

Experience Ministries

Code of Ethical Standards

Effective May 1, 2023

“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...” Philippians 1:27a

We as commissioned, licensed or ordained ministers, who are called by God and credentialed by Experience Ministries, do solemnly commit to a life of joyful obedience and selfless service in order to glorify God and build up His people. Furthermore, we agree to abide by the following code of ethical standards:

General Standards

1. Recognition as a member of the clergy through credentialing is a great honor which should not be taken lightly. Experience Ministries requires quarterly reports and monthly dues, which are billed annually, as well as an annual renewal request and renewal fee. These assist us in providing quality clergy credentialing, training, live webcasts, outreach and support. Failure to complete two quarterly reports or failure to pay the monthly dues for two quarters communicates a lack of value and may result in suspension of clergy credentialing. Failure to submit a renewal request or pay the renewal fee by the renewal deadline will result in immediate termination of clergy credentials.
2. We agree to continue personal and professional growth through participation in continuing education programs, studying the scripture, mentoring, conferences and seminars.
3. Committed to personal, spiritual, physical and emotional health. To seek assistance for our own inner and interpersonal conflicts, from appropriate resources.
4. Committed to providing Biblical counsel for those issues and problems within the sphere of our training and competence.

Professional Standards

1. Ministers will apply their knowledge and training for the benefit and edification of the people they serve.
2. Ministers will not use their unique position of trust for personal gain or unfair advantage at the expense of their followers.
3. Ministers will be selective as to whom they counsel and will make appropriate referrals to other professionals when necessary.
4. Ministers will limit counseling to Biblical counseling. Ministers do not practice nor provide secular psychological, medical or psychiatric services unless they are appropriately trained and licensed to do so.
5. Ministers providing Biblical counseling and care will:
 - a. Pray with those they are ministering to as much as possible.
 - b. Read Scripture during sessions and give Scriptural assignments as part of the counseling.
 - c. Keep a Bible open and visible during counseling sessions.
6. Minister's who provide ongoing pastoral counseling should use a counseling agreement (informed consent) that:
 - a. Requires each person being counseled to sign. In the case of minors, a legal guardian must sign.
 - b. Acknowledges that the minister is providing Biblical counseling and specifies that the pastoral counselor is not a state licensed counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, or therapist.
 - c. Has a clause that the client agrees not to sue for any expenses or damages that result from any of the minister's counseling services or ministry.

- d. Has a clause that confidential information may be disclosed to appropriate state law enforcement or authorities when required by law such as mandated reporting requirements.
7. Retention of records. Ministers providing pastoral counseling may choose to take notes while actively providing care. We recommend destroying all counseling notes / records with exception of the informed consent and termination notice when counseling is terminated unless there is a compelling reason to retain them such as the need to show compliance with mandated reporting, a subpoena, or at the guidance of legal counsel.
 - a. Informed consent and termination notices can be retained longer but should not contain any confidential information such as the reason or outcome of counseling.
 - b. Ministers' notes should only include scriptures read, biblical advice given, and basic facts and not their opinions or personal thoughts.
8. Ministers need to be aware of and comply with state laws that affect them and their ministry. These would include mandatory reporting, counseling laws and regulations as well as any other laws in their state that apply to their ministry.
9. **Experience Ministries provides clergy credentialing, training and support. Experience Ministries does not sponsor, provide direct supervision or oversight. It is the responsibility of each minister to establish and maintain their ministry, legal entity, and comply with all laws and regulations that govern their activities.**
10. **Bringing lawsuits against other Christians, the church or a ministry is prohibited by scripture. (1 Cor. 6:1-8 & Eph. 4:31-32) Ministers credentialed by Experience Ministries agree not bring a lawsuit against each other or against Experience Ministries. Disputes will be settled through mediation.**
11. It is not wise or recommended for ministers to counsel members of the opposite sex alone. If this is unavoidable the minister should endeavor to put safeguards in place. These can include, but are not limited to meeting in a public place, using a location with windows where other can easily see in or using a professional office / location where other people are nearby.
12. Never counsel a minor outside of the easy line-of-sight of another minister or person.
13. Never go into a child's home while the parents are absent.
14. Never touch anyone in an inappropriate way.
15. All financial arrangements, fees or donations will be discussed clearly, professionally and ethically with any person requesting such information.
16. If a person is receiving care from a mental health professional or minister consent should be obtained before providing ongoing pastoral care or counseling to the individual.
17. Ministers who are providing pastoral care / counseling should obtain "Professional Liability Insurance" also known as "Errors and Omissions Insurance."
18. It is the responsibility of the credentialed minister to obtain professional liability insurance. Experience Ministries does not provide this and is not responsible for the actions of credentialed ministers.
19. If a counselee threatens or hints at suicide the biblical counselor should immediately have the counselee contact a suicide hotline or else refer that person to a professional counselor for suicide counseling or hospitalization for testing. The pastoral counselor can continue to do biblical and spiritual counseling; however, that counseling must be supplemented when the issue involves suicide threats or indications.

