the Brethren are accountable, then, to the church: congregation, district, and denomination.

D. CALLING CIRCLE

1. Calling

Calling is a naming and encouraging of an individual's God-given gifts for ministry in the church. Because the Church of the Brethren values the process of calling, the journey into credentialed ministry begins with a time of intentional and structured discernment involving an individual, the individual's congregation, the district, and a calling cohort. When engaged faithfully, the processes of intentional and structured discernment are honest endeavors that include a sincere openness to the leading of God. Discernment may lead toward credentialed ministry, but it may also lead elsewhere. Membership in a Church of the Brethren congregation is an essential and vital part of this calling process. If an individual without a congregational home finds they are entering into discernment about ministerial leadership, a relationship with a local Church of the Brethren shall be developed and cultivated over an extended period of time. Membership in a local Church of the Brethren congregation is required in order to continue in the calling process.

Figure 4



A sense of call to ministry can come in several ways: personal initiative, congregational initiative, or initiative by the church at large. Once an individual senses a call, the first step is to enter into prayerful discussions with the appropriate congregational group, i.e. ministry commission, leadership team, deacon group, or calling committee.

Congregational initiative best characterizes the manner of ministry calling common in plural non-salaried ministry settings. When it is determined there is a need to strengthen the team for effective ministry, the congregation prayerfully considers a call to one who demonstrates character, gifts, and spiritual maturity needed for ministerial leadership.

2. Steps in the calling process

After discussion, the appropriate congregational group shall communicate with the district executive to report that the individual is interested in testing her or his sense of call to ministry.

The individual **discerner** then enters into a time of Exploration of Call, in partnership with the **congregation**, the **district**, and a **calling cohort**. A cohort is "a group of individuals who support and adhere to one another." (*Roget's II: The New Thesaurus*, Expanded Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, 198) This not only implies support but also a common bond, a closeness that extends beyond companionship. The calling cohort is a special small group of brothers and sisters who commit to walking alongside the individual exploring a call to ministry. They will spend time together in prayer, study, and gifts discernment while offering guidance, encouragement, and reflection on the gifts, qualities, and potential for the ministerial call and leadership. The time of exploration of call should typically last between one and two years.

a. The Calling Cohort

The discerner and the congregation, in consultation with the District Ministry Commission select the calling cohort.

Guidelines for the calling cohort

Will include:

- An ordained mentor appointed by the District Ministry Commission

Encouraged to include:

- A congregational companion: a member and representative of the discerner's home congregation
- A district companion: a representative of the discerner's district, in addition to the ordained mentor

May also include:

- A spiritual friend
- A trusted peer
- A teacher or professor

This calling cohort, named by the individual discerner and the congregation in consultation with the district, will remain intact throughout the calling, training, and discernment process. The responsibility of convening the group rests with the individual discerner. The individual discerner shall schedule the cohort to meet as often and as many times as needed for discernment of call, but the group shall gather together no fewer than 4 times prior to a Calling Interview. If a member of the calling cohort is unable for any reason to remain an active participant, it shall be up to the individual discerner in consultation with the calling cohort to decide whether to replace the individual and if so, by whom. The cohort continues meeting up until the time of credentialing, and beyond, should they so choose. A calling cohort may meet in person or via conference call, videoconference or some other means of gathering geographically diverse groups into the same space.

b. Responsibilities

During this time, each group has particular responsibilities for moving through the time of discernment:

1) The **discerner**:

- Expresses a desire to explore a call to ministry;
- Enters into conversation with pastor, district executive, mentors, etc;
- Practices prayerful discernment, Bible study, and spiritual disciplines;
- Participates in the district process;
- Consults with congregational and district leadership to select and convene the calling cohort;
- Convenes, schedules, and meets with the calling cohort at least 4 times.
- Explores ministry training options consulting with calling cohort, congregation, district, and ministry training program leadership.

2) The **congregation**:

- Invites and/or receives the discerner's exploration of call;
- Holds prayerful conversations of call within the appropriate congregational leadership group;
- Notifies the district of the discerner's interest in exploring a call;
- Selects, with the individual discerner and in consultation with the district, the members of the calling cohort;
- Engages in prayerful communication with the discerner and the calling cohort;
- Continues in conversation with the district;
- Walks with the discerner through the district interview and beyond.

3) The **district**:

- Oversees the calling and credentialing process;
- Explains the expectations and differences of Commissioned and Ordained ministry to the congregation and the discerner;
- Invites and provides resources for exploration of full range of ministry training and educational programs in consultation with ministry training program leadership.
- Consults with the individual discerner and the congregation to select the members of the calling cohort;
- Provides tools for gifts discernment and Readiness for Ministry, referencing Office of Ministry Paper, "Candidates for Ministry Readiness for Ministry Program."
- Performs background check;
- Continues in conversation with the congregation and the discerner;
- Conducts a pre-licensing interview;
- Works with the discerner to determine the status of call and what next steps might be.

4) The **calling cohort**:

- Serves as a spiritual companion to the discerner through the times of calling and ministry training;
- Meets at least 4 times during the calling process for Bible study, prayer, theological reflection, and discernment;
- Continues in communication with congregational leadership;

- Is available to be present at the calling interview;
- Helps to process decisions and possible next steps with the discerner, including the development of a Covenant of Accountability.

c. Covenant of Accountability

As the time of exploration draws to a close, the individual **discerner** works closely with the **congregation, district, and calling cohort** to create a “Covenant of Accountability.” This document outlines the responsibilities of each body during the time of training and formation of a Licensed Minister.

