

# **CALLED TO SERVE**

## **A Manual for Ministers**



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# Called to Serve: A Manual for Ministers

Third Edition

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# Foreword

The calling of shepherds of God's flock has not changed over the centuries: to feed and lead the people of God through life's joys and sorrows, celebrations and remembrances. What does change over time is the language we use to convey the practice of ministry. Ministers today also face new challenges in the context of ministry. For this reason, you hold in your hand a revised minister's manual that we trust will meet your need for ministry challenges.

The Board of Leadership and Outreach (BLO) determined that it was time to update the manual after a 20-year run of the second edition. Darryl Klassen was asked to chair the revision committee, and together with Layton Friesen (Conference Pastor), and pastors Ward Parkinson and Russell Doerksen, the committee set out to accomplish this task.

With suggestions from the BLO, a survey administered to ministers in the conference, including the wisdom of the committee, several tasks were identified: reorganization of the contents for ease of use, editing of units for language and resource updating, and the addition of helpful articles for pastoral usage (i.e. material useful for orienting new ministers).

The Revision committee chose to conscript several more writers than has been the norm to add more perspective and collaboration. We thank Doris Penner, Heidi Dirks, Kevin Wiebe, Mitchel Martens, Abe Bergen, Terry Smith, Barry Plett, and James Driedger for their willingness to contribute. Rebecca Roman and Erica Fehr provided excellent layout and copyediting work.

We are indebted to the writers of the first edition of the EMC Minister's Manual: Edwin Friesen, Harvey Plett, and Dave Schellenberg. Additionally, we are thankful for the revisions made by the committee responsible for the second edition: Arden Thiessen, Ron Penner, John Koop, and other writers. We make no pretense of supplanting their work, but endeavour to build on what has been handed down to us.

We believe that this manual will be a helpful resource to new ministers and an encouraging resource to experienced ministers. For clarification, we will use minister and pastor interchangeably in this manual.

*Darryl G. Klassen (D.Min.)*

*Chair of the Minister's Manual Revision Committee 2019*

*"So Christ himself gave...pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God..." (Ephesians 4:11-13).*

# 1. Our EMC Theology of Ministry

**T**o become the Church's minister of the gospel is to follow the decision of the disciples mending their nets, who, hearing a single phrase from Jesus, let go of their security and future and were drawn into a full, wondrous and perilous life proclaiming the Kingdom of God. This call of the disciples to accompany Jesus in ministry is the biblical basis for EMC ministry.

Christian ministry is the work of the Church in leading, empowering, correcting, organizing and inspiring followers of Jesus to take up their cross to contemplate, imitate and participate in the work of God. Christian ministry does not build its own kingdom, but seeks by the power of the Spirit to marvel at the quiet, often hidden arrival of the new reign of God and to teach people how to live their lives in step with this good news.

Here are key biblical and theological foundations to being an EMC minister.

## The Bible and the Minister

There are professions in our society that have similarities to the ministerial vocation. The work of therapists, social workers, executives, teachers, and farmers all overlap with the minister's work in key ways and we can learn from these professions. However in a society where a Christian minister is often misunderstood or ignored, the temptation to make these other frameworks our chief model is a real one.

Christian ministry is shaped by the Bible. Biblical characters who were leaders are the primary models of our work. Besides these scriptural role-models, there is also explicit biblical direction to leaders.

Here are passages that will shape the calling and work of the minister.

1. Exodus 3–4. Here we see the revealing of God's name, the summons to Moses and his struggle to resist his vocation. Old Testament call stories draw a powerful portrait of what it means to be called into service. See also David, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Amos, and Jeremiah.
2. Ezekiel 34. This is the prophet's indictment of the negligent "shepherds" of Israel who have oppressed their sheep. This forms a backdrop to Jesus' claim to be the good shepherd in John 10:1–30.
3. Matthew 10. This is Jesus' commissioning instructions to his apostles. The surrender expected of disciples, the poverty and

suffering predicted, and the promise of God's intimate presence in their ministry describe Christ's vision of ministry.

4. John 21:9–23. This is Jesus' redemptive commissioning of Peter on the beach after his betrayal. The call to ministry is a tangible way Christ shows us that he has forgiven our denials of him.
5. Acts 1:15–26; 6:1–8; 9:10–19; 13:1–4. These are call stories in the early church. While we cannot say that the New Testament has one normative way of structuring church leadership, the practices of the early church show us the Spirit's pattern of sending workers.
6. 2 Corinthians 4. This is the apostle Paul's theology connecting atonement and calling. Our ministry is a ministry of reconciliation because "what we preach is not ourselves; but Jesus Christ as Lord..." (v. 5).
7. Philippians 2:1–13. The apostle Paul modelled ministry on the incarnation of the Son of God. We are not the second Person of the Trinity, but our lives are modeled on the way in which the Son relates to the Father in love for his world.
8. The pastoral letters of Timothy and Titus. These are, in their entirety, instructions about the ministerial life.
9. 1 Peter 5:1–11. Peter's exhortation to elders to shepherd like their Chief Shepherd is a powerful antidote to the idolatrous tendency of ministers to lord it over their flock.

## **Christ-formed ministry**

When Jesus first appeared in resurrected power to his disciples locked in a house, his greeting immediately drew their future lives into his own mission with the Father. "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). Christ lived his entire life within the nurture and direction of his Father. "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38). From this abiding sense of mission Jesus preached the good news, mentored the disciples, fed the poor, healed the sick, cast out demons, and was the fragrance of God to the delight of many. This ministry was hard work, but in this service there was peace, the shalom of God's rule on earth.



Our ministry is a sub-ministry within the mission Jesus received from the Father. We feed those Jesus feeds. We confront those Jesus is driven to confront. We teach those Christ intends to disciple. Christ's mission gives us both the content and the manner of our own mission. We do nothing on our own.

All our attitudes and postures thus must align with Christ's. All con-  
niving, manipulation, violence, arrogance, ambition, and greed have no  
place in our lives as ministers because they simply do not exist in the love  
between Jesus and his Father. All success is meaningless except what comes  
through our participation in the mission of Jesus. It is his Kingdom that  
now gives us the joy we find in this world (Matt. 10:16–23). This is why an  
EMC minister has a fundamental humility and servant attitude in minist-  
ry. Our ministry is not our own.

In these ways, EMC ministry is a Christocentric work.

## **Spirit-empowered ministry**

The Holy Spirit was sent not as a vague force or energy but as the third  
Person of the Godhead, the agent of God to establish the Body of Christ  
on earth. It is only by the empowering and gifting of the Spirit that minist-  
ry can be centred on the mission of Christ from the Father. With the  
anointing of the Spirit, ministry is a work of power and wonder encour-  
aging people to be united to Christ (John 14:25–27).

To be called to ministry does not impose a strange, ill-fitted life on a  
believer. We are created for good works (Eph. 1:3–4, 13; 2:10). The Spirit  
takes possession and transforms us into the likeness of Christ. The work  
of the Spirit in our heart creates virtue, pours out gifts, and cleanses from  
sin, making it possible for us to truly be ourselves as ministers.

The Holy Spirit brings together the community of the Church within  
which various gifts of ministry are unleashed (Eph. 4:11–12). The Church  
is not a mere sociological phenomenon but a new creation of God, a fel-  
lowship united by the Spirit for the purpose of witnessing to Christ's work  
in the world (2 Cor. 5:17). It is this Spirit-filled fellowship that is equipped  
to call forth workers and establish them within the biblical vision. The  
EMC believes that it is the Holy Spirit working within the fellowship that  
recognizes and calls forth ministry.

The Spirit has given the Church the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16–17). The  
Spirit opens our eyes to see the good news in the Bible. As ministers, our  
natural talents, education, experience, personality, and hard work are  
re-directed and anointed by the Spirit to enable us to read the Bible in a

way that profits the Church. We work with the energy that Christ creates in us by the Spirit (Col. 1:29).

In these ways, EMC ministry is Pentecostal ministry.

## **Serving the Church**

The Holy Spirit resources the Church with the workers it needs. The gift of pastoring is given to the Church to build up the body of Christ. Like the disciple Peter, we are called to feed Christ's sheep. All believers are given gifts, and ministers should do nothing to suggest that, somehow, they are "called to ministry" in a way quantitatively different than others (1 Pet. 5:3). The fact that the minister's work may be structured as salaried employment in the church does not change this.

This does not mean that the life of a minister in the church is not unique in some ways. It has a leadership quality and an exemplary quality that other members may not experience in their own service.

It has been the emphasis of the EMC that a minister is a servant of the congregation. We are not the boss of our church, nor are we "in charge" of our church. We are servant leaders whose gentle but firm direction helps the church live out its call before God. We are accountable to the congregation and work with an openness to correction and feedback. Matthew 20:25–28 is a theme verse in an EMC theology of ministry. We serve "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Thus, the call to ministry is not fundamentally about fulfilling the person called to be a minister, but about building the church.

## **The Work of a Christian Minister**

There are four tasks that are central to the work of the minister. These are 1) preaching and teaching, 2) the ministry of listening 3) praying, and 4) leading.

A minister is someone who tells the truth about the Bible from the pulpit, grounding the mission of the Church in God's acts among his people (2 Tim. 4:2). As ministers spend time reading the Bible, studying doctrine, preparing sermons, teaching baptism classes, and engaging in theological conversation they will become known as teachers with wisdom for the church.

Ministers will be rich in love and compassion, providing a generous listening ear (Matt. 9:36). An EMC minister is someone who lives among the people, sharing in life together. A pastor will be known as merciful, generous and gentle. This gives witness to the Good Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:1–4).

A minister speaks to God about the church and speaks to the church about God (Eph. 1:15–21). Prayer is ministry patterned after Christ’s habit of going by himself into the night to speak to his Father (Mark 1:35–38). A minister’s work needs cadence and orderly pace rather than hurry. Prayer demands both solitude and life with others.

A minister is finally someone who understands the particular mission of this specific congregation. A minister provides leadership by motivating, organizing, planning and calling the church to its mission.

The work of ministry is a rich, varied life full of delight in what God is doing. However, it can also become overwhelming in its bewildering demands. A minister is only a participant in the infinitely greater ministry of Christ for the Father through the Spirit.

## 2. The Holiness of a Minister: Pastoral Ethics

**A**s ministers of the gospel, our lives give expression to the good news of Jesus we preach. The apostle Paul can say to the young Timothy “you, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me...” (2 Tim. 3:10–11). We are living parables of the transforming power of the gospel.

However, holiness is not a strange life lived on a pedestal. It is a well-functioning, ordered, healthy human life offered to God. A holy person has the strength to do what needs to be done at the right time and in the right way. Ministers will sin and need forgiveness as all Christians do. The minister leads the church in repentance.

This section cannot describe all the various areas (finances, truth-telling, parenting, neighbour relations, technology, food and drink, medical ethics, and more). However what follows are some central postures that will affect the rest of life.

### **Accountability**

By virtue of their office and responsibility in the church, ministers have authority. However, there can be no godly authority that is not supported and nurtured by godly accountability. The minister’s accountability to God and the Scriptures, which are ultimate, is expressed by a humble willingness to be accountable to the congregation and to the EMC.

The minister’s accountability to the congregation happens formally by submitting to a job description and periodic evaluations, working cooperatively with the church board, and regular reporting at congregational meetings. Informally, this accountability is an eagerness to receive constructive feedback, an availability for meeting, and a demeanour of being willing to learn and change.

Ministers do not design their own “vision” or plan for the congregation. The minister works with the congregation and its leaders to develop a vision and a mission that they together bring about. The minister will refer to the church as *our* church, not *my* church. The minister’s work is evaluated according to this congregational mission.

The minister’s accountability to the Conference takes the form of accepting ordination for those roles in which this is expected. It involves accepting and teaching the EMC Statement of Faith which is the doctrine

we hold to be central to the gospel. Conference accountability is demonstrated by attending EMC Ministerial events and regional ministerial gatherings. Pursuing friendships with other EMC ministers is another way of being accountable.

In cases where the covenant between the minister and the congregation has been broken through grievous sin or false teaching, the EMC has a discipline process that is described in the EMC Constitution (Sec. B, 6)

## **The Use of Power**

To be a minister in a congregation is to have a measure of power. This power is stewarded and held in a sacred trust and not abused. Wise ministers are aware of their power and do not seek to deny it. It is important to realize that there is no encounter between a minister and a congregant that does not involve the power of the minister. In all things, ministers will use their power to further the mission the congregation has together determined as their calling.

The minister will be careful to respect congregational decision-making and will be both a facilitator and a guide to these processes. The minister will bring a theological perspective to these discussions and will lead the church to pray and search the Scriptures for wisdom.

The minister will naturally have strong opinions about some congregational decisions. It is appropriate to let these opinions be known in a spirit of modesty, but there will be no attempt to do “politics”, marshalling support groups, using the sermon to influence decisions, or anything that resembles manipulation. The minister is only responsible to accomplish what can be achieved through godly, gentle witness in the congregation.

A wise minister uses power to create healthy congregational dynamics. Unnoticed or suppressed voices in the church can be highlighted. Scriptural wisdom can be brought to the fore. Opponents can be invited into face-to-face conversation. The church can be motivated and inspired to tackle daunting challenges. In these ways, and many others, the minister’s power serves the well-being of the church.

## **Dual Relationships**

A minister’s relationships in the congregation are complex. For example, the minister’s brother-in-law may be the church board chair. The minister’s spouse may be the Sunday School Superintendent. A pastor may have a supervisory role over a good friend. These “dual relationships” need much wisdom and care in order to be healthy. It is important that the minister have forthright conversations with these people, so that the difference between being a close friend or family member and a co-worker in

the church is made explicit and articulated. The minister will take precautions to ensure that the normal accountability and protocols are followed, regardless of the dual relationship. The minister will avoid discussing church business at family gatherings or other places where this dual relationship needs to be separated.

## **Sexual Ethics**

Ministers, like all humans, long for the intimacy, companionship, and procreation that God has intended for men and women to discover with each other. They enjoy friendships with both men and women. These desires are powerful currents in our lives and need to be directed to their God-given ends. When they are misdirected, they cause heartache, confusion, and the ruin of community.

Ministers will demonstrate a healthy perspective and practice of sexuality in their lives. We welcome both married and single people to the church's ministry. Marriage is a life-long, committed covenant with one person of the opposite gender. Singleness will be a life full of celibate relationships with all people in the church. In relating to congregants, ministers will seek to create an atmosphere of safety and professionalism. The minister will also teach the biblical vision of sexuality in discipling young people, preparing couples for marriage, helping troubled marriages, and proclaiming the biblical vision from the pulpit.

Sexual misconduct constitutes a serious break in the pastor/church covenant. The Sexual Misconduct Policy in the Ministerial Handbook describes the processes we agree to follow when allegations are brought against a minister.

## **Confidentiality**

A minister is given privileged access to the personal lives of congregants and how this information is handled builds trust in the church and creates an environment where healing and guidance can happen. Confidentiality is not about keeping secrets, but rather about allowing people to maintain control over the life-details they share. If the minister feels the need to consult with others or share sensitive information, permission should be sought from the person who shared this information. Fruitful ministry in the congregation demands that ministers be known as people who can be trusted with sensitive and personal information.

There are instances where a minister is under obligation not to keep a secret and must report information to the appropriate legal authorities. When the minister has come to believe that someone is being harmed, or is in danger of being harmed, there must be a report to the authorities.

These are often complex situations and it will often be difficult to know when confidentiality must be broken. In situations where there are questions, a wise minister will quickly consult with counsellors, social workers, or the Conference Pastor to determine what the right course of action is.

### 3. Calling and Appointing Ministers

**C**hurch leadership is a spiritual gift and task given by God to individuals and confirmed by the local church. Church leadership positions are primarily functional and secondary office or title (Acts 6; 1 Tim. 4:11–16). Leadership is asked of people who have the spiritual quality, ability and commitment to such a task.

The appointment of ministers can be seen from two perspectives. Ministers are prophetic in that they are appointed by God as his spokespersons, and they are servants of the congregation, appointed through the discernment of the church (Mark 10:42–45; Acts 1:22–26). They are called to ministry by the congregation in prayer, listening for God’s wisdom.

The EMC uses various titles to name different works of ministry and how they are structured. We do not prescribe one particular parlance and congregations will need to adapt what follows if they use titles differently. As a general rule, “minister” is a broad term referring to anyone appointed and ordained to give spiritual leadership in the church, whether on staff or not. “Pastor” refers to a vocational minister who receives a salary and is on the church staff. This can include a lead pastor, youth pastor, associate pastor, or executive pastor. Deacons are usually included in the ministerial team and are tasked with care-giving and practical assistance in the congregation.

The EMC has a long history of plural leadership in our churches. We believe that a team of pastors, deacons and ministers working together provide wise leadership. The wisdom of a team who corporately seeks God’s will in guiding the church will ensure an effective ministry and prevent extremes in doctrine or practice.

For a ministerial team to function well, there must be clearly defined job descriptions for each leader. The lead pastor will function as the overall ministry leader helping each of the leaders in their assigned roles. Normally, the lead pastor is responsible for the well-being and cohesion of the ministerial team, although this accountability may be shared with a lay leader such as the church board chair.

#### CALLING OF LEADERS

**T**he ongoing responsibility of every church is leadership development. Churches should look for gifted people in the membership when there is a need for additional leaders in the ministerial. After some experience and training, these people may be available for pastoral work in another congregation.



