



March 2022

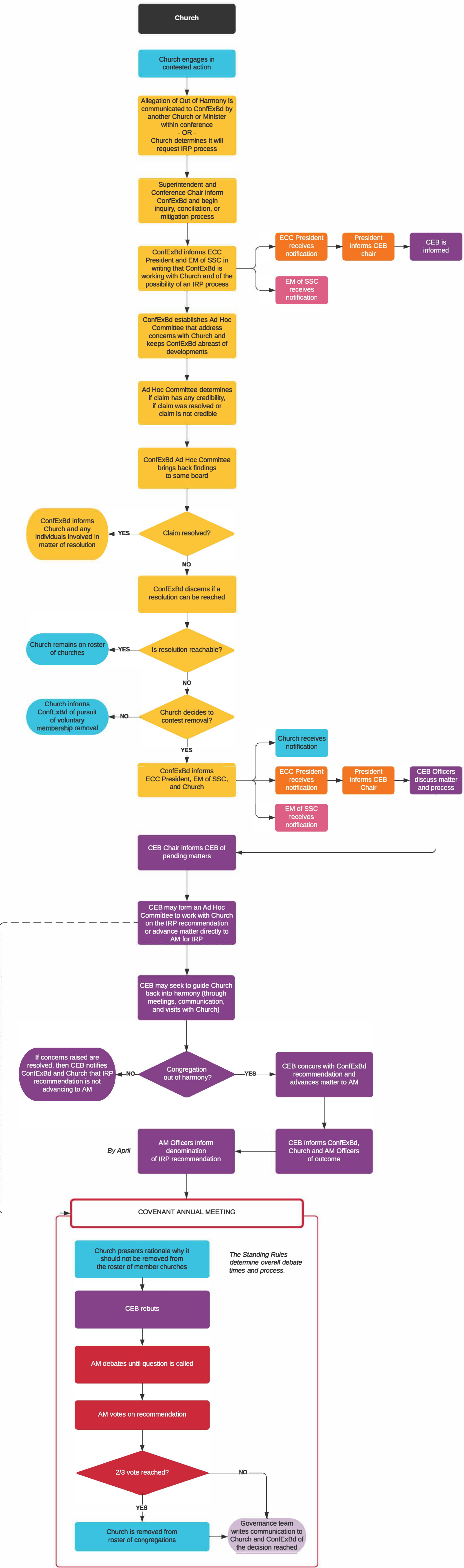
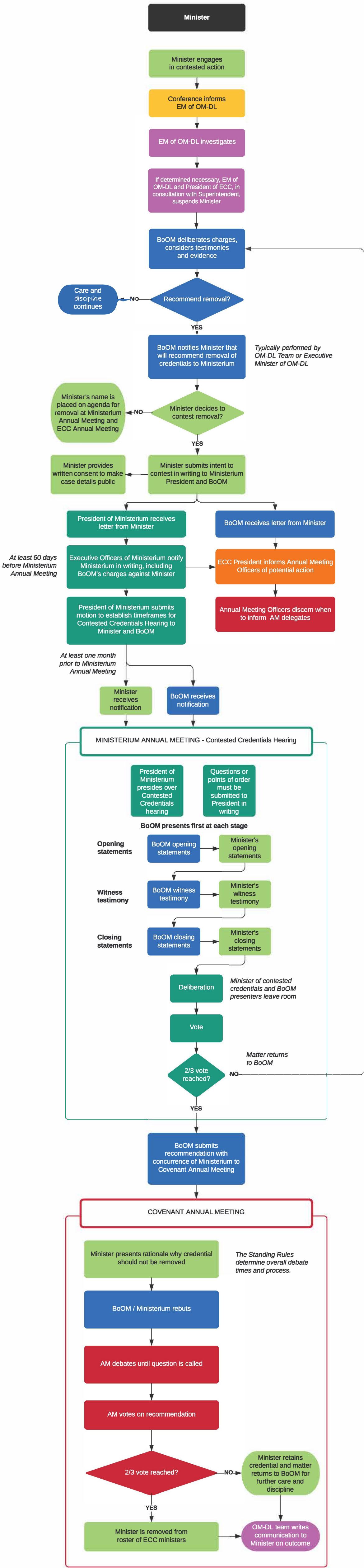
Preface to Involuntary Removal Process (IRP) Documents

