

Standards of Ethical Conduct for Mid-Kentucky Presbytery

For Teaching Elder Members, Church Educators, Commissioned Ruling Elders, Leaders of New Worshipping Communities, and all other persons called to ministry within Mid-Kentucky Presbytery. (Approved by Presbytery on June 9, 2015)

Theological Foundation

As Teaching Elders (also known as Ministers of Word and Sacrament), Church Educators, Commissioned Ruling Elders, Leaders of New Worshipping Communities, and other persons called to ministry within Mid-Kentucky Presbytery – as servants of Jesus Christ in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), we are, among other things, called to:

1. Teach the faith and equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12) as we serve in a variety of ministries, as authorized by the presbytery (G-2.0501);
2. Interpret the mysteries of grace and lift the people's vision toward the hope of God's new creation (G-2.0501);
3. Seek always to discern the mind of Christ and to build up Christ's body through devotion, debate, and decision (G-2.0501).
4. Seek to live holy lives that treat people with that dignity, sanctity and respect because God is holy and all persons are created in God's image. (I Peter 1:15)

We also affirm:

Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission in the world, for its sanctification, and for its service to God. Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills. (F-1.0202).

Christ gives to the Church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its order and discipline. Scripture teaches us of Christ's will for the Church, which is to be obeyed. In the worship and service of God and the government of the church, matters are to be ordered according to the Word by reason and sound judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (F-1.0203).

I. Standards of Ethical Conduct

A. Purpose

The purpose of these Standards of Ethic Conduct is to set forth positive guidelines for the practice of ministry within Mid-Kentucky Presbytery, and to promote sensitivity, spiritual reflection, and action according to the teachings of Jesus Christ. These Standards shall be shared and discussed by the Commission on Ministry with all current and incoming teaching elder members, church educators, commissioned ruling elders, and leaders of new worshipping communities of the presbytery. This is not an exhaustive document, nor will it ever be final, but is one which reflects contemporary concerns in the life of the Church.

B. The Presbyterian Context

Basic to Reformed and Presbyterian understanding of Christian discipleship is faithfulness to personal and communal ethics, integrity and discipline in life and doctrine. This faithfulness is exercised through the decisions of the councils of the church: Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods and General Assembly. It is shaped by reference to standards set forth in Scripture, the advocacy of the Holy Spirit, the accumulated wisdom of the people of God, a critical examination of societal thought and practice in the light of the Gospel, and an awareness that God alone is Lord of each conscience.

While persons engaged in ministry are accountable to the Presbytery wherein they labor, they also bear accountability to their calling congregation, council, or body. There is also a larger accountability to the religious community as a whole and to the general public. Persons in ministry should endeavor to be knowledgeable and sensitive to prevailing moral, social, ethical and religious standards, realizing that any violation on their part may cause harm to church members, colleagues in ministry, their profession, and the Church, which is the Body of Christ.

C. Ordination Vows

Those who are called to ordered ministry (ruling elders, teaching elders, and deacons) and called to other ministries of the church are bound by their membership and ordination vows. All have agreed to trust the Lord Jesus Christ, uphold the truth of the Scriptures and be guided by the confessions, love our neighbors, be governed by our Church's polity, and work for the reconciliation of the world. They have promised to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church, and to pray for and serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love, and to faithfully perform their duties in their particular ordered ministry (W-4.4002). These vows are the foundation for the ethical practice of ministry.

II. Fundamental Principles of Ethical Conduct

- A. In all matters persons called to ministry are to maintain practices that give glory to Christ, advance the Great Ends of the Church, and nurture, challenge, and protect the welfare of church members, clients, and the public.
- B. Persons called to ministry are to limit their practice of ministry to those positions and responsibilities for which they are called within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and for which they are qualified by training and/or experience.
- C. Persons called to ministry are to conduct all matters so that security and confidentiality are maintained, and conflict of interest and exploitation are avoided.
- D. Persons called to ministry are to demonstrate respect, honesty, and fairness with colleagues and persons in related professions.
- E. Persons called to ministry are to maintain professional competency throughout their careers, using opportunities to further develop skills in the practice of their ministry.

