

Presbytery of Coastal Carolina

Code of Ethics for Pastors and Other Church Professionals

The Purpose of These Guidelines: These ethical guidelines for ministerial conduct serve two purposes: first they are a guide to what is expected professionally of ministers and other church professionals in Presbytery of Coastal Carolina. Secondly they also inform members of the church what they can expect from Pastors and other church professionals (this includes Ministers of the Word and Sacrament (Teaching Elders), Certified Christian Educators, Commissioned Ruling Elders, and Qualified Ruling Elders trained and recommended by Presbytery who serve within the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina; officers and employees of the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina; and volunteers and lay persons serving on Presbytery committees, boards, councils and commissions, and other entities in support of Presbytery programs, (hereafter referred to as “Pastor”) and other church professionals serving our congregations as defined in G-2.05 in the *Book of Order*. It is the expectation of Presbytery of Coastal Carolina that individual sessions shall adopt similar standards for all of their other employees.

These guidelines do not presume to speak to all areas of Pastors’ and other church professionals’ lives. They are *minimum* expectations and the Pastor must also be guided by Scripture, personal conscience, the *Book of Order*, Christian tradition and peer approval. They assume basic honesty and integrity of conduct. Expectations of Pastors and styles of behavior change. The ethical behavior of Pastors 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.

Pastors and other church professionals will:

- **conduct their lives in a manner that is faithful to the gospel by practicing the disciplines of study, prayer, reflection, worship, stewardship, and service, speaking the truth in love;**
- **recognize the limits of their own gifts and training, and refer persons and tasks to others as appropriate;**
- **participate in continuing education and seek the counsel of mentors and professional advisors;**

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, Pastors 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. Pastors are to act in such a manner as to uphold and enhance the honor, integrity, morality and dignity of the profession.
3. Pastors are to limit their ministries to those positions and responsibilities for which they are qualified.

4. Pastors will conduct all professional matters in a manner which assures confidentiality and avoids conflicts of interest.
5. Pastors will seek to maintain professional competency throughout their careers.
6. In personal as well as professional relationships Pastors 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.

B. Pastors as Persons

1. **Pastors Bear Unique Expectations.** In considering the ethics particular to ordained ministry, it is well to remember that Pastors 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 Pastors. To deny or ignore this is unrealistic and irresponsible. Pastors 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. **Pastors and Freedom of Conscience.** Though the Reformed tradition emphasized the freedom of individual conscience, Pastors are still subject to the discipline of the church (see *Book of Order* G 2.0105.) Violations of this code may be cause for disciplinary procedures. (Cf. also *Pastors and the Civil Law* in Section D. 4. below.)

Standards for ministerial conduct grow out of a vision of the Christian life and a sense of calling to a particular service. Like other Christians, Pastors 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; responsibility in parenthood and other family obligations; joy in service; and integrity and trustworthiness in all their dealings with others.

3. **The Pastoral Care of Pastors.** Pastors also need pastoral care. They should take the initiative in establishing relationships with other Pastors, with the General Presbyter and with the Committee on Ministry to provide support in difficult times, caring concern, encouragement for Christian growth, and sharing in both successes and failures.
4. **Pastors and Fees, Honoraria and Discounts.** Pastors should ordinarily not require or solicit fees for pastoral services to families or individuals within the congregation. Such services include performing baptisms, marriages, funerals and counseling. However, the sessions should establish their guidelines. In those cases in which an unsolicited gift is given Pastors may use their own best judgment as to what to do with the gift. All Pastors stand ready to render services to individuals and communities in crisis without regard to financial remuneration.

While fees for the use of the church facilities are set by the session, honoraria or fees for the Pastor's services to non-members can be set by the Pastor in consultation with the

session. The Pastor 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 Pastors are expected to participate in Presbytery (by attending Presbytery meetings and serving on Presbytery committees), ecumenical and other activities beyond the particular church, it is wise for the Pastor to discuss the time involved in such activities with the session. (“Discussion” does not mean “seek permission,”) as pastors are expected to participate in the governing bodies of the church by virtue of their ordination vows, (see *Book of Order* W-4.40.03, 4.4005.)

If any 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 Pastor and the session should be established as to the disposition of such honoraria. This presupposes agreement between Pastor and session concerning the limits of the congregation’s claim on the Pastor’s time. Conversation between Pastors and their sessions should arrive at mutual concurrence as to expectations regarding the Pastor’s work time and free time.

C. Pastors and the Presbytery

1. **The Pastor 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 General Presbyter or the moderator of their Community Committee on Ministry. 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 Pastor and the Non-Member.** Pastors 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 Pastor.
3. **The Pastor and Other Churches.** Ordinarily Pastors should not knowingly call upon members of another church in the community to administer pastoral care unless the initiative and interest shown by such a person requires it as a courtesy. If such a visitation occurs, it is a helpful courtesy to, after obtaining the parishioner’s permission, inform the colleague to whose church the person belongs regarding visitation. Invitations to officiate at marriages, funerals and baptisms are not to be accepted by Pastors unless an invitation has been extended by the Pastor of the church involved.
4. **The Pastor and the Multiple Staff.** All Pastors are installed in their positions by action of presbytery and any change in the pastoral relationship must be approved by presbytery. While the pastor 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 mistakes of colleagues and seek to give support and help when needed. 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. A staff member should not aspire to succeed 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, ethnic origin, disability, or marital status.

