

MINISTERIAL CODE OF ETHICS

Southern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

PURPOSE

This code of ethics is to establish a set of agreed expectations for those called to ministry in the Southern California Conference. Recognizing the sacredness of ministry and the professional expectations of those to whom we minister, these provisions shall be the minimal expectations for moral and ethical conduct among the clergy at all levels of ministry (pastoral, departmental, administrative, educational, etc.) in the Southern California Conference. It is the further purpose of this code to demonstrate an increased level of professionalism by a willingness to make public these criteria by which ministers in the Southern California Conference are willing to be held.

Society accords privileged positions to professionals, allowing them to enter into some of life's most sensitive areas. The church does the same for those who are called to the profession of ministry. This code is not written merely for the edification of a few. They are intended to hold all members of the profession to a standard in order to strengthen the bonds of trust that should exist between the professional minister and those whom he or she serves.

Additionally, the purpose of this document is to acknowledge that the Southern California Conference is accountable to its constituent members—those who provide the spiritual, moral and financial base for all its operations and services. The governance of this Conference is ultimately provided under the auspices of the church's constituent members. Each minister hired is directly accountable to the Southern California Conference administration and the conference constituency as a whole, not only to the local church board. It is therefore understood that the pastor will know and follow the Policies of the Southern California Conference, the principles of the Working Policy of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists as they have been incorporated into this Code of Ethics, and the Southern California Conference Pastoral Expectations document, which is attached.

MORAL INTEGRITY OF MINISTERS

The minister occupies an important position within the faith and secular community. Therefore, each is expected to practice wisdom, restraint and integrity in practice of ministry. Intrinsic to ministry are specific matters of professional conduct where particular care must be exercised. These include, but are not limited to, personal and corporate financial practices, sexual behavior, confidentiality, job accountability and relationships to previous parishes.

BASIC EXPECTATIONS

1. The minister will maintain a personal relationship with Jesus and will aim to glorify God, not self.
2. The minister will be guided by Holy Scripture, prayer and a Spirit-led conscience.
3. The minister will be honest and will practice integrity in all aspects of personal and private life.
4. The minister will uphold the honor, integrity, morality and dignity of the profession.
5. The minister will maintain professional competency throughout his/her career.
6. The minister will be loyal and accountable to:
 - a. God, who has gifted and called him/her to this sacred work.
 - b. The congregation, by providing leadership in carrying out the church's objectives, providing spiritual nurture for its members, and representing the church to the community it serves.
 - c. Fellow pastors, by consulting with the last known church where a person held membership, to determine their membership status, before such a person is re-baptized or accepted on Profession of Faith.
 - d. The Conference/Region by communicating pertinent information to their congregations, in order to assist the Region in carrying out its goals and objectives.
 - e. The Southern California Conference, as the employing organization.
 - f. The world church, by rightly representing and upholding the principles and theological teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
7. The minister will avoid *conflicts of interest* by keeping separate his/her personal finances from those of the church and its people. Church funds shall be accounted for and disbursed solely by those duly elected by the church body to assume these responsibilities. Other *conflicts of interest* include, but are not limited to: engaging in outside business that may encroach on the minister's call for full time service; using denominational employment to further outside business interests; accepting any gratuity, favor, benefit or gift that is greater than the common courtesies usually associated with accepted cultural and business practice; use of confidential information acquired through denominational employment for personal profit or advantage.

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

The minister will be responsible to provide and care for his/her family. This includes, but is not limited to, providing physical, spiritual, emotional and financial support.

The minister will respect the rights and dignity of each member of his/her family. Abuse of any family member, whether physical or emotional, is condemned by the church. The minister who abuses a spouse or any other family member may be required to obtain professional treatment, and/or, under certain conditions, may be terminated.

PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

As Preacher and Writer

The minister recognizes that it is honest, legal and ethical to give proper attribution when using ideas, illustrations or stories from other authors or speakers.

As Speaker of Truth

The minister will practice accepted principles of biblical interpretation.

The minister will not knowingly repeat rumors, gossip or hearsay, which may cause harm to people or the church.

As Confidant

The minister will respect the rights of confidentiality in relating to parishioners. Confidentiality is a sacred trust. Information shared in confidence, whether in a counseling situation, a personnel item or other matters of a confidential nature, is not to be shared with anyone, not even a spouse.

As Counselor

The minister who does not hold a current, recognized counseling degree or credentials shall limit counseling to spiritual matters and shall acknowledge his/her limitations and the possible need to refer counselees to professionally trained individuals when necessary.