Relationship Standards

1. Ministers will demonstrate respect, love, and value to each person, regardless of race, religion, gender, income, educational level, ethnicity, or social position. If any of the above issues would interfere with their ability to render unbiased, pastoral care, it is the responsibility of the minister to make a professional referral in the best interest of the person.
2. Every reasonable effort should be made to refer to another minister or professional when appropriate care cannot be given by a minister.

3. Each individual has the personal freedom and responsibility to make informed choices. The minister shall not make life choices or decisions for the person, unless the individual is unable to do so, and where their physical, emotional, or spiritual safety is endangered.
4. Ministers shall not condemn people for their moral, religious, or social standards. Ministers are however, expected to teach Biblical standards of behavior and morality.
5. Ministers shall conduct themselves in a Christ-like professional manner. Emotional pressure, exploitation, or inappropriate language will not be permitted.
6. Sexual contact, exploitation or harassment on any level is unethical. All forms of sexual behavior, even when a person invites or consents to such activities, is inexcusable. Sexual activity is defined as, but not limited to, all forms of overt and covert seductive speech, gestures and behavior, as well as physical contact of a sexual nature. Harassment is defined as, but not limited to, repeated comments, gestures or physical contacts sexual in nature.
7. Unrealistic statements to individuals about the outcome of any counseling process is unethical and unprofessional.
8. Given the complexity of some pastoral relationships, ministers must avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of parishioners.

Confidentiality Standards

1. Credentialed ministers will at times have conversations that shall be regarded as extremely confidential. This shall be considered protected, privileged communication, an act of confession made by a penitent to a clergy person, which may be personal, liturgical, devotional or sacramental. This is privileged information and is communication intended only to be addressed by the minister and is expected to remain in this one-to-one relationship of trust. It can be released only with the consent of the one who confessed or revealed it. This is initiated out of a religious orientation and seals the minister from releasing any information to anyone without the expressed written consent.
2. A credentialed minister who violates, or discloses information as described in the above paragraph is subject to disciplinary action that may include restrictions or loss of credentials
3. When a person receiving pastoral care makes a statement to a minister in the presence of a third party, that statement is usually not protected by confidentiality privilege. The presence of a third party negates any inference that the statement was intended to be privileged communication or an act of confession.
4. All credentialed ministers shall carefully protect the privacy and identity of their counselees and their situations. The minister will avoid revealing information about parishioners, whether publicly or privately, unless the minister has been given informed consent by the subject adult individual or legal holder of confidentiality privilege for minors, in the form of expressed, written permission, and that the release of such information would be appropriate to the situation.
5. All records of counselees or persons receiving pastoral care are to be stored, handled, or disposed of in a way that assures security and confidentiality.
6. In the event that a situation requires the identity of a counselee or third party to understand the situation fully, only the first name of the person shall be used when engaged in a supervision or consultation, unless excused by previously obtained written permission. Situations where more than one person or group is involved, written permission from all legally accountable persons who have been present during the counseling must be obtained before any disclosure can be made. It is the minister's responsibility to impress upon other consultation or supervision professionals, the importance of confidentiality in the case.
7. Written consent forms shall be obtained from individuals before any audio or video tape recording, or permitting of third party observation of any pastoral care sessions.
8. These standards of confidentiality are not designed to be used to avoid appropriate intervention when it is necessary: i.e., when there is evidence of child abuse or abuse of minors, the elderly, the disabled, and the physically or mentally incompetent. It is the professional responsibility of each clergy person

- to be aware of and comply with the laws on such matters in the state in which they provide pastoral care ministry. Ministers must abide by their state's mandatory reporting regulations.
9. The limitations of confidentiality, such as those based on the civil laws of each state, regulations and judicial precedent shall be explained to each counselee as part of the interview process prior to any pastoral counseling being provided. Examples of limitation or exceptions to confidentiality include but not limited to such situations as:
 - a. Legal mandate, when child abuse is revealed, suspected or apparent.
 - b. When the revealing of the information would present a clear and immediate danger to a person or persons.
 - c. Legal proceedings in which the member, pastoral counselor, care giver, minister does not have the confidentiality privilege.
 10. When pastoral care is given to a person under eighteen years of age, the specific content of communications with the minister is confidential, the minor's parents or legal guardians however, have a right to receive general information on the process of care given or methods used.

