

GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH CONGREGATIONAL CONCERNS

The following guidelines are written congruent with COM Policy 5.402 and are offered to provide assistance and suggested best practices in handling problems within the Presbytery.

I. CONCERNS FROM PARISHIONERS

A. GUIDELINES FOR CHURCH MEMBERS

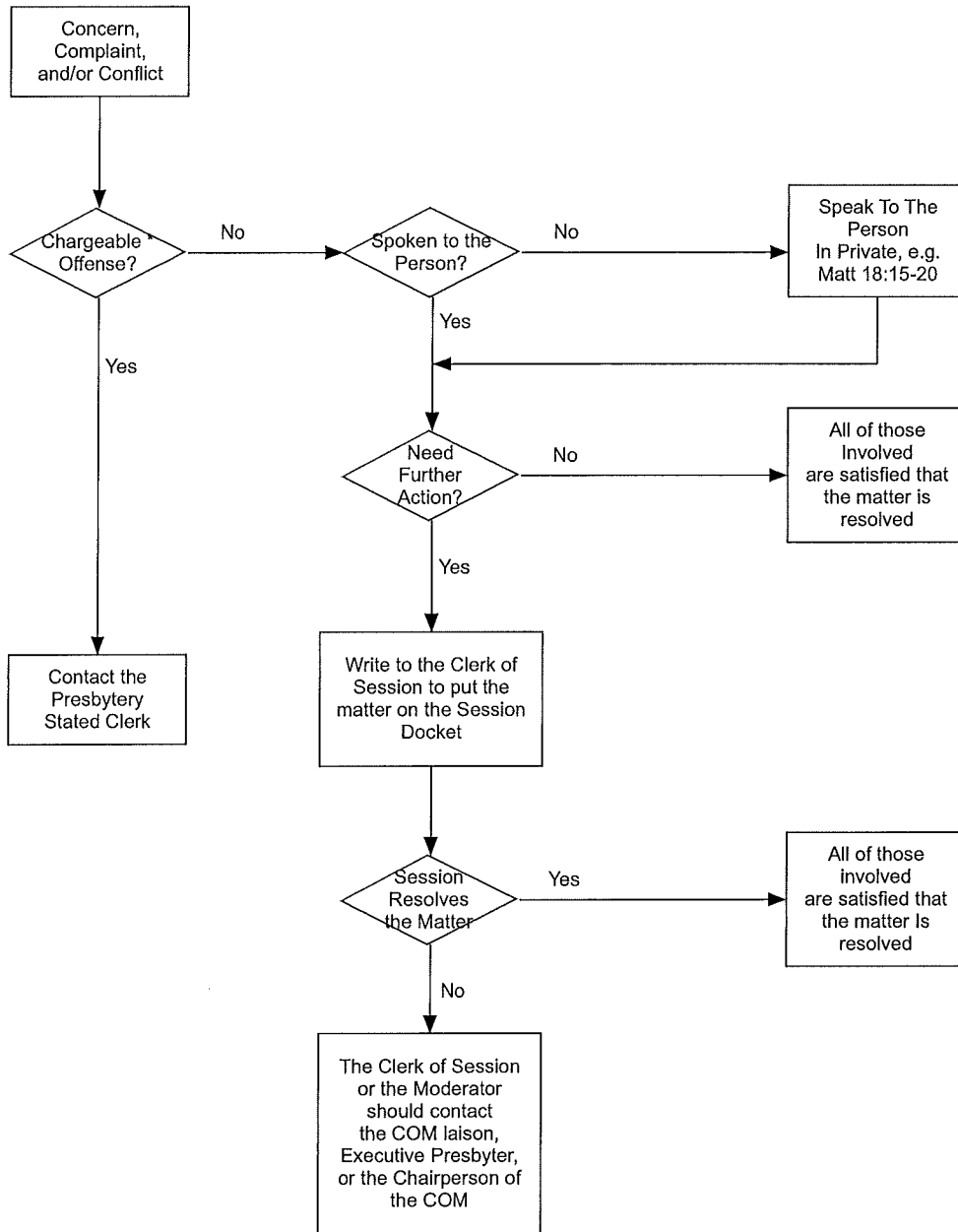
Church members/congregations with concerns, complaints, and/or conflicts should begin by utilizing the flow chart on the following page. If resolution is not reached at the congregation level, follow the steps illustrated in the flow chart. If the conflict/crisis is considered a chargeable offense, contact the Stated Clerk.