The EMC has Minister-in-Training guidelines available for the training of ministers within the congregation. Ministers are encouraged to implement this training with aspiring leaders or newly elected ministers. This allows for emerging leaders to be given responsibilities and be held accountable in a supportive, guided setting.

When a church desires to hire a new pastor from outside the congregation, the EMC has detailed **Pastoral Search Committee Guidelines** to facilitate this process.

Each congregation must determine how many leaders to elect or hire. Since a church will generally not grow beyond its ability to provide appropriate spiritual care for its people, there needs to be an adequate number of church leaders to provide that. People who feel left out, uncared for, or disgruntled will not attract others to the Body of Christ. This can stifle the growth of the Body.

## Choosing and Electing Ministers

Churches have various ways of electing ministers, but they will normally include these three steps.

1. The congregation members discern and suggest possible candidates over a period of several weeks. This can be done in several ways, but it should include the opportunity for congregants to prayerfully think through the membership list and suggest people they feel are worthy candidates.
2. After the congregation has made their suggestions, the leadership board tabulates the suggestions and decides which people will be contacted and asked to let their name stand for election. The board will respect the discernment of the congregation by weighing more heavily those who received multiple nominations. However, the pastor has the right to ask the board to disregard a nominee because of confidential information the pastor may have. The council may choose to select one person for a vote of affirmation or may choose several for a process of election.
3. The congregation then votes on the nominee or nominees chosen. Each elected minister or deacon needs to have the affirmation of at least 80 percent of those voting. If there are more nominees than positions, an initial vote should be held to reduce the slate to only the number of positions needed. Then a subsequent vote seeks the approval of the congregation for each remaining nominee.

The whole process is one of spiritual discernment and should be accompanied with prayer and teaching on the qualifications of pastoral leadership. Once ministerial candidates are elected, the church can then notify the Conference leadership to initiate the process for commissioning and for possible ordination.

## COMMISSIONING OF CHURCH WORKERS

**A** commissioning service appoints leaders for service in the church. For example, a church that has hired a pastor, or elected a new minister or deacon commissions them, formally handing over the responsibilities of their new role. It gives the congregation an opportunity to publicly pledge support, prayer, and respect for the new worker. We also commission missionaries for service to their respective fields and this is discussed below as well. Commissioning is normally understood to be for a specific role or period of time. Ordination, discussed below, follows a different process and is considered a lifetime calling and responsibility.

These services should be led by congregational leadership and should include representation from the EMC.

### Commissioning Service for Pastors or Ministers

The ministerial covenant consists of three commitments: 1) the new minister to the congregation, 2) the congregation to the new minister, 3) and the minister's spouse to the congregation.

Commitment of the congregation:

\_\_\_\_\_ (church name), you have asked \_\_\_\_\_ to be your minister. \_\_\_\_\_ has accepted this invitation and is ready to answer this call from God. Today as we commission \_\_\_\_\_ for this role, we ask you the congregation for your ongoing commitment. The Scriptures say, "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for the works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-13). We recognize that \_\_\_\_\_ has the gifts to be a minister in our church. Will you accept \_\_\_\_\_ as your minister, giving abundant support with your prayers and friendship? [If applicable] Will you provide financially so that our church can give \_\_\_\_\_ the time needed to carry out these duties? Will you use your gifts to work together in building the Body of Christ? If this is your commitment, please rise.

Commitment of the minister:

\_\_\_\_\_, you have seen that this congregation, by standing, has confirmed their call to you to be their minister. Do you accept this responsibility? Will you serve this congregation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Will you work as God has gifted you to help us see Jesus and become his disciples?

*Answer: With the help of God, I will.*

Do you believe that the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, is the Word of God, inspired by God and without error in all that it teaches for faith and conduct?

*Answer: With the help of God, I do.*

Do you accept the teachings and practices of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference as being in harmony with the Scriptures, and do you commit to furthering the spiritual unity of Christ in this congregation and Conference through your teaching as God gives you insight?

*Answer: With the help of God, I will.*

Commitment of the minister's spouse:

(Name) \_\_\_\_\_, the church is calling your spouse \_\_\_\_\_ to be a minister. Being a minister's spouse in our church is not a role with a job description, but it will affect you. We recognize this may bring its own difficulties into your life as you walk together in this ministry. We as the congregation pledge to respect your privacy and the unique gifts that God has given you. Do you support \_\_\_\_\_'s commitment to serve this church as a minister and will you give your encouragement, discernment and prayer to this ministry? Will you also use the spiritual gifts God has given you to serve in this congregation?

*Answer: With the help of God, I will.*

Commissioning prayer:

The minister couple will kneel, if able. Ministerial members, EMC representatives and the church board chair will gather around, lay hands on the couple and pray. At least one person should be asked to pray specifically for the spouse. For the prayer, the congregation can rise and extend their hands toward the couple in solidarity with the laying on of hands.

Response from the minister: it is appropriate for the new minister to offer a brief word of gratitude to the congregation, asking for on-going prayer.

## Commissioning Service for Deacons

The following is a suggested service for deacon commissioning.

*Minister: Because our congregation believes that God loves and tenderly cares for his Church, we call deacons to lead us in sharing the love of Christ with one another. The church, seeing these gifts in you, \_\_\_\_\_, has chosen you to take up this ministry of leading the church in mercy. As you begin this ministry, we remind you once more of the characteristics of deacons as Paul records them in 1 Timothy 3:8–13. He concludes by saying “those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.”*

Commitment of the deacon:

*We invite you to make the following commitments. With your response you accept the responsibility the church has given you and commit yourself to this ministry before God.*

*Do you believe that the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, is the Word of God, inspired by God and without error in all that it teaches for faith and conduct?*

*Answer: With the help of God, I do.*

*Do you accept the teachings and practices of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference as being in harmony with the Scriptures, and do you commit to furthering the spiritual unity of Christ in this congregation and Conference through your work as God gives you insight?*

*Answer: With the help of God, I do.*

*Do you accept the care-giving ministry of deacon in this congregation, and do you commit before God and this congregation that by God’s enabling grace you will have mercy on the sick, the poor, the doubting, the mentally ill, the lonely and those in grief? Will you show us how to be an ever-more loving and merciful congregation?*

*Answer: With the help of God, I do.*

Commitment of the congregation:

*As a congregation you have prayed, and the Lord has guided. You have heard the commitment of \_\_\_\_\_. Now you are invited to make your commitment by responding to these questions:*

*Do you as a congregation welcome \_\_\_\_\_ as your deacon? Do you commit to give abundant encouragement and cooperation as they seek to lead in the ministry of mercy in our church community? If so, indicate your commitment by rising.*

*Let us pray together that God will empower \_\_\_\_\_ to do his ministry.*

Commissioning prayer:

The deacons will kneel, if able, and the minister, the EMC representative and congregational representatives come round and lay their hands on in prayer.

Following the prayer, the congregation is seated, and the couple is given an opportunity to respond, though this is not required.

## **Commissioning Service for Missionaries**

Missionaries are commissioned when they are ready to embark on their work. The commissioning service should be planned in consultation with the EMC Board of Missions. This is an important way to build an on-going sense of partnership between the missionary, congregation, and the EMC.

After the missionary has provided a report in the worship service describing the work, sharing about resources still needed, and giving prayer requests, they will make the following commitment.

*Minister: You have heard the Great Commission which Christ gave to his first disciples. You believe that as followers of Christ we are to devote ourselves to making disciples and baptizing them. By wholly surrendering to God, you have come to glimpse the beauty of a life serving Christ.*

*You have heard and responded to the call of God. This call has been discerned by this congregation and the Board of Missions. You have been appointed to serve as a mission worker in the area of \_\_\_\_\_ and we are now setting you apart for this high and holy service. What you have done alone with God in consecrating your life to this service, you are now doing publicly in the presence of the congregation.*

*May God bless you abundantly with the presence of his Holy Spirit.*

Commitment of the missionary:

*Minister: As a public commitment to this ministry, I invite you to respond to these questions:*

*Do you accept the teachings and practices of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference as being in harmony with the Scriptures, and do you commit to furthering the spiritual unity of Christ in our mission through your work as God gives you insight?*

*Answer: With the help of God, I do.*

*Do you have a deep love for people and a strong passion for their salvation, and do you believe God has called you to missionary work?*

*Answer: With the help of God, I do.*

*Do you give yourself to Christ's work as you are assigned, in humble dependence on God's help; and do you make it the goal of your life to walk with Jesus, faithful in word and deed, and in willing cooperation with your fellow workers?*

*Answer: With the help of God, I do.*

*Recognizing that the EMC Board of Missions [or whatever the sending agency] is responsible for directing and supporting this work, do you respect the authority and directives of the Board of Missions, recognizing that their decisions are made with a deep concern for the welfare of all?*

*Answer: With the help of God, I will.*

Commissioning prayer:

The missionaries will then kneel, as able, as the congregational minister and the Board of Missions member lay on hands and a prayer of consecration is spoken. After the prayer, the missionaries rise, and the officiating minister says, *On behalf of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference and the Board of Missions, I now commission you as a missionary of the Gospel of our Lord to serve as you are called and directed. Go in the assurance that he who called you has also promised to go with you, even to the end of the age.*

Following the prayer, the congregation is seated, and the missionary is given an opportunity to give a response.

## ORDINATION OF MINISTERS

Ordination is the conference and congregation's process of discernment, testing, training, and laying on of hands by which we recognize and affirm that the Holy Spirit has called ministers to give their lives to the Church in the work of pastoral leadership. It is distinguished from commissioning in that ordination is not only for a specific position or task, but expresses a life-long availability and competence for ministerial work.

The process of ordination is undergone with both joyful confidence and serious reflection. It is joyful because it is a sign of God's gracious care of the Church and it is serious because this is a response to the call of the sovereign Lord.

Ordination normally happens after the minister has been commissioned and is already serving the congregation. When the minister has served enough time for the congregation to know and trust the minister and to recognize the God-given gifts of preaching, care, prophetic courage and leadership, the congregation will initiate the ordination process.

The process of ordination is a time of testing to see whether the congregation has truly discerned the call of God. The minister will spend time seeking God in prayer, fasting, study, and asking God to confirm the discernment of the congregation. The congregation will be involved to give feedback and encouragement, upholding the minister in prayer. The conference has a role in testing the faith, theology, and ministry skills of the minister. It is by these human but God-directed practices that we come to affirm that God is indeed calling this person to a life of ministerial service.

The ordination process is also a time of training. While not meant to replace formal education, it will build an appreciation for what it means to serve in an EMC congregation.

When a congregation has decided that a minister should be considered for ordination, they will notify the Conference Pastor. Each year the Conference Pastor will lead a training and discernment course in which all ordinands will be enrolled. This process will include:

- Mentorship provided by a fellow EMC minister.
- Study of key books that are necessary to understand the EMC understanding of ministry.
- Personal prayer and reflection by the minister together with selected people from the congregation.
- Preparation for and successfully completing a theological and ministry examination.

- An ordination service following the examination. This service will be planned by the local congregation in conjunction with the Conference Pastor.

Following the ordination service, the minister is a full voting member of the EMC Ministerial which is the fellowship of all EMC ministers and deacons.

When planning an ordination service, it is fitting to invite representation from other local congregations to attend and bring greetings.

## **The Ordination Service**

The officiating minister invites the minister to come forward with their spouse. The following is a suggested ceremony for ordination of ministers:

*Officiant: Because of Christ's desire that the Church remain faithful and zealous for the mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God in the world, the Holy Spirit gives gifts to believers and empowers them for the building up of the Church. The apostle Paul, in Ephesians 4, writes, "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (4:11-12). Today we recognize and affirm through ordination the call of God upon you, \_\_\_\_\_, to be a minister of the gospel for the sake of the church. This is a one-time event that will be kept active by your continuing involvement and service in the church.*

**Commitment of the Ordinand:**

*Officiant: \_\_\_\_\_, your response to the following questions indicates your acceptance of the ministry the church has given you before God. This is a covenant between yourself, your Lord Jesus, and the body of Christ, a covenant that will lead you throughout your life.*

*Do you believe that the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, is the Word of God, inspired by God and without error in all that it teaches for faith and conduct?*

*Answer: With the help of God, I do.*

*Do you believe in your heart that you are truly called, according to the will of Jesus Christ, to a life of work in pastoral ministry?*

*Answer: With the help of God, I do.*

*Do you accept the teachings of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference as being in harmony with the teachings of the Bible, and will you humbly serve*



*your congregations and the Conference, giving your support and counsel as God gives you insight?*

*Answer: With the help of God, I do.*

*Will you be a diligent student of the Word of God, faithful in prayer and dependent on the Holy Spirit? Will you preach God's Word with all love and boldness? Will you minister without favouritism to the needs of those to whom you are sent? Will you submit to the congregations you serve, giving of yourself as best you know to the building of the Body of Christ?*

*Answer: With the help of God, I will.*

Question to the spouse of the ordinand:

\_\_\_\_\_, though it is your spouse who is being ordained, we recognize that this ministry will involve your favour, discernment, and spiritual surrender to God. Will you serve God to the best of your ability, committing yourself to a godly Christian life? Will you support \_\_\_\_\_'s ministry with your prayers, wisdom and words of encouragement?

*Answer: With the help of God, I will.*

Question to the congregation:

Members of the \_\_\_\_\_ congregation, do you recognize that the Holy Spirit has gifted and called \_\_\_\_\_ to a lifelong work of gospel ministry as a pastor? Will you receive spiritual instruction and guidance from \_\_\_\_\_? Will you give \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and their family your prayerful and generous support as you together seek to build God's Church at this place? Indicate your commitment by standing to your feet.

*I invite guests to also stand as we confer upon \_\_\_\_\_ the office of minister and pray a dedicatory prayer.*

Those involved in laying on of hands now gather round at the front for prayer. The ordinand and spouse are invited to kneel, if able, as various members pray.

After the prayer, the officiating minister raises the ordinand and spouse and says to the ordinand, *In the name of Jesus Christ and on behalf of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, I confer upon you the office of a minister of the Gospel of Christ, ordained and committed to preach the Word, to administer the ordinances, and to be watchful overseer of the Church of Christ. Take to yourself this ministry in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## MINISTER'S RELATION TO THE EVANGELICAL MENNONITE CONFERENCE

**T**he EMC is a covenant of churches who are committed to confess our faith and do ministry together. There is much cultural, ethnic, and theological diversity among our congregations, but we confess a common statement of faith and work together in witnessing to the Kingdom of God in Canada and around the world. This is a biblical pattern. New Testament house churches scattered across the Roman Empire joined in mission, accountability and mutual aid (Acts 8:14–15; 11:22–23; 27–30; 15:1–35; Rom. 16:1–16; 2 Cor. 8:1–3).

The EMC Ministerial and Conference Council meetings are pivotal events that help us discern God's will in our common task. All pastors, ministers, deacons and missionaries are expected to participate in ministerial meetings and retreats when possible. On occasions where the ministerial makes a decision on a significant theological or ministry issue, it will be the ordained ministers who vote.

The Conference Council, which includes the pastor and local church delegates, is the administrative body of the EMC.

Ministerial members are responsible to stay current with what is happening in our EMC missions work, church planting, and education through Steinbach Bible College. Ministers are expected to participate in and promote these ministries. Loyalty and support for our EMC ministries will increase the effectiveness and potential of these ministries.

It is important that we understand our EMC work as an extension of congregational ministry. Together we accomplish much more than we could as individual churches. It's exciting to see God at work in the larger context.

Concerns and suggestions should be freely shared with the respective EMC leadership and boards. Also, recruitment within the local church for EMC ministries is often dependent upon the work of the pastor and other congregational leaders.

In times of local church conflict, the wider conference is available to help, both through its resource people and other means. Churches in conflict are encouraged to seek help early. The minister should endeavor to have a good and open relationship with EMC staff.

Many regions within the EMC have regional ministerial meetings which combine teaching, fellowship, and joint ministry. Pastors and congregations are expected to be involved.

Reading EMC periodicals such as *The Messenger* and our theological journal *Theodidaktos* can help build understanding and unity among churches. Congregations are encouraged to regularly contribute to *The*

*Messenger* so the wider family of churches can stay informed of our work in the Kingdom.

## PASTORAL EXITS

All pastors will eventually come to the end of their role in a congregation. Most of the time this ending will be a satisfying, celebratory mix of relief and sadness at letting go of ministry in this congregation. There are also departures that are much more difficult. These come after a period of intense church conflict, exhausting burn-out, debilitating criticism or a failed vote of confidence.

The decision to move on from congregational ministry involves personal soul-searching, and discussion with mentors, family, and wise friends. It involves conversations with the Conference Pastor. There is no easy formula to determine when the right time has come.

The EMC has a severance policy that will guide the church when pastors are terminated against their will.

Here are some basic guidelines that we believe reflect a concern for the on-going health of the congregation and the future ministry of the pastor. This is not meant as a replacement for human resource assistance from specialists where this is needed.

1. Notice. Giving adequate notice of the intention to resign gives the pastor time to bring closure to the ministry, and for the congregation to say goodbye and thank you. We suggest a notice period of three to six months.
2. The resignation. The announcement to the congregation should clearly state the resignation and the effective date. It should explain how the pastor intends to use the notice period. It may also state the pastor's plans for after the conclusion of ministry. Giving reasons for the resignation should be done carefully. In situations where the pastor is leaving under duress this can easily be a "last shot on the way out the door", and this is to be avoided. If more than a brief explanation is needed, this is best done at a congregational meeting after the resignation.
3. Saying goodbye. After the resignation has been announced the pastor will use the time to bring closure to the ministry and

prepare the church, to some extent, for the interim. The pastor will work diligently to set affairs in order so that the ministry of the church can continue without interruption. Ministers will remain independent in the selection of their successor.