1) The **discerner** agrees to:

- Enter or continue in the approved educational program appropriate to the ministry circle toward which they are headed.
- Continue to be actively engaged in the life of the congregation.
- Meet annually with the appropriate district representative(s) for accountability, reaffirmation of call and renewal of Covenant of Accountability. Licensed Ministers who do not demonstrate accountability and inclination in continued preparation shall not be reaffirmed as a Licensed Minister.
- Continue meeting at least quarterly with the calling cohort for conversations of discernment.

2) The **congregation** agrees to:

- Continue in prayerful discernment and support with the Licensed Minister, offering prayer, conversation and nurture during the time of training and formation.

3) The **district** agrees to:

- Offer resources for preparation
- Consult annually with the Licensed Minister for accountability and reaffirmation of call.

4) The **calling cohort** agrees to:

- Continue meeting with the Licensed Minister at least quarterly for conversations of discernment and prayerful support.

d. Calling (pre-licensing) Interview

At the end of the time of exploration, the **district** conducts a calling interview. The District Ministry Commission arranges for and conducts an interview with the candidate. A District Ministry Commission is the district group responsible for calling and credentialing ministerial leadership. This group should be made up of carefully selected people, clergy and laity, men and women, who are trained in their responsibilities and in these calling and credentialing processes.

The “Pre-licensing Interview Guide” provides the format for the interview, including the candidate’s aims for the ministry, natural ability, moral and spiritual fitness, and willingness to prepare for the roles and responsibilities of ministerial leadership. A District Ministry Commission may invite members of the calling cohort to be present during the calling interview.

At the conclusion of the interview, a District Ministry Commission may:

- 1) approve the individual discerner as a Licensed Minister, affirming the Covenant of Accountability and inviting the discerner to begin or continue training toward either the Commissioned or Ordained Ministry circle;

- 2) invite the discerner to further discernment;
or
- 3) affirm the discerner in a vocational call outside credentialed ministry.

If the District Ministry Commission approves the individual as a Licensed Minister, they then recommend them as such to the congregation. A congregational vote shall be taken to affirm their support of the candidate.

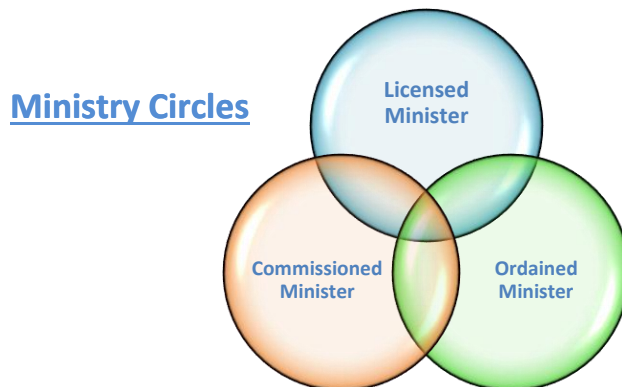
e. Licensing Service

Upon affirmation of the congregation by a simple majority vote, the district executive or a representative of the District Ministry Commission will conduct a service of affirmation, acknowledging formally the Licensed Minister's new recognition and the collaborative Covenant of Accountability during a regular congregational worship service. These actions shall be reported to the district board. Within 30 days after an affirmation service, the appropriate paperwork will be sent to the Office of Ministry.

E. MINISTRY CIRCLES

Each of the ministry circles is designed to effectively form, equip and support ministers for a particular sort of ministry within the denomination. The process of calling forth, training and credentialing leadership into these circles is an important process and requires investment and cooperation from several bodies within the church: an individual, a congregation, a district, the denomination, and a spiritual companion group named the "calling cohort." Just as the calling process is a mutual endeavor, the life of ministry is also a process of accountability, mutual support and peer relationships – both within and across the different ministry circles.

Figure 5



1. Licensed Minister Circle

A Licensed Minister is an individual who has been affirmed in her or his continuation of training and discernment toward a particular ministerial leadership role. The district recognizes a Licensed Minister during the service of affirmation, and this recognition is valid for one year. The district may annually reaffirm the Licensed Minister up to 9 times (10 years total), provided the Licensed Minister demonstrates accountability and inclination in continued preparation and continues to fulfill their responsibilities as stated in the Covenant of Accountability.

The Covenant of Accountability outlines the responsibilities of each body during the time of training and formation of a Licensed Minister, and provides guidelines and a roadmap toward one of the set-apart ministry circles. The Covenant of Accountability may be revised during the annual review and reaffirmation of a Licensed Minister.

A Licensed Minister, in certain circumstances with the approval of the district ministry commission, may serve in a ministerial leadership role. A Licensed Minister must complete denominationally approved ethics training before serving in this way. In addition, a Licensed Minister serving in a ministerial role shall have a Church of the Brethren ordained minister as a supervisor.

Ministry Circle



Figure 6

- Continued discernment of call.
- Nurture relationship with district and calling cohort.
- Ethical and moral integrity.
- Demonstrate qualities and gifts for ministry.
- Active membership in congregation.
- Commitment to Church of the Brethren.
- Enrolled in approved ministry training program.
- Meets regularly with mentor/supervisor.
- Spiritual practices: Bible study, love feast, active prayer life, stewardship, commitment to community/body of Christ.
- Establish practice of attention to holistic healthfulness.

