



# Professional code and rules of conduct

For ministers and ecclesial workers (as proposed to  
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# 1 Introduction

The rules of conduct for a minister and/or an ecclesial worker aim at assisting them in their ministry. The rules in this document are phrased in the language of a minister serving a congregation and of an ecclesial worker serving in a pastoral ministry. Not every rule can be applied literally to ministers and ecclesial workers serving in ministries different from these. Authorities mentioned in these rules (the church council e.g.) may have to be replaced by different bodies, according to the difference in the areas of work.

The rules of conduct arise out of the church order's defining of ministers and ecclesial workers and out of the pledges made at the confirmation in office or ministry. The church order is the basis for the professional code. This professional code is a focused description of the work of a minister or of an ecclesial worker identifying essentials of the ministry and the required attitude connected with the ministry.

In the second chapter the code is portrayed. In the third chapter the rules of conduct are identified.

## **2 The professional code**

### **2.1 Ministers**

A minister pledges to exercise his/her office in a dignified and faithful manner. Therefore something first has to be said about the ministry of the minister. Ministers are pastors and teachers. According to the church order the tasks entrusted to them in particular are:

- The administration of Word and sacraments
- The proclamation of the Word in the world
- Pastoral care and supervision
- Instruction and lay training
- Serving of the entire denomination.

#### **2.1.1 Leadership**

The church entrusts these responsibilities to the minister. However it is God Himself who calls to ministry. This calling provides freedom: a minister isn't an official of the church. This freedom however is determined by the Word of God. The obedience to God and the accepting of the Holy Scripture as source of the proclamation and the only rule for the Christian faith grant freedom and frankness. On the basis of this calling the minister is obliged to provide leadership by focusing the congregation on salvation and to keep it to its call in the world. The minister for that matter provides this leadership together with the elders and deacons.

#### **2.1.2 Serving**

In the confirmation in the ministry the minister is reminded of the congregation being Christ's own flock that is entrusted to the ministry. The ministry is characterized by serving. This service can only be carried out in love to the congregation and in the awareness that the congregation isn't the property of the minister, but belongs to the Lord. The minister therefore will respect the spiritual and physical integrity of those who are entrusted to the ministry. Serving a congregation can be specified as looking after and promoting what is beneficial to the congregation, and as equipping the congregation for good words and the right acts. Providing space for the talents and gifts of the congregation is essential for this. Another aspect is that the minister should not lord over the consciences of those entrusted to the care of the ministry.

#### **2.1.3 Trustworthiness**

The pledge belonging to the confirmation in the ministry speaks about love for the congregation and for all those the Lord enables us to meet. This implies in any case the strictest privacy of what should be kept confidential. Trustworthiness however regards the entire range of ministry and the serving of the congregation in a dignified and faithful manner. This trustworthiness also pertains to the willingness to be accountable of the work in the ministry, and to answer for the agreements that the minister has entered into, concerning this accountability.

#### **2.1.4 Personal education**

The minister has the responsibility to nourish him/herself with the Word of God and to be persevering in prayer. After the initial academic education the minister is expected to practice the theological science by participating in the permanent education. This education implies knowledge of

developments in church and in society, and of the experiences of congregation members in particular.

### **2.1.5 In connection with others**

A minister cooperates with other office-bearers; the ministry is being carried out with others who also have been called to provide leadership. The entire church council provides leadership to the congregation and the work of the minister fits into this framework. This means that the minister complies with decisions that have been made jointly. Objections to these decisions can only be submitted in the ecclesial procedural way.

In addition to member of the church council the minister is a colleague as well. This requires collegial behavior within and without the framework of direct cooperation with colleagues.

Finally the minister serves in the context of the entire denomination. He or she promises to fulfill the tasks according to the church order, recognizing the responsibilities of the ecclesial assemblies and bodies. Next to commitment to a congregation, the minister has to serve the entire denomination. This requires willingness to devote time to denominational responsibilities. This of course requires loyalty toward and cooperation with others who have been called to this task.

## **2.2 Ecclesial workers**

Ecclesial workers, next to ministers, have a fully-fledged place in our church. They serve a local congregation as elders or deacons. They work in particular in the areas of:

- Pastorate
- Diaconate
- Youth and young people
- Missionary work
- Building and educating the congregation

Some ecclesial workers have been granted an authorization to preach; some even have been entrusted with the authorization to administer the sacraments.

