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NATIONAL CAPITAL PRESBYTERY CODE OF ETHICS FOR CLERGY AND OTHER CHURCH PROFESSIONALS

THE PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDELINES: These ethical guidelines for ministerial conduct serve two purposes: as a guide to what is expected professionally of clergy and other church professionals in National Capital Presbytery. They are also to inform the laity what they can expect from clergy and other church professionals (hereafter referred to as "Teaching Elders") as defined in G-2.05 in the Book of Order. It is the expectation of National Capital Presbytery that individual sessions shall adopt similar standards for all of their other employees.

These guidelines do not presume to speak to all areas of Teaching Elders' lives. They are minimum expectations and the Teaching Elder must also be guided by Scripture, personal conscience, the Book of Order, Christian tradition and peer approval. They assume basic honesty and integrity of conduct. Expectations of Teaching Elders and styles of behavior change. The ethical behavior of Teaching Elders is a topic which should be regularly considered, discussed, and mutually agreed upon by the members of presbytery. This code, however, does articulate certain customs and practices which have been largely accepted within the profession of ministry. They are subject to regular review.

These principles are not designed to be a basis for analysis of the civil liability of those persons guided by them.

A. SOME FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

1. In all professional matters, Teaching Elders are to 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. Teaching Elders are to act in such a manner as to uphold and enhance the honor, integrity, morality and dignity of the profession.
3. Teaching Elders are to limit their ministries to those positions and responsibilities for which they are qualified.
4. Teaching Elders will conduct all professional matters in a manner which assures confidentiality and avoids conflicts of interest.
5. Teaching Elders will seek to maintain professional competency throughout their careers.
6. In personal as well as professional relationships Teaching Elders are to demonstrate honest and sincere motives evidencing respect, honesty and fairness; uphold the peace, unity and purity of the church; and share faith, hope and love with all people.

B. TEACHING ELDERS AS PERSONS

1. TEACHING ELDERS BEAR UNIQUE EXPECTATIONS. In considering the ethics particular to ordained ministry, it is well to remember that Teaching Elders are expected to live in the same manner of faithfulness, forgiveness and obedience as are all members of Christ's church. While all who follow Christ are subject to the same human weaknesses, nevertheless, those who are called as ordained servants are set apart with particular expectations.

People expect high standards of Teaching Elders. To deny or ignore this is unrealistic and irresponsible. Teaching Elders 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 congregants, to colleagues in ministry, to their professions and to the body of Jesus Christ.

2. **TEACHING ELDERS AND FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE.** Though the Reformed tradition emphasized the freedom of individual conscience, Teaching Elders are still subject to the discipline of the church (see Book of Order F-3.0108, F-3.0101). Violations of this code may be cause for disciplinary procedures. (Cf. also Teaching Elders and the Civil Law #4 below.)

Standards for ministerial conduct grow out of a vision of the Christian life and a sense of calling to a particular service. Like other Christians, Teaching Elders experience sin, grace, alienation and forgiveness. Along with other Christians, they are expected by the Christian community to witness to the renewal of humanity in Christ by demonstrating in their daily lives love, compassion and respect for other persons; fidelity in marriage; responsibility in parenthood and other family obligations; joy in service; and integrity and trustworthiness in all their dealings with others.

3. **THE PASTORAL CARE OF TEACHING ELDERS.** Teaching Elders also need pastoral care. They should take the initiative in establishing relationships with other Teaching Elders, with the Presbytery Executive and with the Committee on Ministry to provide support in difficult times, caring concern, encouragement for Christian growth, and sharing in both successes and failures.
4. **TEACHING ELDERS AND FEES, HONORARIA AND DISCOUNTS.** Teaching Elders should ordinarily not require or solicit fees for pastoral services to families or individuals within the congregation. Such services include performing baptisms, marriages, funerals and counseling. In those cases in which an unsolicited gift is given Teaching Elders may use their own best judgment as to what to do with the gift. All Teaching Elders stand ready to render services to individuals and communities in crisis without regard to financial remuneration.

While fees for the use of the church facilities are set by the session, honoraria or fees for the Teaching Elder's services to non-members can be set by the Teaching Elder in consultation with the session. The Teaching Elder must be aware of and responsible to civil authorities regarding the possible tax consequences of receipt of honoraria, gifts, etc.

5. **PARTICIPATION IN NON-PARISH ACTIVITIES.** Though Teaching Elders are expected to participate in presbytery, ecumenical and other activities beyond the particular church, it is wise for the Teaching Elder to discuss the time involved in such activities with the session. ("Discussion" does not mean "seek permission," as pastors are expected to participate in the governing bodies of the church by virtue of their ordination vows, W-4.4003.)