2. The Set-Apart Ministry

The two circles of Commissioned Ministry and Ordained Ministry make up what the Church of the Brethren calls the Set-Apart Ministry. These credentialed ministerial leaders have the authority to perform all ministerial services and to oversee the ordinances practiced by the denomination, in compliance with the 2008 Ethics in Ministry Relations Paper.

A set-apart minister, by both word and deed, is a representative of the faith community. In denominational and ecumenical settings, the minister symbolizes the spirit that the Brethren believe to be important about themselves.

Ministry in the Church of the Brethren is embedded in the communal life of the body of Christ. It is from, for, and on behalf of the community of faith. Those called to the set-apart ministry are always called into this sort of servant ministry that exists in the context of community.

Commissioning and Ordination to ministry in the Church of the Brethren are not authorization to practice an individual, personality driven, “lone ranger” or “calling card” ministry. They are instead a calling forth of leadership for the particular, embodied, congregational ministry of the church’s life together.

While baptism functions as enrollment into the whole ministry of the church and carries with it certain expectations of a life of faith, set-apart ministers are held to higher standards of leadership. In the Church of the Brethren, these expectations for ministerial leaders include the ability to express a clear commitment to Jesus Christ demonstrated by a vibrant spiritual life, the practice of regular spiritual disciplines, a healthy physical and emotional lifestyle, a commitment to Church of the Brethren faith heritage and values, ongoing study of biblical texts, history and theology, and a commitment to actively upholding the Covenant of Accountability.

a. The Credentialing Process

When a Licensed Minister is nearing the completion of training for a particular set-apart ministry; discerns spiritual and formative readiness for ministry together with spiritual friends, the calling cohort, and the congregation; and pending a specific ministerial call, the District Ministry Commission will hold an interview with the Licensed Minister, utilizing the Pre-Commissioning or Pre-Ordination Interview Guide.

1) Pre-Commission/Pre-Ordination Interview

During the interview, the Ministry Commission may:

- a) affirm a call to the particular circle of ministerial leadership,
- b) invite an individual to further training, formation, or discernment,
or
- c) affirm a vocational call outside of set-apart ministry.

2) Recommendation to the District Board

When the District Ministry Commission affirms a call to set-apart ministry, they will make a recommendation to the District Board for approval of the call. The District Board shall affirm the call by a simple majority vote.

3) Recommendation to the Congregation

Upon the affirmation of the District Board, the District Ministry Commission shall notify the pastor, board chair, or other appropriate persons in the congregation so that a congregational vote can be taken to affirm the call. A representative of the District Ministry Commission shall be present for the congregational business meeting to take the vote. A congregational affirmation is by 2/3 majority vote.

b. Commissioning or Ordination Service

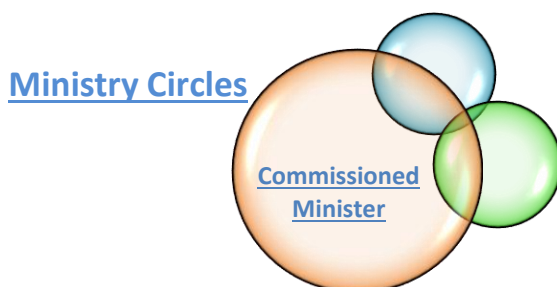
After both the District Board and the congregation have affirmed a call to ministry, the district executive, or their designee, or a representative of the District Ministry Commission will conduct a service of commissioning or ordination during a congregational worship service (regular or special).

3. Commissioned Minister Circle

The Commissioned Minister Circle is one of two circles of credentialed set-apart ministry. This circle is designed for ministerial leaders called to one specific ministry in one specific setting. The commissioned credential is not transferable from one setting to another. The call to commissioned ministry originates in a particular congregation and leads to ministry in that same, originating congregation. The Church of the Brethren values the small-church setting, and has long encouraged both the practice of calling out those already among us to lead and the value of a minister's commitment to and covenant with those who have called them out. Because so many congregations need and call this kind of leadership, consistent processes for calling, training and sustaining these localized leaders in particular settings is very important.

While commissioned ministers are accountable to the larger church body in the form of the district and the denomination, their ministry is restricted to one specific congregation or ministry setting. A Commissioned Minister holds the legal credential of clergy, and is commissioned to perform all ministerial services and to preside at the ordinances practiced by the denomination in the specific congregation for which they have been commissioned. The Commissioned credential is not transferable from one congregation to another or from one district to another. It is intended for a particular ministry in a particular setting.

Figure 7



The Commissioned Minister circle includes certain expectations of formation, training, practice, and accountability. **Commissioned Ministers** shall:

- a. Be an active member of a Church of the Brethren congregation.
- b. Complete training through:
 - Education For Shared Ministry or
 - Academy Certified Training Systems or
 - Training in Ministry programs or
 - another specifically designed curriculum of the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership;
- c. Articulate and provide statements of:
 - obedience to God,
 - a personal faith in Jesus Christ,
 - openness to the continual infilling of the Holy Spirit,
 - understanding the nature and mission of the church from a Church of the Brethren perspective, and
 - the meaning and purpose of scripture;
- d. Demonstrate evidence of discipleship and a faith-filled life;
- e. Demonstrate leadership ability and maturity of judgment;
- f. Affirm the expectations and commitments of ministerial leadership, including a declaration of intention to make church service a major concern of one's lifework;
- g. Be familiar with and comply with the Church of the Brethren Ethics in Ministry Relations Paper including participation in ethics training at least once every five years;
- h. Support the basic beliefs and practices of the Church of the Brethren as determined by Annual Conference;
- i. Engage regularly in healthful spiritual, physical, emotional and relational personal practices;
- j. Meet regularly (at least once per quarter) with a mentor, spiritual friend or peer coach assigned by the District Ministry Commission in consultation with the minister;
- k. Participate in a cohort group for the purpose of continued spiritual formation, accountability and mutual support;
- l. Demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning as evidenced by fulfilling the Annual Conference Guidelines for Continuing Education

- m. Participate in a credential renewal process facilitated by the Office of Ministry and conducted by districts every 5 years.

