



# Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice

## 1 Introduction

Ethics are the bedrock of ministry. The need for integrity is magnified in the present culture of intense scrutiny of the behaviour of people with a public profile.

The purpose of this Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice is to encourage ethical reflection and behaviour by all pastors serving Christ within the Baptist Churches Western Australian (BCWA). The term “pastor” in this document applies to all persons in pastoral ministry across the movement.

Compliance with this Code of Ethics is mandatory for pastors, regardless of registration status with Baptist Churches Western Australia (BCWA). This includes unregistered pastors, as well as persons Registered as Marriage Celebrants, Local Church Appointments, Accreditation Candidates or Accredited Persons in Ministry. Non-compliance can lead to disciplinary proceedings.

The pastor ought to consult with the Baptist Ministry Centre regarding any concerns or questions that arise with the implementation of this code.

## 2 Personal Conduct

### 2.1 Personal Life of the Minister

The pastorate is not merely a profession, but a calling from God which pervades every part of a pastor’s life. 1 Timothy 4:16 says, “Watch your life and doctrine closely ...”.

Pastors will take responsibility for:

- a. the maintenance and development of their own spiritual life.
- b. the maintenance of their physical, mental and emotional health.
- c. establishing and maintaining the priority of their relationship with their spouse and family.
- d. establishing and maintaining their relationship with the church they lead.
- e. establishing and maintaining responsible, law-abiding, ethical citizenship.

### 2.2 Commitment to Continuing Education and Equipping

Pastors are encouraged to continue their education and equipping through formal study programs and / or relevant seminars, books and journals to promote growth in their faith, knowledge, character and ministry skills as well as effective use of professional support and supervision

### 2.3 Relationships with Colleagues

- a. Pastors will demonstrate respect for the call and placement of other ministers, whether colleagues of a local team, pastors in other Baptist churches, other Baptist ministries or other denominations.
- b. Pastors who have authority in relation to other pastors and / or lay staff will exercise their authority justly, legally, with respect and with clear accountability.

### 2.4 Relationship with the BCWA

The pastor’s primary loyalty is always to the Lord Jesus who is the Head of the Church. Pastors called to serve within the Baptist movement will express their loyalty to the wider work of the BCWA by prayerful interest, support and participation as they are able in the corporate endeavours of the movement.

## 2.5 Relationship with the Wider Community

- a. As followers of Christ, pastors are called to live as “salt” and “light” (Matthew 5:13 & 14) in the world.
- b. Pastors involved in the wider community will display a Christ-likeness that includes concern for the spiritual, ethical and moral needs of the community and social justice.
- c. Where a pastor speaks out on community or political issues, they must ensure any statement is factually correct and comments and / or actions are based on moral and spiritual principles and expressed with humility. They should also ensure that any statements are consistent with the position of BCWA.

## 3 Relationship with the Law

- a. A pastor will seek, as far as reasonable and practicable, to uphold and encourage others to uphold the law.
- b. Pastors must ensure that they fulfil all the legal frameworks of the jurisdiction in which they serve (e.g.: Mandatory Reporting).
- c. Should a pastor, in the conduct of their ministry, become aware of serious fraudulent activity, corrupt conduct or other criminal activity they must immediately notify the Director of Ministries who will follow the BCWA authorised processes.

## 4 Pastoral Relationships

### 4.1 Working Relationships

- a. Pastors will ensure that all colleagues in ministry, whether pastoral, administrative or ancillary staff, are treated with respect, consideration, fairness and in good faith.
- b. In the interests of effective ministry together, pastors will recognise and respect the abilities, expertise, areas of responsibility, skills, talents, time commitments and views of colleagues in ministry.
- c. Pastors will refrain from offering or agreeing to undertake and / or engage in work beyond their role, training or professional competence by referring to other suitably qualified persons where necessary. For example, referrals to counsellors, psychologists or other medical professionals may be required in some cases.
- d. Where conflict arises between ministry colleagues the principles of Matthew 18 must first be applied. In the event the conflict is not resolved and relationships restored, pastors can seek the assistance of a suitable mediator, or alternatively, a complaint can be raised with BCWA according to the Complaints Management Framework.

### 4.2 Pastoral Care

- a. Pastors will not use the power inherent in their role in an abusive or unprofessional manner.
- b. Pastoral care will be offered without bias to all within their charge. Where a pastor has a significant relationship with an individual within the fellowship (e.g. a close personal friendship, a close family relationship, a marriage or in the case of a single minister, a relationship which is becoming romantic) the minister will ensure that pastoral care is made available from another suitably qualified person.

- c. When a pastor determines that a pastoral relationship is not beneficial for the person receiving care the pastor will:
  - (i) refer the person to another suitably qualified pastoral carer,
  - (ii) renegotiate the relationship to one which is beneficial, or
  - (iii) terminate the present pastoral relationship.
- d. Pastors should show appropriate wisdom and discernment in applying Safe Church principles to all interactions with people, especially when meeting one on one for any reason.
- e. Pastors will ensure that they treat members of their congregation and members of the public with respect, consideration, fairness and in good faith.

### 4.3 Professional Supervision

All pastors must have a supervision agreement in place with a BCWA registered supervisor. For further information regarding supervision see the BCWA Guide to Supervision.

### 4.4 Professional Integrity

Whilst people enter into a pastoral ministry in response to a call from God and the Church, this call requires that they carry out ministry in a professional and accountable manner. An integral part of any call is a clear delineation and acceptance of the appropriate lines of accountability.

