

# **ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR CONGREGATIONAL CONDUCT**

Adopted: October 14, 1988 by Regional Assembly

We, the members of this congregation, following much prayer and discussion of our attitudes and practices in the light of the life and teachings of Jesus, hereby resolve to follow the ethical principles delineated in the New Testament. The following Ethical Guidelines for Congregational Conduct, while not to be construed as a set of rules or law, will help us to make specific application of our New Testament faith to our practices as a congregation.

May God guide us and give us strength and determination as we endeavor to understand and to fulfill the resolves mentioned in these guidelines.

## **OUR RELATIONSHIP AS MEMBERS TO ONE ANOTHER**

- A. We will treat one another with courtesy and kindness. We will endeavor to maintain an attitude of Christian love in all our relationships.
- B. We will welcome the expression of differing viewpoints and will seek to create an atmosphere of trust and confidence that will encourage free discussion.
- C. We will seek to keep confidences and will refrain from gossip. We will seek in all we do and say to strengthen character and dignify personality.
- D. We will remember that our personal conduct gives evidence of our sincerity and reflects upon the good name of the Church, the Body of Christ.
- E. We will reaffirm this document at least triennially and review these guidelines whenever we are in the process of calling new pastoral leadership.
- F. We will work within the framework of the constitution and bylaws of this congregation. These guidelines will not supersede our own church's constitution and bylaws but may be helpful in their revision.
- G. We will establish and follow a policy on receiving and using special gifts, memorials, trusts, and endowed funds in such a way as to be consistent with Christian stewardship. Reception of the gift entails a consideration of its appropriateness. The policy should also give consideration to when an item outlasts its usefulness.

For Study Refer to:

Scripture

(General) Ephesians 4:1-6, 15-16; 5:1  
I Peter 2:9-10  
II Corinthians 5:17-19

- a. Philippians 1:9; 2:14; John 13:34-35; Romans 3:10
- b. I Corinthians 12:12-26; Matthew 5:23-25; Romans 12:3-8
- c. Galatians 5:13-15; James 4:11-12; Matthew 7:1-5; 18:15-17; Ephesians 4:31-32
- d. I Corinthians 10:31-11:1; Galatians 5:22-25; Philippians 1:27

Disciples Tradition

- a. The law of love is the supreme law of religion, morality, and expediency. No code of laws, without it, could make or keep any people ... peaceable, and happy ... We cannot love by law, but we can walk in love with no other law but that of love.  
Christian System, 1839, p.100

... Love has a transfiguring or transforming efficacy upon the human mind. To impress the image of God upon the human heart, it is necessary that the love of God should be exhibited to the human mind.

Campbell-Owen Debate, 1989, p.373

- b. "In essentials, Unity; in non-essentials, Liberty; in all things, Charity (love)."
- c. The character of the new man is an elevated character. Feeling himself a son and heir of God, he cultivates the temper, spirit, and behavior, which correspond with so exalted a relation ... The character which Jesus sustained amongst men, is the model of his daily imitation. His... aspiration is -

"Thy fair example I would trace, to teach me what I ought to be;  
Make me by thy transforming grace, Lord Jesus, more like thee!"

Millennial Harbinger, 1833, p. 357

**OUR RELATIONSHIP AS MEMBERS  
TO OUR CHURCH OFFICERS AND LEADERS**

- A. We will select our officers intentionally and impartially on the basis of their commitment, competence, compassion and maturity in the faith. We are committed to having men, women and youth serve in the various responsibilities of the congregation.

- B. We will endeavor to distribute our offices among many persons and be appreciative of the services of every member.
- C. We will provide them opportunities for training, skill development and faith formation. We will provide the resources needed for each to be an effective leader.
- D. We will nurture through encouragement and prayer our officers, committees, classes, auxiliary groups and the board of the congregation.
- E. We will expect our officers to manifest Christian principles in their conduct.
- F. We will offer constructive support and feedback to our officers and leaders.

For Study Refer to:

Scripture

(General) Matthew 23:1-12;  
 Mark 10:42-45; 9:35  
 I Peter 5:1-3; Colossians 3:12-17  
 I Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9

Disciples Tradition

(General)

By virtue of membership in the church, every Christian enters into the corporate ministry of God's people. Within the corporate ministry, each Christian fulfills her or his own calling as a servant of Christ sent into the world to minister. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) shall seek to provide all its members with opportunities to exercise this ministry. The Design for the Christian Church, paragraph 90.

The offices of the eldership and the diaconate are ordered by the congregations, through election and recognition with appropriate ceremony, for the performance of certain functions of ministry appropriate to the offices. (a) A person elected to the eldership is authorized to exercise within the congregation which elects him or her to ministerial functions which it assigns for periods of time which it specifies, such as: sharing in the ministration of the Lord's Supper and the conduct of worship, and sharing in the pastoral care and spiritual leadership of the congregation. The eldership is a voluntary ministry, each congregation having a plurality of elders. (b) A person elected to the diaconate is authorized to serve in the congregation which elects him or her for periods of time which it specifies by assisting in the ministration of baptism of the Lord's Supper, in the conduct of worship, and in the pastoral care and spiritual leadership of the congregation. The diaconate is also a voluntary ministry. The Design for the Christian Church, paragraph 97.

## **OUR RELATIONSHIP AS MEMBERS TO OUR MINISTER(S)**

- A. When seeking a minister, we will follow our denominational guidelines, work through the Regional Office, and will conduct all negotiations with integrity, courtesy and orderly procedure without unfair discrimination with regard to marital status, sex, age or race.
- B. We will keep informed on how ministers are compensated in our denomination through information supplied by the Pension Fund of the Christian Church and by the regional office, and will support our ministers with salary, housing, a pension plan, health insurance, necessary expense funds, vacation, and the time and financial means for continuing education consistent with the demands and resources of our congregation.
- C. We will provide our minister with necessary facilities and equipment for his or her work and will respect study hours. We will be considerate of the need for rest and relaxation and will sensitive to the need for time with family.
- D. We will respect the time and talents of members of the minister's family and will have no greater expectations of them than of other lay people.
- E. We will grant our minister responsible freedom of the pulpit and the right to present Christian convictions without fear.
- F. We will respect and cooperate with our minister's spiritual and intellectual leadership.
- G. We will call on our present minister for weddings, funerals and other special services. Our former ministers or others unconnected with the congregation may be invited to participate in such services only when appropriate and at the present minister's invitation.
- H. We will cooperate with our minister to best utilize our congregation's talents in fulfilling the mission of the church.
- I. We will keep our minister informed when pastoral services are needed.
- J. We will support our minister's reasonable participation in District, Regional, and/or General Activities of the denomination, as well as civic and ecumenical activities.
- K. We will encourage and assist our minister through constructive feedback, appropriate praise, constant prayer and faithful participation with him or her in ministry.
- L. Because the congregation is a priesthood of believers that minister to one another (pastor to the congregation and congregation to the pastor), our relationships in the church will be covenantal as well as contractual, and we will maintain and conclude all pastoral relationships in a spirit of Christian love.

- M. The church will be sensitive and will voluntarily find specific ways to go the second mile in ministry with love, compassion and trust in the event of personal and/or family crisis, illness of the minister or minister's family, a death in the family, psychological or emotional difficulties or other extenuating circumstances.
- N. We will have an active Pastoral Relations Committee or a corresponding body to continually monitor the relationship between our minister and the congregation, and we will call on the assistance of the regional staff before a conflict situation grows into a crisis.
- O. We will observe similar appropriate principles with all other professional staff of our congregation.

For Study Refer to:

Scripture

(General) Ephesians 4:11-14; Philippians 2:10-22  
 II Corinthians 6:3-10; 8:16-19; 8:22-24

B. I Corinthians 9:1-10; Galatians 6:6

M. Galatians 6:2; Romans 12:15; Matthew 18:21-25

Disciples Tradition

A. & N. Within policies developed by the General Assembly, regions certify the standing of ministers and provide help, counsel and pastoral care to ministers and congregations in such matters as: ordination, licensing, ministerial relocation, establishment and dissolution of pastoral relationships, and installation of ministers. Regions seek to supply a minister for congregations without full-time pastoral services and offer counsel and assistance in cases of difficulties between ministers and congregations. The Design for the Christian Church, paragraph 95.

**OUR RELATIONSHIP AS MEMBERS TO OUR COMMUNITY AND/OR COUNTRY**

- A. We accept our missional responsibility for the moral and spiritual development of our community. We agree to live in a manner consistent with our Christian convictions.
- B. Because our Christian convictions set the standard for our citizenship, our faith will lead us to be informed, to respect law, to vote our conscience and to influence government officials in working toward a just and morally responsible community.
- C. We will be attentive to the moral and ethical implications of every project we are asked to support.

- D. We will maintain a good credit standing in the community. We will expect our staff to do the same.
- E. We will respect the rights and privileges of persons living near the church and will endeavor not to inconvenience our neighbors nor to harm their property.
- F. We will establish no barriers that might prevent anyone from worshipping with us.
- G. We will work in a complementary way with community service agencies and organizations to most effectively serve and improve our community.

For Study Refer to:

Scripture

(General) Matthew 10:35-37; 25:31-46; 28:18-20  
 Philippians 1:29-30; I John 5:17-18  
 James 1:26-27; 2:14-17

Disciples Tradition

- A. ... It is ... as essential to our usefulness in this world as it is to our Christian integrity and purity, that truth and justice be supreme in all our transactions with men. Millennial Harbinger, 1838, pp. 386-389
- B. In our country and government, every man is responsible for his vote. When therefore there is a question or a crisis involving, as he judges, any good, or the prevention of any evil, it is his duty to God, who gives him a vote, and it is his duty to man, to use, or to give that vote, to that person, or to the measure, which will, in his judgment, insure the most good, or of two evils to prevent the greater, by voting for the less. Millennial Harbinger, 1857, p. 174

**OUR RELATIONSHIP AS MEMBERS TO THE  
 CHURCHES IN OUR COMMUNITY**

- A. We will seek to understand the beliefs and practices of others. While we may be constructively critical of their doctrine, we will refrain from unkind remarks about people who differ from us.
- B. We will encourage unity and harmony among the various communions of Christian peoples and will give evidence of our sincerity through participation at appropriate local, state, national and/or world levels.
- C. We will not be part of proselytizing members from other congregations in our community, nor will we exploit the problems or crises of other congregations. We will present the witness of our congregation in a manner not injurious to others.

- D. We will respect the privilege of borrowing from other congregations.
- E. We will consider sharing our facilities according to the necessities of the community and the purpose for which they are needed.

For Study Refer to:

Disciples Tradition

With all this evidence before us, we must plead for cooperation among all the citizens of Messiah's kingdom ... Millennial Harbinger, 1838, pp. 268-269

... a combination ... if churches is essential to accomplish some of the great objects of Christian humanity. Millennial Harbinger, 1850, pp. 500-501

Churches are all equal and independent in some respects, but not in all. They are also all equally subordinate to one another in the Lord. Millennial Harbinger, 1841\, pp. 46-47

**OUR RELATIONSHIP AS MEMBERS TO THE  
CIIRISITAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)**

- A. We will seek to know and to understand the various points of view within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and will respect the opinions of those whose interpretations differ from our own.
- B. We will recognize our covenantal relationship with the Disciples and will give generous and prayerful support to our programs at home and overseas.
- C. We will endeavor to know, claim and live our identity as set forth in the Preamble for the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and be knowledgeable about the actions of the District, Regional, and General Assemblies.
- D. Mission gifts received by our congregation will be used for their intended purpose(s). Budget commitments for world outreach causes are as binding as those secured for our local obligations.
- E. We will encourage our minister(s) and our members to serve beyond the local congregation in the Cluster, District, Regional and/or General manifestations of Disciple work.

For Study Refer to:

Disciples Tradition

As members of the Christian Church, we confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and proclaim him lord and Savior of the world. In Christ's name and by his grace we accept our mission of witness and service to all people. We rejoice in God, Maker of heaven and earth, and in the covenant of love which binds us to God and one another. Through baptism into Christ we enter into newness of life and are made one with the whole people of God. In the communion of the Holy Spirit we are joined together in discipleship and in obedience to Christ. At the table of the Lord we celebrate with thanksgiving the saving acts and presence of Christ. Within the universal church we receive the gift of ministry and the light of scripture. In the bonds of Christian faith we yield ourselves to God that we may serve the One whose kingdom has no end. Blessing, glory and honor be to God forever. Amen. The Design for the Christian Church, paragraph 1.

In order that the Christian church (Disciples of Christ) through free and voluntary relationships may faithfully express the ministry of Christ made known through scripture, may provide comprehensiveness in witness, mission and service, may furnish means by which congregations may fulfill their ministry with faithfulness in Christian stewardship, may assure both unity and diversity, and may advance responsible ecumenical relationships, as a response to God's covenant, we commit ourselves to one another in adopting this design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The Design for the Christian Church, paragraph 4.

**OUR RELATIONSHIP AS MEMBERS TO THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL**

- A. With the church universal we proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior of the world. In his name and by his grace we accept our mission of witness and service to all people.
- B. We are bound to God and one another through covenant, and through baptism we are made one with the whole people of God.
- C. We are called to express the unity God bestows by ecumenical study, dialogue, cooperation and expression.
- D. Because all Christians in the Church universal have the obligation to uphold the Christian life in the face of the evil forces of our day, we will cooperate with other church bodies in living the Christian witness.
- E. We will support acceptable agencies of Christian cooperation in local, national and/or global manifestations of the Church's life.
- F. So as to establish no barriers that might prevent any of Jesus' followers from communing with us, we will remember that He invites his believers to the Lord's Table in the spirit of Christian love and unity.

For Study Refer to:

Scripture

(General) Philippians 2:5-11

- B. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 26:26-28; I Corinthians 11:23-25; Hebrews 9:15a; I Corinthians 12:13, 27
- C. Acts 17:26a; Ephesians 4:3-7; John 17:20-21
- D. Ephesians 6:12-17

Disciples Tradition

Unity is our Polar Star. The Church is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one.

- B. ... the word church, in the singular number, is, by sacred and apostolic usage, often made to represent all the churches in a nation, an empire, or in the world. It is a term used as commensurate with the whole body of Christ, or the entire community of all the faithful on earth. Hence, there is but one kingdom of Christ, one body of Christ, or one church of Christ on earth. The word church, by reference to its occurrences in the New Testament, indicates the whole Christian community on earth. Millennial Harbinger, 1853, p.303
- C. Ever since the commencement of this kingdom, the governments of this world have either been directly opposed to it, or, at best, pretended friends; and therefore their influence has always been opposed to the true spirit and genius of the Christian institution. Christians have nothing to expect from them except liberty of conscience and protection from violence, while leading peaceable and quiet lives, in all godliness and honesty, till Jesus takes to himself his great power, and hurls all these potentates from their thrones and make his cause triumphant, - a consummation devoutly to be wished, and which cannot now be regarded as far distant. Christian System, 1839, pp. 170-171
- D. ... Committees of ways and means are required. Executive councils, financiers, and general agents, are indispensable to success. These duties ought not to be assumed - no one church, any more than any one individual, could or should assume such responsibilities. Does Christianity leave all these interests to ... mere chance, to individual wisdom, or to individual caprice! ... Why should "children of this world be more prudent in conducting their affairs than the children of light?" If, in the affairs of this world, there are legislative, judiciary, and executive departments necessary; ... why should it be thought ... improper for Christians to have their deliberative bodies, their conventions, for the sake of the concentration of their energies in the accomplishment of their duties to themselves and the world? Millennial Harbinger, 1850, pp. 500-501
- E. ... I am inconsistent with my own principles when "any evangelical sect or congregation" shall have welcomed me to their communion and I have refused it. Christian Baptist, 1826, pp. 237-238

Upon the loaf and upon the cup of the Lord, in letters which speak ... to the heart of every disciple, is inscribed, "When this you see, remember me," ... Each disciple, in handing the symbols to his fellow disciple, says, in effect, "You, my brother, once an alien, ... are now brought home to the family to God. You have owned my Lord as your Lord, my people as your people. Under Jesus the Messiah we are one."  
 "Blest be the tie that binds  
 Our hearts in Christian love;  
 The fellowship of kindred minds  
 Is like to that above."  
Christian System, 1839, pp. 329-331

These Ethical Guidelines for Congregational Conduct were adopted by the Regional Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Kansas, meeting October 13-15, 1988.

We, the members of

\_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Name of church) (Name of city)

on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_.

Desire to uphold the covenantal relationships we share with  
 one another,  
 our church officers and leaders, our minister(s),  
 our community and country, the churches in our community,  
 the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and  
 the Church universal  
 regarding these guidelines.

Signed on behalf of the Congregation by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Chair of the Board

Reaffirmed: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Date) (Board Chair)

Reaffirmed: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Date) (Board Chair)

Reaffirmed: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Date) (Board Chair)