

Presbytery of Philadelphia
POLICY ON CODE OF ETHICS

Revised May 2013

These ethical guidelines for ministerial conduct serve two purposes. They are a guide to the appropriate conduct expected of Teaching Elders, Commissioned Ruling Elders (CRE), Certified Christian Educators (CCE), Presbytery staff, and Candidates and Inquirers, in the Presbytery of Philadelphia. Also, they inform the laity what they can expect from clergy and other church professionals (hereafter referred to as "ministers") as defined in G-2.05 in the Book of Order. It is the expectation of the Presbytery of Philadelphia that individual sessions shall adopt similar standards for all of their other employees.

These guidelines do not presume to be exhaustive in governing ethical behavior. They are minimum expectations for both professional and personal conduct. Also, the minister must be guided by Scripture, personal conscience, the Book of Order, Christian tradition and peer approval. The guidelines assume basic honesty and integrity of conduct. Expectations of pastors and styles of behavior change. The ethical behavior of ministers is a topic which should be regularly considered, discussed, and mutually agreed upon by the members of presbytery. This code, however, does articulate certain customs and practices which have been largely accepted within the profession of ministry. They are subject to regular review.

Attendant documents to this Policy are the Presbytery of Philadelphia Sexual Misconduct Policy and the Presbytery of Philadelphia Administrative Leave Policy.

These principles are not designed to be a basis for analysis of the civil liability of those persons guided by them.

A. SOME FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

1. In all professional matters, ministers are to maintain practices that give glory to Christ, advance the goals of the Church, and nurture, challenge and protect the welfare of church members, parishioners, clients and the public
2. Ministers are to act in such a manner as to uphold and enhance the honor, integrity, morality and dignity of the profession. This represents being faithful to the ordination vows of the Presbyterian Church
3. Ministers are to limit their ministries to those positions and responsibilities for which they are qualified
4. Ministers will conduct all professional matters in a manner that assures confidentiality and avoids all conflicts of interest
5. Ministers will seek to maintain professional competency throughout their careers
6. All aspects of a minister's life are bound by the ethical standards of Scripture and the church. In personal as well as professional relationships ministers are to demonstrate honest and sincere motives evidencing respect, honesty and fairness; uphold the peace, unity and purity of the church; and share faith, hope and love with all people
7. It is ***always and without exception*** the responsibility of the minister to set, maintain, and honor appropriate and ethical professional and personal boundaries in all that she or he does

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8. It is expected that each minister will engage in ongoing training in the ethics of his/her profession

B. MINISTERS AS PERSONS

1. **MINISTERS BEAR UNIQUE EXPECTATIONS.** In considering the ethics particular to ordained ministry, it is well to remember that ministers are expected to live in the same manner of faithfulness, forgiveness and obedience as are all members of Christ's church. While all who follow Christ are subject to the same human weaknesses, nevertheless, those who are called as ordained servants are set apart with particular expectations.

People expect high standards of ministers in both their personal and their professional lives. To deny or to ignore this is unrealistic and irresponsible. Ministers will show sensible regard for the moral, social and religious standards of the Christian community and the community at large, realizing that any violation on their part may be damaging to their congregants, to colleagues in ministry, to their professions and to the body of Jesus Christ.

2. **MINISTERS AND FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE.** Though the Reformed tradition emphasizes the freedom of individual conscience, ministers are still subject to the discipline of the church Book of Order (G-2.0105, F.-3.0101, F-3.0102, G-3.0306, G-2.0504). Violations of this code may be cause for disciplinary procedures. (Cf. also Ministers and the Civil Law #D-4 below.) Standards for ministerial conduct grow out of a Scriptural vision of the Christian life and a sense of calling to a particular service. Like other Christians, ministers experience sin, grace, alienation and forgiveness. Along with other Christians, they are expected by the Christian community to witness to the renewal of humanity in Christ by demonstrating in their daily lives love, compassion and respect for other persons; fidelity in marriage; chastity in singleness; responsibility in parenthood and other family obligations; joy in service; and integrity and trustworthiness in all their dealings with others.
3. **THE MINISTERIAL CARE OF MINISTERS.** Ministers also need ministerial care. They should take the initiative in establishing relationships with other ministers, with the presbytery executive and with the Commission on Congregations and Leadership (CCL) to provide support in difficult times, caring concern, encouragement for Christian growth, and sharing in both successes and failures.
4. **MINISTER AND FEES, HONORARIA AND DISCOUNTS.** Ministers should ordinarily not require or solicit fees for ministerial services to families or individuals within the congregation. Such services include performing baptisms, marriages, funerals and counseling. In those cases in which an unsolicited gift is given, ministers may use their own best judgment as to what to do with the gift. While fees for the use of the church facilities are set by the session, the minister in consultation with the session may set honoraria or fees for the minister's services to non-members.

