

Restoration Process – A Manual for Superintendents and Ministerial Education and Guidance Boards



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When a minister has confessed to or been accused of grievous sin, the entire church comes alongside to take responsibility for his/her repentance, restitution and restoration. The initial response of the church is entrusted into the hands of any elder to whom the minister voluntarily confesses, and in certain cases to the superintendent and the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board.

In such a situation the elder or superintendent who receives a confession begins the process of healing. This process focuses not only on the minister, but also on his/her family, others harmed by the minister's sin, the congregation the minister serves and the larger Christian community.

The following process will be useful in all cases, even though each restoration case will be unique. When we follow these principles of healthy biblical community, then God's guidance through His church maintains a consistent pattern of wholeness and holiness in each unique situation.

PREPARATION

A. Spiritual

As leaders, we begin with prayer. We are never in more spiritual danger ourselves than when we are in a restoration process with someone who has done wrong. Paul warns us: "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Galatians 6:1-3).

1. Before beginning this restoration process take extensive time to pray. Pray for protection, humility, wisdom and insight. Ask the Holy Spirit to come alongside you as you come alongside all those who suffer because of this alleged failure.
2. Pray for those you will be restoring and comforting. Pray for every person affected by this confessed or accused wrongdoing. Pray for the truth to be clear and each person to be humble and open. Pray for God's protection over the church and willing spirits within everyone.
3. Discern whether you are in a place of spiritual health to be the elder who accepts responsibility for either hearing a private confession with the responsibility to direct the restoration, or investigation of an accusation. The danger to be permissive rather than merciful, or punitive rather than holding accountable, is greater when we are personally struggling with similar sin. If in your meditations and prayers you discern this is not something you should do then find another elder to do this spiritual work in your place.

B. Resource Manual

The following procedure is designed as a companion to Thomas L. Pedigo's *Restoration Manual: A Workbook for Restoring Fallen Ministers and Religious Leaders*.¹ The Pedigo manual deals with a full range of aspects common to catastrophic failure by clergy. Some of Pedigo's details are not included in the basic restoration guidelines here. Some of them will be helpful in specific instances. Pedigo offers, for example, checklists to evaluate those who are responsible for guiding a restoration process.

Footnote

¹ <http://win-edge.com/Restoration.shtml>

FIRST ACTIONS

We respond differently to a confession of grievous sin than to an accusation or discovery of such sin.

A. Confession

1. “The confession of one elder to another is an inviolate confidence, unless the conduct is both ongoing and unrepentant” (*Book of Discipline*, ¶7170B). The opportunity to bring an end to wrong behavior through the confidential care of another elder is a healthy biblical opportunity within the community of the church. Thus, when a minister confesses the truth of his/her sin and repents from that behavior such that he/she turns away from that behavior to do what is right, then such a confession is confidential and need not be reported to any other person or to any official body.
 - a. A private confession to another elder will require a restoration process and accountability that is guided by the elder to whom the confession is made. A clear statement of confession needs to be written by the penitent elder and must include a pledge stating exactly how the behavior will be changed. (See Pedigo pp.15-36.) Though confidential, this process still deals with all the areas a formal restoration would cover as noted in Pedigo, such as: Denial; Spiritual; Moral; Behavioral; Emotional; Mental; Marital; Psychological; Relational/Social; Familial. The questions provided by Pedigo hold the person accountable to his/her own confession and pledge to changed behavior.
 - b. This private restoration process can be delegated to a professional counselor or pastoral counselor with the agreement of the penitent elder. When such a referral occurs, the counselor must agree to follow the Pedigo categories and to work with the elder in providing a full restoration in all stipulated areas, agreeing to report to the confidential elder when the work is complete. If the confidential elder is trained to provide this counsel and chooses to do so, it is understood by the confessing elder that the confidential elder will be seeking confidential supervision from a pastoral counselor or professional counselor for both accountability in the process as well as transference issues. This will not be the confessing elder’s superintendent or bishop but a trained pastoral counselor or professional counselor.
 - c. The accountability to assure that the offending conduct is not ongoing or unrepentant rests on both elders. Repentance requires

a consistent change in behavior. When this change has occurred, then completion of the restoration focuses on the future life of the elder. These include such topics as vocational, volitional, physical and personal/recreational (Pedigo pp.37-64).

