



Ministerial Ethics - 1998

This Code of Ethics, revised from the 1974 and 1984 editions, is recommended by the Committee on Ministry for the purpose of maintaining the high character of the Christian Ministry.

1. Speech and Conduct – Like all Christians, the minister shall shape speech and conduct so that it is patterned after Paul’s counsel to think about whatever is honorable, pure, lovely, gracious, excellent, and worthy of praise. Trying to act as God’s servant, the minister should speak the truth in love. Understanding, tact, and discretion, with a sense of respect for all people, a spirit of fairness and decency, and a concern for Christian equality shall be used. In speaking of other ministers it should be remembered that making disparaging statements is destructive of the peace, unity, and purity of the Church. At all times the clergy should strive to share faith, hope, and love in all relationships.
2. Services for Members of Another Church – When a minister is called upon to officiate at a wedding, funeral, or baptism for families who are not members of his or her congregation, the minister shall ascertain whether they are members of a different church. If they are members of another congregation, the people shall be urged to procure the services of their own pastor. If that effort fails, the minister shall contact the pastoral colleague and explain the circumstances.
3. Calling on Members of Neighboring Churches – The responsibility is to the pastor’s own congregation. Normally a minister does not call upon persons whom he or she knows to be members of another church unless the initiative and interest shown by such persons require it as a courtesy, or the circumstances indicated that it would be helpful. When such a call is made, immediate communication to the home pastor can contribute to the avoidance of misunderstanding and may prove to be salutary to all parties concerned.
4. Multiple Staff Relationships – In staff relationships, the objective is to work together with a spirit of cooperation in building up the whole church. To this end, members of the staff shall be understanding toward one another, accepting of each other as persons, respecting the competencies of each other, offering constructive suggestions to one another, being able to forgive misunderstandings, and being tolerant of differences of opinion and styles of leadership.

A staff member shall not aspire to succeed any other person on the staff. Innuendo and gossip shall be avoided. A staff member is encouraged to speak openly and frankly about their differences and problems to the individual with whom he or she differs, and only to that person. Loyal support between members of the staff is a tremendous help toward building a positive working climate. As members of the staff

do their work with enthusiasm and confidence in each other, a strong team can be formed to carry forward the work of the church.

5. When a Minister Leaves a Congregation – When a pastoral relationship is dissolved, the minister shall announce publicly that he or she will no longer be the pastor and will not be available for pastoral services. A former pastor may be called upon for services only when unusual circumstances exist, and at the invitation of the moderator of that session. Such an invitation should come only from the pastor after consultation with the parties concerned. It is understood that the former pastor would not conduct such services but would offer only to assist the pastor in taking part as requested by the pastor, such as baptism, confirmation, weddings, or funerals.
6. The Interim Associate Pastor or Interim Pastor – The purpose of an Interim Pastor is to prepare a particular congregation for the coming of a new pastor soon to be called. To this end the Interim shall not encourage personal loyalties but rather loyalties to the office of pastor, and most of all, loyalties to Christ and to the Church, which is His Body on earth. (According to the Form of Government, a person cannot be a candidate for the pulpit which he or she serves in a temporary capacity.)
7. The Minister and Successor – When a pastor is called to another congregations or retires due care shall be exercised against any influence, by direction or indirection, by spoken or written word, of the selection of a successor or the policies of a successor. One shall be especially discreet in visits to a former congregation. A courtesy visit to the new pastor is in order. Visits on one’s former congregation shall be discouraged.

During the interim before a pastor is called, the former pastor may be called upon to conduct ministerial services, upon invitation of the session’s moderator. The interim pastor, if there is one, shall be accorded the same courtesies as the new pastor. If there is no interim pastor, the former pastor may serve as called upon and as approved by the session. At the coming of the new pastor, all official relationship shall be dissolved.

A pastor who leaves a church shall exercise all care so as to have no further influence upon the congregation either by conversation, correspondence, or other action. The former pastor shall seek to be supportive of the new pastor when comments are made about him or her, the program, policies, and activities of the former church.

When a congregation elects to confer upon its former minister the title of “Pastor Emeritus” or “Pastor Emerita”, it should be clearly understood that this is an honorific title neither denoting nor connoting any continuing responsibility or status save affection and esteem.

8. The Minister and the Predecessor – The successor also has the responsibility to be courteous to the predecessors. The years may have built up loyalties that are strong,

and though predecessors may do everything possible to discourage a family from seeking their services, it is the wise incumbent pastor who knows when to exercise discretion and sensitivity in the invitation to involve former ministers in pastoral services.

9. The Minister and Retirement – Upon retirement, a pastor ordinarily seeks church involvement in some community other than the last congregation. The former pastor will not attend meetings or services of worship at the former parish except for possible special occasions or by invitation.
10. Recognizing that there may be occasional and warranted exceptions to the above articles, i.e. 5, 7, 8 and 9; it shall be incumbent upon the former or retired minister to set the boundaries apropos of any continuing relationship with his/her former congregation. Whatever form this continuing relationship may take, it shall be done only with the cooperation and concurrence of the Pastor and Session of the said church under the continuing oversight of the Committee on Ministry.
11. Other Ministers – Those ministers “in other service of the church” (G-11.0406) shall respect the position of ministers serving within congregations regarding all pastoral functions. Weddings, funerals, and baptisms shall not be accepted by ministers-without-charge unless an invitation has been given by the pastor of the church involved. Ministers-without-charge may administer the sacraments only at the request of the local pastor or session or by permission of the Presbytery. Ministers-without-charge ordinarily shall not counsel with not advise former members concerning problems in their churches, but should encourage them to seek the counsel of their pastors.
12. Pastoral Confidentiality – All information of a personal nature shared with a pastor in formal and informal conversations shall be considered confidential. Such information shall be shared with others only in the most carefully considered professional circumstances, such as in supervision with a qualified professional. or in situations in which the health and well-being of the counseles or of others would otherwise be endangered.
13. Financial Responsibility – Clergy shall not use church funds and accounts for their personal or private advantage. Adequate accounting shall be made of any funds handled by clergy. All requests for reimbursement (example: medical deductible, travel, continuing education) from the church treasury shall be accompanied by documentation relevant to the expense. Ministers of the Presbytery shall be prudent and responsible in their personal financial matters, including care in assuming debt and full payment of personal debts.
14. Personal and Professional Relationships – In relationships with church members, colleagues, family members and others, ministers of the Presbytery shall avoid acting in manipulative or exploitative ways by taking advantage of the power or influence of the role of ministry. All actions of the clergy shall be motivated by a concern for the spiritual well-being of the related persons.

15. Sexual misconduct has become a serious threat to the integrity of the Church's ministry and a violation of persons subject to the loving and responsible care of the community of faith. It is never acceptable or permissible. The Presbytery of Cincinnati, consistent with the *Book of Order* and guidelines set forth by the 1993 General Assembly, has a policy and procedures* to be followed in all cases of alleged misconduct taking into fair and responsible account all concerned parties. Discipline and penalties for such misconduct can be severe. Given these realities, it is incumbent upon all of our clergy to commit to constant diligence in exercising responsible sexual conduct in all our dealings with people in the church and out of the church. Sexual misconduct is a violation of our role as pastors, a misuse and abuse of our authority and power and antithetical to the Gospel call that we be God's servants in the struggle to bring wholeness to our broken world.

* - available in the Presbytery Office through the Stated Clerk and distributed in each packet given to new clergy.