

# **FAITH, WORSHIP AND MINISTRY REPORT TO GENERAL SYNOD, JUNE 2007**

## **APPENDIX B: Codes of Ethics**

### **WE WILL, WITH GOD'S HELP: A Guide to Codes of Ethics for those authorized to practice ministry in the Anglican Church of Canada**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

General Synod 2004 directed the Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee to produce a guide for dioceses to assist them in the development of a code of ethics and standards of practice for lay and clergy engaged in ministry in the Anglican Church of Canada.<sup>1</sup> In this guide, the Committee sets out scriptural and theological foundations for ministry ethics and directs those concerned to areas which should be covered in any locally-developed code. The guide also contains a suggested process for formulating ethics codes, along with a list of existing resources which dioceses could adapt for their own use, tailoring them to meet their own local needs and situations.

By adopting this guide, the Anglican Church of Canada affirms our insistence upon appropriate conduct among all those who minister in our church, lay and ordained, and further declares that:

A Ministry Code of Ethics:

- Is rooted in our baptismal and ordination vows.
- Is grounded in scriptural perspectives.
- Adheres to Christian doctrine.

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<sup>1</sup> Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod 2004, Resolution A-171.

## 1. ROOTED IN BAPTISMAL and ORDINATION VOWS:

“So natural is the union of Religion with Justice, that we may boldly deny there is either, where both are not.” *Richard Hooker, Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, V, 1.2.*

As Anglicans we place a high value on justice. We all promise at baptism to “strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being (BAS, p. 159).” Those in ordained ministry promise to pattern their lives after Christ’s teachings (deacons and presbyters) and “be merciful to all, show compassion to the poor and strangers and defend those who have no helper” (bishops, BAS, p. 637). We make these promises before God and each other and call upon God to help us keep them. Love of God and neighbour means extending fair treatment and ethical conduct to all whom we encounter in every aspect of ministry, whether lay or ordained, formal or informal, within church buildings or without.

Wherever the church’s ministers live out our ministry, opportunities arise to do great good or great harm. The high degree of trust that people have in the church’s ministers often encourages them to reveal deeply sensitive and important aspects of their lives, making them more vulnerable and less alert to boundary violations than they would otherwise be. At the same time, those to whom such trust, authority and power are given may use them inappropriately, blind to their own wrongdoing. Knowing ahead of time how to avoid and/or handle risky situations keeps the vulnerable safe, the ministers trustworthy and the effective integrity of God’s church intact.

A code of ethics grounds the ministry process in Holy Scripture and Christian doctrine. In its more specific applications, it provides a code of conduct giving particular direction and setting out particular procedures if violations occur. A code of ethics for ministry is not a comprehensive handbook of good ministry practice in all its dimensions;

rather, it focuses on the standards of conduct which must exist if personal ministry relationships are to be responsibly loving and pastorally just.

The need for ethical standards in ministry is based as much on the inevitability of human error as it is on the inevitability of human confusion. We make our baptismal and ordination vows in a context of community prayer and celebration. We keep them, or not, in a complexity of community need, conflict and power imbalance.

Ethical reflection is neither a theological luxury nor a managerial burden in these circumstances, it is a pastoral necessity. It enables us to respond appropriately and in practical ways to both God's calling and our promises. This is not easy work, so it is not remarkable that we need God's help in doing it. As Francis Bridger states in the 2003 Church of England ethics guidelines, "We . . . are sustained in ministry by the activity of God in us. Ministerial codes or guidelines may set the boundaries, but only by grace can we live them out."<sup>2</sup>

## **2. BASED IN SCRIPTURE:**

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."  
Jn15:12 (NRSV).

As Anglicans we agree with Christian ethicists Bruce Birch and Larry Rasmussen when they say that Holy Scripture is "to be taken seriously in all ethical reflection within the church."<sup>3</sup> The ethics of Christian ministry begin with the teachings of the Bible. Most of us point to the Ten Commandments and the Summary of the Law as divinely

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<sup>2</sup> Bridger, Francis, Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy, London, Church House Publishing, 2003, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Birch, Bruce and Larry Rasmussen., Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life, Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1989, p. 154.

derived mandates for all human behavior and relationships, guides in all our doings. Both Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament contain numerous injunctions and provisions about behavior, many of which have a particular relevance in their application to codes of ethics for ministry. It is important, however, to think of Scripture in ethics, rather than ethics in Scripture. In other words, we seek the biblical perspective in the context of both historical and current worshipping communities rather than proof-texting for rules.

