

CODE OF MINISTRY ETHICS

CRC CHURCHES INTERNATIONAL

CONTENTS

1. Preamble	Page 2
2. Attitudes Expected of Pastors	Page 4
3. Responsibilities to God	Page 6
4. Responsibilities to Others	Page 7
4.1 Family	Page 7
4.2 Congregation	Page 8
4.2.1 General	Page 8
4.2.2 Relational Issues	Page 8
4.2.3 Pulpit Matters	Page 9
4.2.4 Financial Considerations	Page 10
4.3 Community	Page 10
4.4 Peers	Page 11
4.5 My Denomination	Page 12
4.6 Other Denominations	Page 13
5. Responsibilities to Self	Page 13
6. Ministerial Vow	Page 15
7. Sources, Acknowledgements and References	Page 15

1. PREAMBLE

The wisdom and teaching of Scripture is the basis for formulating this code of ethics; and perhaps the single scripture which best describes how we should live to please God is Micah 6:8, which The Message translation renders: *“But He’s already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It’s quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbour, be compassionate and loyal in your love, and don’t take yourself too seriously – take God seriously.”*

However, there is often a disparity in what people judge to be “fair and just” in dealing with others. Likewise the manner in which we “take God seriously” and not take ourselves “too seriously” needs clarification. The code of ethics addresses this by declaring more specifically how we should behave in relation to God, others and ourselves.

Of course it is impossible to legislate or proscribe the correct course of action for a pastor in every situation where a moral/ethical decision must be made, and any attempt to provide a comprehensive list of required responses in various situations will invariably be deficient. Nevertheless, having an accepted set of guidelines should aid a pastor to make the right decision when faced with an ethical choice.

A further benefit of a ministerial code of ethics is that it constitutes an agreed standard of behaviour whereby a pastor’s character may be assessed. Failure to behave in an acceptable manner may indicate a lack of wisdom or a wayward attitude, and a continuance in the same behaviour will reveal or result in a character flaw.

Attitude is the crucial factor, the foundation for making the correct decision when confronted with an ethical dilemma. A right attitude should lead to correct behaviour, and behaviour over an extended period defines character. Therefore this code of ethics firstly identifies the key attitudes which should prevail in a pastor’s life. Pastors can attempt to evaluate themselves against the listed attitudes, but their peers can also make an assessment based on observed behaviour and personal interaction. Basically, the attitudes which every mature Christian should have are those which Jesus displayed, and so it is reasonable to expect that such attitudes should be readily observable in pastors and Christian leaders.

Any Christian code of ethics will recognise love as the essential quality to be nurtured and exercised in the pursuit of ethical behaviour. The love of God is the pre-eminent issue, with the love of others and love of self (or self worth, self respect) being the next most important considerations in determining appropriate conduct. As already intimated, a three-fold classification of responsibilities - in relation to God, others and ourselves – is appropriate, and this order is employed to enumerate the responsibilities and behaviour expected of all our CRC Churches International pastors. The section dealing with “others” is necessarily the largest, and has numerous subdivisions for ease of use.

To facilitate application of the code of ethics, the main sections comprise a series of “I will ...” statements. These clearly reveal what individuals are committed to doing on acceptance of the code. It is fitting that the text of the ministerial vow, which really encapsulates the spirit and essence of the code of ethics, concludes the document.

For the sake of simplicity the terms “pastor” and “pastoral” are generally used throughout the document, instead of “credentialed minister” or “ministerial.” Moreover, the code of ethics has been formulated with the traditional church pastor very much in mind. Consequently some of the stipulated requirements are inappropriate for ministers holding Specialist Minister Credentials (e.g., evangelists), Retired Ministers or pastors in para-church organisations. It is hoped that all of those special classes of credentialed ministers will be readily able to identify the specific “I will ...” statements which do not apply to them, and accordingly feel free to ignore inappropriate requirements.

2. ATTITUDES EXPECTED OF PASTORS

2.1 LOVING – John 13:35 1 Peter 1:22

An attitude of love is the mark of a true follower of Christ (John 13:35) and should be the outstanding characteristic of Christian leaders. Pastors can evaluate the degree to which a loving attitude is prevalent in their lives by reference to God's description of love in 1 Corinthians, chapter 13. Some of the virtues associated with love are kindness, patience, forgiveness, perseverance, generosity, contentment and self-control.