III. Personal Practices

A. Preface

God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world. They must have the approval of God's people and the concurring judgment of a council of the church. (G-2.0104)

Persons called to ministry serving in a validated ministry, shall:

1. demonstrate conformity with the mission of God's people in the world as set forth in Holy Scripture, The Book of Confessions, and the Book of Order of this church;
2. serve and aid others, and enable the ministry of others;
3. give evidence of theologically informed fidelity to God's Word;
4. be carried on in accountability for its character and conduct to the presbytery in addition to any organizations, agencies, and institutions served; and
5. include responsible participation in the deliberations, worship, and work of the presbytery and in the life of a congregation of this church or a church in correspondence with the PC(USA) (G-2.0503a)

Like all church members, persons called to ministry are called to demonstrate a new quality of life within and through the Church and to live responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life (G-1-0304).

B. Financial Matters

1. Terms of Call for persons called to ministry should provide adequate compensation. Honoraria shall not be considered a substitute for adequate compensation and should not be sought by the Teaching Elder or Church Educator from members of the congregation served. Care should be exercised in accepting gifts or honoraria.
2. Persons called to ministry shall exercise fiscal responsibility pertaining to their calling, which includes:
 - a. Setting an example of benevolence and responsible stewardship;
 - b. Exercising particular ministries of the church (e.g. baptisms, weddings, funerals) to the congregation they serve without expecting honoraria;

- c. Standing ready to render pastoral services without compensation to individuals and communities in crisis;
 - d. Considering the obtaining of professional liability insurance;
 - e. Declining fees or gifts as payment for business or professional referrals;
 - f. Living within the family's financial means and paying all just debts as promptly as possible;
 - g. Refusing to use church funds, accounts or resources for personal advantage;
 - h. Maintaining adequate records for allowances and reimbursable expenses;
3. Standards governing financial arrangements for pastoral services provided for nonmembers shall be determined by individual Sessions in consultation with the teaching elder / pastor, taking into account local practices.

C. Speech and Conduct

1. Conduct includes the following principles:
 - a. Recognizing that all relationships require integrity, sensitivity, confidentiality and caring.
 - b. Modeling responsible authority with parishioners, students, clients, colleagues and employees.
 - c. Protecting those who are vulnerable by recognizing and refusing to take advantage of others in any situation.
2. Persons called to ministry are well advised to follow the advice of Paul that those in the church should act for the sake of the weaker believers (Romans 14, I Corinthians 8,) and should understand that their behavior is under a greater scrutiny. Teaching Elders and Church Educators should recognize that their speech, actions and sexual behavior are measured by members of the community against prevailing local standards.
3. In any relationship between persons called to ministry any abusive behavior is unacceptable, whether it is verbal, physical or sexual in nature.
4. The Sexual Misconduct Policy of Mid-Kentucky Presbytery sets forth a standard of relationships and conduct for all members, including those called to ordered ministries of Teaching Elders, Ruling Elders, and Deacons, as well as Church Educators, other church employees and volunteers and procedures for addressing misconduct. The Commission on Ministry as well as all persons called to ministry within Mid-Kentucky Presbytery should be familiar with these standards and procedures.

D. Concerning Personal Freedom

The right to freedom of conscience is one of the historic principles of Presbyterian Church Order (F-3.0101). This freedom of conscience must be exercised within our Presbyterian Polity, which states:

It is necessary to the integrity and health of the church that the persons who serve it in ordered ministries shall adhere to the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity as expressed in this Constitution. So far as may be possible without serious departure from these standards, without infringing on the rights and views of others, and without obstructing the constitutional governance of the church, freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained. It is to be recognized, however, that in entering the ordered ministries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek, or serve in, ordered ministry. The decision as to whether a person has departed from essentials of Reformed faith and polity is made initially by the individual concerned but ultimately becomes the responsibility of the council in which he or she is a member. (G-2.0105).

