

Presbytery of Arkansas

Policy for Presbytery Inquiry into a Particular Church

General

The Presbytery is the corporate expression of the church in a particular geographic area. Gathering the Teaching Elders and congregations under its authority, the Presbytery acts to support the larger mission and ministry of the church of Jesus Christ. Among its duties, the Presbytery is responsible for “assisting and supporting the witness of congregations to the sovereign activity of God in the world...” (G-3.0301)

From time to time difficulties arising in a particular church may interfere with the congregation’s ministry and mission. In such times, the Presbytery has a responsibility to inquire into the life of that congregation, provide support to its members and leaders, and assist the church in finding a way through the difficulties and back to the work of witness in the world. In such times, the Presbytery acts as pastoral leadership for the congregation seeking not to punish or lay blame but to restore the peace, unity, and purity of the church through reconciliation and partnership.

Initiating the Inquiry Process

An inquiry into a particular congregation may be initiated by the congregation through a written request to the Committee on Ministry or the Presbytery’s Coordinating Team. An inquiry may also be initiated by the Committee on the Ministry, the Future of the Church Ministry Area, or Presbytery’s Coordinating Team.

However initiated, the process of inquiry shall include both the Committee on Ministry and the Future of the Church Ministry Area as described below.

The Inquiry Process

Each congregation is different and every inquiry into congregational life presents unique challenges and opportunities. This policy seeks to give some vision for the overall structure of the process, however it will be up to the ministry teams involved to tailor the process and the membership of an inquiry team to meet the presenting needs in a particular case.

In all cases, the Inquiry Process shall:

1. Be coordinated between both the Committee on Ministry and the Future of the Church Ministry Area.
2. Include on any inquiry team or Administrative Commission designees each from the Committee on Ministry and the Future of the Church Ministry Area. (NB: These do not have to be currently seated members, however it is advisable that at least one from each team be in current service to ensure good communication and input from both ministry areas)

3. Seek to further the peace, unity, and purity of the Church through reconciliation and restoration.
4. Advise the Stated Clerk immediately of any issues which may have an implication on future disciplinary or remedial action against an individual under the jurisdiction of the presbytery or against the session as a whole.

In all cases the Inquiry Process should:

1. Be mindful of the need for members to understand the particular needs of the community and context of ministry. Also, be mindful of the need to be able to respond to issues in a timely manner. An inquiry team made up of regional representation would be a way to achieve this objective.
2. Report regularly on their progress to both the Committee on Ministry and the Future of the Church Ministry Area.
3. Take care to ensure continuity of leadership through the Inquiry/Resolution process. In the event the resolution involves a change of leadership, the Committee on Ministry liaison may serve as a liaison for a pastoral search. This or some other mechanism to ensure continuity is essential.

Completing the Inquiry Process

When the difficulties in the congregation are resolved:

1. It is appropriate for the Inquiry Team to appoint a liaison to continue in contact with the congregation as they live into the season of resolution and restoration.
2. When appropriate, a thanksgiving to God during worship may be held involving the church and the Inquiry Team.
3. The Inquiry Team shall notify the Committee on Ministry, Future of the Church Ministry Area, and the session of the congregation of the resolution and any conditions or procedures for moving forward.

When the difficulties in the congregation are not resolved:

1. When the Inquiry Team completes their work and the difficulties in the congregation are not resolved, the congregation an Administrative Commission may be appointed.
 - a. In cases when the difficulties in the congregation are between the congregation and the PC(USA), the church may be determined to be in schism and the process of inquiry shifts to more formalized Policy for Schismatic Churches.
 - b. If the difficulties are confined to the particular church yet are deemed unresolved by the Inquiry Team, an Administrative Commission may be appointed.
2. When either of the above determinations are made, the Moderators of the Committee on Ministry and the Future of the Church Ministry Area shall notify the Stated Clerk that an Administrative Commission should be appointed in accordance with the *Book of Order*.

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