

Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel

Introduction

The United Church of Canada believes that all people are children of God, created in the image of God and therefore worthy of respect and love. Living out that belief requires a deep sense of mutuality, trust, and accountability. There are, however, times when the church does not live out that commitment. As a result, people suffer—both people within the community and people outside it. We believe that one suffers, all suffer together (1 Cor. 12:26). Discipline has to do with the good of others, with mutual accountability and with the “building up” of the community of faith.

The 38th General Council (2003) charged the Task Group on the Exercise of Discipline of Ministry Personnel with developing standards of practice and ethical standards for ministry personnel, and with evaluating existing practices through which ministry personnel are held accountable. The development and implementation of standards represents a first step in the rethinking and possible development of a broader policy of discipline for ministry personnel. Ethical standards are developed so that ministry personnel may commit to agreed-upon standards of conduct that will guide their practice and behaviour.

Responses to the questionnaire in 2004 and the draft standards document in 2005 contained much support for the development of ethical standards and suggested that they may be used as

- a common set of values
- a basis for talking openly about ethical issues and concerns
- a foundation for creating a stronger sense of community
- a starting point for productive resolutions
- an operating framework within the church that provides for transparency and principled behaviour
- a set of norms for the education and formation of ministry personnel

Ethical standards enable the church to attain two goals. They act as a resource for ministry personnel as they struggle with ethical issues and dilemmas in the context of their daily practice. Ethical standards also enable ministry personnel to be accountable to self, church, and community.

Among the many questions addressed during the development of the ethical standards was: “How are ethical standards to be articulated?” Clearly, it is not possible to anticipate and specify how one should behave in every circumstance. In many ways, it is easier to be specific about what one should *not* do than what one *should* do. However, a list of prohibitions may imply that everything is allowable unless otherwise prohibited. Rather than focus on the negative, the task group has opted to use affirmative language when drafting the ethical standards. The intent is to highlight the expectation rather than identify the prohibition.

The standards of practice describe practices to which ministry personnel aspire. They recognize that personal and professional growth is a developmental process and that ministry personnel move through a variety of career and life changes that affect their practice of ministry.

In practice, ministry personnel are expected to know and understand the culture of the ministries in which they serve so that they are responsive to the spiritual needs of those contexts. They take seriously local traditions of faith and worship, and share their faith in ways that are relevant and constructive.

Ministry personnel are responsible for leading, guiding, and supporting the community of faith in the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. What is more, they touch people's lives at various points of joy, pain, celebration, and vulnerability. Ministry personnel do this in a variety of ways—by leading in worship, by providing pastoral care, by standing with those who suffer, and by working for justice and peace.

These standards are not to be viewed as measurements of performance. Rather, they are descriptions of practice to which ministry personnel aspire.

The 39th General Council (2006) received the report "The Exercise of Discipline of Ministry Personnel" and adopted the draft standards of practice as standards of practice for ministry personnel in The United Church of Canada and the draft ethical standards as ethical standards for ministry personnel in The United Church of Canada.

A motion to amend, which was carried, required the word "profession" be removed from the documents, and replaced with the word "vocation."

Ministry is a calling and a vocation. The standards of practice and the ethical standards address the professional nature of the vocation of ministry. In order to comply with the amendment, and at the same time retain the integrity of the standards of practice and ethical standards, the word vocation has been inserted in the following document where appropriate, but where reference is made to professional skills and training, and to the level of accountability and expertise, and expected behaviours or practices for ministry personnel, the word profession remains.

Standards of Practice

The standards are presented alphabetically. Ministry personnel, Ministry and Personnel Committees, and other bodies to which ministry personnel are responsible may want to order the standards of practice according to the priorities of the particular pastoral charge or appointment.

