

# Presbytery of Great Rivers

## POLICIES AND GUIDELINES ON MISCONDUCT

### 1. Introduction

- a. Purpose. The purpose of these policies and guidelines for the PGR is to:
  - (1) Declare and maintain a high standard for the professional ministry.
  - (2) Prevent misconduct and abuse, safeguard the church, the church's members and staff from abuse through any form of misconduct.
  - (3) Seek justice by assuring effectiveness of the church's administrative, investigative and judicial processes in determining truth, protecting the innocent, and dealing appropriately with those who victimize others.
  - (4) Promote healing of all persons and congregations where misconduct has occurred, working to restore relationships broken by the misconduct, and seeking to bring healing to those who are found guilty of misconduct.
- b. The Need for Explicit Norms.

We believe that Jesus Christ calls us to standards of responsible conduct in all of life. We affirm on the basis of both scripture and the Presbyterian Constitution, that the behavior of church leaders must be exemplary.
- c. Application. These policies and guidelines apply to all members of PGR, including Ministers of Word and Sacrament, commissioned ruling elders, and any who are approved for service in and for the PGR, including volunteers. It shall be the responsibility of sessions to set their own policies and guidelines for staff members and volunteers in congregations.
- d. General Assembly Standards of Ethical Conduct. The PGR adopts as guidelines for behavior by ministers, elders and members, the "[Standards of Ethical Conduct](#)" adopted by the 210th General Assembly (1998). While the provisions of that document are not substitutes for the provisions of Scripture or the Constitution, the document is a useful teaching tool for the presbytery and sessions.
- e. Named Behaviors Not Comprehensive. The list is not intended to be all-inclusive, nor is it intended to be a comprehensive commentary on the constitution of the church or civil law. No one should conclude, however, that what is not on the list is therefore permitted. Rather, the listing reflects some areas in which problems tend to arise.

### 2. Standards for all Teaching Elder members of Presbytery, those serving as Pastors and Commissioned Ruling Elders

- a. Privileged Clergy Communication. One of the most critical issues regarding confidentiality relates to child abuse. Although the civil law of Illinois does not make a minister as pastor a mandatory reporter, the Book of Order (Constitution) of the PCUSA does in many (G-4.0302) circumstances. The ethic of confidentiality is intended to assist people to get help for their problems. It is not intended to prevent people from being held accountable for their harmful actions or to keep them from getting the help they need.
- b. Sexual Behavior. Sexuality is a gift of God, and an integral part of who we are as persons. However, it can become the basis for oppression, when trust relationships are breached and persons are abused. The following sexual behaviors are prohibited.

- (1) Sexual Misconduct. No sexual relationship can or should exist between a minister and a member or employee except between pastor and spouse. The relationship between a minister and a church member is one of trust. Ministers experience different levels of interrelationships with members and employees. This requires the minister to be conscious of his/her professional responsibility to maintain appropriate relationships and boundaries. The office of teaching elder carries with it a tremendous amount of responsibility, whether it is perceived or not. Ministers are responsible for maintaining the appropriate boundaries between themselves and members of the congregation, counselees, employees and also members of the general public.
  - (2) Sexual Harassment. Sexual harassment, pursuant to the EEOC and Illinois Department of Human Rights, consists of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal, non-verbal, or physical acts of a sexual or sex-based nature.
  - (3) Sexual Abuse. Sexual abuse of another person is any maltreatment or undue advantage taken involving sexual conduct in relation to any person under the age of eighteen years or anyone over the age of eighteen years without mental capacity to consent, or any person when the conduct includes force, threat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of office or position. (D-10.0401a)
  - (4) Pornography: Pornography is material that depicts sexual activity or erotic behavior in a way designed to arouse sexual excitement, whether determined to be obscene or not.
  - (5) Sexually Offensive Behavior. Ministers must take care to avoid either sexually overt or oriented language or behavior. The minister is in an unequal, power position in his or her professional setting. His or her inappropriate sexual references and behavior can intimidate and sexually harass those with whom he or she works or those to whom he or she ministers. The minister alone is responsible for seeing that this behavior does not occur.
- c. Domestic Violence. Any form of physical or verbal abuse by a minister within family, whether of spouse, children, incapacitated persons, or the elderly is unacceptable.
  - d. Controlled Substances. Any form of use of "controlled substances" or illegal drugs is unacceptable. Any abusive use of alcohol and/or prescription drugs is unacceptable.
  - e. Financial Responsibility. Ministers are expected to be responsible in personal and professional financial matters. When a minister borrows money, he/she is expected to repay the debt as agreed when undertaken. Ministers should not use church or members' funds, accounts, and/or resources for personal or private advantage. Ministers should not serve in the capacity of signing checks on church accounts, except in the case of a specifically designated pastoral discretionary fund.