All ministers stand ready to render services to individuals and communities in crisis without regard to financial remuneration.

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The minister must be aware of and responsible to civil authorities regarding the possible tax consequences of receipt of honoraria, gifts, etc.

5. **PARTICIPATION IN NON-PARISH ACTIVITIES.** Though ministers are expected to participate in presbytery, ecumenical and other activities beyond the particular church, it is wise for the minister to discuss the time involved in such activities with the session. ("Discuss" does not mean, "seek permission". Ministers are expected to participate in the governing bodies of the church by virtue of their ordination vows, W-4.403i (3).)

If honoraria are received for duties outside the particular church (such as speaking, lecturing or teaching), and these duties are carried on during time which would otherwise be understood as available to the congregation, a common understanding between the minister and the session should be established as to the disposition of such honoraria. This presupposes agreement between minister and session concerning the limits of the congregation's claim on the minister's time. Conversation between ministers and their sessions should arrive at mutual concurrence as to expectations regarding the minister's work time and free time.

C. MINISTERS AND THE PRESBYTERY

1. **THE MINISTER AND COLLEAGUES.** Whenever a colleague's conduct is believed to be harmful to any individual or group, including that person himself or herself, the concerned person should speak directly to that colleague or consult the presbytery executive or the chairperson of the CCL. Anyone registering a concern with regard to the behavior of a colleague will be encouraged to make her or his own identity known.
2. **THE MINISTER AND THE NON-MEMBER.** Ministers are sometimes called upon to officiate at weddings and funerals for persons who are not members of the congregation. It is appropriate in such situations to ascertain to what particular church these persons belong and to suggest that they procure the services of their own minister.
3. **THE MINISTER AND OTHER CHURCHES.** Ordinarily ministers should not knowingly call upon members of another church in the community to administer ministerial care unless the initiative and interest shown by such a person requires it as a courtesy. If such a visitation occurs and after obtaining the parishioner's permission, it is an expected courtesy to inform the colleague to whose church the person belongs regarding visitation. Officiating at marriages, funerals and baptisms is not acceptable unless by invitation of the minister of the church involved.
4. **THE MINISTER AND THE MULTIPLE STAFF.** All ministers are installed in their positions by action of presbytery and any change in the ministerial relationship must be approved by presbytery. While the minister serves as head of staff in a congregation and bears the responsibility which this implies, the spirit within the staff should be that of a shared ministry where all bring their particular gifts to the work of ministry. To this end, everyone should be understanding of the shortcomings of colleagues and seek to give support and help when needed.

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Care should be taken to avoid inappropriate criticism, negative suggestions and innuendo. It is not appropriate to attempt to seek to ally other church members and/or co-workers in disagreements. All sexual relationships, language and behavior among church staff members are inappropriate. A staff member should neither aspire to nor initiate any actions that might lead to succeeding any other person on staff.

The principles of ethical, healthy staff relationships apply equally to professional, paraprofessional, support staff (secretarial and custodial employees) and volunteers. All staff members are given equal respect without regard to sex, race, religious affiliation, ethnic origin, disability, or marital status.

