

Ministerial Code of Conduct for Credentialed Ministers in the Assemblies of God in Australia.

The Rationale for a Code

Ministry is a call to serve both God and people. Credentialed Ministers are firstly accountable to God (1 Corinthians 4:4-5), but also to church members and those who receive ministry (Ephesians 4:1-2). Ministers are public figures whose lives are on display and are viewed with considerable public scrutiny. A high degree of conformity is expected with the biblical call to holiness (Matthew 5:48; Titus 2:7-8). Accordingly, pastoral relationships are to be characterised by love, justice, care, and compassion (Micah 6:8). A minister is firstly a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, (1 John 2:6) and as such ministry is grounded by prayer, Bible study, regular worship and a readiness to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20).

Ministers of our Movement are to live and minister in accordance with biblical values. Additionally, it is expected that every profession have a code of conduct that sets an example of excellence for the society in which it seeks to minister. Ministers are to be examples in the creation of healthy communities.

The following guidelines are designed to identify areas, articulate relevant principles, note areas of caution, and state what is clearly prohibited in terms of biblical conduct for Ministers in our Movement.¹

The Purpose of the Code

This code is intended to guide the behaviour of Ministers in our Movement. It is articulated to assist leaders to serve in such a manner that it will cause our churches and ministries to be safe places for all; places where integrity is honoured, accountability is practised, misconduct is not concealed, and forgiveness is encouraged to bring about healing and restoration.

Article 15 of the United Constitution and Article 8.3 of the National By-Laws provides for action that may be taken where the holder of a ministerial certificate has committed improper conduct.

Improper conduct is generally regarded as behaviour that in all the circumstances of a case is an inappropriate or incorrect way of discharging a person's duties, obligations, or responsibilities.

This Code of Conduct sets out the standard that is expected of credentialed Ministers, and therefore is an important document for determining whether a person has committed improper conduct.

A breach of a **“Prohibited”** provisions will always be improper conduct and will result in disciplinary action. A breach of a **“Cautionary”** provision, depending on the circumstances may be improper conduct, and may result in disciplinary action.

¹ This Code of Conduct will set the basis for acceptable behaviour by ministers of the AOG in Australia. Behaviour inconsistent with this may form the basis for disciplinary procedures See ASSEMBLIES OF GOD NATIONAL CONFERENCE NATIONAL BY-LAWS May 1999 – ARTICLE 8, 13.4.11 Restoration and Reinstatement of Disciplined Ministers.

The Code of Conduct

1. Pastoral Example

Ministers should be “*above reproach*” (1 Timothy 1:11-12). The values of the Gospel of Christ should be obvious to members of the church and wider society (Matthew 5:16; 1 Corinthians 11:1). It is also important for an effective minister to have a healthy lifestyle and a balance of service, recreation, and family (Ecclesiastes 3:1-11; Titus 1:6). This lifestyle should also be supported and encouraged for all members of church staff.

Ministers should be good citizens and obey the laws of the community (Proverbs 24:21; Romans 13:1-4; 1 Peter 2:11-17). The only rare exception may be when a Christian engages in non-violent civil disobedience as a matter of protest (Acts 4:18-20).

Caution

Addictive behaviours: Scripture requires that we exercise caution in the use of alcohol (Proverbs 20:1; 1 Corinthians 6:12; 1 Corinthians 8). Abstinence is a stand that is highly respected in our Movement. Extreme caution must also be exercised with all potentially addictive and harmful behaviours that bring unwarranted harm to the body or jeopardise our own or another’s faith.

Language: The use of offensive language should also be avoided (such as swear words, sexual connotations, and racial or religious slurs).

Prohibited

A Minister must avoid drunkenness, gambling, and abstain from the use of all illegal drugs (Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:21). A Minister must not smoke.

2. Ministry Matters

Authority to minister comes from Jesus Christ; the head of the Church (Matthew 28:18; 1 Corinthians 12:27). Christian leadership must never be manipulative or authoritarian (John 15:15). Ministers are servants of Christ, who should endeavour to become servant leaders as modelled by Jesus (John 13:3-14). Leadership in all its dimensions must always be accountable, and it is essential that ministers act responsibly in the best interests of those they serve (James 3:1; 1 Peter 5:2-4).

Caution

Qualifications: Ministers must not misrepresent their competence, qualifications, training, or experience. Ministers should recognise their level of skill and experience. If they are unsure, they must seek additional advice from other colleagues or other professionals.

Pastoral relationships: Ministers should also be aware of the danger of dependency developing in pastoral relationships, and seek supervision or advice when such concerns arise. A balance should be found between the need for mutual support and the need for accountability.

Ministry gifts: It is a Pentecostal distinctive to honour the role of the Holy Spirit who imparts spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7). There are a variety of gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4) and the true exercise of these gifts will always be consistent with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). For example, prophecy is to be exercised for “*strengthening, encouragement and comfort*” (1 Corinthians 14:3). A leader must always be willing to held accountable, admitting to the possibility of human error when exercising the gifts of the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21).