If any honoraria are received for duties outside the particular church (such as speaking, lecturing or teaching), and these duties are carried on during time which would otherwise be understood as available to the congregation, a common understanding between the Teaching Elder and the session should be established as to the disposition of such honoraria. This presupposes agreement between Teaching Elder and session concerning the limits of the congregation's claim on the Teaching Elder's time. Conversation between Teaching Elders and their sessions should arrive at mutual concurrence as to expectations regarding the Teaching Elder's work time and free time.

C. TEACHING ELDERS AND THE PRESBYTERY

1. **THE TEACHING ELDER AND COLLEAGUES.** Whenever a colleague's conduct is believed to be harmful to any individual or group, including that person himself or herself, the concerned person should speak directly to that colleague or consult the presbytery executive or the chairperson of the Committee on Ministry. Anyone registering a concern with regard to the behavior of a colleague will be encouraged to make her or his own identity known.
2. **THE TEACHING ELDER AND THE NON-MEMBER.** Teaching Elders are sometimes called upon to officiate at weddings and funerals for persons who are not members of the

congregation. It is appropriate in such situations to ascertain to what particular church these persons belong and to suggest that they procure the services of their own Teaching Elder.

3. THE TEACHING ELDER AND OTHER CHURCHES. Ordinarily Teaching Elders should not knowingly call upon members of another church in the community to administer pastoral care unless the initiative and interest shown by such a person requires it as a courtesy. If such a visitation occurs, it is a helpful courtesy to, after obtaining the parishioner's permission, inform the colleague to whose church the person belongs regarding visitation. Marriages, funerals and baptisms are not to be accepted by Teaching Elders unless an invitation has been extended by the Teaching Elder of the church involved.
4. THE TEACHING ELDER AND THE MULTIPLE STAFF. All Teaching Elders are installed in their positions by action of presbytery and any change in the pastoral relationship must be approved by presbytery. While the Teaching Elder serves as head of staff in a congregation and bears the responsibility which this implies, the spirit within the staff should be that of a shared ministry where all bring their particular gifts to the work of ministry. To this end, everyone should be understanding of the mistakes of colleagues and seek to give support and help when needed. Care should be taken to avoid inappropriate criticism, negative suggestions and innuendo. It is not appropriate to attempt to seek to ally other church members and/or co-workers in disagreements. A staff member should not aspire to succeed any other person on staff.

The principles of ethical, healthy staff relationships apply equally to professional, paraprofessional, support staff (secretarial and custodial employees) and volunteers. All staff members are given equal respect without regard to sex, race, ethnic origin, disability, or marital status.

5. THE TEACHING ELDER IN AN INTERIM SITUATION. The purpose of an interim Teaching Elder is to provide pastoral service and to prepare a particular congregation for new pastoral leadership. An interim Teaching Elder should avoid seeking to mold loyalties to the interim Teaching Elder and should instead direct a congregation's attention to the new challenges in mission and ministry that manifest themselves in a period of transition to new pastoral leadership. Under no circumstances should an interim Teaching Elder become involved in the work of the pastor nominating committee beyond preparation of the Church Information Form. Presbytery representatives should make this policy clear to the congregation at the time the congregation elects a pastor nominating committee.
6. THE TEACHING ELDER AND THE SUCCESSOR. When a Teaching Elder accepts another call, the Teaching Elder should exercise due care not to influence directly or indirectly the policies of the successor. Frequent visits to one's former parish should be avoided. Even when occasional visits occur, it is a courtesy to pay one's respects to one's successor and to inform the successor about the nature and purpose of the visit. During the period of temporary supply or interim, the former Teaching Elder should avoid performing ministerial services (weddings, funerals, baptisms, etc). Moreover, even when a successor issues an invitation to a former Teaching Elder to assist or take part in a ministerial function, it is a wise idea for the former Teaching Elder to take the initiative in a candid discussion with the successor about the propriety of such functioning and the possible harmful effects of the life of the congregation in terms of its new ministry. In general the former Teaching Elder should decline invitations to serve in a pastoral function in a former congregation. This practice pertains also to pastors emeriti. Any exception to this practice requires the written permission of the chair of the Committee on Ministry or his/her designee in addition to the Moderator of the Session (G-2.0905).
7. THE TEACHING ELDER AND THE PREDECESSOR. If the former Teaching Elder or retired Teaching Elder bears primary responsibility for making clear that the ministry in a given location should be directed to the future rather than to the past, it is the primary responsibility of the successor or the currently installed Teaching Elder to show respect and gratitude for the heritage of that church and for the positive work of the predecessor. Ordinarily it is wise for the successor to take the initiative in making contact with a predecessor to discuss the mission and work of the church. There may

be occasions when it is appropriate to invite a predecessor to return to the church for a visit, possibly to celebrate a special occasion or event or, if deemed appropriate by all concerned, to assist in a ministerial function with the permission of the Moderator of the Session and chair of the Committee on Ministry or his/her designee.