4. Exit interview: Near the end of the notice period the church board will have a formal exit interview with the pastor. This is an opportunity for the board to ask: what pastoral care needs and other ongoing issues in the congregation do we need to be aware of? What aspect of ministry has been most satisfying to you? What has been most difficult? What do you see as our church's greatest challenge moving forward? How can we make the pastoral position in our church more effective?
5. Transitioning from the role. After the resignation has become effective, the former pastor will exercise great sensitivity towards the new pastor and the congregation and will take initiative in setting boundaries. It is best for a former full-time lead pastor to refrain from attending congregational events for one year following the arrival of the new pastor. In some cases, it may be healthiest if the pastor moves on permanently from the congregation, but in each case there needs to be a time for the relationship between the church and pastor to be negotiated afresh.
6. The former pastor will refrain from exercising any further leadership in the congregation, such as returning to offer pastoral care, or performing weddings and funerals (except at the invitation of the new pastor). It is inappropriate for a former pastor to publicly disparage the church in any way.
7. The time following a pastoral tenure is a difficult time for the former pastor, especially if the departure was stressful. The pastor will need time to reflect, heal and re-compose before taking on a subsequent pastoral position. The pastor should stay in contact with the Conference Pastor and may also wish to have counselling or spiritual direction during this time. The EMC has a counselling fund that can be used by the pastor during this time.

## 4. The Worship Service

“**H**e has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). The primary purpose of the weekly worship service is to worship God. But how worship together happens also trains people in their personal daily worship. Our view of God is shaped by the worship we participate in.

### The Definition of Worship

Worship means “worth-ship.” Worship recognizes God as supreme and responds by honour, praise, and surrender. To worship is to encounter God—to surrender, praise, exalt, and celebrate him!

Worship is both an individual and corporate response to God’s character and his acts. We worship God for who he is—the eternal, only God, Heavenly King, Lord of the Universe, Loving Father, and the Holy and Righteous Judge. We worship God for his magnificent past, present, and future acts—creation, covenant, redemption, sustaining grace, recreation of a new people, and the gift of a new heaven and a new earth.

In worship we acknowledge who we are as humans before God. We are people made in God’s image (Gen. 1:26; Ps. 8:3–8); damaged by the fall, lost and helpless (Gen. 3; Rom. 3:23); who have been found (Luke 15:1–7) and are now daily being remade in Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). One day our transformation will be complete (1 Cor. 15:51–54; Phil. 3:20–21). As we anticipate a gracious future (1 Pet. 1:13), we find wholeness in surrender and worshipping God.

Genuine worship leads to a godly life of obedience to God and service to our neighbours. Our lives draw attention to God and cause others to glorify him; by worshipping God we invite others to life in Christ. A holistic response guards against our worship being empty and condemned (2 Chr. 7:14; Isa. 58:1–6; Amos 5:23–24; Matt. 23:23). Worship involves stewardship and sacrifice; we offer our praise and possessions, and surrender ourselves and our plans.

### Planning for Worship

Those who plan and lead worship have a privileged and awesome task. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide the planning and work beyond what is anticipated. A worship service is not a random series of unrelated items. It can have a prayerfully planned theme to help people grasp divine comfort and truth. It can also be centred around one specific Scripture.

Worship gives expression to the whole range of our emotions: joy and celebration, reverence and awe, sadness, and agony. The reading of the Bible, prayer, singing, children's time, sharing prayer requests and announcements are integral parts of the service and none are just a warm-up for the sermon. Where possible involve children, teens, and seniors. Some will require advance coaching.

The order of service need not be identical each week, yet continuity helps people look to God without focus on the logistics of the worship service.. Liturgy is "the work of the people". Any planning and leading should be focused on enabling people to enter into the worship. No leader can ever worship God for the people. The pastors, song leaders and musicians, Scripture readers and those who lead in prayer, all prompt, guide, and assist the church in worship. God is the audience.

EMC worship services seek to maintain both good planning and a relaxed atmosphere that encourages participation. The Spirit gives gifts for common good in worship (1 Cor. 12:7) and both form (pattern, order, structure) and freedom (flexibility, variety, gifted participation) are appropriate. The Spirit is not "a God of disorder but of peace" (1 Cor. 14:33).

## **Focus and Flow, Dignity and Posture**

Leaders guide the church in its actions before God; they do not perform for people. Consider the order of focus (God, then his people, others), flow (structure), and congregational participation. Whoever leads the service is to know how it flows.

Dignity and posture communicate respect before God, and leaders are examples to God's people. Clothing choices, formal or casual, are not to distract from worship; know and respect the church's culture. Physical actions can express worship: bowed heads, closed eyes, bended knees, raised hands, clapping, and singing loudly or softly.

## **Structure**

How is a service structured? Some elements fit in various places (sharing, announcements, prayer). Others fit earlier (welcome) or later (benediction). The sermon can occur either earlier or later in the worship.

A basic movement that can give structure to almost every service is the drama of *conversion*. We are called by the Lord from the sinful world and our distractedness, we encounter the truth of God in the sung declaration of God's character and in the preaching of Scripture, we confess our sin and then linger in the presence of God. We are then sent out to the world in service and witness. Worship as an encounter with God draws us from sin and sends us to witness by an encounter with the living God.

Here is one order of service that depicts this weekly conversion event. Below is an explanation of each element.

Invocation and call to worship  
Welcome  
Announcements  
Singing  
Personal Sharing  
Congregational Prayer  
The Lord's Prayer  
Confession of Sin  
Assurance of Pardon  
Children's Time  
Scripture Readings  
Message  
Prayer  
The Lord's Supper  
Confession of Faith  
Offering  
Singing  
Commissioning  
Benediction

## **The Elements in the Order**

### *The Invocation and Call to Worship*

This first act focuses on God, not his people. It is a prayer, often quoting Scripture, to invite the Triune God to be present. "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you" (1 Kgs. 8:27). We have lived in "deep darkness" and long for "a great light" (Isa. 9:2; Matt. 4:16). We need it, want it, and delight to receive it.

### *Welcome*

Having acknowledged that we gather in the presence of the Holy One, we now turn to each other in welcome. This can be a simple welcome from the worship leader, or the congregation can welcome each other.

### *Announcements*

Keep spoken announcements short and focused. Repeating what is already printed in the bulletin is unnecessary for most people. Bring out how the announcements fit the church's mission.

### *Congregational Singing*

Singing is a wonderful biblical way to praise God, confess our faith, and encourage each other. Music expresses thoughts too deep to say with only words. Speak to one another with “psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit” (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

To give all generations the opportunity to express themselves openly to God, it is common to balance new and old songs. The book of Psalms has always been the songbook of the Church and should be used as a source for music. A good congregational song expresses biblical truth poetically and invites participation from people who have no musical training. Worship through song falters if the congregation is not able to sing with full voice. The work of the song leader or worship team is to facilitate congregational singing.

### *Sharing*

The Church is unique—the loving, supportive community of God’s people. It is to nurture fellowship (participation, communion, community). Christians need to talk about their experiences, victories and defeats, joys and concerns. Invite people to share answers to prayer whether yes, no, or not yet. This gives cause for joy and celebration, or acceptance and perseverance. This mutual ministry is assisted by kind leaders and gentle teaching.

### *Prayer*

After sharing, prayer should focus on needs mentioned. Yet this is only one of several times of prayer in a service. Prayer can be unrehearsed or prepared and it can be led by leaders or by congregants. Those who pray represent the church, which makes “we” language (corporate) fitting rather than “I” (individual) language: “Lord, we pray...,” represents us better than “I pray...” Among the moments of prayer are these:

- Congregational or pastoral prayer:  
This prayer expresses concern for individual needs, the local community, wider church ministries, missions concerns, national issues, and international crises. It can include a moment of silent prayer followed by a leader or others (planned or called upon) who mention needs. The leader can pray with the congregation responding at regular intervals, “Lord, hear our prayer!”
- The Lord’s Prayer  
The congregational prayer can flow into the corporate use of the Lord’s Prayer: “Then, as Jesus taught his disciples to pray, we say...”



It is a joint expression of faith that focuses on God, brings in our needs, and ends with a hymn of praise.

- **The offering prayer**  
If teaching on stewardship is needed, provide it before the prayer. Avoid preaching in prayer. The offering acknowledges what God has graciously given and pledges to be thankful stewards concerned for the Church's well-being and beyond.
- **Confession of sin and assurance of pardon**  
To be truly evangelical, Christian worship must include the confession of sin. We live by grace, which is the forgiveness of sin. We are not yet fully the people God has promised to make us. Our confession can begin silently and then a leader can give voice to our failings. Responsive readings fit here. Then must come the moment when the leader announces the gospel and calls on us to take courage (confident hope) in divine grace (1 John 1:8–9 has both parts).
- **Prayer for Illumination**  
We are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to open our eyes, and a prayer acknowledging this and asking for aid is appropriate before the reading of Scripture or before Scripture is expounded in sermon. "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Ps. 119:18).

### *Children's Time*

Children are included in worship because they are children of God and Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me" (Luke 18:16). When children are called forward for a brief time of teaching and conversation, make it their time—not a mini-sermon for adults. Help them to learn and practice Christian faith and teaching at their level. Children need to know God's love and involvement in their lives more than moralistic teaching on behaviour or abstract thoughts that are beyond them. There is nothing better for a children's time in worship than a well-told Bible story.

### *Confessing the Church's Faith*

Confessing our faith in the Triune God can be as simple as a Scripture read or quoted by a believer. It can also use the Apostles' Creed, a summary of truth linking us to Christians past, present, and future. The Creed is a powerful bridge when a congregation serves in a denominationally

diverse community. This is both an expression of our faith and a teaching of our faith.

### *Scripture Reading*

The church's worship needs to be filled with Scripture. Public reading of Scripture can be compelling and well done but it demands attention and practice. Use responsive readings, choral readings, and reading in unison. Using congregants other than the preacher to publicly read the Scriptures used in the sermon allows more voices to be heard and symbolizes how the Bible is the Church's book. In some congregations, after Scripture is read the reader says, "This is the Word of the Lord" and the worshippers respond, "Thanks be to God."

### *Sermon*

Preaching is a central way in which the Word of God feeds the people of God. Good preaching is both the proclamation of the glory of the gospel and its application in life. The Bible is a divinely inspired library of books written over thousands of years and it speaks from various countries and settings; proclaim its variety to ensure a balanced diet. Some churches use a lectionary to match together appropriate Scriptures to be read and preached each Sunday, with passages from the Old Testament, Psalms, Gospels and Epistles. This ensures that a large percentage of the Bible is read in worship every three years.

An effective sermon is rooted in the Scriptures, contemporary in its applications, uses clear language, and delivered attractively. Evangelical sermons are centred on the Bible, Christ, Cross, and Conversion. Anabaptist teaching also brings out discipleship, community, accountability, justice, and peace. Together these emphases reflect our Lord's holistic mission and our commission (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 4:16–21).

Some biblical books, by length and repetition, (i.e., 1 and 2 Kings) are better used thematically or topically than verse-by-verse. A series of topics, a series on a Bible book, and the church year can be used. Strive to preach what is "helpful" and "the whole will of God" (Acts 20:20, 27) to "present everyone fully mature in Christ" (Col. 1:28). Some churches coordinate the sermon with Sunday School or mid-week Bible study so people can study the Scripture in advance or interact after the sermon.

### *The Lord's Supper*

See the separate section below on the Lord's Supper.

### *Commissioning*

To have encountered God, repented of sin and heard the Word of God proclaimed is to be equipped for life in the world all week. The Church is to carry out Christ's mission and is to be sent forth aware of this. Remind it of the mission, of opportunities to be faced, and of Christ's presence and strength that will go with us.

### *Benediction*

The last word in each genuine encounter with God is a blessing. Do not send God's people out without a reminder of his care—the forces we face are many. After the Great Commission, the disciples' final earthly sight of Jesus was of him blessing them, his Church (Luke 24:50–51).

## 5. Ceremonies and Special Events

### THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

**B**aptism is the act by which Christ welcomes sinners, takes them into his Body and makes them disciples “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:18–20). Baptism is the Church’s central act of hospitality (Gal. 3:27–28). Baptism can thus be called the ordinance of conversion. Mere water alone cannot effect conversion. But when an adult is moved by the Spirit to believe in Jesus and consents to be baptized, having counted the cost, it becomes the rite in which a person is publicly taken into the way of the cross. This commitment before God and the Church happens through the power of the Holy Spirit who moves the heart to repentance from sin and confession of faith in Jesus.

Baptism is not a milestone or higher achievement in a believer’s life. Rather, it is a disciple’s first act of obedience, the entrance into the fellowship of the Church. Baptism must be followed by further teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer with other believers (Acts 2:42).

### The Bible and Baptism

1. Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Christ and the teaching of Scripture (Matt. 3:13–17; 28:18–20).
2. We are baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection. Baptism represents death to sin and the old nature and our union with Christ in a new life (Rom. 6:1–10).
3. We are baptized into the Church, the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). New believers are added to the Church through baptism (Acts 2:41, 47).
4. Baptism represents spiritual cleansing and the forgiveness of sins (Acts 22:16; Titus 3:5; I Pet. 3:21).
5. Baptism represents the anointing of the Holy Spirit the believer experiences at the time of conversion (Acts 2:38; Rom. 8:9–10).

## **How We Baptize**

Our normal EMC practice of baptism is pouring, but immersion baptism is also practiced. Both have equal validity as a biblical baptism. Pouring depicts especially the anointing of the Spirit and the washing away of sin. Immersion depicts especially our burial and resurrection with Christ.

While both modes of baptism are valid, baptism should not be “personalized” or tailored to the individual’s preference. We discourage baptisms in youth group meetings, during Bible camp, at the Jordan River, or anywhere else the congregation is not present. To be baptized is to be entered by the Spirit into the fellowship, care, and accountability of the whole congregation, and all should be present to witness this.

## **Baptism Classes**

The Ethiopian eunuch was instructed by Philip on how to read the Scriptures before he was baptized (Acts 8:26–38). This sets a biblical precedent for instruction before baptism. Someone being baptized should first sample the rich feast of the church’s teaching on salvation to begin to grasp the profound meaning of what will happen in the ceremony. Conversion is rarely a single moment of turning but involves an intellectual, emotional and moral revolution in life. This is all represented in baptism and candidates need to grapple with this before they are baptized. The classes should open the candidate’s mind to the depth, wonder and meaning of what is entailed in being a follower of Christ and point them in a good direction for a growing, fruitful Christian life. This should be done without creating the impression that baptism is only for those who have reached a certain level of maturity in their faith.

Classes should be scheduled regularly in the church’s life. Pentecost and Easter are theologically appropriate times for baptism, though this can be done at other times as well. Ministers are encouraged to use the instructional materials prepared by the Conference.

## **Who Should Be Baptized?**

All who agree to be followers of Jesus should be baptized. This is not an optional feature of the Christian life. The evangelistic work of the Church should invite unbelievers to be baptized.

Our Mennonite tradition has emphasized that following Christ in baptism is an adult decision, one made when a person has freedom from parental demands. A five-year-old can decide to follow Jesus, but her parents would not allow her to become a secularist, for example. An older teenager, on the other hand, has this freedom to genuinely choose. When

a person is old enough to set their lifelong path, this is the appropriate age of baptism.

For this reason, we do not practice infant or children's baptism. We believe that such a practice does not adequately testify to the sober surrender of one's whole life which the practice of baptism represents (Matt. 3; Luke 14:25–33; Mark 8:34–38).

It is appropriate that ministers discern a person's readiness for baptism before bringing them to the congregation. A personal visit with the pastor or other church leader will seek to discern whether the person genuinely wants to follow Jesus and is ready to commit to being a disciple. However, it needs to be clear that this is not a testing of spiritual maturity. Baptism is the departure point of a Christian life, not a milestone.

The candidates will then be presented to the membership for acceptance prior to baptism. The church is concerned that each person gives evidence of the new birth. Accepting our Statement of Faith shows that they have gazed upon the mystery they are being drawn into and have not consented flippantly. By agreeing to baptize someone the congregation assumes responsibility for their spiritual growth and service. This is why baptism necessarily involves church membership. Churches may wish to pair each baptismal candidate with a mature church member for mentoring and friendship following baptism.

## **The Baptismal Ceremony**

It is useful to think of a rich, full baptism service as having three “voices” present; the voice of God, blessing his child as he blessed his Son at baptism, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11); the voice of the congregation giving witness to the Spirit's work and thanking God for bringing him/her to the knowledge of salvation; and the voice of the person being baptized consenting to follow Jesus and become part of the Church. Each of these voices should find expression in the service.

The sermon at the time of baptism should explain the meaning of baptism and give a clear presentation of salvation.

Following the sermon, those being baptized will share the story of how God has brought them to baptism. Following their testimonies, the church can sing “Amazing Grace” or another song celebrating the grace which has brought this person to baptism.

