

Peace River Presbytery
A Code of Ethics for Ministers

6.1301 A Code of Ethics for Ministers. 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

6.1302 In their ordination vows, all Ministers 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 serve in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, continually guided by our confessions and governed by our church's polity and discipline. In their personal lives all ministers, acting as God's servants, are called to 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 pray for and serve with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.

6.1303 Fundamental Principles. Ministers in Peace River Presbytery:

- A. Take their ordination vows seriously as they consciously strive to glorify God in all they do, both personally and professionally.
- B. Are accountable to one another, and to the larger church, as they abide by the church's discipline and work as friends among their colleagues in ministry.
- C. Act in such a manner as to uphold and enhance the honor, integrity, morality, and dignity of their calling to serve Jesus Christ.

6.1304 Guidelines for Ministers' Code of Ethics.

- A. These ethical standards are not an attempt to set legalistic limitations, but rather to guide all of us in showing the love Christ has shown us. We live by the grace of God and willingly choose to do so in a disciplined manner. The sole purpose of such standards is to build up the body of Christ.
- B. These are not exhaustive guidelines but are an attempt to lift up particular concerns as Ministers seek to carry out their ordination vows.
- C. 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 also a larger accountability to the religious community as a whole and to the general public.
- D. 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, to 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 do not involve themselves or their congregations in questionable business practices. They do not incur debts they cannot pay in a reasonable time, nor do they leave any community with unpaid personal bills.

6.1305 Personal and Professional Practices.

In all matters, ministers should 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. Financial arrangements or expectations regarding preaching, speaking, counseling, weddings, funerals, and other professional services are discussed at the start of such relationships 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. 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 are responsible for reporting to the Internal Revenue Service all income, including honoraria and unused housing allowance.
- F. Ministers are responsible to ensure that notes on counseling sessions, and the like, are stored in a place assuring security and confidentiality.
- G. Ministers avoid the disparagement of any person.
- H. Ministers respect the integrity and protect the welfare of persons or groups with whom they are working.
- I. 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, and refrain from actions that create the appearance of an inappropriate relationship.
- J. All personal communications from parishioners are treated with professional confidence, with the exception of Section K below. Confidentiality respects the uniqueness of parishioners as individuals. It is the foundation for honest communication and is a necessary element in the creation of a community where people feel free to express personal thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. When confidentiality is violated, when private information is made public, trust between a parishioner and pastor is destroyed. It is important for a pastor to preserve confidentiality so that relationships with parishioners may foster personal and spiritual growth.
- K. Ministers have an obligation to society as well as to their parishioners. When a teaching elder becomes aware that persons with whom they are working...
 - (1) intend to inflict grave bodily harm on another individual, the pastor takes all reasonable steps to inform the intended victim immediately. If applicable, the pastor is to inform civil authorities.
 - (2) are inflicting physical and/or sexual abuse on children or the elderly, the pastor informs civil authorities (and the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery if a pastor is involved).
 - (3) are a danger to themselves, the minister takes reasonable steps to arrange treatment and/or hospitalization, even against the person's wishes.

- L. Ministers receiving funds (i.e., loans or grants other than normal honorarium) from either a congregation or members with whom the pastor has had a pastoral relationship, or ministers who are beneficiaries, personal representatives or trustees of estates or trusts involving members of their congregation shall report such information to the Committee on Ministry.
- M. Sessions whose pastor has a discretionary fund shall assure that they have appropriate guidelines and accountability for how these funds are used.

6.1306 Colleague Relationships. Ministers are encouraged to 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 relationships, 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.
- B. Loyal support between members of the staff is a tremendous help toward building good working relationships. Members of the staff do their work with enthusiasm and confidence in each other. 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. 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 gender, race, ethnic origin, disability, or marital status.
- C. After leaving a church, former pastors shall exercise due care so as to have no further influence upon the congregation by conversation, correspondence, or other action.
- D. Former pastors, either directly or indirectly, shall not seek to influence the selection or policies of any successor, moderators of the session, interim or supply pastors, or the membership of a Pastor Nominating Committee.
- E. When the relationship between a pastor and a congregation is dissolved, the pastor shall call attention to the fact that there will be another pastor to whom the people should give their loyalty and shall state clearly that the departing pastor should not be called upon for pastoral services or ceremonies. The departing pastor shall provide the names of persons on the session or Committee on Ministry who should be called when such services are desired.
- F. Pastors who leave a parish position to retire or take on a different kind of work while continuing to reside in the same community shall be especially careful to accord all professional and pastoral courtesies to other ministerial colleagues in the community whether associate, interim, stated supply, or installed pastors. Should an Honorably Retired pastor choose to affiliate with any congregation of Peace River Presbytery, whether individually or in the support of their spouse, the HR Pastor should avoid potential conflicts in the life of that church. To do otherwise could be seen as disrupting the peace, unity, and purity of the church and would risk potential allegations of offense.
- G. Retired or relocated pastors shall be especially discreet when visiting in a former parish. In such cases, it is proper to pay personal respects to one's successor. Frequent visits to one's former parish are avoided.
- H. When a pulpit is vacant and there is no interim pastor, stated or temporary supply, the former pastor shall serve only as called upon and approved by the session and Committee on Ministry. At the coming of a new pastor, all professional relationships are dissolved.

- I. In the unfortunate instance where a parishioner insists on seeking the services of a former pastor for an occasion like a wedding, baptism or funeral, the previous minister is expected to redirect the parishioner to the current pastor. The current pastor, moderator of session, may choose to invite the predecessor to serve in such a way. At times, such flexibility may help smooth a difficult transition.
- J. Any former pastor shall seek to be supportive of the new pastor when comments are made about that person or any program, policies, or activities in the former church. If the former pastor cannot in good conscience be supportive of the new pastor, (s)he shall remain silent.
- K. Ordinarily a pastor shall not provide pastoral care to a person who is a member of a church other than the one currently being served. This includes pastoral calls to someone's home or hospital room unless specifically invited at the person's initiative or by that person's pastor.
- L. Professional courtesy suggests that if a pastor does call on a parishioner from another church, the parishioner's own pastor shall be notified. The need for pastoral visitation is never used as an opportunity for proselytizing.
- M. Pastors who worship with a particular church without a formal pastoral function in that congregation maintain proper professional boundaries. They do not officiate at weddings, funerals, and baptisms unless invited by the pastor of the church involved.
- N. Pastors not in pastoral relationships shall administer the sacraments only at the request of the local pastor or session or by permission of the Presbytery.
- O. When a pastor is called upon to officiate at a non-member's wedding, funeral, or baptism, the pastor shall determine whether they are members of another church. If they are, the pastor shall urge to secure the services of their own pastor. If that effort fails, the pastor seeks to inform their pastor of the circumstances.
- P. An installed, interim or supply pastor shall always be courteous to any predecessor. In special circumstances the current pastor may choose to invite a former minister to participate in some service. This is always at the initiative of the current pastor. Careful flexibility in such matters may help a congregation more readily accept a new minister as their own.
- Q. Pastors 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.
- R. The purpose of an interim pastor is to prepare a particular congregation for the coming of a new pastor. To this end, the interim shall not seek to glorify or mold loyalties to self, but rather to the office of the pastor, and most of all, to Christ and His Church. The interim or supply pastor cannot be a candidate for the pulpit served. Interim and supply pastors do not become involved in the search process.

6.1307 Conclusion and Rationale.

Ministers are called to lifestyles that reflect the words of Jesus in John 15:12, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." This code of ethics seeks to guide us in that endeavor.