E. Social Media

As stated in The Second Helvetic Confession, "This good and almighty God created all things, both visible and invisible, by God's co-eternal Word, and preserves them by God's co-eternal Spirit. . ." (Book of Confessions, 5.032); therefore, one's online presence is not separate from the other parts of one's life. The same legal and ethical responsibilities that apply in face-to-face interactions also apply in digital interactions. One's digital content (social media presence, website postings, emails, private messages and other internet based communications) should

demonstrate the Christian belief that all people are beloved children of God to be treated with dignity, honesty, fairness and respect and should be consistent with one's ordination vows. For additional resources on using social media platforms for evangelism, strengthening Christian fellowship and creating a social media policy for a congregation, the following documents may be useful:

1. "Social Media and Congregations: Strategies, Guidelines, Best Practices and Resources"
 - a. This Evangelical Lutheran Church in America document offers specific advice on developing a congregational social media presence and a social media use policy; it also includes an extensive list of resources for further study.
http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Social_Media_and_Congregations.pdf?_ga=1.64829231.1016880643.1429379543
2. "Pastoral Transitions in the Age of Social Media"
 - a. This post offers advice on managing relationships on social media for pastors leaving a congregation and is part of the Alban at Duke Divinity School technology advice web page. Many other helpful blog posts on the use of social media are found on Alban's technology advice web page. Page 3 of 5. <https://alban.org/archive/pastoral-transitions-in-the-age-of-social-media/>
3. "How-To Create a Social Media Policy for Your Church" by Eric Dye
 - a. While this is a review of a web service that helps congregations create a social media policy, it lists guidelines for clergy interaction with youth and adults on social media platforms. <http://churchm.ag/social-media-policy/>

IV. Professional Practices

A. Leadership

1. The purpose and pattern of leadership shall be understood in terms of service rather than to gain personal benefit or power.
2. To further the peace and unity of the church, persons called to ministry should work with the Session to nurture the congregation toward faithful membership in Christ's body through growth in worship, mission, service, evangelism, stewardship, and education (G-2.05040).
3. In order to maintain and enhance the quality of leadership, persons called to ministry shall provide for their own care, attending to matters such as Sabbath rest, vacations, continuing education, activities with friends and families, regular worship, study and prayer, and establishing support systems.

B. Practice and Personal Expertise

1. Persons called to ministry shall accurately represent their qualifications in education, training and experience in all communications with the church and the public (i.e. Personal Information Forms, announcements, services, etc.). Persons called to ministry are responsible for correcting any misrepresentations.
2. Persons called to ministry shall work within their personal and professional qualifications and limitations, making appropriate referrals when persons called to ministry feel they have encountered needs beyond their expertise.

C. Confidentiality

1. Persons called to ministry shall conduct all pastoral matters in a manner that ensures appropriate confidentiality and avoids conflict of interest.
 - a. Privileged information shall not be used for personal gain.
 - b. Personnel records of staff members (written or recorded) and records concerning members of the congregation or nonmember clients should be stored where security and confidentiality are maintained.
 - c. Persons called to ministry are mandated reporters for sexual abuse of children, domestic violence of adults and abuse of elders and the disabled in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Persons called to ministry should advise those whom they counsel that certain types of information cannot legally be held in confidence as well as inform the person what they will do if such information is shared.

d. It is a spiritual and professional duty of persons called to ministry to hold in confidence other matters (other than abuse) revealed to them in their counseling, caring and confessional ministries.

2. In giving references of any kind (employment, adoption, college forms, etc.) for another person, persons called to ministry should be willing to share only what they would share with the person for whom the reference is requested. When giving recommendations and references about persons called to ministry, one should be cautious when interjecting opinion or judgment about professional conduct or ethics.

D. Relationships with Other Church Staff and Volunteers

1. Persons called to ministry shall respect all professional, support staff and volunteers without regard to age, race, ethnic origin, disability, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, or function in the church.
2. Termination of non-ordained staff should be in accordance with Equal Employment Opportunity and Book of Order guidelines.
3. 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. To this end, persons called to ministry should be understanding toward one another, accept each other as persons made in God's image, respect each other's competencies, offer constructive suggestions to one another, forgive misunderstandings, and be tolerant of differences of opinion and style of operation.
4. Loyal support for all other staff members is a tremendous help in building and maintaining good working relationships and in edifying the church. 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 ministry and mission of the church. If a person called to ministry is unable to manage relationships with other staff members in a creative and effective manner, then they should give serious consideration to relocating for their own sake and for the sake of the ministry and mission of the church.

