

*The Penn West Conference: Engaging in Covenantal Relationships; Sharing
God's Love with All.*

**A Resolution
On Pastoral Ethics Requirements
For the Associations of the Penn West Conference of the
United Church of Christ**

Submitted by David Ackerman and the Penn West Conference Committee on Ministry

SUMMARY

In the Ordained Minister's Code, authorized ministers are called to ethical standards and growth in ministry (see attached). With these standards in mind, some time ago, the Associations of the Penn West Conference of the United Church of Christ consented to require boundary awareness training for all authorized ministers in order to maintain standing. The expectation was that such training should be completed once each five years and that we would offer it with that frequency. Since then, it has come to our awareness that this frequency may be inadequate. Moreover, it has been noted that training in such developing areas as social media are of increasing importance but have never been addressed in our Conference events in the past. While we have affirmed that the comprehensive "one day" training has been helpful, some pastors have voiced a desire to explore certain areas of the training more deeply than previous events have done.

In addition, the Thirty-first General Synod of the United Church of Christ passed a resolution this year inviting Conferences to require anti-racism training of their authorized ministers as a condition of their standing. It has also been brought to our attention that the importance of a broader "diversity training" event would be beneficial to our Conference.

Finally, it has also come to our awareness that a variety of issues of abuse are rising to epidemic levels in our society. Drug and alcohol abuse have reached record levels, yet our clergy often feel ill-equipped to address the issues confronting them. Moreover, state laws in Pennsylvania regarding child abuse have brought this issue to a new level of awareness in our churches. Clergy are in the unusual position of being mandatory reporters without being required to take training on this, as is the case with most other professionals who work with children. Finally, partner abuse, elder abuse, and suicide/crisis situations are issues that are at the forefront of our society, yet ministers are often not sufficiently prepared to respond to them. All of these things open up our clergy to greater liability and risk if they are not ready to address these situations in professional ways.

As a result of calls for increased boundary awareness training in our Conference, as well as the evident need for training in other important areas of ethics facing authorized ministers in the 21st century, the Penn West Conference proposes the implementation of a pastoral ethics program over the next decade, which will focus on the following aspects of ministry:

2018: Anti-Racism Training (Diversity)

2019: Boundary Awareness Orientation (Boundary Awareness)

- 46 2020: Internet/Social Media Boundaries (Boundary Awareness)
- 47 2021: Substance Abuse: Addiction and Recovery (Continuing Education)
- 48 2022: Ministry with LGBTQ Persons (Diversity)
- 49 2023: Retirement/Departure/Interim Boundaries (Boundary Awareness)
- 50 2024: Child Sexual Abuse/Elder Abuse (Continuing Education)
- 51 2025: Ministering with Persons with Disabilities (Diversity)
- 52 2026: Sexual Ethics/Dual Relationships/Gifts/Finances (Boundary Awareness)
- 53 2027: Domestic Violence, Suicide, and Crisis Response (Continuing Education)

54
55 The plan is to partner with the Penn West Academy for Ministry to offer more than one training
56 event in more than one location on more than one day of the week, in order to provide the
57 greatest possible attendance opportunities for ministers. Authorized ministers need not attend
58 more than one of these events in a given year. Certificates of completion of training will be
59 provided to those who are physically present for it. We want these events to be quality
60 experiences that benefit our pastors and our churches and that use time together as efficiently as
61 possible.

62
63 Boundary Awareness Orientation will be offered one final time for all our pastors in 2019. This
64 will be the last time in PWC that all pastors who have taken Boundary Awareness Orientation
65 will need to do so again. After 2019, Boundary Awareness Orientation will be offered on an
66 annual basis (perhaps ecumenically) for all pastors new to the Conference who have not taken
67 Boundary Awareness Orientation. These pastors must take this before any of the other courses
68 offered in the curriculum. Taking Boundary Awareness Orientation satisfies the Pastoral Ethics
69 Requirement for that year. This would be the only offering that would be exclusively for
70 authorized ministers and Members in Discernment and not for laity.

