

51 and/or congregation are in crisis or conflict, it can be difficult to discern appropriate channels
52 for communication and intervention with the congregation.

- 53 • Conference ministers carry out most of the day-to-day work with congregations and pastors. It
54 has not been clear exactly what information conference ministers should share with Ministerial
55 Leadership Commission (MLC), beyond MLC's basic agenda of ministerial credentialing, general
56 resourcing and policy.

57
58 **In light of these challenges, WDC conference ministers considered these questions:**

- 59
60 a. *How often do WDC conference ministers connect with credentialed ministers? What barriers stand*
61 *in the way of regular engagement with credentialed ministers?*

62
63 This varies from 1-2 times per year to much more frequently, depending on circumstances,
64 context, preference and specific ministry concerns. Conference ministers tend to have more
65 regular contact with congregational pastors than with other credentialed ministers (e.g.,
66 chaplains, retired ministers). Barriers include time limits, distances, travel expenses,
67 cultural/ethnic/language differences, technological/media challenges, scheduling conflicts and
68 a pastor's lack of interest or negative experiences with WDC.

- 69
70 b. *How often do conference ministers connect with congregational leaders? What barriers stand in*
71 *the way?*

72
73 This is determined by occasions such as pastoral transition, pastor–congregation review,
74 discernment processes, requests for resources, or crisis. Barriers include different leadership
75 structures/cultural patterns in each congregation, leadership changes, congregational sense of
76 alienation/distance from the conference as well as conflict between pastor and congregational
77 leaders or between pastor and conference.

- 78
79 c. *In what other ways do conference ministers maintain an understanding of what is happening in*
80 *congregations?*

81
82 In various ways conference ministers reach out to learn from pastors and congregational
83 leaders — they talk with pastors, check a congregation's online resources, attend
84 congregational events, learn congregational history and also invite and listen to feedback.

- 85
86 d. *How do conference ministers document contacts with credentialed ministers and congregations?*

87
88 Conference ministers file notes and communication records of contacts with ministers and
89 congregations. [Note: In February 2019, the MLC established a *Record Retention Policy for*
90 *Credential Files.*]

- 91
92 e. *What information is shared between the conference ministers, and how is confidentiality handled?*

93
94 The Conference Minister has weekly check-ins with each Associate Conference Minister to share
95 information and discernment relevant for their ministry. Confidentiality is assumed unless
96 information is already public or there is a ministry-related purpose for sharing the information.
97 Conference ministers receive each other's monthly reports, consult about their specific areas of
98 ministry focus (e.g., Resource, Church Planting or Ministerial Leadership Commission) and
99 inform each other when that focus leads them to connect to a congregation for which another
100 conference minister is liaison.

101

102 f. Does MC USA have “best practices” for conference ministers’ engagement with credentialed
103 ministers and congregations?
104

105 No. Conferences establish their own systems for this. Conference ministers should consult
106 further with the Ministerial Leadership Commission when clarification about this is needed.
107

108 **Ministerial Leadership Commission (MLC) considered these questions:**
109

110 a. What issues or circumstances within a congregation or related to a credentialed minister should
111 prompt conference ministers to share information with MLC for discernment, additional support,
112 or intervention? These should include but are not limited to:

- 113 • Allegations or incidents of sexual abuse involving any congregation member, leader or
114 staff person. [See MC USA resources: 1) *Prevention and Response: Sexual Abuse and*
115 *Non-credentialed Individuals*, and 2) *Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and*
116 *Procedure.*]
- 117 • Legal issues that will impact the congregation or its leaders.
- 118 • Natural or human-caused disaster or trauma impacting a congregation or minister.
- 119 • Severe conflicts involving congregation members, leaders or staff.
- 120 • Serious disagreement or conflict with the conference or denomination.
- 121 • Discernment to become a sanctuary church for undocumented persons.
- 122 • Discernment to be designated as an affirming congregation for LGBTQ members.
- 123 • Anything related to a pastor’s credential.
- 124 • Legal status of a minister (if undocumented or status is unclear).
- 125 • Health issues of pastor or family members (e.g., physical, mental or emotional) that can
126 affect pastoral functioning.
- 127 • Significant financial stress.
- 128 • Other issues, trauma or potential trauma, determined by conference minister.
- 129 • Other issues, determined by MLC.

130
131 **ACTION STEPS.**

- 132 1) WDC should regularly remind congregations and credentialed ministers to notify WDC
133 promptly when they encounter crises or unusual challenges.
- 134 2) Conference ministers are encouraged to seek permission from credentialed ministers to
135 share information with MLC. The purpose of informing MLC of such matters is for MLC
136 to understand what is happening in WDC congregations, to offer prayer, care and
137 support and to give counsel to conference ministers as they relate to congregations and
138 ministers.
139

140 b. How does MLC offer support to credentialed ministers. To what expectations does MLC hold
141 credentialed ministers accountable?

