

Frequently Asked Questions

GNJ Clergy Gathering 1.11.17

Confidential

These frequently asked questions and answers have been produced in response to questions asked by GNJ clergy following the Clergy Gathering on January 11, 2017. The information at the Clergy Gathering and clarified below is a part of our covenant. The questions and answers are to be considered confidential. They are provided to help clarify difficult situations that were discussed and are not to be shared or forwarded.

If you feel it is important to share this information with someone else or a group, please contact [Carolyn Conover](mailto:cconover@gnjumc.org), Director of Communication, cconover@gnjumc.org.

Complaint Process

Why was specific information regarding one complaint brought up 3 years after the event?

Several clergy and congregations within Greater New Jersey have not heeded repeated directives from the bishop and superintendents to discontinue their participation with the program led by a former clergy member who was under complaint and surrendered his credentials. Continued participation was a failure to be supervised and put the young people, congregations and the conference at potential risk.

Why was it important to share graphic evidence from a specific complaint?

Many clergy and laity did not recognize the severity of the matter without the detail exemplified in the text messages. We were aware of three clergy who continued to participate until the text messages were shared. By sharing this information, we have generated additional information about the situation. We have learned of two additional congregations in which laity are participating with the former clergy person and four other clergy who are involved with an entity which intends to use the former clergy person in ministries with youth. The text messages highlighted the severity and potential risks for young people.

The bishop has also heard from several clergy who believe we have misjudged the former clergy person. The text messages graphically illustrate the severity and the basis for the actions taken by the bishop and cabinet.

Because the former clergy person surrendered his credentials instead of participating in the complaint process, there has been no resolution or healing for the people involved. The church does not have confidence that the clergy person has repented, received the appropriate help and accountability to ensure it does not happen again and taken the appropriate steps. The lack of resolution has created more hurt on the part of the survivor and mistrust among people who have relationship with the former clergy person. Sharing evidence on the severity of the issue clarifies the urgency of the request to discontinue involvement in this and all programs led by the former clergy person.

What will be the follow up in the future?

We have worked with the survivor and will continue to do so. We also will work with congregations that may have been impacted by the situation to provide healing for all. When a complaint is brought to resolution, there is a time of healing for everyone involved. Because the person in question surrendered his credentials rather than resolving the complaint, there was no resolution for healing individuals and communities that have been impacted. If you or members of your congregation need support with healing, please the [episcopal office](#).

Has GNJ taken the appropriate legal steps regarding the complaint that was discussed? Is there anything we can do legally to assure that no other predatory relationships are created?

The Bishop has worked with GNJ's Chancellor to take every step available to address the situation legally and ethically. The events outlined took years to unfold. The survivor in this case was of legal age when the sexual relationship commenced and only sought resolution from GNJ after a period of counseling after the relationship had ended. The age of the survivor, the desires of the survivor and the fact that it passed the statute of limitations constrained legal action. GNJ will continue to instruct churches and congregations not to engage with programs that involve the person in question and to advise peer institutions as appropriate. We have learned of three additional situations in which the former clergy person has involvement or influence and will be following up with these individually.

How can the executive session of the clergy at Annual Conference better inform the body when there is serious cause for someone being removed from ministry - both the licensed and the ordained?

Whenever a clergy person surrenders their credentials or is put on an involuntary status any clergy person may request information surrounding the clergy person's change of status. Clergy may also ask what steps conference leadership has taken to inform appropriate church and civil bodies and individuals to ensure appropriate steps are taken.

From a legal viewpoint, this was sexual assault, why was our "Safe Sanctuaries Policy" not enacted?

Appropriate church leaders, including clergy were informed along with bishops in the neighboring conferences. The survivor did not want to file a police report or contact other authorities and it was beyond the statute of limitations.

Why is there not more transparency around the complaint made against Jisun Kwak?

The complaint process regarding Jisun Kwak is following the proceedings outlined in the Book of Discipline (¶ 363) which requires that during the process "alleged facts not be shared which may compromise any possible forthcoming administrative or judicial process." The complaint has been referred to the counsel for the church to prepare the case for the Committee on Investigation and anticipated trial.

Questions about Elders Moving to Part-Time

How will decisions be made regarding moving Elders from full-time to part-time appointments?

