

GUIDELINES on the question of the DISCIPLINE and RESTORATION of MINISTERS

Moral, financial, ministry ethics & doctrinal areas CRC Churches International - Australia National Executive

PREAMBLE

The CRC is committed to maintaining high moral and ethical integrity of its ministers. In the case of failure in these areas it is important to have a uniform approach in matters of discipline and restoration of ministers. This guideline outlines our approach in this matter.

1. Constitutional statements

1.1 In Article 5.6 “Forfeiture of Credential, the Constitution of the CRC Churches International – Australia”, National Council makes the following statement.

“Should the Issuing Authority of a credential (as defined in clause 5.3.1) determine that a holder of a credential has violated the basic requirements of Scripture, or this Constitution, or the Charter, in the areas of:

- Use of finance, or
- Ministerial ethics, or
- Personal morality, or
- Doctrine’

then they shall be required to:

- Surrender their credential immediately.
- Resign from leadership of their church immediately.
- Resign from any leadership position held within the Organisation.
- Accept a reasonable period of restoration and rehabilitation as prescribed by the relevant Issuing Authority which has given due consideration to the current “Guidelines on the Discipline and

Restoration of Ministers” document of the Organisation.”

1.2 The Charter of the CRC Churches International gives an abbreviated version of our Declaration of Faith with respect to our basic doctrines, our Core Values and other cardinal Christian truths that we expect all our credentialed ministers to believe in and follow. The expanded version of our Declaration of Faith is the official CRC version of our Christian doctrines. Our Charter also clearly spells out the principles that govern our fellowship, ministerial policy and financial ethics.

We have a Statement on Forfeiture of Credential in our National Constitution and this now provides a clear method of assessment of when a person has violated Scripture, our Charter and Constitution and secondly, how the restoration and rehabilitation of the credentialed minister is to occur.

1.3 To help the necessary officers and leaders within the CRC to determine when action should be taken against an erring minister, the following amplification of the Constitutional Article 5.6 is given.

A Minister's credential may be removed for any of the following reasons.

- Falling into grave doctrinal error or deception regarding the abbreviated Declaration of Faith contained in the CRC Charter, or the expanded version in the CRC Ministry Manual, or
- Wilfully violating the provisions of the CRC Charter, National Constitution and/or State Constitution, or
- Being overtaken by personal problems of such a nature that would discredit the work of the Lord, producing a detrimental effect on the CRC Churches International - Australia.

2. The nature and purpose of discipline

Discipline is an exercise mandated by the scriptures for which the Church has authority in and is responsible to outwork. The aims of discipline are that God may be honoured, that the purity and welfare of the ministry and the Church be maintained, and that those under discipline may be brought to repentance and restoration in Christian lifestyle and, where applicable, Christian ministry.

Discipline is to be administered for the restoration of the minister, while fully providing for the protection and the spiritual welfare of our local churches. It is to be redemptive in nature as well as corrective and is to be exercised as under a dispensation of mercy.

However badly a minister may have fallen he can, upon genuine repentance (as far as can be determined) be restored to fellowship in the Christian Church, but this does not guarantee restoration to ministry.

Discipline includes training, especially of the kind that produces self-control, orderliness, obedience and a capacity for co-operation. It is believed that discipline can only be adequately implemented where accountability and a monitoring of a person's response is provided for.

3. Matters that require disciplinary action

Cases Of Moral, Financial, Ministry Ethics And Doctrinal Breakdown Are Covered In The Following Areas:

3.1 Moral breakdown or failing to maintain one's sexual integrity includes:-

Embracing or condoning the areas of sexual behaviour that are clearly contrary to accepted Biblical Christian principles and ethics: i.e. fornication, adultery, homosexual practice, lesbianism, rape, paedophilia/child molestation, sexual harassment, incest, etc.