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72 **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL RATIONALE**

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74 Scripture is filled with calls for leaders to exercise their leadership faithfully. The prophet
75 Ezekiel rails against shepherds who fail to do their work: “As I live, says the Lord God, because
76 my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild animals, since
77 there was no shepherd; and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the
78 shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep; therefore you shepherds, hear the
79 word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God, I am against the shepherds; and I will demand my
80 sheep at their hand, and put a stop to their feeding the sheep; no longer shall the shepherds feed
81 themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, so that they may not be food for them”
82 (Ezekiel 34:7-10). In the Gospel of John Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. The good
83 shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11) and then later says to Peter “Tend my
84 sheep.” (John 21:16). Also, we see in the Epistles numerous calls for faithfulness in leadership.
85 The author of 2 Peter writes, “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will
86 be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions. They will even
87 deny the Master who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves. Even so, many
88 will follow their licentious ways and because of these teachers the way of truth will be maligned.
89 And in their greed they will exploit you with deceptive words” (2 Peter 2:1-3a). Again, James
90 writes, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we
91 who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1). Clearly, the Bible calls those who

92 lead to maintain strong ethical standards, so as not to take advantage of their leadership position
93 in order to harm or abuse those who are entrusted to their care.

94

95 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

96

97 Whereas, scripture and tradition charge those who are called to leadership positions in ministry
98 to high ethical standards of behavior; and

99

100 Whereas there stands a code of ethics and a commitment to growth for those authorized in the
101 United Church of Christ; and

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103 Whereas, changes in society and in church compel authorized ministers in the United Church of
104 Christ to keep current on changes in significant practical issues of ministry in our time; and

105

106 Whereas, clergy cannot afford to rest on training for ministry that occurred years ago and not
107 discern the need for current learning in areas of pastoral ethics, for their own benefit as well as
108 for the benefit of those whom they serve; and

109

110 Whereas, lawsuits emerging from cases of clergy malpractice are a growing threat to the well-
111 being of the church universal and the case for clergy maintaining healthy boundaries and being
112 cognizant of best practices on critical ministry issues is of tantamount importance in our world
113 today; and

114

115 Whereas, the need for ongoing training in the areas of boundary awareness, cultural diversity
116 awareness, and abuse awareness/response is evident to most, if not all, practitioners of ministry
117 today.

118

119 Therefore be it resolved, that the Associations of the Penn West Conference agree to participate
120 in the pastoral ethics program as outlined in the Resolution Summary.

121

122 Be it further resolved that participation in this program will be an annual expectation for all
123 authorized ministers to maintain standing in their respective Associations. If a minister fails to
124 attend a session, that minister shall submit a paper to their Association Committee on Ministry.
125 In the years that the subject involves Boundary Awareness or Diversity training, the paper must
126 be on the subject of focus for that year. Failure to do so within a given calendar year may lead to
127 suspension and/or termination of an authorized minister's standing in the Association.

128

129 Be it further resolved that laypeople are also encouraged to attend these events (with the
130 exception of Boundary Awareness Orientation in 2019), in order to provide as broad of a base of
131 ethical wisdom as possible among the Associations of the Penn West Conference.

132

133 **FUNDING**

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135 Funding for the implementation of this resolution will be provided in consultation with the Penn
136 West Conference Committee on Ministry.

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138 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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140 The Penn West Conference Office will work with the Penn West Academy and Conference
141 Committee on Ministry in order to establish dates, times, locations, and staffing for these events.

142 The hope is that they will occur in the first half of the calendar year. Authorized ministers who
143 fail to attend any of these events will be notified by their Association Committee on Ministry of
144 their need to submit a paper on this subject. The Faith-Trust Institute has resources that
145 ministers may find helpful for such papers. Ministers who have not attended the events or
146 completed a paper should be notified of their need to do this in October, November, and
147 December. After these notifications, authorized ministers who have not submitted a paper may
148 have their standing in their Association suspended and/or terminated.

149

150 In addition, it is hoped that items such as Informational Reviews and Three and Four-Way
151 Covenants will be made available to authorized ministers for their completion at these events.

152

153 **ATTACHMENT: THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST MINISTERIAL CODE**

154

155 I acknowledge as the Church's sole Head, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior, and as kindred in
156 Christ all who share in this confession. I will look to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to
157 the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the
158 world. (Preamble to the UCC Constitution)

159

160 Affirming that I have been called by God to be a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ and granted
161 ministerial standing by the United Church of Christ, I agree to preach and teach the gospel, to
162 administer the sacraments and rites of the Church with integrity, and to exercise pastoral care and
163 leadership in covenant with others.