5. **THE MINISTER IN AN INTERIM POSITION.** The purpose of an interim minister is to provide ministerial service and to prepare a particular congregation for new ministerial leadership. An interim minister must avoid seeking to mold loyalties to the interim minister. An interim minister must direct a congregation's attention to the new challenges in mission and ministry that manifest themselves in a period of transition to new ministerial leadership. An interim minister should make clear and without ambiguity that presbytery takes the position namely that a minister may not be called to be the next installed minister or associate minister of a church served as interim minister.

Under no circumstances may an interim minister become involved in the nomination or work of the minister nominating committee. Presbytery representatives should make this policy clear to the congregation at the time the congregation elects a minister nominating committee.

6. **THE MINISTER AND THE SUCCESSOR.** When a minister accepts another call, the minister must exercise due care not to influence directly or indirectly the policies of the successor. A written covenant between the minister and the session is helpful in describing the new relationship. This applies as well to ministers who are retiring. Frequent visits to one's former parish are to be avoided. Even when occasional visits occur, it is a courtesy to pay one's respects to one's successor and to inform the successor about the nature and purpose of the visit. During the period of temporary supply or interim, the former minister shall not perform ministerial services (weddings, funerals, baptisms, etc). Moreover, even when a successor issues an invitation to a former minister to assist or take part in a ministerial function, it is a wise idea for the former minister to take the initiative in a candid discussion with the successor about the propriety of such functioning and the possible harmful effects of the life of the congregation in terms of its new ministry.

A written covenant of relationship between the departing minister and the session should make clear to the congregation that the former minister would accept an invitation of the present minister only to assist the present minister in a ministerial function. In any case, regarding all such situations, the former minister and the present minister should seek the advice and approval of the current session of the church.

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If misunderstandings arise in these areas, it is appropriate for the former minister and the present minister to seek the counsel of presbytery's CCL. The Book of Order, G-2.0905 states: "After the dissolution of the ministerial relationship, former ministers and associate ministers shall not provide their ministerial services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the moderator of session."

7. **THE MINISTER AND THE PREDECESSOR.** The former minister or retired minister bears primary responsibility for making clear that the ministry in a given location should be directed to the future rather than to the past. It is the primary responsibility of the successor or the currently installed minister to show respect and gratitude for the heritage of that church and for the positive work of the predecessor. Ordinarily it is wise for the successor to take the initiative in making contact with a predecessor to discuss the mission and work of the church. There may be occasions when it is appropriate to invite a predecessor to return to the church for a visit, possibly to celebrate a special occasion, event or, if deemed appropriate by all concerned, to assist in a ministerial function.
8. **THE MINISTER AND RETIREMENT.** The above discussions (items no. 6 & 7) are relevant to the retired minister, but some additional matters also require comment. Sometimes a retired minister remains within the boundaries of presbytery and sometimes within proximity to a former church. This can create problems both for the successor and for the retired minister. This should be a matter for serious discussion by the session of the local church and presbytery's CCL. Perhaps most important is for all concerned to recognize some fundamental professional priorities, namely:
 - a. The local church and its new ministry should be uppermost in everybody's mind
 - b. The new ministry will probably develop new directions and should be encouraged in freedom to do so
 - c. There will be a natural tendency for some in the church to resist change. It is very important for the successor and the retired minister to deal with this resistance by reiterating with love and understanding that the mission of the church is to be oriented to the future and not the past

The retired minister or staff person who still remains within the bounds of presbytery or in proximity to the local church bears primary responsibility for making these priorities known. Moreover, the retired minister should make it entirely clear that "retired" means "withdrawn from active service," at least in that location. There may naturally be misunderstandings about these matters, and there may be occasions when the line between "old friend" and "parishioner" will be unclear. In all such cases of ambiguity, again it is the retired minister who bears primary responsibility for making clear what "retired" means.

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One obvious way to ease the pain in such situations is for the retired minister and the family involved to relocate to a residence some distance away from the former parish and to become active in another church in a non-professional role; economically, however, moving is not always feasible. Another way to deal with such situations is for the retired minister to have candid conversation with the installed minister regarding their mutual feelings in terms of collegial interaction. Where there is a difference of opinion, the retired minister must defer to the installed minister with respect to collegiality in that location. In the case of lack of agreement or uncertainty, it is appropriate for either minister to seek the guidance of the CCL.