### **3. Standards for Relationships with Congregations and Constituents**

- a. Violence, verbal or physical, by pastoral leaders against parishioners is clearly unacceptable.
- b. Services for Members of Another Church. When a minister is called upon to officiate at a wedding or funeral, or counsel regarding baptism for families who are not members of his/her congregation, he/she should ascertain whether they are members of a different church or denomination. If they are members of another congregation or denomination, they should be urged to procure the services of their own pastor. If the persons are members of another church, the minister is encouraged to consult with that pastor in advance of his/her services.
- c. Calling on Members of Neighboring Churches. The pastor's first responsibility is to the congregation he/she serves, and he/she should concentrate calling on the members of that congregation in home or hospital. The minister does not normally call on one who is a member of another congregation. However, if a pastor is requested to make a courtesy call on a non-member, the non-member's pastor is to be informed of the nature of the call.

- d. Multiple-staff Relationships. In ministerial staff relationships, as in all intra-church relationships, each staff member is responsible to contribute to the welfare of the whole church. Staff members are expected to speak directly about their differences and problems to the individual(s) with whom they differ and, if necessary, to the session's personnel committee. Innuendo and gossip are unacceptable. If a minister is working on a staff and concludes he/she is unable to manage relationships with other staff members in an effective manner, then he/she should consult with the COM for assistance to help resolve the conflict.
- e. When a Minister Leaves a Parish. When the relationship between the minister and the congregations is dissolved, that minister shall announce to the congregation that he/she will no longer be the pastor and, therefore, will not be available for pastoral services. It is also expected that the pastor's family members will be sensitive to issues related to closure. The proper role for a minister who is not serving in a permanent or temporary pastoral relationship to the congregation is the role of a friend and member of the worshiping congregations.
- f. Special Gifts and Honoraria. If there is a specific financial arrangement for a minister's services, it shall be determined in advance in consultation with the session. A pastor often receives additional honoraria beyond his/her terms of call. Examples include stipends for funerals, weddings, special lectures or presentations, the provision by church members of such things as club memberships, special arrangements for automobiles, private school tuition, etc. Further, many churches demonstrate their support for their pastor(s) and other staff by various bonuses. Pastors need to take care that such gifts not take on an obligatory nature and remember that all such income is taxable according to state and federal tax laws.

#### **4. Standards for Specialized Ministers of the Presbytery**

All ministers who fall into the category of General Assembly's listing of "other ministers" should respect the position of the installed pastors regarding all functions within the community. Weddings, funerals, and baptisms of church members are not to be performed by specialized ministers unless an invitation has been offered by the pastor, the session, or by permission of the presbytery. Specialized ministers are governed by the standards of the PGR.

#### **5. Standards on Matters of Conscience**

If a minister comes to the point in his or her faith and life when in good conscience it is no longer possible to abide by the polity of our denomination, he or she should work for change within the denomination. When and if that no longer seems a viable recourse, the pastor should abide by the polity and fulfill the ordination vows, or else leave the denomination. It is unethical to encourage elders to deny their ordination vows, either by word or example.

#### **6. Prevention of Misconduct**

- a. These policies and guidelines shall be distributed to all ministers, ruling elders, employees, volunteers, and entities of the PGR. A new copy shall be sent to them whenever a change is adopted by presbytery. A new acknowledgment must be signed and submitted when any change is adopted in the policy. These policies and guidelines shall be made available to all persons who accuse others of misconduct as well as those accused of misconduct.
- b. All candidates, ministers, and employees of the PGR are required to sign a written acknowledgment (**see Attachment A**) indicating that they have received a copy of these Policies and Guidelines on Misconduct. Such acknowledgment will be kept in the person's personnel file. The Stated Clerk will report annually to presbytery the names of those ministers who have not submitted the form, and communicate to their session or employer their failure to comply.
- c. All ministers seeking new calls within the PGR shall complete the PIF currently being distributed by the Church Leadership Connection of the PC(USA), including Sexual Misconduct Information or its

successor form and shall allow the presbytery to do a background check on criminal, financial, and driving information.

