



Commission on Ministry

Code of Ethics for Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and Commissioned Ruling Elders



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All ministers and commissioned ruling elders have the responsibility assumed in their ordination vows, 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 Order and Book of Confessions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In their personal lives all ministers and commissioned ruling elders, 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 society with honesty.

Fundamental Principles

1. In all professional matters ministers of the Word and Sacrament and commissioned ruling elders shall 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 and commissioned ruling elders shall act in such a manner as to uphold and enhance the honor, integrity, morality, and dignity of the profession.
3. Ministers and commissioned ruling elders shall limit their practice to those positions and responsibilities for which they are qualified.
4. Ministers and commissioned ruling elders shall conduct all professional matters in a manner that assures security and confidentiality and avoids conflicts of interest.
5. Ministers and commissioned ruling elders shall demonstrate respect, honesty, and fairness when interacting with clergy colleagues and persons in related professions.
6. Ministers and commissioned ruling elders shall maintain professional competence throughout their careers.
7. In personal, as well as professional relationships, ministers and commissioned ruling elders shall have honest and sincere motives, upholding the peace, unity, and purity of the church and sharing faith, hope, and love with all people.

Guidelines for the Application of the Ministers and Commissioned Ruling Elders Code of Ethics

The maintenance of high standards of professional competence is an ethical concern and is a responsibility shared by all ministers of the Word and Sacrament and commissioned ruling elders. They shall maintain practices that give glory to Christ, advance the goals of the church and nurture, challenge, and protect church members, parishioners, and clients. Their practice of the profession will also seek to advance the profession itself.

1. Ministers and commissioned ruling elders accurately represent their professional qualifications, education, training, and experience in all contracts with the church and the public. Ministers and commissioned ruling elders are themselves responsible for correcting any misrepresentation.

2. Ministers and commissioned ruling elders use their knowledge, skill, experience, and their professional connections for the benefit of the people and the institutions they serve and not to secure unfair personal advantage.
3. Members of the profession limit their practice to those positions and responsibilities for which they are qualified and know when to make referrals if this is indicated in a particular case.
4. Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and commissioned ruling elders avoid the disparagement of any person, and particularly of colleagues and other professionals.

Pastor/Client-Parishioner Relationships

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and commissioned ruling elders respect the integrity and protect the welfare of persons or groups with whom they are working and have an obligation to safeguard information about them that has been obtained in the course of the counseling process.

1. It is the duty of a minister/pastoral counselor during the counseling process to maintain the relationship with the client on a professional basis.
2. Ministers/Commissioned Ruling Elders/pastoral counselors shall not engage in sexual misconduct, mental or physical abuse with their clients or any other persons. (See the Presbytery of Des Moines Sexual Misconduct Policy)
3. All personal communication from clients or parishioners is treated in a professional manner and confidentially.
4. Although the State of Iowa does not require clergy to be mandatory reporters in cases of physical abuse, neglect, or sexual molestation, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has placed that requirement on itself. (G-4.0302)

Colleague Relationships

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and commissioned ruling elders maintain a vital association with their profession colleagues and other colleagues in related professions – healthcare, social services, legal services, and the like.

1. In staff relationships, as in intra-church relationships, the objective is to work together with a spirit of cooperation in building up the whole church. Specific position descriptions are prepared to describe the responsibilities, accountabilities, and interrelationships of all church staff. Ministers and commissioned ruling elders are to act with understanding toward one another, accept each other as persons, know and honor each other's position descriptions, respect the competencies of each other, offer constructive suggestions to one another, forgive misunderstandings, and be tolerant of differences of opinion and style of operation.
2. In pastoral calling and other home or hospital visiting, seeing one's own parishioners is the minister's responsibility. Ordinarily the minister or commissioned ruling elder should not visit someone who is a member of another church unless initiative comes from that person or from that person's minister. Professional courtesy suggests that if a minister does visit a parishioner from another church, the parishioner's own minister should be notified.

3. When a minister or commissioned ruling elder 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 should determine whether they are members of another church. If so, they should be urged to secure the services of their own minister. If that fails, the minister should seek to inform their minister of the circumstances. In administering the sacraments, the minister will know and honor the provisions of the Director for Worship and the Form of Government as found in the Book of Order.
4. When the relationship between a minister or commissioned ruling elder and a congregation is dissolved, the minister should announce publicly what that means, calling attention to the fact there will be another minister to whom the people should give their loyalty and stating clearly that the departing minister should not be called upon for pastoral services or ceremonies. Ministers who are elected as pastors emeriti should recognize that this is an honorary title only and carries no responsibilities or special privileges unless they are expressly stated by the session and approved by the presbytery.
5. The purpose of an interim pastor is to prepare a particular congregation for the coming of a new pastor. According to the Form of Government, the interim should not usually be a candidate for the pulpit which he/she serves as an interim supply pastor.
6. When a minister or commissioned ruling elder is called to another parish or retires, due care should be exercised not to influence, by direction or indirection, by spoken or written word, the selection of any successor or the policies of the successor. In addition, the departing pastor should avoid influencing the choice of the next moderator of the session or an interim supply pastor or the election of the Pastor Nominating Committee or its work. The pastor should be especially discreet when and if visiting in a former parish. In such cases, it would be proper to pay personal respects to the successor. Frequent visits to one's former parish should be avoided. If there is no supply pastor or no stated or temporary supply, the former pastor may serve as called upon and approved by the session and/or Commission on Ministry (G-2.0905). At the coming of the new pastor, all professional relationships should be dissolved.
7. An installed pastor, a supply pastor, or commissioned ruling elder has the responsibility to be 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/her services, that parishioner may be quite persistent. If this happens, the former pastor should simply and courteously refuse the request and urge 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 should be 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.
8. The Commission on Ministry shall take appropriate steps to resolve any questions that may arise in these areas in accordance with the provisions of the Book of Order. The commission shall be open to communication at all times with the ministers, elders who are members of session, and sessions of presbytery.