The cabinet will convene a team to make recommendations as to how to handle a part time appointment that is initiated by the bishop and cabinet. The team will advise the full cabinet who will make a presentation to the clergy session of Annual Conference in May of 2017. The plan will not be implemented until the 2018 appointment season. The cabinet will also request a declaratory decision concerning the meaning and effect of the paragraphs related to part time appointments.

Who will be asked to serve on the team making recommendations?

The advisory team will consist of:

- Two Cabinet Members
- Chair of the Order of Elders: Kyu Tae Pak
- Chair of the Order of Deacons: Brenda Wheeler Ehlers
- Chair of the Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members: Douglas Goldsborough
- Chair of the Board of Ordained Ministry: Tom Korkuch
- Chair of Conference Relations: Jessica Brendler Naulty
- Conference Lay Leader: Rosa Williams
- Finance and Benefits representatives as needed.

What are some of the issues that will be addressed by this advisory team?

The team will review the questions submitted by clergy who participated in the survey sent after the clergy gathering on January 11. If you have not completed the survey and would like to add feedback, please [click here](#). The questions raised by the survey include among other things:

- The specific criteria that will be used to determine which Elders will be given part-time appointments
- The type of consultations that will be held when someone is being considered for part-time
- The method of recourse, if any, the Elder will have after being alerted to part-time status
- Clergy who are not members of Greater New Jersey Annual Conference
- Information and resources that will be shared throughout the conference
- Consideration of clergy status (elder vs local pastor) or efficiency

The following are additional areas in which questions have been raised regarding appointments which the cabinet will review and report to the clergy

- The practice of rehiring retired Elders to fill part-time positions
- The miles ratio in which a pastor can serve if he/she does not live in the parsonage
- The effect on these decisions to Licensed Local Pastors
- Opportunities for Elders moving to part-time to go to another conference

Why doesn't the conference invest more money in equitable compensation for churches going part-time to ensure full-time appointments?

This idea has been studied and looked at and the following is what has been found?

- Churches supported by equitable compensation have not grown, in fact in all but a very few cases, the churches have declined.
- Equitable compensation has worked best to grow congregations in second sites, new church starts, new ethnic congregations and investing in our highest potential apostolic leadership.
- If GNJ subsidized congregations with equitable compensation to keep full-time pastors:
 - Over the last 10 years, GNJ would have spent more than \$8 million in equitable compensation and the budget for 2017 would have been increased by more than \$2 million.
 - In the next 10 years, GNJ would need to spend as much as \$18 million.

GNJ wants to support our smaller full-time congregations but equitable compensation has not proven to be a method that has worked. The new proposal is to work with clergy that are in jeopardy of going part-time and with congregations that are in jeopardy of going part-time. We will pilot a new program to test its impact and report to the conference our learnings.

What clergy will be considered for part-time ministry?

1. Clergy with limited itineracy. These are clergy who have communicated that they are unable to move beyond a certain area or have limitations on where they can serve. If it is necessary to move the clergy person because they have asked for a move or the congregation has requested a move or their appointment is going part-time, it may be necessary to move them to a part-time appointment.
2. Clergy who can only serve a particular congregation that may not be available. For instance someone who can only serve in a rural or urban church, someone whose language skills does not allow them to itinerate to any congregation and there is not a full time congregation available in their primary language, or someone who can only serve in a congregation with a particular theology.
3. Clergy who meet the minimum standards for effectiveness but without further development, are having difficulty leading a congregation through challenges or maintaining a congregation's full-time status.

How does the cabinet make appointments?

Appointment practices, policies and practices may be found at on the GNJ website by [clicking here](#).

Questions about Benefits

Can the conference health benefits extend for pastors who will transition from full-time to part-time?

The conference health insurance provides coverage for full-time appointments only. Health benefits for part-time clergy are not part of our contract with HealthFlex.

Clergy losing eligibility in the plan as a result of moving to part-time are eligible for up to 12 months of continuation coverage if they pay for it directly. HealthFlex requires the conference to bill and collect contributions for continuation coverage directly from the participants who are covered. Participants covered through continuation coverage must pay their required contributions on an after-tax basis.

Can the conference offer early retirement incentives for those anticipating retirement in 3-6 years to go early?