2.2 HUMBLE – Philippians 2:3-8 James 4:6-10

Humility is another hallmark of a mature Christian. Pastors should acknowledge their total dependence on the Lord and be in submission to His will. It is perhaps easier to assess humility by checking for the opposite attitude of pride, which displays itself in our interaction with others as arrogance, an unwillingness to admit faults, non-acceptance of criticism and failure to fully acknowledge the contribution of others in any team successes.

2.3 MERCIFUL – Matthew 18:21-35 Luke 6:36

None of us could survive without God's mercy being extended to us, and this should motivate us to have a merciful attitude towards others. We must fulfil our responsibilities to administer justice and address wrongful behaviour. But when we do, we should temper our judgment with mercy, and refrain from exacting the maximum admissible penalty for an offence if a fair, but less painful, ruling can be made.

2.4 GRACE-FILLED – 2 Corinthians 8:7-9 1 Peter 3:8,9; 4:10

God not only shows us mercy, but favour and blessing which are likewise undeserved. We should cultivate this same attitude, seeking to be instruments of God's grace to enrich the lives of others, irrespective of merit, as we have opportunity to do so. God's grace to us is free, but also immeasurably costly, and we need to realise that our outworking of a grace-filled attitude will cost us in time and resources.

2.5 TEACHABLE – Proverbs 1:5; 18:15 Colossians 3:16

Good pastors recognise that there are always others who possess more wisdom, learning or experience than themselves, and a teachable spirit will enable them to access and utilise such knowledge. Those who are most teachable will be marked by their willingness to listen more than they speak and a commitment to search for wisdom and openness to consider opinions different to those they currently hold.

2.6 ACCOUNTABLE – Romans 14:12 Hebrews 3:13

Ultimately we are accountable to God for our actions and words, but He has also made us accountable to each other so that we can correct, encourage and challenge one another. Those who are unwilling to submit their lives to the inspection of their peers or who refuse needed correction are destined for trouble. Whereas those with a heart to live accountably with fellow Christians reap the benefits which will help safeguard their ministry effectiveness.

2.7 RESPECTFUL – 1 Peter 2:17 Romans 12:10

The Lord encourages us to “Show proper respect to everyone” and “Honour one another above yourselves.” A respectful attitude should characterise all Christians, and especially those exercising leadership. The temptation to feel superior to others because of status or God-given abilities must be strongly resisted. Recognising every individual as a person for whom Christ died, will help us to give due respect to others. Particular respect should be shown to those deserving of special honour or recognition, such as the elderly and godly leaders.

2.8 SUBMISSIVE – 1 Peter 2:13,14 1 Thessalonians 5:12,13

Evidence of our submission before God is shown by our willingness to submit to godly leadership and our acceptance of God-ordained discipline. For CRC Churches International pastors, a submissive attitude entails a willingness to accept the movement’s major directives and requirements, unless a contrary response can be justified on the grounds of Scripture.

2.9 SERVANT-LEADERSHIP – Mark 10:35-37 1 Peter 5:2,3

Mature Christian leaders should see themselves as serving the Body of Christ, as opposed to using their position to have others serve them. The attitude of servant-leadership is best exemplified by Jesus, and perhaps illustrated most dramatically when He washed the disciples’ feet on the eve of His death. Pastors do well when they seek to cultivate this attitude, for it will inspire others to serve willingly and sacrificially in God’s Kingdom.

The following sections attempt to cover, either specifically or by association, the majority of ministry situations which may require an ethical choice. However, in the event of a scenario where the proper course of action is unclear, it is suggested that pastors should seek first to align their mind-set with the above attitudes. Their ensuing behaviour is then likely to be correct.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES TO GOD

3.1 Our foremost responsibility is to love God. In the context of ethical behaviour, it has been said “Love God and do as you please,” with the reasoning that if our love for God is genuine we will automatically do what is right. However it is all too easy to claim to love God, while neglecting to do those things which substantiate our confession. Our love for God must be tangible, and the Bible clearly reveals what we should do in order to love God and please Him. As we relate to God in the way He requires, our love for God will be both validated and strengthened, and we can more readily choose to act ethically in every situation.