- d. If the penitent minister is unable to maintain a consistent change of behavior, then the confidential listening elder is responsible to negotiate a voluntary withdrawal from ministry. Both elders have responsibility to see that this step is taken. Withdrawal from ministry allows the elder to be free from the weighty responsibilities and pressures of ministry, to focus on recovery and to focus on his/her own and the family's spiritual well-being.
2. When an elder's confession is not followed by a change in behavior, and is unwilling to voluntarily withdraw, then the confidential listening elder must alert the failing elder that his confession is no longer confidential. The failing elder is now abusing the ministry position. The failure is therefore evidence of "... a request to be helped to stop this abuse and removed from the temptations and responsibilities of his/her position until repentance and healing occurs" (*Book of Discipline*, ¶7170B). It is to the detriment of the minister, others involved in the wrongdoing and the congregation as a whole if grievous sin is allowed to be ongoing behavior in an elder's life. If the use of confidentiality becomes a way an elder attempts to protect his/her sinful behavior, then the elder to whom the confession is made is responsible to contact the superintendent who informs the MEG Board. The individual now moves to the Restoration Process outlined in this manual.

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B. Accusation

1. An accusation usually arises through the complaint of a spouse, a member or an informer, either from inside or outside the church. Word may come while the wrongdoing is occurring or some time after the fact. The passing of time does not ease the necessity of careful attention.
2. This principle must be kept clearly in mind: Every elder is innocent until proven otherwise. The respectful exploration of the accusation must establish wrongdoing beyond any reasonable doubt. Hearsay is never evidence. All who make accusations must be willing to document or otherwise prove his/her allegations against the elder.

3. The investigation of a denied accusation is to be kept confidential. This confidentiality extends to those requested to participate in the investigation.
4. When an accusation has been shown to be true and the elder is involved in grievous sin, then the Restoration Process is begun. If the accusations are unfounded, the matter is over.

RESTORATION PROCESS

Following the first step of Confession, there are three additional steps in the Restoration Process: Communication; Repentance; Recovery.

A. Communication

1. The overseer's first communication is with the elder having a pastoral counselor or professional counselor present. This communication is first pastoral.

Ascertain whether the elder has sought and found pardon from God through Christ. If not, offer to make this moment of initial contact one of contrition and confession before God.

Discover whether they have also been reconciled to other persons and made restitution, to the degree possible and appropriate, to persons who have been victimized by their sin.

Explore ways this could be accomplished. Explain clearly what his/her rights are as an elder and what the Restoration Process entails.

The process of restoration entails this:

- a. We *communicate* this restoration process by reading these rights to the elder;

The rights of an elder are these:

An accusation of _____ has been made about you. This is an inappropriate behavior as described in ¶7130 of the *Book of Discipline*.

This meeting is explained in Chapter VII of the *Book of Discipline* titled Church Order and sets forth the purpose and goals, response to disorder and processing of complaints. Anything you say in this or subsequent meetings, including any written communication will become a part of our report to the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board.

You have the right to consult with another elder and with the *Book of Discipline* before speaking with us. You have the right to have another elder with you during this meeting. You also have the right to voluntarily “withdraw under charges.” Do you understand?

If you decide to continue this meeting now without another elder

present, you will have the right to stop at any time and have another elder present with you. Do you understand?

The content of this meeting is held within the confidentiality of the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board unless there is risk of imminent bodily harm to another person present, or if the allegations are required to be reported by law, such as sexual abuse of a child or abuse of the elderly.

Knowing and understanding these rights as they have been explained to you, are you willing to continue this meeting without either having another elder present or consulting with Chapter VII of the *Book of Discipline*?