1 Administration

Ministry personnel have administrative responsibility to

- a) ensure timely completion of tasks that are their responsibility, delegating such tasks where needed and/or appropriate
- b) ensure that all documents that are the ministry personnel's responsibility, such as marriage, baptismal, and funeral records, are complete and that they are safely stored
- c) know the organization, governance, and policies of the United Church
- d) know the administrative responsibilities of their positions
- e) encourage and enable the congregation to keep accurate records and to maintain and protect administrative and historical documents in accordance with the policies of the United Church

2 Community Outreach and Social Justice

Ministry personnel with The United Church of Canada, a church committed to social justice and global and community outreach ministries, have responsibility to

- a) engage people with a vision of gospel that recognizes and responds to needs beyond their own
- b) encourage and support the development and pursuit of social justice and outreach programs
- c) encourage the support of the Mission and Service Fund of The United Church of Canada
- d) facilitate knowledge about outreach projects and activities of the United Church
- e) encourage people to know and understand United Church policies as they apply to social justice issues
- f) encourage lay leadership on social justice issues and outreach programs

3 Continuing Education

Education is a lifelong and ongoing process. Ministry personnel are responsible for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills. To this end, they

- a) pursue personal, vocational, and professional goals for continuing education in conjunction with the appropriate persons or committees related to their ministry
- b) strive to be current with issues in theology, ministerial practice, and community and world events

4 Denomination and Communities

Ministry personnel have responsibilities as members of The United Church of Canada to the denomination, the wider church, their communities, and the world. As such, they

- a) honour the organization, governance, and policies of the United Church
- b) participate in the courts of the church as set out in *The Manual* of The United Church of Canada (session/official board or equivalent, presbytery/district, Conference, and General Council)
- c) respond in appropriate ways to needs beyond the ministry in which they serve
- d) participate in ecumenical and multi-faith activities as possible and appropriate
- e) maintain an active connection with the wider church
- f) represent the United Church in the larger community

5 Faith Formation and Christian Education

Ministry personnel have responsibility for faith formation and Christian education. As part of this responsibility, ministry personnel

- a) learn about the ministry context in which they serve
- b) serve as teachers, advisers, and spiritual resource persons sharing faith stories—formally and informally—with insight and integrity based on their education, life experience, knowledge, and background
- c) relate the gospel to the everyday experience of people
- d) communicate the theology, history, and traditions of The United Church of Canada

6 Leadership

Ministry personnel are expected to function as leaders in their ministry contexts, recognizing that leadership has many dimensions. Ministry personnel have responsibility to

- a) encourage and challenge people to assist with or take on leadership roles
- b) employ such means as communication, co-operation, collaboration, consultation, and wise and appropriate use of authority for effective leadership
- c) identify and address conflicts in appropriate ways
- d) work with people in the ministry context to achieve agreed-upon goals

7 Pastoral Care

Ministry personnel are responsible for the pastoral care of persons they encounter through the ministry in which they serve. As providers of pastoral care, ministry personnel

- a) are sensitive to the situation and needs of those to whom they offer pastoral care, and recognize the unique dynamics of the pastoral relationship
- b) provide a supportive presence for and are accessible to people in times of change and crisis
- c) encourage and facilitate a process to ensure that pastoral care occurs on a regular basis

8 Self-care

Ministry personnel are responsible for maintaining a healthy balance in their own lives. Accordingly, they

- a) maintain their own physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being
- b) nurture supportive personal and collegial relationships
- c) manage time for work, family, friends, personal development, and renewal

9 Worship

Ministry personnel have primary responsibility for the conduct of worship. As worship leaders and facilitators, they

- a) lead and enable the exploration and celebration of God's presence through preaching, liturgy, prayer, music, drama, dance, and other means
- b) inspire, strengthen, and challenge the people of God
- c) encourage and support lay participation and leadership in worship
- d) celebrate God's grace, facilitate the community in its prayer and devotion, and help the community to recognize God's presence in the church and the world
- e) relate the good news of our faith to everyday experience
- f) heighten awareness of world events and invite appropriate responses
- g) encourage the exercise of faithful stewardship
- h) conduct special services of worship (such as weddings and funerals) and administer the sacraments of communion and baptism

Ethical Standards

The ethical standards are presented alphabetically. The document does not represent an attempt at establishing priority or sequence.