If a commissioned minister begins to discern a change in call to a new ministry and/or a new setting, re-commissioning within the district is an option. In order to proceed, the commissioned minister shall engage in discernment with the District Ministry Commission as their Calling Cohort. This discernment may include the need for additional training, ministry formation, and identification of gifts and skills. If a District Ministry Commission affirms re-commissioning, they will make a recommendation to the District Board for approval of the call.

If a commissioned minister begins to discern a major shift in call toward the Ordained Minister Circle, the commissioned minister shall consult with the District Ministry Commission. With the approval of the District Ministry Commission, a commissioned minister may re-enter the calling process as a Licensed Minister, establish a calling cohort along with a Covenant of Accountability to assist in discernment processes including any training or formation needed to move toward Ordained Minister Circle.

4. Ordained Minister Circle

The Ordained Minister Circle is the second circle of credentialed set-apart ministry. This circle is designed for ministerial leaders called to serve the church in capacities that expand beyond a specific congregation. Ordained ministers are accountable to the wider church in the forms of district and denomination, and their ministry is carried out in various forms within a particular district and across the denomination. The Church of the Brethren values the work of trans-local church leaders and has long practiced a kind of connectional church structure, from the historical tradition of “visiting elders” to today’s collaborative district and denominational leadership. The Ordained Minister Circle acknowledges this need for leaders trained and formed in the larger church and provides standards and expectations for the calling out, training, credentialing and sustaining of these ministers.

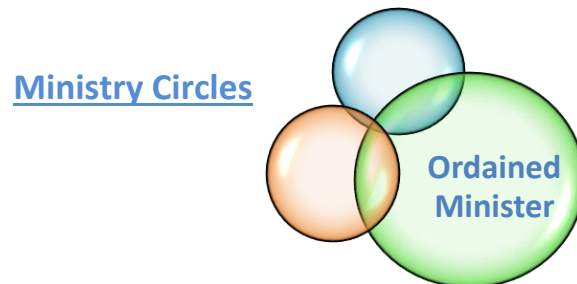
Ordination is recognition of a person for leadership in a particular area of service. The following “areas of service” are recognized and monitored by the district boards:

- a. Pastor of a congregation.
- b. Person serving a congregation in self-supporting ministry.
- c. Administrator or teacher in a theological seminary.
- d. Teacher of religion in a school, college, or university.
- e. Staff persons with districts, the denomination, and other Annual Conference agencies.
- f. Missionary assigned to pastoral or evangelistic duties.
- g. Chaplain (e.g., chaplaincy in a hospital, hospice, long-term care facility, campus, prison, or industrial setting).
- h. Person serving in a specialized ministry under the auspices of a congregation or other institutional entity (e.g., youth ministry, Christian education, camp administrator, ecumenical ministries, spiritual direction, pastoral counselor, church planter).
- i. Ministers retired from their area of service.

Because of the Church of the Brethren’s historic and living emphasis on non-resistance and peacemaking, the Church of the Brethren is not a legal endorsing body for military chaplaincy; therefore it is not an approved area of ministerial service.

If an ordained minister senses a call out of one location and into another, an intentional conversation with the district executive is in order. Together they may discuss options for discernment including whether an intentional conversation with the District Ministry Commission is in order.

Figure 8



The ordained minister circle includes certain expectations of formation, training, practice, and accountability. **Ordained Ministers** shall:

- a. Be an active member of a Church of the Brethren congregation;
- b. Complete one of the following approved educational programs:
 - The Master of Divinity degree from Bethany Theological Seminary or another institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools
 - The Training in Ministry program through the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership provides an alternative for those who find it impossible or impractical to complete a Master of Divinity degree. It also offers appropriate ministry training to supplement the education of those who may hold degrees in higher education other than those named here.
 - The Academy Certified Training Systems programs, district or regional programs certified by the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, provide still another alternative training track.

Persons holding other degrees of higher education (e.g. a B.A. in Ministry, an MA in Theology, a PhD in Education) may complete an M.Div. through Bethany's residential or distance programs or supplement their degree with the appropriate courses from the TRiM program.

- c. Articulate and provide statements of obedience to God, a personal faith in Jesus Christ, openness to the continual infilling of the Holy Spirit, understanding the nature and mission of the church from a Church of the Brethren perspective, and the meaning and purpose of scripture;
- d. Demonstrate evidence of discipleship and a faith-filled life;
- e. Affirm the expectations and commitments of ministerial leadership, including a declaration of intention to make church service a major concern of one's lifework;
- f. Have a specific ministerial call as defined under the "areas of service;"
- g. Be familiar with and comply with the Church of the Brethren Ethics in Ministry Relations Paper, including participation in ethics training at least once every five years;
- h. Support the basic beliefs and practices of the Church of the Brethren as determined by Annual Conference;

- i. Engage regularly in healthful spiritual, physical, emotional and relational personal practices;
- j. Meet regularly (at least once per quarter) with a mentor, a spiritual friend, or peer coach assigned by the District Ministry Commission in consultation with the minister;
- k. Serve as mentor to peer colleagues and those being called into ministry;
- l. Participate in and be willing to offer leadership for a cohort group for the purpose of continued spiritual formation, accountability and mutual support;
- m. Demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning as evidenced by fulfilling the Annual Conference Guidelines for Continuing Education
- n. Participate in a credential renewal process facilitated by the Office of Ministry and conducted by districts every 5 years.

