

A Code of Ethics for those in Leadership in the Local Church

INTRODUCTION

Christian leaders exercise a special role within the Christian community and the community at large. They have a responsibility to their peers, to the local community of faith, to the wider Church, and to society. This is indicated by passages of scripture that spell out the qualities and responsibilities expected of Christian leaders (such as 1 Timothy 3 and 1 Peter 5: 1-4).

This Code of Ethics has been developed to offer guidelines about appropriate behaviour for Christian leaders, and to provide a framework for addressing complaints about inappropriate behaviour by Christian leaders. The code provides basic guidance, although it cannot anticipate or address every ethical question that will arise for those in Christian leadership. This code should be read in conjunction with the “Code of Ethics applicable to the Ministers of Churches of Christ” and statements in this code are informed by the Code of Ethics for Ministers.

It is anticipated that each local congregation will consider the application of this code to their community of faith, and that local congregations should require their leaders to comply with this code of ethics. Requests for assistance with the implementation of the code, or questions about its contents, may be directed to the Ministry Work Group through the State Minister, Mark Butler (ph 8269 7873) or the Work Group Chair, Roz Park.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

This code is predicated on four foundational principles which should guide the conduct and attitudes of all Christian people, particularly those entrusted with the responsibility of leadership. The foundational principles are:

- **The Dignity of the Human Person**

Human beings are created in the image of God with a clear recognition in Scripture that each person is of unique value. Christian leaders have a particular responsibility to respect and enable all who are part of the creation of God to fulfil their calling as children of God. Christian leaders are called to encourage, nurture and guide those who come under their leadership, recognising the dignity of all made in the image of God.

- **Justice and Integrity**

Those who exercise leadership in the name of Christ will act with respect, consideration and honesty towards all people. Christian leaders are called to seek justice where there is oppression, and truth where there is deceit.

- **Humility and Love**

Christian leaders are called, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to pattern their leadership on the example of Jesus, whose ministry of service was exercised in humility and marked by a deep spiritual love. The abuse of power and privilege has no place in the Christian community. This

means that Christian leaders will be sensitive to their relationship with those amongst whom they serve. They must avoid causing harm and actively seek to do good.

- **Mutual Ministry**

Christian leaders share in the ministry of Christ. Within that ministry, all exercise particular responsibilities, according to their giftedness, for which they are held accountable to the Body of Christ.

A CODE OF ETHICS FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERS

Those serving in Christian leadership with Churches of Christ in SA will:

1. Strive to keep their private and public life above reproach.
2. Ensure that they do not exploit those in their care for any reason, including sexual, emotional, spiritual and financial reasons.
3. Treat all those with whom they serve and live with compassion, respect, consideration and fairness.
4. Respect the dignity of all people, regardless of age, race, religion, gender, political belief, disability or sexual orientation.
5. Respect the right of all people to make their own informed decisions and choices in life, recognising their responsibility for their own lives.
6. Respect the right of those within their duty of care to confidentiality, privacy and a relationship of mutual trust. Accordingly, information divulged by people will not be discussed with others unless consent is given, other than in exceptional cases, usually involving a serious risk to life.
7. Recognise and act on the need to refer matters beyond the level of their gifts and competencies, or matters where there may be a conflict of interest, to an appropriately skilled colleague or professional.
8. Refrain from sexual exploitation or sexual harassment, recognising that those exercising leadership are in a position of power relative to those subject to their leadership. This means that sexual relations within any relationship involving the exercise of leadership can never be between equals. Sexual harassment covers a wide range of unwelcome and unreciprocated behaviours, verbal and physical, and with psychological and spiritual dimensions. It ranges from such unwelcome actions as gestures or the display of offensive pictures through to explicit demands, suggestions of sexual activity, patting, pinching and rape.
9. Refrain from using emotional or spiritual abuse. Statements such as the following may be indicative of spiritual abuse:
 - “I am put down by our church leaders because I don’t have the same gifts as everyone else.”
 - “When I question the teachings of my small group leader I am told that I must accept his authority on the matter.”
 - “Sometimes my minister uses things I have shared with him as sermon illustrations, and tells others about the struggles of my spiritual journey.”

- “My elder came to me yesterday and said he was disappointed in me and didn’t think I was being Christian because I was not cooperating with the church leaders.”
1. Recognise that membership of the Body of Christ implies a partnership in ministry, and agree to follow the proper counsel of those to whom they are accountable (Church Board, Elders, Ministers, Committees, etc).
 2. Refrain from making comments that may needlessly damage the reputation of fellow leaders, or cause anxiety to anyone subject to their leadership, or damage the Church.
 3. Seek mediation in the face of conflict with others.
 4. Accept responsibility for their own emotional, mental, physical and spiritual health.
 5. Acknowledge their significant duty of care for their own family and friends.
 6. Act within the laws of society, ensuring that at all times their position is not used for personal gain.

A PROCESS FOR INVESTIGATION OF COMPLAINTS

Any complaint about the conduct or attitudes of a Christian leader should be taken seriously. If the allegation appears to involve a breach of the law the complainant should be encouraged and assisted to report the matter to the police. Where this breach of the law relates to sexual abuse of a minor it may be mandatory for a report to be made to the police.

The complaint should be made in the first instance to the minister or one of the elders of the congregation. If the complaint is about the behaviour or attitudes of a minister it should be referred to the State Minister, Churches of Christ in SA Inc.

Upon receipt of a complaint the minister and/or elders shall form a Pastoral Intervention Team (PIT) comprising a minister of the congregation, an elder from the congregation and a helping professional from beyond the congregation.

The PIT will meet with the complainant to hear their story, offer pastoral support and guidance and determine whether the complaint warrants further investigation.

The PIT may recommend the standing down of the respondent from positions of leadership during the course of the investigation.

If no further investigation is deemed warranted the PIT will ensure adequate and independent pastoral support is offered to the complainant and/or the respondent, including access to professional counselling. The complainant should also be informed of their right to appeal the decision not to investigate the matter.

If further investigation is warranted, the PIT shall conduct such investigations with a view to determining, on the balance of probabilities, whether the allegation is substantiated. Upon reaching such conclusion the PIT will determine an appropriate course of action to bring a resolution to the process. Such action may include, but is not limited to:

- mediation (at the discretion of the complainant)

- dismissal of complaint with no action taken;
- a warning to the respondent;
- a written or verbal apology to the complainant;
- a written or verbal apology to the respondent if wrongly accused;
- a public apology to the complainant or the respondent;
- an explanation and/or apology to the congregation;
- a requirement that the respondent receive counselling as determined by the PIT;
- the resignation or dismissal of the respondent from positions of leadership.

In the course of its investigations the PIT may make reference to the Ministry Work Group of Churches of Christ in SA for assistance in determining appropriate process, response, resolution and mediation.