

# REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON REVISING DIRECTORY OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT D-22

January 27, 2020

On February 27, 2018, the Bloomington R.P. Church (BRPC) issued a pastoral call to Rev. Philip McCollum, a minister within the R.P. Church of Ireland. Upon the forwarding of this call to our presbytery's *Ad Interim Commission* (AIC), it was discovered that, following the departure of Rev. Adam Niess (its previous 'second pastor' alongside Rev. Rich Holdeman), BRPC had not requested presbytery's authorization prior to calling Mr. McCollum. Likewise, neither the presbytery nor the AIC had taken the initiative to issue such authorization. The only action taken by the AIC at the time (11/20/17) was its passing of a motion to "declare the pastoral relationship dissolved between Adam Niess and Bloomington RPC as of December 18, 2017." Therefore, there was some cause for concern that the election of Mr. McCollum had not been duly authorized by the presbytery, as required in the *Directory for Church Government* (D-17).

On March 28, 2018, having reviewed the call to Rev. McCollum and diligently researched the apparent constitutional dilemma, the AIC issued the following ruling:

It was noted that due to an understandable oversight the Presbytery had not officially notified the Bloomington Session and congregation by letter that the pastoral relationship with Adam Niess had ended as of December 18, 2017 and of their right to make a call for a new Pastor. This was due somewhat to the fact that the Constitution does not adequately address multi-pastor congregations and therefore primarily deals with a pulpit being declared vacant, which was not the case at Bloomington.

It was moved, seconded and passed to recognize, confirm, and validate the Bloomington congregation's authorization to replace its departing teaching elder, as of the dissolution of its pastoral relationship with Rev. Adam Niess on December 18, 2017 and to prepare the required letter and forward it to the Bloomington Session Clerk. The letter follows these minutes.

In its letter to the BRPC Session, the AIC explained its ruling in greater detail.

On November 20, 2017, last year's Ad Interim Commission passed a motion to "declare the pastoral relationship dissolved between Adam Niess and Bloomington RPC as of December 18, 2017."

According to our DCG (D-22, 5-d), presbytery should also have sent you a letter at that time, confirming the dissolution of your pastoral relationship with your departing teaching elder (TE) and authorizing you to call a replacement.

As far as we know, it has not been common practice in our presbytery to send this letter to a congregation losing one of its multiple TE's, since its pulpit is not thereby rendered vacant. As a result, such congregations have been expected to *initiate* a request for authorization to make out a call (per D-17), whereas congregations looking to replace their *sole* TE have received authorization *automatically* via letter, at the time of dissolution (per D-22).

We believe that this is patently unfair and represents an inconsistency between our practice and our constitution, which requires *presbytery* to take the initiative in granting authorization to replace a departing TE. Of course, if a congregation is seeking to call an *additional* TE (rather than *replacing* a *departing* TE), its session must take the initiative and petition presbytery for authorization (per D-17). However, when a TE departs, presbytery is supposed to send a letter that "shall also contain presbytery's authorization and counsel regarding... moderating a call" (D-22, 5-d). Even if the letter does *not* include a declaration that the pulpit is vacant, it should *still* include (1) confirmation of the dissolution date and (2) authorization for a call.

We would therefore like to apologize, on presbytery's behalf, for our unfortunate oversight in not sending you this letter of authorization last November. Constitutionally, this is your right and we regret any unnecessary anxiety and confusion that we have caused. We do not believe that this was primarily the fault of the previous Ad Interim Commission, but rather represents a teachable moment for all of us. In addition, we hope that our blue book will be updated in the coming years to reflect the peculiar needs of congregations with multiple TE's.

In light of the concerns raised over the current wording of the *Directory for Church Government* (D-22), the AIC passed an additional motion (3/28/18) to “make the following recommendation to Presbytery at its May 11, 2018 meeting: *That a committee of three, appointed by the moderator, consider how the language in our DCG respecting the departure of a teaching elder (D-22) might be improved so as to clarify its application to congregations with more than one teaching elder, and report back with a recommendation to the Spring 2019 meeting.*”

The presbytery later approved this recommendation on May 11, 2018 and the following committee was appointed by the moderator: CJ Davis, Adam Kuehner (ch), and Frank Smith. Due to an unfortunate oversight, this committee did not report in the spring of 2019, but is pleased at this time, in accordance with its mandate from presbytery, to recommend the adoption of the following proposed amendment to our *Directory for Church Government* 3.II.5.d (D-22) as well as the parallel section in DCG 3.II.6.f (D-23):

<b>CURRENT DIRECTORY FOR CHURCH GOVERNMENT 3.II.5.d (D-22)</b>	<b>PROPOSED REVISION TO DIRECTORY FOR CHURCH GOVERNMENT 3.II.5.d (D-22)</b>
d. Presbytery shall inform the clerk of session by letter that the pulpit has been declared vacant. This letter shall be read to the congregation. The letter shall also contain presbytery’s authorization and counsel regarding pulpit supply, administration of sacraments and moderating a call.	d. Presbytery shall inform the clerk of session by letter that <b>the pastoral relationship has been dissolved, conveying presbytery’s authorization and counsel regarding the replacement of the departing teaching elder.</b> This letter shall be read to the congregation. <b>If the dissolution leaves the congregation without an installed teaching elder, the letter shall also declare the pulpit vacant and include</b> presbytery’s authorization and counsel regarding pulpit supply, administration of sacraments and moderating a call.

<b>CURRENT DIRECTORY FOR CHURCH GOVERNMENT 3.II.6.f (D-23)</b>	<b>PROPOSED REVISION TO DIRECTORY FOR CHURCH GOVERNMENT 3.II.6.f (D-23)</b>
d. Presbytery shall inform the clerk of session by letter that the pulpit has been declared vacant. This letter shall be read to the congregation. The letter shall also contain presbytery’s authorization and counsel regarding pulpit supply, administration of sacraments and moderating a call.	d. Presbytery shall inform the clerk of session by letter that <b>the pastoral relationship has been dissolved, conveying presbytery’s authorization and counsel regarding the replacement of the departing teaching elder.</b> This letter shall be read to the congregation. <b>If the dissolution leaves the congregation without an installed teaching elder, the letter shall also declare the pulpit vacant and include</b> presbytery’s authorization and counsel regarding pulpit supply, administration of sacraments and moderating a call.

**Recommendation #1** – That presbytery endorse the proposed revision to the Directory of Church Government 3.II.5.d (D-22) and forward it to the 2020 Synod with a view to formal adoption by the denomination.

**Recommendation #2** – That presbytery dissolve this committee.

Respectfully Submitted,  
 CJ Davis  
 Adam Kuehner (chair)  
 Frank J. Smith