- a. Pastors must be sensitive in keeping records ensuring that they maintain the spirit of the Privacy Act. Critical incidents with legal or insurance implications require all records to be kept, and contact made with the church's insurance provider as well as the Baptist Ministry Centre.
- b. Pastors have a moral and spiritual commitment to truthfulness and should refrain from plagiarising both in their preaching and presentation of written material. Other sources will be appropriately acknowledged.
- c. Pastors must openly declare any potential conflict of interest (perceived or actual) to their church leadership and where appropriate to the Director of Ministries.
- d. Pastors will not seek, nor accept, financial gain for themselves or their families from a pastoral relationship beyond their recognised stipends and entitlements.
- e. Pastors who receive gifts resulting from the pastoral relationship must use discretion concerning the acceptance or return of those gifts by considering the intent and affordability of the gift, and whether the gift places the pastor at risk of being compromised or losing objectivity with declaration to the church leadership. Pastors are to ensure they refer to the local church policies in regards to the receipt of gifts.
- f. Pastors will not use their ministry to recruit clients for private practice or commercial interests.
- g. Pastors and their spouse will not normally be involved in managing church finances. If circumstances make it necessary for them to be involved, it should be a temporary arrangement and would require robust external accountability to protect the pastor and the church.
- h. Pastors will not engage in inappropriate sexual behaviour.
- i. Pastors must not undertake any pastoral ministry when impaired by alcohol or any other mind-altering substance.
- j. When a pastor's call is being considered by a church Members Meeting neither the pastor nor their family members should be present at such a meeting.

- k. When a senior pastor, sole pastor or team member leaves their position in a church, for whatever reason, they are no longer a pastor in that church and should cease all involvement in the ministry of that church, unless specifically invited by the succeeding pastor / s and / or the governing body of the church. BCWA recommends that a 'suitable time of absence' from the church at the end of a ministry period is healthy and that this should be part of the discussion with church leadership at the end of a ministry period.
- l. A pastor should not normally be involved in the process of calling their successor. If for some reason it is considered necessary by the church for the pastor to be involved in the process for the calling of their successor, the pastor will do so in cooperation with the church leadership and in consultation with BCWA.
- m. Family members of the outgoing pastor should not normally be a member of the Pastoral Search Task Team for the succeeding pastor.
- n. Staff members, Associate Pastors or any pastor who will be accountable to a new pastor being called should not normally be a member of the Pastoral Search Team for the new pastor.
- o. In cases where it may appear to be necessary to deviate from the normal pastoral search processes, churches should consult with the Baptist Churches Western Australia for advice.

#### 4.5 Confidentiality

Information received in the context of a pastoral relationship shall remain confidential *unless*:

- a. the person gives permission for the particulars to be disclosed; or
- b. retaining such information could potentially result in significant harm to another person; or
- c. disclosure is required by law; or
- d. information is received that discloses that a criminal offence may have occurred or is likely to occur, then that information should be passed onto the police; or
- e. it is believed a child is in imminent danger, in which case Department of Child Protection or police should be alerted; or
- f. disclosure is necessary to prevent financial loss to some other person due to fraud or other dishonesty or where undue hardship might result (as stated in the *Privacy Act 1988*)

**For the above reasons, in a pastoral relationship, pastors must take care to discuss the nature and limits of their confidentiality with the other person.**

#### 4.6 Sexual Misconduct

- a. Inappropriate sexual behaviour contravenes God's Word and is unethical and unacceptable. Inappropriate sexual behaviour covers a range of welcomed and unwelcomed behaviours, including but not limited to, sexual activity outside of marriage, extramarital affairs, etc.
- b. All pastors involved in BCWA are expected to comply with the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) as well as relevant BCWA policies and position papers (eg: Human Sexuality paper).
- c. Where cases of inappropriate sexual behaviour are alleged involving ministers, they must be thoroughly investigated using the BCWA Complaints Management Framework.
- d. In the case of alleged offending pastors this information must be promptly passed on to the Director of Ministries.
- e. Where cases of child sexual abuse are reported or suspected the police and Director of Ministries must be notified.

## 5 Working with Other Institutions and Professions

- a. Pastors must familiarise themselves with the Codes of Ethics or similar guidelines in other institutions where they may minister (e.g. hospitals, schools and Correctional Centres).
- b. Where the demands of another organisation conflict with this Code of Ethics, pastors will seek to clarify the nature of the conflict between those demands and the principles of this Code, inform all parties concerned of any perceived conflicts and seek to resolve them.

## 6 Breach of Code of Ethics

- a. Pastors are required to inform the Director of Ministries if the behaviour of any pastor, employee or lay appointee could be considered as inappropriate sexual behaviour (as defined in section 3.6).
- b. Breach of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice refers to any violation of the requirements or principles of the Code by Pastors. It includes any instance where pastors have deliberately encouraged another to breach the terms of the Code.
- c. When a pastor becomes aware of another pastor potentially breaching this Code they should, in private, attempt to resolve the issue by bringing the matter of concern to the attention of that minister in a constructive manner. If this is among pastors at a local church, then they should follow the local church complaints and / or grievance process. If raising the concern with the pastor is not practical or does not address the issue of concern or does not resolve the issue, the pastor ought to be advised of the intention to report the facts to the Director of Ministries.

## 7 Exceptional Circumstances

Throughout this document there are a number of circumstances that require the Director of Ministries to be notified. However, in cases where the Director of Ministries is implicated in the allegation, the Chairperson of the Council of BCWA should be informed. If the DOM is unavailable, his / her delegated representative shall be informed.

## 8 Undertaking

Those who fall under the jurisdiction of this document shall indicate their acceptance of both the BCWA *Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice* and the related *Complaints Management Framework* by signing the following.

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Name

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Signature

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Date

Resources referred to in the development of this material include:

Churches of Christ in Australia, Code of Ethics applicable to Ministers of the Churches of Christ, 1999.

Queensland Baptists, Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for Queensland Baptist Ministers, 2021.

Uniting Church in Australia, Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice, 2010.