- b. We seek a sincere *repentance* as verified by a consistent change in behavior; and
 - c. The MEG Board will form a Restoration Team to seek a full *recovery* from the sin and a restoring to ministry.
2. The second communication is with the area bishop. This communication is in writing and explains that a Restoration Process has begun with this elder. This communication seeks counsel and wisdom as well as possible resources beyond the conference.
 3. The third communication is with the MEG Board. This communication is done in a meeting of the board with confidentiality by all members.
 4. The fourth communication is with the church and conference. This communication is at the discretion of the superintendent in consultation with the bishop and MEG Board and may be made later in the restoration process when recovery is well underway. The public statement made at the time of the removal from ministry may simply say: “Pastor ____ has asked for a leave of absence to work on personal issues in his/her life.” Or: “Pastor ____ is being relieved from pastoral responsibilities to work on personal issues in his/her life. We ask that you respect his/her privacy and when appropriate, Pastor _____ will speak to you of his/her journey.” If the elder’s grievous sin is public knowledge then a statement may be made: “Pastor _____ has been relieved from pastoral responsibilities to enter a process of restoration to God and recovery to ministry. We ask that you pray for him/her and ask for God’s care during this difficult time.”

B. Repentance

1. The process of restoration requires a time of recovery measured by transformation and fresh empowerment to reenter ministry.
 - a. Pastoral and professional counseling explores the power of a grievous sin's hold over a person, not only enslaving but damaging to one's character and self awareness. Denial and self-deception are two psychological defenses which make it difficult for a person to be aware of his/her sin and its power over them. Hypocrisy and deceit are also forms of self-protection which humans tend to use in order to escape from accountability.
 - b. The spiritual and emotional support of the elder's family, victim of the elder's pastoral abuse and the congregation will require a time of recovery as well. This recovery may necessitate the provision of counseling and group healing to deal with trust and grief issues. This care for the congregation is the responsibility of the superintendent in cooperation with the Restoration Team.
2. The process of restoration requires an accountability procedure. These procedures involve the creation of a "Restoration Team" by the MEG Board. Pedigo describes the formation of this team and the accountability procedure on pages 9-14. In addition, Pedigo treats "Scriptural Instruction Regarding God's Grace in Restoring and Reinstating Fallen Leaders" on pages 86-94 and provides an extensive bibliography on pages 95-99.
 - a. Financial care of the elder and the elder's family. Due to the life changes restoration requires, the financial needs of the elder and his/her family are discussed in Pedigo (pp. 39-40). Working with the superintendent and the local board of administration, the Restoration Team will help the elder work out a plan to financially care for his/her family. Care should be taken in this difficult task to make sure that the family is not put further at risk by the crisis of lost income. The goal is financial stability during the transition and expert assistance toward alternate employment.
 - b. Remaining within the congregation or finding a host congregation. The question of continued participation in the local church or finding another congregation to host the elder and his/her family during the restoration is discussed in Pedigo (pp. 73-74). Working with the superintendent and the local board of adminis-

tration, the Restoration Team will help the elder work out a plan to spiritually care for his/her family.

- c. The process of restoration requires the accountability procedure to refer both to the accountability of the elder to the Restoration Team, as well as the Restoration Team to the MEG Board. To assist in this Pedigo has several additional pages of helpful reference: Initial Meetings Purpose Planner (pp. 75-76); Guidelines for Restoration Team (pp. 77-78); Accountability questions (p. 79); and John Wesley's Questions (partial) (p. 80). Also helpful is a Checkpoint Rating Scale so the Restoration Team can assess their own process in an ongoing way (pp. 66-67).
- d. The process of restoration requires the elder to surrender his/her ordination parchments, without ornamental frames, to the conference secretary until restoration is complete. The elder's membership is then placed with a local church to provide spiritual care for the elder and his/her family. (See Pedigo's "Pastor-in-Residence Program" pp. 73-74.) When restoration is complete and the elder is restored to ministry, a celebration of his/her ordination can be held as the parchments are returned and ministry restored.
- e. Continuing relationship with the elder is an important part of restoration. Healthy biblical communities are those which reach out to those in restoration, inviting them to personal and public gatherings, offering love and grace in our Lord's name. This is made more feasible if the conference provides prevenient care in supportive groups so that personal relationships are enhanced and ongoing love is expressed.