5. **The Pastor in an Interim Situation.** The purpose of an interim Pastor is to provide pastoral service and to prepare a particular congregation for new pastoral leadership. An interim Pastor should avoid seeking to mold loyalties to the interim Pastor and should instead direct a congregation's attention to the new challenges in mission and ministry that manifest themselves in a period of transition to new pastoral leadership. Under no circumstances should an interim Pastor become involved in the work of the pastor nominating committee beyond preparation of the Church Information Form. Presbytery representatives should make this policy clear to the congregation at the time the congregation elects a pastor nominating committee.
6. **The Pastor and the Successor.** When a Pastor accepts another call, the Pastor should exercise due care not to influence directly or indirectly the policies of the successor. Frequent visits to one's former parish should 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 Pastor should avoid performing ministerial services (weddings, funerals, baptisms, etc.). Moreover, even when a successor issues an invitation to a former Pastor to assist or take part in a ministerial function, it is a wise idea for the former Pastor 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. In general the former Pastor should decline invitations to serve in a pastoral function in a former congregation. This practice pertains also to pastors emeriti. Any exception to this practice requires the written permission of the moderator of the Community Committee on Ministry or his/her designee in addition to the Moderator of the Session (See *Book of Order* G-2.0905).
7. **The Pastor and the Predecessor.** If the former Pastor or retired Pastor 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 Pastor 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 maybe occasions when it is appropriate to invite a predecessor to return to the church for a visit, possibly to celebrate a special occasion or event or, if deemed appropriate by all concerned, to assist in a ministerial function with the permission of the Moderator of the Session and moderator of the Community Committee on Ministry or his/her designee.
8. **The Pastor and Retirement.** The above discussions (#s 6 & 7) are relevant for the retired Pastor, but some additional matters also require comment. See *Appendix A* of the Committee on Ministry Handbook for Details.
9. All teaching elders who fall into the category of the *Book of Order's* listing of Validated Ministry, Member-at-Large and Honorably Retired (See *Book of Order* G-2.0503) are

expected to be **active in the life of a particular congregation** while respecting the position of installed Pastors regarding all ministerial functions within the community. Counselors should also refer to their own code of ethics.

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

D. Ethical Issues of Particular Concern

1. **Pastors and Confidentiality.** Pastors shall not disclose confidences to anyone except in any one of the following situations:
 - 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 Pastor against claims made by a person who asserts that particular communications related to the claim were made in confidence.
2. **Pastors and Special Privileges.** Pastors, as servants of the Servant of God, need to be sensitive to the danger of any use of the authority of the pastoral office for personal benefit. Boundaries should be set, in consultation between the Pastor, the session and the Community Committee on Ministry to determine how much and in what manner a Pastor may promote among the members of the congregation any of the Pastor's private business endeavors, tours or products. The same consultation should occur concerning the Pastor's private use of church resources, business machines, secretarial time, etc.
3. **Business and Finance.** The Pastor's integrity in personal business and financial dealings is also an ethical concern. Pastors are expected to conduct their financial affairs with the utmost integrity. Many Pastors manage discretionary funds on behalf of the congregation. It is suggested that wherever possible the Pastor identify someone in the congregation or presbytery to audit the use of this money. This suggestion is made to protect the Pastor both from the temptation to use the funds unwisely and from rumors in the congregation about his/her misuse of the funds. Pastors are not to solicit clergy discounts for merchandise or services rendered them.
4. **The Pastor and the Civil Law.** The Pastor shall him/herself obey the civil law and insist leaders and members of his/her congregation do likewise. This includes, but is not limited to, matters related to taxes, copyrights, insurance, marriages, and the keeping of records. The continuing problem in many churches is the photocopying use of Copyright materials. Proper licensing and compliance of these licenses must be adhered to.

There may be times when the Pastor 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 Pastor's public preaching, teaching and writing shall always be her or his own work with appropriate academic acknowledgment. In sermons this includes the exegetical work, the organization and the words of the sermon, and the use of examples and illustrations.
6. **Language and Behavior.** The Pastor 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, the Pastor shall maintain strict decorum. Pastors shall not treat persons arbitrarily based on their gender, race, nationality, age, physical, emotional or mental condition, sexual orientation, or economic condition.

Pastors 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. 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 professional has the responsibility to set the boundaries and to maintain them. See the separate Presbytery of Coastal Carolina *Policy on Sexual Misconduct* which supersedes any perceived discrepancy with this Code of Ethics.

Due to the issues of power and trust involved, it is recommended that single pastors 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 Pastors of Presbytery who are involved as teachers, counselors, or supervisors in programs which train for special work in ministry, e.g., Clinical Pastoral Education or Spiritual Development. As professionals, Pastors are aware of the variation in spiritual and psychological dynamics at work in a person. Where the Pastor himself or herself feels compulsions to behavior which is either criminal or unethical he or she will seek immediate help from an appropriate counselor. This standard shall apply to those caught in substance, drug, or alcohol abuse or addiction. If therapy or counseling seems to be unfruitful the Pastor shall lay aside the office of ministry.

7. **The Pastor and Rumors.** The Pastor may find her/himself the subject of rumors in the congregation or community. Response to these shall be carefully considered. Consultation with the session or an appropriate committee of a higher governing body is recommended. 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. It is not acceptable.

E. Circulation of Ethical Standards

Coastal Carolina Presbytery will circulate this code of ethics among its member churches and Pastor members. Each Pastor shall submit a signed statement 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.

F. Violations and Sanctions

The Presbytery 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 in the United States of America.

G. Candidates and Inquirers

The Committee on Preparation for Ministry 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.

H. Conclusion and Rationale

Central to the vocation of Pastors of Word and Sacrament [Teaching Elders] 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 at setting legalistic limitations but rather 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:

- National Capital Presbytery's *Code of Ethics for Clergy and other Church Professionals*, January 24, 1995
- Presbytery of the James, *Expectations for Faithfulness in Ministry for Teaching elders and Certified Educators*, October 8, 2002
- Presbytery of Coastal Carolina *Sexual Misconduct Policy*, Amended October 2, 2004 and Updated with *Book of Order* References, April 20, 2013

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