8. THE TEACHING ELDER AND RETIREMENT. The above discussions (#s 6 & 7) are relevant for the retired Teaching Elder, but some additional matters also require comment. Sometimes a retired Teaching Elder remains within the boundaries of presbytery and sometimes within proximity to a former church. This can create problems both for the successor and for the retired Teaching Elder. This should be a matter for serious discussion by the session of the local church and presbytery's Committee on Ministry. Perhaps most important is for all concerned to recognize some fundamental professional priorities, namely: (a) that the local church and its new ministry should be uppermost in everybody's mind; (b) that the new ministry will probably develop new directions and should be encouraged in freedom to do so; (c) that there will be a natural tendency for some in the church to resist change and that it is very important for the successor and the retired Teaching Elder to deal with this resistance by reiterating with love and understanding that the mission of the church should be oriented to the future rather than the past.

The retired Teaching Elder or staff person who still remains within the bounds of presbytery or in proximity to the local church bears primary responsibility for making these priorities known. Moreover, the retired Teaching Elder should make it entirely clear that "retired" means "withdrawn from active service," at least in that location. There may naturally be misunderstandings about these matters, and there may be occasions when the line between "old friend" and "parishioner" will be unclear. In all such cases of ambiguity, again it is the retired Teaching Elder who bears primary responsibility for making clear what "retired" means.

One obvious way to ease the pain in such situations is for the retired Teaching Elder and the family involved to relocate to a residence some distance away from the former parish and to become active in another church in a non-professional role; economically, however, moving is not always feasible. Another way to deal with such situations is for the retired Teaching Elder to have candid conversation with the installed Teaching Elder regarding their mutual feelings in terms of collegial interaction. Where there is a difference of opinion, the retired Teaching Elder should defer to the installed Teaching Elder with respect to collegiality in that location. In the case of lack of agreement or uncertainty, it is appropriate for either Teaching Elder to seek the guidance of the Committee on Ministry.

9. All teaching elders who fall into the category of the Book of Order's listing of Validated Ministry, Member-at-large and honorably retired (G-2.0503) are expected to be active in the life of a particular congregation while respecting the position of installed Teaching Elders regarding all ministerial functions within the community. Counselors should also refer to their own code of ethics.

Teaching Elders may administer the sacraments only at the request of the Teaching Elder or session concerned, or by permission of the presbytery.

D. ETHICAL ISSUES OF PARTICULAR CONCERN

1. TEACHING ELDERS AND CONFIDENTIALITY. Teaching Elders shall not disclose confidences to anyone except in any one of the following situations:
 - a. required to do so by law [Most states will not require this].
 - b. disclosure is consented to by the person communicating confidences, which consent is normally given in writing.

- c. disclosure is necessary to prevent the person from harming himself or herself or others. Harmful behavior is that which is a violation of law or poses a threat to the physical well-being of the self or others
 - d. disclosure is necessary to defend a Teaching Elder against claims made by a person who asserts that particular communications related to the claim were made in confidence.
2. **TEACHING ELDERS AND SPECIAL PRIVILEGES.** Teaching Elders, as servants of the Servant of God, need to be sensitive to the danger of any use of the authority of the pastoral office for personal benefit. Boundaries should be set, in consultation between the Teaching Elder, the session and the Committee on Ministry to determine how much and in what manner a Teaching Elder may promote among the members of the congregation any of the Teaching Elder's private business endeavors, tours or products. The same consultation should occur concerning the Teaching Elder's private use of church resources, business machines, secretarial time, etc.
 3. **BUSINESS AND FINANCE.** The Teaching Elder's integrity in personal business and financial dealings is also an ethical concern. Teaching Elders are expected to conduct their financial affairs with the utmost integrity. Many Teaching Elders manage discretionary funds on behalf of the congregation. It is suggested that wherever possible the Teaching Elder identify someone in the congregation or presbytery to audit the use of this money. This suggestion is made to protect the Teaching Elder both from the temptation to use the funds unwisely and from rumors in the congregation about his/her misuse of the funds.

Teaching Elders are not to solicit clergy discounts for merchandise or services rendered them.