Disciplinary Procedures

Each minister credentialed by Experience Ministries is committed to upholding these established ethical standards. Each minister voluntarily submits to the evaluation of other ministers as to standards of professional ethics with regard to the following procedures. Upon a complaint being lodged against a minister, a refusal or failure by such minister to cooperate with an investigation or inquiry may be considered grounds for immediate dismissal or revocation of credentials.

If a serious complaint, unethical situation, legal action or allegation against a minister arises they are required to inform Experience Ministries as soon as reasonably possible. If the action or allegation is being brought by someone other than the minister in question the person bringing the information forward must provide a written statement or provide evidence to cause an investigation. In the situation where a third party is bringing the allegation or information forward the minister may be notified that there has been a complaint or allegation against them. The identity of the person bringing the information forward may be withheld if there is an appropriate reason or safety concern.

The initial investigation and determination will be conducted by a member of Experience Ministries leadership team. If the situation can be addressed at this level and a reasonable resolution or disciplinary action can be attained the matter will be resolved between the member of the leadership team and the minister. This is in keeping with Matthew 18:15-19 where we are instructed to go to the person privately as a first step.

If the investigation, determination and appropriate resolution cannot be attained during the initial investigation, one or more of the leadership team or the board of directors will be asked to participate in the ongoing investigation until an appropriate action can be taken.

In some situations legal counsel may be consulted. If Experience Ministries is requesting legal counsel it will incur the cost thereof. If the minister is requesting legal counsel the minister and not Experience Ministries will incur the legal fees.

The investigation may gather information from a variety of sources, including but not limited to:

- Another professional organization.
- Another Christian ministry.
- Television, radio, internet sources or news media.
- Law enforcement, attorneys or state investigators.
- Any individual directly or indirectly associated with the situation.

The minister against whom an allegation or complaint has been made will be treated with the utmost care, support and professional Christian courtesy. No assumptions of guilt or innocence should be formed, before the investigation is completed.

If the allegation puts the minister or another person at risk the minister's clergy credentials will be suspended and Experience Ministries will request they cease from ministry until the investigation is completed.

Upon completion of an investigation or inquiry of a minister credentialed by Experience Ministries, the following actions may be taken:

1. **Exoneration.** The allegation or complaint did not have sufficient foundation. Thus, the member is exonerated, free of accusation or allegation.
2. **Admonishment.** This occurs when a minister is unaware of having violated the "Code of Ethics." The minister must accept admonishment about ethics and professional standards.
3. **Reprimand.** This is a serious rebuke or reproof of a minister. In this case the minister has either admitted or accepted responsibility for the situation. This rebuke will be in writing and may include further disciplinary action such as probationary status.
4. **Probationary Status.** This action is based upon an assessment that the minister needs to work on a particular practice or behavioral issue, clearly identified and presented in written format. The written format will reasonably assure that the violation will not occur again. The minister may continue his or her pastoral ministry and caregiver role, as long as he or she will not pose a threat to the well-being of himself or herself or others. The term of probationary status may be extended if deemed necessary. At any time during the probation the situation may be re-evaluated and may be change based upon a new understanding of previous information or compliance with the terms of the probation.
5. **Suspension.** Suspension is the same as probation with one major difference. The minister must cease and suspend all ministerial functions unless specific allowances are made.
6. **Revoking of Credentials.** The minister's clergy credentials are immediately revoked. This may occur in any of the above cases. This action is mandated where a repeated occurrence of the same violations or multiple violations, particularly if legal, financial, or sexual indiscretions. This may occur when a minister is found guilty of a misdemeanor or a felony in a court of law.
7. **Appeals.** In any of the above actions the person being disciplined can appeal the decision. They will be given the right to present new information or to clarify known information. This must be done in writing within thirty days of the initial decision. Experience Ministries leadership team member may call upon other members or the board of directors to evaluate an appeal.
8. **Confidentiality.** The results of an investigation and any disciplinary action taken by Experience Ministries will not be held as confidential. Experience Ministries has the right to act in its best interest or in the best interests of the public. Other ministries may be notified of the investigation and outcome including disciplinary action if there is a compelling reason for them to be notified.

Agreement and acknowledgment.

The code of ethics may be updated periodically. In such cases the updated information will be made available. If any part of this agreement is found to be unlawful or unenforceable it does not nullify the rest of the agreement. The rest of the agreement shall stand and shall be enforced.

I, _____ agree to abide by Experience Ministries Code of Ethical Standards. I further agree to conduct my life and ministry in such a way as to be pleasing to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Signature of Minister

Date