3.2 To fulfil my responsibility of loving God, I will:

3.2.1 Worship Him by presenting my total being to Him (Romans 12:1)

3.2.2 Develop a regular devotional life by:

- **Expressing adoration, praise and thankfulness** to Him and committing to frequent corporate worship.
- **Deepening my fellowship with Him through prayer**, taking time to listen to His voice as well as expressing my failures, concerns and petitions.
- **Reading and studying the Scriptures**, applying its revealed truth to my life.
- **Meditating on key Scripture verses** and passages to allow God’s Spirit to maximise their effectiveness.

3.2.3 Act in obedience to God’s commands and seek to do His revealed will.

3.2.4 Have the goal of a lifestyle which is fully pleasing and **glorifying to God**.

3.2.5 Recognise that **serving God** and working in cooperation with His Spirit to extend His Kingdom is a privilege that demands **my best efforts**.

3.2.6 Accept that I can take no credit for my **talents and abilities** – they are given by God – and **diligently seek to develop** them to their fullest measure to bless the Body of Christ.

3.2.7 Embrace the principle of tithing, acknowledging God’s ownership of all that I have by giving a minimum of 10% of my income.

3.2.8 Cultivate a generous disposition, realising that any material blessings I enjoy are to be shared with others.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES TO OTHERS

Our responsibility to love others is fulfilled as we serve them, seeking to put their interests and welfare above our own, and acting with kindness and compassion as opportunity or need dictates. The concept is simple, but the execution is fraught with difficulties. Having clearly defined guidelines for specific circumstances, especially when different courses of action might seem plausible and even appealing, is helpful. Hence the following scenarios are included, covering situations as diverse as family relationships and denominational responsibilities.

As before, the behaviour expected of pastors is expressed in the form of personal commitments.

4.1 FAMILY

With regard to my family, I will:

- 4.1.1 **Give each family member the time, consideration** and support they need.
- 4.1.2 **Protect my spouse** from the excessive demands or expectations which can occur in ministry, while releasing her/him to fulfil the ministry roles which they feel called and gifted to do.
- 4.1.3 [Husbands] **Love my wife** sacrificially, as exemplified by Jesus in His love for the church.
- 4.1.4 [Wives] **Submit to my husband**, as exemplified by Jesus in His submission to His Father.
- 4.1.5 Seek to ensure that my **children receive the nurture** and encouragement they deserve, and prayerfully commit them to God for their salvation, ongoing **Christian growth and ministry service**.
- 4.1.6 Help my children to deal with the undue expectations and unfair criticisms that sometimes befall pastors' children.
- 4.1.7 **Maintain a positive attitude to my pastoral responsibilities** and the congregation in front of my children, encouraging in them a sense of pride and respect for the ministry.
- 4.1.8 Recognise that married couples and families will expect my family to **model how a solid Christian family should operate**, and seek to provide them with a good example.
- 4.1.9 Allow others to see that my family is not exempt from the worries, problems and pressures common to most families, and inspire them by the godly way we handle difficult situations.
- 4.1.10 Endeavour, with the support of my spouse, to ensure that the financial needs and obligations of my family are met in a responsible fashion.
- 4.1.11 Plan to have **an annual family holiday** in which the whole family can be strengthened and refreshed.

- 4.1.12** Program regular time slots for relaxation and relational intimacy with my spouse, and try to have an extended time with each child for relational building several times a year.

4.2 CONGREGATION

With regard to my congregation, I will:

4.2.1 General

- a. Fulfil my designated duties and responsibilities** to the best of my ability.
- b. Seek to be an example of Christ-like behaviour**, displaying love, faith and integrity in a way which will inspire and assist others to follow.
- c. Act impartially** in all my dealings, refusing to allow special friendships or influential members to prevent me giving fair treatment to every person.
- d. Avoid starting or passing on gossip**, and diligently attempt to stop others from engaging in this destructive behaviour.
- e. Maintain strict confidentiality** in any counselling setting, unless legally obligated to disclose certain facts or unless failure to pass on information would endanger the safety of others.
- f. Keep confidential pastoral records**, particularly in regard to counselling appointments and other sensitive matters.
- g. Open my home to others**, recognising that hospitality is a wonderful way to build friendships and trust.
- h. Attempt to address the spiritual, emotional and physical needs** of the congregation, utilising the resources of my ministry team and/or appropriate congregational members to affect pastoral care.
- i. Limit the number of speaking invitations I accept** from other churches/groups, since my primary responsibility is to my own congregation.
- j. Not hold membership in any secret society**, as this would adversely affect the trust of those in my church.
- k. Not abuse the power of my pastoral position** for personal gain or to exercise unhealthy control over vulnerable individuals.
- l. Avail myself of appropriate literature, courses and conferences** which will help me to better fulfil my pastoral responsibilities and grow as a Christian Leader.
- m. Admit to my professional limitations**, arranging referrals and/or seeking help from other pastors, counsellors, etc. in situations where I am not competent to provide the needed help for anyone in my congregation.