E. Relationships with Members of Other Churches

1. Normally persons called to ministry should not visit for pastoral purposes, either in the home or hospital, one who is a member of another church, unless invited by the moderator of session, or the pastor.
2. When called upon to officiate at a wedding, funeral, or baptism for families who are not members of one's own congregation, teaching elders should ascertain whether they are members of a different church. If they are, they should be urged to procure the services of their own pastor. If that effort fails, the teaching elder should seek to inform their pastor, explaining the circumstances and attempting to secure the concurrence of their pastor wherever possible prior to performing any services.
3. Persons called to ministry should not encourage people to transfer membership from neighboring congregations, Presbyterian or other. Care must be taken to avoid enticing people in vulnerable situations.

F. Relationships with Related Professionals

When persons called to ministry are called to work closely with other professionals in related fields (e.g. health care, social services, mental health, legal services, teachers), they shall conduct themselves so that vital concerns for clients and confidentiality are maintained. In every relationship the integrity of the person called to ministry shall be above reproach.

G. Relationships with the Larger Community

1. Persons called to ministry shall support and participate in efforts to better the community in which they live and work.
2. Persons called to ministry shall respect the responsibilities and working hours of other business and professional people.

H. Terminating Relationships with the Congregation

The Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky Commission on Ministry has prepared a helpful resource in this area: *Guidelines for the Dissolution of the Relationship Between Pastor and Congregation in the Presbytery of Mid Kentucky*. This document is available on the Presbytery web site:

<http://midkentuckypresbytery.org/images/documents/GuidelinesEndPastoralRelationship.pdf>

Teaching Elders considering the dissolution of a pastoral relationship should seek the guidance of the Commission on Ministry. Ethical behavior is required to preserve the peace and unity of the church. Below is a brief summary of the above-mentioned guidelines.

1. Departing Teaching Elder shall:

- a. Announce publicly they are no longer available for pastoral services (weddings, funerals, baptisms, or hospital visitation), except by invitation from the moderator of session and/or session; and that a new pastoral relationship needs to be established.
- b. Refer requests for pastoral services to the current moderator or Clerk of the Session when such requests come from members of a former congregation. Former Teaching Elders shall not solicit such overtures.
- c. Recognize ongoing bonds of friendship, exercising care to have no further ministerial influence on individual members by conversation, correspondence, or other action.
- d. Exercise no part in the selection of a Pastor Nominating Committee or in the selection of a successor.
- e. Be especially discreet when and if visiting their former parish. In such cases, it would be proper to pay their respects to the successor. Frequent visits to one's former parish should be avoided.
- f. Along with their immediate family, exercise all care so as to have no further influence upon the congregation either by conversation, correspondence or other action.
- g. Seek to be supportive of the new pastor when comments are made about them, the program, policies, and activities of the former church.

I. Voluntary and Involuntary Dissolutions of Call:

1. It is essential that the provisions for dissolving a pastoral relationship in the Book of Order and the guidelines provided by the Commission on Ministry are known and followed by all parties.
2. When a call is dissolved either voluntarily or involuntarily, it is a time of challenge for both the departing teaching elder and congregation involved. To insure the peace and unity of the church it is essential that all parties, Presbytery, congregation and teaching elder, avoid escalating conflict and to achieve an equitable dissolution to the call.
3. When it is not possible to serve effectively in a conflicted situation, the teaching elder should seek to dissolve the call with integrity, grace and dignity so that healing occurs for both the minister and the congregation.

J. Temporary Pastoral Relationships (reprinted from G-2.0504b)

Temporary pastoral relationships are approved by the presbytery and do not carry a formal call or installation. When a congregation does not have a pastor, or while the pastor is unable to perform her or his duties, the session, with the approval of presbytery, may obtain the services of a teaching elder, candidate, or ruling elder in a temporary pastoral relationship. No formal call shall be issued and no formal installation shall take place.

