

# What's On Your Mind?

## Review of Ministry—Part 1

Don Muir, Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office

Over the years, I have received several questions related to the non-disciplinary case judicial process. To learn more about what follows in this article, please read *Book of Forms* sections 324-344.

Section 324 introduces the concept of the non-disciplinary judicial case. “There may be times when relationships are strained within the congregation or between the congregation and/or session and the minister. This may result in complaints being made that are non-disciplinary in nature. Such complaints may include several minor acts of negligence, unsuitable actions, differences of opinion and personal misunderstandings or disputes that, when taken together, undermine effective ministry.”

We know problems like these arise from time to time in a congregation. Generally, the sooner they are addressed the greater the likelihood they will be successfully resolved. The longer they fester the greater the likelihood they will grow more complicated and the people involved more deeply entrenched in their positions, making reconciliation increasingly doubtful.

In keeping with Matthew 18:15-17, it is hoped such issues can be resolved early on, when those who are at odds meet and attempt to work things out face to face. Only if that attempt fails may the matter be taken to another level. If the conflict is between members of the congregation, it is dealt with by the session. If the conflict is between members of the congregation and the minister, it is dealt with by the presbytery.

In cases involving the minister, if initial attempts to resolve differences fail, a review of ministry may follow as part of the oversight of the presbytery. It is essential to remember “The purpose of the review of ministry is

to provide the opportunity for changes or actions to take place within the ministry that will help to rectify or improve the pastoral relationship, or to determine fairly that the pastoral relationship is no longer viable” (*Book of Forms* section 337). Given the goals and possible serious consequences of the review, it must be conducted with careful attention to the details of each step.

Some have thought the name “review of ministry” implies that every aspect of the ministry of a congregation comes under the scrutiny of the presbytery. That is not the intent. The intent is to review only those aspects of ministry identified in the complaint.

Imagine a minister refuses to lead Bible studies or make hospital visits. Members who are upset by this meet with the minister and express their concerns. The minister says there isn't time to lead Bible studies and hospitals are germ-ridden places that can make people seriously ill. Not satisfied, the members make a formal “complaint” and ensure the minister and the clerk of session receive a copy. The session forwards the complaint to the presbytery. The presbytery, if convinced the complaint is in order, will appoint an investigating committee to meet with the minister, those making the complaint, and possibly with others. The matter may be resolved at this stage, but if not the presbytery may begin a review of ministry.

In the next issue, we will explore what the terms of review of ministry could look like and the conclusions the presbytery may reach.

Blessings,

Don Muir

Do you have a suggestion for a topic to be considered in this resource? Are you confused by something that happened at session, presbytery, synod, or General Assembly? Puzzling over a section of the *Book of Forms*?

Send your comments to The Rev. Don Muir and he will strive to answer them in future issues of *Equipping for . . . Elders* in a manner that maintains confidentiality and seeks to be helpful to the church at large.

Contact Don at: [dmuir@presbyterian.ca](mailto:dmuir@presbyterian.ca), 50 Wynford Dr., Toronto, Ontario M3C 1J7  
416-441-1111, ext. 223 or 1-800-619-7301, ext. 223