

**A CODE OF ETHICS
FOR MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT
CHARLESTON ATLANTIC PRESBYTERY**

PREAMBLE

*By grace you have been saved through faith...
We are created in Christ Jesus for good works.
As God who called you is holy,
be holy yourselves in all your conduct.
Tend the flock of God that is your charge,
not under compulsion but willingly,
not for sordid gain but eagerly;
do not lord it over those in your charge
but be examples to the flock...
You know that we who teach
shall be judged with greater strictness.
(Ephesians 2:8, 10; I Peter 1:15, 5:2; James 3:1 NRSV)*

In their ordination vows, all Ministers of Word and Sacrament promise to trust Jesus Christ as Savior, to acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and to believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are further committed to obedience to Christ under the authority of Scripture and guided by the Book of Confessions and the Book of Order. In their personal lives all ministers, acting as God's servants, follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love their neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world. In both their personal and professional lives they strive to further the peace, unity, and purity of the Church, and serve with honesty, imagination, and love.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Ministers in Charleston Atlantic Presbytery at all times shall:

- 1. Maintain practices that give glory to Christ, advance the goals of the Church, and nurture, challenge and protect the welfare of church members and the public.*
- 2. Act in such a manner as to uphold and enhance the honor, integrity, morality, and dignity of their calling to serve Jesus Christ.*
- 3. Demonstrate respect, honesty, and fairness when interacting with clergy colleagues and persons in related professions.*
- 4. Seek to maintain professional competency in all matters.*

GUIDELINES FOR THE APPLICATION OF MINISTERS' CODE OF ETHICS

There are two aspects to ministerial ethics--the professional code and the personal code. Both aspects are concerns for the whole church and have a direct relationship to effectiveness in ministry. The maintenance of high standards of professional competence is an ethical concern and is a responsibility of all ministers.

While ministers are directly accountable to the presbytery to which they belong or where they labor with permission, they also bear accountability to their employing body or session and congregation. In the realm of ethics there is a larger accountability to the religious community as a whole and to the general public.

Ministers are called by God to an office that requires integrity and high standards; therefore, it is right that people expect ministers to act accordingly. 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 parishioners, colleagues in ministry, to their calling, and to the body of Jesus Christ. The minister's integrity in personal business and financial dealing is also an ethical concern, and ministers should never involve themselves or their congregations in questionable business practices, nor should they incur debts they cannot pay in a reasonable time, nor should they leave any community with unpaid personal bills.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

In all matters ministers should act in ways that give glory to Christ; advance the goals of the church; and nurture, challenge, and honor church members.

- A. Ministers accurately represent their professional qualifications, education, training, and experience in all contacts with the church or the public.*
- B. Ministers use their knowledge, skill and experience, and their professional connections for the benefit of the people and the institutions they serve and not for personal advantage.*
- C. Ministers limit their work to those positions and responsibilities for which they are qualified and make referrals where such are indicated.*
- D. Any financial arrangements or expectations regarding preaching, speaking, counseling, weddings, funerals, and other professional services are discussed at the start of any such counseling or services and are handled in a business-like manner. Ministers who serve congregations offer their services to members of their own congregations without charge and without expecting any honoraria for such services. While fees for the use of church facilities are set by the session, honoraria or fees for the pastor's services to non-members are set by the pastor in consultation with the session.*
- E. Ministers shall ensure that notes on counseling sessions, and the like, are stored in a place assuring security and confidentiality.*
- F. Ministers avoid the disparagement of any person.*

- G. *Ministers respect the integrity and protect the welfare of persons or groups with whom they are working.*
- H. *Ministers do not engage in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with church members, employees, counseling clients, or any persons by whom they may be perceived to be in a pastoral relationship. Ministers are always responsible for considering the impact of their words and actions on such persons.*
- I. *All personal communications from parishioners are treated with professional confidence, except as indicated in Section J below.*
- J. *Ministers have an obligation to society as well as to their parishioners. When in the course of their work, a minister becomes aware that persons with whom they are working:*
 - 1. *...intend to inflict grave bodily harm on another individual, the minister takes all reasonable steps to inform the intended victim immediately.*
 - 2. *...are inflicting physical and/or sexual abuse on children, the minister informs Child Protective Services or other appropriate agency of the behavior.*
 - 3. *...are a danger to themselves, the minister takes reasonable steps to arrange treatment and/or hospitalization even against the person's wishes.*

COLLEAGUE RELATIONSHIPS

Ministers maintain a vital association with their professional colleagues and with colleagues in related professions -- health care, social services, legal services, and the like. This includes persons in the Presbyterian Church, those in other faith groups, and possibly some without any faith-group connection. They communicate with such peers and collaborate with them professionally.

