

Proposed Policy for Restoration to Ordered Ministry Following Censure of Removal

Background:

At the 2021 Fall Stated Presbytery Meeting, the presbytery approved the following motion. The context of this motion was the report of the Call Commission that Wain Wesberry, who was removed from ordered ministry by a decision of the Permanent Judicial Commission on June 16, 2021, had recently inquired about a pathway for restoration.

“(1) the Presbytery of St. Augustine acknowledge that responsibility for process and recommendation belongs in the Call Commission and that the Call Commission be charged with drafting a policy for the handling for any requests for restoration and bringing it to the next stated meeting of the presbytery for consideration and possible adoption, and (2) the Call Commission not undertake any substantive response to Dr. Wesberry’s request before the presbytery has an adopted policy in place, and (3) the Call Commission is encouraged to consult with the Office of the General Assembly, with our Permanent Judicial Commission, and others who may have experience with the processes and practices of restoration and the issues to be considered.”

Process:

The Call Commission formed a smaller group to prepare a draft policy for review and possible adoption. The group met three times and engaged in the consultation encouraged by the presbytery's action. During that process, and in consultation with the Office of General Assembly and its counsel to Permanent Judicial Commissions, it was noted that our constitution requires that discernment processes be done on a case-by-case basis. (Another example of the case-by-case constitutional requirement is the discernment of the terms for dismissal of a church to another denomination.) Therefore, formulas, checklists, and specific timelines cannot be put in place before a particular discernment process begins.

It was also noted that a comprehensive revision of the Rules of Discipline is scheduled for the 225th General Assembly in 2022. It is very likely that substantial changes will be made, and the revision process (approval by the presbyteries, etc.) will continue to unfold through the year 2023.

These matters were discussed in the Call Commission, which approved a final version of this policy (see below).

While confirming that the process for restoration must unfold on a case-by-case basis and that constitutional changes are likely, the Call Commission affirms the enduring scriptural themes of sincere repentance and discernment in relationship.

Proposed Policy:

When a minister of the Word and Sacrament (teaching elder) under the censure of removal from ordered ministry (and, if applicable, from membership) seeks restoration, the presbytery will follow the provisions of the Rules of Discipline in effect at that time.

Unless the Rules prohibit it or provide differently, the minister shall provide a request in writing to the stated clerk, who shall refer the request to the Call Commission. The stated clerk shall also notify the presbytery of the request at the next stated meeting.

The Call Commission shall address each request on a case-by-case basis and shall make a report and recommendation to the presbytery regarding the request. If the presbytery votes in favor of the restoration request, it shall follow the provisions of the Rules of Discipline with respect to a service of ordination and, if applicable, restoration to membership.