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

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

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL RATIONALE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FUNDING

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

The Penn West Conference Office will work with the Penn West Academy and Conference Committee on Ministry in order to establish dates, times, locations, and staffing for these events. The hope is that they will occur in the first half of the calendar year. Authorized ministers who fail to attend any of these events will be notified by their Association Committee on Ministry of their need to submit a paper on this subject. The Faith-Trust Institute has resources that ministers may find helpful for such papers. Ministers who have not attended the events or completed a paper should be notified of their need to do this in October, November, and December. After these notifications, authorized ministers who have not submitted a paper may have their standing in their Association suspended and/or terminated.

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

ATTACHMENT: THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST MINISTERIAL CODE

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

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

Relying on the grace of God, I…

COVENANT WITH GOD TO:

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

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

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

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

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

o Honor the diversity of God’s creation and work for the unity of the body of Christ (John 17:21).
Approved by all PWC Associations in 2017
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o Recognize the communal nature of God, ensuring that ministry does not happen in isolation.

COVENANT WITH SELF AND FAMILY TO:

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

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

o Accept responsibility for all debts that I incur.

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

o Maintain high moral standards in my sexual behavior.

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

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

COVENANT WITH THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST TO:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

COVENANT WITH MY MINISTRY SETTING TO:

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

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

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

o Speak the truth, not using my position, power, or authority to exploit any person nor using my position for unwarranted personal financial gain.
o Assess with care the implications of accepting gifts from congregation members.

o Not perform pastoral services within a congregation or for a member of a congregation, without the invitation of the current pastor of that congregation.

o Neither interfere with nor intrude upon the ministry of my successor, upon my departure from a ministry setting; and to deal honorably with the record of my predecessor and successor.

COVENANT WITH ALL ORDAINED MINISTERS TO:

o Work cooperatively and collegially, with intercultural awareness.

o Stand in mutual relationships with colleagues in ministry, offering and receiving counsel and support with intentionality.

o Use technology and social media responsibly.

o Act to prevent and to report known or suspected cases of physical or sexual abuse or neglect.

o Attribute the sources of words and ideas that are not my own.

o Accurately represent my professional qualifications, education, experience and affiliations, acknowledging the limitations of my office, abilities, skills and competencies, and making referrals when necessary and/or appropriate.

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