

A Guide to Developing a Code of Conduct for Church Leaders



Baptist Union
of Victoria

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This guide assists churches to develop a code of conduct reflecting key values and guiding principles, articulating expectations of behaviour and appropriate boundaries for all members, but in particular leaders. It provides a suggested process where there have been breaches of the code, to help churches ensure appropriate responses and accountability of actions occur where concerning behaviour has been identified.

How this Guide can help you

A church's capacity to engage with God's mission in a particular time and place is dependent on the capacity of its people to work together in unity and act with integrity as ambassadors of Christ. Therefore it is critical that all members and leaders have an understanding and expectation regarding appropriate standards of behaviour in how they interact with each other, with members of the congregation and with Pastors and other staff of the church.

It is a sacred task to be called and appointed to leadership positions within a church, whether as a member of a governance body (elders, deacons, leadership, council or board), a volunteer leader of a large ministry through to leaders of adults, youth or children groups. Being a leader in a church brings with it a range of responsibilities and activities that people willingly give their time to perform. However being a volunteer leader in a church also brings with it expectations regarding appropriate behaviour, values and guiding principles that, as Christian disciples, should be at the core of how we behave towards each other and with those outside the church. It is also important to remember that any leader within a church, whether paid or voluntary, holds a position of power in relation to other members of the congregation. Therefore it is critical that due care is exercised in the manner in which leadership duties are exercised.

"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."
(Rom 12:3b-5)

It is recommended that churches develop their own code for all leaders of the church and that this be a working document which is reviewed and confirmed regularly. It is recommended that churches develop a Code of Conduct within the context of healthy church relationships, rather than implementing a Code of Conduct if a situation of conflict or concern emerges. In this way the Code will be seen as proactive rather than reactive and it can serve an aspirational and educational role in the ongoing development of leaders.

A Code of Conduct for all church leaders document does not replace the *Code of Ethics and Companion Guide for Pastoral Leaders*, adopted by the Baptist Union of Victoria. The *Code of Ethics and Companion Guide for Pastoral Leaders* aims to provide Pastoral Leaders (and their churches) with clear guidelines and common benchmarks for ethical conduct and legal responsibility. Likewise the *Guidelines for Healthy Church/Pastor Relationships* provides practical guidance regarding the church/pastor relationship and highlights that the "relationship between the church and its pastor(s) is special and unique, involving a commitment by each party. The pastor responds to the call to provide leadership and care for the church and the church commits to provide care and support for the pastor." A code for leaders should be read in conjunction with these documents when it addresses Leader-Pastor relationships. A code for leaders also addresses relations between leaders and others within and outside the church.

Other relevant resources to consider alongside this code include (click on heading to link through):

- [We are Victorian Baptists](#)
- [Safe Church Awareness Workshops and Resources](#)
- [Complaint Procedure for Allegations of Misconduct by Pastoral Leadership](#)
- [Duties and Responsibilities of Church Leadership Groups](#)

Churches may choose to apply their Code to all members. However, it is recognised that there is an increased expectation and responsibility for those in leadership positions. Therefore it is particularly relevant to those leaders in the church who are in voluntary roles, including elders, deacons, board members, volunteer ministry leaders and team members (where those positions are not covered by the *Code of Ethics and Companion Guide for Pastoral Leaders*).

A Code of Conduct cannot be exhaustive and does not foresee every set of circumstances that may arise across the variety of church events and activities. It, rather, should be viewed as an educative guide to the principles that help inform what is appropriate conduct.

This document provides some guiding values and principles to assist congregations to develop a written code of conduct which can be agreed on with all leaders in the church. Sample Code of Conduct documents are provided in Appendix A to assist churches in the development of a Code. There are also many other good examples of Code of Conduct that would be equally applicable. The recommended response to a breach of a code of conduct is provided in Appendix B.

Key Leadership Values

The doctrinal statement of the Baptist Union of Victoria provides the theological basis on which Baptist churches live out discipleship and mission as Christian believers.