F. ACCOUNTABILITY

Based as it is upon the Spirit's empowerment but also upon a process of discernment and designation by the church, ministerial leadership is not seen as a right as much as a gift and a naming of gifts.

All licensed, commissioned and ordained ministers are accountable to both the district and the denomination. Annual Conference charges districts with the responsibility of credentialing ministers in the Church of the Brethren, and the denominational Office of Ministry works to resource and support districts in this process. Ministers remain accountable through the five-year credential review process, participating in continuing education, and regular training in ministerial ethics. Ministers serving as pastors of congregation are also responsible for ensuring that yearly district and denominational statistical report forms are completed and submitted.

Every five years, District Ministry Commissions, in consultation with the Office of Ministry, shall conduct a credential review process. At the conclusion of these reviews, credential cards will be renewed for those ministers in good standing. In addition to the regular five-year reviews, District Ministry Commissions may also review credentials at any point. Ministerial credentials may be reviewed at any point under conditions deemed appropriate by a District Ministry Commission.

Reasons for termination of a credential may include the following:

1. The credentialed person voluntarily chooses to discontinue his or her ministry to enter into another type of calling for which a ministry credential is not designated or desired.
2. The credentialed person, for reasons other than illness or diminishment due to aging, ceases to be active in the life and work of the church.
3. The credentialed person cuts himself or herself off from the ministry through some indiscretion so that usefulness for the leadership services designated by a ministerial credential is no longer tenable in the Church of the Brethren. In the event of indiscretion, after due process according to the paper on "Ministerial Ethics - 2008," the District Board may terminate a credential.
4. The credentialed person's commissioning or ordination may be terminated by the District Board if the individual fails to fulfill his or her vows of membership and commissioning or ordination.

Ministers credentialed in the Church of the Brethren are also responsible for participating in lifelong learning. The Church of the Brethren Office of Ministry provides Annual Conference Guidelines for Continuing Education, and all ministers shall abide by these guidelines.

Credentialed ministers are also required to participate in an official denominational ethics training course every five years. The Ministerial Ethics paper outlines this requirement.

G. REINSTATEMENT OF ORDINATION

If a District Board terminates an ordained status, an individual may seek to become a candidate for reinstatement by following the normal procedures for ordination outlined in this paper.

H. MOVING BETWEEN CIRCLES

For a variety of reasons, ministers may wish to move from the Commissioned circle into the Ordained circle, or vice versa. Ministers wishing to move from one circle to another shall spend time in intentional discernment with the District Ministry Commission and complete all requirements and expectations of that credentialing circle.

I. RECEIVING MINISTERS FROM OTHER DENOMINATIONS

Congregations may call a pastor presently ordained in the Church of the Brethren, since this implies approval of the District Board. A congregation may not call a pastor from another denomination without following these guidelines in consultation with the district executive.

An ordained minister from another denomination wishing to serve in ministerial leadership and be credentialed in the Church of the Brethren must enter into an intentional time of discernment and orientation overseen by the District Ministry Commission. The word *denomination* refers to a church body that has established standards and procedures, similar to the connectional polity of the Church of the Brethren, for calling, educating, and ordaining persons for ministerial leadership. During this period the individual may serve as a Commissioned Minister for a term of service. This period, which should last no less than 2 years, will include:

1. Documentation of ministerial standing and satisfactory written assurance from the appropriate ordaining group within the minister's denomination as to his or her moral, spiritual, leadership and educational qualifications required by Church of the Brethren polity.
2. Orientation to Church of the Brethren history, theology, beliefs, polity and practices through courses in these areas offered through Bethany Theological Seminary or the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership.
3. Prayerful discernment about which ministry circle the individual is being called to enter.
4. Any additional education and/or training required for particular ministry circle.
5. Regular meetings with a discernment cohort group.
6. A completed background check.
7. Completion of approved ministerial ethics training.
8. Verbal commitment in the "transfer of ordination interview" and a public commitment at the time of installation to teach and uphold the beliefs, practices, and polity of the Church of the Brethren.
9. Provide a written acceptance of the ordination polity and policies of the Church of the Brethren in completing the "Pre-Ordination Interview Guide."

An ordained minister from another denomination wishing to serve in ministerial leadership without transferring credentials to the Church of the Brethren may serve as a Commissioned Minister for a term of service, but still must enter into the discernment and orientation process overseen by the District Ministry Commission.

With the guidance of the district executive/minister, and upon approval of the District Ministry Commission a congregation may call an ordained minister from another denomination as interim pastor. This individual is not required to seek membership and ordination in the Church of the Brethren, but must agree to provide documentation of ministerial standing and articulate in writing a commitment to teach and uphold the beliefs, practices, and polity of the Church of the Brethren.

