

# Ministerial Ethics Document (3.0)

## Sample Code of Ministerial Ethics for the Association of Grace Brethren Ministers (*Version 3.0 Proposed July 15, 2008*)

**Preamble:** The Association of Grace Brethren Ministers exists to strengthen its members in their personal walk with Jesus and their professional ministry to the church. As such, its members have a responsibility to encourage local church leaders to hold their ministerial leadership accountable for ethical behavior. The final standard for ethical behavior is the Bible. This document is an application of the Bible to situations that ministers are likely to encounter in today's ministry. It is a dynamic document, not that the biblical principle changes but that the issues encountered change. These statements are to be used as a guide for the ministers and those of the local church who oversee His ministry, as they hold one another accountable for ethical behavior.

### OUTLINE:

#### Section I. Spheres of Conduct.

- In my personal life.
- With my family.
- With my congregation.
- With my colleagues.
- In my community.
- In my Fellowship.
- Within the Kingdom of God.

#### Section II. Functions of Ministry.

- Leadership.
- Teaching.
- Counseling.

### CODE OF MINISTERIAL ETHICS:

#### Section I: Spheres of Conduct.

##### IN MY PERSONAL LIFE

I will seek to remind myself daily that...

- my eternal relationship with God as His beloved child is based solely upon His grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ and not upon my performance as His follower, and
- I should seek to enjoy His love for me in whatever circumstance I may find myself.

I will make it my aim to show my gratitude to God daily for His grace and forgiveness through trying to please Him by...

- following His leadership through the Word and the Spirit, and
- attempting to align my thoughts, actions, mindsets and attitudes with His will, as best as I can determine it.

I will endeavor to care for myself as a good steward of the gift of my life from God, paying attention to pursuing health in the spiritual, emotional, physical and relational dimensions of my life.

I will strive to practice spiritual disciplines that the Scriptures or God's people through the ages have affirmed position us to experience His presence and transformation, including such important practices as...

- daily interaction with Scripture,
- daily time in prayer,
- fasting, meditation, solitude and other disciplines as God leads me.

I will discipline myself to maintain sexual purity, whatever my marital state, guarding my thoughts by...

- being chaste in what I see and hear and in my affections, and
- being innocent and pure in my thoughts, intentions, speech and demeanor with others.

I will be an example as a Christian and as an elder of God's church, striving at all times to conduct myself in accord with the Scriptures' commands concerning godly, Christ-like conduct with a determined dependence upon the work of the Holy Spirit.

I will avoid materialism in my mindset and lifestyle by...

- practicing good stewardship with the finances and material goods entrusted to me, and...
- being a positive example to the flock of the grace of Christian giving and the obligations of charity and generosity.

## **WITH MY FAMILY**

I will, if I am married, strive to make the health of my marriage my top priority in earthly relationships by...

- selflessly seeking the spiritual growth, personal enrichment and marital happiness of my partner
- proactively communicating and showing respect, love and trust in God in all our interactions
- never allowing the pattern of my ministry to damage our relationship.

I will, if I have children, do my utmost to...

- provide an atmosphere of nurture and discipline for them,
- always show grace and dependence upon God while upholding His commands and precepts
- manifest the character of God's parenthood by consistently praying for them and enthusiastically participating in their lives and interests
- never allow the pattern of my ministry to damage our relationship.

I will honor my responsibilities to my extended family by...

- never allowing the expression of my faith or the conduct of my ministry to keep me from providing for their needs, spiritual, emotional and material, and...

- if I have a family of my own, keeping my own marriage and children as my highest familial responsibility, leaving and cleaving while still caring and connecting.

I will endeavor to base all my family interactions upon the Word of God and make the reading, learning and discussion of the Scriptures an important part of our regular routines and disciplines.

I will always strive to be an example of Christ-like behavior to any and all family members I may have...

- striving at all times to conduct myself in accord with the Scriptures' commands concerning godly conduct
- with a determined dependence upon the work of the Holy Spirit.

## **WITH MY CONGREGATION**

I will be an example to my congregation by...

- viewing myself as an undershepherd of Christ's flock,
- caring for them with complete cognizance that He is fully aware of all my attitudes and actions
- showing them His grace, wisdom, compassion, righteousness, fairness and love through me.

I will endeavor to ensure that the truths of the Word of God and the leadership of the Holy Spirit will direct all my interaction and ministry to and with my congregation and its individual members.

I will attempt to give my flock my best energies and efforts, not as a reluctant employee, but as Christ's steward of my calling, carefully stewarding my time, energy and passion in the conduct of my ministry.

I will frequently remind myself of the spiritual nature of my calling,...

- being attentive to the vital priorities of prayer, study, fasting and other spiritual leadership disciplines
- avoiding the pitfall of reducing my leadership to mere human wisdom through worldly management or leadership principles while still learning from them with discernment and biblical fidelity.

## **WITH MY COLLEAGUES**

I will refrain from speaking disparagingly against any predecessor, any successor, or any colleagues in ministry.

I will not perform services such as funerals, weddings, home visitations or other ministry activities in the area of responsibility of my colleagues in the Christian ministry except upon their request and/or consent.

I will seek to support all colleagues in ministry by

- building constructive relationships wherever I serve and
- not being willing to engage in negative conversation, or
- encouraging dissatisfaction by listening to any negative communication.

I will speak frankly and privately to a colleague who is engaging in practices that are clearly unbiblical with the endeavor to be of help. If needed, I will bring my concerns to the attention of the appropriate group, for their consideration of disciplinary action.

## **IN MY COMMUNITY**

I will accept responsibilities of service in my community only to the degree that they do not jeopardize my personal and family priorities or my ministry to my church.

I will support public morality through reasonable and responsible prophetic witness and through appropriate social expression.

I will guard myself in expressing public statements that are political in nature by addressing only the issue without involving personalities or political parties.

I will obey the laws of my government until that law requires my disobedience to the law of God.

## **IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF GRACE BRETHREN CHURCHES**

I will voluntarily place myself and ministry under the guidelines and accountability of the Association of Grace Brethren Ministers.

I will only accept a position in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches if I am in accord with the Statement of Faith.

I will not use my influence to alienate my congregation from the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. If my convictions change, become controversial or detrimental to the ministry of the Fellowship, I will resign my position in the local church.

I will not quickly begin another Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches ministry if it would interfere or cause problems with an existing Fellowship ministry. If there is doubt, I will seek counsel from a wide spectrum of fellow elders who can provide objective feedback, including those who might be affected.

## **WITHIN THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

Since I believe that whoever is not against Jesus Christ is for Him, in Kingdom ministry, I will seek to be a cooperative colleague in areas that will not violate my biblical convictions and jeopardize my standing with the congregation I serve.

I will respect those who attend other churches, even those with whom I have major theological disagreements.

I will not encourage a person under church discipline from another church to join our ministry. I will seek an adequate investigation and consultation with the home church with an understanding towards mutual agreement.

## **Section II: Functions of ministry.**

### **LEADERSHIP**

I will share leadership in full accountability to a team of leaders from the congregation in whatever polity the church chooses for itself

- embracing this accountability fully and proactively,
- offering respect to and accepting biblical challenge from my fellow leaders.

I will by no means take advantage of my flock for personal or financial gain, refusing significant gifts or favors from people within the congregation that are not filtered and approved by the church leadership.

I will not create an unhealthy dependence upon me and my leadership within my congregation, seeking always its long-term good and always looking out for its long-term health and success in any decision I influence or make.

I will not use the power of my position to cause intentional harm to someone in any form—spiritual, financial, emotional or social—seeking always to steward any authority given me with a Christ-like and gentle spirit of service and humility.

I will, upon transitioning to another ministry, vocation or retirement

- support my previous church through public and private verbal affirmation,
- avoid gossip and criticism, and
- only contact members of that former congregation with the full knowledge of my successor.

I will not harbor an “entitlement mentality” in which I believe that I deserve special privileges, or that others should overlook offensive behaviors, because I have “earned the right” to be shown special consideration.

In my personal and professional scheduling I will seek to be flexible in adjusting to unanticipated crisis or opportunities for ministry.

I will keep my promises and will return voice mails and emails when I promise to do so.

I will be honest and not lie or misrepresent the facts.

I will uphold the biblical principle of listening to two or three eyewitnesses before believing a report. Only then will I proceed with extreme caution before taking action.

When an individual is disciplined by another church and comes to the church of which I am pastor, I will see that appropriate informal investigation is carried out, when possible, to determine our involvement and will seek the spiritual good of all involved.

I will recognize my primary obligation to the church to which I have been called and will accept added responsibilities only if they do not interfere with the overall effectiveness of my ministry.

- If the governing board of the church I serve deems the additional responsibilities are interfering, I will resign from that additional responsibility.
- I will continue to inform the governing body of the church of my additional responsibilities.

## **TEACHING**

I will exhibit integrity and industry in the preparation and presentation of my preaching and teaching.

I will be diligent in correctly interpreting and presenting the truth of the Bible accurately and fully.

I will produce material from studies that I have completed and will not plagiarize, exaggerate the facts, or present others’ experiences as my own.

I will not use illustrative material that could reveal sensitive issues about individuals in the congregation, unless I have received their permission to do so.

I will not intentionally embarrass anyone from the pulpit.

I will not use the pulpit to deal with personal issues I might have with an individual or a family.

## **COUNSELING**

Since I am primarily a minister of the gospel, and not a professional counselor

- I will provide responsible pastoral care and spiritual direction to the members of my congregation and
- will lovingly refer people to professional Christian counseling as necessary.

I will set a reasonable and accountable limit on the maximum number of counseling sessions per week and the total number of five with an individual since I recognize that pastoral care and spiritual direction may benefit an individual, but could jeopardize the larger ministry to the church.

*Note:* This limitation will not apply to those individuals whom I seek to disciple or mentor as part of my equipping responsibilities.

I will refer counselees to competent counselors when it appears the needs are beyond my capabilities or training.

I will schedule appointments with a member of the opposite sex only with appropriate accountability and visual access.

I will guard all privileged and confidential communications I acquire during the conduct of my ministry, except in those situations where disclosure is necessary to prevent harm to the counselee or others, or when required by law.

I will secure any recorded material arising out of a counseling session in a locked file cabinet or a password-protected electronic file.