4.2.2 Relational issues

- a. Be circumspect in all my relationships**, particularly with the opposite sex, recognising the danger of entrapment in co-dependent and overly-close relationships and try to avoid even the appearance of wrong doing.
- b. Not minister to a person of the opposite sex**, unless in the presence of one or more responsible people or in a setting that can be seen and is interruptible by a responsible person.
- c. Be wise when ministering to children**, recognising their special vulnerabilities and my duty of care obligations. (Refer to CRC Children's Duty of Care Guidelines)
- d. Be cautious when making a ministry home visit** to a person of the opposite sex, and avoid the possibility of a compromising situation developing by having my spouse or a trusted colleague accompany me.
- e. Endeavour not to provide unaccompanied transport for a person of the opposite sex**, or a child, outside of family relations.
- f. Seek to work harmoniously with my Church Board or Eldership Team**, respecting their God-given role. When I exercise the position of Senior Pastor I will provide wise and courageous leadership and also make myself accountable to the Leadership Team. I will submit myself to correction and even dismissal in the event of a major moral failure or an irreparable leadership crisis; and be open to counsel and direction from Senior Ministers within our CRC Churches International movement. (Refer to CRC Senior Pastors/Eldership Board Guidelines)
- g. Show loyalty and support for my Senior Pastor**, if I do not myself hold that position, and foster supportive and respectful relationships with other team members.
- h. Be approachable and open to correction and instruction** from my Senior Pastor, fellow pastors and others who have genuine and godly interest in my well-being.

4.2.3 Pulpit matters

- a. Devote sufficient time for prayer, study and sermon preparation** to enable me to preach anointed, Scripturally-sound messages in a way that will lead people to Christ and build their spiritual lives.
- b. Not use the pulpit to humiliate anyone, denigrate other pastors or denominations**, or make political statements in a way which could polarise and harm the congregation.
- c. Avoid condemnatory preaching**; rather seek to allow the convicting work of the Holy Spirit to have full expression.
- d. Not use the pulpit for self-aggrandisement**, but rather focus attention on Jesus.
- e. Try to eliminate any annoying or offensive mannerisms** which could distract listeners from hearing the message that is being given.

- f. **Give opportunity**, whenever practical, **for potential ministers to develop in their preaching gift.**
- g. **Exercise care in inviting guests to minister**, making sure they are properly briefed and willing to abide by the guidelines given them, as the welfare of my congregation is at stake.
- h. Be generous in the hospitality and payment offered to guest ministries, particularly if they draw no regular salary.

4.2.4 Financial considerations

- a. **Abstain from personally handling church finances**, in so far as this is possible, by appointing qualified personnel to deal with the various financial transactions and record keeping required.
- b. **Ensure that adequate safeguards and procedures are in place** to protect and efficiently administer all the funds given to the church.
- c. **Not use any church funds for personal use**, or seek to borrow money from the church.
- d. **Not use my position in the church to gain financial favour** from those in my congregation.
- e. **Not determine my own salary**, but instead I will look to an appointed salary committee or denominational guidelines to set my salary.
- f. **Be honest and transparent with government authorities** in relation to my salary situation and avoid the abuse of fringe benefit concessions.
- g. **Not get involved in any personal money-making schemes** which could adversely affect my reputation or my pastoral work.
- h. **Be transparent with my church leadership when receiving love offerings and gifts**, and abide by church guidelines specifying how such monies/gifts should be handled.
- i. **Offer to perform weddings and funerals for members of my congregation without charge**, if I am being paid a full salary.
- j. **Not embark on any major fundraising venture without the full support of the Church Board/Eldership.**

4.3 COMMUNITY

With regard to my community, I will:

- 4.3.1 **Obey the laws of the land**, unless by so doing I am disobeying God.
- 4.3.2 **Diligently pay my taxes** and fulfil the normal obligations expected of all citizens.
- 4.3.3 **Attempt to live a life that is above reproach**, giving attention to such matters as paying bills on time, being punctual for appointments, displaying courtesy and good manners towards others, and being especially careful to relate to the opposite sex in a manner which is glorifying to God.