- A. *In staff relationship, as in all intra-church relationships, the objective is to work together with a spirit of cooperation in building up the whole church. Ministers are understanding toward one another, accept each other as persons, respect the competencies of each other, offer constructive suggestions to one another, forgive misunderstandings, and are tolerant of differences of opinion and style of operation.*

A staff member never aspires to succeed any other person on the staff. Innuendo and gossip are avoided. Staff members are encouraged to speak openly and frankly about their differences and problems to the individual concerned and only to that person. Loyal support between members of the staff is a tremendous help toward building a good esprit-de-corps. Members of the staff do their work with enthusiasm and confidence in each other. The principles of ethical, healthy staff relationships apply equally to professional, paraprofessional, and support staff (secretarial and custodial employees) and volunteers. All staff members are given equal respect without regard to sex, race, ethnic origin, disability, or marital status.

- B. *Ordinarily, the minister does not call on someone at home or in the hospital who is a member of another church unless some initiative comes from that person or from that person's minister. Professional courtesy suggests that if a minister does call on a parishioner from another church, the parishioner's own minister should be notified. The need for pastoral visitation is never used*

as an opportunity for proselytizing.

- C. When a minister is called upon to officiate at a wedding, funeral, or baptism for families who are not members of the minister's own congregation, the minister determines whether they are members of another church. If so, they are urged to secure the services of their own minister. If that effort fails, the minister seeks to inform their minister of the circumstances.*
- D. When the relationship between a minister and a congregation is dissolved, the minister announces publicly what that means, calling attention to the fact that there will be another minister to whom the people should give their loyalty and states clearly that the departing minister should not be called upon for pastoral services or ceremonies. The departing minister indicates how such services and ceremonies are to be provided until a new pastor is present, giving the names of persons on the session or on presbytery committees who should be called when such services are desired. Ministers who are elected as pastor emeritus recognize that this is an honorary title only and carries no job responsibilities or special privileges unless they are expressly stated by the session and approved by the presbytery.*

Ministers who leave a parish position to take a different kind of work, but who continue to reside in the same community are especially cautious to accord all professional and pastoral courtesies to other ministerial colleagues in the community whether those others are temporary, stated, or interim supplies, or installed pastors.

- E. The purpose of an interim pastor is to prepare a particular congregation for the coming of a new pastor. To this end, he/she does not glorify him/herself or mold loyalties to him/herself but rather to the office of the pastor, and most of all, to Christ and to the Church, which is His Body. The interim cannot be a candidate for the pulpit which he/she serves as an interim supply pastor. The interim does not become involved in the search process.*
- F. When a minister is called to another parish or retires, due care is exercised to not influence, by direction, indirection, or by spoken word, the selection or the policies of any successor. In addition, the departing pastor avoids influencing the choice of the next moderator of the session, the interim supply pastor, and the election of the Pastor Nominating Committee and its work. The pastor is especially discreet in visiting a former parish. In such cases, it is proper to pay personal respects to the successor. Frequent visits to one's former parish are avoided. If there is no supply pastor or no stated or temporary supply, the former pastor serves as called upon and approved by the session and/or Committee on Ministry. At the coming of the new pastor, all professional relationships are dissolved.*

After leaving a church, the former minister and spouse exercise all care so as to have no further influence upon the congregation either by conversation, correspondence, or other action. Any former minister seeks to be supportive of the new pastor when comments are made about that pastor or any program, policies, or activities in the former church.

- G. An installed pastor or supply pastor is always courteous to any predecessor. The years may have built up loyalties that are strong, and though the preceding minister may do everything possible to discourage a former parishioner from seeking his or her services, that parishioner may be quite persistent. If this happens, the former pastor steadfastly resists the request and urges the parishioner to seek the current minister's services. If, in unusual circumstances, the current minister chooses to invite a former minister to participate in some service, this is completely on*

the initiative of the current minister. Some careful flexibility in such matters may do more to move a congregation to accept a new minister as their own than would “standing up for one’s rights” as the installed minister.

- H. All ministers not serving in a temporary or permanent pastoral relationship with a particular church are active in the life of a particular congregation but still respect the position of ministers in pastoral relationships regarding all ministerial functions within the community. Weddings, funerals, and baptisms are not accepted by ministers not in a pastoral relationship unless an invitation has been given by the pastor of the church involved. Ministers not in pastoral relationships administer the sacraments only at the request of the local pastor or session or by permission of the presbytery. These ministers ordinarily do not counsel with nor advise former members concerning personal problems or problems in their churches except by referral by their current pastor. Normally they should encourage them to seek the counsel of their own pastor.*
- I. When ministers are no longer serving in a validated ministry, they either seek inactive status in presbytery or ask to be released from exercise of the ordained office and transfer their presbytery membership to a particular congregation. In situations not covered by the Book of Order, the minister consults the Committee on Ministry for guidance.*

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’s words in John 15:12. “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

This code of ethics guides 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.

[This policy for Charleston Atlantic Presbytery was adapted, with permission, from the policies of Trinity, New Harmony, Foothills and Providence Presbyteries of SC. And is consistent with the General Assembly document entitled “Life Together in the Community of Faith: Standards of Ethical Conduct For Ordained Officers in the PC(U.S.A.).”]