B. GUIDELINES FOR COM (If a non-chargeable offense)

1. Confirm congregational use of flow chart.
2. Listen actively and compassionately. (Take notes; do so with their knowledge.) Ask questions that narrow the focus: What is the specific concern? What problem-solving approaches have already been used? Get updates of each step.
3. Request documentation from Clerk of Session including a copy of the written concern:
 - a. Letters
 - b. E-mails
 - c. Minutes
 - d. Other information
4. Talk to the Moderator of Session.
5. Determine the level of conflict using the Conflict Intensity Chart (Go to the Presbytery website – www.presbyinw.org , highlight Resources, click on COM Resources, click on Reconciliation Resources)
6. Meet with the Reconciliation Team for discernment, mediation and/or COR involvement.
7. Carry out action from Reconciliation Team.
8. Regularly report actions back to Reconciliation Team and/or COM to follow up with appropriate bodies as needed.

Attending to concerns, complaints, and/or conflicts in a church setting are particularly difficult. We hope our faith community will be a place of shalom. In the course of human relationships, we encounter difference of opinion, understanding, and belief. Furthermore, we are imperfect in living out the love of God and actions and behaviors toward one another can create hurt and/or cross the boundaries of right and appropriate behavior. When we have these concerns, complaints and/or conflicts within our church the goal of safe community of faith that is a place of shalom may be lost. However, concerns, complaints and/or conflicts may have different intensity levels. Church members, church leadership and presbytery committees that interact with these concerns, complaints and/or conflicts may recognize that the level of intensity should be considered in addressing the concerns, complaints and/or conflicts that arise. A useful tool to help in this assessment is “The Conflict Intensity Chart-A Resource for Committees on Ministry-Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” 2002. (Go to the Presbytery website – www.presbyinw.org, highlight Resources, click on COM Resources, click on Reconciliation Resources – or call the Presbytery office for a hard copy (509) 924-4148.

Congregational Level Flowchart of the Process to Resolve Concerns, Complaints, and/or Conflicts



* Book of Order, D-2.0203: "An Offense is any act or omission by a member of the church that is contrary to the Constitution of the PC(USA)"

II. DIVORCING CLERGY

A. INTRODUCTION

The COM recognizes that divorce is always a traumatic experience. It is the breaking of a covenant that started with hope and high expectations. For clergy serving congregations there is trauma for the clergy, for the spouse and family, and also for the congregation. Therefore these procedures should be followed as a way of helping with the trauma and of being pastorally concerned for the clergy, the spouse and family, and the congregation.

B. GUIDELINES

1. When a member of the clergy of this Presbytery is seriously considering the possibility of divorce, he or she should communicate this fact to the COM, either directly to the chairperson of the commission, the Presbytery Executive, or through the COM liaison, prior to any announcement to the session or to others.
2. If counseling has not occurred and before any public announcement of this contemplated action, the clergy and spouse, if the spouse is willing, should undergo marriage counseling at the Presbytery's expense. This counseling is to evaluate whether any other possibilities for reconciliation exist, and if so, to determine future directions. The results of this evaluation should be shared with the chairperson of COM.
3. If all parties are satisfied that reconciliation is not possible or that divorce is the best solution to the existing problems, the clergy should notify the session of the church he or she is serving as to what is contemplated. For the purpose of asking questions, expressing feelings, and clearing the air, there should be time allowed for the session to meet with the COM representative while the clergy is absent. Ordinarily no decisions regarding the clergy's future should be made at that meeting. However, the clergy and the session shall decide at that meeting the timing and form for notifying the congregation of what is contemplated. The COM person should report to the session that counseling was provided and paid for by the Presbytery, if relevant.
4. The COM should offer to appoint a representative to be a contact/support person for the spouse and family. In addition to being supportive, this person should be responsible for advising the spouse of any rights regarding pension and/or health benefits.
5. The COM should offer to appoint a support person for the divorcing clergy. In addition to being supportive, this person should be responsible for advising the clergy of any rights regarding pension and/or health benefits.
6. The COM should alert the Board of Pensions liaison to assist the pastor, session and congregation.
7. The COM liaison should be available to the session to answer questions, to listen and to be supportive.

