

ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY 3

ETHICAL BEHAVIOR FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

Book of Order. The foundational ideal for all church officers is love for God, others, and themselves. They are called to live out their love in the pattern of Christ Jesus who "came not to be served but to serve" (Matt 20: 28). Church officers are defined in the *Book of Order* as teaching elders of the Word and Sacrament, elders and deacons (The Form of Government G-2.0102)

OUR CONDITION

1. In the beginning God created everything and declared it to be good. This is our first foundation for hope of maintaining ethical and moral standards (Genesis 1 and 2).
2. Given the freedom to choose, we rebel against our Creator (Genesis 3). Refusing to love God and neighbor, corrupting ourselves, exploiting others, and threatening death to the planet entrusted to our care, we deserve God's condemnation (Brief Statement of Faith, *Book of Confessions*, 10.3).
3. Yet God chose a covenant people for the blessing of the nations, and remains faithful still. "But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). "It is the will of God that his purpose for human life shall be fulfilled under the rule of Christ and all evil be banished" (The Confession of 1967, *Book of Confessions*, 9.53). This is our second foundation for hope.

OUR CALLING IS IN RESPONSE TO THIS GOOD NEWS:

1. We are forgiven, now set free to proclaim the Good News and to work for justice and for reconciliation. "The Church is called to be a sign in and for the world of the new reality which God has made available for human life ..." (Form of Government, G- 3.0200).
2. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are called to witness for Christ in positive and constructive endeavors, and to refrain from doing harm. We are called to bring Good News in word and in deed. (Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, F-1.0301; F-1.0404)

OUR STANDARDS FOR BEHAVIOR AS CHURCH OFFICERS

1. Basic Principles

- a. As Church officers, we are accountable for our behavior to the council of jurisdiction. Deacons and elders are under the jurisdiction of the session, and teaching elders are under the jurisdiction of presbytery (Jurisdiction in Judicial Process, Rules of Discipline, D-5.0100). We have the obligation to accept the council's discipline.

In affirming our ordination vows before the council, we enter into a covenant of exemplary behavior and obedience to Jesus Christ. We come under the authority of scriptures and the guidance of the Confessions, and accept the governance of the Church. This includes the furthering of the peace, purity, and unity of the Church and participating actively in the Church's government. (Constitutional Questions of Ordination, *The Directory of Worship*, W-4.4003)

In spite of our fallen nature (rebellng against and hiding from our Creator, Brief Statement of Faith, line 33), we are called by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Good News . We accept the discipline and support of our sisters and brothers in Christ. Fundamental to The Reformed and Presbyterian tradition of Christ's Church is the principle of subjecting oneself to the discipline and nurture of the Church. We acknowledge this when the council completes our ordination with prayer and the "laying on of hands."

- b. As officers in the reformed Church, we seek the purity of God's truth according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit.

We are constantly subject to error and we continually desire to exercise power over others in ways that sometimes lead to exploitation. "All human virtue, when seen in the light of God's love in Jesus Christ, is found to be infected by self-interest and hostility" (The Confession of 1967, 9.13). Yet God in Christ is the Reconciler. God accepts us in spite of what we are (The Confession of 1967, 9.22). This reconciliation does not call for complacency and lethargy, but acknowledges that our "old nature" still persists. This requires a constant and continuous reforming, seeking purity in the Church.

The Reformers admitted "that all synods and councils may err, through the frailty inseparable from humanity" (Foundations of Presbyterian Polity *F-3.0107*); therefore we are "'The Church

reformed, always reforming, according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit" (Foundations of Presbyterian Polity *F-2.02*).

- c. As Church officers we work for peace which emanates from God's righteousness. We work not just for "human peace," which tends to be both a transient illusion of tranquility and a maintenance of the status quo, but we seek the peace which is beyond human understanding - God's peace. Peace comes from God to us (Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2). It is the fruit of God's righteousness, not ours; it emanates from God's restoring the relationship (Romans 3:19-25). Being justified, we have "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1) and manifest such peace in our behaviors. The salutation of Jesus, "Peace be with you," calls for "doing peace" as well as "receiving peace," with our being illuminated and charged by the Holy Spirit to make this peace possible (John 20:19-23).
- d. As Church officers we affirm the sacredness of confidences and we honor covenants. Being prideful creatures, we search for attention through boasting. We are tempted to divulge information given us in confidence. Yet if we boast, let our boasting be for the Good News of Jesus Christ (I Cor. 1:31). Information which has been divulged to a Church officer, in particular that divulged to a teaching elder, in his or her role as a pastor, counselor or chaplain, is guarded and protected. It has been given in the context of a covenant relationship.

The sixth ordination question asks, "Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for reconciliation of the world?" (*Directory for Worship, W-4.4003*) Such a vow includes holding to confidences and honoring covenants.

2. Care For Others

- a. As church officers we honor our covenants to the Councils, to our families, to our friends, and to our communities, and we encourage each other's ministries through prayer and active support.

The fifth set of ordination questions ("Will you be governed by our Church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?") requires an affirmation of covenants and a subjection to the ordering of God's Word (*Directory of Worship, W-4.4003*).

We honor our relationships with spouse and children, treating each family member with love and respect. We do not neglect those in our family, nor are we destructive toward them in any manner---verbally, physically, or spiritually. We heed the words of the author of Hebrews (13:4): "Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled." Our responsibilities do not end with this admonition. We treat both adults and children with Christian love.

