

**Summary of the Covenant Community Church Administrative Commission's
Report to Mid-Kentucky Presbytery
May 20, 2024**

Purpose: At the request of Covenant Community Church's session and Healing Team, the presbytery created an administrative commission (AC) under G-3.0109b(6) "*to seek to reach a determination of the truth*" surrounding misconduct allegations directed at former pastor, Jud Hendrix. This AC functions to discern truth when the accused leader is no longer subject to the church's judicial process. This is the case regarding Mr. Hendrix, who asked to be released from his ordination as a Presbyterian minister in 2013. CCC's hopes for the AC included hearing and acknowledging individuals' stories of abuse and learning from breakdowns in presbytery process that might have enabled continuing misconduct.

Understanding Sexual Misconduct/Abuse by a Pastoral Leader: The PC(USA) Book of Order definition of *sexual abuse* includes "any offense involving sexual conduct in relation to ... any person when the conduct includes force, threat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of ordered ministry or position." *Sexual misconduct* is a broader term that includes this abuse as well as harassment. As spiritual leaders are granted significant authority and trust, they hold a level of power that inherently compromises their ability to be in a consensual relationship with a congregant. In such a dual relationship, a congregant who would otherwise be empowered to openly share their needs instead becomes pressured, consciously or otherwise, to defer to their sexual partner's pastoral authority.

Put simply, any sexual contact between a minister and congregant is considered sexual abuse.

Process: The AC reviewed documents provided by CCC, by the presbytery leadership, and by individuals who were interviewed, to learn about CCC's culture and history as well as about the presbytery's response to a 2011 complaint against Mr. Hendrix. We invited current and former members of CCC to share with us through confidential interviews, on Zoom or in person. We are grateful for the courage of those who spoke about their experiences. We also asked specific leaders in CCC and the presbytery to talk with us. Mr. Hendrix interviewed with the commission as well. Our findings are based on these interviews, review of documents, and feedback that interviewees provided to a draft of the report.

Learnings about CCC's culture: The AC heard from congregants about the unique aspects of CCC that were life-giving to many young adults, including acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals, theological openness, and a welcome for those who had been hurt by traditional models of church. Participants found friendship and fun as well as spiritual nurture. Many young adults who found CCC were eager to engage topics that were taboo in their former faith communities, including sexuality and alcohol. For a portion of the congregation, the church culture came to include heavy alcohol use and partying, loose boundaries in relationships, and eventually, secret-keeping.

Behaviors That Laid a Foundation for Abuse: Rather than recognizing his primary responsibility to be a mentor for congregants seeking a safe faith community, Mr. Hendrix participated in and promoted a culture where lax boundaries between pastor and congregant were normalized. Mr. Hendrix refused to acknowledge the authority and power inherent in his role as pastor, instead promoting the idea of a flat hierarchy within the congregation. He hosted gatherings in his hot tub, with heavy drinking. He encouraged alcohol use, even for those who had a problem with alcohol, and secretly in the church building. He dressed provocatively during at least one church party and participated in "dirty dancing" at parties with congregants. Though he overtly encouraged authenticity in relationships, he also dismissed or even ridiculed those who expressed discomfort with his behavior.

The AC also learned about Mr. Hendrix's frequent use of sexual/sexualized language and behavior. He publicly exchanged a "holy kiss" with female congregants and wove double-entendres into his liturgy and communications. He gave massages to congregants and conducted massages within the church building, in contradiction to presbytery guidance and James Lees' session's permission. He also represented himself as a licensed massage therapist, but he was not licensed in Kentucky.

As one interviewee explained in looking back over Mr. Hendrix's pastorate, there were many incidents that at the time were justified as silly, over-the-top, or "just Jud." And yet, taken together they reveal a troubling grooming pattern, with Mr. Hendrix normalizing boundary-crossing, sexualized language and touch, and secret-keeping.

Findings of Sexual Misconduct: Mr. Hendrix had inappropriate sexual contact with ten or more women within his pastorate at CCC. These abuses range from unwelcome erotic touch to ongoing sexual relationships. It was also reported that Mr. Hendrix sent lewd photos to a congregant, and spoke with CCC members about his sexual attraction to congregants. These instances of abuse continued after he left CCC. It appears that Mr. Hendrix lied about these relationships in his ministry assessment and likely did not disclose them in presbytery-mandated counseling dealing with pastoral/professional boundaries.

Learnings about the Presbytery's Response: The presbytery responded to a 2011 complaint formally submitted against Mr. Hendrix by forming an investigating committee that confirmed Mr. Hendrix had acted inappropriately in this incident of sexualized behavior. The committee was also concerned about Mr. Hendrix's use of alcohol and his attitude concerning professional boundaries. The Commission on Ministry of the presbytery (COM) provided Mr. Hendrix supervision and required counseling for a period of time.

The presbytery remained concerned over the coming months about Mr. Hendrix's behavior and attitudes. In 2013 (soon after Mr. Hendrix left CCC), the COM declined to validate Mr. Hendrix's ministries and required him to complete a thorough ministry assessment. It was within this pressure by COM and the ministry assessment that Mr. Hendrix asked to be released from ordained ministry.

Though the presbytery did respond seriously to concerns about Mr. Hendrix's behavior, this response fell short by allowing Mr. Hendrix to control communication with the congregation about the results of the investigation. Rather than disclosing any of the disciplinary requirements he was assigned to fulfill, Mr. Hendrix framed his leaving both CCC and ordained ministry as a response to a call to alternative ministry.

Conclusions: Mr. Hendrix is a charismatic leader who was charged with caring for an emerging congregation seeking a place of acceptance and belonging. Some in the CCC congregation, from what they knew of Mr. Hendrix's behavior, saw him as well-intentioned yet having overreached in his pushing of traditional norms and boundaries. The AC has found that while Mr. Hendrix's leadership skills brought many ministerial gifts to CCC, they also enabled him to commit intentional, premeditated, repeated violations that served his own desires. Mr. Hendrix cultivated a culture where he could initiate sexual contact with multiple congregants, under the guise of holistic spirituality and non-hierarchical leadership. This abuse is particularly devastating within a congregation where many had already been harmed by the church, and trusted Mr. Hendrix to foster a safe community of acceptance and belonging. The sexual abuse perpetuated by Mr. Hendrix has resulted in lasting harmful impacts on individual survivors as well as on the CCC congregation as a whole.