Ethics professor<sup>4</sup> and Episcopalian Stephen Holmgren offers a way to search for biblical perspectives with his description of how Scripture is a mirror, a restraint and a map for Christian ethics.<sup>5</sup> Scripture reflects our actions back to us and gives us an image of righteousness with which to compare our own deeds. Psalm 15: 2-4 provides such an image:

Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right,  
And speak the truth from their heart;  
Who do not slander with their tongue  
And do no evil to their friends,  
Nor take up a reproach against their neighbours;  
In whose eyes the wicked are despised,  
But who honor those who fear the Lord;  
Who stand by their oath even to their hurt; (NRSV)

The prophet Amos also gives us a looking glass with which to bring ourselves into conformity with God's will for us, "Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate;" (Amos 5: 14-15, NRSV).

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<sup>4</sup> Nashotah House, now rector of Grace Church, St. Francisville, La.

<sup>5</sup> Holmgren, Stephen, Ethics After Easter, The New Church's Teaching Series, Vol. 9, Boston, Cowley, 2000, p. 73.

As a restraint, Scripture provides several lists of do's and don'ts, the Ten Commandments being the major example. But Scripture is more than a catalogue of prohibitions. Paul, for example, urges continual self-discipline and self-evaluation. "Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. . . ." (2 Cor. 13:5a, NRSV). The First Letter of Peter likewise offers caution, specifically to those in ministry leadership. "Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock . . . . And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another. . . ." (1 Pet. 5: 3, 5b, NRSV).

Scripture presents broad ethical guidance in its capacity as a map. The Summary of the Law (Mk. 12: 28-31) provides the basic coordinates: love of God and love of neighbour. Jesus' consistent attention to the poor, the marginalized and the vulnerable are all the compass points in between those coordinates. Our behavior toward the least among us, the location where much of our ministry takes place, is the measure of our relationship with Christ (Mt. 25: 37-40).

This is by no means a complete list of Scriptural indicators in the search for ethical foundations. However, it provides a sufficient overview to reinforce the assurance that Scripture undergirds all of our ministry efforts, including the ethical principles which order them.

### **3. ADHERES TO CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE**

"The quest for ethical wisdom is the moral dimension of our life together"  
Rev. Alla Renee Bozarth, *Womanpriest: a personal odyssey*, p. 141.

Theology and ethics are more than abstract academic topics. In concrete and practical ways, Christians engage in them all the time. First Nations authors Paul Schultz

and George Tinker define theology as “people talking about what they are doing when they pray.”<sup>6</sup> Christian ethics, then, is people talking about what they are doing, period. When ministry is the context for theological and ethical reflection, as it is in the preparation of a code or guide, several Christian doctrines and ethical concepts are particularly relevant.

The doctrine of human nature holds that humans are created in the image of God. This means that humans as moral actors are to keep their actions in line with God’s mandate to be holy as God is holy (Lev. 11.45). It also means that we view each person we encounter as bearing the same image of God we do. This doctrine also acknowledges that, although fallen short of the divine ideal, we have the continuous responsibility to live into it. Holiness in ministry means that respect, thoughtfulness and love are part of our every act.

The doctrine of salvation explains how our human fallen-ness is not a permanent barrier to our doing good because of Christ’s saving action in history and in each individual life. A new self is ours, “which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. . . . In that renewal . . . Christ is all and in all.” (Col. 3: 10-11, NRSV). We are capable of acting appropriately, with God’s help and Christ’s saving power in our lives.