In extreme circumstances, the conference has worked with clergy within a couple of years of retirement. Our goal is always to work with people for the good of the mission of the church. The following highlights what The Book of Discipline outlines concerning the question.

There is no financial incentive for early retirement. Per the 2016 Book Discipline (Par. 358.2b of the 2012 Book of Discipline), at their own request, clergy who are age 62 or have 30 years of service may be placed in retirement with an annuity claim at an actuarially reduced pension.

The Comprehensive Protection Plan (CPP) offers a “Voluntary Transition Program” that is available to clergy with a minimum of five years in full connection as an Elder or Associate Member. The individual must be in good standing and an active CPP participant for five years immediately preceding separation but not within two years of eligibility to retire. This program requires clergy to surrender their credentials to participate. The severance benefits include two weeks of participant’s plan compensation (housing plus cash salary) for each full year of continuous service up to maximum 26 weeks – “transitional period”. This will be a lump-sum payment via direct deposit. The conference would pay the continuation coverage for health benefits during the transitional period. According to conference policy, clergy moving out of parsonages will be reimbursed for moving expenses.

How will moving from full-time to part-time affect clergy pension?

For clergy changing from full-time to part-time service, the years of credited service in the Clergy Retirement Security Program (CRSP) Defined Benefit component will change depending on whether the participant is 50% or 75%. For example, if a pastor has served 10 years at a 50% appointment, the pastor will receive the equivalent of five years of credited service for pension purposes. If a pastor has served 10 years at a 75% appointment, the pastor will receive the equivalent of 7.5 years of credited service.

The retirement formula for determining retirement benefits under the CRSP Defined Benefit is:

1.00% X the final DAC (Denominational Average Compensation) X # of years of credited service.

For clergy who have served full-time, benefits accrued will not be affected and will be recognized as full-time years of service at time of retirement.

Part-time clergy may continue to contribute 1% into the United Methodist Personal Investment Plan (UMPIP) to receive the 1% match in CRSP.

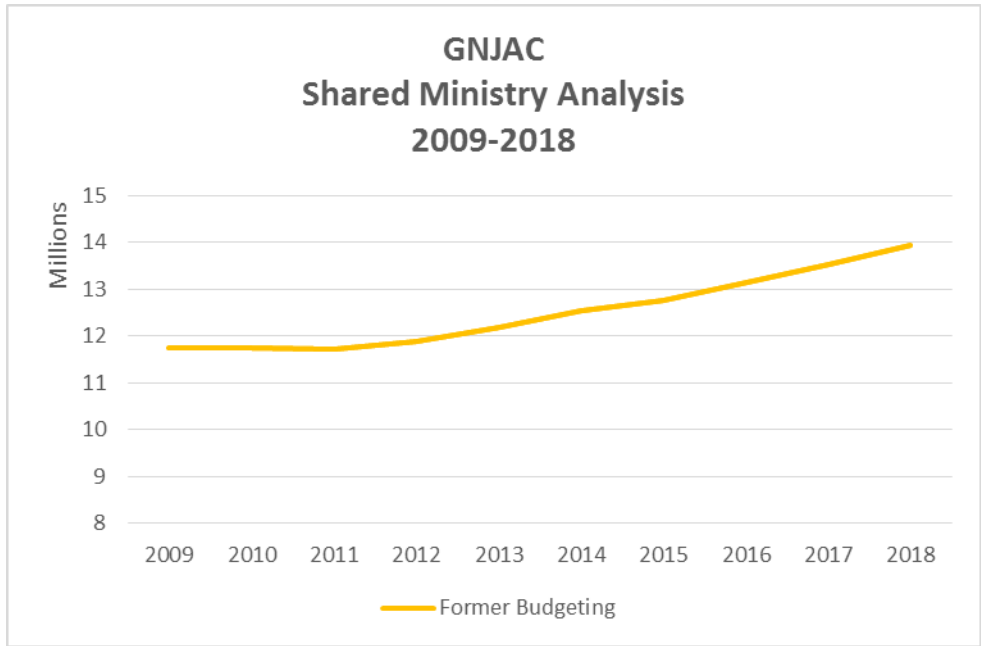
Other Staff Questions

Why are we not considering the possibility of freezing salaries and additional staff positions in the conference office?