J. MINISTERS SERVING CONGREGATIONS WITH DUAL DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION

An ordained minister who is called to serve a dual ministry (an approved ministry in his or her denomination and an approved ministry in the Church of the Brethren) and who elects to maintain membership and ordination in his or her denomination, may be recognized as an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren for the duration of that dual ministry, so long as the following conditions are met:

1. That the minister becomes a member or an associate member of the Church of the Brethren he or she is serving.
2. That the District Ministry Commission be assured in writing of the good standing of the person within his or her denomination and make the appropriate recommendation to the District Board.
3. That the minister express a willingness to teach and uphold the beliefs, practices, and polity of the Church of the Brethren, including the requirements for ordination in the Church of the Brethren, through a verbal commitment in the interview with the District Ministry Commission and a public commitment at the time of installation.
4. That the minister agrees to participate in a period of orientation and discernment with a cohort group.

K. ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To Annual Conference Delegates:
 - a. Ensure that this paper receives attention and study within their congregations so that all members of the church are aware of the content and process of this paper.
2. To Individuals and Congregations:
 - a. Take seriously the shared responsibility of calling forth leadership for the whole church.
 - b. Willing to walk alongside those exploring a call to ministry.
 - c. Utilize the study guide that accompanies this paper.
3. To Ministerial Leaders:
 - a. Take seriously the roll of calling and mentoring others into ministerial leadership.
 - b. Pay attention to their own well-being, including spiritual disciplines, self-care, life-long learning, and developing networks of support beyond the ministry setting.

- c. Become familiar with the opportunities and possibilities for peer coaching, spiritual direction, spiritual friendship, etc.
4. To Districts:
- a. That credentialing committees become familiar with this paper through participation in orientation and training sessions provided by the Office of Ministry.
 - b. That credentialing committees participate in intercultural competency training sessions in order to become sensitive to non-dominant cultural differences.
 - c. Become familiar with the full range of ministry training and educational programs of the Church of the Brethren.
 - d. Utilize gift discernment tools and Readiness for Ministry program in the calling and ministry inquiry processes.
 - e. That when a calling or credentialing interview is held with a non-dominant culture candidate, the interview committee include representation from the culture of the candidate and consider conducting the interview in the language of the candidate.
 - f. Provide nurture and support for ministers for their life of service.
 - g. The Layspeaker designation is no longer a part of the Ministerial Leadership polity of the Church of the Brethren. Districts should be in conversation with individuals carrying this designation to explain the new polity and to discuss district-based non-credentialed leadership options.
5. To the Council of District Executives:
- a. That the council encourages districts to follow the procedures in this paper in order to provide consistency throughout the denomination.
 - b. 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 calling, credentialing, and sustaining ministerial leaders included in this paper, and so that they can guide inquiries and processes.
 - c. That the council in collaboration with the Office of Ministry holds a professional growth event focusing on intercultural competencies in the context of calling and credentialing of ministerial leadership.
6. To Bethany Theological Seminary and other Ministry Training Programs:
- a. That Bethany Theological Seminary collaborate with the Office of Ministry to develop calling and discernment resources to assist in the formation and training of calling cohorts.
 - b. That Bethany Theological Seminary develop interpretation pieces to help the denomination understand its role in forming and training quality ministerial leaders.
 - c. That Bethany Theological Seminary and the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership collaborate with the Office of Ministry to develop interpretive pieces to aid in communicating the full range of ministry training and educational programs.
 - d. That Bethany Theological Seminary develop recruitment and retention strategies for graduate level ministry training for non-dominant culture students.

7. To the Office of Ministry of the Church of the Brethren:
 - a. 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 consistency in following the processes outlined in this paper.
 - b. That the Office of Ministry develop orientation, training, and interpretation resources for the denomination and its membership giving special attention to training district calling and credentialing committees.
 - c. That the Office of Ministry collaborate with Bethany Theological Seminary to develop calling and discernment resources to assist in the formation and training of calling cohorts.
 - d. That the Office of Ministry collaborate with Bethany Theological Seminary and the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership to develop interpretive pieces to aid in communicating the full range of ministry training and educational programs.
 - e. That the Office of Ministry collaborate with the Council of District Executives and the Ministry Advisory Council in reviewing and revising the “professional instruments” portion of Readiness for Ministry.
 - f. That the Office of Ministry develop study guides and resources for cohort groups.
 - g. That the Office of Ministry collaborate with ministry partners in developing resources and tools to assist ministerial leaders in paying attention to their own well-being.
 - h. That the Office of Ministry collaborate with ministry partners to develop and define the Covenant Circle for set-apart ministerial leaders in the Church of the Brethren. The Covenant Circle is intended to encourage and enhance spiritual leadership, excellence in ministry, well-being, and vitality.
 - i. That the Office of Ministry assures that this document, a summary, and its accompanying resources are translated into Spanish and Creole.
 - j. That the Office of Ministry collaborates with the Council of District Executives as it holds a professional growth event focusing on intercultural competencies in the context of calling and credentialing of ministerial leadership.
 - k. That the Office of Ministry supports districts with clarification and encouragement of the work of plural non-salaried ministry congregations as well as new models of bi-vocational ministry teams.

L. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Calling Circle - the first step toward a credential circle, the calling circle is called forth from the larger circle of community and includes representatives from an individual’s congregation, district, and calling cohort

Cohort: A cohort is "a group of individuals who support and adhere to one another." (*Roget's II: The New Thesaurus*, Expanded Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, 198) This not only implies support but also a common bond, a closeness that extends beyond companionship.

- **Calling Cohort** - a small group of brothers and sisters who commit to walking alongside an individual exploring a call to ministry. The calling cohort meets during the time of calling, training, and discernment, and includes an ordained mentor appointed by the District Ministry Commission and companions from an individual’s congregation and district. It may also

include spiritual friends, trusted peers, or teachers/professors. The calling cohort spends time together in prayer, district executives study and gifts discernment.