Titles and terms of service for temporary relationships shall be determined by the presbytery. A person serving in a temporary pastoral relationship is invited for a specified period not to exceed twelve months in length, which is renewable with the approval of the presbytery. A teaching elder employed in a temporary pastoral relationship is ordinarily not eligible to serve as the next installed pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor.

A presbytery may determine that its mission strategy permits a teaching elder currently called as an Associate Pastor to be eligible to serve as the next installed pastor or co-pastor, or a teaching elder employed in a temporary pastoral relationship to be eligible to serve as the next installed

pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor. Presbyteries that permit this eligibility shall establish such relationships only by a three-fourths vote of the members of presbytery present and voting.

K. Relationships with Predecessors

The successor also has the responsibility to be courteous to one's predecessor. The years may have built up loyalties that are strong, and though a predecessor may do everything possible to discourage a family from seeking that person's services, it may be gracious in certain instances for the successor to invite the family's former minister. Wise Teaching Elders and Church Educators will observe that such an attitude might do more to move people to accept their own ministry than would resistance and "standing for one's rights" as the new pastor or educator. In all cases, the desire to minister to persons should take precedence over personal considerations.

L. Retired Pastors

When pastoral relationships are dissolved through retirement, special sensitivity is required to preserve the peace and unity of the church.

1. Upon retirement, a retiring pastor and (if married) spouse normally shall not attend meetings or services of worship at their former parish except by invitation of the Moderator of Session.
2. Retired teaching elders who remain in the community should take care in their participation in the life and work of a former congregation. They should avoid comment on the work of the Pastor Nominating Committee and the work of any succeeding Interim Pastors or installed Pastors.
3. Retired teaching elders should send clear and unambiguous signals that the word "retired" basically means "withdrawn from active service", at least in that location. There will naturally be misunderstandings about these matters, and there will be occasions when the line between "old friend" and parishioner" will be muddled. In all such contexts of ambiguity, again it is the retired teaching elders who bear primary responsibility for making clear that "retired" means "withdrawn from active service" in that location.
4. In all community contacts, retired teaching elders shall make clear to the community that they speak for themselves and not as the pastor or official representative of a former congregation.
5. The status of Honorably Retired or the title of Pastor Emeritus does not give the authority or the right to engage in ministerial activities or to exercise influence in former congregations except by specific invitation of the Moderator of the Session.

V. Authority of these Standards of Ethical Conduct

The authority of these Standards of Ethical Conduct for persons called to ministry within Mid-Kentucky Presbytery derives from its adoption by the Presbytery at its stated meeting on February 21, 2015.

All questions, concerns, and evidence of apparent disregard of these "Standards of Ethical Conduct" should be submitted to the Commission on Ministry. Insofar as it is possible, the Commission should exercise pastoral oversight and counsel privately with any persons who may be involved. If a teaching elder who is a member of another presbytery is involved, the Commission shall communicate with the Commission on Ministry in that presbytery.

Recommendations

1. That the Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky adopt this statement entitled "Standards of Ethical Conduct for Mid-Kentucky Presbytery."
2. That persons called to ministry within the Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky covenant with each other to follow these "Standards of Ethical Conduct" in a spirit of brotherly and sisterly concern for the welfare and success of each other's ministry and in the spirit of Christ.
3. That the Commission on Ministry and/or the Stated Clerk ensure that a copy of these "Standards of Ethical Conduct" is sent to every current and entering teaching elder, church educator, commissioned ruling elder, leader of a new worshipping community, and any other person involved in ministry within the Presbytery, including a request for a signed statement that the

- individual has read and understands this document. A copy of the signed statement shall be kept in the Presbytery files.
4. That the Commission on Ministry and/or the Stated Clerk ensure that a copy of these “Standards of Ethical Conduct” be sent to every clerk of session within the presbytery with the request that they make this document known to their session.

Helpful References and Resources:

Standards of Ethical Conduct, approved by the 210 General Assembly in 1998. Available at:

<http://www.pcusa.org/resource/standards-ethical-conduct/>

Guidelines for the Dissolution of the Relationship Between Pastor and Congregation in the Presbytery of Mid Kentucky.

Available at:

<http://midkentuckypresbytery.org/images/documents/GuidelinesEndPastoralRelationship.pdf>