- 142 • Credentialing process (with assigned mentor).
- 143 • Orientation for pastors new to WDC.
- 144 • Pastor peer groups.
- 145 • Annual Accountability Plan.
- 146 • Ministerial Ethics procedures (Healthy Boundary training, signed Ethics form).
- 147 • Resourcing and appreciation events for ministers.
- 148 • Financial resources: Seminary scholarship, Continuing Education Grant, Goertz
149 Scholarship Fund for ministry training for persons with special needs, sabbatical
150 scholarships, Kansas Leadership Center grants, Pastor Assistance Fund for emergencies,
151 Lilly/Everence matching grant, Congregational Development Fund (to support
152 consultants for ministerial and congregational discernment processes).

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ACTION STEPS. These are additional suggestions regarding support and accountability for credentialed ministers and congregations:

- 1) Encourage all congregations to review their governance structure and safety policies and the pastor’s role in these.
- 2) Resource pastors with information and materials to share with their congregation in response to the question “What does WDC do for us?”
- 3) Create a video showing what the conference has to offer.
- 4) Send annual letter to congregational leaders and pastors, listing resources for congregations.
- 5) Survey congregational leaders to identify needs for which WDC could be a resource.
- 6) Resource pastors and congregational leaders on governance and structure, equipping pastors to be teachers, and other aspects of effective congregational ministry.
- 7) Add resources for congregational moderators on the WDC website.
- 8) Invite congregations to annually inform WDC of their current officers/leaders.

2) Leadership relationships in WDC

Because WDC is a small system, dual roles and relationships exist. For example, individuals serving in WDC leadership roles are also members of WDC congregations and may be credentialed pastors in congregations with whom conference ministers serve as liaisons. The Conference Minister is accountable to the Moderator who is a member of a WDC congregation and may also be a credentialed person.

Because of these factors in WDC polity, the Executive Board considered these questions:

- a. *When nominations or appointments are made for WDC leadership roles, what dual relationships should be identified, or what adjustments should be made to avoid a dual relationship?*

If the WDC Moderator is a credentialed minister, the executive Conference Minister (who is accountable to the Moderator) should not be the liaison to that minister or congregation.

- b. *Should the MLC include noncredentialed persons along with credentialed persons to provide varied perspectives related to credentialed leadership roles?*

MLC members have often been credentialed but WDC policy and MC USA polity do not require that. While they bring leadership skills and understand the work of ministerial leadership, a credentialed person may have a conflict of interest in discernment regarding their credentialed peers. Those without credentials should also be considered for service on MLC.

- c. *What other factors should be considered when assessing an individual’s suitability for a leadership role in WDC? How should conflicts of interest be managed (including “conflict of interest” for staff persons?) What, if any, instructions regarding dual relationships, conflicts of interest and suitability for leadership roles should be given to those making nominations or appointments?*

Bylaws of Western District Conference say,

*“Any person elected to a conference position must be a member of a WDC congregation.”
(Bylaw 1.D.3.)*

ACTION STEPS.

- 203 1) The Executive Board recommends that groups making nominations or appointments for
204 WDC leadership roles should consider dual relationships and potential conflicts of
205 interest when making nominations or appointments.
206 2) Groups making nominations or appointments should contact the nominee/appointee's
207 pastor or a congregational leader to verify that he/she is a member in good standing of
208 their congregation.
209 3) Should any other accountability measures be established for noncredentialed persons
210 serving in conference leadership? Conflicts of interest should be identified and
211 managed wisely. Executive Board and Commission members annually complete
212 "Conflict of Interest" disclosure forms and occasionally are recused or dismissed from
213 discussions and decisions due to conflicts of interest. The disclosure form states: "When
214 personal, family, financial, moral or theological interests interfere with fulfilling [Board
215 members' ... responsibility to the mission of WDC and Executive Board] a conflict of
216 interest results."
217 4) A WDC employee's family member should not serve on the Executive Board, on other
218 groups that determine staff salaries and benefits, or on groups that make decisions that
219 would stand to benefit that employee.
220
221 d. *If a person serving in a WDC leadership or volunteer role is accused of misconduct, what*
222 *procedures will be followed regarding the person's ongoing service in that role? Who will discern*
223 *this?*
224

225 ACTION STEPS.

- 226 1) The accused person should be suspended or granted a leave of absence from any
227 leadership role for the duration of an appropriate process until the outcome is
228 determined. The Executive Committee should discern this so that the decision can be
229 made in a timely way.
230 2) If the accusation is against a member of the Executive Committee, denominational
231 leaders should be consulted. Misconduct by a credentialed person would have different
232 jurisdiction than a noncredentialed person. It would be necessary to discern how the
233 process would differ depending on whether alleged misconduct occurred within a WDC
234 leadership role or within a congregation or other context. MC USA resources (such as 1)
235 *Prevention and Response: Sexual Abuse and Noncredentialed Individuals*, 2) *Ministerial*
236 *Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure*) and any relevant congregational policies would
237 need to be consulted as appropriate.
238