Ecclesial workers, in analogy with the ministers carry many responsibilities:

- Providing co-leadership to the congregation
- Serving the congregation
- Being trustworthy and respecting the confidentiality
- Carrying out their responsibilities in alliance with the church council and with their colleagues and working in the context of the entire denomination.

Therefore the professional code and the rules of conduct (with some exceptions) apply to the ecclesial workers as well. There is one professional code and one set of rules of conduct for ministers and ecclesial workers being together the professional people working in the church.

## 3 The rules of conduct

### 3.1 Purpose

Not all behavior can be caught into rules. This isn't necessary. The leading principle is the church's understanding of ministry and the pledge made by the minister or by the ecclesial worker. These don't need to be expressed in rules. Rules indicate realizations of what has been identified as ministry in the previous chapter. They may provide direction and may assist in testing out behavior and decisions that have to be made in complicated situations. Rules indicate borders and therefore provide space and opportunities for exercising ministry in a responsible manner.

### 3.2 Structuring the rules

The different aspects of the work of the minister or ecclesial worker indicate the structuring principle for the rules.

- Section A deals with the trustworthiness
- Section B calls the attention to the minister or the ecclesial worker as a trusted confidant
- Section C is about the minister or the ecclesial worker as a colleague
- Section D deals with the relationship with the church council and with the denomination.

#### 3.2.1 The minister/the ecclesial worker as a trustworthy person and as a pastor

The minister/ecclesial worker

- A 1 provides pastoral care to those who have been entrusted to his/her ministry, according to the policy that has been set and that has been made public knowledge. As far as possible he/she provides pastoral care in emergency situations, and wherever other people appeal for care, as far as they haven't been entrusted to the pastoral care of other ministers/ecclesial workers.
- A 2 is aware of the limitations of pastoral care and abstains from acts and words that exceed his/her commission. In consultation with the conversation partner he/she mediates in finding appropriate care.
- A 3 is aware of the possibilities other people working in social or health settings have in providing appropriate care exceeding the competence of the minister or the ecclesial worker.
- A 4 is communicating openly at the outset of and during the contacts what can be expected in care and effort. He/she is open with regard to choices and objectives. He/she is accountable in this.
- A 5 bears together with the church council the responsibility for a colleague being available during his/her absence, including the handing over of contacts with consideration for the required confidentiality.
- A 6 remains independent in exercising his/her ministry, paying heed to conflicts of interest whenever contacts by virtue of ministry and different contacts come together.
- A 7 respects the personal, both physical and spiritual, integrity of the discussion partner, being aware of the weight the position of a trusted confidant carries, and of the danger of other persons becoming dependent on him/her.
- A 8 is aware of the character and the confidentiality of a pastoral relationship; is responsible and accountable in indicating and guarding the limits of a pastoral relationship.
- A 9 does not enter in the privacy of the discussion partner any further than required by the framework of a pastoral relationship.
- A 10 does not in a contact by virtue of ministry make any advances in the form of sexual acts, sexual innuendos or invitations to a sexual contact, and abstains from any conduct that

- could be interpreted as such; does not engage in advances coming from the discussion partner.
- A 11 in consultation with the discussion partner transfers the pastoral relationship to a colleague, whenever by existing relationships pastoral care cannot be given properly.
- A 12 keeps in entering or maintaining relationships not by virtue of the ministry in mind that he/she should remain independent of those who have been entrusted to his/her pastoral care. He/she makes sure that any possible dependence based on contacts by virtue of ministry cannot be abused.
- A 13 makes sure that when entering a personal relationship after a pastoral relationship, the pastoral relationship doesn't have disproportional meaning; establishes if required that when entering a personal relationship all due caution has been exercised by him/her; advises board of the church council of entering a relationship like this.
- A 14 safeguards his/her independence from congregation members, by not negotiating loans or accepting inheritances or bequests from them, and by not accepting gifts from congregation members in any form at a value exceeding € 50.
- A 15 consults, when being uncertain or in doubt about the proper behavior, a colleague, a trusted confidant or an expert, in compliance with the confidentiality required.
- A 16 enlists the aid of others when he/she is about to commit acts – or has committed acts – that, when becoming public knowledge, would affect the credibility of the ministry or would be incompatible with the ministry.
- A 17 advises the board of the church council of acts transgressing the limits of ministerial conduct, and submits him/herself to the judgment of the proper ecclesial authorities.