After Gather '19, the Covenant Executive Board (CEB) sought to clarify and improve awareness and communication on the Involuntary Removal Process (IRP) of clergy's credentials and/or of church membership from the rosters. A workgroup, led by CEB officer Cindy Wu, was organized in February 2021 to identify, and improve gaps in the processes of each of the governing bodies involved in involuntary removal. To that end, the workgroup met several times before ultimately convening the governing bodies in September 2021. A representative from all the following attended: Covenant Executive Board, Council of Superintendents, Board of Ordered Ministry, Ministerium, Annual Meeting Officers, Start and Strengthen Churches, Develop Leaders and Ordered Ministry, Governance, and Covenant President. The goal was to facilitate understanding within each area of responsibility and establish clarity in areas where overlap may exist. All held a common commitment to shepherd future involuntary removal cases with the utmost care and integrity.

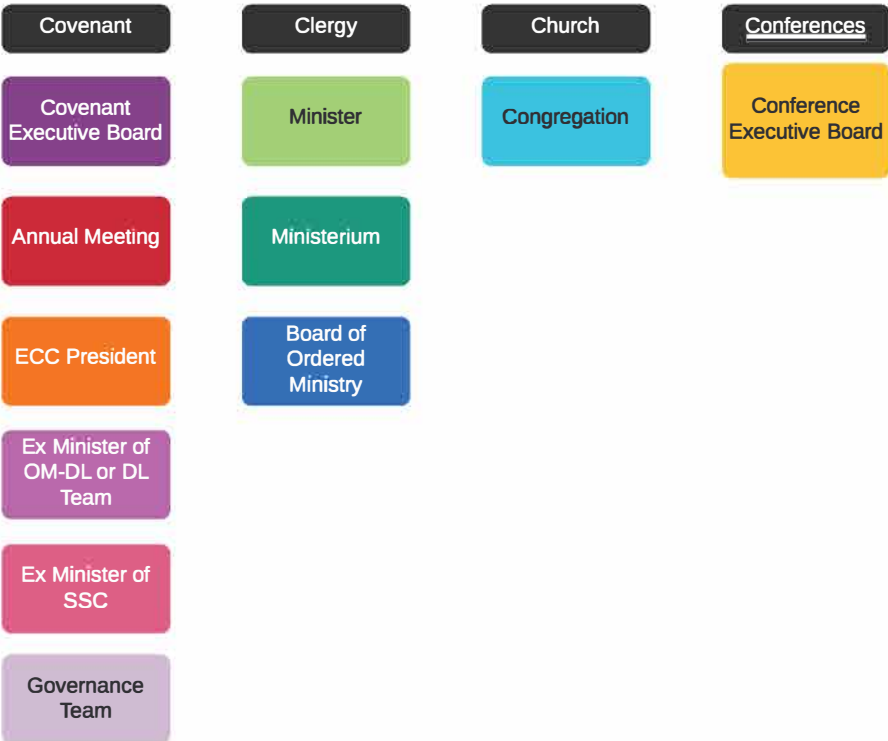
One of the results from these engagements with the workgroup and the governing bodies is the IRP flowchart. It outlines, step-by-step, the different involuntary removal process for clergy and congregations. Each governing body oversees the steps that would unfold within their respective bodies. Though details are housed within each governing body, this diagram provides a denominational-wide overview of the involuntary removal process. Our hope is that this resource will be conducive to creating greater clarity and understanding, as well as aid in fostering greater relational and institutional trust.