1 Competence

Ministry personnel come to their work adequately prepared to fulfill the positions to which they are called or appointed. In these positions, they are called to

- a) represent, truthfully and accurately, their abilities, skills, education, qualifications, and experience
- b) acknowledge the limitations of their skills, abilities, and competencies and make referrals when necessary and/or appropriate
- c) establish, maintain, and communicate appropriate personal and professional boundaries

2 Conflicts of Interest and Perceptions of Bias

Conflicts of interest and perceptions of bias may put ministry personnel's integrity and professional conduct in question. Therefore, ministry personnel are called to

- a) identify and appropriately disclose conflicts of interest or bias, real or perceived
- b) follow, where applicable, guidelines established by the church with respect to conflict of interest
- c) deal appropriately with conflicts of interest, consulting where possible with colleagues and/or the body to which the ministry personnel are accountable

3 Personal Relationships and Professional Conduct

"God's intention for all human relationships is that they be faithful, responsible, just, loving, health-giving, healing, and sustaining of community and self" ("Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality," 1988). Therefore, ministry personnel are called to

- a) abide by and faithfully live out the explicit policies and procedures on sexual abuse (sexual harassment, pastoral sexual misconduct, sexual assault) and child abuse as outlined by The United Church of Canada
- b) be appropriately open and transparent in all relationships
- c) conduct relationships in ways that honour covenants
- d) conduct relationships, especially those that may be intimate and/or sexual, in ways that seek to maintain the peace and welfare of the community of faith
- e) take steps to ensure that alternate pastoral care is available for any person with whom they have an intimate and/or sexual relationship and for whom they are the sole or primary providers of pastoral care
- f) disclose to and seek advice from a colleague and/or the appropriate body to which they are accountable, and take steps to disengage from the pastoral care or professional relationship when that relationship is moving beyond a pastoral or professional level

4 Professional Relationships

Ministry personnel are expected to honour the covenantal relationships of other ministry personnel. Therefore they are called to

- a) respect the call and placement of other ministry personnel, including colleagues or those with whom they are in team ministry
- b) respect the expertise of members of other professions with whom they work in the church, other institutions, or the community
- c) uphold and honour the church's policies on the exercise of the functions of ministry, such as weddings, funerals, baptisms, and pastoral care, as outlined in *The Manual*

5 Relationship with the Law

Action on behalf of the church in pursuit of social justice may bring ministry personnel into conflict with the law. Ministry personnel are called to

- a) abide by the law and encourage others to do so
- b) consult with the body to which they are accountable when contemplating any action that they believe to be an ethically justified act of civil disobedience in aid of a greater good
- c) consider—before acting—the consequences to self, church, and community of any action that contravenes or appears to contravene the law

6 Relationships with Persons Served

Ministry personnel are aware of and attentive to the possible impact of their words and actions in caring for the emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of persons who seek their help. In all relationships, ministry personnel are called to

- a) uphold the integrity of the ministry relationship in which they serve
- b) honour the dignity, culture, and faith of all persons
- c) respect personal boundaries such as those of space and touch
- d) use the power and influence of their office appropriately
- e) be sensitive to the needs and vulnerabilities of all, while clarifying and maintaining the professional nature of the relationship

7 Responsibilities of the Role

Ministry personnel are expected to execute faithfully the various responsibilities of their roles. Thus, ministry personnel are called to

- a) adhere to the organization, governance, and procedures of The United Church of Canada as outlined in *The Manual*
- b) fulfill all the responsibilities of their position description and honour the United Church's standards of practice for ministry personnel
- c) protect the integrity of funds and any property entrusted to their care
- d) use discretion and good judgment and abide by applicable guidelines when accepting favours, honoraria, gifts, and other forms of remuneration

8 Self-awareness

Ministry personnel are called to exercise good judgment and maintain a level of self-awareness that enables them to

- a) be accountable to the church, to the ministry in which they serve, and to themselves
- b) be authentic, dependable, trustworthy, compassionate, and understanding, and live with integrity
- c) keep confidences
- d) be open to constructive criticism, guidance, and challenge
- e) accept that, at times, they will fail or make mistakes
- f) be aware of the visibility of their position and consider how their conduct may be experienced and perceived by others

Definitions of Terms

This document uses several terms in particular contexts and with particular meanings, as clarified below:

Bias: Canadian courts have said that “bias denotes a state of mind that is in some way predisposed to a particular result, or that is closed with regard to particular issues” (R. v. S. (R.D.), [1997] 3 S.C.R. 484). It is a state of mind that affects an individual’s judgment and makes the individual unable to exercise his or her functions impartially in a particular situation.