We honor our relationships with friends and community, acknowledging that "God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family. In his reconciling love he overcomes the barriers between brothers (and sisters) and breaks down every form of discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary" (The Confession of 1967, 9.44). We honor our friends and our worldwide community in God's spirit.

- b. As Church officers we refrain from remarks and behaviors that manifest discrimination.

Church officers are role models for the congregation and in the community, and therefore should refrain from any action or words that cast people of a particular race, nationality, sexual orientation, or faith in a negative manner. This statement applies to gender, handicap, and age. "In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community" (Brief Statement of Faith, lines 29-32).

- c. As teaching elders we reject any pastoral activities, which invade another teaching elder's arena or calling, without a specific invitation by that teaching elder, including returning to former parishes to perform pastoral services.

"Former pastors, associate pastors, and assistant pastors may officiate at services for members of a particular church, or at services within its properties, only upon invitation from the moderator of the session or, in case of the inability to contact the moderator, from the clerk of session." (Form of Government G-2.0905) We affirm that this applies to all members of Heartland Presbytery.

As teaching elders, we oppose any fostering of informal relationships in parishes in which we have served which in turn may harm the ministry of the current pastor or pastors.

- d. As church officers, while participating in a meeting of any council or of a congregation, or of a committee or other unit of a council or a congregation, we encourage each other to refrain from
 1. making comments which appear to be directed at the personality or integrity of another person; and
 2. making derogatory comments about another person or about the motivation of another person.

3. Care for Self

- a. As Church officers we seek to maintain a healthy balance between work, recreation, and rest.

As Christ's spirit abides in us (The Second Helvetic Confession, Book of Confessions, 5.020), we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives (Brief Statement of Faith, lines 73-74). In both play and rest, we renew ourselves to be better able to serve God in every aspect of human life.

We find ourselves heavily occupied with the functions of daily life, performing in a secular occupation, managing a household, conducting classes, leading worship, engaging in pastoral care and many other occupational activities. Therefore, we seek and maintain at least one day each week free from these functions. The governing body expects its officers to find restful diversion.

- b. As Church officers we are servants of God and do not use our offices for personal gain or self-aggrandizement.

We strive to be without fault (Titus 1); be faithful in stewardship (Luke 12:41-48); be concerned with the interests of others (I Cor. 10:24); and not be boastful of our own merits (Scots Confession, Book of Confessions, 3:15). The Form of Government (G-2.0104) calls us to be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the Church and in the world.

- c. As Church officers, we will diligently pursue continuing education for on-going preparation for all aspects of ministry. In our choices of

continuing education we will take into consideration both the needs of our ministry and our own areas in need of growth.

4. Pastoral Work

- a. As Church officers we refrain from spiritual, social and sexual intimacies that compromise pastoral care.

Our "manner of life should be a demonstration of Christian gospel in the church and in the world ... and one of compassion, witness, and service, sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ. . . ." (Form of Government G-2.0201; G-2.0104).

Our mission is to proclaim God's love as revealed in Jesus Christ and made known and empowered by the Holy Spirit. This requires a ministry of conciliation and reconciliation, not of division. The Good News contained in Scriptures is for all persons. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (I Cor. 12:12-13).

In our role of leadership, we will "not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). "The Seventh Commandment requireth the preservation of our own and our neighbor's chastity, in heart, speech, and behavior" (The Shorter Catechism, Book of Confessions, 7.071).

5. Financial Work

- a. As Church officers we shall maintain financial integrity and engage in responsible stewardship.

"As stewards of God's creation who hold earth in trust, the people of God are called to ... use the earth's resources responsibly without plundering, polluting, or destroying ..." (Directory for Worship, W-7.5003).

"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never fail you nor forsake you'"(Hebrews 13.5).

- b. Teaching elders should maintain complete distance from the church's receiving and disbursing of funds.

The collection of money has been an activity of the church since earliest times. We strive to follow the example of Paul who, when asking for contributions from the Corinthian Christians, rejected any responsibility for collecting and transporting these funds himself, indicating that he knew that to do otherwise would leave himself open to criticism and suspicion (I Cor. 16:3; II Cor. 8:16-21).

The Form of Government addressed this problem directly by assigning a church's financial responsibility to Session and its elected treasurer (Form of Government G-3.0205).

6. Conclusion

- a. We as Church officers affirm an ethical standard which reflects the Gospel and transcends that which is considered legal.

Christians find themselves in tension because of their obedience to Jesus Christ over the demands of the society and of those in power, who define what is legal. "Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death" (Theological Declaration of Barmen, Book of Confessions, 8.11). "We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords--areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him" (Theological Declaration of Barmen, 8.15).

"In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace" (Brief Statement of Faith, lines 65-71).

"In Jesus Christ God was reconciling the world to himself (II Cor. 5:19). Jesus Christ is God with humankind. He is the eternal Son of the Creator, who became human and lived among us to fulfill the work of reconciliation. He is present in the church by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue and complete his mission . . . Therefore, the church calls all people to be reconciled to God and to one another" (The Confession of 1967, 9.07).

"Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to one's own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippines 2:3-4).

References:

Scripture
Brief Statement of Faith, 1983
The Confession of 1967
The Scots Confession, 1560
The Shorter Catechism, 1647
The Second Helvetic Confession, 1566
The Theological Declaration of Barmen, 1934
Book of Order, PC(USA)
The John Knox Presbyterian Manual of Operations