As Power/Authority Figure

The minister, because of his/her position, has power and is considered an authority figure. Recognizing this position of authority, the minister will maintain boundaries in relationships with staff and parishioners. The minister will protect and honor those under his/her supervision and care. At all times the minister will assume an attitude of authority in the style that Christ himself modeled—as a servant to all humankind.

As a Model in Language and Behavior

The minister will maintain respect for his/her calling as a position of sacred trust. When pastors visit, counsel, or have other contacts with people, care shall be taken to maintain this trust. Use of questionable slang or vulgar expressions, suggestive language, the telling of shady or borderline stories in any form, is unprofessional and unacceptable.

The minister shall treat all persons with respect that is free from prejudice toward gender, race, nationality, age, physical, emotional or mental condition, sexual orientation, or economic circumstances, and in recognition that all people are equal and are part of God's family.

PERSONAL FINANCE

The minister will recognize the importance of being a faithful steward with personal finances.

The minister will pay a faithful tithe and give offerings to the church in compliance with scriptural counsel and as a model of stewardship. Faithfulness in tithes and offerings is a condition of employment in this Conference.

The minister will not solicit gifts or loans from those under his/her care.

The minister will not use the ministry to promote personal economic gain.

The minister will not allow sideline affiliations, businesses or other activities to diminish his/her influence or efficiency in the work that he/she is employed to do. Scripture counsels that no one can serve two masters.

The minister will manage family finances so as to live within his/her income. Financial obligations will be fulfilled consistently in a timely manner.

The minister who is unable or unwilling to live within his/her income will be advised to resign and to take up another line of work/business other than denominational employment.

The minister will not consider bankruptcy without first consulting with Conference Administration.

CORPORATE FINANCE

The minister will be honest and judicious in the use and protection of church funds. He/she will be held accountable if church funds are misused or directed to improper or personal use. Embezzlement is a crime and will be reported to the proper authorities.

LEAVING A PARISH

The minister will perform professional services in a former parish only in consultation with, or by invitation of the incumbent pastor. Intentionally maintaining contacts or entertaining communications with members in the former parish often has a negative impact on the current pastor's ministry. This is inappropriate professional practice. Some exceptions could include: the pastor's children's friendships with peers in the former parish or affiliation with relatives or immediate family members who remain in the former church community.

When a pastor retires from active service but continues to reside in the same parish community, it may be better for the retiree to attend another area Adventist church. When another church is not within reasonable traveling distance, the retiree should maintain a discreet and low profile in the local church community, allowing his/her successor to become fully established as the spiritual leader of that parish.

MINISTERS AND CIVIL LAW

The minister will obey all civil laws, and will insist that any and all church entities do the same, except in situations when civil disobedience is required as a matter of conscience. Obedience to all civil laws includes, but is not limited to, employing and paying only persons legally eligible to be employed; paying all applicable state and federal taxes; complying with the requirements of copyrights, insurance and marriages; the accurate keeping of church records; and the careful observance of all municipal requirements and building codes.

SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

The minister will protect and nurture those who are vulnerable. A report of child abuse, whether from a child or adult, is not privileged communication and by law must be reported to the Child Protective Services. The moral and ethical demand to protect the vulnerable is appropriate even without the State's requirements.

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

A gospel minister's moral fall brings devastating consequences. The victim(s), the church community, the affected families all suffer. The devastation continues in ever-widening circles of pain long after the indiscretion has occurred.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment, as defined by the laws of the land, is not allowed. The minister who violates these principles forfeits the rights of ministry and is subject to termination.

Sexual Misconduct

Sexual misconduct includes any romantic involvement or sexual relationship with someone other than one's spouse, involvement with pornography, incest, molestation, child abuse, homosexual relationship, or any other sexual behavior that is incompatible with Christian ministry. Such indiscretions are determined not by the degree or amount, but by the fact of such action.

Sexual Child Abuse

Sexual contact in any form between a minister and a child is immoral and illegal. A minister who engages in, or is reasonably suspected of engaging in such activity will be immediately reported to the appropriate civil authorities, placed on Administrative Leave pending investigation, and may be subject to termination.

The policies and procedures that the Southern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists will follow when charges of Sexual Misconduct or Child Abuse have been brought against a minister will be found in the North American Division Working Policy, in the section titled "*Sexual Misconduct in Church Relationships Involving Denominational Employees or Approved Volunteers.*"

**Minister's Commitment to
Southern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Ministerial Code of Ethics**

I acknowledge receipt of and have read the Southern California Conference Ministerial Code of Ethics.

Affirmed on: Month _____ Date _____ Year _____

Signature _____

Print Name _____

[for office use only]

This form has been received at the Southern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Human Resources Office:

By _____ Position _____

Date _____