Involuntary Removal Process (IRP)

Angela Yee | April 11, 2022



KEY



ACRONYMS

AM Covenant Annual Meeting
BoOM Board of Ordered Ministry
CEB Covenant Executive Board
ConfExBd Conference Executive Board
EM of OM-DL Executive Minister of Ordered Ministry / Develop Leaders
EM of SSC Executive Minister of Start and Strengthen Churches
IRP Involuntary Removal Process
OM-DL Team Ordered Ministry / Develop Leaders Team (Staff)

Involuntary Removal Process (IRP)

Minister

1. Minister engages in contested action
2. Conference informs EM of OM-DL
3. EM of OM-DL investigates
 - a. If determined necessary, EM of OM-DL and President of ECC, in consultation with Superintendent, suspends Minister.
4. BoOM deliberates charges, considers testimonies and evidence
 - a. Does BoOM recommend removal?
 - i. No: Care and discipline continues. Process concludes.
 - ii. Yes: BoOM notifies Minister that will recommend removal of credentials to Ministerium (typically performed by OM-DL Team or Executive Minister of OM-DL). Continue to Step 5.
5. Does Minister decide to contest removal?
 - a. No: Minister's name is placed on agenda for removal at Ministerium Annual Meeting and ECC Annual Meeting. Process concludes.
 - b. Yes: Minister submits intent to contest in writing to Ministerium President and BoOM
 - i. Minister provides written consent to make case details public. Continue to Steps 6 and 7 simultaneously.
6. President of Ministerium receives letter from Minister.
 - a. Executive Officers of Ministerium notify Ministerium in writing, including BoOM's charges against Minister (at least 60 days before Ministerium Annual Meeting). Continue to Step 8.
7. BoOM receives letter from Minister
 - a. ECC President informs Annual Meeting Officers of potential action
 - b. Annual Meeting Officers discern when to inform AM delegates

8. At least one month prior to Ministerium Annual Meeting, President of Ministerium submits motion to establish timeframes for Contested Credentials Hearing to Minister and BoOM
 - a. Minister receives notification
 - b. BoOM receives notification
9. MINISTERIUM ANNUAL MEETING – Contested Credentials Hearing
 - a. President of Ministerium presides over Contested Credentials hearing
 - b. Questions or points of order must be submitted to President in writing
 - c. BoOM presents first at each stage
 - i. *Opening statements*
 1. BoOM opening statements
 2. Minister's opening statements
 - ii. *Witness testimony*
 1. BoOM witness testimony
 2. Minister's witness testimony
 - iii. *Closing statements*
 1. BoOM closing statements
 2. Minister's closing statements
 - d. Deliberation
 - i. Minister of contested credentials and BoOM presenters leave room
 - e. Vote
 - f. 2/3 vote reached?
 - i. No: Matter returns to BoOM
 - ii. Yes: BoOM submits recommendation with concurrence of Ministerium to Covenant Annual Meeting

10. COVENANT ANNUAL MEETING

- a. The Standing Rules determine overall debate times and process.
- b. Minister presents rationale why credential should not be removed
- c. BoOM / Ministerium rebuts
- d. AM debates until question is called
- e. AM votes on recommendation
- f. 2/3 vote reached?
 - i. No: Minister retains credential and matter returns to BoOM for further care and discipline. Continue to Step 10g.
 - ii. Yes: Minister is removed from roster of ECC ministers. Continue to Step 10g.
- g. OM-DL team writes communication to Minister on outcome

Church

1. Church engages in contested action
2. Allegation of Out of Harmony is communicated to ConfExBd by another Church or Minister within conference - OR - Church determines it will request IRP process
3. Superintendent and Conference Chair inform ConfExBd and begin inquiry, conciliation, or mitigation process
 - a. ConfExBd informs ECC President and EM of SSC in writing that ConfExBd is working with Church and of the possibility of an IRP process
 - i. ECC President receives notification
 1. President informs CEB chair
 2. CEB is informed
 - ii. EM of SSC receives notification
 - b. ConfExBd establishes Ad Hoc Committee that address concerns with Church and keeps ConfExBd abreast of developments

