

CASE STUDIES FOR DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION:

As candidates prepare to meet with the Committee on Ministry, they will be presented with one of three case studies. These case studies are fictional accounts reflecting complex situations pastors may face in ministry. They are deliberately open-ended without simple or obvious solutions, designed to facilitate nuanced thinking and discussion. A candidate's reflections and responses will help the Committee to assess the candidate's preparedness for the ethical and practical challenges of local church ministry.

Candidates will be asked to choose a case study from the three options enclosed in this document in advance of their meeting with the COM so they can prepare to present their thoughts and ideas. Committee on Ministry representatives are encouraged to reflect on these case studies before the meeting and come prepared to listen to the candidate's responses and ask questions. While COM representatives will undoubtedly have their own insights about the situations presented in the case studies, their job isn't to offer opinions, debate with the candidate, or share their personal stories and anecdotes, but to listen thoughtfully and ask appropriate clarifying questions.

Some questions for the candidate to consider in advance of the meeting with the COM:

- What is going on? What are the dynamics at play?
- At what point do you think things started to go wrong?
- What were the contributing factors that led to things going wrong?
- What are some next steps in dealing with the situation(s) as things stand at the end of the case study?
- What are some things the pastor might have done differently in the situation? How might these different responses or actions have changed the outcome?
- If you found yourself in this situation, what would you do? Why?

CASE STUDIES:

Case study #1: (written by Laura Holt-Haslam)

Pastor Nicole Greenfield accepted a call to First Baptist Church eight months ago. Like many congregations, First Baptist's membership and worship attendance has declined over the past 30 years. Their current average worship attendance is 25, with most members in their seventies through nineties. The only children are Angela Conway's three grandchildren, who have attended sporadically since Pastor Nicole began her ministry at First Baptist. Angela Conway is a deacon and one of the most faithful workers in the congregation.

Hoping to encourage Angela's grandchildren to become more regular participants in the life of the church, Pastor Nicole took them out for pizza. She learned that the oldest, Troy, a junior in high school, plays electric guitar in a band with his friends. The middle grandchild, Lila, age 14, enjoys playing the drums. The youngest, Noah, doesn't play any instruments, but sings with the middle school chorus.

Pastor Nicole asks if the Conway grandchildren would have an interest in forming a worship band. The idea excites them, and Troy says he can ask his friend, Lucas, to play bass guitar.

Pastor Nicole and Angela Conway bring up the idea at the next deacon's meeting. They discuss how important it is for the younger people to feel included in the life of the church and wonder if this might be a way to draw in more families. Everyone goes along with the idea, although deacon Scott Johnson expresses concern that the music might alienate some of the members and their volunteer church pianist, Birgitta.

Two weeks later, Troy, Lucas, Lila, and Noah excitedly set up their equipment and warm up. This is the first time Pastor Nicole has heard them play. She's surprised by how loud they are, and immediately worries that some of the members will not respond positively. She asks them to turn down the volume. When their worship set begins, Pastor Nicole notices several people in the congregation murmuring, and Birgitta frowns and covers her ears.

After worship, most members express appreciation for the teens' efforts. But Scott Johnson calls Pastor Nicole the next day. He tells her he's heard a lot of complaints about the worship band, and hopes they will not play again. But Angela and her grandchildren are already excited about the two contemporary worship songs they've picked out for the next week.

On the following Sunday, Troy's friend Lucas brings his mother to church. She is welcomed warmly, and the band plays their songs. Pastor Nicole thinks the group sounds a little more polished this week, but they are still loud, Lila isn't a very good drummer, and Noah sings off-key. The songs aren't familiar to the congregation, and they struggle to sing along. Half-way through, many sit back down in the pews.

After the Wednesday night prayer meeting, Scott asks to speak to Pastor Nicole privately. He informs her that Birgitta is planning to resign as the pianist if the church continues to let the worship band play. He says he's polled most of the members, and they don't like the worship band, though they are "too polite to tell you". He suggests that if Birgitta steps down as pianist, some of the members will be looking for a different church. He reminds her of the church's tight finances.

Pastor Nicole lies awake most of the night. She fears that if the teens' worship band continues to play on Sunday mornings, people like Birgitta and Scott will leave the church. Scott is one of the biggest givers. But if she tells the kids not to play, it might alienate them from the church, and maybe even from Christians in general. How will Angela respond if her grandchildren are pushed out? Pastor Nicole doesn't know what to do.