- **Accountability Cohort** – a small group of brothers and sisters in ministry committed to walking with one another. The accountability cohort meets regularly during ministers’ time of service in their ministry settings, and is intended to offer structures of continued spiritual formation, accountability and mutual support.

Commissioned Minister – is a credentialed minister whose call is to a specific ministry in a particular congregational setting. The commissioning credential is valid in one congregation and in one district. Commissioning is not transferable from one congregation to another and not transferable across districts.

Credentialed Ministry – the designation of those leaders who demonstrate particular gifts and abilities for ministry are called forth from the priesthood of all believers into set-apart ministry and are granted either a Commissioned Minister credential or an Ordained Minister credential by a District Board.

Council Of District Executives – is an association comprised of the executives of the denomination’s districts that meets twice each year to participate in mutual ministry discussion and explore the various voices of district and agency life, leadership, and ministries.

District Ministry Commission – is the district group responsible for calling and credentialing ministerial leadership. This group should be made up of carefully selected people who are trained in their responsibilities and in these calling and credentialing processes. It is also referred to as “calling and credentialing team.”

Licensed Minister – is a restricted and limited recognition for leaders in the midst of their ongoing discernment, training, and preparation for commissioned or ordained ministry.

Ministry Advisory Council – is an advisory group created by and reportable to Annual Conference for facilitating effective ministerial leadership in the Church of the Brethren. The Council is comprised of representatives from the Church of the Brethren Office of Ministry and General Secretary, Bethany Theological Seminary, the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, the Council of District Executives, and the Brethren Higher Education Association.

Ordained minister – A credentialed minister whose call is to a broad ministry that may span multiple congregations or ministry settings over the course of their lives of service. The ordination credential is valid across the denomination and transferable across districts.

Spiritual Friend - a kind of formative relationship similar to spiritual direction, “typically more mutual and equal than other forms of guidance and has as its end shared encouragement in the love of God,” (Beasley-Topliffe, ed., *The Upper Room Dictionary of Spiritual Formation*, Upper Room, 2003).

II. ETHICS IN MINISTRY RELATIONS²

A. 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,³ 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.⁴

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.

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 adopted it. 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.

² 2008 Minutes (2005-2008), “Update to Ministerial Ethics,” 1205-1231. This paper replaces the 1996 “Ethics in Ministry Relations” paper and all previous ethics papers. It also replaces the former “Discipleship and Reconciliation” polity in terms of holding ministers accountable for ethical behavior. See 2002 Minutes (2000-2004), 729: “The Ethics papers serve a discipline function in the church that may have been formerly carried by the Discipleship and Reconciliation Committee.” The Discipleship and Reconciliation polity approved in 1976 and amended in 1977 was replaced by “the Shalom Team Model” for responding to conflicts in congregations and the wider church. See 2002 Minutes (2000-2004), “Update Discipleship and Reconciliation Polity,” 726-735. The Shalom Team polity can be found in chapter 3 of this manual.

³ 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.

⁴ 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. The Discipleship and Reconciliation polity was replaced by “the Shalom Team Model” in 2002 – see note 2 above.

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...

- B. A Theology of Ministerial Ethics
- C. Code of Ethics for Ministerial Leadership⁵
- D. Process for Dealing with Complaints of Ethical Misconduct
- E. Additional Recommendations
- F. 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.

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,

⁵ 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.

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.

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

B. A THEOLOGY OF MINISTERIAL ETHICS

1. 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, including 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.

2. 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).

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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 (1 Thess. 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.⁶

C. 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:

1. 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.

2. 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. However, when an individual is a danger to self or others, I will take appropriate action, even when this breaks confidentiality.

⁶ 2014 Minutes, “Congregational Ethics Polity,” 256-275. This polity is also found in chapter 4 of this manual.

- 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 proselytize⁷ 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. I will only perform ministerial services, such as weddings, funerals, baptisms, anointing, pastoral counseling, and critical pastoral care at the request of the current pastor.⁸
- q. Whenever serving in a category of ministerial leadership other than pastoral or congregational ministry (i.e., chaplain, professor, denominational leader, retired, etc.), 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.

3. Integrity of the Ministerial Relationship (Fiduciary Responsibility)⁹

- 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.¹⁰
- 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.
- 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

⁷ See Glossary of Terms.

⁸ See Guidelines Ministerial Service and Membership in a Former Parish, Office of Ministry, 2000.

⁹ See Glossary of Terms.

¹⁰ See Glossary of Terms.

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.

D. 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 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 E. "Additional Recommendations.")

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 E. "Additional Recommendations.")

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. However, it is difficult and sometimes impossible 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.

1. Roles and Responsibilities

a. 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.

b. The District Board¹¹

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

¹¹ See Glossary of Terms.

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.

c. The Ministry Commission¹²

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.

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.

d. 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 cause¹³ 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 him/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.

e. 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.

¹² See Glossary of Terms.

¹³ See Glossary of Terms.

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, monitoring 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 him/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.

f. 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 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.

g. 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.

2. Using the Process

a. 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 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 email 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.

b. 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 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.

3. 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 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.

a. 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.

b. 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.

c. 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.

d. 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.

e. 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.