The theology of forgiveness also enters into the preparation of ethical codes because it reminds us to include provision for reconciliation when mistakes occur. Recent church history tells us that impropriety, especially involving sexual misconduct in

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<sup>6</sup> Schultz, Paul and George Tinker, “Rivers of Life: Native Spirituality for Native Churches,” in Treat, James, ed., Native and Christian: indigenous voices on religious identity in the United States and Canada, New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 58.

pastoral situations, has been a blight on church life in some places. Putting matters right involves not just restitution, but rehabilitation and the opportunity for a repentant wrongdoer's re-entry into the community.

The theology and ethics of virtue also have a bearing on ministry behavior standards. Christian virtues are those character traits consistent with the Christian life.<sup>7</sup> In the New Testament, faith, hope and love stand out as named virtues, but in the field of ministry we can add justice, respect, humility and trustworthiness. Reference to and definition of virtuous conduct can provide a positive foundation for ministry ethics codes and transform them from a list of regulations into a means of deepening ministry formation.

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<sup>7</sup> Porter, Jean, "Virtue ethics," in Gill, Robin, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 99.

## **MINISTRY AREAS REQUIRING ETHICAL GUIDELINES**

### 1. PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELLING:

- Definitions and clarifications about appropriate interpersonal boundaries
- Confidentiality standards
- Power differential understanding
- Human sexuality awareness - advisable to require training in abuse prevention
- Knowledge of competence limits - when to make referrals
- Definitions of conflict of interest and when to declare them
- Compliance with requirements of civil law and criminal law

### 2. FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:

- Personal loans from parishioners - set dollar amount limit or prohibit altogether
- Compliance with tax and pension rules
- Standards for charging fees
- Define appropriate non-monetary remuneration
- Advise on personal debt management
- Policy for being heir and/or executor of parishioners' estates

### 3. EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES:

- Fairness in hiring or appointing
- Workplace propriety and safety
- Fair compensation for staff
- Treatment of volunteers
- Clarity of tasks for partially- or non-stipendiary clergy
- Clear job descriptions
- Periodic evaluations

### 4. EDUCATION:

- Fulfillment of continuing education obligations

### 5. HEALTH:

- Self-care, emotional and physical
- Care for family
- Substance abuse avoidance

### 6. ADMINISTRATIVE INTEGRITY:

- Responsible organization and record keeping
- Task follow-through
- Reasonable delegation



Honesty and truth-telling

7. EMPOWERMENT OF OTHERS' MINISTRIES:

Sharing appropriate information with appropriate laity  
Sharing tasks and responsibilities  
Making education opportunities available for others

8. COLLEGIALITY AND COOPERATION:

Clear process in place for consideration of call to another parish  
Confidentiality  
Canonical obedience  
Representing the church in the community  
Support and respect for other pastors  
Behavior after leaving one parish for another or at retirement

**SUGGESTED DIOCESAN PROCESS TO MAXIMIZE LOCAL DESIGN,  
RELEVANCE AND OWNERSHIP**

1. Identify a committed working group, e.g., clergy, laity, ethicist, lawyer, teacher, counsellor, physician, nurse social worker
2. Convene the group and ask them first to consider prayerfully the biblical, theological and practical underpinnings for a code of ministry ethics.
3. Ask them next to consider the mission and vision of the diocese.
4. Identify and state why an ethics code is important to the diocese.
5. Consider how the code can reflect the character of the diocese, keeping in mind especially the needs and protocols of other cultures. For example, some First Nations have cleansing feasts or other methods to reintegrate an offender back into the community.
6. Consider adapting and/or adopting a code in use by another diocese.
7. Frame the consequences of misconduct clearly. Some may want to include them in diocesan canons. It may be advisable to sequence violations with warnings, temporary removal, rehabilitation requirements, permanent removal, loss of license.
8. Make ample and clear provisions for pastoral care for all parties involved in alleged code violations.

9. Allow time for diocesan consultation with lay and ordained ministers.
10. Consider language clarity and accessibility.
11. Provide educational workshops for clergy, staff and volunteers.
12. Provide a method of ratification and periodic review and revision of the code.

### **OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS**

Make assent to the code's provisions a requirement for ordination and licensing.

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<http://www.ucc.org/ministers/manual/MOM%2001%20Partners.pdf>

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