Case Study #2 (written by Laura Holt-Haslam)

Bill Watson felt God calling him to pastoral ministry when he was in his early 60s. He took classes through A.I.M., was mentored by his pastor, served in various leadership capacities in his home church, and was commissioned through ABCOM. Bill ran a successful family business for many years, and while he still enjoys working, he gave most of the day-to-day responsibilities to his two capable daughters. He

didn't want to move away from his family and community, so he hoped to find a pastoral position within a reasonable commuting distance from his home.

Bill was thrilled when Grace Baptist called him for a second interview. Located just twenty-five minutes from his house, the small but active church held Sunday morning and evening services, a mid-week prayer and Bible study, co-sponsored a youth ministry with another church, and hosted a food pantry and clothing closet. Their long-time pastor, Rev. Smith, had recently retired and planned to stay involved with the church.

Grace Baptist's finances were limited, and they were only able to offer Bill a part-time salary. This didn't bother Bill, as he really didn't need the money. He accepted their offer and was called as their pastor.

It is now four months later, and Pastor Bill is exhausted. Despite being paid for 20 hours a week, Pastor Bill must write two sermons and prepare two worship services each week in addition to leading the Bible study. Several church members have been hospitalized recently, and one family lost their home in a fire. Pastor Bill organized a fundraiser on their behalf. While the congregation hasn't required Pastor Bill to assist with the food pantry, which is open three mornings each week, Pastor Bill recognizes the value of interacting with the volunteers and clients. Two food pantry clients and their families have joined the church since Bill became the pastor.

Pastor Bill routinely works 45-50 hours each week for the church, while still trying to maintain a presence at the business he owns. He's seldom home before 8:00 p.m., and that's if he doesn't have a nighttime meeting at the church. He even missed his grandson's sixth birthday party and his granddaughter's music concert. Pastor Bill never expected to be as busy and overworked in "retirement" as he had been as a younger man.

Rev. Smith has offered his assistance several times. He enjoys preaching and would be happy to take over the Sunday evening service. While Pastor Bill appreciates the offer, he's concerned that many of the church members still see Rev. Smith as the "real" pastor. A few weeks earlier, Rev. Smith officiated a funeral for a long-time member without asking permission. When Pastor Bill confronted him about it, Rev. Smith apologized, but said that he and his wife had been close friends with the member for many years.

When Pastor Bill returned home after ten tonight, his wife broke down. "I know how important it is for you to serve God, but I feel like you've abandoned me and our family—again. I can't take it anymore."

Case Study #3 NOMINATING CHURCH OFFICERS (Laura Holt-Haslam's adaptation of an adaptation by the American Baptist Churches of Pennsylvania from Ethical Dilemmas in Church Leadership, Michael R. Milco, Kregel Publications, 1997)

At the most recent meeting of the church's nominating committee, potential leaders were considered for open positions. Harold Montgomery's name was suggested for the position of elder. Pastor Stephanie Williams, who sat on the committee, thought that Harold would make an excellent candidate. Harold had once pastored a church and his walk with the Lord seemed to be consistent.

A few days later, Pastor Williams received a call. "Hello, Pastor Williams, this is Grace Knowles. I understand that Harold Montgomery's name came up as a potential candidate for the office of elder at church. Pastor, has anyone ever told you why Harold left the ministry ten years ago?"

"No," responded Pastor Williams.

"I have never told anyone else this before but... Harold is gay and has tested HIV positive. I know his life appears to be in order on the outside, and Harold would love to be an elder here, but for the wrong reasons. If you keep him on the slate I know you will have more difficult problems to deal with in the future. Pastor, please do not tell anyone else. I hope I have made myself clear."

Pastor Williams hung up the phone, stunned by the conversation. Why had she never heard any of this before? Did Grace Knowles have some sort of personal agenda? Who could she talk about this with? What would she say to the nominating committee about the reasons why Harold's name should be withdrawn? People would ask why. Should she ask Harold whether this story was true?

Over the next week, Pastor Williams questioned various church leaders about their knowledge of Harold Montgomery. Not wanting to break her confidence with Grace Knowles, Pastor Williams didn't discuss what she'd been told. No one mentioned HIV or even hinted that Harold might be gay.

What if she went along with the nomination and didn't say anything about what Grace had revealed? Bringing it up or requesting that his name be withdrawn from consideration would create conflict and controversy within the church, and if the allegations weren't true, it would hurt Harold and anger many of his friends and supporters. But if she didn't say anything, and it later came out that she knew he was gay, that would also create conflict and controversy, and might even cost her job as pastor.