164

165 Relying on the grace of God, I...

166

167 COVENANT WITH GOD TO:

168

o Lead a life worthy of the calling to which I have been called.

169

o Demonstrate a sincere yearning for connection with the triune God, expressed in prayer,
170 worship, Bible study, retreat, and other spiritual practices.

171

o Affirm the importance of discernment in relationship to my call and, using the Marks of
172 Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers, will continue to discern the nature of my call in
173 community.

174

o Grow in faith, knowledge, and the practice of ministry through intentional continuing
175 education, study, and devotional life.

176

o Cultivate a culture of call by nurturing the gifts of others in the Church and joining their gifts
177 with mine in seasons of change and continuity for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ and the
178 health of the Church.

179

o Honor the diversity of God's creation and work for the unity of the body of Christ (John
180 17:21).

181 o Recognize the communal nature of God, ensuring that ministry does not happen in isolation.

182

183 COVENANT WITH SELF AND FAMILY TO:

184 o Attend to my physical well-being by adopting a healthy life style including diet, exercise, and
185 rest, setting aside time for Sabbath and vacation.

186 o Steward my time, talents, and personal financial resources responsibly.

187 o Accept responsibility for all debts that I incur.

188 o Refrain from abusive behavior including abusive behavior toward others, the abuse of alcohol,
189 drugs, or any other substance; to seek appropriate care for physical and mental health concerns;
190 and to avoid addictive behaviors.

191 o Maintain high moral standards in my sexual behavior.

192 o Honor my family commitments, including my family's need for privacy and time together.

193 o Develop and maintain meaningful personal relationships outside of my ministry setting.

194

195 COVENANT WITH THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST TO:

196 o Actively participate in the covenantal life and work of all settings of the United Church of
197 Christ.

198 o Adhere to all requirements for maintaining ministerial standing as set forth by my Association,
199 and abide by the terms of my call agreements and covenants with energy and vitality.

200 o Seek the counsel of others, including Conference staff and/or the Association Committee on
201 the Ministry, should divisive tensions threaten my relationship with those with whom I minister.

202 o Serve as an ambassador for the United Church of Christ, and participate in activities that
203 strengthen its mission, vision and purpose.

204 o Advocate for fair standards of compensation for all ordained and lay employees of the Church,
205 and honor the search and call process of the United Church of Christ.

206 o Seek to know, understand and respect the diversity of opinions and people within the United
207 Church of Christ, affirming that all settings of the UCC speak to the church and not for it.

208 o Encourage and participate in the evaluation of my ministry, understanding and demonstrating
209 that ministry is of and for the Church as it seeks to advance God's mission in the world.

210

211 COVENANT WITH MY MINISTRY SETTING TO:

212 o Preach and teach the gospel without fear or favor, regarding all persons with equal respect and
213 concern, and undertaking to minister impartially.

214 o Honor all confidences shared with me, telling only those who need to know, what they need to
215 know, when they need to know it.

216 o Steward church funds and property faithfully, while overseeing the administrative tasks of
217 ministry with integrity.

218 o Speak the truth, not using my position, power, or authority to exploit any person nor using my
219 position for unwarranted personal financial gain.

- 220 o Assess with care the implications of accepting gifts from congregation members.
- 221 o Not perform pastoral services within a congregation or for a member of a congregation,
- 222 without the invitation of the current pastor of that congregation.
- 223 o Neither interfere with nor intrude upon the ministry of my successor, upon my departure from
- 224 a ministry setting; and to deal honorably with the record of my predecessor and successor.
- 225
- 226 COVENANT WITH ALL ORDAINED MINISTERS TO:
- 227 o Work cooperatively and collegially, with intercultural awareness.
- 228 o Stand in mutual relationships with colleagues in ministry, offering and receiving counsel and
- 229 support with intentionality.
- 230 o Use technology and social media responsibly.
- 231 o Act to prevent and to report known or suspected cases of physical or sexual abuse or neglect.
- 232 o Attribute the sources of words and ideas that are not my own.
- 233 o Accurately represent my professional qualifications, education, experience and affiliations,
- 234 acknowledging the limitations of my office, abilities, skills and competencies, and making
- 235 referrals when necessary and/or appropriate.

- 236 o Maintain appropriate boundaries and practice self-differentiation in both my personal and
- 237 professional life, including within the Local Church where I hold membership.