- i. Ad Hoc Committee determines if claim has any credibility, if claim was resolved or claim is not credible
 - ii. ConfExBd Ad Hoc Committee brings back findings to same board
 - 4. Claim resolved?
 - a. Yes: ConfExBd informs Church and any individuals involved in matter of resolution. Process concludes.
 - b. No: Does Church decide to contest removal?
 - i. No: Church informs ConfExBd of pursuit of voluntary membership removal. Process moves to voluntary removal.
 - ii. Yes: ConfExBd informs ECC President, EM of SSC, and Church.
 - 1. Church receives notification
 - 2. EM of SSC receives notification
 - 3. ECC President receives notification
 - a. President informs CEB Chair
 - b. CEB Officers discuss matter and process.
 - i. CEB Chair informs CEB of pending matters
- 5. CEB may form an Ad Hoc Committee to work with Church on the IRP recommendation or advance matter directly to AM for IRP
 - a. If CEB decides to advance matter directly to AM for IRP, continue to Step 7. Otherwise continue to Step 5b.
 - b. CEB may seek to guide Church back into harmony (through meetings, communication, and visits with Church)
 - c. Does CEB discern congregation is out of harmony?
 - i. No: If concerns raised are resolved, then CEB notifies ConfExBd and Church that IRP recommendation is not advancing to AM. Process concludes.
 - ii. Yes: CEB concurs with ConfExBd recommendation and advances matter to AM

1. CEB informs ConfExBd, Church and AM Officers of outcome
6. AM Officers inform denomination of IRP recommendation by April.
7. COVENANT ANNUAL MEETING
 - a. The Standing Rules determine overall debate times and process.
 - b. Church presents rationale why it should not be removed from the roster of member churches
 - c. CEB rebuts
 - d. AM debates until question is called
 - e. AM votes on recommendation
 - f. 2/3 vote reached?
 - i. NO: Continue to Step 8.
 - ii. YES: Church is removed from roster of congregations. Continue to Step 8.
8. Governance team writes communication to Church and ConfExBd of the decision reached

Acronyms

AM	Covenant Annual Meeting
BoOM	Board of Ordered Ministry
CEB	Covenant Executive Board
ConfExBd	Conference Executive Board
EM of OM-DL	Executive Minister of Ordered Ministry / Develop Leaders
EM of SSC	Executive Minister of Start and Strengthen Churches
IRP	Involuntary Removal Process
OM-DL Team	Ordered Ministry / Develop Leaders Team (Staff)



Preface for Contested Removal of Ministerial Credentials

COMMUNICATION FROM THE ANNUAL MEETING OFFICERS

Agenda item 21a.7.ii. states that the agenda item is contingent. A contingent agenda item takes place only if certain conditions are met. In this case, the agenda item “Contested Removal of Ministerial Credentials” concerns a recommendation from the Board of Ordered Ministry for the removal of ordination credentials of a Covenant pastor.

Because the Ministerium’s action on this matter (scheduled for Wednesday, June 22, 2022) must precede the Annual Meeting’s action, we cannot confirm whether or not the agenda item will come before the Annual Meeting, nor can we provide additional information until the evening of June 22. At that time, if necessary, we will provide the additional information via email, using the email address you registered with for the 136th Annual Meeting.

The following excerpts from various governing documents explain the roles of the Board of Ordered Ministry, the Covenant Ministerium, and the Annual Meeting in such an action:

1. The Board [of Ordered Ministry] has general supervision over all ordained ministers, commissioned ministers, licensed ministers, and consecrated missionaries of the ECC, including their ordination, commissioning, license, consecration, standing, discipline, and the maintenance of high standards in their ministry. The Rules for the Ordered Ministry shall be developed by the Board, approved by the annual meeting of the Covenant Ministerium, and adopted by the Annual Meeting of the ECC. The Rules for the Ordered Ministry shall govern the Board and its work. (Rules for the Ordered Ministry, section 1.2.a)
2. The purpose of the Covenant Ministerium includes the following: ...to consider and act upon the licensure, ordination, commissioning, consecration, and discipline of ministers and missionaries in accordance with the Rules for the Ordered Ministry and the Constitution and Bylaws of the Evangelical Covenant Church. (Constitution of the Covenant Ministerium, section 2.1.a)

