

Ten pastoral courtesies

Feature

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Below is a document drafted by Michael Breininger, senior pastor of Richland Center Fellowship in Wisconsin, in his capacity as president of the Richland County Ministerial Association; it was adopted by the RCMA. Read more about the RCMA and the friendship between Breininger and Five Points Lutheran Church pastor Larry Engel in Debra Bendis's article "[No Longer Strangers](#)."—Ed.

Courtesy:

politeness; good manners

a courteous gesture or remark

As pastors and spiritual leaders in the Richland County area we subscribe to the following pastoral courtesies:

1. **Respect.** We agree to show respect to other pastors and spiritual leaders in word and actions. Disagreement or criticism will focus on topical relevance rather than personal insult or undermining of character. We refuse to diminish the ministry of others through slander or gossip. (1 Peter 2:17)
2. **Dispute resolution.** If there is a dispute between pastors or spiritual leaders it will be handled by taking the matter directly to the person who is offended or the offending party. Pastors and spiritual leaders refuse to carry the offense of a congregant who is offended with another pastor or spiritual leader without taking all necessary steps to resolve the matter biblically. (Matthew 18:15; Matt. 5:23)
3. **Care of congregants.** Each pastor or spiritual leader is to honor the sphere of authority that exists when a person belongs to a given church. As such, pastors and spiritual leaders will make efforts to put people in contact with their own pastor or spiritual leader if they come into contact with a person from another church in need of spiritual care. This courtesy does not mean that a pastor or spiritual leader cannot

pray for or encourage or hold a conversation with a congregant from a church other than his own. (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; 1 Peter 5:2-4)

4. **Appeals.** When there is a disagreement between pastors or spiritual leaders, rather than allegations or accusations each pastor or spiritual leader will make appeals for the sake of Christ and the unity of His body. An appeal is a request for consideration of potential errors and/or possible suggestions for change. (Philemon 1:8-10; 1 Peter 5:1; 1 Corinthians 1:10)

5. **Involvement of people in disputes.** Pastors and spiritual leaders agree to involve only people who are directly associated with a dispute. Pastors and spiritual leaders refuse to broaden the scope of involvement beyond what is absolutely necessary to resolve the dispute. There should be no “rallying” of people to take up sides and, thereby, cause unnecessary divisions. If a person does not have the position to effect resolution then they are not to be taken into the matter. (Ephesians 4:2-4; 1 Corinthians 10:32-33)

6. **Theological disagreements.** There are valid theological disagreements between churches as well as pastors and spiritual leaders. Some of these disagreements may be considered the essential doctrines while others may be considered non-essentials. Wherever agreements over theology and doctrine can be found, they should. However, each pastor or spiritual leader has the right and responsibility to hold fast to their deeply held theological and doctrinal convictions. It must be the goal of pastors and spiritual leaders to extend mercy and grace when possible while not compromising personally. (1 Timothy 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13)

7. **Public disputes.** On occasion some disputes, especially moral issues, may become public. In such cases pastors and spiritual leaders agree to be respectful in their discourse and hold up the standard of not dishonoring the name of Jesus Christ. It is better to be wronged than to dishonor the Lord and his church. (1 Corinthians 6:7-8)

8. **Observe due process.** When charges are brought against another pastor or spiritual leader, whether formal or informal, due process will be observed. “Innocent until proven guilty” is a biblical concept. It is not the role of the pastor or spiritual leader to rush to judgment until the facts have been revealed. We must extend the right of due process to friends and enemies within the ministry and the church. (Deuteronomy 19:15; 2 Corinthians 13:1)

9. A disposition of reconciliation. When a biblical violation is brought to light and the matter is established through due process there must be a heart to reconcile with God and other followers of Christ. The offending party must be willing to repent with godly sorrow and brokenness. The offended party must be willing to forgive and release an offense. This is the pattern that Jesus gave us so that we might be reconciled to God. Pastors and spiritual leaders must demonstrate this biblical pattern of reconciliation to the community at large and the church. (Luke 17:3-4; 2 Corinthians 7:10)

10. Recognize the disciplinary actions of other churches. If a person has been placed under discipline in another church or has left that church causing division or dissension, pastors and spiritual leaders will make efforts to reconcile such a person with their past associations. This will probably mean contacting the previous church and working cooperatively to attempt to restore this person in their breach condition with the church of Jesus Christ. It also means that pastors and spiritual leaders will not easily receive someone who has caused strife or division in previous churches or is slandering other leaders. (Titus 3:10; Romans 16:17-18)