

# Ministerial Code of Ethics

## Southern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Pastors are leaders, and with leadership comes the responsibility of setting a positive example. Pastors exercising poor judgment can negatively affect people and reflect poorly on their churches and the organization. To help reduce these risks, pastors can benefit from guidance through a professional code of pastoral ethics.

For pastors, ethics are principles that govern their behavior in a professional environment. Like values, professional ethics provide a framework for how a person should act toward others and institutions. Thus, the Southern California Conference code of ethics is grounded in its values: *Integrity with Transparency, Engagement, Stewardship, Unity in Diversity, Relationships and Team and in addition, Accountability.*

This code of ethics establishes a set of agreed behaviors 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, this ethical framework is intended to hold all

members of this profession to a standard to strengthen the bonds of trust that should exist between the professional ministers and those whom they serve.

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 offered ultimately 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, not only to the local church board. So, it is 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.

*“Giving no reason for taking offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited.”* 2 Corinthians 6:3 (NASB)  
*“Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ...”* Philippians 1:27 (NKJV)

Those invited into ministry in Southern California Conference are called to *“exalt Christ by serving our diverse communities through networked and creatively engaged churches and schools.”*

Therefore, a minister will:

### Practice Integrity with Transparency:

*“My God, since I know that you put the heart to the test and delight in uprightness, I, in the integrity of my heart, have willingly offered all these things...”* 2 Chronicles 29:17 (NASB)

- **... in leadership.**  
Act with respect, consideration, and honesty towards all people, modeling the trustworthiness of God in your spiritual leadership to encourage and develop credibility in others. Keep promises. Seek justice where there is oppression and truth where there is deceit. Serve and live with respect, compassion, consideration, and fairness. Demonstrate a commitment to the health of the entire congregation.
- **... in character.**  
Recognize God's transforming power in your life in the pursuit of wholeness in character. Be honest and trustworthy, not exaggerating or overpromising; peace-loving, not contentious; patient, not hot-tempered; conscientious, not apathetic. Seek counsel and guard against the appearance of evil. *“Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace.”* 2 Corinthians 1:12 (NIV)

- **... in theology.**  
Regularly and carefully study the Bible to understand its message and embrace the biblical doctrine. In forming theology, consider biblical authority over all other sources. Rightly represent and uphold the Seventh-day Adventist Church's principles, practices, and theological teachings. *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* 2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV)
- **... in preaching and teaching.**  
Communicate truth in love. Pursue clarity in presenting the word of God. Apply it discerningly. Give due credit when using the ideas of others. Be transparent when indebted to others. *"In your teaching, show integrity, seriousness, and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned."* Titus 2:7-8 (NIV)
- **... in personal care.**  
Exhibit respect for the dignity and worth of self. Self-care for your person's spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical dimensions is ultimately your responsibility. *"...your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit."* 1 Corinthians 6:19 (NIV)
- **... in use of authority.**  
Recognize the power of the minister's position as an authority figure by maintaining boundaries in relationships with staff and parishioners. Use authority and influence prudently and humbly. *"Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your servant."* Matthew 20:26-27 (NLT)

## Pursue Engagement:

*"It is our first duty to be faithful to the one we work...."* 1 Corinthians 4:2 (CEV)

- **... in mission.**  
Be fully engaged in accomplishing the church's mission given by Jesus to make disciples. Pastors have been called to care for the needs of those in their care and empower each one of them to share the compassion, love, and grace of Jesus so many others will be drawn to become followers of Christ. Failure to engage in this calling is a breach of ministerial ethics. *"Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."* Matthew 28:19 (NIV)
- **... in service.**  
Respond appropriately and sensitively to ministry requests and needs. A minister will assume an attitude that Christ himself modeled—as a servant of all. *"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much."* Luke 16:10 (ESV)
- **... in the community.**  
Edify the kingdom of God in cooperation, not competition, with other churches and other local ministries. Be externally focused in ministry, providing Christian ministry to the public as much as possible. Build partnerships to serve the community's needs. Encourage good citizenship. *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."* Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)
- **... in learning.**  
Pursue lifelong learning and growing in professional competencies. It is incumbent on the minister to pursue excellence in their leadership profession. Lifelong learning is how *a pastor can be continually effective even in an ever-changing culture.* Lifelong learning is the umbrella term incorporating items such as mandated reporter training, boundary training, anti-racism awareness, social justice orientation, sexual harassment training, and Continuing Education. *"Let the wise also hear and gain in learning, and the discerning acquire skill."* Proverbs 1:5 (NIV)

## Embrace Stewardship:

*"Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young but be an example for other believers in your speech, in behavior, love, faithfulness, and purity."* 1 Timothy 4:12 (ISV)

- **... with resources.**  
Be honest and prudent regarding personal and ministry means. Turn down benefits that could undermine influence in ministry. Secure that all given gifts are used for their designated purpose. *"If you have not been faithful with riches of this world, who will trust you with true riches?"* Luke 16:11 (NLT)
- **... in creation.**  
The "dominion" given humankind over the earth is not a license to exploit and ruin, but a call to responsibility and stewardship. We're to honor our Creator in our care for our earthly home, the creatures we share it with, and the complex systems that sustain our lives.