Those being baptized are asked to stand and the minister asks them to affirm their faith by answering the following questions:

*Do you believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, that the Bible is the Word of God and that salvation is only through the Lord Jesus Christ?*

*Answer: With the help of God, I do.*

*Do you reject Satan and all rebellion against God? Do you repent of your sin, welcome Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and surrender your will to following him as the Scriptures teach?*

*Answer: With the help of God, I do.*

*Do you accept our church's Statement of Faith and will you support the church with your prayer, gifts and service as God enables?*

*Answer: With the help of God, I will.*

*Do you desire upon this profession to be baptized and received into the fellowship of this church?*

*Answer: With the help of God, I do.*

The Apostles' Creed can be said together as a congregation.

*Minister: Congregation, do you say "Amen!" to what you have heard and do you rejoice that \_\_\_\_\_ is discovering the salvation that is in Jesus Christ alone, and do you welcome him/her into the covenant which is Christ's Church in this place. If so answer, With the help of God, we do.*

*Let us pray: Gracious God and Father of our Lord Jesus: we thank you that you are bringing \_\_\_\_\_ to a knowledge of your great love and are giving him/her the empowering grace of your Holy Spirit. As you said to your Son at his baptism, we hear you say today, "This is my beloved son/daughter, in whom I am well pleased". As your Church baptizes those whom you call, we pray that you would take them into your care and bring them home to heaven. In the name of Christ, we pray, Amen.*

Following prayer, the candidates kneel forward for baptism. The minister proceeds to baptize each in turn, and says:

*Upon your profession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and upon your confession and repentance of sin and upon your faith in Christ, we baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.*

After all have been baptized, the minister extends the hand of fellowship to each in turn, saying, *In the name of Christ and his Church I extend to you the right hand of fellowship. May God bless you and keep you.*

Here it is appropriate to sing the song “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus” or a similar song of resolve and decision.

The candidates may be seated.

Appropriate benedictions might be 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24, Hebrews 13:20–21 or Jude 24–25. Following the benediction, those baptized should exit to the foyer, so the congregation can greet them with words of support and encouragement.

The pastor should issue a baptism certificate (available from the Conference office) to those baptized as a reminder of this special event in their life.

The church should keep a current list, with the relevant statistical data, of all its members.

## **CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

### **The Meaning of Church Membership**

The Church is a covenant community bonded together by the love of the Holy Spirit. This covenant is a unity with God and with one another. The local church is the visible expression of the universal Church. We enter into the ancient, world-wide body of Christ by committing to a local expression of that body.

A biblical Christian cannot live independently of other believers. The church is for people who, with humble insight, realize they need the strength, guidance, fellowship, and service available in the congregation. To become a member is to say to the church, “Fellow believers, I need to be a part of the family of God here. Help me to walk as a faithful disciple of Christ. I will serve God with you.”

In turn, the church provides teaching (Eph. 4:11–16), encouragement (Heb. 10:23–25), fellowship (Acts 2:42), physical assistance (Acts 6:1–11), correction (Matt. 18:15–20) and service opportunities (Acts 13:1–3).

### **Membership through Baptism**

According to the Scriptures a person is baptized into the Church (Acts 2:41; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27–29). Baptism creates the church community where all are one in Christ. Because baptism is an initiation into the universal Church as it finds expression in a local assembly, the EMC sees a profound connection between baptism and local church membership. This



practice proclaims our belief that salvation is not a private matter but a personal, public entry into the body of Christ as it exists in this congregation.

## **Membership through Transfer**

Those who have been baptized in a previous congregation may become members by transferring their membership. This recognizes the previous church's baptism and welcomes the person on the basis of that commitment to Christ. Receiving such a person would normally include the following:

1. A meeting with the pastor to discuss what membership means in this congregation. Churches may also require that potential members go through membership classes similar to baptism preparation.
2. The acknowledgement and acceptance of the EMC Statement of Faith.
3. A letter or certificate of transfer from the previous church if that is available.
4. An advance announcement of intended transfer.
5. In some churches a public testimony is shared, in others this is provided in written form to the ministerial.

The following questions should be answered publicly by the new member:

- *Have you been baptized upon the confession of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?*
- *Do you acknowledge and accept our Statement of Faith?*
- *Is it your desire to work together with us as God enables and be received into the fellowship of this church?*

The person would then be received with a handshake by the pastor.

## **Membership Restored**

When a baptized believer has departed from fellowship with Christ and the church, especially where excommunication has happened, and the person desires to return, it is appropriate to express this repentance publicly and celebrate the reaffirmation of faith and fellowship within the church. However, discernment is needed to protect the dignity of the person returning to the church. In the past, public confessions have

sometimes created shame rather than reconciliation and this needs to be discerned by the ministers.

The erring person should confess their sin (with discretion) either in a small group of church members chosen by the pastor in consultation with the person, or in a membership meeting. The members of the group may ask questions to understand the person and acknowledge their repentance.

In cases of excommunication, the renewal of fellowship should be formalized at a membership meeting by asking the repentant person a question such as: *Have you repented of your sin and recognized your need of God's power? Do you covenant with God and with this church to walk a life of discipleship along with all of us sinners in need of grace? If so, answer, "With the help of God, I do."*

The pastor will lead the members in prayer, thanking God for the restoration and forgiveness and interceding for power to live victoriously for God. The pastor would then reaffirm the fellowship with a handshake.

Following such a service, the members should be encouraged to greet the person and give expressions of encouragement.

## **Membership through Covenanting Services**

In the traditional practice of the EMC, a person becomes a church member for life in a one-time event. This person retains membership until the relationship is ended for whatever reason. Some churches have discovered that this practice does not fully engage our ongoing need to renew our commitment and freshen our love for the church. Regular covenanting services, either annually or every two years can be a way to maintain a vibrant commitment to the church and to regularly teach about what it means to belong to this community.

In moving towards this practice, it is wise to recognize that this may be a significant change for some people. It is wise not to coerce those who are not ready to make this switch. This can be done by allowing people who are already members but who are not ready for the covenanting service to retain membership for several years without participating in the covenanting service. Over time as these members come to see the beauty of the covenanting practice, they will hopefully join in.

A covenanting service is a time of both commitment and celebration. Accompany this service with good food and festivity.

Here is a covenanting ceremony that can be used in these services.

*Recognizing the wonderful and awesome responsibility of being the body of Christ together we the \_\_\_\_\_ Church, covenant to give to you our members:*

1. *A place for fellowship, where you can belong, where you will be cared for, where you will be held accountable, and where you can meet for worship (Rom. 12:5; Gal. 6:1–2; Eph. 5:19).*
2. *A place to serve in the area of your giftedness, both inside and outside the church fellowship (Rom 12:6a; Gal. 6:10).*
3. *A place to learn through preaching, teaching and Bible study (2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Thess. 4:1–2).*
4. *A place to receive spiritual care and nurture through instruction and Believer’s Baptism, through participation in communion, through visitation and prayer in times of need and through providing significant life events like weddings and funerals (Jas. 5:13–16; Acts 2:42).*

*Having received Christ as my Lord and Savior and having been baptized upon my confession of faith in him, I am led by the Holy Spirit to unite with my spiritual family, the \_\_\_\_\_ Church. I humbly commit myself to God and to this community of believers to:*

1. *Shield the unity of my church by acting in love toward other members, by refusing to gossip, by supporting, holding accountable, and having confidence in the leadership, and by accepting and supporting corporate decisions. (Rom. 15:5; Eph. 4:29)*
2. *Share responsibility for the growth of my church by praying for its growth, by inviting the unchurched to attend and by welcoming those who visit (Luke 14:23; Rom.15:7).*
3. *Serve in the ministry of my church by living a godly life, by discovering and using my gifts, by leading with a servant’s heart and by serving for God’s glory and not human praise (1 Pet. 4:10; Phil. 2:4–5, 7).*
4. *Support my church in practical ways with my time, with faithful worship attendance, and with finances (Heb. 10:25; Eph. 4:15–16; 1 Cor. 16:2).*

## **THE LORD’S SUPPER**

### **The Meaning of the Lord’s Supper**

Communion, or the Lord’s Supper, was instituted by Christ on the last night before His crucifixion. The apostle Paul gives instructions to the Corinthians on how and why communion is to be celebrated. “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This

cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:23–26).

In the Lord's Supper, the Church experiences the presence of Christ, a presence that brings to mind his suffering and death. Christ leads us to celebrate our costly redemption. He promises that he will return and urges on us the need to proclaim the gospel until he comes. We eat together as a foretaste of the Supper of the Lamb that will be shared in the eternal Kingdom of Heaven (Luke 22:18; Rev. 19:9).

The Lord's Supper is rightly called "communion." "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16). As we share together as brothers and sisters we are drawn into a spiritual unity with the body of Christ. This is fellowship; an act of solidarity with fellow Christians.

The Scriptures say that "whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). Because the supper is linked to the proclamation of the Lord's death and resurrection, which is the Church's mission in its entirety, it should be a regular practice of the Church. It is good for churches to share this meal once a month.

## **Who May Participate in the Lord's Supper?**

In Matthew 26:26–28, Jesus shares this special meal with his disciples whom he had called to be his followers. The Christian's longing for Jesus means a desire for regular fellowship in the Lord's Supper, and it will lead to care in preparing to eat the meal. "So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup" (1 Cor. 11:27–28). To be answerable for "the body and blood of the Lord" is to sin against Christ and against the community of believers. The apostle also warns of eating while acting unjustly towards our fellow Christians.

The church will proclaim both the need to prepare, and the abundant welcome that Jesus expressed in eating with sinners. Christians seek God's forgiveness and, on that basis, participate with joy and confidence (Heb. 4:14–16). They should also seek to restore any broken relationships between them and other people (Matt. 5:23–24; 1 Cor. 11:17–22, 33). It is appropriate to include a time of confession in the communion service.

Normally, baptism should precede participating in communion. Baptism is the scriptural way of welcoming people to the church's fellowship and communion is that fellowship in the ongoing life of the church. Those

who are baptized and in right relationship with God and the church community fellowship together in the Lord's Supper. Individual churches vary in whether an unbaptized believer or children can partake. In cases where communion is offered to the unbaptized it should be explained that receiving Christ's Supper indicates a willingness to seek Christ's baptism.

### **The Practice of the Lord's Supper:**

Several steps are seen in the procedure of partaking of this meal: 1) Jesus gave thanks for the bread. 2) He broke the bread. 3) He commanded that it be eaten. 4) He gave an explanation of it. 5) He gave thanks for the cup. 6) He drank the cup. 7) He invited the disciples to drink from the cup. 8) He gave an explanation. 9) According to John 13:2ff, he washed the disciples' feet.

### **Suggested Order When a Separate Service from Sunday Worship**

Welcome and Prayer of Invocation

Worship in Song

Scripture Reading. This can include either one of the passages of institution or accounts of Christ's meal ministry such as Matthew 26:26–27; Luke 22:14–20; 1 Corinthians 11:23–27; Matthew 14:13–21 or Mark 14:22–25. See also Acts 2:43–47 and Acts 27:33–38.

Offering. Because the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:17–22 teaches that the relation between rich and poor is a crucial question in preparation for communion, it is a good practice for the church to take a special offering that is given directly to the congregation's benevolent fund for helping the poor.

Confession of Sin and Prayer. This can include a time of corporate sharing as well as public prayers of confession and the assurance of forgiveness.

Testimonies. It is appropriate to invite members of the church ahead of time to tell their faith story, or an account of a recent experience of the grace of God in their lives.

Sermon

Distribution of Bread and Cup. When all have received both elements, the leader prays: *Gracious Father we thank you that your Son Jesus gave his body for us on the cross. His body was broken so we could be healed and live together in unity. In the presence of Christ your Son we now eat together.* The congregation eats the bread.

When all have eaten the leader continues praying, *Gracious Father, we thank you that your Son Jesus lovingly gave his blood for us on the cross. By this gift of his life, we have the forgiveness of our sins and a restored covenant with you our creator. By the gift of his blood we stand clean, whole, and strong in your presence. In the presence of your Son we now drink together.* The congregation drinks together.

Saying the Apostles' Creed together at the end of the Supper is an expression of the unity of the church with believers across the world and through the ages.

Footwashing. Where footwashing is included in the communion service, the minister will read a passage of Scripture (Luke 22:24–27; John 13:1–17; Phil. 2:1–11), emphasizing cleansing, humility and service. Following the prayer, the men and women may go to different areas of the sanctuary or building for footwashing. Those chosen to serve should have basins, warm water and towels ready for the participants. It is also customary to greet each other, wishing each other God's blessing.

Following footwashing, the congregation should gather for a common closing and benediction.

## **The Lord's Supper in a Regular Sunday Worship Service**

In the regular Sunday worship, communion and its meaning should be integrated into the service rather than attached to the end as an extra feature. The Communion should be announced a week in advance so that the congregants may plan and prepare for it.

Because of visitors or unbelievers who may be present, the meaning of the Lord's Supper should be explained carefully, and the procedures should be clarified in advance. The pastor should explain who is invited to share and what that participation means.

Footwashing can also be done during Sunday worship. One way to do this is to have people who desire footwashing go to stations around the sanctuary where basins have been set up. A person sits down at the basin and waits for another to join him or her and they wash each other's feet. When they have washed each other's feet, they proceed to take communion together.

## PARENT AND CHILD DEDICATION CEREMONY

### Purpose of the Service

When a baby is born, we have the keen awareness that God has given the world a special gift, and that we need to celebrate and make sober commitments about how this child will be raised. A parent and child dedication service has several purposes.

First the ceremony is an opportunity to teach the congregation what childhood means in the salvation story. In Scripture, children are received as a special sign of the blessing of God (Gen. 21:1–7; 1 Sam. 1–2; Luke 1:5–17; Luke 1:39–56). Children are seen as having a unique ability to praise God and live out Kingdom values (Ps. 8:2; Mark 10:13–16).

Children are born into a fallen world and already have a propensity to sin within them (Ps. 51:5). All people need salvation, including children. This does not, however, mean that children are unsaved until they later become believers. Children are born into the keeping hands of God who is already saving, loving and protecting them by his cross and resurrection. The parents and the church have the privilege of joining in God's saving work with the goal that this child will eventually be baptized upon a confession of faith (Ps. 139:13–16).

The church recognizes that children in the church have a unique privilege in hearing the gospel and responding to it. Children raised in the church should know their entire childhood as a gradual conversion. The church can incubate this conversion in a host of ways. Ideally, the child will gradually grow up in the Lord, understanding, grappling with, and embracing more of the life of Jesus. The culmination of this childhood-long conversion is believers' baptism when the person fully accepts the gospel of Jesus and determines to be a disciple for life.

Second, the ceremony is an opportunity to teach about parenting and to assure parents that God is with them. Being a Christian parent, while it requires all the wisdom anyone needs to raise a healthy child, also entails a commitment to teaching children the Bible, prayer, worship, and how to be a witness in their community (Deut. 6; 1 Sam. 1:1–2:10; Luke 2:5–52; 2 Tim. 1:5–7).

Third, the ceremony is an opportunity to give public thanks to God for a safe birth, and for the gift of new life in the world. When a child arrives safe and healthy there is great cause for celebration and thanksgiving.

Fourth, the ceremony is an opportunity for the church to welcome a new person into the congregation. Though formal church membership will happen when the child is baptized, children of the church are in a unique position of belonging to and serving in a Christ-centred community of

faith as they grow up. Simeon and Anna welcomed Jesus into the people of Israel in Luke 2:25–38.

Fifth, the ceremony is an opportunity to divide up responsibilities for raising this child to know and fear the Lord. Christian parenting is a key part of how the church will lead this child in conversion. The church community will be this child's spiritual family and will provide education, service, and friendship.

## **Preparation for the Dedication Service**

A ministerial member should have an orientation session with the parents to explain the meaning of the service, the place of the child in the family of God, and to have a discussion about what it means to be a Christian parent. This can be a valuable opportunity for the minister to be involved in the lives of young families in the church.

## **A Suggested Parent/Child Dedication Service**

Minister: *Children are a marvelous gift from God and today we are celebrating \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. I invite their parents \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to the front.*

*Families are one of the great gifts God has given the Church in order to raise up the next generation of disciples. We are celebrating today with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in the birth of \_\_\_\_\_. Praise God for his wonderful gift!*

*Today, we are dedicating our children, the children of the church, back to the Lord from whom they came. Hannah offering Samuel to the temple has often been seen as a biblical example of this kind of commitment. We pray that our children will grow up to embrace their privileged life as children of God. We pray that one day they will take this for themselves and receive the baptism of Christ and serve the Lord for the glory of the kingdom of God.*

*There is work to be done in raising these children. You the parents, and we your church family, will do this together. Together we will bring these children to God, as the Spirit empowers us to love and teach. We will teach these children the Bible. We will teach these children to worship and pray. We will teach these children right from wrong. We will teach these children to be a witness in the world. The daily work of this will be yours as parents. We your church will pray for you, support you and provide teaching, friendship and support to your children.*

*Let us dedicate ourselves and our children to the Lord.*



*Congregation, our Lord sends us to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything he commanded. Do we take these children \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ as Christ's disciples in our midst, and will we teach them everything Christ taught; loving, guiding, and challenging them so that when they are ready we can baptize them and send them to the nations as a witness of the good news?*

*Answer: If God helps us, we do.*

*Parents, you will do much of the church's work in raising these children. Will you love them, care for them, and teach them to pray? Will you raise them to love Christ and his Church, to know right from wrong, and to discover the gifts the Spirit has given to them for the refreshing of the body of Christ? And when they are ready, will you offer them back to the church, knowing that, when they have submitted to baptism, the Spirit will send them wherever God desires?*

*Answer: If God helps us, we will.*

**Prayer of dedication:**

The minister takes each child and prays. It is a good practice to write out each prayer and give it to the parents for keepsake. The Bible has many verses that work well as specific blessings that can be given to a child. Here is one example:

*Gracious Father, you have given us \_\_\_\_\_ and we give you thanks for her new life. Bless her with health. Draw her ever to yourself through the love of her parents \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. Protect her from the attacks of the evil one. Bless her with talents and gifts that bring joy to the Church and the world. May she always know that she belongs to you. John 4:14 says "The water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

After all have been prayed for, the minister says:

*The Lord bless you and keep you.*

*The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.*

*The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.*

## FUNERAL SERVICES

**A**s followers of Jesus Christ, we believe in the hope of the resurrection since Christ our brother is the firstborn of the dead. Funerals are an occasion to proclaim this great hope by focusing on the good news of Christ's triumph over death. While we want to remember the life of the person who has died, our main purpose is to declare our hope in the resurrection of Christ.

