

LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESSES

I. Policy Statement

The Presbytery of San José will protect the rights and advocate for persons employed by it and its member churches who have any life-threatening or catastrophic illness.

II. Rationale

The Presbytery, operating under the authority of the Book of Order, respects the dignity and worth of every person.

III. Responsibilities

A. Committee on Ministry (COM) Responsibilities

COM shall advocate for churches and pastors affected by this situation, in keeping with the principles stated herein under 'Additional Responsibilities/Information'.

COM shall act as a resource to the Committee on Church-Employed Laity in cases involving a person with a life-threatening illness.

B. Minister Responsibilities

Pastors shall relate to persons in the employ of their churches and the Presbytery in accordance with the principles stated herein under 'Additional Responsibilities/Information'.

Any pastor or associate pastor with a life-threatening or catastrophic illness should seek the counsel and support of COM.

C. Session Responsibilities

The session of a church shall treat all persons in its employ in accordance with the principles stated herein under 'Additional Responsibilities/Information'.

D. Additional Responsibilities/Information

The following principles shall apply.

1. Right to continue work: Employees with any life-threatening illness should be offered the right to continue work as long as they are able to perform their job satisfactorily and as long as the best available medical evidence indicates that their continual employment does not present a health or safety threat to themselves or others.
2. Confidentiality: San Jose Presbytery and its affiliated churches and agencies and

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the employee's coworkers shall treat all medical information obtained from employees with strict confidentiality. In the case of an employee with a life-threatening illness, confidentiality of employee medical records in accordance with existing legal, medical, ethical, and management practices shall be maintained.

3. Compassion and understanding: Employees who are affected by any life-threatening illness should be treated with compassion and understanding in their personal crisis. Reasonable efforts should be made to accommodate seriously ill employees by providing flexible work areas, hours, and assignments whenever possible or appropriate.
4. Needs: Employees should be asked to be sensitive to the needs of critically ill colleagues. Continuing employment for an employee with a life-threatening illness is often life-sustaining and can be physically, mentally and spiritually beneficial.
5. AIDS discrimination prohibition: No test to determine the existence of a life-threatening disease shall be a prerequisite for employment unless the best available medical evidence indicates the disease tested for represents a health or safety threat to others through such employment.
6. Education: Given the irrational fear that AIDS, cancer, and other life-threatening diseases often inspire, the most effective way to avoid unnecessary disruptions in the workplace is to prepare and educate both ministers and employees before any employee is affected by a life-threatening disease. To this end, San Jose Presbytery shall conduct regular educational programs based upon: the best available medical knowledge to understand the disease; any services locally available to aid employees with any medical, psychological, or financial hardships caused by the disease; and any policies that the Presbyterian Church (USA) has in place to cover employees with a life-threatening illness.