- 4.3.4 **Act responsibly in the public arena**, knowing that my status as a pastor will draw particular attention which will either help or hinder Christ's work.
- 4.3.5 Recognise that my primary responsibilities are to my church and family, and ensure my **level of involvement in civic affairs and social action** is not to the detriment of these.
- 4.3.6 **Look for opportunities to evangelise**, mindful of the fact that the immediate community is a primary mission field for my church.
- 4.3.7 **Seek to develop good relations with civic and local government leaders**, but not at the expense of compromising my pastoral calling.
- 4.3.8 **Refuse to publicly align myself so closely with a particular political party that it will alienate some of my congregation** and thereby limit my effectiveness as their pastor.
- 4.3.9 **Exercise wisdom when making public statements** on community issues, and ensure such pronouncements are in line with scriptural principles.

4.4 PEERS

With regard to my peers, I will:

- 4.4.1 **Act in a spirit of cooperation** rather than competition, recognising my peers as fellow-workers in God's Kingdom.
- 4.4.2 **Never publicly criticise or belittle a fellow minister**. Instead attempt to privately correct and encourage them.
- 4.4.3 **Endeavour to maintain good relationships with other pastors**, applying the principles outlined in Matthew chapter 18 to resolve any relational difficulties.
- 4.4.4 **Draw on the expertise and guidance of my peers** when I am faced with acute problems or critical decisions, and acknowledge their help at the appropriate time.
- 4.4.5 **Seek to bless other pastors** by whatever available means, being generous with finances, resources and the sharing of wisdom and experience.
- 4.4.6 **Avoid plagiarising another's work**, give due credit and recognition for any ministerial resources that I use, and abide by copyright regulations.
- 4.4.7 **Not entice members of another congregation to join mine**; but if I am aware of Christians moving from a neighbouring church to mine, I will contact their previous church leader to apprise them of the move.
- 4.4.8 **Give guidance regarding a new spiritual home for any of my church members** who need to move, making contact with a pastor in their new church and writing a letter of transfer if required.
- 4.4.9 **Refuse to speak critically of my predecessor** when I move into a new church.

4.4.10 Make every effort to help my successor transition easily into their new role when I leave the church, and discourage any ongoing congregational allegiance to myself that would disadvantage the new minister.

4.4.11 Continue to support my Senior Pastor on my retirement; or, in the event of another pastor taking over my position, help them acquire the information needed to efficiently outwork their new responsibilities.

4.5 MY DENOMINATION

With regard to my denomination, I will:

4.5.1 Seek to uphold and live by the core values of the CRC Churches International, i.e. Word-based, multiplying churches, interdependent ministries, 'New Creation' message, Gospel of grace, stable spirituality, contemporary ministry, harmonious relationships, dynamic faith, selfless service.

4.5.2 Be loyal to it for as long as I remain within the denomination, acknowledging both the privileges and responsibilities incumbent on my credential.

4.5.3 Encourage loyalty and respect for the denomination amongst my fellow pastors.

4.5.4 Give my own congregation a sense of identity and pride within the denomination, making them aware of its rich heritage, distinctive emphases and current spiritual directions and strategies.

4.5.5 Pay the stipulated fees and levies set by the denomination so that it can function effectively.

4.5.6 Make attendance at State and National Council meetings and conferences a priority, and where exceptional circumstances prevent my participation I will register an official apology.

4.5.7 Responsibly exercise my voting rights, seeking God's guidance as I fulfil this duty.

4.5.8 Give due respect to the appointed leaders and governing executives in the denomination, praying for them and submitting myself to their leadership.

4.5.9 Accept that I may not always agree with the policies or approach of the appointed leaders, yet **disallow myself to react in a way which would undermine their authority** or cause personal offence.

4.5.10 Choose to live with a spirit of interdependence, declining any independent course of action which would detract from the welfare of the denomination as a whole.

4.5.11 Utilise the resources that my denomination provides to improve my ministry effectiveness, as well as offering my time and abilities to benefit the denomination when it is feasible to do so.