The tendency of the modern funeral is to move from being a worship service proclaiming God's comfort and the resurrection of the dead, to being a "celebration of life" with a more human-centred focus on the deceased person. We are saved by grace and not by works. A modest amount of eulogy is appropriate, but the focus of the Christian funeral is the gospel understanding of death and resurrection, and the promise of God to be with us in our grief. If possible, a minister should guide the family in turning the focus of the service to the promises of Christ. This is the comfort we offer.

The loss of a loved one through death is a traumatic experience. At such times, the minister has an opportunity to provide support and assistance to families who need help navigating grief and preparing for a funeral. During this period of grieving, the minister represents the presence of God to families in pain. A minister's concern, warmth, and dignity may be a tremendous source of comfort and may help people process grief in a manner that helps them respond positively to God.

Funeral services provide an opportunity for individuals and families to find closure, to say goodbye, and to find comfort in God's Word. They may also be an opportunity for the minister to share the gospel with family and friends who do not know Christ personally. With grace and tact, the minister needs to be aware of these opportunities.

### **Pre-Funeral Expectations**

Whether death comes suddenly or over a time of illness, death shocks us. Many feel so stunned that they do not know what to do next in preparation. If the minister knows the family and the deceased, the minister's assistance will be appreciated.

If possible, upon the notification of a death, the minister's first task is to be present with the family of the deceased. This is especially important with those who belong to the church family, but it is also important when called upon by members of the larger community. Joining the family in the hospital room or chapel will bring comfort. The minister is not there to preach or to counsel, but to be present. They may offer to pray a brief prayer.

A minister is not obligated to sit with the person if they are dying. If the person has no family or supporters, the minister should use discretion as far as what is appropriate in being present. Family may want private time with the loved one and it is fine to leave after a short visit. Communication is key. A minister should discover what support the family needs at this time and think about how best to be a connection between the family and the rest of the church. They should make sure the family knows how to reach them when they need to make plans.

## **Planning a Funeral Service**

Planning a funeral should be done together with the key family members. A service ought to reflect the general wishes of the family. However, a minister will want to influence the funeral to be Christ-centered, gospel-based and glorifying to God. Unless the family of the deceased person has an accepted leader, the minister will be expected to take the initiative and lead the family through the steps of funeral arrangements.

The minister also needs to be alert to practical needs such as food, legal, or social needs. Often churches have deacons, committees, or individuals who are ready to offer meals for the grieving family. Involving them will provide them an opportunity to show the compassion of the church. Ministers should make use of these servants.

Writing an obituary is the responsibility of the family. The minister may offer counsel, reminding them to include the dates of birth, baptism, marriage, and death. Obituaries may also include information about occupation, residence, relationship to Christ and the church, and who the deceased has left to grieve him or her in terms of spouse, children, grandchildren, and special friends. Further counsel may be offered to avoid unrealistic praise of the loved one.

Some family members may want to offer extensive tributes at the viewing or service. The number and length of tributes can become overwhelming and consideration for the congregation ought to be remembered. The minister may want to suggest that individuals collaborate on a collective tribute of appropriate length. Photo tributes or video montages also need to be of appropriate length.

Churches may not be able to assemble volunteers for parking, food, and technological services due to various circumstances. Funeral homes offer alternatives with larger chapels and food services. If the family desires a funeral in the church building, having individuals who can recruit volunteers on short notice is an asset.

The details can be overwhelming, so it would be beneficial for a minister to have a checklist of the items that need attention. Having one for yourself and one for the family would be helpful (see sample guide).

### **Funeral Planning Guide (sample)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Location of Funeral \_\_\_\_\_

Funeral Home \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Officiating Minister \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Funeral Service:**

Service Leader/Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Song Leader/Worship Band \_\_\_\_\_

Pianist \_\_\_\_\_

Organist \_\_\_\_\_

Scripture Reading \_\_\_\_\_ by whom  
\_\_\_\_\_

Obituary \_\_\_\_\_

Tribute(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Sermon \_\_\_\_\_

Special Music \_\_\_\_\_

Technology (Sound; Video; Hearing Assistance)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Pallbearers \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Officiating Minister at Committal  
\_\_\_\_\_

Memorial Plan \_\_\_\_\_

Inside Ushers \_\_\_\_\_

Parking Lot Attendants \_\_\_\_\_

## **Fellowship Lunch**

Family Contact \_\_\_\_\_

Church Contact \_\_\_\_\_

Welcome by \_\_\_\_\_

Grace/Prayer of Blessing for Food  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **Viewing Service/Visitation at the Funeral Home**

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Chairperson (if necessary) \_\_\_\_\_

Song Leader \_\_\_\_\_

Devotional \_\_\_\_\_

Musical Accompaniment \_\_\_\_\_

## **The Funeral Service**

*Pre-Funeral Family Times* – Families may want to have a brief but private service at the funeral chapel the day before the main funeral, or an hour before the service. This allows the family and close friends an opportunity to comfort each other privately. The minister, with permission, can offer a word from the Scriptures and a prayer.

Following this private moment, the funeral director will offer guidance and instructions on how the family will enter the worship area.

*Public Viewing* – Usually done prior to the service. The family may have one final viewing before the procession into the worship area. Funeral directors will provide instructions on when this will take place and how long.

Order of Service (sample):  
Procession (congregation stands as minister leads family into service)  
Call to Worship and Prayer (may include scripture)  
Congregational Singing  
Obituary  
Special Music  
Tributes  
Message  
Closing Congregational Song  
Announcements  
Benediction (suggested: Heb. 13:20–21)  
Procession to the Graveyard (minister leads family)

### **Suggested Scripture Passages for Various Funerals**

A child – 1 Samuel 1:2–28; 2 Samuel 12:16–23; Psalm 23; 103:11–14; Matthew 18:1–5, 10–14; Mark 10:13–16; Revelation 7:16–17.

A youth – 2 Chronicles 34:3; Ecclesiastes 12:1–7; Luke 7:11–16.

General – Psalm 25:1, 16–18; 46:1–7, 10–11; 91:9–11; 121; Isaiah 40:31; 41:10–13; 1 Corinthians 15:20–26, 35–44, 54–58; 2 Timothy 4:6–8; Revelation 21:3–7.

Special – In the event of unusual circumstances leading to the death of an individual, or if the person was not a follower of Christ, or a tragic or untimely death, the minister will need to rest upon the Holy Spirit for guidance in preparing to speak at the funeral and relating to the grieving family.

Suicide – If the funeral is for a person who has committed suicide, the minister should avoid passing judgment in the ministry to the family or in the message. God is the judge and is better able to see each life in its context. The minister should present the gospel and encourage a positive response to God in repentance and faith. Possible passages: 1 Samuel 31:4; Psalm 39:4–7; 90:1–6; John 3:16; 7:53–8:11; Romans 5:1–11; James 4:13–17.

### **Committal or Graveside Service**

This is a short service and not an occasion for another sermon. When the family has gathered around the grave, the casket having been positioned by the directors, the minister should begin with a brief introduction and scripture. Suggested Scriptures: Psalm 103:13–17; John 5:28–29; 1 Corinthians 15:50–58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; James 4:13–17.

A sample committal address:

*It is normal to want to cling to \_\_\_\_\_'s body since it belonged to someone we love. However, the time has come to lay \_\_\_\_\_'s body*

to rest until the day of resurrection. Leaving the body of \_\_\_\_\_ in the ground feels permanent. But just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so will those who have hoped in him be raised from the dead. This earth will not hold the saints in the ground when the trumpet sounds. Therefore, we await the coming resurrection of the dead when this body we now lay to rest will be transformed into a body that is fit for eternal life. Until then we commit this body to the ground and trust God. “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51–52).

If the deceased is presumed to be unsaved, the words of committal may be altered to reflect this status: *We now commit this body to the ground and the spirit into the hands of God who gave it, in the assurance that he who is the Judge of the living and the dead will do what is right according to his perfect wisdom.*

## **Memorial Services**

In special circumstances where family may not be available to travel to the place where the deceased lived, the body may need to be buried and a memorial held later on. Sometimes cremation is requested beforehand and the body not presented for viewing. Other times families request a private burial with a service to follow in the future. In these situations, preparing for a service will follow the same steps as outlined above and are still appropriate for this service.

## **Cremation**

Cremation has become an accepted practice among Christians and families may choose this option with good conscience for the body of their loved one. A buried body returns to the dust from which it came; cremation simply accelerates the process (Eccl. 12:7). Services for cremated persons may resemble the memorial service and committal follows a similar procedure as burying a casket. With cremation, mourners may feel that they are unable to find closure without seeing the body. It may be helpful to leave cremation till after the funeral service.

## **Post-Funeral Ministry**

Following the funeral, it happens that friends and relatives forget those who are still grieving. These are especially lonely times for spouses, children, siblings, and close friends who still feel the sting of death in their lives. Attending social functions can be difficult when it seems that everyone has gone on with life seemingly forgetting the departed one. Ministers

need to be particularly aware of these occasions for ongoing care and visits. The minister will act as one who reminds the congregation of the care that their sister or brother needs in the following months.

## THE CHRISTIAN WEDDING

Christians believe that marriage is a gift from God and should not be taken lightly. When a woman and a man desire to enter into a loving, lifelong commitment to one another, being married before the church or its representatives is appropriate. A marriage is a public declaration before God and church of the couple's love and commitment to each other.

Marriage of a woman and a man reflects the relationship of Christ and the Church. It stands as a testimony of how God loves his people (Eph. 5). The wedding is therefore not only a procedure whereby people marry, but also expresses our theology about marriage. It is important that the wedding ceremony, including the reception and the program, bring glory to God (Col. 3:17).

A Christian wedding is not a civil ceremony. It is a service of worship that brings attention to God's design for women and men who want to enter into a lifelong relational and sexual union. Pastors are privileged to guide couples in preparing for marriage and planning a wedding. The focus of wedding ceremonies will be Christ-centered as family and friends gather together to celebrate the love of God and the love of a man and a woman.

### Different Couples

Ministers will find a variety of couples approaching them for marriage. One needs to be prepared for each scenario by consulting with the church board or elders so as to have an agreed upon response to each request. In any scenario it must be understood that the minister is being asked to perform a Christian wedding.

*Believers* – Members of the church normally ask their minister to officiate their wedding and it is the minister's responsibility and privilege to do so. In some cases, a congregant from one church will marry a congregant from another church and the couple may be conflicted in whom to ask. A minister needs to be gracious. One deciding factor may be which church they will attend after marrying. A minister might want to encourage them to choose the pastor of the church they plan to attend.

*Unbelievers* – The marriage of unbelievers is recognized by God as a good part of the created order (Gen. 2:18–24). Unbelievers often desire to make their union official and see the church as a traditional aspect of



the wedding ceremony. A minister can see this as an opportunity to bear witness for Christ and God's vision for marriage. The minister will want to ensure at the outset that there will be freedom to honour God at the wedding. No pretense is necessary regarding the faith of the couple—vows may be adjusted to agree with the couples' faith position. A scenario such as this must be entered into with prayer that there would be a sense of God's gracious presence through this interaction.

*Believer-Unbeliever* – At times a believer may desire to marry an unbeliever. These situations require special care and conversation regarding what the couple understands regarding faith. The minister needs to dialogue about the importance of faith, what the term “faith” means, and how the couple sees this impacting their relationship. If one or both are connected to the church through family, it would be wise to consult the parents and to seek guidance from the church board/elders.

*Divorced* – If one or both of the individuals seeking marriage has been divorced, the minister should respect the convictions of the congregation in respect to officiating this marriage. Again, consultation with the church board would ensure support for the minister in their decision. Divorce leaves broken relationships in its wake and the minister needs to discuss forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation with the couple. The ministry of the grace of God needs to be expressed to couples seeking remarriage.

*Cohabiting* – A cohabiting couple may desire to get married. The minister should encourage the couple to live apart until the wedding. This is a good opportunity to discuss what is meant by having a *Christian* wedding and marriage. This conversation can also be a good way to discuss what faith means to them. Why do they wish to have church pastor perform their wedding? If they are unwilling to separate (because of shared children, rent or mortgage), the minister should consult their church board so that they can proceed according to what their leadership team has determined will be the practice of their church.

## **Premarital Counselling**

Becoming more acquainted with a couple as the officiating minister is one of the benefits of performing weddings. When the “big day” arrives, the couple's anxieties may be lessened knowing they have a friend on stage with them. This relationship will have been built through the process of premarital counselling. Counselling of this nature helps the couple prepare for marriage and build a Christian foundation for their life together.

When possible due to time constraints or travel, it would be good for couples to meet with the minister five to six times before the wedding. These

sessions may last from 60 to 90 minutes depending on the conversation.

The officiating minister typically conducts the counselling sessions, though at times it may be beneficial to have another minister conduct them (when a minister's son or daughter gets married, distance issues, etc.)

The purpose of premarital counselling is to:

- Help the couple come to a clear understanding of the biblical teaching of marriage.
- Address the practical dimensions of married life.
- Enable the couple to have important conversation about issues they are or will face.
- Discuss wedding plans.

Using prepared surveys will assist the minister in becoming better acquainted with the couple and enable the couple to see themselves with additional clarity.

A suggested five-session premarital counselling outline is provided below. The minister should be flexible in determining whether more or less sessions will be needed. Prayer as part of the sessions is an important element. Giving couples the opportunity to pray may help them become comfortable praying in front of one another.

#### Session 1: Getting to Know One Another

- Each individual should briefly share who they are, where they are from, their spiritual journey, family connections, etc.
- Question: "Why do you want to get married?"
- Question: "What are you expecting of me, your minister?"
- Question: "What do I expect of you, the couple? (re: assignments, wedding preparation)."
- Question: "Why do you want a Christian wedding?"
- Ask if the couple has any further questions.
- The minister should confirm with the couple that they will or will not officiate the wedding.
- Set dates for next meetings.
- Give assignments if any (marriage books, Scripture).

#### Session 2: Biblical Foundations of Marriage

- Prepare for and discuss the biblical concepts of marriage:
  - That marriage is a unique male-female relationship (Gen. 2:18–22).
  - That it is an exclusive choice (Gen. 2:23–24).
  - That it is a lifelong commitment (Mark 10:6–10).
  - The nature of true love (Eph. 5:25–30).

- That marriage is for companionship (Gen. 2:18).
- Jesus' view of marriage and divorce (Matt. 19:1–9).
- Give assignments for next session: Communication – have the couple reminisce about one significant conflict they have had, evaluate it, and come back prepared to discuss it with you. What do they consider to be good communication? Reading assignment (book/chapter).

### Session 3: Communication and Conflict Resolution

- Discuss the importance of being assertive (asking for what they want or need).
- Discuss strategies of fair communication.
- Discuss the nature of relationships and how they will relate to:
  - Family (including in-laws)
  - Extended family
  - Single friends
  - Couple friends
  - Their own friends
- Discuss how the couple solves conflict now. How do they need to grow in this area?
- Give assignments for next session: Have the couple come back with a full and detailed budget plan. Also have them talk together about how they plan to divide the work of the home. Reading assignment (book/chapter).

### Session 4: Foundations of the Home: Finances and Household Duties

- Review last week's assignment: budget analysis.
- Discuss financial goals (buying a house, car, etc.).
- Discuss the biblical view of money (2 Cor. 9:6–15) and the importance of giving.
- Discuss how they will spend money (consult one another?).
- Talk about likes and dislikes regarding household chores (laundry, housecleaning) and who they expect will do what.
- Discuss the importance of spiritually investing in each other (attending church regularly, prayer and devotional times together, etc.).
- Give assignments for next session: Have the couple discuss a) their greatest regret regarding sexuality, b) what they are most looking forward to about sex and c) what fears or misgivings do they have about sex. Come back prepared to discuss this with

the minister. Reading assignment (book/chapter). Be prepared to finalize wedding ceremony details (This will have been an ongoing process throughout the premarital counselling).

#### Session 5: Biblical Sexuality

- Review last week's assignment: sexual expectations.
- Discuss the meaning and expression of sex (1 Cor. 6:15–20; 7:3–5).
- Discuss the couple's plan for a family.
- Finalize details for the wedding ceremony (make sure the legal documents have been attained and review rehearsal plans).