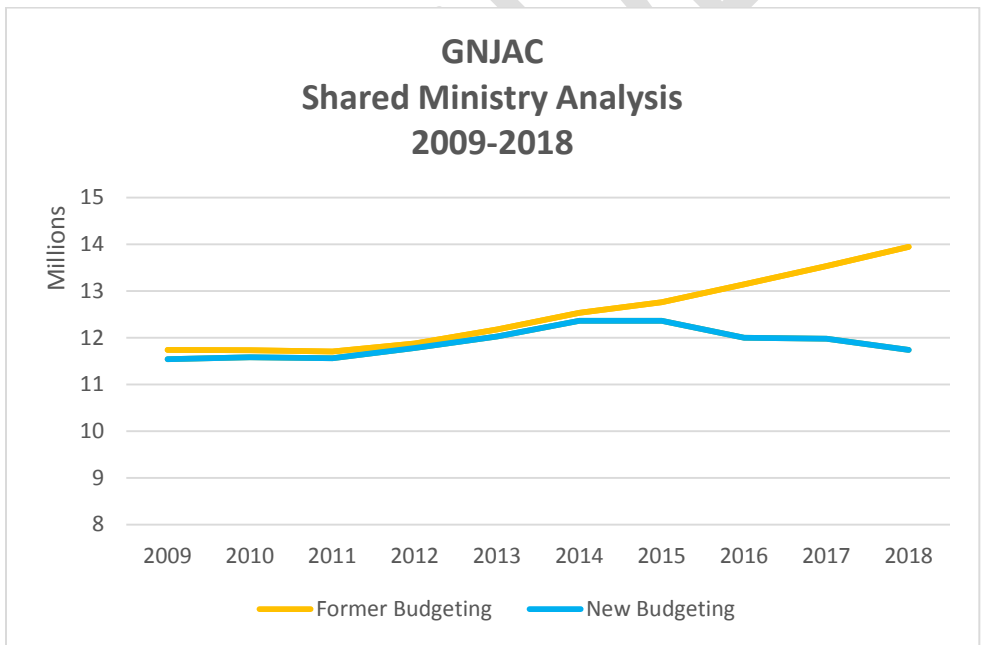
GNJ leadership, included staff and elected leaders, recognize that clergy make significant sacrifices on behalf of the church including many times their own salaries. We are and will continue to work with our clergy and churches to strengthen the health and vitality of congregations especially around giving. We believe that clergy salaries are insufficient for the work, faithfulness and fruitfulness of many of our clergy. Our pledge is to work with all of our clergy and congregations to grow and thrive.

Each year GNJ elected and staff leadership look closely at staffing and compensation to ensure we are good stewards of congregations' resources. In the past several years, staff positions and responsibilities have changed to better serve our congregations. During that same time, staff have found ways to reduce spending, find funding sources outside shared ministry for staffing and maximized staffing to increase efficiencies and accomplish more.

All of this continues to be done with a concern for shared ministries. For instance, in 2016 GNJ clergy compensation increased by 1.7% while conference staff compensation increased by 1.1%. Also if overall shared ministry continued at the rate of growth prior to 2013, it would look like the following graph.



But the steps taken by staff to monitor spending and improve giving changed this trajectory and today it looks like this:



There is a difference of more than \$2 million based on our steps to monitor spending and improve giving.



Presently there is a plan to raise more funds in addition to shared ministry giving so that as much as 20% of the budget is raised through shared services, grants and other gifts. Our goal is to continue to hold flat and decrease the shared ministry apportionment leaving more funds for the local church.

What specifically is the cabinet doing to stop certain clergy from taking (repeated) salary increases while at the same time discouraging/not encouraging full payment of shared ministry or billables?

The goal is always to assist congregations to develop a plan in which they work toward 100% shared ministry participation. The typical plan is for 3-5 years in which it is expected that a church will be giving 100% toward shared ministry and billables. A DS can also require a Financial Ministry Action Plan for the church leadership to complete which assesses budget, examines all areas of income and expenses and generates a plan as described above.

In some instances because of the financial circumstances of the community, such as urban and poor rural communities, a longer plan may be necessary.

Pastors and congregations that do not make progress will be considered for a change of an appointment. Churches that withhold shared ministries because they disagree with the conference or the denomination will be considered for a change of appointment. When an appointment change occurs, a pastor will be appointed at a salary level commensurate with shared ministry giving.

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