

Protocol of Care for ECC Pastors Discerning Credentials While in Dissent

Within the COMS, we steward with our colleagues their discernment of Call to credentialed ministry in the ECC. The Call to ministry is “multi-voiced” – it is heard personally, congregationally, regionally, and denominationally. These all need to line up as a witness to our collective discernment of Call.

When a minister interviews with COMS and acknowledges in writing or in conversation that they are in “dissent” related to an aspect of Covenant Affirmations, ECC Distinctives (Baptism, Gender and Ministry, Human Sexuality, Congregational Polity, Racial Equality), or ECC Rules & Guidelines for Ordered Ministry, it is important that we apply a fair, respectful and consistent rubric of care in discernment. This should include the following standards:

1. We respect and welcome open, honest, and transparent expressions of conviction, personal journey, and conscience. We work to draw this out and help it to be named.
2. We pledge to respect each person, and to recognize diversity of backgrounds, experience, education, and formation that contribute to understanding.
3. In committee interviews we do not focus on arguing, but understanding; on clarifying, not simply confronting ideas that may differ from or do not align with our personal convictions and those of the ECC. We flag those issues for discussion in committee and the subsequent resourcing of applicants.
4. If concerns emerge in an applicant's written or oral presentation that may disqualify a candidate from proceeding (undisclosed personal issues, evident plagiarism, incompatibility, hostility, etc.,) we may consult with the larger COMS Team and the Superintendent in discerning how to proceed. In all matters, we work to express courtesy and care for those we are interviewing.
5. During a licensing interview, if a minister acknowledges they are in dissent, or is observed by the COMS to be in dissent, we slow down and focus on resourcing them in the areas in question. We do this through providing mentors, written resources for reading/reflection, and seeking greater clarity. This calls for scheduling a return to COMS following their course of further study, where demonstration of due diligence, prayer, study and interaction with colleagues has been accomplished. This may be in six months or one year. The possible outcomes of this period of reflection are as follows: A) The minister is still in dissent and

cannot abide by the ECC policy or guidelines. The result in this case would be that the license is not renewed. B) The minister changes his or her position from one of dissent to one of agreement with the ECC position. Result: license may be renewed. C) The minister is still in dissent but agrees that s/he can publically support and teach the ECC position, and agrees that that s/he will not allow their personal opinion to overshadow the ECC position. The COMS is satisfied that s/he can do this. Result: license may be renewed.

6. During this time of study and prayer, a minister in dissent may be licensed, but shall agree to serve within all ECC guidelines and will work collaboratively with a COMS-assigned mentor. The [Freedom and Responsibility](#) document is a resource that may be used in that process.
7. If the disclosure of dissent first occurs in a pre-finalization or finalization interview, it may be appropriate to direct a delay in moving forward so that steps 4 and 5 above can be implemented together. Efforts should be taken to assure the candidate that this is not punitive or retributive but respectful and formative. The integrity of the minister and the integrity of the ministry in the context of the ECC are both essential.
8. The COMS is responsible to make sure that this standard is applied not only fairly but also evenly to all issues where dissent may emerge, serving prayerfully, persistently, and patiently with colleagues seeking credentials and accountability within the ministerial community.
9. Members of the COMS are responsible to administer these standards, based on the discerned positions and policies of the ECC and in keeping with all of our ECC Ethical Principles and responsibilities as agents of the Conference and the Board of the Ordered Ministry.
10. Decisions to allow a minister to advance through finalization where dissent continues to present or is at an impasse requires the utmost care in thoughtful discernment and prayerful consideration together. Consulting with the Ordered Ministry may be advisable so that the standards of the ECC are fairly applied across all issues in fairness not only to the freedom of the minister but also in fairness to the identity and harmony of the ECC.