### Planning a Wedding Ceremony

Questions to consider when planning the ceremony:

- Will the service reflect the centrality of Christ in marriage?
- Will the symbols and rituals communicate Christian values?
- Will the congregation be active participants or detached observers?
- Will the reception and program complement the Christ-centered ceremony?

#### Outline for a Christian Wedding (suggested)

Prelude

Processional

Parental Affirmation (optional)

Welcome and Prayer

Congregational Hymn (optional)

Scripture Reading

Devotional (12–15 minutes)

Vows and Rings

Pronouncement

Prayer of Dedication

Signing of the Register

Presentation of the Couple

Recessional

Announcements

Parental Affirmation:

*You, the parents, have nurtured and trained \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in the Lord from infancy through childhood to maturity. You have provided encouragement, counsel, and example. Today they stand before you ready to pledge their lives to each other as husband and wife. Do*

*you now commit yourselves to continue to stand with them as a couple in prayer and moral support as they establish a Christian home?*

*Answer: If God helps us, we do.*

## **Sample Templates for the Wedding Ceremony**

The following are suggested models to use in officiating. The couple may wish to modify the parts together with the minister's guidance. Personalizing the vows, for instance, is permissible, but over-sentimentalizing should be avoided.

Two Marriage Vows:

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ *have indicated their desire to enter into the bonds of holy marriage and no reason has been shown to prevent them. If it is still your desire to do so, please indicate by joining hands.*

Vow 1:

*Do you, \_\_\_\_\_, take \_\_\_\_\_, whose hand you now hold, to be your wedded wife /husband? Do you promise to live together according to God's plan in the holy bond of marriage? Do you promise to be a faithful Christian wife/husband, to protect, honour, love, and cherish her/him in prosperity or adversity, in sickness or in health, and to keep yourself for her/him alone as long as you both shall live? If this is your commitment before God and these witnesses, answer "I do."*

Vow 2:

*I \_\_\_\_\_ take you \_\_\_\_\_ to be my wife/husband  
To have and to hold  
From this day forward;  
For better, for worse,  
For richer, for poorer,  
In sickness and in health,  
To love and to cherish  
For the rest of our lives,  
According to God's holy law.  
This is my solemn vow.*

Note 1: Should couples write their own vows or modify the sample above, three promises need to be included. 1) A commitment to love each other; 2) a commitment to each other for life; 3) a commitment to support and submit to each other. Vows must be approved by the officiating minister

ahead of time to ensure that the vow taken by the individuals is in keeping with the solemnity of the occasion.

Note 2: Vows may be conducted in three ways. 1) The minister may ask the vows as a question whereby the bride and groom simply answer “I do”; 2) the minister may have the bride and groom repeat the vows after the minister; 3) the bride and groom may read the vows off of a paper that the minister holds discreetly before them.

#### Sample Ring Ceremony:

*You have committed yourselves before God and these witnesses to live together as husband and wife. As a symbol of your love and commitment you may now exchange the wedding rings.*

#### Sample Pronouncement:

*For as much as you, \_\_\_\_\_, and you, \_\_\_\_\_, have declared your wish to be united in marriage and in the presence of God and these witnesses have pledged your love and faithfulness each to the other for life, I as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ pronounce you husband and wife. What God has joined together let no one separate.*

#### Sample Dedication Prayer:

*Our Father in heaven, you have heard \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ express their love for each other through vows of marriage. We believe you are pleased with their commitment to each other. We pray that you will give them wisdom to build their marriage. When trials and disappointments come, bless them with the strength and the courage to remain true to each other.*

*Guide them as they establish a Christian home. And if you should bless their home with children, give them wisdom and joy in parenting. May the presence of Christ in their home always be evident. Grant them a deep, abiding love for each other and fill their lives with your joy. May they continue to grow in their Christian faith, and may they be keen to invest in the community of believers to which they belong.*

*May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the everlasting Father, and the fellowship of the Spirit who is with us, bless you and keep you. Amen.*

#### **For Blended Families:**

When the marriage involves children from a previous relationship it is good to acknowledge that a blending of families is taking place. This may take place before the vows are spoken. The person who is receiving

the other's children may want to make a pledge to accept, love, and care for the new family members.

Children who are of a certain age may also want to pledge to accept and respect the new parent.

Where the wedding is a remarriage after a divorce, it is appropriate to acknowledge this reality tactfully during the ceremony. Many attending will have memories of the first wedding and the minister does a service to acknowledge this in a simple way.

## 6. Issues in Pastoral Work

This section contains pastoral wisdom for some of the challenging life situations that demand poise and grace from the minister. We cannot address every concern, but these will demonstrate broad patterns for relating to a variety of issues.

### MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL ILLNESS

Many people in our congregations live with a mental illness, such as depression, bi-polar disorder, schizophrenia, addictions, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and others. These illnesses are sometimes misunderstood, or misdiagnosed as spiritual problems, and people who struggle with them may feel on the margins of the congregation.

“Mental illnesses are health problems that affect the way we think about ourselves, relate to others, and interact with the world around us. They affect our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Mental illnesses can disrupt a person’s life or create challenges, but with the right supports, a person can get back on a path to recovery and wellness” (Canadian Mental Health Association).

The Canadian Mental Health Association reports that 20 percent of Canadians will experience a mental illness at some point in their life, with eight percent of adults experiencing major depression. Between 10 and 20 percent of Canadian youth are impacted by a mental illness, with five percent of male youth and 12 percent of female youth experiencing a major depressive episode.

### Theology

The theology of the minister and the congregation regarding mental illness is important. The Bible has much to say about passions, emotions, and feelings and this needs to be noted in our teaching. Coming to a rich biblical and personal understanding of our emotions will prevent ministers from giving the impression that mental illness is a sign of personal sin, or that increased time spent in prayer or reading the Bible is all that is needed to experience healing.



Ministers can model honesty and vulnerability in ways similar to those used by the Psalmist (Ps. 31:9–16; 42) and prophets like Habakkuk (1:2–4; 12–13). They can acknowledge pain and sadness and unanswered questions as part of living in this world and in this way model that it is good to ask hard questions of God and to express darker emotions. This kind of preaching and vulnerability will give permission to people to be more open about their pain. Struggling with a mental illness does not reflect a lack in one's relationship with God. Suffering without finding relief is a spiritually demanding path to be asked to walk and people should be respected who find this to be their experience.

## Understanding Mental Illness

The Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual model helps understand the multifaceted experience of mental illness:

- Biological: Our brains, nervous system and genetics affect our mental health.
- Psychological: Moods, personality, past trauma, and developmental story are involved.
- Social networks: What kind of family systems, peer influences, and cultural influences are contributing to this illness?
- Spiritual: Our beliefs about God, sin, forgiveness, death, suicide and the meaning of life play a key role in our mental health.

There are many treatment options that help address the different aspects of the above model:

- Medication (Biological)
- Therapy (Psychological, Social)
- Social supports, self-care (Social, Spiritual)
- Spiritual and theological care from pastors and Christian counsellors and coaches (Spiritual)

Education about mental illness is important for both ministers and congregants. Resource people may be available for congregations, such as chaplains from local psychiatric wards, medical doctors, nurses, social workers and therapists who work in the area of mental health. There are also resources through organizations involved with providing services and education, such as:

- Mood Disorders Association: <https://mdsc.ca/>
- Canadian Mental Health Association: <https://cmha.ca/>
- Anxiety Canada: <https://anxietycanada.com/>

Ministers should use person-first language when speaking about individuals with a mental illness. Person-first language focuses on the humanity of the individual rather than their struggle or diagnosis. For example, rather

than saying “Bob is schizophrenic”, we can say that “Bob struggles with schizophrenia”, or “Bob is diagnosed with schizophrenia.” No mental or physical health diagnosis is the defining aspect of any person.

Inviting resource people to speak in a church service or Sunday school can be one way to open up discussions and help the church become comfortable talking about mental illness. Congregants who have shared about their struggles with mental illness may be open to discussing how mental illness could be discussed in their church.

## **Caring for Congregants with a Mental Illness**

Supporting people who live with mental illness is similar to caring for anyone who has an illness. Every person will be unique, and ministers should take time to get to know each person rather than making assumptions or generalizations. However, most people do not appreciate simple solutions or quick Bible quotations. Unfortunately, because of the stigma often attached to mental illness, individuals may be hesitant to share the extent of their struggle with people in their lives.

It is important that ministers have appropriate referral options for therapists and/or medical professionals. Unless a minister has specific training as a counsellor or psychotherapist, they should refer congregants who need help to appropriate individuals or organizations. When a referral is made the minister needs to walk with the individual as the person's minister, checking to see whether the person is continuing to go for help, helping the person to understand faith issues and discovering whether there are other ways the congregation can support the person or the family emotionally, spiritually or physically.

Counselling is available through the public health system, as well as through private practitioners. If cost is a limitation for a congregant to access counselling, perhaps the church or a congregant's small group can help to cover costs. One resource to find Christian counsellors is the Professional Association of Christian Counsellors and Psychotherapists ([www.paccp.ca](http://www.paccp.ca)). Family doctors can also help direct individuals to mental health counselling.

If a person says they are thinking about suicide or hurting either themselves or others, this needs to be taken seriously. Ministers cannot keep information confidential regarding serious harm to self or others. Ministers should also know the legal requirements to report suspected abuse or neglect towards a child. Specific requirements and procedures vary by province.

Many communities have mobile crisis lines and crisis stabilization units. Ministers should find out where to locate help quickly in their

community. This may involve calling a crisis line with the person, or transporting the person to the local emergency department. If there is an immediate danger, or a suicide attempt is in progress, call EMS-911 immediately.

Ministers are encouraged to attend professional development and training opportunities related to mental health. Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) through Living Works is the standard suicide intervention training in Canada and is invaluable to all people in caregiving roles ([www.livingworks.net](http://www.livingworks.net)).

## Self Care

In many instances, mental illness becomes a long-term illness. It is, therefore, important for caregivers not to expend too much time and energy initially but to make deliberate choices to continue support for the long term. Ministers cannot be expected to provide 24-hour crisis support for mental health concerns. Local crises help lines and other supports should be provided to congregants for them to access when needed.

Supporting people who struggle with a serious mental illness can be spiritually and emotionally draining. Ministers should continue to build practices to care for themselves, addressing the Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual aspects of their own lives. Ministers are encouraged to access counselling therapy for themselves if they are struggling with a mental illness or the load of caring for ill congregants is becoming overwhelming. Ministers who have been credentialed with the EMC can apply for financial help through the Minister's Counselling Fund.

It is imperative for ministers to network with both professional people in the field of mental health and with other caregivers in the congregation. The minister and people in the congregation working together, accessing community resources as appropriate, can provide the support and the care people need.

## SICK/TERMINALLY ILL

**S**ickness can be a time of tremendous physical and spiritual struggle. It is a time when values and basic life beliefs are challenged and questioned. The minister needs to put these issues into a Biblical perspective and affirm God's presence and care.

As Christians, we believe that one of the effects of living in a fallen world is that suffering is a fact of life. We also believe that there will come a day when Christ returns and pain and sorrow will be a thing of the past. Theologically, a large part of our work is to reflect this future time of the

returned Christ in the here and now. This means that as a minister we have a duty to care for both the spiritual and physical wellbeing of those who are currently in a state of suffering.

## **Visits to the Sick**

In general, visits to the sick should be regular, brief and supportive. Listen to the patient. Affirm the positive. Respond realistically to the negative. A minister should avoid retelling their own history of illness or negative stories of others who have had a similar illness. They should share their friendship and love. This will enable the person to be more open to receive God's love and healing.

Most people appreciate a brief Scripture reading and prayer. As an expression of love and identity, the minister is encouraged to first ask, and if it is okay, hold the hand of the sick person for prayer.

Suggested Scripture readings: Psalms 23, 27, 46, 91, 103, 121; Isaiah 40; Matthew 6:25–33; John 14; Romans 8:26–39; 2 Corinthians 1:3–11; 12:9–10; Hebrews 12:1–3; 1 Peter 4:12–19; 1 John 1:9; Revelation 21:1–4.

When visiting patients in the hospital, inquire about clergy visiting privileges and respect these. Friendships with the hospital and medical staff are an asset and should be cultivated. The hospital chaplain is a particularly important friendship for the minister.

If the patient will be in the hospital for an extended stay, it is valuable for the minister to find a wider base of people to visit than just themselves. This will provide both consistent visitation for the patient and also will help prevent caring fatigue making continued care more sustainable.

## **Divine Healing**

We believe that the redemption through our Lord Jesus Christ is for the whole person. God may choose to bring healing and encouragement through medical care, through prayer or through the anointing of oil and prayer by the elders of the church. Christians are invited by Scripture to trust and ask God for healing.

The Scriptures encourage people to ask for “the elders of the church and to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord” (Jas. 5:14), expecting God to heal. Such a request should be honoured. The event should include several ministers and/or deacons of the church. This service may be held in a home with mostly the family present, or it might be included as part of a church service.

The anointing of oil is symbolic of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The anointing service should include some appropriate Scripture, anointing the forehead with oil and prayer for healing and benediction.

Suggested Scriptures: Isaiah 53:4–6; Mark 14:36; Luke 8:43–48.

If healing does not happen, it is important to remind the person that this is not necessarily because of sin (John 9:1–3) or insufficient faith (2 Cor. 12:7–10). Nor does it mean that God is absent or indifferent to their suffering. We also need to remember that in spite of the advances of science and the healing ministry entrusted to the church, all people eventually die. They need our love, prayers and practical expressions of care.

## **Terminal Illness**

Perhaps the need for pastoral care is greatest when people receive news that they are terminally ill. The minister needs to respond with genuine empathy, yet not be incapacitated by the gravity of the situation. Self-care is important to remember when a minister is spending a lot of time responding to terminal illness.

It is helpful for the minister to be aware of the Kübler-Ross model of the stages of grief that are often experienced by those with terminal illness. While recent research has called aspects of the model into question, it is nevertheless a helpful tool for the minister responding to those grieving the loss of their life. See the following page for an example.

It is important to note when viewing the stages of grief that not all people go through the stages as a progression, nor do they necessarily move through the stages in a particular order. It is instead intended as a descriptive model more than a prescription for how healthy grieving should appear. Also note that the divisions between the stages may blend together from patient to patient.

## Stages of Grief

1. Denial. Disbelief. It can't be true. Not me.
2. Anger. Expressions of anger, particularly at God. Venting emotions is helpful.
3. Bargaining. Feels trapped by past failure. Promises a better future life if God extends life.
4. Despair. Depression. Mourning the loss of parts of the body, changes in appearance, and disability.
5. Acceptance. Extending the amount of sleep. "A final rest before a long journey."  
"I have fought all I can."

## Pastoral Response

- Be aware that denial may be a needed defence for the moment until the reality can be accepted.
- Create an "okay" feeling about venting anger, especially toward God (Psalm 13:1-4).
- Help people restore right relationships with God and humans even though He may not extend life.
- Encourage the expression of sorrow. Avoid over-assurance. Sit with the person. Ask, and if alright, touch and pray. Work with the person to move to a point of acceptance so they will not remain bitter or resentful.
- Regular visits. Listening for confessions, last requests, funeral wishes, and estate planning. Work with the person to make bad relationships right.

1. Adapted from *Death: The Final Stage of Growth* (ed. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (Prentice-Hall, 1975).
2. Adapted from *Pastoral Care and Counselling in Grief and Separation*, Wayne E. Oates (Fortress, 1974).

The minister may need to suggest practical ways of helping to the congregation, such as the care of children, making meals in the home and more. The congregation needs to be involved to provide a larger network of support and ongoing care for the family. This should be one of the special blessings of those who are a part of God's family.

Ministers must not pretend to have medical knowledge they do not possess. Medical doctors, nurses and other medical specialists take years

to achieve their expertise, and as such should be the ultimate voice into the medical well-being of their patients.

## PEOPLE WHO ARE SINGLE IN THE CHURCH

**A**n increasing number of adults in our society are unmarried. Some people have chosen not to marry and may see their singleness as a “gift from God” (1 Cor. 7:7). Some want to be married but for various reasons are not. Others, through the trauma of death, divorce or separation, are no longer married. In our Christian circles, people who do not have marriage partners often feel out of place.

### General

The basic human needs of love, companionship, self-worth and meaningful ministry apply to all people. Everyone needs to be encouraged to see their potential for fulfilment within their present status in life. The Bible does not guarantee marriage, nor is marriage an indication of spiritual maturity or our worth before God.

Single people should be seen as partners in ministry and included in all areas of church ministries without reference to their marital status. We minister with single people, not to them.

All people, regardless of marital status, have a need for friendship with both genders. Whether as spouses or friends, men and women should work together to serve God and further his Kingdom. Pastors can include Bible stories of single and married people in their sermons and not present marriage as the only reflection of God’s covenant with his people.

Churches are meant to be caring, sharing, covenant communities of faith. If possible, social events should be person-oriented, not couple-oriented, in order to best provide friendships for all congregants. Churches have the opportunity to celebrate a variety of life milestones such as graduations, birthdays, and new jobs that are not related to marriage or having children.

We are all sexual beings and are called to honour God with our sexuality whether we are single or married. Many people who are single wrestle with how to honour God with their sexuality. This is especially so when much Christian teaching focuses only on sexual intimacy within marriage. Single people need more than just to be told not to have sex until marriage. The church can explore how single people can also find the companionship, accountability, and support couples have in their marriage. Those who were once married may struggle with the loss of the sexual intimacy they previously had as well. Church can serve as an opportunity to develop meaningful friendships and social supports.

## **Separated and Divorced People**

People who experience the trauma of seeing their dream of a beautiful relationship disintegrate need support and guidance. As far as possible, in the absence of abuse or violence, we should work at restoring relationships. Even when the best efforts are not enough, we need to continue to include individuals in the fellowship of the church.

In the case of families, particular attention should be given to supporting parents in meeting their children's needs. Churches can also help with the practical needs of single parents as they shoulder the responsibility of caring for their children along with many other life responsibilities. Parents may seek out same-gender role models for their children from within the church. All children, regardless of family situation, can benefit from having many caring adult role models in their lives. For a theological discussion of divorce and remarriage see the EMC position paper on this topic.

## **Widows and Widowers**

It is difficult for a person to pick up life after the death of a spouse. The adjustment of being one, not two, is hard. The previous network of friends and social supports should be maintained as much as possible. Where there are young children or adolescents, churches can help with the practical needs of the family.

The grief of children or adolescents in the home compounds that of the widowed parent, and can result in emotionally charged situations the parent has little strength for. Referrals for grief counselling as individuals or as a family may be helpful. Grief should not be rushed, and a range of emotions, including questions about God, are normal and should be welcomed. Anniversaries and holidays may be especially hard after the death of a spouse. Many people appreciate when others remember painful anniversaries, and acknowledge it with a thoughtful note, phone call, or gift.

## **PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

**P**eople with disabilities are entitled to full participation in the church community. The minister's responsibility to them is the same as to the non-disabled persons in the congregation: to share the gospel with them and work to ensure they are an integral part of the congregation and that their abilities are used to the glory of God.

Many parents become isolated from their church, relatives, friends and even God upon the birth of a child with disabilities. Ministers should seek to keep the family included in church life and assist good communication



with family members who do not have sympathy or understanding. Parents may struggle with guilt, anger, fear and doubt, and ministers need to be sensitive and supportive.

Ministers should be available to offer their guidance and counsel when families deal with the dilemma of committing an infant, a child or an adult to an institution. They can offer hope, coupled with realism, as parents struggle with the diagnosis and advice of doctors. Sometimes parents require assistance in admitting that their child has a disability. They may be apprehensive, not knowing what help is available for their child's schooling and personal development.

Ministers must examine some common theological misunderstandings related to God's will, such as suffering as punishment for sin, epilepsy and demon possession, divine healing, or that disabled children are "angels" only sent to "special families." They must work at correcting false attitudes within the church, seek the alleviation of the causes of disabilities and work toward a climate of understanding and acceptance (without pity or paternalism) in which all persons can glorify God.

Ministers may have to assist a person with disabilities with their self-image, with recognizing and using their talents, and with developing confidence in their ability to manage. They must bear in mind that people with disabilities are not special people but people in different circumstances who learn to live fully within their situations.

When considering a person with cognitive disabilities for baptism and church membership, our expectations of their understanding of the faith must be related to their individual ability. Many persons with cognitive disabilities have a firm faith in Jesus Christ, though their knowledge is quite limited.

People must be encouraged to view suffering not as an absence of God but rather as the result of a fallen world. The question is not so much why we suffer but how we respond to suffering (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

The congregation should work towards making church buildings fully accessible (washrooms, sanctuary, fellowship hall and more).

People must realize that similarities are grounds for unity, and differences are an opportunity for growth and understanding. People with disabilities were loved by Christ; he treated them with respect. We need to follow his example.

## PASTORAL CARE FOR SENIORS

### A Philosophy of Aging

“We are all moving in one direction—towards old age. We cannot change direction, nor the speed we are travelling. But we can do something to change the quality of our old age” (Abe Unger, *The Senior Citizen*). Good attitudes, meaningful activities and relationships are imperative.

Aging begins at birth and eventually the body begins to show signs of aging. Whenever possible, changes in workload and responsibilities should be gradual rather than abrupt. A person adapts better to a series of small changes than major upheavals.

Growing old is not a process to be resisted. As people, we bear in our bodies the effect of sin, a part of which is the deterioration of our physical bodies, culminating in death (Gen. 3:17–19). We look forward to eternal life, and death or the Lord’s coming will usher in that new life.

The Scriptures teach us to respect older people (Lev. 19:32). Old age was greatly desired and seen as a divine blessing (Gen. 15:15; Ps. 91:16; 92:14). Older people may at times feel deserted by their family, friends, and even God. They need to be reassured in a practical way that people care, and that God never deserts his children (Ps. 37:25). Seniors have often experienced God in unique and meaningful ways in their lives. Sharing this with the next generation will encourage the new generation to trust God fully for the present and the future (Ps. 71:18).

### Pastoral Care of Seniors

Seniors, by their wisdom and spiritual stability, can add an abundance to congregational life. Though their work or health status may have changed, seniors are people with aspirations, feelings and emotions. The church, with its message of the worth of the individual, should affirm the elderly as people of worth and dignity. The minister can foster this by occasionally bringing them into the limelight. Birthdays and anniversaries could be included in the church bulletin. The church should also seek to provide for the needs of older people who have disabilities (hearing aids, ramps, and more).

Seniors may need to be reminded to make a will. Others may need help in learning to live on a reduced income. Accident and health insurance need to be kept current. Seniors are also vulnerable to elder abuse, and many internet and phone scams target them. Caregivers need to maintain vigilance for signs that their loved ones are being taken advantage of. If married, the spouse should know the location of personal belongings and documents.

Ministers should visit seniors regularly, providing friendship and spiritual encouragement. Their involvement with seniors will provide many blessings.

## Seniors Doing Ministry

If at all possible, people should retire to something. Seniors want to have meaningful work, an activity which will in part replace their former employment. For this reason, it is important that the person acquire some hobbies or things that he finds fulfilling. For one person, it could mean being a chauffeur for other senior citizens who are not able to drive. He or she could take them shopping, visiting or to doctor's appointments. Another person has an interest in woodworking and enjoys making gifts for others. Hobbies such as fishing, swimming, photography, woodwork, landscape painting, sewing, writing, reading, and more, could stand a person in good stead in the retirement years.

There is no reason why seniors should stand on the sidelines in the church program. Their ministry may take on a different form from what it has been, but the minister needs to see them as having great potential for ministry. Some ministries which seniors might participate in are the following:

1. Offering taxi service to pick up children and adults who have no way of getting to church and Sunday School.
2. Volunteering to help with the preparation of church bulletins.
3. Being in charge of regular mailings to the church's missionaries. Bulletins or other church news would be welcomed by those away from home.
4. Serving on church committees where their expertise would be valuable.
5. Doing hospital visitation.
6. Teaching (Titus 2:3-4).
7. Volunteering for short-term service away from home such as Mennonite Disaster Service and EMC Prayer Teams.

## INACTIVE OR NON-RESIDENT MEMBERS

**D**ealing with inactive or non-resident members is a delicate issue. There are various reasons why people become inactive. Non-resident members who live in another community sometimes wish to retain membership in a church for sentimental reasons. The minister and congregation need to respond prayerfully, taking different circumstances into account.

## **Responding to Temporary Non-Residents**

This might include, for example, those who move away for work reasons for less than two years.

1. They should receive regular mailings of bulletins and other church materials.
2. They should be encouraged to become part of an EMC church, if there is one in the area. Otherwise they should be encouraged to participate in a local evangelical church.
3. They should be encouraged to write letters to their home church, excerpts of which might be shared with the congregation (in bulletin inserts, at membership meetings and as prayer requests).

## **Responding to Permanent Non-Residents:**

This might include those who moved away with a sense of permanence and are active in another evangelical church.

1. Attempt to maintain some communication through visits, letters, and more, expressing interest and sharing church news. An annual “Friends of \_\_\_\_\_ Church” newsletter to the congregation’s foreign workers, students away at school, and former members who still want to retain contact, can be an easy way to stay in touch.
2. The minister should encourage people to transfer their membership to a new church.
3. If there is no response to the suggestion of transferring membership, another letter should be sent emphasizing and explaining the concept of membership and encouraging them to transfer.
4. If there is no response, then, upon consultation with church leaders and the membership, another letter should be sent advising the member that if there is no response, the church will assume they no longer desire to be affiliated and will at that time terminate their membership. There should be a reassurance that when they return to the home church area, the door to fellowship is open.

## **Responding to Inactive Members**

This could include resident or non-resident members.

1. For some reason these people have lost the desire for fellowship and service and have withdrawn. In some cases, it is a gradual, general decline of spiritual interest and corresponding lack of growth. For others, there are feelings of neglect, disappointment and strained relationships. To correct the malady, there needs to be an understanding of the problem and then appropriate responses.

2. If there is need for discipline for unrepentant sin, then the process of Matthew 18:15–20 should be followed. (See the Conference Constitution for further direction.)
3. If there is simply a withdrawal from fellowship:
  - a) A serious attempt should be made to restore these people to the fellowship of the congregation.
  - b) If, after several attempts and a period of time (such as two years), there is no response, then, upon consulting with the church leaders and the members, a letter should be sent advising these members that if there is no response in thirty days, the church will assume they no longer desire to be affiliated with it and will at that time remove their name from the membership list. Again, there should also be the reassurance that if and when they return to the fellowship of the church, they would be welcome.

The church must function in a spirit of love, concern and exhortation when it responds to inactive or non-resident members. Visits and telephone calls are preferable to letters. All contacts and correspondence should be such that when these people move back into the community or are restored in the faith, there will be no barriers to assuming full fellowship and service in the church.

Responding to inactive or absent members will be easier if the church informs its present members of its policy, so that when they leave, they know what to expect the church's practice will be.

## THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

**T**he EMC believes that all humans live as the image of God from conception until natural death. This can be a counter-cultural belief in our time. This topic has wide-ranging impacts in society and is, therefore, an important one for ministers to live out and teach.

The belief in the sanctity of life must come through in our pastoral actions, conversation, and teaching. If we act or speak in a way that demeans people, any amount of speaking out on issues related to the sanctity of life will be severely compromised. Our congregations and communities are filled with health care workers, politicians and other people who are seeking to understand how to think of these issues. A positive and consistent witness to the sanctity of life as a minister will go a long way toward helping people think through these matters themselves.

A minister can save lives when they help people who are considering abortion choose life for their baby, or by helping an individual choose to

keep on living instead of choosing physician-assisted dying. It can transform families, workplaces and neighbourhoods when a minister helps people realize that aggression is not a good way of solving problems and that everyone is worthy of basic decency and respect.

## **Abortion**

There are many ways in which Christians can respond to the question of abortion. We must not lose sight of the fact that an unborn baby is a human person who is loved by God. We must also remember that the mother and father who are contemplating abortion are also loved by God. Many people consider abortion because they honestly see no other option for themselves. Responding to them in ways that shame or disregard their dignity as human beings should never be an option—it is, in fact, contradictory to belief in the sanctity of life.

As ministers teach and preach on this topic, they should teach with grace and sensitivity to the difficulty of this decision. They should always assume they are speaking to silent people in the congregation who have had an abortion and who feel tremendous shame. Furthermore, inaccurate statistics abound in this area. It is important that ministers double-check any statistics they do use. Using inaccurate information will undermine the credibility of their message and what they seek to accomplish.

A minister can respond to people's felt need to abort their baby by supporting and volunteering at local crisis pregnancy centres, or by encouraging others to start one if there isn't one in the community. A minister can respond by supporting single mothers and treating their pregnancies as a gift from God. Their unborn child is a gift to them and to the community. In some circumstances, a minister may help connect them with places that can facilitate adoptions if they feel they cannot raise the child themselves.

For those who have had abortions, or whose partners have had abortions, it is important to remind them of God's grace and willingness to forgive. Some men wanted their child but had no part in the decision to abort, and so are especially grieved not only at the loss of life but at the sense of betrayal and helplessness. Other times women were pressured by their partners to abort their wanted baby and so feel guilty for capitulating to the desires of their partner or family. In addition, a minister should be prepared to refer individuals to mental health professionals who can help in ways that pastoral ministry simply cannot.

## **Medical Assistance in Dying**

People can descend to such despair in suffering that they don't see hope, dignity or purpose in life. This goes against the innate value we know

life to have (Gen 1:26–27; John 10:10). This despair is fertile soil for the gospel message because Christ reminds us that there is hope and meaning for us even in the midst of our suffering.

Practicing a theology of presence is important in ministering to people considering medical assistance in dying. A lack of presence can be interpreted as having a lack of value. Some people wish to die not because their pain is severe but because they are afraid of being alone. Some people change their minds about death when they find a supportive community.

A good way for a minister to be with people in this level of suffering is to invite the person to tell some of their life story and share some of their life's experiences. This may give the minister the opportunity to see why the person suffering has come to see death as the best alternative.

There are people who found the hope of Jesus while considering medical assistance in dying and who went on to live for the Lord until they died a natural death, finding great meaning in their additional time on this earth and enriching the lives of many.

When talking to someone contemplating medical assistance in dying, it is important to remember that no matter what their choice may end up being, these are people in pain who need pastoral care because of it. While a minister may be opposed to the choice the person is considering, they should focus on the reason the person is considering death.

## **Abuse**

If we truly believe in the sanctity of human life we will be opposed to any violence against our fellow human beings. As such, church leaders must stand against abuse in the strongest possible terms. There is grace and reconciliation in Christ for those who abuse. But seeking justice for the oppressed and acting justly ourselves will mean that we handle abuse properly, with due diligence and unwavering dedication.

Ministers need to follow provincial laws in how and when to report abuse. While there are some abuses that need not be reported to authorities (for example, the testimony of a senior citizen who shares about an abusive childhood as a part of her journey to faith), many instances do need to be reported. If the minister neglects their duty, a judge may interpret the decision not to report abuse as evidence that the abuse never actually happened. This can serve to pervert justice for the abused.

When a minister reports abuse, they should be careful with whom they share this information. If news of the abuse becomes public knowledge, gossip can run rampant and this can prevent justice from happening. They should be prepared to hold proper confidence, even in the face of criticism. Obeying privacy laws and holding confidence are important

for ministers. They should be prepared, however, to speak at appropriate times and in appropriate ways in order to lead the congregation through these critical times.

It is important to document in writing whenever someone shares about abuse and any significant interactions the minister has with the relevant parties. This kind of documentation can help in the event that it goes to court, and it can also help reduce the minister's own personal liability in terms of proving what they did or did not do in a given situation. People who systematically abuse others can be manipulative, so accurate and thorough documentation can help in addressing such individuals, both in church and in the court system.

The grace of God is available to all repentant sinners, including abusers. By hearing the good news of the gospel, strict accountability, counselling, and long-term transformation, people who abuse can change. A "red flag" should occur when an abuser speaks the words of repentance but balks at the limitations placed on them because of the abuse. True repentance will result in abusers being willing to live within the appropriate limits set by the church to protect the vulnerable and to protect abusers from their own temptations to abuse others.

Believing in the sanctity of human life should include a concern for people from conception until natural death. A consistent life ethic connects these issues to questions of war, the death penalty, the treatment of those on the margins, our approach to refugees and immigration, and so much more. As we advocate for these issues we should be careful that our approach toward those with whom we disagree does not become violent or seek to rob them of their dignity.

## RESPONDING TO THOSE IN POVERTY

**M**inisters have an important role in helping churches address, reduce, and dismantle poverty in their communities and beyond. They can help through what they teach, through the way they define poverty, through their leadership, and through their personal example. They can encourage and engage in work that is both formal and informal, international and local, that doesn't unintentionally harm those whom they are serving.

### Teaching and Preaching

Jesus taught a great deal about poverty, from his parables to his sermons. He lived what he taught. Ministers of Jesus should also teach about



God's heart for helping people in poverty. This should come up regularly as they preach and teach. Jesus repeatedly taught about this and so should we.

## **Defining Poverty**

Many of us think of poverty as simply a lack of worldly goods. While this can be true, it fails to address many other kinds of poverty in our world. Bryant Myers<sup>[1]</sup> defines poverty holistically as a series of four broken relationships between oneself and God, others, the environment and oneself. By defining poverty in this way, one can also address spiritual poverty, unhealthy self-conceptions such as worthlessness, a feeling of being trapped, damaged interpersonal relationships, toxic environments, and more.

## **The Minister's Leadership**

A minister is a leader who can mobilize their whole congregation to serve the Lord using the gifts that God has given to them. As such, they are not alone, and endeavours to address poverty should involve and lead the people of the congregation. One of the minister's biggest contributions in this aspect of ministry should be in mobilizing their church for serving the Lord in our world.

## **The Minister's Example**

The example of the minister is important on this topic specifically. Since congregations often look to their leaders for an example to find out what should be normative in the Christian life, the way the minister personally responds to people in poverty is important. More significantly, in Jesus' ministry we find him spending time helping those in poverty in ways that met their needs holistically and in a way that brought them dignity. As a minister leads by example, they bring credibility to the message they are proclaiming.

## **Formal and Informal**

There is much that can be done, from simply getting to know our neighbours and being friends with people on the margins, to formal programs that are run through the church or a para-church organization. Ministers should encourage their congregation to work together with other organizations within the community as well as being involved informally as friends and concerned community members.

## International and Local

There are needs overseas where modest support from a church can make a tremendous difference. There are also needs in the minister's own community, where they live, work and play. It is important not to neglect either but rather pursue both aspects of ministry.

