

Guidelines for Our Life Together

West Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church

The West Ohio Conference seeks to be both proactive and preventive in responding to issues that impact the church and its mission. In response to current concerns in both the Church and the world, we have created the following Guidelines. Everyone in our community, both active and retired, Elders and Deacons, Licensed and Supply Pastors, are asked to uphold these Guidelines.

The West Ohio Conference will use these Guidelines as a complement to the *Book of Discipline*. They address timely concerns that are not addressed in other resources. They will be utilized as an educational tool of the Board of Ordained Ministry, license certification school, for further dialogue, and at other conference trainings.

While no policies or other documents can anticipate all of the challenges and situations that may arise, the Guidelines for Our Life Together delineate key areas of personal and professional relationships, integrity, power, and conflicts of interest. These guidelines are designed to assist our community to have a common understanding of difficult issues, which may arise.

As clergy within the West Ohio Conference, we will be guided by the following:

A. IN OUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS WE WILL

1. Be above reproach in all that we do;
2. Serve the members and constituents in our current appointment and not provide ministerial services elsewhere unless a consultation between the former pastor/retired pastor and the pastor under appointment determine that it is for the health and in the best interest of the congregation;
3. Keep appropriate confidences and privileged information;
4. Avoid communicating (verbal, written, and electronic) negatively about a colleague, especially our predecessor or our successor;
5. Avoid the appearance of impropriety in visitation and counseling sessions;
6. Maintain a healthy emotional and social balance and maintain boundaries between pastoral identity and self-identity, private and community life, self and others;
7. Separate our ministerial role from our personal lives by not dating those directly served by our ministry;
8. Encourage the congregation in the care and upkeep of the parsonage, leave the church and parsonage clean and in good condition, and accept financial responsibility for damage to the parsonage beyond normal wear and tear (see Conference Parsonage policy);
9. Practice habits that encourage and promote the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of our families and ourselves.

B. IN ISSUES OF INTEGRITY WE WILL

1. Be fiscally responsible;
2. Be honest;
3. Properly represent the policy, mission, and program of the Annual Conference and the United Methodist Church;
4. Acknowledge sources for preaching and in written material; we will not plagiarize another's work;
5. As full time clergy, accept employment outside of the appointed charge only with the consent of the S/PPRC and conference cabinet (paragraph #338.1)
6. Maintain the highest ethical standards regarding the use of modern technology, avoiding even the perception of inappropriate use of the internet and understanding that email and text messaging are not a private domain and should not be treated as such;
7. Provide pastoral services for weddings, baptisms, and funerals to church members without charge; the receipt of honoraria is acceptable;
8. Abstain from pornography and gambling in any form;
9. Abstain from misuse or abuse of alcohol and drugs, prescription or other.

C. IN REGARD TO POWER ISSUES WE WILL

1. Be aware of the power that is inherent in our various roles and use that power to maximize ministry opportunities that communicate worth, mutuality, and collegiality;
2. Provide ministerial services in order to build up the body of Christ;
3. Establish clear, appropriate boundaries with anyone with whom we have a ministerial, business, professional, or social relationship;
4. Not use our ministerial status, position, relationship, or authority to abuse, misguide, negatively influence, manipulate, or take advantage of anyone.

D. IN AREAS WHERE THERE MIGHT BE A CONFLICT OF INTEREST WE WILL

1. Advise and refer persons to other clergy or other professionals such as lawyers, doctors, counselors, etc. when appropriate; be aware that our judgment can be impaired by prior dealings, by becoming personally involved, or by becoming an advocate for one party against another;
2. Absent ourselves at an appropriate time from discussion and decision when there is an actual or potential conflict of interest in matters affecting ourselves, our family, or our financial interests;
3. Never take advantage of anyone to whom we are providing services in order to further our personal, religious, political, financial, or business interests or those of our family;
4. Use discretion concerning the acceptance of or return of gifts for ourselves or our family;
5. Avoid using the congregation as a captive audience for products or services created or provided in a non-clergy role;
6. Not accept or confer an office, position, assignment, or receive compensation, which may present the appearance of favoritism or a conflict of interest.

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