- **...of humanity.**  
Environmental and human exploitation are manifestations of the same underlying systems and sins. We're called to work in the interest of the poor and marginalized. A minister must address social injustice, ignorance and poverty.
- **... with information.**  
Practice confidentiality as a sacred trust. Information shared in confidence, whether in a counseling situation, a personnel item, or other matters, is not to be shared with anyone. Inform in advance to the person when an acceptance is about to be made that might legally require the disclosure of information. Tell the truth or remain discreetly silent. A minister will not knowingly repeat rumors, gossip, or hearsay, which may cause harm. *"A gossip goes around revealing a secret, but a trustworthy person keeps confidence."* Proverbs 11:13 (CSB)
- **... in personal finance.**  
Recognize the importance of being a faithful steward. Return a faithful tithe and give offerings in compliance with scriptural counsel and as a model of stewardship. This is a condition of employment in the

Southern California Conference. A minister must not solicit gifts or loans for those under his/her care; use the ministry to promote personal economic gain; allow sideline affiliations, business, or other activities to diminish his/her influence or efficiency in the work of ministry. A minister will manage family finances to live within his/her income; fulfill financial obligations consistently on time.

- **... in language.**  
Avoid using questionable slang or vulgar expressions, suggestive language, and telling shady or borderline stories in any form. Such behavior is unprofessional and unacceptable. *"Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless."* James 1:26 (NIV)
- **... in spiritual formation.**  
Purposely seek the help of the Holy Spirit for guidance and spiritual growth. Maintain faithfully a heart devoted to the Lord. Be intentional and consistent in prayer and scriptural study. *"Take every thought captive to obey Christ"* 2 Corinthians 10:5 (ESV)

### Facilitate Unity in Diversity:

*"Brothers and sisters, do not show favoritism... if someone comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and a poor person dressed in filthy clothes also comes in, if you look with favor on the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Sit here in a good place," and yet you say to the poor person, "Stand over there," or "Sit here on the floor by my footstool," haven't you made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"* James 2:1-4 (CSB)

- **... with all people.**  
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. *"From one man God made every nation of the human race, that they should inhabit the whole earth"* Acts 17:26 (NIV)
- **... in pastoral care.**  
Do not withhold pastoral care based on race, gender, creed, ethnic origin, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation.
- **... in conflict.**  
Avoid aggression and defensiveness in conflict, bringing the Church through a biblical conflict resolution. Attempt to be proactive rather than reactive, foreseeing and diminishing a problem before it occurs rather than waiting until issues degrade into difficulties and crises. Seek to maintain an objective attitude toward the people and the circumstances before acting. A minister of integrity with a servant's heart may not insist on remaining as a leader in a congregation if it involves fighting with the people he has been called to shepherd. It may be better for all if he/she leaves rather than causing a Church split.

### Guard Relationships and Team:

*"Shepherd God's flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but willingly, as God would have you, not out of greed for money but eagerly; not lording it over those entrusted to you but being examples to the flock."* 1 Peter 5:2-3 (CSB)

- **... with family.**  
Respect the rights and dignity of each member of the family. Be responsible for providing care for the family. This includes but is not limited to, providing physical, spiritual, emotional, and financial support. 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.
- **... with staff.**  
Practice approved church and denomination protocols in staff selection processes. Schedule a regular staff team to build, affirm, train, evaluate, and

get feedback. Be truthful with staff regarding areas to celebrate as well as those needing improvement.

- **... with colleagues.**  
Seek to support all colleagues in ministry by building constructive relationships with them. I will personally and publicly support my colleagues who experience discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, age, marital status, national origin, physical impairment, or disability.
- **... with parishioners.**  
Ensure appropriate access to staff by parishioners. Take responsibility for congregational health. Refer others to those with required expertise when asked for help beyond personal competence.
- **... with prior congregations.**  
Do not recruit members from a previous church without consulting with their pastor. Abstain

### Model Accountability:

- **... in professional practice.**  
Find another minister/counselor who can offer specialized personal counseling and advice when needed. Cultivate an awareness of individual and others' needs and vulnerabilities. Avoid taking advantage of the weaknesses of others through exploitation or manipulation. Address the misconduct of another minister directly or through appropriate persons to whom that pastor may be accountable.
- **... in conflicts of interest**  
Avoid *conflicts of interest* by keeping separate 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 an outside business that may infringe 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.
- **... in corporate finances.**  
Promote acceptable accounting practices and ask for regular audits. Ensure that church funds are used for their intended ministry purposes. A minister will be

interfering in the ministry of a former congregation. (See SCC *Separation Ethics Guidelines*).

- **... with sexual conduct.**  
Expected sexual deportment includes no romantic involvement or sexual relationship with someone other than one's spouse, involvement with pornography, incest, molestation, child abuse, same-sex sexual relationship, or any other sexual behavior that is incompatible with Christian ministry. A moral fall brings devastating consequences. The victim(s), the church community, and the affected families will suffer. The devastation continues in ever-widening circles of pain long after the indiscretion has occurred. "*But among you, there must not be either immorality, impurity of any kind...*" Ephesians 5:3a (NET)

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.

- **... in ministry and denominational duties.**  
Ensure compliance with denominational standards and expectations and clarity in authority structures, decision-making procedures, and grievance processes. Be responsible for regular reporting as requested. Model accountability at the highest organizational levels.
- **... in civil law**  
Obey all civil laws and insist that 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 government requirements and building codes.
- **... in protecting the vulnerable**  
Protect and nurture those who are vulnerable. A minister is a mandated reporter. Reporting child abuse, whether from a child or adult, is not privileged communication and must be notified to Child Protective Services by law. The moral and ethical demand to protect the vulnerable is appropriate even without the State's requirement

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

I acknowledge receipt of and have read this 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 \_\_\_\_\_