4. **THE TEACHING ELDER AND THE CIVIL LAW.** The Teaching Elder shall him/herself obey the civil law and insist leaders and members of his/her congregation do likewise. This includes, but is not limited to, matters related to taxes, copyrights, insurance, marriages, and the keeping of records.

There may be times when the Teaching Elder affirms the necessity of civil disobedience for moral reasons. Whether this is done alone or in conjunction with others (including officers and members of the congregation), it shall be done openly and with a willingness to accept the consequences of the law. However, in such cases no moral justification for violence against another person or property is acceptable.

5. **PREACHING AND WRITING.** The Teaching Elder's public preaching, teaching and writing shall always be her or his own work with appropriate academic acknowledgment. In sermons this includes the exegetical work, the organization and the words of the sermon, and the use of examples and illustrations.
6. **LANGUAGE AND BEHAVIOR.** The Teaching Elder shall recognize her or his unique position in the eyes of the congregation. It is a position of trust. This position shall not be abused through misuse of ministerial authority. In visits, counseling sessions, or other contacts with members of the congregation, the Teaching Elder shall maintain strict decorum. Teaching Elders shall not treat persons arbitrarily based on their gender, race, nationality, age, physical, emotional or mental condition, sexual orientation, or economic condition.

Teaching Elders shall avoid discriminatory or harassing treatment of any person or group. Ministerial language shall not include slurs or other verbal conduct relating to gender, race, etc., which has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment. Sexual harassment shall not take place. This includes but is not limited to verbal or non-verbal behavior such as sexist remarks, demeaning statements relating to gender, pressure for sexual activity and threats of punishment or promises of rewards for sexual behavior

Sexual abuse of or misconduct with a congregational member shall be understood as strictly forbidden. The professional has the responsibility to set the boundaries and to

maintain them. See the separate National Capital Presbytery Policy on Sexual Misconduct which supersedes any perceived discrepancy with this Code of Ethics.

Due to the issues of power and trust involved, it is recommended that single pastors or professional church workers not date members of their congregations. The same is true for presbytery staff members regarding the members of committees or other groups they staff.

These provisions shall include Teaching Elders of presbytery who are involved as teachers, counselors, or supervisors in programs which train for special work in ministry, e.g., Clinical Pastoral Education or Spiritual Development

As professionals, Teaching Elders are aware of the variation in spiritual and psychological dynamics at work in a person. Where the Teaching Elder himself or herself feels compulsions to behavior which is either criminal or unethical he or she will seek immediate help from an appropriate counselor. This standard shall apply to those caught in substance, drug, or alcohol abuse or addiction. If therapy or counseling seems to be unfruitful the Teaching Elder shall lay aside the office of ministry.

7. THE TEACHING ELDER AND RUMORS. The Teaching Elder may find her/himself the subject of rumors in the congregation or community. Response to these shall be carefully considered. No action including verbal response shall be taken without consultation with the Session or an appropriate committee of a higher governing body. The goal of whatever action taken shall be to end such rumors; hostile action toward the bearer of such rumors endangers the life of the congregation as well as the spiritual or emotional health of the perpetrator. It is not acceptable.

E. CIRCULATION OF ETHICAL STANDARDS

National Capital Presbytery will circulate this code of ethics among its member churches and Teaching Elder members. Each Teaching Elder shall submit a signed statement certifying he/she has read the code of ethics, is aware of the standards of the presbytery, and will make a sincere, good faith effort to abide with both the spirit and the letter of this code of ethics.

F. ETHICAL COUNSELORS

National Capital Presbytery will appoint a number of its members to serve as counselors in understanding and fulfilling these standards. These counselors will not be members of the presbytery's staff.

G. VIOLATIONS AND SANCTIONS

The presbytery considers that fidelity to these standards enhances the peace, unity, and purity of the church. Violations of these standards may be viewed as a breaking of ordination vows and subject to the disciplinary processes of the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

H. CANDIDATES AND INQUIRERS

The Committee on Preparation for Ministry shall circulate these standards to its inquirers and candidates for the ministry. It shall make clear that these standards apply also to those under its supervision.

I. CONCLUSION AND RATIONALE

Central to the vocation of Teaching Elder of Word and Sacrament is leadership of the people of God in a peculiarly Christian lifestyle which has at its core the embodiment of Jesus' words in John 15:12. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

These ethical standards are an attempt, not at setting legalistic limitations but rather guiding us all in showing the kind of love for each other that Christ has shown. So may all be encouraged to live in such a manner as to promote the health and growth of the Church, and give glory to God in Jesus Christ.

References:

- American Association of Pastoral Counselors Code of Ethics and Procedures, April 28, 1994
- National Capital Presbytery's Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures