

LANCASTER MENNONITE CONFERENCE

**CODE
of
MINISTERIAL
ETHICS
for
CREDENTIALLED PERSONS**

January 2000

Lancaster Mennonite Conference

CODE OF MINISTERIAL ETHICS

for Credentialed Persons

“We believe that ministry continues the work of Christ, who gives gifts through the Holy Spirit to all believers and empowers them for service in the church and in the world. We also believe that God calls particular persons in the church to specific leadership ministries and offices. All who minister are accountable to God and to the community of faith as they serve the church.” (Article 15, *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, 1995.*)

The call to ministry is respected and taken seriously by the Lancaster Mennonite Conference. While the priesthood of all believers, is affirmed, it is also recognized that God gifts and chooses certain persons to serve, in the church, as ministerial leaders. The Conference believes that God’s call to ministry presupposes that:

- * Christ gives gifts to His church to continue His ministry -- among these gifts are persons or leaders (*Ephesians 4:7-13*).
- * God calls leaders to equip His people for ministry and service (*Ephesians 4:11-13*).
- * God calls to the ministry with both an inner and outer call (*Acts 13:1-4*).
- * Leaders are to have a servant attitude (*Matthew 20:25-28*).
- * The church sets some of their leaders apart through ordination (*I Timothy 4:14*).

The New Testament identifies qualifications which ministers should possess (*I Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:6-9*). They include: personal spiritual maturity, moral integrity, and the ability to relate in a healthy way to other people. Following the example of Christ, ministers are to be servants of all. Biblical qualifications for leaders focus upon character and personality factors which affect the person’s ability to get along with people. This ethics statement is an attempt to address this concern. Ethical standards are guidelines or principles for conduct necessary to maintain helpful, responsible relationships within the church. The spiritual health and welfare of the church are primary concerns.

This code of ethics is applicable to all ministers in Lancaster Mennonite Conference, whether ordained or licensed.

MINISTERS AND THEIR CONDUCT

Integrity. Ministers are committed to integrity of character. This implies honesty in the presentation of one's self, abilities, accomplishments, views, faith and discipleship. Integrity springs from submission to God's discipline, providential care, and reliance on His enabling grace.

Disclosure. Persons seeking ministerial assignments or credentialing will give honest, and full disclosure of all pertinent information that could impact upon their ministry and the congregation/institution they intend to serve.

Discipleship. A commitment to following Christ daily and totally in life is God's will for all Christians. The minister's life will give evidence of conformity to Christ and separation from evil.

Spiritual Disciplines. The regular practice of spiritual disciplines such as prayer, study of scripture, reflection on God, corporate worship, witness, and service open us to a growing relationship with God and teach us to trust Him with our lives.

Family Relationships. Ministers, whether single or married will have a strong commitment to marital fidelity and sexual purity. Those married are to model healthy husband and wife relationships, and demonstrate their faith in relationships with spouse and children. Family responsibilities have precedence over ministerial responsibilities and other demands.

Social Relationships. Ministers understand that loving and open relationships are foundational to effective ministry. Ministers seek to build healthy relationships with the congregation as a body. They also seek to build healthy person-to-person relationships within the congregation. Awareness and observance of boundaries in the area of sexual morality are imperative. Any sexual exploitation of a congregational member, counselee, or a co-worker is a betrayal of faith, of trust and an abuse of power, and is subject to discipline. *(For further help in this area refer to the current edition of "Guidelines for Discipline Regarding Ministerial Credentials." Appendix A.)*

Ministers represent their congregations in the community, all activities will be in harmony with the testimony and theology of the church. Serving non-members will be considered community service, and will be guided by personal and congregational priorities and time constraints.

MINISTERS AND THEIR CONGREGATIONS

Commitments. Ministers must be committed to biblical truth as understood in the Anabaptist theological stream. They affirm the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (or the older *Mennonite Confession of Faith* used in their congregation).

Contractual Agreements. Ministers treat contractual agreements with care and will work earnestly to fulfill agreed upon expectations. Expectations and job descriptions are mutually agreed upon by the minister and the congregation or agency at the beginning of ministry.

Professionalism.

- a. **Credentials:** Ordination and licensing are sacred trusts. One's call to ministry is considered a stewardship to the Lord.
- b. **Leadership:** Ministerial leadership is expressed in the care for individual members and for the members altogether as the body of Christ. A servant leadership style facilitates and gives direction. A definite agenda for the mission of the congregation along with leadership skills are necessary to lead the congregation in achieving its goals. Ministers, as they lead, seek to be an example in speech, in behavior, in love, in faith and in sincerity. At home and in personal appearance the minister is neat and clean, careful not to offend the expectations of the congregation.
- c. **Confidentiality:** Ministers will guard all confidential and official information, will avoid taking sides in conflicts between individuals or factions, and will avoid becoming unduly involved in counseling situations.
- d. **Accountability:** Ministers are accountable to both the congregation and the conference for the manner in which ministry is performed and for their Christian faith and life. They respect and cooperate with the designated leadership group/structure within the congregation. There is honest and open dialogue between congregational leaders and the ministers to sustain and improve a proper relationship.

MINISTERS AND THEIR CONFERENCE

Faith and Order. Ministers will have respect for the faith and order of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference and its historic witness. This implies a willingness to work with Conference positions; support for Conference programs; attendance at Conference leadership assembly (for those within reasonable driving distance); recognition of the relationship of the congregation to both the Lancaster Mennonite Conference and the broader Mennonite Church.

Disagreements. Leaders who have reservations about affiliation with the Conference will resolve such issues before assuming a ministry assignment. If ministers find themselves in disagreement with the Conference, they will express that disagreement in an appropriate manner (truthfully, respectfully) and through the appropriate channels (bishop, conference minister, moderator). An arbitrary effort to lead a congregation to withdraw from Conference is a breach of trust and is unethical.

Accountability. Credentials for ministry (ordination, licensing) come from the Conference. The Conference also provides resourcing and training for leaders. Credentialed leaders will work in full cooperation with their district bishop/overseer. Ministers will relate not only to their bishop/overseer, but also to the ministers in their respective bishop district. Ministers serve as peers and colleagues to one another. Participation in district meetings and activities is expected.

In the event of a major breach of ethics (moral failure or neglect of duties) the district bishop and Conference minister shall become involved. They may request the assistance of other persons depending on the nature of the situation. Matthew 18 serves as a foundational text for guidance. In addition, the steps and procedures as outlined in the current edition of “Guidelines for Discipline Regarding Ministerial Credentials” will be followed. Note the section in this document which specifies complaints which warrant disciplinary action.