- 4.5.12 Be tolerant of other pastors** whose views and approach to ministry differ from mine, knowing that diversity in thought and action is healthy so long as the essentials of Christian doctrine and conduct are not compromised.
- 4.5.13 Support my fellow-pastors through encouragement and material help when practical**; and, in the event that I become aware of a serious breach of ministerial ethics or moral failure, I will help the pastor by bringing their behaviour to the attention of the respective state or national leaders to initiate correction and restoration.
- 4.5.14 Participate in my denomination’s mission initiatives**, through prayerful and financial support and by undertaking mission trips as appropriate, while being free to engage in other mission opportunities as God guides.
- 4.5.15 Resign my credential if** I find I no longer hold to the vision, values and beliefs of my denomination or **cannot willingly submit to the appointed leadership**; and in so doing I will also relinquish any influence or control over my congregation, which will remain in the denomination.

4.6 OTHER DENOMINATIONS

With regard to other denominations, I will:

- 4.6.1 Seek to have cordial relationships with pastors in other denominations**, and be willing to cooperate in joint activities that will advance God’s Kingdom.
- 4.6.2 Participate in local ministers’ fraternal meetings**, if invited to do so.
- 4.6.3 Pray for and seek to bless churches and leaders**, irrespective of denomination, if they are actively fulfilling Christ’s Great Commission.
- 4.6.4 Maintain a humble attitude towards the leaders and pastors in other denominations**, recognising that my own denomination is not better than every other.
- 4.6.5 Respect the differences in governmental structures, beliefs and styles of worship in other denominations**, refusing to be critical of them unless they are clearly in contradiction of the tenets of Scripture.
- 4.6.6 Recognise the disciplinary action taken against any pastor in another denomination**, and ensure that I do not oppose or jeopardise the effectiveness of the discipline even though it may differ from that practised by CRC Churches International.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES TO SELF

God instructs us to “Love your neighbour as you love yourself.” Implicit in this command is the assumption that we do love ourselves, and it is apparent that our capacity to love others is limited if we have a poor self image. Furthermore, our ability to serve others is diminished if we do not take due care of our health – spiritual, emotional and physical.

In recognition of these facts, I will:

- 5.1 **Endeavour to live a life of integrity**, being true to the commitments I make to myself as well as other people.
- 5.2 **Regularly practise spiritual disciplines**, such as prayer, celebration, meditation, etc, which will help strengthen my spiritual life.
- 5.3 **Seek to grow intellectually** through wise reading and appropriate study.
- 5.4 **Regulate my social and work-related contacts**, spending time with those who will add to my emotional bank account and contribute to my learning, whilst avoiding excessive exposure to angry/critical/negative people who will sap my emotional energy.
- 5.5 **Attempt to exercise self-control** in every area of my life, maintaining sexual purity, handling finances responsibly and avoiding behavioural extremes which would weaken my Christian witness.
- 5.6 **Avail myself of conferences and courses** (subject to favourable time and financial considerations) which will develop my skills and competencies.
- 5.7 **Manage my time well**, balancing the various obligations and demands of church, family and others with the need for self-care to guard against health problems.
- 5.8 **Take care of my body** through regular exercise, sensible eating habits, adequate sleep and times of relaxation so that I have the energy to fulfil my daily responsibilities and the capacity to serve God effectively over a prolonged period.
- 5.9 **Schedule one day per week for rest from the pressures of work and ministry**, as advocated by God, and plan to take an annual vacation for recreation and refreshing.
- 5.10 **Not abuse alcohol or other drugs** which will be harmful to my health.
- 5.11 **Avoid pornography, gambling and other activities which are demeaning or destructive to my well-being**
- 5.12 **Be accountable for my use of the internet.**

6. MINISTERIAL VOW

I believe I have been called by God and equipped by the Lord Jesus Christ to be a Minister of His Gospel of Grace and a spiritual leader of His people.

I will humbly, obediently and faithfully develop and outwork Christ's calling upon my life, and work together in love and unity with my fellow ministers within our CRC Churches International family.

I acknowledge that God has placed me in the family of the CRC to develop and express the ministry call that He has for my life.

I accept the Vision and Values that we in the CRC regard as the reason why God has called us into existence and commit myself to gather, nurture, serve and release God's people within the purposes of our CRC family.

I will exercise my ministry duties responsibly, be accountable to my spiritual family and submit to the wise checks and balances of my CRC Ministry peers and overseers.

I accept the CRC's ministerial code of ethics and will endeavour to outwork these principles in my life and ministry.

Signed

7. SOURCES, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND REFERENCES

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