

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

GUIDE: MINISTRY RELATIONS COMMITTEE

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper is intended to be of assistance to those persons who have been called to serve their congregation as a member of the committee dealing with ministry relations issues. The 1992 polity manual for the Church of the Brethren assigns this role to the executive committee of the church board. However, the assignment may be different in congregations where the plan of organization has been adapted or changed. Whatever the name, the role of such a group is very important. For the purposes of this guide, we will use the term “Ministry Relations Committee.”

II. BASIC TERMINOLOGY

- A. *Polity.* The polity manual, revised by Annual Conference in 1992, defines how congregations, districts, and the General Board relate to one another and to the Annual Conference. This manual is as close as we get to an agreed upon form of government within the Church of the Brethren.
- B. *Practice.* This term refers to the ways in which polity is carried out. For instance, District Executives/Ministers have agreed to a practice for pastoral placement that is in accordance with the established polity.
- C. *Ministerial Leadership.* Within the Church of the Brethren we understand that all baptized believers are ministers of the gospel. Some of those baptized into ministry are called out for ministerial leadership. There are nine areas of service for ministerial leaders, but this paper will focus on one—pastoral ministry. Below are some of the categories and common terminology that are used for those called to pastoral roles.
 - 1. *Self-supporting-Bivocational Minister.* This term indicates the minister has employment beyond the pastoral role. In some areas of the country, the term refers to self-supported ministers who do not receive any compensation for pastoral ministry. However, in most cases, it indicates the person is earning income from two part-time sources, one being ministry.
 - 2. *Pastor.* The Church of the Brethren calls out some within the body of believers to serve congregations as pastors. These ministers, licensed and ordained by the district, have the qualifications to meet the standards for this assignment. The role of pastor includes caring for a congregation through preaching, teaching, visiting,

counseling, and many other tasks, depending on the size and needs of the congregation.

3. *Interim Pastor.* The time period “in-between” after a pastor has gone and before a new pastor arrives is referred to as the interim period. Generally this time is valuable for preparing the seed bed for the next pastorate. An interim pastor is *generally* not a candidate for the permanent position.
 4. *Preacher.* This term is often used in place of *pastor*, probably due to the fact that preaching is so central to the pastoral role. It is unfortunate when that is the only role associated with pastoral ministry.
- D.** *Pulpit Supply.* Each congregation provides vacation and other days off for the pastor when a guest preacher is needed. The District Office will provide a list of people available for pulpit supply.
- E.** *Call.* This term relates to a process used in the Church of the Brethren for selecting those who will serve in ministerial leadership roles. We *call* persons to pastoral ministry. The call is both personal and communal. It is never one or the other; it is always both. There is a common understanding within our polity about how the call will be tested and confirmed. An important aspect of the call is affirmation within the body of believers, by both the congregation and the district.
- F.** *Licensed and Ordained Ministers.* The Church of the Brethren has established two degrees of ministerial leadership: licensed ministry and ordained ministry. Persons called to leadership positions, such as pastor, are expected to fulfill the ministerial standards established by the Annual Conference. The policies for both apply equally to men and women. Each district within the denomination is responsible for licensing and ordaining individuals and for holding these persons accountable.
- G.** *Lay Speaker.* The 1977 Annual Conference created the lay speaker position, and these persons function under a separate set of guidelines and standards as defined in “The Lay Speaker” paper.
- H.** *Sabbatical.* This is the opportunity for three (3) months rest and renewal, with salary and benefits continuing as usual. One of the three (3) months is taken as regular vacation. The denominational guidelines for pastors encourage a sabbatical be taken every seven (7) years.
- I.** *Non-Brethren Pastors.* This term is used to differentiate ministers who are licensed or ordained within the Church of the Brethren from those who are not. Non-Brethren pastors may be serving a congregation by special permission of a District Ministry Commission, for a specific circumstance. It is important to note that a congregation who employs a pastor without following the accepted procedures of the district are at greater risk in the event of a liability suit.

III. EXPECTATIONS OF THE MINISTRY RELATIONS COMMITTEE

- A. Meet with the pastor quarterly, or more often as needed, in an advisory capacity and serve in maintaining good ministerial relations with the congregation.
- B. Serve as the core group when a search committee is appointed for selecting a new pastor.
- C. Review annually the terms of employment for the pastor(s). When terms have been mutually accepted, they should be included in a written renewal agreement between the church and pastor.
- D. Define clearly and review periodically the division of responsibility and lines of authority when there is multiple staff.
- E. Consult with the pastor regarding vacations, professional growth, and in-service training opportunities.
- F. Recruit capable men and women for ministerial leadership. Give them encouragement and guidance during their training, and make recommendations to the congregation and district regarding licensing and ordination.
- G. Arrange for pulpit supply and other ministerial services during the absence of the pastor.
- H. Consult with the pastor regarding requests from outside groups or individuals for special appeals, programs, or services.
- I. Assist the pastor in coordinating and giving balance to the various program aspects within the congregation's organizational structure.
- J. Encourage the pastor to adhere to self-care practices regarding work schedule, family time, and personal time.
- K. This committee shall be responsible and accountable to the church board.

IV. WHAT TO DO IF . . .

A. *Someone comes to you with a complaint related to the pastor.*

Be prepared! Critique can be very helpful, but not if it comes as a blind-sided attack. Do not accept complaints out of context! Anonymous complaints form triangles of unhealthy relationships and a church full of triangles cannot move without cracking!

Make it known to the congregation that critical comments about the pastor must always have a context of *who, what, when, where*. Be sure to record the complaint in writing so you quote it correctly.

B. *The pastor is gone for an extended period of time.*

The Deacons or another caregiver group in the congregation should be available and on call for emergency. A cooperative arrangement with a neighboring pastor from a different

denomination can be helpful during Annual Conference. The District Office will supply a list of people available for pulpit supply.

C. *It is time to negotiate salary and benefits.*

If the policy of the congregation is to follow the salary plan suggested by the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee, be sure you have the latest copy. The committee reports its recommendations to the Annual Conference, and each District Office mails it out to each congregation shortly thereafter. If the recommended salary plan is not possible, or has been adapted, consult with the District Executive/Minister.

Prior to any recommendations to the church board, meet with the pastor to go over the details and ask for comments.

D. *A conflict occurs between the pastor and members of the congregation.*

If the executive committee is unable in an objective and timely fashion to confront the situation and persons involved, contact the District Executive/Minister and request assistance. The district Discipleship and Reconciliation Committee is trained and willing to provide this kind of ministry.

E. *The pastor resigns or retires.*

In most cases, the District Executive/Minister will be consulted well in advance of a resignation; however, if not, let him/her know immediately. An important role of the district is to assist with pastoral transitions, both going and coming. An important rule is that the congregation should never be blind-sided on Sunday morning with the announcement of a resignation. It is wise to send the pastor's letter and a letter from the executive committee in the same envelope to members and friends in the middle of the week prior to the announcement. Give everyone the opportunity to digest the news before Sunday morning worship. Your District Executive/Minister can give you helpful suggestions to include in the letters.

F. *Someone reports unethical conduct of the pastor.*

In 1996, Annual Conference adopted a revision of the 1992 paper on ministerial ethics. The revised paper describes clear expectations for ethical conduct for all licensed and ordained ministers and lay speakers, with procedures for reporting violations of those standards. Each minister and congregation should have copies of the paper and be familiar with the contents. When a report of a violation is received, the first step is to contact the District Executive/Minister.

G. *Someone reports unethical conduct within the congregation.*

In 1996, Annual Conference adopted a paper on congregational ethics. This paper describes clear expectations for a congregation's conduct in relationship to the larger church, the community in which the congregation lives, members of the congregation, the pastor, and staff. There are steps of accountability included within the paper, with the first one being a report to the District Executive/Minister when there is a perceived or reported violation.

V. THE ROLES OF EMPLOYER / EMPLOYEE

A. Internal Revenue Service

1. Pastors are in a confusing position regarding the Internal Revenue Service of the federal government. With respect to **Social Security**, they are considered self-employed and are required to pay the employer and employee portion of their salary and benefits to FICA. In every other way they are considered employees of the congregation they serve. Even though the label “self-employed” is given to the pastor for tax purposes, it is important for the executive committee to be a good employer.
2. A second issue that is different from most employment situations is the **housing allowance** for pastors and other ordained ministers. This benefit has typically been given to those professions in our culture where moving was expected to happen. Today, the military and the ministry professions are still eligible for the housing allowance. The housing allowance is included when calculating payments to Social Security; however, it is not included when calculating income tax. It is important that the pastor and the ministry commission understand these differences and be ready to clarify misunderstandings within the congregation.

B. An important role of the executive committee is to be the advocate for the pastor’s employment package by . . .

1. Providing a position description that is clear and fair, including specific expectations of the job;
2. Providing regular opportunities for listening to the pastor’s joys and concerns;
3. Being aware of the work load and stresses and finding ways of being supportive;
4. Holding the pastor accountable to reasonable work schedules;
5. Providing adequate salary and benefits, including health insurance;
6. Providing the employer’s portion of retirement contribution;
7. Initiating a ministry assessment of the congregation, including a performance review of the pastor, on an annual basis. Consult with the District Executive/Minister about doing a major congregation/pastoral assessment every three (3) years.

Resources:

Annual Conference 1977, “The Lay Speaker”

Annual Conference 1992, “Manual of Organization and Polity”

Annual Conference 1996, “Ethics in Ministry Relations”

Annual Conference 1996, “Ethics for Congregations in the Church of the Brethren”

Annual Conference 1999, “Ministerial Leadership”

Office of Ministry (revised annually), “Guidelines for Pastors’ Salaries and Benefits”

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