

Pastor Administrative Leave Policy

Preamble

As the Book of Order makes clear (G-2.0501-2.0509), a pastor has membership in their presbytery by action of the presbytery itself, which alone can establish, change or dissolve pastoral relationships. In the performance of their ministry, a Minister of Word and Sacrament or Commissioned Pastor is accountable to their presbytery.

It also relates (G-3.0301c) that a presbytery is responsible for nurturing the covenant community of disciples of Christ. In exercising this responsibility, a presbytery is empowered to ordain, receive, dismiss, install, remove and discipline its members who are pastors. It also is empowered to promote the peace and harmony of congregations and to inquire into the sources of congregational discord.

Among the presbytery's responsibilities lodged within its Committee on Ministry is that of "facilitating relations between the presbytery and its congregations, ministers of Word and Sacrament, ruling elders commissioned to pastoral service... and settling difficulties on behalf of the presbytery where possible and expedient" (G-3.0307). In certain circumstances, when the difficulties that have arisen warrant it – in order to promote the welfare of a congregation, or its pastor, or of both parties – providing a way for a pastor to have, for a time, distance from their congregation and relief from all pastoral leadership responsibilities can create the very opportunity the Committee on Ministry needs to engage effectively in a restorative ministry.

The Book of Order in the section titled Church Discipline it specifically gives councils the authority of oversight of its members (D-7-0301). The Presbytery exercises this authority through an Investigative Committee and its Permanent Judicial Commission which will have the authority to place pastors on administrative leave for situations when allegations of sexual abuse have been communicated to their Stated Clerk (D-7.0902). A presbytery's duty to see to the health and welfare of its pastors and congregations (G-3.0303) includes the responsibility to consider establishing policies and procedures to address other difficulties in a manner which is both effective and sensitive to the needs of the parties involved. These difficulties might be about leader burnout, unaddressed conflicts, factions, loss of health, mental health issues, competing visions, differing expectations, anger management challenges, violations of the presbytery's ***Policy on Ethical Standards of Behavior for Teaching Elders and Commissioned Ruling Elders***, or any number of other things that, although they are entirely unrelated to sexual abuse, can generate significant turmoil and relational difficulties sufficient to warrant Committee on Ministry engagement. Sometimes, as the Committee on Ministry seeks to address such turmoil, it realizes that if the church's pastor could step out of their responsibilities for a time—if the pastor could have a period of administrative leave—it would be immediately helpful. A period of administrative leave can provide a pastor, a session, a congregation and a presbytery time, space and opportunity for listening and learning, prayer and discernment, for planning and practice of new ways of behavior by those involved—presbyteries, pastors, congregations, ruling elders—so that difficulties can be resolved. This being so, the Presbytery of Genesee Valley establishes the following Policy on placing a Pastor on Administrative Leave to make it possible for its Committee on Ministry to use this tool to relieve pastors, when it's warranted and appropriate, for defined periods of time from their responsibilities to and involvement with their congregations. This policy applies to all installed and temporary pastoral positions that take place in the bounds of this Presbytery.

Committee on Ministry Responsibilities

A recommendation to relieve a pastor, for a defined period of time, from their pastoral responsibilities and involvements, may be made by the Presbytery's Committee on Ministry. *[Note - Administrative Leave in*

response to accusations of sexual misconduct shall be administered in accordance with The Rules of Discipline in the Book of Order of the PCUSA, the Presbytery's Sexual Misconduct Policy and the laws of the State of New York]

1. The recommendation must be grounded in a conviction that the welfare of the congregation, the pastor, or both warrants and calls for such a step.
2. There must be compelling evidence of the need for the Committee on Ministry to act in order to prevent or mitigate harm to the pastor, the church, or the presbytery, and to provide time and space for the Committee on Ministry, on behalf of the presbytery, to aid in settling difficulties. The evidence might include expressions of concern by the pastor, by colleagues in ministry, by members of the congregation or community; letters or calls of complaint, with allegations clearly articulated; and direct observation of relational conflict by the Session or the Committee on Ministry.
3. Before the Committee on Ministry votes on a recommendation to relieve a pastor from their responsibilities for a time, two Committee on Ministry liaisons of the churches in the assigned Neighborhood Group to which the church is assigned must have consulted with the pastor[s] and the church's session about the potential use of this tool.
4. The Committee on Ministry shall be required to recommend the use of administrative leave and the initial period of leave, which may be up to three months in length.
5. The recommendation of the Committee on Ministry will be received by the Session which must vote by a three-quarter vote to concur to place the pastor[s] on administrative leave.
6. The Committee on Ministry having made the decision to recommend relieving the pastor[s] temporarily of their pastoral responsibilities and congregational involvement and the Session concurring, it shall appoint a Reconciliation Team of three to five members, ordinarily, current members or former members of Committee on Ministry to work with the church's session/ leadership and pastor[s].
7. The Committee on Ministry and the Reconciliation Team should be clear about the expectations for the leave as well as any methodology to be employed for assessment, counseling, and discernment purposes including mental health inventories or financial audits.
8. Once the appointed Reconciliation Team has been briefed about its responsibilities, the Committee on Ministry will communicate with the pastor[s], the church's Session, and introduce the appointed Reconciliation Team to the session and pastor[s], and initiate the administrative leave.
9. The Committee on Ministry shall appoint a temporary Moderator for the Session. It will also appoint an advocate pastor in consultation with the pastor proposed for the administrative leave for the purpose of acting as an advocate and companion to the pastor[s] on administrative leave, seeing to their spiritual well-being and facilitating conversation with the Reconciliation Team and/or Committee on Ministry as necessary. This individual should not be presently serving on the Committee on Ministry or the Reconciliation Team.
10. As appropriate, the Committee on Ministry will inform the Presbytery of the actions it has taken. The language used will be sensitive to both the need for confidentiality, particularly for a personal health crisis, as well as the need for transparency.