C. Recovery

1. When the restoration process has been followed, giving ample time for the elder to establish a trustworthy pattern of Christian character and conduct, the Restoration Team reports this completion to the superintendent and MEG Board.
2. The MEG Board may then interview the elder and determine whether the time has come to return the elder's parchments and restore him or her to ministry, or whether additional restoration is necessary. When it is determined that the restoration process is complete the MEG Board recommends to the conference or its board of administration the return of parchments and a restoring of ministry.

3. The recovery of an elder is a cause for celebration. The conference or its board of administration may publicly rejoice with the elder and his/her family by restoring his/her parchments in a way that brings dignity to the elder and the church.

APPENDIX

A. Records

In all instances where an elder is being restored, a complete log of phone calls, personal contacts, reactions and responses are to be kept. In addition, a careful compiling of all correspondence related to the restoration or attempted restoration is to be done. Duplicate copies should be made and placed in two separate and safe locations.

B. Covenant of Restoration

**MINISTERIAL EDUCATION AND GUIDANCE BOARD
COVENANT OF RESTORATION WITH _____ (elder) of the
_____ CONFERENCE of the FREE METHODIST CHURCH**

This agreement is entered into as a Covenant by and between _____, an ordained elder, who is currently in the Restoration Process in the _____ Conference of the Free Methodist Church, and the Conference Ministerial Education and Guidance Board.

The elder and the board enter into this covenant for the purpose of pastoral care and professional restoration.

It is therefore hereby acknowledged that as an elder in the Free Methodist Church, I accept the authority of the Restoration Team established by the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board of the _____ Conference. The Restoration Team and the MEG Board will join the elder in pursuing every effort to accomplish the restoration to wholeness of life and service within the Free Methodist Church. The MEG Board retains the authority to determine when the Restoration Process has been completed.

Restoration Team

The Restoration Team established by the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board will guide the restoration process. Members of this team are:

Ordination Credentials

The elder agrees to leave his/her ordination credentials voluntarily submitted in trust with the _____ Conference.

RESTORATION PROCESS

The process for restoration is outlined in the document: *Restoration Process — A Manual for Superintendents and Ministerial Education and Guidance Boards*.

Restoration Time Line

There is no specific time given in which the Restoration Process must be completed. This allows for the unique journey of each elder in their restoration process. However, if the elder has not submitted to the restoration process as outlined above, or not become actively involved in a Free Methodist Church prior to the _____ (date) _____ Annual Conference, he/she agrees to request to be withdrawn from the conference and denomination with the designation: “Withdrawn Under Complaint.”

In witness thereof, the parties agree in the presence of God to abide by and fulfill this Covenant of Restoration:

Elder

Date

Superintendent

Date

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C. Moral Failure Debriefing (Sample Format)

Introduction

The following is an outline for a debriefing by the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board and superintendents on cases of breach of church order. The intention in carrying out this check-up is to learn from the experience. With regard to process, this agenda may also be useful to outline important elements to follow as the case is treated.

Define the situation in one sentence in professional language.

- How did church authorities learn of the problem?
- Were there legal/civil charges?
- Was there confession, contrition and repentance?

Characterize:

complete, remorseful; reluctant; resistant, forced

Describe the attitude of spouse, family, etc.

Was the area bishop informed?

Describe the action of conference leadership relating to 1) the minister involved, 2) the other person(s) involved, 3) the local congregation:

- What did the superintendent do?
- What actions did the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board take?
 - For discipline
 - For restoration (see Restoration Process)
- How were these decisions/actions communicated?
- Was there counsel from the area bishop?
- Was a detailed record kept of all interactions and communications in the case (telephone conversations, interview, correspondence)?

What were the (initial) reactions to the superintendent/Ministerial Education and Guidance Board actions?

- By the minister involved
- By the other person(s) involved
- By the congregation
- By the conference

To what extent was the minister cooperative with the Restoration Team of the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board in receiving discipline and participating in the process for restoration to ministry/leadership?

- A year after the event, what seems to be the outcome?
 - a) What have been the identifiable effects on the local congregation?
 - b) What have been the effects on the individual involved and his/her ministry?
- What did you learn from this situation? What did you do right? What went well?
- Has a debriefing report been filed with the area bishop?
- If you had to handle this situation again, what would you do differently?