These beliefs shape and guide our Christian faith as we strive to live in Christian community with each other. In Christ, we are called to, "Serve one another humbly in love" (Gal 5:13)

Alongside these theological beliefs some key values that should be considered within the context of leading in a church congregation are:

- Respect
- Trust
- Integrity
- Honesty
- Humility
- Support
- Compassion
- Community
- Forgiveness and Reconciliation
- Generosity and Thankfulness
- Equality and Inclusiveness
- Justice
- Service and Stewardship
- Peace
- Confidentiality

Please note: confidentiality and trust are fundamental to sound relationships and must be upheld at all times except where there is a legal obligation or a duty of care issue.

Key Guiding Principles for Leading in Congregations

The following are some key principles which can guide the development of a Code of Conduct for church leaders.

A) We lead out of a relationship with God by:

- Joining regularly in the life and ministry of the Church we are serving in
- Studying the Scriptures in private and in fellowship with the people of our Church
- Praying together regularly to seek God's guidance and direction
- Giving of our time, gifts and finances to the work of the Church, as an expression of your gratitude to God.
- Recognising the need to continually learn and grow in our character and competence as disciples of Jesus
- Acts 2:46, Col 2:6-7

B) We serve others in the context of healthy relationships by:

- Loving and caring for our families; paying attention to the effect of leadership on them.
- Treating others with respect; teaching and exercising authority respectfully.
- Upholding confidentiality; non-disclosure to anyone (including spouse), of any confidential information without the consent of the person providing the information. (There is an exception where there is a legal obligation or duty of care issues.)
- Being a team player; cooperating with other leaders, there will be areas that overlap and someone else may have the advice needed.
- Using words that build up; do not ridicule or embarrass people.
- Respecting the boundaries of people over whom we have a leadership or pastoral responsibility.
- Making alternative arrangements for pastoral ministry for any person with whom we develop an appropriate romantic relationship.
- Heb 10:24-25, Eph 4:1-6

C) As Christian Leaders we will:

- be accountable to our fellow leaders, watch out for each other and protect each other's integrity, e.g. never alone with a child or vulnerable adult.
- Act in the best interests of those we serve.
- Treat every program participant equally, 'no favourites'.
- Communicate with integrity, including accountable and wise use of electronic communication, commit to following our churches guidelines for electronic communication.
- Acknowledge when we are out of our depth &/or do not possess the required skills &/or professional credentials –and refer to those who do.
- Not take property belonging to others, including intellectual property (copyright).
- Not knowingly make false, misleading, deceptive or defamatory statements.
- Not engage in bullying, emotional abuse, harassment, physical abuse, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, sexual grooming or spiritual abuse of any person, including our own family.
- Not act violently or intentionally provoke violence when engaged in civil disobedience.
- Be responsible in our use of legal addictive substances and activities (e.g. prescription drugs/alcohol/gambling)
- Not use any prohibited substance

- Act with sexual purity. Sexuality is a gift from God. We will express our sexuality in healthy and God directed ways.
- Act with financial integrity, including having accountable and transparent systems in place for financial matters.
- Not seek personal advantage or financial gain from our position, other than in wages, recognised allowances and deductions.
- Disclose to the church leadership if we are or have been investigated for any criminal offences or have any knowledge of any serious criminal activity
- 1Thes 5:12-15, Col 3:12-14

Establishing a Code of Conduct in your Church

The development of your church Code of Conduct should be done by/or in conjunction with your church governing body (Elders, Council etc).

1. The Leadership body of the church should discuss the need to develop a Code of Conduct for their church and record in the meeting minutes a decision to develop a Code of Conduct.
2. The Leadership body can use this guide to help them develop a draft a Code of Conduct or the Leadership body may establish an internal Leadership working group to develop a draft Code of Conduct to present back to the Leadership body.
3. The Leadership body may choose to circulate the draft document to a broader section of leaders within the church for review.
4. Once the Leadership body is satisfied with the document, it should be presented to a Members meeting for endorsement.
5. Following the endorsement of the Code of Conduct, the church should regularly review and confirm the Code (it is suggested that this occur every year).