There may be circumstances where an individual does not consider himself or herself to actually be biased, but where it is alleged that he or she should not participate in a decision. In this case, the test that must be applied is whether his or her particular conduct gives rise to a reasonable apprehension of bias.

For a reasonable apprehension of bias to exist, the apprehension of bias must be judged by a reasonable person, who is informed of all the relevant circumstances, to be reasonable in the circumstances.

Conflict of interest: A conflict of interest occurs when an individual makes a decision, is present when a decision is made, or participates in making a decision in carrying out his or her role that may directly or indirectly confer a benefit on that individual or on any person with whom he or she does not deal at arm’s length. The individual must know that in making the decision there is an opportunity to further his or her own interest, or the private interest of a party with whom he or she does not deal at arm’s length.

Boundaries: A boundary is the limit of that which is reasonable or permitted. Boundaries are necessary to help define and shape the structure within which healthy and appropriate relationships may develop and grow, as well as to manage the power and vulnerability present in the relationship. In ministry, as in other helping relationships, boundaries need to be clearly defined and maintained, primarily for the benefit of those who seek help.

Ministry personnel are expected to function in informal and even intimate settings (e.g., a home or hospital bedside) and in multiple roles (e.g., pastor, teacher, community leader, social friend), usually without supervision or oversight.

Discipline: The words “discipline” and “disciple” share the same Latin root, *discere*, meaning to learn. Discipline has to do with learning and education (which is why the various branches of learning are often referred to as “disciplines”).

Jesus gave a discipline to his followers and held them accountable for their actions. Discipline refers to the practices in which the disciple is engaged to maintain a healthy, focused spiritual life that is reflected in his or her ministry. Through such discipline, the disciple holds himself or herself accountable to God through the community to which the disciple belongs.

Theologically speaking, discipline is an act of faith and must be understood and exercised as an expression of faith. Discipline has to do with mutual accountability, with building up the community of faith, and with the good of others.

Ministry: The term ministry includes the following: service in a pastoral charge; staff appointments in presbyteries/districts, Conferences, or General Council; outreach ministries; teaching and analogous positions.

Ministry personnel: Ministry personnel means the following people: ordained and diaconal ministers; designated lay ministers; persons serving under appointment as student supply, intern supply or candidate supply; and ministers from other denominations who are serving the United Church as ordained or diaconal supply. It includes members of the Order of Ministry under appointment to a staff position within the United Church, to the faculty of an educational institution, or to an outreach ministry such as a hospital, home, social service centre, community project, or chaplaincy. It also includes all ordained and diaconal ministers retained on the roll of presbytery/district, whether they are active or retired.

Pastoral care and pastoral counselling: Pastoral care refers to any pastoral work that involves supporting and nurturing people and interpersonal relationships. It includes everyday expressions of care and concern that may take place within the context of various pastoral activities and relationships.

Pastoral counselling refers to caring ministries that are structured and focused on specifically articulated need or concern. Counselling always involves some degree of "contract" in which a request for help is articulated and specific arrangements are agreed upon concerning time and place of meeting. In extended counselling, a fee may also be agreed upon depending on the institutional setting and other considerations.

Polity: The polity of the United Church includes all the policies and procedures for accountability, organizational structure, and decision-making that are followed in the church, as set out in *The Manual* and other church documents.

Profession: Profession means a calling requiring specialized knowledge and intensive preparation, including instruction in skills and methods and in the underlying historical and scholarly principles of those skills and methods. The apostle Paul exhorted leaders to "Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves." (2 Cor. 13:5).

A profession also maintains, by force of organization or concerted opinion, high standards of achievement and conduct. This means that members are accountable to each other as well as to their profession. Members of a profession commit to continued study and to the kind of work that has for its prime purpose the rendering of a public service, or in the case of ministry personnel, of service to God.



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