Public statements: We live in a society that has become increasingly sensitive to matters of discrimination and vilification. A Minister must show respect and godly care to all people, inside or outside the Christian community (Colossians 4:6). Care must be taken in how Ministers speak of the ministry of others in public (Mark 9:40) since reputation is something highly valued in Scripture (Proverbs 22:1).

Care must be exercised when Ministers express a personal opinion on controversial matters. They must distinguish expressing an opinion from speaking on behalf of a local church or the Movement (1 Corinthians 7:12).

Staffing and volunteers: There is a need for transparency and Godly motivation in any employment or ministry offer extended to a Minister, staff member, or volunteer serving in another church². The offer must only be made with the prior knowledge and agreement of the Senior Minister of the church where they currently serve. It is inappropriate that an approach be made to a Minister or staff member serving in a church that is geographically local. It is additionally inappropriate for a Minister or staff member serving in a pastoral team to seek a position in a neighbouring church without the endorsement of their Senior Minister.

After retirement or resignation from a ministry, the Minister must terminate existing pastoral relationships to allow their successor to assume responsibility. Friendships may continue as long as the end of the pastoral relationship is mutually recognised. Any request for a continuing pastoral relationship must only occur with the permission of the new Senior Minister or the person who has overall pastoral oversight.

It is unethical to be employed by a church, to build up that ministry, and then resign or be dismissed and then start a new work incorporating former church members without the prior knowledge and consent of the former Senior Minister. It is also unethical for a Minister to do anything to encourage a member of another church to join his or her church/ministry.

Prohibited

A Minister must not be abusive in any way toward others (1 Timothy 3:2-5; Titus 1:7).

The misuse of authority can be a particular temptation in leadership and must be avoided. Ministers must not attempt to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit to manipulate or coerce a person. This includes attempting to use healing for financial gain; attributing miracles for personal glory; or using a word of knowledge to control an individual; or using prophecy to change church membership or to enlist support for a ministry. Accountability in all areas of ministry is essential.

3. Sexual Behaviour

Sexuality is a gift from God and integral to human nature. Ministers must value this gift by maintaining chastity in singleness and faithfulness in marriage (Proverbs 5:18, 6:32; 1 Corinthians 7:2). Homosexual behaviour is forbidden by Scripture (Romans 1:24-25).³

Caution

² Obviously, this would apply to churches inside and outside our Movement.

³ Assemblies of God Policies 13.4.2 Homosexuality and Lesbianism.

Children: Being especially vulnerable, children are entitled to be safe and protected. Ministry to children needs to be characterised by absolute trustworthiness. The Senior Minister and leadership of the local church are responsible to implement the appropriate **Child Protection Policy** for their State or Territory.⁴

Physical contact: Caution must always be exercised when initiating or receiving physical contact including gestures of comfort that may be unwanted or misinterpreted.

Pastoral conversations: A Minister must be careful in pastoral conversations when a person talks about sexual problems. Consideration must always be given to whether it is appropriate to refer a person to a suitable counsellor.

Ministry to people in the sex industry requires clear boundaries, a high level of accountability and mixed gender peer support (Proverbs 5:21).

Pastoral relationships: It is only in the rarest of circumstances that a pastoral relationship can legitimately develop into a romantic relationship. If two single people meet in a pastoral setting (not a counselling relationship), and there is mutual attraction, then it is important for both parties to acknowledge that the nature of the relationship is changing. Once mutually recognised and acknowledged, it is the responsibility of the Minister to disclose this to the Senior Minister or their supervisor, and to arrange for someone else to assume pastoral responsibility for that person.⁵

Prohibited

All inappropriate sexual behaviour is forbidden. A Minister must not have a sexual relationship with a member of the church or anyone who is receiving, or has recently received, pastoral ministry. It is never acceptable to blame the person who has received counselling or ministry.

Sexual innuendo or compliments of a sexual nature are always inappropriate.

A Minister must not view pornographic material or go to places of commercialised sex such as strip clubs or visit a brothel (Matthew 5:28; 2 Peter 2:14a; Proverbs 5:3-6; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20; Ephesians 5:12).⁶ Additionally, they must avoid chat rooms or internet sites of a sexual nature.

4. Financial Matters

A Minister must set an example and have integrity in all their financial dealings. This would include the timely payment of debts, the effective management of finances, as well as providing for their family (Romans 13:7-8). Failure to do so will have a significant impact on the church and the perceptions of the wider community.

The Senior Minister and the leadership of the local church have responsibility for the sound management of church and ministry finances. They may or may not be involved in actual transactions,

⁴ Assemblies of God Policies 13.4.9 Protection of Children.

⁵ As a suggestion: before any dating or physical contact, there should be a gap of three months for a member of a church or youth group, and no less than a year if there was any counselling ministry. Mental health professions would consider this the minimum time required and even then, it is not generally accepted as appropriate behaviour.