3. A minister or consecrated missionary may be charged with indiscretion, immorality, doctrinal error, unethical behavior, or disloyalty to the ECC. (Rules for the Ordered Ministry, section 10.2.a)
4. In all matters involving disciplinary action, care shall be exercised to keep information confidential. (Rules for the Ordered Ministry, section 10.3.c)
5. All decisions of the Board of the Ordered Ministry requiring action by the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Covenant Church shall be submitted to the Covenant Ministerium at its annual meeting for approval before being submitted to the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Covenant Church. Matters not approved by the Covenant Ministerium shall be recommitted to the Board of the Ordered Ministry for further consideration. (Constitution of the Covenant Ministerium, section 6.2)
6. If, after investigation, it is warranted by the gravity of the offense, the Board [of Ordered Ministry] shall with the approval of the Covenant Ministerium recommend to the Annual Meeting of the ECC that a minister or consecrated missionary be dismissed from the ministry of the ECC. (Rules for the Ordered Ministry, section 10.3.e)
7. The Bylaws of the Covenant Ministerium were amended in 2021, adding a new section 5, which establishes the rules for a Contested Credentials hearing in the Ministerium. These rules indicate that a two-thirds vote is required to approve the recommendation [of the Board of Ordered Ministry for credential removal and to present the matter to the Covenant Annual Meeting]. (Bylaws of the Covenant Ministerium, section 5.7.b)
8. The Board [of Ordered Ministry] may recommend to the Annual Meeting of the ECC actions that are exceptions to these rules. Such exceptions and the rationale for each shall be clearly stated in presenting the recommendation to the Covenant Ministerium and the Annual Meeting of the ECC. (Rules for the Ordered Ministry, section 12.1)

COMMUNICATION FROM THE BOARD OF THE ORDERED MINISTRY REGARDING MICAH WITHAM

The Board of the Ordered Ministry, with a profound sense of grief, lament, and pain, recognizes Micah Witham's unwillingness to submit to the ECC's discipline as provided by the work of the Board of Ordered Ministry.

In 2017 Micah was suspended for violating the ethical guidelines for Covenant Ministers. After meeting with the Board and reassuring the Board of his intention and promise to live within the ethical guidelines for Covenant Ministers Micah was reinstated and his suspension was lifted.

In the Fall of 2021, Micah used his Covenant credentials to perform a same sex wedding. This is a violation of his vows of ordination. As a result, Micah was again placed under suspension and directed to cease all sacerdotal duties and required to appear before the Board in November 2021. At that meeting, Micah freely admitted that he had not honored this requirement. As a result, the Board upheld the suspension and urged Micah to honor the terms of his suspension. The Board communicated that if he did not comply with the terms of his suspension his credentials would be recommended for removal at an upcoming meeting.

In January 2022, Micah met with the Board where he again freely admitted that he was not honoring the requirements of his suspension, nor did he intend to.

In March 2022, Micah met with the Board. Micah however had yet to honor the terms of the Board's suspension and communicated that he could not faithfully follow the ECC's discerned position on human sexuality.

The Board heard again, the deep conviction of Micah's care for the LGBTQ community in Covenant congregations. The Board heard and agrees with the importance of care for the LGBTQ community.

Micah has actively stated and demonstrated his refusal to live within the ethical guidelines or to be in full accord with the mission and ministry of the Evangelical Covenant Church. Therefore, the Board now moves to recommend to the Covenant Ministerium and to the Annual Meeting of the church that Micah Witham's ministerial standing be removed, and his name be stricken from the roster of Covenant ministers and missionaries.