III. HEALTH PROBLEMS-PHYSICAL AND MENTAL

A. PHYSICAL

1. INTRODUCTION

Disability, rehabilitation, and confidentiality are several concerns to be considered when a pastor is ill. These are:

- a. short-term illness when, after hospitalization, there is sure and steady recovery and no more than a month or two before return to normal duties.
- b. long-term and chronic problems such as a severe accident or stroke when the recovery time is related to severity and other factors.
- c. severe, sometimes fatal, illness such as cancer that has one in and out of treatment with periods of remission.
- d. illness known by the pastor but hidden from the congregation, such as early-stage degenerative diseases.
- e. illness known by the pastor but suspected by the congregation, such as some mental illnesses or Alzheimer's but beginning to affect the performance of the pastor.
- f. other physical conditions that may affect the performance of the pastor.

2. GUIDELINES

- a. The involvement of the COM, the session, and the congregation with the pastor.

- i. For the shorter term COM liaison or other appointed representative should be available for counsel and to help provide for pulpit supply and other needed ministerial services including finding a temporary pastor if needed.

- ii. Together, all parties need to work out a sensitive plan for the return to ministry of the pastor at a level that will be acceptable to the congregation and the pastor. Decision about the wisdom of continuation of ministry should be made in consultation with all parties.

- b. Revelation to the congregation.

The pastor, COM and session need to create a plan to be as candid as possible with the congregation.

- c. The COM should alert the Board of Pensions liaison to assist the pastor, session, and congregation.

- d. The COM should intervene at any time the pastor or church cannot continue to function because of a pastor's health problem.

B. MENTAL

1. INTRODUCTION

Clergy have historically relied on their own resources and that of their spouses when facing severe stress or mental illness and have tried to hide their need for help for fear of misunderstandings in the congregation. COM strongly encourages clergy to utilize the services of qualified mental health professionals as early as needed. The COM stands ready to assist and to be an advocate for any clergy, interpreting their need of mental health services to sessions or other groups. All clergy are encouraged to approach either the Chairperson of the COM or the Executive Presbyter for any needed confidential help.

2. GUIDELINES

a. The COM has responsibilities to the pastor, the session, the congregation, and the Presbytery. They should be informed as soon as possible so that COM can exercise pastoral care to them.

b. The pastor and the COM should be discreetly candid with the session and congregation.

c. It is desirable that there be frequent contact with the therapist or counselor after a signed release is secured, particularly if the pastor is treated on an in-patient basis.

d. The course of treatment (diagnosis, length of inpatient treatment, prognosis, etc) may be considered as the congregation decides how best to assist the pastor and address the ministry needs of their congregation. The COM should take part in the decision regarding temporary staffing.

e. Disabling diagnosed mental illness may require dissolution of the pastor church relationship. In such an instance, the pastor, congregation and others involved will be encouraged to reach as amicable a dissolution as possible. Concern for the health of both the congregation, and its members, and the pastor, and any family involved, will guide COM action and support during this time.

f. The COM should intervene at any time the pastor or church cannot continue to function because of a pastor's mental problem.

C. ADDICTIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

When a pastor is involved in addictive behavior it is often a double problem, both mental and physical.

2. GUIDELINES

Since it is often best to treat the illness part of the addiction first, guidelines dealing with illness should apply.

If the congregation is viewed as an extended family, the people, when given discretionary but good information, can be a part of the recovery program with their support, encouragement and prayers.

IV. DEATH OF A MINISTER IN ACTIVE SERVICE

A. INTRODUCTION

In the event of a death of a minister in active service, the following procedures should be followed:

B. GUIDELINES

The Executive Presbyter should:

1. Immediately visit the family and offer the full assistance of the Presbytery.
2. See that the Board of Pensions is notified and the Board of Pensions liaison. Ensure that there is an advocate for the family with the Board of Pensions.
3. Assure that the pulpit will be filled. Ordinarily the Executive Presbyter should lead worship in the deceased pastor's church on the Sunday following the death.
4. Ensure that COM, or its representatives, will help session secure pastoral services for the congregation and offer pastoral care as needed.
5. See that the Presbytery is represented at any memorial service and offer his or her assistance to the family in planning any service.

The Stated Clerk should:

See that members of Presbytery are notified of the death and time and place of any memorial services.

The Chairperson of COM should:

Marshal the resources of the COM to assist the congregation during this time of trauma. COM, or its representatives, should help session secure pastoral services for the congregation and offer pastoral care as needed.