APPENDIX A

Sample Code of Conduct 1

We, [name of church], commit ourselves to a standard of responsible and ethical behaviour which is expected in our church and will bring honour and glory to God. Our code is underpinned by trust and a belief that everyone should be treated with respect and dignity.

This Code of Conduct gives guidance about what practices (actions) are supported and what practices are NOT condoned.

The Code of Conduct is not exhaustive and does not foresee every set of circumstances that may arise across the variety of Church events and activities.

The Code of Conduct should be viewed as an educational guide to the principles that help inform what is appropriate conduct.

The Code of Conduct values the social, relational and interpersonal safety and wellbeing of people of all ages. The Code of Conduct also values the role of leaders and mentors by prompting transparent, accountable relationships that promote trust and confidence in the Church and its programs.

We, [name of church] value:

Respect, Trust, Integrity, Honesty, Humility, Support, Compassion, Community, Forgiveness and Reconciliation, Generosity and Thankfulness, Equality and Inclusiveness, Justice, Service and Stewardship, Peace and Confidentiality (select any or all dependent on agreed values).

We commit ourselves to living out these values in all areas of our lives.

We commit ourselves to:

1. Conduct ourselves at all times in a manner that honours God and His Church.
2. In all financial matters act with scrupulous honesty and publically account for all monies handled by us on behalf of others.
3. Endeavour to conduct all personal relations in a godly manner, acting with respect, love, integrity and truthfulness toward all those we seek to associate, irrespective of their race, gender, position or religious position.
4. Where grievances occur and a resolution is not forthcoming, that we will seek additional assistance. We will seek every effort to pursue reconciliation following biblical principles when conflict or division occurs. Issues pertaining to criminal actions, bullying or sexual misconduct will be handled in accordance with Baptist Union of Victoria policies and we will report to the Police as required by law.
5. Be diligent in providing each other with information and resources to fulfil our roles and be mindful of the expectations others have of us.
6. Be truthful and honest in our communication with each other. We will be willing to share our reflections, concerns and ideas with each other.
7. Be loyal in our support of each other and other church members. We may express our opinions robustly but understand that once collective decisions have been reached we support the outcomes.

8. Actively promote:
- a. A safe environment where abuse of any nature is neither tolerated nor able to take place.
 - b. A safe environment where bullying of any kind is neither tolerated nor able to take place. Bullying can include:
 - i. Exclusion from a group or activity
 - ii. Intimidation
 - iii. Extortion
 - c. A safe environment where harassment is neither tolerated nor allowed to take place. Harassment is unwelcome conduct whether intended or not which makes another person feel offended, belittled, threatened which may occur through a single incident or a series of incidents over a period of time. Harassment can include:
 - Unwelcome physical contact
 - Gestures or language that could give offence including unwarranted shouting
 - Unjustified or unnecessary comments about a person’s attributes or abilities.

Confidentiality: confidentiality and trust are fundamental to sound church relationships and must be upheld within the constraints of the law and statutory requirements. Voluntary reporting is strongly encouraged where a belief has been formed that there is a requirement to do so.

This code of conduct will be reviewed annually at the first leadership meeting following the church’s annual general meeting.

Signed:

(Name)

(Signature)

Leadership Position:

Date:



Sample Code of Conduct 2

Eldership Team Covenant

Covenant of Honesty	We will be truthful and honest in our communication with each other. We will be willing to share our reflections, concerns and ideas with each other. We will not withhold from each other information and insights which are important for us to discuss together for the sake of the church community.
Covenant of Loyalty	We will be loyal in our support of one another in our discussions with other team members, staff, and members of the congregation. We will avoid allowing ourselves and others to be triangled or manipulated.
Covenant of Accord	We will not avoid disagreement and be willing to resolve conflict in a healthy context by following biblical principles. We will seek assistance when needed. We recognise we model this as elders.
Covenant of Commitment	We will practice the disciplines of listening to God, listening to the congregation and listening to each other both personally and collectively. We will be diligent in providing each other with information and other resources needed to fulfil our roles in the context of this eldership team and in church life.
Covenant of Regularity	We will be intentional in giving priority to meetings, gatherings of God's people and our own ministries in the church.
Covenant of Accountability	We will be accountable to each other to develop a balanced lifestyle, to fulfil our responsibilities to the church and maintain spiritual health. We will be accountable to the congregation for our leadership as members of this team through regular communication and reporting.
Covenant of Prayer	We will pray regularly for each other, for our Pastors and Ministry Leaders, for the congregation and for the mission of the church.
Covenant of Encouragement	We will be purposeful in stimulating each other in our commitments to learn, grow and explore new ideas.
Covenant of Affirmation	We will affirm the value of having different personalities and leadership styles. We will respect and accept each other and learn to serve together.
Covenant of Care	We will support and care for each other. We will be aware of each other's personal pressures and family situations. We will look out for each other and be willing to raise concerns appropriately with each other.

This covenant will be reviewed and confirmed each year at the commencement of the year or when new Elders join the team.

Adapted and used with permission from John Mark Ministries (<http://johnmark.net.au/jm/>)

APPENDIX B

What should happen if the code is breached?

This code outlines expectations of behaviour and appropriate boundaries for all members and in particular leaders of a church. However, in every community there are situations where issues arise and behaviour occurs that can cause offense or hurt between individuals. It is important that as Christian communities, we ensure that the response to this behaviour is appropriate to the severity of the breach but also offers the opportunity for individuals to find a godly and appropriate pathway to see their issues and concerns addressed.

Core Biblical Values:

The core Biblical values that underpin this process are:

- Truth-telling (Eph 4:15,25)
- Justice-seeking (Micah 6:8)
- Grace-giving (Col 3:13)
- Peace-making (Matt 5:9, Eph 4:2-3)

Matthew 18: 15-20 provides an outline for the overall process where Jesus indicates both God's presence in the process of resolution and also the significance which God places on the outcome reached.

Note: The reference in Matt 18:17 of treating people like "tax collectors and sinners" does not mean rejecting them from the church. It means that if a person consistently does not behave like a Christian, then we do not expect them to behave like a Christian and we adjust our expectations for them. That is, that if the expectations we would normally have of Christian disciples, (i.e. that they demonstrate grace, truthfulness, humility and a willingness to see and respond to personal sinfulness) are not being seen in their behaviour, we minister to them as if they were still to join the community like tax collectors and sinners. They are treated with kindness, gentleness but invited to repent and respond to the forgiveness of God, and to begin the journey of Christian discipleship.

It is recommended that where concerns have been identified, they are dealt with quickly to ensure that the matter does not become more complex.

A procedure like this can be a guide for individuals in any situation where conflict or a broken relationship occurs. However within a church context, particularly among leaders, it may be an agreed and expected procedure to which leaders are accountable. Some churches have a policy that refusal to engage in a process such as this at a time of conflict requires standing down from leadership as unwillingness to work toward reconciliation disqualifies a leader from service.

The recommended process below is adapted and used with permission from John Mark Ministries (<http://johnmark.net.au/jm/>).

Recommended Process:

Step One	<p style="text-align: center;">Personal Reflection</p> <p>Take some time before God to pray and reflect on the offence or injury you have received. In some situations you may decide not to take the matter further, in other situations important principles may be at stake and the situation needs to be taken further.</p>
(Optional Step)	<p style="text-align: center;">Wisdom and Accountability</p> <p>If you are unsure about the right response and feel the need to seek wise counsel for yourself before taking the situation further it is appropriate to do so. Seek a godly counsellor, pastor, leader or mentor to share with. The focus of this is to gain clarity on the right path to take and to be accountable in the situation to act with integrity, wisdom and towards making peace.</p> <p>This consultation must be distinguished from gossip or sharing the incident with others in order to gain sympathy and support. These are inappropriate.</p>
Step Two	<p style="text-align: center;">Informal Discussion</p> <p>A key step in resolution is to go to the other person informally and in private and share your concern. Seek to understand the perspective and viewpoint of the other. Be willing to receive an apology or respond to a process of restoration if it is offered. If the matter is resolved, no further action is needed.</p> <p>If you are on the receiving end of a discussion of this nature, be quick to listen, make sure you understand what the person is sharing. Guard yourself from simply reacting. If you need time to reflect ask for it. If you can see what you have done and can accept responsibility for it, apologise and seek forgiveness.</p>
Step Three	<p style="text-align: center;">Formal Discussions</p> <p>If step two fails to reach a resolution ask that it move to a formal process. Here others may be invited to be involved as either support people or informal facilitators. At this level it is appropriate that some record be kept of what occurs. If resolved, no further action is required. Normally the church leadership would be notified that this has happened. The meeting should be pre-arranged and both parties have the opportunity for support people present.</p>
Step Four	<p style="text-align: center;">Formal Mediation</p> <p>If step three fails, then the church (elders or pastor) should be notified and with the agreement of all, a trained mediator should be appointed who will meet with both parties and then facilitate a discussion together. Opportunities for interpersonal reconciliation are usually given. Points of agreement and disagreement are usually documented along with the outcome. Usually a solution which is acceptable to both is negotiated. If agreement is reached, no further action is required. A confidential report is given to the church leadership as well as to the individuals. Keeping the agreement is a matter of trust on both sides.</p>
Step Five	<p style="text-align: center;">Arbitration</p> <p>If step four fails, the church and both parties may agree to abide by the ruling of an appointed and agreed arbiter or arbitration panel. Again this person or panel is appointed by the church. In this scenario the arbiter interviews both parties and may ask for further witnesses. The case is examined and principles of justice applied. A judgement is given and the parties by their own agreement should abide by it.</p> <p>If this step fails, the situation has moved beyond the ability of the community to handle it internally and it must be referred to the civil courts.</p> <p>Within a church environment, both parties would then normally stand down from any leadership positions.</p>

Further considerations regarding the severity of a breach:

- i. **Minor:** Everyone is capable of sin but can repent and be forgiven (1 John 1:8-9). It stands to reason then, that the code can be breached. When this happens in an area that is not a breach of civil or criminal law, simply cease the conduct. If this is difficult, the person should see their team leader or supervisor about receiving help (e.g. counselling). In some cases it may be necessary to step a person aside from their duties whilst this takes place. It is crucial to deal with such matters confidentially and sensitively.
- ii. **Unknown:** Not all leaders will understand 'unacceptable' behaviours. Even after explaining the code some may be unaware they are exhibiting unacceptable behaviours. Leaders need to be open to correction and humble enough to modify behaviours so as to not discredit the gospel. As above, stepping a person aside from their duties may be necessary.
- iii. **Constant:** There are breaches that are not a breach of civil or criminal law, but still unacceptable behaviour in a ministry context. Where a leader has been made aware of their behaviour and yet refuses to change:
 - a. The ministry coordinator meets with the person for behaviour review meetings. Communicate required behaviour change (no more than 3 meetings).
 - b. If behaviour continues, a small group of church leaders are to arrange a meeting to address the behaviour. Stepping aside is appropriate at this point.
 - c. If the behaviour/s continue beyond this meeting, then respectfully, and upholding confidentiality, the person will be stood down for a set period. They will be offered help in changing their behaviour via counselling if they are willing. NB. Written notes of all meeting to be carefully taken and a copy given to all parties.
- iv. **Breaches of the law or allegations of abuse:** Allegations of abuse or serious misconduct are to be referred to the appropriate government authorities, in line with the Baptist Union of Victoria processes.

Adopted from Safe Church Manual