

Dissolving Pastoral Relationships within the Classis of North Grand Rapids

Final (approved by the Pastoral Care Committee on 11/30/11 and approved at the January 2012 NGR Classis Meeting)

Background: The relationship between the Classis, congregations, and installed Ministers of Word and Sacrament is unique and fully predicated upon a discerned call between all parties. Our tradition takes seriously the covenantal nature of such a call as well as the engaged involvement from all three parties to sustain healthy, faithful pastoral leadership. Grace-filled intentionality and deep prayerfulness are needed both in establishing and dissolving such relationships. **Furthermore, only Classis, or its agent (in our case, the Pastoral Care Committee with notice to the full Classis or the Executive Committee of classis) can dissolve a relationship.** Whether initiated by the minister or the consistory of a particular congregation, dissolving such a relationship always involves the work of Classis. This document is meant to offer guidance to this process, including suggestions on how to negotiate severance.

What should we do if we think this relationship is in crisis or is ending?

- 1) Accordingly to the Book of Church Order, **both parties are responsible for immediately contacting classis leadership if and when the end of the ministerial relationship is in view** (BCO 1.II.15, section 8). If such a discussion revolves around some sort of conflict or economic pressure, it is our hope that Classis leadership is able to guide the conversation and, if possible, find places of reconciliation and assistance. *Please note, our Classis website, www.northgr.org, always has specific contact information for the Pastoral Care Committee chair.*
- 2) After contacting the classis and working through the issues, both the minister and consistory are **very much encouraged to negotiate a fair severance package**, as well as details around finishing the ministerial relationship with the church (date of last sermon, helpful transitions, means of healthy communication to the congregation and so on). A Classis representative from the Pastoral Care Committee needs to be present when both parties sign such an agreement.
- 3) If a fair severance package cannot be negotiated, this **suggested classis model may be used:**
 - a) Six Months full salary and housing set at the appropriate classis minimums for that current year. *This amount may be higher or lower than current salary/housing figures.*
 - b) Six Months of full Medical Insurance (insuring all currently insured).
 - c) Any past obligations due from previous years.*Again, classis leadership is very willing to help both parties communicate and negotiate an agreement, including how to calculate figures and offer helpful suggestions.*

- 4) According to the Book of Church Order, **either party may seek a special hearing of Classis to determine if the ministerial relationship should be ended** (BCO 1.II.15, section 8). It is our hope that such an action is done only after exhausting all other means of finding fair and faithful terms of separation. **The Classis is responsible for establishing and terminating all installed relationships within its ecclesiastical jurisdiction and may vote to impose a severance package upon both parties, if something cannot be negotiated in good faith earlier.**

What about other staff members working in our churches?

Technically, only Ministers of Word and Sacrament installed into NGR congregations are subject to the direct processes addressed above. This being said, congregations are also strongly encouraged to treat all employees with honor, transparency and respect (this includes ministers under contract, commissioned pastors, support staff and so on). **If there is a question or concern about a termination process/severance agreement for non-installed staff within our congregations, people are encouraged to contact the Church Care Team.** The Classis is ultimately responsible for the ministries under its care and jurisdiction, which includes these important issues of staff transition.