9. TEACHERS, CHAPLAINS, AND OTHERS (G-3.0306). All ministers who fall into the category of the Book of Order's listing of "others" are expected to be active in the life of a particular congregation while respecting the position of installed ministers regarding all ministerial functions within the community. Counselors should also refer to their own code of ethics.

Ministers may administer the sacraments only at the request of the minister or session concerned, or by permission of the presbytery.

D. ETHICAL ISSUES OF PARTICULAR CONCERN

1. MINISTERS AND CONFIDENTIALITY. Ministers shall take reasonable precautions to protect the confidentiality rights of church employees, parishioners, and others. Ministers shall not disclose confidences to anyone except when:
 - a. Required to do so by law (Most states will not require this)
 - b. Disclosure is consented to by the person communicating confidences, which consent is normally given in writing
 - c. Disclosure is necessary to prevent the person from harming himself or herself or others. (Harmful behavior is that which is a violation of law or poses a threat to the physical well-being of the self or others)
 - d. Disclosure is necessary to defend a minister against claims made by a person who asserts that particular communications related to the claim were made in confidence
 - e. "Any member of this church engaged in ordered ministry and any certified Christian educator employed by this church or its congregations, shall report to ecclesiastical and civil legal authorities knowledge of harm, or the risk of harm, related to the physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse of a minor or an adult who lacks mental capacity when (1) such information is gained outside of a confidential communication as defined in G-4.0301, (2) she or he is not bound by an obligation of privileged communication under law, or (3) she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse."

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2. **MINISTERS AND SPECIAL PRIVILEGES.** Ministers, as servants of the Servant of God, need to be sensitive to the danger of any use of the authority of the ministerial office for personal benefit. Boundaries should be set, in consultation between the minister, the session and the CCL to determine how much and in what manner a minister may promote among the members of the congregation any of the minister's private business endeavors, tours or products. The same consultation should occur concerning the minister's private use of church resources, business machines, secretarial time, etc.
3. **BUSINESS AND FINANCE.** The minister's integrity in personal business and financial dealings is also an ethical concern. Ministers are expected to conduct their financial affairs with the utmost integrity. Many ministers manage discretionary funds on behalf of the congregation. It is suggested that wherever possible the minister identify someone in the congregation or presbytery to audit the use of this money. This suggestion is made to protect the minister both from the temptation to use the funds unwisely and from rumors in the congregation about his/her misuse of the funds.

Ministers are not to solicit clergy discounts for merchandise or services rendered them.

4. **THE MINISTER AND THE CIVIL LAW.** The minister shall obey the civil law and must insist leaders and members of the congregation do likewise. This includes, but is not limited to, matters related to taxes, copyrights, insurance, marriages, and the keeping of records.

There may be times when the minister affirms the necessity of civil disobedience for moral reasons. Whether this is done alone or in conjunction with others (including officers and members of the congregation), it shall be done openly and with a willingness to accept the consequences of the law. However, in such cases no moral justification for violence against another person or property is acceptable.

5. **PREACHING AND WRITING.** The minister's public preaching, teaching and writing shall always be her or his own work with appropriate source acknowledgment. In sermons this includes the exegetical work, the organization, the text of the sermon, and the use of examples and illustrations. Using sermons written by others, including those taken from subscription services, without accreditation is never acceptable and is considered plagiarism.
6. **LANGUAGE AND BEHAVIOR.** The minister shall recognize her or his unique position in the eyes of the congregation. It is a position of trust. This position shall not be abused through misuse of ministerial authority. In visits, counseling sessions, or other contacts with members of the congregation, colleagues, and community, the minister shall maintain strict decorum. Ministers shall not treat persons arbitrarily based on their gender, race, nationality, age, physical, emotional or mental condition, disability, marital, domestic, or parental status, sexual orientation, or economic condition.

