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Association of Unity Churches International

Restoration Policy

I. Purpose

This policy offers a reconciliation process by which a person who has been suspended by the Credentialed Leader/Ministry Review System [CLMRS] or placed not in good standing can be restored to good standing in the Association of Unity Churches International.

II. Who is eligible?

Ministers who have been suspended through the CLMRS process or placed on a Required Plan of Action and who have chosen not to appeal or who have exhausted their appeals, may be eligible to seek restoration.

III. Background

Broadly speaking, Unity ministers are placed on a Required Plan of Action or are suspended by peers through the CLMRS process for one of two reasons – either they have acted in a way that is primarily a violation of Association policies but doesn't cause significant harm to people or a ministry, or they have acted in a way that causes frank harm to a person or a ministry.

Along the spectrum of offenses, from violating policy to causing frank harm to persons or a ministry, there is a threshold beyond which the offense is significant enough that restoration to good standing cannot be considered. Examples of offenses that would put restoration out of reach would include, but not be limited to, embezzlement, and sexual misconduct with a minor.

Demonstrated good works that exemplify servant-based leadership will be taken into account in all applications for reconciliation.

Restoration of good standing depends on restoring or healing relationships. It will require that a person come back into right relationship with Association policy and procedures. And it may require that a person establish or reestablish a harmonious relationship with one or more people and/or a ministry.

This policy is intended to be an expression of restorative justice which has as its focus the questions, “What harm has been done and how can the harm be repaired?” This policy is intended to avoid expressing attributes of retributive justice which seeks to blame and administer punishment.

Contrasts between restorative and retributive justice*

Restorative Justice

Crime is a violation or harm to people and relationships.

The aim of justice is to identify obligations, to meet needs and to promote healing.

The process of justice involves victims, offenders, and community in an effort to identify obligations and solutions, maximizing the exchange of information (through dialogue and mutual agreement) between them.

Retributive Justice

Crime is a violation of the law and the state is the victim.

The aim of justice is to establish blame and administer punishment.

The process of justice is a conflict between adversaries in which offender is pitted against state. Rules and intentions outweigh outcomes. One side wins while the other loses.

[* Material by Howard Zehr, Director of the Office on Crime and Justice of the Mennonite Central Committee]

The Blessings of Time

When an offense is recent the person who has offended may feel (and in fact may be) accused of wrongdoing. When we feel accused, backed into a corner, we often defend ourselves with vigor. We may be insensitive to the needs of others, to their experience, and to their points of view.

When we perceive that we have been offended, we may put energy into telling our story. We may continue to gather and share evidence. We build a case. Under these circumstances we may outline our position with vigor. We may be insensitive to the needs of others, to their experience, and to their points of view.

Time, usually a year or more, gives the offender and offended opportunities to see what has happened not only in terms of the other person’s role, but in terms of one’s own contribution to the situation. These opportunities to broaden perspective come through prayer, reflection and dialogue with others.

Suspended reviewees who have exhausted their appeals may be eligible to seek restoration under the Association of Unity Churches International Restoration Policy no earlier than twelve months after their suspension and/or their last day of ministerial employment, whichever is later.

IV. Procedure

- A.** When an individual* desires reconciliation with the Association of Unity Churches, that person will contact the Association's Director of Ministry Employment or the VP Minister & Ministry Services. The individual will be asked to write a letter answering these questions:
- 1) What event or situation caused a change in your status with the Association?
 - 2) What was your role in/contribution to the event or situation?
 - 3) What is your assessment of the decision made by CLMRS (or its predecessors)?
 - 4) Who was harmed and in what way(s) by the event/situation?
 - 5) What have you done to make things right?
 - 6) What can be done to make things right?
- [*Reconciliation happens for individuals, not couples. If two persons were involved in the original incident, they need to apply for reconciliation as individuals.]
- B.** The letter and other pertinent material will be reviewed by Standards Ministry Team to determine whether steps toward restoration to good standing are warranted. Standards Ministry Team may decide to:
- 1) Recommend that the person be restored to good standing/cleared status, or,
 - 2) Meet with the person by bridge line call or face to face before making a recommendation, or,
 - 3) Refer to Judicatory Representative in the Region in which the minister making the request currently resides for a review, or,
 - 4) Decline to recommend restoration. In this case a letter will be written to the individual outlining specific actions the individual can choose to take that could lead to reconsideration for restoration at a later date. Or the letter might indicate that the individual is not a candidate for restoration to good standing/cleared status.
- C.** If an individual is recommended for restoration, the individual will be responsible to make things right by:
- 1) Agreeing that a written apology to colleagues will be reviewed and approved by the Standards Ministry Team and will be published in an appropriate internal media.
 - 2) Making amends to individuals or ministries that have been harmed through written or face to face apology.
- D.** Conditions of restoration may also require the individual to:
- 1) Work closely with a mentor or coach.
 - 2) Complete Peacemaking training.
 - 3) Receive psychological counseling.
 - 4) Accept clearance for limited placement.
 - 5) Fulfill other obligations determined by the Standards Ministry Team.

- E. If suspension has been instituted because terms of a Required Plan of Action have not been fulfilled then those terms of the Required Plan of Action must be met prior to an application for restoration can be made.

V. **Notice of Restored Standing**

- A. Recommendations of the Standards Ministry Team will be considered to be decisions in effect under the authority of the Board of Trustees of the Association of Unity Churches International.
- B. After the Association's Board of Trustees has reviewed the recommendation, the Chair of the Board will write a letter to the individual who is restored to good standing/cleared status. A copy of the letter will be placed in the minister's permanent file.
- C. When an individual has been restored to good standing/cleared status, the Chair of the Association's Board of Trustees will write a letter to individual(s) and/or the ministry affected by the initial situation. The letter will inform the individual(s) and/or ministry of the restored status and will outline the steps taken by the individual to warrant restored status.
- D. An individual restored to good standing/cleared status will have the option of having an announcement of restored status published in *Minister's Letter*.