Reconciliation Team Responsibilities

The Reconciliation Team shall be responsible for:

1. Meeting with the church's session and pastor to discuss the purpose of the leave and provisions for managing it and the congregation's ministry.
2. Assist Session in communicating with the congregation regarding the necessity for leave.
3. Establish and document:

- a. the terms for the pastor's compensation during the pastor's leave, a congregation will be expected to honor the terms of compensation it has agreed upon for its pastor. Any change to the terms of call, in particular any change in compensation, must be approved by the congregation, pastor and Committee on Ministry.
 - b. the pastor's relationship and communication with the Session and other church staff members.
 - c. the pastor's relationship and communication with the Congregation.
 - d. the time the pastor is on leave.
4. Working with the session to provide preaching, pastoral care and administrative support. The Committee on Ministry may pay for pastoral services during the first three months when the necessity dictates and if funds are available.
 5. Assisting the session in listening and learning, prayer and discernment, for the planning and practice of new ways of behavior by those involved so that difficulties can be resolved.
 6. Determining, with the approval of the Committee on Ministry, if extensions to the initial period are warranted. If it believes they are, it will work with the church's leadership to determine the best and most appropriate way to provide for the pastor's compensation.
 - a. The overall duration of the pastor's leave will depend on the time required for resolution of the difficulties that led to it. The effort will be carried out with all deliberate speed and with awareness of the financial obligations of the congregation and the Presbytery. Any change to the terms of call, in particular any change in compensation, must be approved by the congregation, pastor, and Committee on Ministry.
 7. The Reconciliation Team will be in contact with the Committee on Ministry's Team on Sexual Misconduct Prevention if there is a possible violation to the Presbytery's Sexual Misconduct Prevention Policy which is related to the Administrative Leave of the pastor.

Church/Session Responsibilities

When the Session acts on the recommendation of the Committee on Ministry to relieve the pastor[s] of their responsibilities the session and congregation will be expected to:

1. Continue compensation for the pastor in accordance with the approved Terms of Call through the initial period of administrative leave. It will ordinarily pay for all other pastoral services needed during this time of leave. The Committee on Ministry may assist in paying for pastoral services for the period of the leave if necessity dictates and funds are available.
2. Be in relationship with the Reconciliation Team to work with them concerning appropriate persons to provide pastoral services and to consider carefully its directives and behavioral expectations for the Session and the congregation.
3. Have no contact with the pastor except as the terms of the leave specifically permits.
4. A session's or congregation's violation of the behavioral expectations established by the terms of the leave shall be reported to the Committee on Ministry, and the violation may be considered grounds for the establishment of an Administrative Commission.

Pastor's Responsibilities

When the Session acts to relieve the pastor[s] of their responsibilities and the Committee on Ministry appoints a group to work with the congregation and its leaders, the pastor will be expected to:

1. Be in relationship with the Reconciliation Team and comply with the terms of the leave.
2. Remain out of all church facilities and off of the church's grounds, except for the manse, if applicable.
3. Refuse to initiate or have contact with any member of the church or its staff, except for a person designated specifically by the Reconciliation Team to deliver mail or messages.

4. Refuse to conduct corporate worship or to engage in any form of pastoral activity (exceptions for extraordinary cases can be arranged in consultation with the Reconciliation Team).
5. Not attend or participate in any meetings or activities of the church.
6. Be in relationship with the pastor assigned as an advocate for support of their needs.

A pastor's violation of the behavioral expectations established by the terms of the leave shall be reported to the Committee on Ministry, and the violation may be considered grounds for initiation of a formal disciplinary process, in accordance with The Rules of Discipline in the Book of Order.

Endnotes

1. All references to pastoral leader in this policy should be understood to include Ministers of Word and Sacrament and/or Commissioned Pastor whether installed or in a temporary pastoral relationship.
2. Administrative Leave in response to accusations of sexual misconduct shall be administered in accordance with the Rules of Discipline in the Book of Order and the Presbytery's Sexual Ethics Prevention Policy.
3. This policy is not intended as a disciplinary policy and is not a substitute for disciplinary actions as prescribed by the Book of Order under the Rules of Discipline.
4. The Committee on Ministry Leadership Team is composed of four duly elected representatives of the Committee on Ministry and the Presbytery Leader, Ex Officio.
5. Medical Leave is an entirely different form of leave. *(See the Family and Medical Leave Policy of the Presbytery)*