

# Ethics Policy for Church Leaders<sup>1</sup>

The First Presbyterian Church, Moorestown, NJ

***“It is true that anyone who desires to be a church official [leader] wants to be something worthwhile. That’s why officials [leaders] must have a good reputation and be faithful in marriage. They must be self-controlled, sensible, well-behaved, friendly to strangers, and able to teach. They must not be heavy drinkers or trouble-makers. Instead, they must be kind and gentle and not love money.... Those who serve well as officers will earn a good reputation and will be highly respected for their faith in Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 3:1-3, 13, CEV).***

Leadership in the church is a responsibility and not a right. In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) it is extended to those who come under the authority of the church’s teaching as set forth in the Bible and *The Book of Confessions*. It has always been a demanding calling. Today, the gap between Christian and societal/cultural values makes this calling particularly challenging. As we serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in leadership, we model what we really believe about our faith. Both our beliefs and our actions are critical to the way we serve Christ and demonstrate Church leadership.

The lack of clear moral and ethical guidelines in our society leaves many confused; this confusion extends often to church life. In an effort to bring some clarity, we have distilled some Biblical principles for the training and development of those who serve the church as leaders. We want to be faithful to the ethical behavior outlined in scripture while avoiding hypocrisy or Pharisaic legalism. All of us have sinned, with failings both public and private. At the same time, we repent of those sins in dependence upon God’s grace, believing that our leadership must demonstrate our beliefs, and that we should be able to say with the apostle Paul, ***“follow me, as I follow Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:1).***

There are three principal passages in the New Testament that explicitly discuss the guidelines for Christian church leaders. They are 1Timothy 3:1-13<sup>i</sup>; Titus 1:5-9<sup>ii</sup>; and 1 Peter 5:1-4<sup>iii</sup>. Christian life standards are described well in 2 Corinthians 6:3-10<sup>iv</sup> and Ephesians 5:1-5<sup>v</sup>, and instruction on Christian service is found at Philippians 2:1-4<sup>vi</sup>. The Church Leader should continually seek the Lord’s help in achieving the standards set forth in these passages. We have drawn from them the following guidelines. We encourage you to consider them, praying that God will honor your desire to model Christian beliefs and lifestyle.

All who seek to lead in the Christian community will strive with the help and power of the Holy Spirit to exemplify the following Ethics Policy for Church Leaders:

## Personal:

- **Integrity:** The Church Leader shall be committed to the highest ethical standards in both personal and professional conduct.
- **Speech:** Church Leaders speak the truth in love and are not quarrelsome. Their speech should reflect their commitment to Christ.
- **Self-Control:** The Church Leader exercises self-control in speech and action.
- **Sexual Behavior:** The Church Leader is committed to living in fidelity in the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, and chastity in singleness.
- **Distinctive Lifestyle:** The Church Leader will demonstrate in lifestyle what is desirable in all believers, the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

## Spiritual:

- **Personal Faith:** The Church Leader demonstrates a mature, vibrant and Christ-centered faith. That faith includes a personal grasp of basic Christian beliefs; an active on-going relationship with God in Jesus Christ, rooted in prayer, obedience to Scripture; and a commitment to growth in love, holiness, service and fellowship. Church Leaders should not be recent converts.
- **Lordship of Christ:** The Church Leader is one who is committed to Jesus Christ and his Lordship in all areas of life.
- **Servants:** Church Leaders are to be the servants of others both inside and outside of the church community, and helpers of those in need.
- **Spiritual Formation:** Church Leaders make spiritual growth a continuing priority, reflected in Bible study, prayer, fellowship with other Christians, worship and involvement in Christian community.
- **Confession:** Church Leaders are able to confess and repent of their sins. They lead the church in demonstrating humility and the need for God's grace and redemption.
- **True to the Word of God:** Those who lead are called upon often to teach in the Christian community. They must teach with doctrine faithful to the Scriptures and the guidance of *The Book of Confessions*. They come under the authority of the Bible in their own lives.
- **Commitment to the Local Church:** Church Leaders at First Presbyterian Church ordinarily are to be members of a PC/USA congregation or presbytery, regular in attendance of worship and faithful to the extra commitments their positions require.
- **Stewardship:** Church Leaders are to have a growing commitment to tithing and disciplined giving, proportional to resources. They are to be generous in giving of their time, talents and financial resources.

## Leadership:

- \* **Balance:** The Church Leader makes an ongoing effort to balance quality relationships among family, occupation, and church responsibilities.
- \* **Concern for Others:** Church Leaders demonstrate a heart for the poor and the marginalized, and for seeing people come to know Jesus Christ and develop their Christian walk; they cultivate an ability to share their faith in word and deed.
- \* **Commitment to Training and Equipping Leaders:** The Church Leader is committed to training and equipping others in ministry, encouraging them, and giving them opportunities to use their gifts.

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**Church Leaders** include Teaching Elders (Ministers of the Word and Sacrament), Ruling Elders, Deacons, Trustees and Church Ministerial Staff (Director of Music, Director of Children's Ministries, Youth Director, Associate Director of Music and Arts, Director of PreSchool and other positions as designated by the Session).

First Presbyterian Church of Moorestown, New Jersey  
(adapted from a similar document from First Presbyterian Church, Fort Collins, CO)

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### <sup>i</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1-13 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup>Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, <sup>3</sup>not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup>He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way— <sup>5</sup>for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church? <sup>6</sup>He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. <sup>7</sup>Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.

<sup>8</sup>Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; <sup>9</sup>they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup>And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons. <sup>11</sup>Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. <sup>12</sup>Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well; <sup>13</sup>for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

### <sup>ii</sup> Titus 1:5-9 (NRSV)

<sup>5</sup>I left you behind in Crete for this reason, that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you: <sup>6</sup>someone who is blameless, married only once, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious. <sup>7</sup>For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; <sup>8</sup>but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. <sup>9</sup>He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.

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iii 1 Peter 1:1-4 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you <sup>2</sup>to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly. <sup>3</sup>Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup>And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away.

iv 2 Corinthians 6:3-10 (NRSV)

<sup>3</sup>We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, <sup>4</sup>but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, <sup>5</sup>beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger; <sup>6</sup>by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, <sup>7</sup>truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; <sup>8</sup>in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; <sup>9</sup>as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; <sup>10</sup>as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

v Ephesians 5:1-5 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, <sup>2</sup>and live in love, as Christ loved us\* and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

<sup>3</sup>But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints. <sup>4</sup>Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk; but instead, let there be thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup>Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

vi Philippians 2:1-4 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, <sup>2</sup>make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.