### **3.2.2 The minister/ecclesial worker as a trusted confidant**

The minister/ecclesial worker

- B 1 confers about pastoral care only with people sharing the responsibility for this care including the aspects of confidentiality; shares confidential matters only after making sure that the person concerned does not object to this.
- B 2 confers with people not sharing the responsibility for pastoral care only when this is necessary in the framework of pastoral care, and only with consent of the person concerned.
- B 3 in asking for advice and supervision or in giving examples in sermons or in writing only uses data from pastoral contacts when anonymity is warranted.
- B 4 begs to be exempted when being interviewed by judicial authorities or court with regard to matters he/she is informed of confidentially.
- B 5 considers him/herself to be relieved from the obligation of confidentiality when the following conditions have been met, i.e. that he/she:
- has done everything to obtain consent from the person concerned, or is convinced
    - that obtaining consent is harmful to the person concerned or to third parties
    - that there is no other way to achieving a solution unless confidentiality is breached
    - that maintaining confidentiality is seriously and demonstrably harmful and dangerous to the person concerned or to third parties
    - that breaching confidentiality is limiting the harm to the person concerned or to third parties
  - breaches confidentiality only inasmuch necessary to ward off danger or to prevent harm
  - becomes involved in a moral dilemma by maintaining confidentiality.
- B 6 will only with consent of the person concerned provide recognizable data enabling congregation members to sympathize, and will not publish those data on the internet.
- B 7 takes care that personal data and notes are not accessible to others (including family members).
- B 8 asks for advice anonymously when he/she knows of or has a suspicion of child molesting, sexual abuse of minors or domestic violence. When this concerns a minor, he/she will in

considering whether confidentiality should be breached take into account that abuse and molesting of minors must be prevented and stopped.

### **3.2.3 The minister/ecclesial worker as a colleague**

The minister/ecclesial worker

- C 1 behaves professionally and respectfully in public when passing judgment on colleagues, even when differences of opinion have occurred.
- C 2 refers those criticizing a colleague to that colleague or to those who are authorized to pass judgment, and exercises restraint.
- C 3 addresses a colleague whenever serious questions arise about the conduct or the exercising of the ministry by this colleague and urges for a broader consultation when necessary.
- C 4 notifies the proper ecclesiastical authorities when misgivings about conduct of a colleague occur, requiring ecclesiastical discipline.
- C 5 whenever notified confidentially of (misgivings about) conduct requiring ecclesiastical discipline and breaching confidentiality therefore announces that this conduct should stop or should be prevented and may not be covered up. When sexual abuse occurs he/she will follow the official protocol regarding this abuse.
- C 6 does not comply with a request for pastoral care when the congregation members concerned are entrusted to the pastoral care of a colleague and refers to this colleague or to the church council.
- C 7 when leaving ministry in a congregation observes distance in order to provide space for his/her successor.
- C 8 participates in arrangements supplying the vacancies.

### **3.2.4 The minister/ecclesial worker at the denominational levels**

- D 1 The minister sets in consultation with the church council the priorities for ministry, and discusses in the church council the progress in the ministry, observing the requirements of confidentiality.
- D 2 The ecclesial worker consults with the church council about the priorities to be set by the council, and gives account to the church council about the work being done, observing the requirements of confidentiality.

The minister/ecclesial worker

- D 3 takes care of gearing all activities to the work of other people.
- D 4 takes care that the workload corresponds with the available time and indicates the limits of his/her possibilities.
- D 5 contributes to enabling church council members and others to whom the council has entrusted responsibilities to make informed decisions about matters pertaining to their tasks.
- D 6 takes care that tensions between him/her and (a part of) the church council can be discussed, and asks the ecclesial visitors for help when tensions drag on.
- D 7 consults with the church council in time for arranging to supply vacancies during leave of absence, e.g. for permanent education.
- D 8 behaves him/herself respectfully and professionally in public debate when dealing with the church and with the ecclesial assemblies, even when differences of opinion occur.