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Ministers shall avoid discriminatory or harassing treatment of any person or group. Ministerial language shall not include slurs or other verbal conduct relating to gender, race, etc., which has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

Racial harassment shall not take place. Racial harassment may include unnecessary, exaggerated, or unwarranted attention or attack, whether verbal or non-verbal, because of a person's race or ethnicity.

Sexual harassment shall not take place. This includes but is not limited to verbal or non-verbal behavior such as sexist remarks, demeaning statements relating to gender, pressure for sexual activity and threats of punishment or promises of rewards for sexual behavior. Sexual abuse of or misconduct with a congregational member shall be understood as strictly forbidden. The ministry professional *always* has the sole responsibility to set, maintain, and honor appropriate boundaries. The minister should be knowledgeable about the Presbytery's *Sexual Misconduct Policies and Procedures*.

Due to the issues of power and trust involved, it is strongly recommended that single ministers or professional church workers not date members of their congregations. The same is true for presbytery staff members regarding the members of committees or other groups they staff.

These provisions shall include ministers of presbytery who are involved as teachers, counselors, or supervisors in programs which train for special work in ministry, e.g., Clinical Ministerial Education or Spiritual Development.

As professionals, ministers are aware of the variation in spiritual and psychological dynamics at work in a person. Where the minister feels compulsions to behavior which is either criminal or unethical, he or she will seek immediate help from a qualified counselor. This standard shall apply to those involved in substance, drug, gambling, or alcohol abuse or addiction. If therapy or counseling seems to be unfruitful the minister shall lay aside the office of ministry.

7. THE MINISTER AND RUMORS. The minister may find her/himself the subject of rumors in the congregation or community. Response to these shall be carefully considered. No action, including verbal response, shall be taken without consultation with the Session or an appropriate committee of a higher governing body. The goal of whatever action taken shall be to end such rumors. Hostile action toward the bearer of such rumors endangers the life of the congregation, as well as the spiritual or emotional health of the perpetrator, and is not acceptable.

E. CIRCULATION OF ETHICAL STANDARDS

The Presbytery of Philadelphia will circulate this code of ethics among its member churches and minister members. Each minister shall submit a signed statement (supplied by the CCL) certifying he/she has read the code of ethics, is aware of the standards of the Presbytery, and will make a sincere, good faith effort to abide with both the spirit and the letter of this Code of Ethics.

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G. VIOLATIONS AND SANCTIONS

The Presbytery of Philadelphia considers that fidelity to these standards enhances the peace, unity, and purity of the church. Violations of these standards may be viewed as a breaking of ordination vows and subject to the disciplinary processes of the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A).

If a minister member is found guilty of violating his or her ordination vows, the offender should expect to suffer disciplinary consequences incurred by the offense(s). The Christian concept of forgiveness does not preclude consequences that arise from breaking the ordination vows, even if those consequences require the forfeiture of the office of minister. Forgiveness happens in the midst of consequences, not in place of them.

H. CANDIDATES AND INQUIRERS

The Commission on Preparation and Credentials shall circulate these standards to its inquirers and candidates for the ministry. It shall make clear that these standards apply also to those under its supervision. Each Inquirer or Candidate shall submit a signed statement (supplied by the CCL through the Commission on Preparation and Credentials) certifying he/she has read the code of ethics, is aware of the standards of the Presbytery, and will make a sincere, good faith effort to abide with both the spirit and the letter of this code of ethics.

I. CONCLUSION AND RATIONALE

Central to the vocation of Minister of Word and Sacrament is leadership of the people of God in a peculiarly Christian lifestyle which has at its core the embodiment of Jesus' words in John 15:12. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." These ethical standards are an attempt, not to set legalistic limitations, but rather to guiding us all in showing the kind of love for each other that Christ has shown. So may all be encouraged to live in such a manner as to promote the health and growth of the Church, and give glory to God in Jesus Christ.

References:

American Association of Pastoral Counselors Code of Ethics and Procedures, April 28, 1994

National Capital Presbytery Code of Ethics, revised 2002.

General Assembly materials on developing an Ethics Policy

Calling and Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life. William H. Willimon. Abingdon Press, Nashville TN. Copywrite 2000.

BYLAWS REVISION

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