- d. The calling or employing body is responsible for contacting references for prospective ministers, employees, or volunteers.
- e. The PGR and all its committees, and organizations will adhere to this policy, including its standards, procedures, and practices.
- f. The PGR will provide an annual training workshop on misconduct for all ministers, candidates, and elders serving as commissioned ruling elders in the PGR, who shall be required to attend each year. Employees and volunteers of the PGR will be encouraged to attend. The Stated Clerk will report annually to PGR the names of those ministers, candidates and elders serving as commissioned ruling elders who have not attended a workshop, and communicate to their session or employer their failure to attend. The content of the workshop will include at least the following:
  - (1) Why the PGR has a Policies and Guidelines for Behavior.
  - (2) The presbytery's Policies and Guidelines for Behavior.
  - (3) The General Assembly's statements of ethical behavior for members, volunteers and employees, and ordained officers.
  - (4) The broader issues of professional behavior and conduct in the workplace.
  - (5) Why each congregation needs its own Policies and Guidelines for Behavior, or sexual misconduct policy.
  - (6) Model congregational policies.
  - (7) Why each congregation needs its own liability insurance for misconduct.
  - (8) Available resources within the presbytery for counseling services for personal, emotional and family problems, and for drug and sexual addiction.

## **7. Disciplinary, Judicial and Administrative Processes**

- a. Disciplinary Process. All allegations of misconduct will be investigated through the appropriate process. In cases of members under the jurisdiction of the PGR's judicial process as provided in the Rules of Discipline will be followed. In cases involving employees, the provisions of the personnel policy will be followed. For employees who are members of PGR, both personnel policy provisions and disciplinary process will apply.
- b. Judicial Process. If the clerk receives written allegations under D-10.0100, the clerk shall convene the team charged with selecting the members of the investigating committee (D-10.0202 and PGR Manual of Operations Section II "The Appointment of an Investigating Committee") that shall meet as soon as possible after its formation. The investigating committee shall conduct its investigation in accordance with D-10.0202.
- c. Contact with Persons. The investigating committee shall maintain regular contact with the person making the allegations, keeping her/him informed about the status of the investigation. Under no circumstances shall the investigating committee contact the person being accused without first advising the person making the allegations of the date of that contact with the accused.
- d. Administrative Process. Following an accusation of misconduct against a staff member of the PGR or a member of presbytery serving a church or agency, the appropriate committee (COM or personnel) shall consult with the accuser, the accused, and the involved session or board of oversight to ascertain whether the circumstances would be aided by the person accused being advised to take an administrative leave. If the person accused refuses and the presbytery believes it imperative, the presbytery may proceed to remove the person. The COM or other body may also request that an administrative commission be appointed to deal with the discord caused by the alleged misconduct. The COM will help congregations find interim or supply pastors trained in responding to congregations where abuse has occurred. The COM also will appoint persons to work carefully with the session to recognize and deal with denial and anger that typically accompanies abuse allegations.

# ATTACHMENT A

**Acknowledgment**

**Presbytery of Great Rivers**

## **Policies and Guidelines for Misconduct**

This attachment to the Policies and Guidelines for Misconduct in the Presbytery of Great Rivers is to be signed by all candidates, ministers, and lay pastors of the Presbytery.

By signing this attachment, you acknowledge that you have received, read and understand the most recent Policies and Guidelines for Misconduct adopted by the Presbytery of Great Rivers. The Stated Clerk will report annually to presbytery the names of those ministers who have not submitted the form, and communicate to their session or employer their failure to comply.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

This document will be kept in your personnel file.

Please give your comments on how this policy might be improved:

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**Please sign and return to:**  
**Presbytery of Great Rivers, Attn: Patti Parrish**  
**1230 W Candletree Dr, Suite D, Peoria, IL 61614**