4. [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.

a. 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:

- 1) Gathering and introduction of participants.
- 2) Invoking God's presence through scripture and prayer. Romans 12:1-3 is suggested.
- 3) Explanation of purpose and process for the meeting.
- 4) Reading of the complaint.
- 5) Presentation of information and statements from individuals supporting the complaint.
- 6) Presentation of information and statements from individuals refuting the complaint.
- 7) Time for silent reflection.
- 8) Time for ethics committee to ask questions for clarification.
- 9) Opportunity for those making the complaint to respond.
- 10) Opportunity for those refuting the complaint to respond.
- 11) Time for silent reflection.
- 12) Time for ethics committee to ask questions for clarification.
- 13) Closing comments by those making the complaint.
- 14) Closing comments by those refuting the complaint.
- 15) 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.
- 16) Executive session of the ethics committee. Deliberations and discussions are informal and not recorded or transcribed, with careful consideration given to the material presented. However, the committee's findings and recommendations must be put into writing.

b. 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 . . .

- 1) 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.

2) Exoneration, but with censure for poor judgment.

3) 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.¹⁴ 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:

- a) Substantiation of charges with warning. Care should be given for outlining steps for appropriate counseling, mentoring, or restorative action.
- b) 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.

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

- (1) Personal counseling/therapy by a professional approved by the committee or chosen by the minister from a referral list provided by the committee.
 - (2) Voluntarily leaving ministerial service.
 - (3) Payment or reimbursement of all or part of the costs of counseling/therapy for the aggrieved for a specified time period.
 - (4) Career evaluation.
 - (5) Early retirement.
 - (6) Relevant educational experiences.
 - (7) Peer support and supervision.
 - (8) Leave of absence.
 - (9) Other appropriate directives.
 - (10) 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.
- c) 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.
 - d) 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.

c. Follow-up with the Accused

The ethics committee is responsible for follow-up with the accused. Follow-up should include

¹⁴ See Glossary of Terms.

appropriate care and support of the minister and his/her family including opportunities for healing, reconciliation, and restoration into the body of Christ.

d. 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.

e. 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.

5. Concluding Matters

a. 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 Discipleship Ministries, following denominational guidelines.

b. 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 Director of Ministry. Other than the district executive/minister, no participants in the proceedings may make any of the written records available to others.

c. Sharing Information

For purposes of placement, the 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 Director of Ministry.

d. 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 after being informed of the final district action, which shall take place after every means of resolution or reconsideration by the district have been exhausted. The means to be utilized include, but are not limited to, reconsideration of the matter by the district board and submission of the issue to a district shalom team or other reconciliation workers. This is consistent with our historic understanding of Matthew 18:15-20, which calls us to take matters first to the parties involved in a disagreement or conflict before bringing it to the church as a whole.¹⁵ 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 may hear such appeals received at least 60 days prior to its next regularly scheduled meeting. If the appeal is received less than 60 days prior, it may be postponed to 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 and conducted fairly by the ethics committee or district board.¹⁶

E. ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To Annual Conference Delegates:

- a. 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.
- b. 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.

2. To Individuals and Congregations:

¹⁵ The Standing Committee Appeal Process requires that a party dissatisfied with a ministerial ethics decision must first seek assistance from the district's Shalom Team or any other means of reconciliation or reconsideration within the district before submitting an appeal. Standing Committee's Appeal Process states: "Before submitting an appeal, the dissatisfied party shall have exhausted every means of resolution or reconsideration by the district or denominational entity that made the decision. Unless and until such initiatives are demonstrated to have been pursued in good faith, access to this Standing Committee Appeal Process will be regarded as premature. The means to be utilized include, but are not limited to, submission of the issue to a district Shalom Team or other reconciliation workers and/or reconsideration of the matter by the district board or denominational entity. This is consistent with our historic understanding of Matthew 18:15-20, which calls us to take matters first to the parties involved in a disagreement or conflict before bringing it to the church as a whole" (Standing Committee Appeal Process, rev. July 2019). *Note: The addition of this footnote does not signify a change to this polity. Rather, it is a clarification to this polity based on other polity – see chapter 1 of this polity manual, section III.A.2.a.3), which identifies Standing Committee as the judicial body of the Church of the Brethren and thereby authorizes Standing Committee to establish and enforce the policies that govern the appeal process.*

¹⁶ 2022 Minutes, "Amendments to the 'Appeal' Section of the 'Ethics in Ministry Relations' Polity," 254-256.

- a. 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.
- b. That local church bodies charged with pastoral relations become familiar with this paper.
- c. That congregations take measures to ensure a smooth transition when there is a change of pastors.
- d. 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.
- e. 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.

3. To Ministerial Leaders:

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

4. To Districts:

- a. That credentialing committees become familiar with this paper.
- b. That candidates for ministry and ordained ministers coming from other denominations be required to study and affirm the Code of Ethics.
- c. 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.
- d. That districts provide training in ministerial ethics at least once every five years, within the ordination renewal period.¹⁷
- e. 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.
- f. That district ministry commissions and ethics committees be provided adequate financial and personnel resources.
- g. 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.

5. To the Council of District Executives:

- a. That the council encourages districts to follow the procedures in this paper in order to provide consistency throughout the denomination.

¹⁷ Districts should also note the recommendations made in the ninth and tenth paragraphs of Section D. "Process for Dealing with Complaints of Ministerial Misconduct" (a) that each district should provide clarity about its states' laws within the district relative to reporting child abuse and abuse of vulnerable adults, and (b) that districts should clearly state and publicize to congregations and individuals in the district information about procedures for making a complaint and about how the district will respond.

- b. 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.

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

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

7. To the Ministry Office of the Church of the Brethren:

- a. 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.
- b. 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.
- c. 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.

F. 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 difficult 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.