239 **3) Resourcing, support and accountability for credentialed ministers, congregations** 240 **and congregational leaders for prevention of and response to sexual abuse**

241
242 Current WDC resources and practices for prevention of and response to sexual abuse and other
243 misconduct include:

- 244 ● WDC website notes how to report ministerial misconduct. See [mennowdc.org/report-](http://mennowdc.org/report-ministerial-misconduct-abuse/)
245 [ministerial-misconduct-abuse/](http://mennowdc.org/report-ministerial-misconduct-abuse/).
- 246 ● WDC website refers to MC USA resources. See mennoniteusa.org/resource/sexual-misconduct/
247 which lists *Prevention and Response: Sexual Abuse and Non-credentialed Individuals* (2018);
248 *Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure* (2016)
- 249 ● MLC administers the Procedure Regarding Ministerial Ethics for credentialed ministers,
250 adopted in 2017. See [mennowdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/WDC-Procedure-](http://mennowdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/WDC-Procedure-regarding-ministerial-ethics-signature-form.pdf)
251 [regarding-ministerial-ethics-signature-form.pdf](http://mennowdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/WDC-Procedure-regarding-ministerial-ethics-signature-form.pdf)
- 252 ● An Associate Conference Minister's job description includes promoting resourcing for
253 prevention of sexual abuse/misconduct. She is trained to lead Healthy Boundaries training for
254 credentialed persons, has received training for investigators of sexual misconduct and offers

- 255 training and consultation for congregations developing or implementing policies for safety and
256 prevention of and response to sexual abuse.
- 257 • Financial assistance is available to congregations to engage consultants and services related to
258 the prevention of and response to sexual abuse.
 - 259 • Safe Sanctuary Abuse Prevention Policy for Events of the Western District Conference.

260

261 **The MLC and conference ministers considered these questions:**

262

263 a) *What do you see specifically as your role and responsibility in the prevention of and response to*
264 *sexual abuse within congregations and by credentialed ministers in WDC? What roles and*
265 *responsibilities do you expect other groups or staff in WDC to carry?*

266

- 267 • MLC oversees ministerial ethics requirements and responds to ministerial misconduct.
- 268 • An Associate Conference Minister’s job description includes promoting resourcing for
269 prevention of sexual abuse/misconduct (see above).
- 270 • Executive Board and Conference Minister care for overall leadership culture and
271 priorities in WDC.

272

273 b) *Where do you see gaps in WDC’s work of prevention of and response to sexual abuse? What other*
274 *questions or suggestions do you have?*

275

- 276 • Need more training and equipping (for WDC staff, congregations and leaders) on
277 responding to allegations of abuse by noncredentialed persons within congregations.
- 278 • Consider establishing an abuse prevention/response team appointed by MLC.
- 279 • Be alert to how WDC structures and systems contribute to dual relationships.
- 280 • Provide training to WDC staff on prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace.
- 281 • Update WDC Personnel Policy to address sexual misconduct prevention and response
282 and employee privacy policy.
- 283 • Establish a fund to support sexual abuse survivors.
- 284 • Provide more training on intersections between legal issues, church polity and cultural
285 context.

286

287 **ACTION STEPS.**

288 1) Conference ministry staff will convene an advisory group to audit WDC’s current work,
289 related specifically to the prevention of and response to sexual abuse in congregations
290 and by credentialed ministers. Members of the advisory group would include (but not
291 necessarily be limited to) the Associate Conference Minister responsible for promoting
292 resourcing for prevention of sexual abuse/misconduct and at least one consultant with
293 training and expertise in the area of sexual abuse prevention/response and survivor
294 perspectives and experience.

295 2) The advisory group’s work would include a review of WDC programs, policies,
296 resources and website and offer recommendations for strengthening WDC’s ministry in
297 this area in consultation with MC USA leaders and other conferences and organizations
298 as necessary.

299

300 **4) Support, accountability and resources for WDC conference ministers**

301

302 It is important to provide support, resources and accountability for conference ministers as they
303 relate to congregations and credentialed leaders in the face of complex challenges.

