

Administrative Leave Policy
Presbytery of Long Island
Presbytery Review on 9/21/24

As indicated in the Book of Order (G-2.0502), 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 ministry, a Minister of Word and Sacrament, Commissioned Ruling Elder, or those serving in a temporary pastoral relationship is accountable to the presbytery.

The 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. It also is empowered to promote the peace and harmony of congregations and to inquire into the sources of congregational discord. (G-3.0301c)

A presbytery's duty to see to the health and welfare of its pastors and congregations (G-3.0106) includes the responsibility to consider establishing policies and procedures to address other difficulties in a manner that is both effective and sensitive to the needs of the parties involved. These difficulties may involve but are not limited to: leader burnout, unaddressed conflicts, factions, loss of health, mental health issues, competing visions, differing expectations, anger management challenges, or any number of other events that, outside of the context of sexual misconduct or abuse, can generate significant turmoil and relational difficulties sufficient to warrant Committee on Ministry engagement.

The Presbytery of Long Island lodges within its Committee on Ministry (COM) responsibilities related to facilitating "relations between the presbytery and its congregations, ministers of Word and Sacrament (MWS), commissioned pastors" (called Commissioned Ruling Elders, or CREs), and all serving in temporary pastoral relationships, as well as 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 COM needs to engage effectively in a restorative ministry.

Sometimes, as the Committee on Ministry (COM) seeks to address such turmoil, it realizes that if the church's pastor is relieved of their responsibilities for a time – warranting a period of administrative leave – it would be immediately helpful. This 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 including but not limited to: presbyteries, pastors, congregations, ruling elders – so that situations can be resolved.

The Presbytery of Long Island establishes this policy on administrative leave to make it possible for the COM to use this tool to relieve pastors from their responsibilities and involvement with a congregation when it is warranted and appropriate for defined periods of time. (D-7.0902) This policy applies to all installed and temporary pastoral relationships that take place within the bounds of this presbytery. Any situation involving inquirers and candidates under care of the presbytery is under the jurisdiction of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry. This policy does not prevent or interfere with the initiation of disciplinary process if a written statement alleging an offense (any act or omission by a member of a congregation or a minister of the Word and Sacrament that is contrary to the Scriptures or the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)) is submitted to the clerk of session or stated clerk of the presbytery by any member of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). (D-7.01-702)

Administrative Leave in response to accusations of sexual misconduct shall be administered in accordance with the Book of Order, the presbytery's Sexual Misconduct Policy, and the laws of the State of New York.

If a leave is determined for any purpose (other than that which is addressed through sexual misconduct policy), the Minister of the Word and Sacrament shall not perform any pastoral, administrative, educational, or supervisory duties, and shall not officiate at any functions such as the administration of sacraments, funerals, or weddings. The effect of administrative leave for a Minister of Word and Sacrament in a validated ministry beyond the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is the suspension of the validation of the ministry until the matter is resolved, which shall be communicated to the employer by the stated clerk of the presbytery. (D-7.0903)

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 COM.

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 COM 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 COM, on behalf of the presbytery, to aid in settling difficulties. The evidence might include expressions of concern by the pastor, by colleagues in ministry, or 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 COM.
3. Before the COM votes on a recommendation to relieve a pastor from their responsibilities for a time, at least two members of COM must have consulted with the pastor and the church's session about the potential use of this tool. Both the pastor and the session must be given an opportunity to be heard by the COM and notice of that opportunity.

4. The COM shall recommend the use of administrative leave and the initial period of leave, which may be up to three months in length; full salary, benefits, and housing shall continue to be paid/provided by the congregation according to the pastor's existing agreement or terms of call.
5. The recommendations of the COM will be received by the session which must vote by a three-quarter vote to concur to place the pastor on administrative leave.
6. The COM having made the decision to recommend relieving the pastor temporarily of their pastoral responsibilities and congregational involvement, and the session concurring, shall promptly appoint a reconciliation team of at least three members (at least one of which shall be a current member of COM) to work with the church's session/leadership and pastor.
7. The COM and reconciliation team shall be clear about the expectations for the leave as well as any methodology to be employed for assessment, counseling, and discernment processes. Those may include, but are not limited to, mental health inventories and financial audits.
8. Once the appointed reconciliation team has been briefed about its responsibilities, the COM will communicate with the pastor and the church's session and introduce the reconciliation team to the session and pastor, and initiate the administrative leave.
9. The COM shall appoint a temporary moderator for the session. No member of COM, of the reconciliation team, or any other person involved in assessments, counseling, or discernment processes may be appointed as the moderator.
10. The COM, in consultation with the pastor, will appoint an advocate pastor for the administrative leave for the purpose of acting as an advocate and companion to the pastor on administrative leave, seeing to their spiritual well-being and facilitating conversation with the reconciliation team and/or COM as necessary. No member of COM, of the reconciliation team, or any other person involved in assessments, counseling, or discernment processes may be appointed as the advocate pastor, unless requested by the pastor on leave and approved by the COM.
11. As appropriate, the COM will inform the presbytery of the actions it has taken. The language used will be sensitive to both the need for confidentiality (particularly regarding personal health) as well as 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 the session in communicating with the congregation regarding the necessity for leave.
3. Establish and document:
 - a. the pastor's relationship and communication with the session and other church staff members;
 - b. the pastor's relationship and communication with the congregation, including the use of social media;
 - c. the time the pastor is on (paid) leave;

- d. the process and expectations of the pastor and session/congregation for the pastor's return to the congregation, as appropriate.
4. Working with the session to provide preaching, pastoral care, and administrative support.
5. Assisting the session in listening, learning, prayer, and discernment for the planning and practice of new ways of behavior by those involved so that difficulties can be resolved.
6. Identifying assessments, counseling, discernment processes, mental health inventories, or financial audits to be required of the pastor and professionals able to provide such assessments.
7. Determining, with the approval of COM, if extensions to the initial period are warranted. If the reconciliation team 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. 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 must be approved by the congregation, pastor, and COM.
8. The reconciliation team will be in contact with the presbytery's Sexual Misconduct Response Team if there is a possible violation of the presbytery's Sexual Misconduct Policy which is related to the administrative leave of the pastor.
9. Any dissolution of the pastoral relationship, whether initiated by the congregation, the pastor, or the presbytery, must be done in accordance with the Book of Order.

Congregation/Session Responsibilities

When the session acts on the recommendation of the COM to relieve the pastor of their responsibilities, the session and congregation will be expected to:

1. Continue compensation, benefits, and housing for the pastor in accordance with the existing 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. (As with any type of leave, the congregation may reach out to the presbytery if it needs short-term assistance with pulpit supply or moderator costs.)
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.

A session's or congregation's violation of the behavioral expectations established by the terms of the leave shall be reported to the COM, 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 of their responsibilities, and the COM 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, including any requirements for assessment, counseling, discernment processes, mental health inventories, or financial audits.
2. Remain out of all church facilities and off the church's grounds, except for the manse, if applicable. If personal items need to be retrieved from church facilities, arrangements must be made through the pastor advocate.
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 COM, and the violation may be considered grounds for initiation of a formal disciplinary process, in accordance with Church Discipline in the Book of Order.

Endnotes

1. All references to pastor or pastoral leader in this policy should be understood to include Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Commissioned Ruling Elders, or any clergy serving in a pastoral relationship, whether installed or temporary.
2. Administrative leave in response to accusations of sexual misconduct shall be administered in accordance with Church Discipline in the Book of Order and the presbytery's Sexual Misconduct 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 Church Discipline.

Resources: Presbytery of Baltimore, Presbytery of Genesee Valley, PCUSA Book of Order