

# Guidelines for Ministerial Conduct

## West Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church

### **Our Life Together as a Covenant Community**

As clergy we are called by God to various forms of ministry. Each of us is called to live as a disciple, but also to lead and nurture others in their discipleship. Our life and work is shaped around serving Christ, thus embodying our call by living it out in the daily practices and carrying the good news of Jesus Christ into the world. As servant leaders of Christ our calling demands the highest ethical behavior. To maintain the integrity of our life and work, it is crucial that the highest ethical standards be maintained in all our relationships and actions.

All appointed or assigned clergy form a covenant community within the church. This community is formed to mutually support, care for, and hold accountable its members for the sake of the life and mission of the church. This covenant is written to ensure that all deacons, elders, licensed pastors, and supply pastors have a common understanding of a life of integrity so that we might seek to live out of that understanding.

The Book of Discipline and West Ohio documents recognizes several behaviors as chargeable offenses (The Book of Discipline, ¶12702). These offenses abuse the virtues of justice, mercy, truth, loyalty, community, and individuality, which inform ethical boundaries expected of United Methodist clergy.

While no policies or other documents can anticipate all of the challenges and situations that may arise, the Covenant for Ministerial Conduct delineates key guidelines in the areas of personal and professional relationships, issues of integrity, power issues, conflicts of interest and retirement. These guidelines are to assist all clergy in making ethical decisions and in showing respect for colleagues, to enhance the integrity of the church and in accordance with applicable legal requirements and the Book of Discipline. This is a guide and is not intended to encompass all situations.

In a perfect world, we wish that we didn't have to deal with these issues, but due to changing social values and new generations we seem to have lost some of our foundational principles. The lack of a moral and ethical standard, coupled with the disconnects in society as a whole, make it important to delineate those values. The West Ohio Conference is not the only Annual Conference, nor the only denomination looking into naming these values. This issue is being felt by many Annual Conferences and in many different settings.

As clergy within the West Ohio Conference we covenant to live out the following guidelines:

A. IN OUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS WE COVENANT TO

1. Be above reproach in integrity, honesty, and faithfulness in all that we do;
2. Be cognizant of situations which challenge our integrity;
3. Resolve disagreements within the framework of principles that express Christian community and a commitment to prayerful and rational debate;
4. Serve the members and constituents in our current appointment, and except in emergencies, not render pastoral service or occupy another's pulpit without an invitation from the pastor of that congregation;
5. Keep appropriate confidences and privileged information;
6. Be fair and impartial to all and not abuse our position by taking advantage of those to whom we minister for purposes of personal, institutional, political, or financial gain;
7. Treat other colleagues with respect and support and encourage them in ministry;
8. Avoid speaking negatively about a colleague, especially our predecessor or our successor;
9. Avoid the appearance of impropriety, by not being alone in visitation and counseling sessions unless another person is present nearby;
10. Separate our ministerial role from our personal lives by not dating those directly served by our ministry
11. Follow high moral standards in speech and conduct and appearance;
12. Respect cultures different than our own;
13. Treat others fairly not allowing manners or appearance to hinder us in providing pastoral care;
14. Maintain a healthy emotional and social balance and maintain boundaries between pastoral identity and self-identity, private and community life, self and others;
15. Encourage the congregation in the care and upkeep of the parsonage, leave the church and parsonage clean and in good condition, and accept financial responsibilities for damage done to the parsonage beyond normal wear and tear or age (see Conference Parsonage policy);
16. Practice habits that encourage and promote our physical, emotional, and spiritual health;
17. Care for family and spouse addressing their needs and concerns through appropriate lines of communication;
18. Share ministry with other professional or lay persons appointed or employed to do so, seeking just compensation for all persons;

B. IN ISSUES OF INTEGRITY WE COVENANT TO

1. Acknowledge sources for preaching and in written material and not plagiarize another's work;
2. Promote advertising of the church or ministry in ways that build up the body not ourselves;
3. Be fiscally responsible;
4. Use appropriate documentation for reimbursements of professional expenses practicing good management practices for church funds, accounts, and/or resources;
5. Provide pastoral services for weddings, baptisms, and funerals to church members without charge and establish policies for nonmembers based on ministry opportunities, time constraints, and theological beliefs;
6. Be honest in all communications, actions, and relationships;
7. Abide by the covenant and the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, and represent the policy, mission, and program of the Annual Conference and the United Methodist Church fairly and appropriately;
8. Maintain honesty and integrity in all business transactions;
9. Accept employment outside of the appointed charge only with the consent of the local church and conference cabinet.

10. Maintain the highest ethical standards regarding the use of modern technology, avoiding even the perception of inappropriate use of the internet and understand that email and text messaging are not private and should be treated as such;
11. Abstain from pornography and gambling in any form;
12. Abstain from misuse or abuse of alcohol and drugs, prescription or other;

#### C. IN REGARD TO POWER ISSUES WE COVENANT TO

1. Be aware of the power that is inherent in our role and use that power to maximize ministry opportunities that communicate worth and mutuality;
2. Provide ministerial services in order to build up the body of Christ not to further our personal, religious, political, financial, or business interests;
3. Not use our ministerial status, position, relationship, or authority to abuse, misguide, negatively influence, manipulate, or take advantage of anyone;
4. Establish clear, appropriate boundaries with anyone with whom we have a ministerial, business, professional, or social relationship;

#### D. IN AREAS WHERE THERE MIGHT BE A CONFLICT OF INTEREST WE COVENANT TO

1. Advise and refer persons to another clergy or other appropriate persons such as lawyers, doctors, counselors, etc. when appropriate and when our independent judgment is impaired by prior dealings, by becoming personally involved, or by becoming an advocate for one (person) against another;
2. Absent ourselves at an appropriate time from discussion and decision when there is an actual or potential conflict of interest in matters affecting pastors, their family, or their financial interests;
3. Never seek or receive financial gain for ourselves or our families from a pastoral relationship beyond recognized fees, stipends, and entitlements;
4. Never take advantage of anyone to whom we are providing services in order to further our personal, religious, political, financial, or business interests;
5. Use discretion concerning the acceptance of or return of gifts by considering the intent and affordability of the gift and whether there is a risk of being compromised or losing objectivity;
6. Not accept or confer an office, position, assignment, or receive compensation, which may present the appearance of favoritism or a conflict of interest;
7. Avoid entering into contracts for services to be provided to the church without seeking bids;
8. Avoid using the congregation as a captive audience for products or services created or provided in a non-clergy role;

#### V. ADDITIONALLY RETIRED PASTORS COVENANT TO

1. Not perform worship services or offer advice or counseling within the bounds of a pastoral charge without permission of the Appointed Pastor or the District Superintendent; Book of Discipline, ¶358)
2. Make it clear to those they visit that they are not representing the church or pastor and will only make hospital calls as a friend pastor (unless employed by a particular congregation).

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