⁶ Assemblies of God Policies 13.4.6 Pornography.

but must ensure the implementation of a proper system for financial integrity and accountability. All church and ministry accounts should be independently audited.

Caution

Conflicts of interest: It is important to avoid any potential conflict between personal finances and pastoral responsibilities. If there is anything that could lead to a conflict of interest, then it must be immediately disclosed to the Board or Elders. It is important to disclose to the Senior Minister or Board or Eldership any personal gift or bequest (2 Corinthians 8:21; James 2:1, 2-4).

A leader must avoid borrowing money from, or lending money to, a person with whom there is a pastoral relationship.

Particular care must be exercised in the appointment of a spouse or family member to a paid position in the church or ministry. It must be done only with careful consultation with the Board or Eldership.

Taxation: A Minister must exercise caution with tax minimisation strategies and must not improperly use fringe benefit allowances.

Prohibited

A Minister must not seek additional personal advantage or financial gain because of a pastoral role. Naturally, this includes any benefit to a spouse and/or immediate member of his or her family. Various professions forbid dual relationships (2 Timothy 2:4). For example, a doctor cannot enter into a business relationship with a patient. A Minister must disclose to their Board or Eldership any situation that could be viewed as a dual relationship, including business agreements.

A Minister must never borrow or take church funds without proper authorisation. A Minister must not seek financial support from people in a previous church or ministry unless there is authorisation by the current Senior Minister, Eldership, or Board. On termination of employment with a church (ministry or agency), a Minister must not expect a payment that is excessive, illegal or by private arrangement. In cases of dispute, the matter must be referred to the State President or their appointee.

5. Confidentiality⁷

Trust is essential in pastoral ministry. Those involved in pastoral care must note that both formal interviews and casual conversations in a ministry context are pastoral encounters where confidences are shared and confidential information received. This information must not be disclosed, and must be treated with the utmost care. Exceptions include when disclosure is required by law (subpoena or abuse notifications), there are concerns for the safety of the person or others, or when the information is in the public domain.

Caution

Pastoral records: Pastoral notes and records are important, but caution must be taken with securing them. Any record of a pastoral counselling session is considered a health record, which is governed by national legislation. Computer records must be password protected and access limited to authorised persons. Paper records must be locked up and access limited to authorised personnel.

⁷ Assemblies of God Policies 13.4.4 Pastoral Confidentiality; 13.4.10 Confidentiality Guidelines.

Particular care must be exercised in the publication of personal information in church directories, newsletters, rosters, and websites, etc. This also extends to publishing voices and images of individuals.

Confidentiality should be preserved in peer supervision or in mentoring relationships. All care should be taken to avoid disclosing those being discussed. Preachers should be careful with sermon illustrations, in teaching and especially in publications (Proverbs 11:13).

Prohibited

A Minister must not disclose confidential pastoral conversations except if required by law or if there is a concern for the safety of the person or another person (James 5:16).

6. Ministerial Development

It is important to continue to develop ministry skills through a variety of means including education, professional supervision, peer support, mentoring, and a regular ministry review (Proverbs 27:17). It is expected that Ministers will regularly attend District, State, and National Conferences and special events, and undertake ongoing professional development (Romans 13:7). This includes an expectation the Ministers demonstrate a loyalty the Movement and its vision, values, and mission.

The Implementation of the Code

If questions arise with areas of **“Caution,”** the individual Minister must talk to a supervisor, mentor, consult with peers, and if necessary pursue voluntary counselling.

With any breach of the Code of Conduct in a **“Prohibited”** area the Minister in breach must notify the State President (or the person fulfilling those duties at that time) within 7 days (24 hours if civil or criminal action is involved). See **National By-laws, Article 8**. The State President will implement the **Grievance Policy of the Assemblies of God in Australia** upon notification.

Failure to notify in accordance with the paragraph above will itself be a **“Prohibited”** breach of the code.

Acknowledgements.

This code has drawn on the following codes of conduct, ethical statements, and ministerial guidelines:

Faithfulness in Service: A national code for personal behaviour and the practice of pastoral ministry by clergy and church workers (General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia Child Protection Committee, Draft - 2004)

Code of Professional Ethics for the practice of Pastoral Ministry: A guide for church workers and their communities (General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia Child Protection Committee, Draft - 2003)

The Code of Good Practice: (Anglican Church of Australia Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, 2005)

Code of Ethics applicable to ministers of Churches of Christ and The protocol for investigating complaints on matters pertaining to Sexuality: (Churches of Christ in Australia adopted 1997 and amended for Churches of Christ in Queensland 1998-1999)

Pentecostal Ministerial Ethics: Pastor Harry Leesment (1988)

Statement of Moral Integrity: Pastor Rick Warren.

A Statement of Restoration and Re-instatement of Disciplined Ministers.

New South Wales Registration Board Guidelines for Psychologists.