

Committee on Ministry Handbook Updates Rational

Last year, it became clear to the COM that our Handbook, while comprehensive, was out of date with current practices in some areas. This began a year-long intensive review of the Handbook by the Training and Resources Subcommittee, which went through the entire Handbook, page-by-page. This was done with the help of the now former Lead Presbyter for Transformation. There are several changes being recommended to Presbytery for approval. This rational will not address all these changes. Rather, it will address the more significant changes to the Handbook that are being proposed. Several of the changes to the Handbook update the language of the Handbook to the current language being used within the COM, PGR, and PCUSA. There are several additions to the Handbook that represent changes to the operations of COM that have been over the last several years but have not been reflected in the Handbook. This rational will not address all these changes. Rather, it will address the more significant changes to the Handbook that are being proposed. What follows are those changes we feel that Presbytery should be made aware of before voting on these changes.

- Item #1: The Handbook is now divided into three parts: Definitions, Procedures, and Forms. Procedures are further divided into mandates and best practices. Best Practices are easily identifiable by the Bolded letters in red followed by a text box. Best Practices are commended for your use but are not required. For instance, you do not have to ask the questions listed in the Best Practice box for the exit interview. You might find multiple questions for an exit interview listed in the Handbook. You can even develop your own exit interview questions as desired and appropriate. The exit interview questions listed in the Best Practices box represent the hard work and wisdom of our COM predecessors. It is worth noting that, while it is not required that you ask the specific questions listed in the Best Practices box for the exit interview, an exit interview is still required. What is not labeled as Best Practices should be treated as a mandate as indicated by the language: shall, should, may, etc.
- Item #2: It is recommended that Commissioned Ruling Elders, hereafter referred to as Commissioned Pastors or CP's, be allowed to serve their home congregation with the approval of 2/3rds of the Presbytery at a Presbytery meeting. We are recommending this change to be more flexible and responsive to our smaller and more rural congregations within our Presbytery. We also do not have a large number of CP's to choose from within our Presbytery. Allowing a member of a congregation to complete the CP program and then serve their home congregation would allow us to be more responsive to congregations that desire a CP. Having the 2/3rd's approval by Presbytery recognizes that this should not be the norm going forward and must be done with all due diligence and forethought.
- Item #3: It is recommended that we remove the exemption that allows congregations with CP's to pay their CP less than the Minimum Terms of Call with approval. This same exemption is not present for Ministers of Word and Sacrament. The Book of Order speaks of parity between MWS and CP's. Further, we believe that this defeats the purpose of setting a Minimum Terms of Call if any congregation can simply obtain an exemption. Then, what is the point of having a minimum? Finally, and most importantly, a congregation should pay their staff fairly for the work that they are

doing. If a congregation cannot afford a pastor at full-time, then that pastor should not be expected to work full time.

- Item #4: The Transitions Subcommittee of COM updated and clarified the process for the orderly transfer of clergy from other denominations. This procedure is outlined in greater detail in the Handbook and is in-line with the Book of Order.
- Item #5: A point of clarification: we removed the debt assistance section from the Handbook. This does not mean that those funds are not available. However, we felt that this section did not belong in the COM handbook as the Board of Pensions is constantly updating their debt assistance programs and they will have the more up-to-date information.
- Item #6: We updated the Pastoral Ethics policy to allow ministers and CP's to attend boundary training provided by an accredited agency or denomination on a yearly basis. This is to be more flexible and all more people the opportunity to complete this requirement if they cannot attend the November meeting of Presbytery.
- Item #7: It is important to note that Illinois statutes name clergy as mandate reporters for known or suspected instances of child abuse or neglect. This is a requirement for Commissioned Pastors, Elders, and Deacons as well, even if you are not currently in active service. This is reflected in the handbook.

Finally, once these changes have been approved, the COM Subcommittee on Training and Resources will work with the PGR office staff to update the forms and website so that all this information will be clearly marked and consistent.