

Covenant Ministerium Constitution and Bylaw Amendment Proposal FAQ

1. Why is this proposal being recommended?

The last several years have been tumultuous and have damaged the health and collective trust amongst the Ministerium. The intent of this proposal is to foster increased health and trust through an amended and improved process for Contested Credential Hearings that:

- Maintains the crucial voice of the Ministerium within the ECC
- Is representative of our diversity.
- Retains appropriate checks and balances.
- Allows for a more in-depth and nuanced review of discipline cases for the benefit of all parties involved.

2. In a nutshell what is the proposal we are voting on?

The proposal is to move Contested Credentialed Hearings out of the Ministerium Annual Meeting and provide, instead, a similar and equitable space for hearing and discernment by the Ministerium Executive Committee, a 26-member committee elected by, and representative of, the larger Ministerium. The proposal was unanimously voted on by the Ministerium Executive Committee and the Board of Ordered Ministry. It was presented to Covenant Executive Board, the Council of Superintendents, and Covenant Offices executive leadership where there was support for the proposal.

Discussion of this proposal has taken place in all regional ministerial associations by zoom and in additional gatherings that have taken place in person. This will be voted on at the Annual Meeting of the Ministerium in June of this year.

3. If passed, when will the proposal go into effect?

The proposal will go into effect upon passage of the Ministerium constitution and bylaw amendments, the Rules of Ordered Ministry amendment, and the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) bylaw amendment. There must be congruence of all governing documents for the recommended process to be adopted.

4. If passed what happens next?

If the motion is passed a Presidential Task Force will be formed for the purpose of considering alternative pathways of accountability for use by the Board of Ordered Ministry with pastors who have practiced behaviors out of alignment with our ethical guidelines on human sexuality. These discussions will be held in congruence with the position adopted by the Covenant Annual Meeting (1996, 2004). The Presidential Task Force will not be convened if the proposal is not passed.

5. Who makes the decision for the removal of a credential?

The Board of Ordered Ministry does not remove credentials. The Ministerium and/or the Executive Committee of the Covenant Ministerium do not remove credentials. The Annual Meeting is the only place that a removal of a credential takes place. Currently, the entire Ministerium votes on whether to advance the recommendation of the Board or Ordered Ministry to the Annual Meeting for vote.

If the recommended proposal passes, the Executive Committee of the Ministerium will vote on whether to advance the recommendation of the Board of Ordered Ministry to the Annual Meeting for vote. The decision to remove a credential remains with the delegates of the Annual Meeting.

6. Will this proposed change dilute the voice of the Ministerium?

The Ministerium will continue to have a voice through the representatives we elect. The Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) has practiced representative leadership since its inception. The proposed Constitutional amendment follows that pattern. There are many Boards throughout the conference and denomination, and even in our churches, where representative governance is practiced. In all these processes we depend on the discernment of our colleagues. In addition, if a contested credential is moved forward to the Annual Meeting, the members of the Ministerium will continue to have an opportunity to vote as a delegate to the ECC Annual Meeting on the recommendation from the Board of Ordered Ministry.

7. Who comprises the Executive Committee of the Covenant Ministerium?

The members of the Executive Committee of the Covenant Ministerium are all elected to their positions. They include the Regional Conference Ministerial Association Chairs (11), Presidents of each of our Ethnic Associations (4), Officers of the Ministerium (5), Chair of the Covenant Chaplains' Association, Chair of Advocates for Covenant Clergy Women, Dean of North Park Seminary, Chair of the Board of Ordered Ministry, President of the ECC, and the Executive Minister of Serve Clergy.

8. How well does the Executive Committee of the Covenant Ministerium represent the diversity of the whole Ministerium?

The twenty-six members of the Executive Committee are all elected and represent the diversity of our pastors including bi-vocational, geographical, male/female, and the multi-ethnic mosaic. The addition of the virtual option for the Annual Meeting has been a welcome change, providing broader access for attendance at Ministerium. However, the actual attendance at our Annual Meeting is still only a fraction of the membership in any given year, (i.e., in 2022 we had 680 of 2500+ present and voting). In that manner, the Annual Meeting does not represent the totality of the membership of the Ministerium. The Executive Committee of the Ministerium has funds available to make sure all members of the Executive Committee can participate.

In selecting members of Boards and commissions, the ECC bylaws establish requirements based on gender balance, geography, in some cases lay vs. clergy. For the Ministerial Association good standing has been the basis for selection. We strongly encourage Ministerial Associations to follow this same practice and continue to use good standing as the basis for selection.

9. When will the Executive Committee of the Covenant Ministerium communicate to the Ministerium that there is a contested credentials discernment process?

The bylaw proposal outlines the timing and process for how and when the Ministerium is notified about a contested credential hearing.

In the event a hearing takes place, the President of the Ministerium will inform both the Minister and the Chair of the Board of Ordered Ministry of the results and vote percentages immediately following the hearing (same day).

After every annual gathering of the Executive Committee of the Covenant Ministerium, if there was a contested credentials hearing and a two-thirds vote is reached to advance the recommendation to the Annual Meeting, then that information will be disclosed to the ministerium within 7 days from the contested credentials hearing.

If a contested credential hearing recommendation is not forwarded to the ECC Annual Meeting, the Ministerium will not be notified about the hearing, maintaining the confidentiality of the minister in question. The minister will remain under suspension and the case will return to the Board of Ordered Ministry for continued care and discernment.

10. How will these proposed changes improve the tone and tenor of future meetings?

The Executive Committee of the Covenant Ministerium is a smaller body that will allow for a time of shared understanding, prayer, discernment, and care for the minister in question. In the past, time limits were imposed which can limit the number of voices heard. Every member of the Executive Committee will have an unhurried opportunity to be heard and ask questions which gives voice and consideration to various perspectives and discernments. A two-thirds threshold will be maintained to move a recommendation forward.

This proposal will eliminate the need for two contested credential hearings for a pastor in the same week. In the past, if the Ministerium advanced the recommendation of the Board of Ordered Ministry then Annual Meeting Officers had to scramble to get last minute information to delegates for a duplicate hearing two days later. If this proposal is adopted there will be adequate time to notify churches that such a hearing is taking place and to provide relevant materials for church delegates in advance.

11. Will a member on the Board of Ordered Ministry be able to have more influence in their vote if they are also a member of the Executive Committee of the Covenant Ministerium?

This bylaw amendment does nothing to change how voting already occurs in the ECC. Currently, a member of the Ministerium can vote in the Ministerium and again vote as a

delegate on the same matter in the Annual Meeting. Likewise, a minister on the Board of Nominations can vote for a member to be on a Board, and then vote again for them as a delegate in the Annual Meeting.

Underlying this question may be an assumption that all members of the Board of Ordered Ministry vote affirmatively for any contested credential recommendation and therefore they will vote similarly on the Executive Committee of the Ministerium. The Board of Ordered Ministry rarely has unanimous decisions, and an assumption of this nature would not be accurate.

12. How common is a contested credential hearing?

There have been three contested credential hearings, and all have occurred within the last five years. Most pastors who find themselves in strong disagreement with the theology and/or practices of the ECC for any number of reasons normally opt to withdraw their credential as a matter of conscience. Each year we have people withdraw for a variety of reasons. It is not until recent years that a pastor has determined not to practice within guidelines and not to submit to the authority of the Board of Ordered Ministry without withdrawing their credential. This has led to the recommendation for removal of a credential. In these three cases the pastor had contested the removal of their credential which led to a contested credentials hearing. It is our sincere hope that we will not have a need for future contested credential hearings.