3.2 Financial breakdown or lack of integrity in personal and/or church matters includes:

- (i) Purposefully failing to maintain a proper financial accounting procedure for the church, ie. monthly or quarterly and yearly statements and a yearly audit of the churches finances by a qualified person who is not a member of the church.
- (ii) Purposefully failing to be accountable with respect to recording or minuting all authorised financial decisions and receipting of all expenses incurred by the church and any responsible officers.
- (iii) Purposefully failing to ensure that no conflict of interest occurs with respect to a minister's salary/remuneration.

Salary/remuneration decisions should be taken out of the hands of the salaried pastoral ministry staff who are recipients of a wage and placed into the hands of an independent salaries/remuneration committee; ie. a group of non-salaried leaders of the church (with reference to the National Guidelines for setting salaries document.)
- (iv) Purposefully failing to obey the letter and the spirit of the law of the land with regard to Taxation matters and other legal requirements.
- (v) Any instance of theft by a minister.

3.3 Ministry Ethics violations include:

- (i) Refusing to be cooperative and having a contentious attitude that continually violates ministerial courtesy with fellow CRC ministers and with ministers of other Christian movements.
- (ii) Refusing to work within a team structure (ie Elders, Spiritual Oversight) as required in our Charter and assuming a dictatorial and unaccountable authority over a Church.

3.4 Doctrinal breakdown includes:

Adhering to and/or promoting doctrinal error which is recognised as such by Bible-believing Pentecostal Christians and is contrary to the CRC Declaration of Faith.

All CRC preaching and teaching is to be consistent with the cardinal Christian doctrines and truths as stated in the CRC Declaration of Faith.

4. Preventative, rather than remedial, emphasis

The leadership of our Movement should endeavour to offer sound preventative measures to our ministers from the training phase prior to ordination, right through to special in-service sessions for men and women who have been in the ministry for many years.

These measures include:

- 4.1 Ministry Training Courses – as these are often a training phase for potential ministers, as well as for other ministry roles, then character formation and discussion in the areas of moral, financial and ministry ethics should not be neglected.
- 4.2 Competency-based credentialing – competencies for all credential levels should always include competencies that cover knowledge and application of moral, financial and ministry ethics.
- 4.2 Credentialing interview process - it is recommended that smaller teams of senior and experienced ministers (i.e. Office Bearers) be the Credentialing Committees rather than the whole Executive to cover the very important duty of thoroughly assessing credential applications.
- 4.3 Comprehensive and strictly confidential application forms with detailed referee's statements from at least three referees that touch the potential problem areas are necessary.
- 4.4 Teaching and discussion sessions at State and National Conferences or at special In-service Training Seminars for credentialed ministers.
- 4.5 Generally lifting the ethical and moral expectations of our potential ministers to the highest possible standards.

5. Basic procedure for discipline and restoration

5.1 Discipline of Ministers

- a. When it has been clearly established that a minister is guilty of a prolonged abuse of ministerial trust in any of the following areas:
 - sexual immorality
 - financial corruption

- violation of ministerial ethics
- doctrinal error,

then unless there is a full and frank acknowledgment of wrongdoing and acceptance of their guilt, the minister shall be disfellowshipped from all CRC churches; ie, the minister should not be invited to participate in any CRC church service or activity, and should not be permitted to take out membership in any CRC church.

- b. Discipline in general should wait until the case has been heard and judged by three members of the relevant Ministry Credentialling Authority or by other suitable ministers who have held a National credential for at least 5 years. These appointments are to be made by the relevant Chairman.

However in extreme and emergency cases where there is sufficient evidence of a serious breach of ministerial conduct the State Chairman together with the National Chairman have the power to suspend ministerial certificates and credentials pending an investigation and judgement by the relevant Ministry Credentialling Authority.

- c. A National Minister's Credential may only be suspended by the relevant State Ministry Credentialling Authority where there has been prior consultations with the National Chairman or in his absence, the Vice-Chairman.
- d. It is recognized that any minister has the right of appeal, in accordance with the provisions of the State and National Constitutions.