304

305 WDC Bylaw 2 on Conference Leadership and Structure notes that the duties of the Executive Board
306 include:

307
308 *“Appoint a conference minister as the primary administrative officer of WDC. Guide, assist and*
309 *support the conference minister in the oversight of the mission, ministries and staff. ... Conduct,*
310 *or provide for a limited annual review of the conference minister and a major review every*
311 *three to five years.”* (Bylaw 2.B.1.d. and e.)
312

313 Sections A and E of the WDC Personnel Policy describe accountability and support and
314 accountability for the conference minister and other staff:

315
316 *“The Conference Minister functions as leader of the staff, is accountable to the Executive*
317 *Board, and administers the Policy on behalf of the Staff Relations and Executive Committee.*
318 *The Conference Minister or designee serves as the supervisor for all staff.”*
319

320 WDC policy provides for continuing education and an annual performance review for all staff.
321

322 **The Executive Board and Conference Minister considered these questions:**
323

324 a) *How does the Executive Board “guide, assist and support” the conference minister?*
325

326 The Executive Board provides a Conference Minister job description (updated in 2020) and
327 receives regular reports from the Conference Minister, based on the job description. The
328 Conference Minister engages the Executive Board regarding vision for WDC. The Executive
329 Committee receives the Conference Minister’s annual accountability plan, conducts limited
330 annual reviews and conducts a major term review involving people from various segments of
331 WDC and MC USA. (A term review was conducted in fall 2019, prior to the Board’s approval of
332 calling the Conference Minister to a new 5-year term, beginning August 2020.)
333

334 b) *How does the Conference Minister practice self-care, enlist personal support and determine*
335 *priorities for professional growth?*
336

337 The Conference Minister works an average of 50 hours of work per week, and practices self-
338 care through vacation and personal time, according to WDC’s personnel policy, and through
339 regular spiritual disciplines, congregational worship, family and friendships, and emotional,
340 mental and physical health care. Professional growth priorities are determined by the
341 challenges of her ministry, and in consultation with other staff and Executive Committee.
342

343 **The Conference Minister and Associate Conference Ministers considered these questions:**
344

345 a) *How does the Conference Minister provide support and accountability to the Associate Conference*
346 *Ministers?*
347

348 Weekly meetings of each Associate Conference Minister with the Conference Minister provide
349 valuable support and accountability. Conference ministers read each other’s monthly reports.
350 Annual reviews are conducted according to the WDC Personnel Policy.
351

352 b) *How do Associate Conference Ministers practice self-care, enlist personal support and determine*
353 *priorities for professional growth?*
354

355 Associate Conference Ministers submit timesheets to the Conference Minister and practice self-
356 care through vacation and personal time, according to the WDC’s personnel policy, and through

357 regular spiritual disciplines, congregational worship, family and friendships and emotional,
358 mental and physical health care. Priorities for professional growth are determined in
359 consultation with the Conference Minister as relevant to job responsibilities, to expand
360 knowledge and gifts while practicing good stewardship of WDC financial resources.

361
362 **5) Specific issues regarding MC USA’s Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and**
363 **Procedure and implications for future implementation of the policy and**
364 **procedure in WDC.**

365
366 WDC and MLC recognize that MC USA’s Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure belongs
367 to MC USA.

368
369 **MLC identified these specific areas that MC USA needs to address:**

370
371 **SUGGESTIONS FOR MC USA.**

- 372 1. Develop appropriate procedures to respond to non-sexual misconduct allegations.
- 373 2. Clarify who determines when a non-sexual misconduct allegation requires a full misconduct
374 process and what criteria determines this.
- 375 3. Clarify what information should be given to the MLC at various points in the misconduct
376 process.
- 377 4. Clarify issues related to conflict of interest and the role of an alternative conference
378 minister liaison to the congregation/pastor(s) in the event that the Conference Minister is
379 found to have a conflict of interest.
- 380 5. Clarify expectations regarding required level of expertise and resources for facilitation,
381 investigation and consultation in a misconduct process, including resources provided by MC
382 USA.

383
384 **The MLC also considered this question:**

385
386 *Assuming that MC USA Leadership Development office will carry forward the work on these concerns,*
387 *how does the MLC desire to engage with MC USA in this process?*

388
389 MLC wants to be kept updated by the WDC Conference Minister on how MC USA is working on the
390 above concerns related to the Policy and Procedure.

391
392 Michael Danner, MC USA Associate Executive Director for Church Vitality, has contracted with
393 GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in Christian Environments) to review the Policy and Procedure
394 for feedback on potential improvements and revision and to identify what in the Policy and
395 Procedure is related specifically to sexual misconduct and what could be used for other misconduct.
396 Michael Danner is also pursuing a conversation with GRACE regarding the question of restoration
397 following sexual misconduct. Michael Danner has engaged several representatives from
398 conferences in processing feedback from GRACE to gain additional perspectives of church leaders.
399 The WDC Conference Minister will continue to report further information about this to MLC as it is
400 available.

401
402 **IN CONCLUSION**

403 **With this report, WDC will request feedback from MC USA leaders, with these questions:**

- 404
405 *Should WDC review additional areas or consider other questions and recommended actions?*
406 *Should WDC engage additional expertise or consultation?*
407 *Do you have any additional feedback or recommendations for WDC?*