5.2 Restoration of Ministers

- a. Objective and Process

The aim is to restore the minister in his or her personal relationship with the Lord and, if necessary, effect restoration in the minister's relationship with spouse, family, local church and any other offended parties.

- The restoration process is to focus on :
 - i. Working through the issues that predisposed the person to commit such sin.
 - ii. Rebuilding firm Biblical moral values and a lifestyle consistent with such values, so that the minister is restored to be able to model God's standards.

- b. Basic Procedure

The restorative period is to cover a minimum period of two years. During this time a suspension of the minister's credential and

marriage celebrant's licence is to occur. There is to be at least a twelve month minimum break from active ministry.

A gradual return to some ministry function in the second year of the restorative process can occur but under the covering of restorers/counsellors.

This period may need to be extended. Due consideration needs to be given by the restorers/counsellors to the gravity of the initial offence or problem area, the apparent degree of repentance, the areas of new responsibility, the size of the restoring church and other associated factors.

c. The Restorers/Counsellors

These are to be two ministers who have held a National Ministers credential for at least 5 years. We are looking for maturity of experience and an excellent track record.

Galatians 6:1-2 provides the authorisation, qualifications and spiritual attitudes for practitioners of restoration.

The restorers should offer assistance to the local Oversight and any offended parties as is required.

d. State Chairman's Role

The State Chairman does not need to be involved in all the restorative process but does need to be updated by the two ministers at least quarterly during the restorative period. The two restorative ministers need to have the State Chairman's endorsement before commencing work.

e. National Chairman's Role

The National Chairman does not need to be involved in all the restorative process but does need to be sufficiently informed by the State Chairman every six months during the restorative process of ministers who were holding a credential issued by the National Executive. (refer to Ministry Guidelines document for Issuing Bodies for different credential types)

f. State Executives, State Councils, National Executive, National Council

These bodies do not need to be directly involved and confidentiality needs to apply during the restorative process. It is assumed that State Executives, State Councils, National Executive and National Council have absolute confidence in their State Chairmen and in their National Chairman.

g. Resource for all State Chairmen

Restorees could be required to attend or study specific remedial courses targeted to the breakdown area.

A resource kit is to be made available which includes key articles, books and case studies with the important acknowledgment that all counsel, advice, and directions given must not contravene Scripture and that restoring ministers prayerfully seek the leading and wisdom of the Holy Spirit on the matter.

h. Consideration of Errant Minister's Spouse

It should be recognized that the spouse of a minister who has had to be disciplined will need special support, encouragement and counsel. During the restorative process for the minister, the restorers / counsellors should ensure that the minister's spouse receives appropriate care and counsel.

5.3 Spouse Committing Transgression

In the event of the spouse of a credentialed minister committing a moral or financial misdemeanour of the nature that would require discipline and restoration if a pastor committed such an act, the minister and the spouse shall be:

- (i) Responsible to advise the State Chairman;
- (ii) Placed under the covering of a Nationally credentialed minister (for at least 5 years) normally for a 2 year period to assist in working through the situation.

6. CARE OF ADULT VICTIM(S)

Compassionate attention needs to be given to the victim(s) of any misdemeanour by a minister. Any victims should receive comfort, counsel and encouragement as appropriate. Victims should not feel that their well-being is considered of lesser importance than the restoration of the minister responsible for their hurt. Refer to the CRC Guidelines document 'CRC Ministry Code of Ethics' for further support regarding Adult Duty of Care.

If any victim is a child or youth (under the age of 18) then there is both a legal and moral obligation to report any criminal, suspected criminal or negligent behaviour to the appropriate secular authorities. Refer to the 'CRC Duty of Care and Child Protection Guidelines' for further information on how to report, or contact the CRC National or State office for support.

FINALLY

The same general principles of discipline and restoration are expected to be applied for the spouses of a minister and for all in senior lay leadership who are fulfilling key ministry roles within our churches, ie. elders, ministry department leaders.

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Drafted by Bill Vasilakis

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End Document