## Do No Harm

The book *Toxic Charity* by Robert D. Lupton offers a set of helpful guidelines for ministry to those in poverty. These can help prevent Christians from unintentionally harming those they seek to serve. They include the following:

1. Never do for the poor what they have (or could have) the capacity to do for themselves.
2. Limit one-way giving to emergency situations.
3. Strive to empower the poor through employment, lending, and investing, using grants sparingly to reinforce achievements.
4. Subordinate self-interests to the needs of those being served.
5. Listen closely to those you seek to help, especially to what is not being said—unspoken feelings may contain essential clues to effective service.
6. Above all, do no harm.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Honour Dignity

As a minister helps others, they should seek to dismantle “god-complexes” or “saviour mentalities” that can be prevalent in such ministries. These mentalities undermine the dignity of the people the minister is reaching out to and serve to reinforce the marred identity complexes of the poor. This further hinders them from being able to view themselves as empowered and able. The minister should guard their dignity as passionately as they guard their own. They should learn how this is done in the specific culture, language, and context they are working in.

1. Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 27.
2. Robert D. Lupton. *Toxic Charity* (pp. 8–10). HarperOne. Kindle Edition.

## PASTORING PEOPLE WHO ARE SAME-SEX ATTRACTED

**W**e are created by God to be sexual creatures, and from this follows all the hopes, regrets, frustrations and happiness we experience in this area. God has a vision for our sexuality and it is both a beautiful, mysterious aspect of our lives, and something we are always striving toward and discovering. God's vision is always before us, calling us deeper into both pain and joy, seeking the love God promises will be ours in the new creation.

To be a sexual being in the image of God is to have one's very physical body ordered and directed toward the wonder of union as God has created it. We are created, at the biological, emotional, and spiritual levels, for loving union between man and woman. The EMC proclaims the good news of the historic Christian understanding of marriage as given by God to be a union between man and woman, ordered toward the birth of children. Same-sex intercourse is a failure to live according to God's creation intent.

All people experience brokenness in some way. For some, this brokenness will be expressed through a same-sex orientation. When we consider people who are same-sex attracted we must remember that this is not just an "issue" for discussion, nor are these people "out there." These are people made in the image of God, who are a part of our congregations, and who long to be treated with the same dignity Jesus gives all people. The minister, therefore, should not treat those who identify as "gay," "lesbian" or any other identifier as less human or more broken; all people should be ministered to with the graciousness and theological faithfulness that we all need to bring our sexuality under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

One way a minister can show graciousness is by using the appropriate terminology. Whether or not same-sex attraction can be attributed more to nature than nurture—some combination of the two is probably the case—the term "homosexual" (as a noun or adjective) is considered an offensive and outdated clinical term. Right language will have to be discerned on a case-by-case basis, but typically the terms "gay" and "lesbian" are preferred and are only used to refer to one's attraction to people of the same sex. In other words, identifying as "gay" says little about one's sexual behaviour. Honouring an individual's preferred terms without compromising theological faithfulness goes a long way in showing the grace, love, and respect that all of us desire.

It is helpful to distinguish between "same-sex attracted" and "same-sex practicing." While same-sex erotic behaviour is called out in the Bible (Rom. 1:26–27), there are distinctions to be made between a same-sex orientation, sinful actions, and sinful desires (James 1:14–15). An orientation

describes what kind of emotions, desires and temptations one is likely to experience. This in itself is not sin. However, to desire something that is wrong is what the Bible calls a sinful passion or evil desire (Rom. 1:27; 1 Cor. 7:9; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:5). Sanctification is the life-long process by which the Spirit trains our hearts to desire the goal or end for which we were created.

How one ministers to the same-sex attracted differs little from how one might minister to anyone wrestling with sexual brokenness. The minister should be willing to walk patiently with someone who is same-sex attracted, just as we would with any member of our congregation. The minister can point the individual away from finding their primary identity in their sexual orientation, finding their identity instead in God. The minister should recognize that some people, even as faithful followers of Christ, have already made numerous failed attempts to live a Christian life as that relates to their sexuality. Temptation to sin will be our experience as we await the coming of Christ. Godly counselling can be helpful. However, therapy that claims to reverse a person's orientation has been discredited and can be harmful. Counselling can help a person live in a healthy way according to the Bible's teaching on sexuality, while anticipating sexual wholeness in the new creation.

A key pastoral goal should be to help a person with same-sex attraction find the friendship, intimacy and support they need to live a life of celibacy. Celibacy includes but is much more than not having sexual intercourse. It is a life in which all one's desires are recognized, accepted, re-directed and offered to God, apart from marriage.

Same-sex attracted Christians who surrender their desires to Christ, living in a beautiful celibacy, deepen their walk with the Lord in ways all of us need to follow. All of us become robust and resilient in our faith as we struggle with our desires, seeking to redirect them to life with God. As a result, opportunities for ministry should not be withheld from the same-sex attracted on the basis of their sexual orientation; rather, the same process and requirements by which anyone is vetted for such positions of spiritual leadership should be employed.

How one ministers to a same-sex couple differs from those who merely identify as same-sex attracted. We cannot bless or affirm such relationships. However, Christians like ourselves who believe that marriage between man and woman is the one appropriate context for sexual intimacy can teach this conviction in a hurtful way. People have been wounded by the church as a result.

It will, therefore, require wisdom on the minister's part to convey the radical grace of Jesus through a biblical understanding of sexuality. It will

not do to say we invite same-sex couples to be in our church, as all people are invited, if we do not know how to show them love and genuine relationship. As with anyone that we are helping, merely quoting handy Bible verses is not sufficient or helpful. The minister has the responsibility of graciously and patiently pointing such couples to the vision of sexuality expressed in Scripture and the possibility of living a fulfilled life under the Lordship of Christ.

Remaining theologically faithful in a gracious way will also involve addressing some challenging cultural assumptions. Assumptions such as, “sex is the only means of intimacy”, or “if you’re born that way it can’t be wrong” or “the church can’t tell people what to do with their bodies” or “celibacy is an unfulfilled and repressed life” have become common in our culture. Much teaching is needed.

Churches will be affected by someone they know “coming out” or by the presence of a same-sex couple in the congregation. In many instances, the minister’s own example of embodying both grace and truth will be followed by the congregation. Ministers can lead in such a way that the congregation develops a relaxed atmosphere in which people with all kinds of struggles, addictions, sins, and differences find a welcome place where all meet together at the foot of the cross. Parents with a child who is same-sex attracted are in an especially difficult place. They need the care and support of the church.

To be able to warmly welcome and show genuine interest without affirming sinful actions is a lofty pastoral goal, a skill our congregations can be invited to without scolding or guilt.

## **Recommended Resources**

Preston Sprinkle, *People to be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just An Issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016); see also Sprinkle’s small group study, *Grace//Truth 1.0 and 2.0: Five (More) Conversations Every Thoughtful Christian Should Have About Faith, Sexuality & Gender*. Ed Shaw, *Same-Sex Attraction and the Church: The Surprising Plausibility of the Celibate Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015). Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016); idem, *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015).

## 7. The Pastor: Administration and Leadership

Ministers are shepherds, preachers, caregivers and worship leaders. But they are also *leaders*. They stand in the congregation helping the church glimpse its Holy Spirit-given vision and follow that direction. This requires knowing the biblical shape of the Church. It also requires understanding how change works in organizations and understanding the congregation's method of organizing itself and making decisions.

Ministers are also *administrators*. The administrative work of keeping records, printing bulletins, passing motions, and creating budgets can be spiritual work and worthy of pastoral time. This may not be our core identity, but it is an indispensable part of our work in the church. Administration done with holy excellence creates a healthy place within which transforming ministry happens.

It has been said that administration is doing things right, while leadership is doing right things. Both skills are important and valuable in the work of the minister. Administration involves planning, coordinating, directing, defining objectives, and supporting the work of others. Leadership is more nuanced and visionary. It is envisioning mission, developing strategy, inspiring people, and changing culture.

### Common EMC Church Polity

EMC churches believe that setting the vision of the church is a congregational responsibility. This is sometimes called “congregationalism”. Congregationalism is our expression of the priesthood of all believers, though how it is worked out can vary from church to church. Each member of the Body of Christ has the responsibility and privilege of helping the church discern God's will, in keeping with the gifts and abilities of each believer. Members of the congregation, in discussion, consensus and voting, seek to know and do God's will (Acts 1:24). The Holy Spirit guides individually and corporately as believers meet to prayerfully make decisions about the work of the church.

Recognizing and working with this understanding is critical for ministers. A large part of the leadership aspect of pastoring involves drawing out this congregational wisdom, and then leading from within that vision. Rather than importing their own vision, ministers are accountable to the vision the congregation discerns together.

It is sometimes said that EMC ministers do not have as much authority as leaders in some other churches, but this is not the case. Authority is built as the minister faithfully draws out, interprets and courageously stewards the congregational vision of the church over time.

This congregational vision grows out of all the work the church does together, but it is crystalized by regular congregational meetings. It is here that the staff, leadership board and congregation come together to talk about important questions in the church's life. These meetings set the overall direction of the church, from which the staff and the board derive their own work.

In addition to the staff most churches have a leadership team, variously called the church board, council, elder board or leadership board. For the purpose of this document this will be referred to as the leadership board. Churches vary on who is on this leadership board; for some this includes all ministerial members, and for others this is a lay group distinct from the ministerial. The lead pastor will normally be on this leadership board.

Typically, the congregation delegates much decision-making to this leadership board. It is important that ministers understand the administrative or governance structures and how they fit into the polity. How will the minister interact with congregational meetings, the leadership board, and the committees of the church? These relationships will determine how the minister is expected to provide leadership and be accountable to the congregation. Who makes what kinds of decisions in the congregation?

## **Planning Congregational Life**

In responding to the direction of the Spirit, there are three basic questions that every congregation needs to answer. First, what are the bedrock convictions and defining practices that will never change in this congregation? The answer to this question cannot be assumed. It requires group Bible study, prayer and discussion. Part of this is "given" in the EMC Statement of Faith, but it still needs to be appropriated and made specific to the context of this congregation. For example, a church may decide, *We will be a church that offers intergenerational worship to God.*

Second, what significant accomplishments do we want to see happen in our church in the next five to ten years that will give witness to these bedrock convictions? Who will we become? What major challenge do we need to address? This goal will strengthen a certain aspect of what Christ has called the church to be. For example, *in five years we will become a church where a network of seniors finds nurture in community and opportunity for service.*

Third, what are the practical steps we will take to move us to our goal? These are plans for specific actions that will move the congregation step by step towards its goal. For example, *First, we will appoint a senior's pastor to develop ministry opportunities for seniors. Second, we will develop ways for our children to be matched to a church "grandparent." Third, we will re-incorporate children into our worship rather than doing children's church.*

Both the pastor and the leadership board need to ensure that the pastor's philosophy and manner of ministry remain consistent with the church's intended direction. If done appropriately the pastor can also play a role in confronting the congregation with challenges that need to be addressed. For example, the pastor might be hearing regularly that newcomers find the congregation inhospitable. A culture change needs to happen that affects everything from attitudes, to signage, building design, ushers, small-groups and bulletins. This culture change may take several years. The pastor can gently keep bringing this back to the attention of those who need to make the decisions. The pastor can also gauge whether changes are occurring too slowly, or too quickly.

## **Guiding Governance Documents**

Every church will articulate its administrative structures in an organizational paper, handbook or constitution. This provides clarity for how ministries are coordinated and how they help to achieve the objectives of the church. The pastor needs to be familiar with these guiding documents. The pastor can help ensure that these documents are kept current and that the boards and committees function according to its plan. When structures and processes do not align with the constitution, they need to be clarified. Leadership board members and committee members will come and go over time; the pastor can provide continuity through a working knowledge of the guiding documents.

## **Meeting Minutes and Proper Record Keeping**

Consistent minutes of meetings, discussions and decisions are important for clarity, reference and historical memory. Whether at a congregational meeting or at a board meeting, decisions need to be recorded. The most common form of record is a set of meeting minutes that summarize discussions and record formal decisions. Ministers are not normally the secretaries or keepers of the church records, but they can contribute to a culture in which decisions, both informal and formal, are carefully documented. Even when a significant informal decision is made, the pastor can "over-communicate" by writing a summary email and sending it to those involved so a paper trail is created.



## **Accountability for Decision Making and Ministry Direction**

Pastors need to be clear about their own ministry expectations, job description and accountability. How will the job description be established or negotiated? With whom does the pastor negotiate the details of the employment contract? How will the pastor be evaluated, affirmed, or critiqued?

Pastors need a clear job description that accurately describes and limits the pastor's work. In addition, an employment contract will spell out the details of salary and benefits. The leadership board should conduct an annual internal review of the pastors. In these annual reviews the pastor will set goals for the coming year and decide on how to address areas where the leadership board feels ministry needs to be strengthened. The leadership board should also lead a wider congregational review of the staff regularly (every three years is a good guideline). These reviews should be done on both paid and unpaid ministers. For direction on reviews see the EMC Pastor and Congregational Review guideline.

## **The Pastor and the Leadership Board**

The pastor's relationship to the leadership board is a key relationship for the pastor as a leader and administrator. The pastor is normally accountable to the leadership board, and through the board to the congregation. It is the board's responsibility to ensure that the church has adequate guiding documents, that the congregation makes decisions in a timely manner, and that the pastor (and all staff) have a structure of support and accountability. The leadership board normally has oversight over the programs and ministries of the church, and ensures that the required finances, building needs, and staff are available for these ministries. The board directs and empowers the pastors, staff and committees to carry out this ministry within certain limits and boundaries.

The pastor's ministry is one of the key ways in which the leadership board accomplishes the mission the congregation has set forth. By providing clear policies and direction, regular accountability and emotional support, the board provides the framework for the pastor to lead the work of the church.

The pastor will normally be a member of the leadership board but will not have voting privileges. The board should have regular *in-camera* sessions at board meetings when the pastor leaves the room allowing the board to have a conversation off the record. This practice maintains the independence of the board to hold the pastor accountable. The *in-camera* session is a time to discuss concerns the board may have about the pastor

and decide on how the pastor now needs to be affirmed and encouraged. These should be conveyed to the pastor immediately when the pastor returns to the meeting.

It will be normal for the pastor to work with the chair of the leadership board to set out a board agenda. This is a key relationship and these two should meet regularly. The pastor also has a theological and spiritual role on the leadership board. The pastor will work to ensure that board and congregational meetings remain fixed on the Holy Spirit's guidance of the congregation. Where does this budget, policy, structure, or committee fit into the story of this congregation's obedience to Christ?

## **Conclusion**

Churches, like all organizations, must resist chaos in order to do what God has called them to do. Authentic, skilled, transparent, humble, courageous administration and leadership creates a climate in which church members are empowered to make difficult choices in their lives, commit to sacrificial giving of their time and money to the mission of the church, and lift their thoughts to God and his work in the world. A chaotic organization is not focused on its mission and does not create the space for people to follow God's direction in living out their gifts. Skilled administration by sanctified leaders is a testimony to God's loving care for his creatures. For additional information on church administration see the EMC Constitution section "Church Administration."

# Appendix: A Guide to Leading a Church Business Meeting

This appendix provides a basic framework for leading meetings according to generally accepted practices. Pastors may at times provide coaching to other leaders in the church and can use this material. This guide will use as its example a chairperson leading a congregational discussion.

## General Guidelines on Good Congregational Meetings

The first key to a good meeting is a clear agenda. Publishing an agenda requires leaders to understand what is to be accomplished with each item. An agenda item can be phrased as a question showing what needs to be accomplished. For example, “1. Evaluation of Jim’s pastoral ministry: should we conduct a pastoral evaluation this summer?” or “2. Sunday School Committee Report: what have our children been studying this fall?” or “3. Sanctuary renovation: Should we begin thinking about this?”

A “quorum”, or minimum number of participants, is necessary to conduct a meeting. As a general rule, a quorum is not a specific number; it is the number of people who have generally attended the meeting in the past. If a specific meeting is much less than this (for example, because of bad weather) a meeting does not have quorum and cannot make decisions on behalf of the whole body. For some votes, a specific quorum is needed. These include votes for hiring a minister or taking out a mortgage. These specific quorums should be described in the policies of the church.

## Good Discussions

Congregational meetings involve open, fair and honest discussions. The first task in the discussion of any agenda item is for the chairperson to clearly explain what work needs to be done on this item. Are we needing a decision, is this for discussion only, or is the leadership board merely seeking input on its own decision? If congregants misunderstand what work is being asked of them today, the discussion will be scattered and unproductive. This requires that the chairperson come to the meeting with a good grasp of all the agenda items.

Secondly, either the chairperson or someone delegated will give the necessary background to the agenda item. What process has already happened on this question? What important facts does the congregation need

to understand about the issue at hand? When does this question need to be finalized? How will this affect the church budget?

Third, in many cases, the committee or board initiating the agenda item should have done enough work before the meeting to present a proposed solution before discussion begins. This tentative proposal will be based on the board's solid research and discussion ahead of time. Of course, the board is open to feedback on its proposal and changing its position based upon the meeting's discussion. But presenting a proposed solution usually initiates a better discussion than presenting an open-ended question to test the viability of an idea. The practice of presenting wise proposals in a humble posture builds trust in the leadership of the church over time.

The floor is then opened for discussion. The chairperson moderates the discussion, though the committee leader presenting the question should be near at hand to answer questions. The chairperson ensures that adequate time is given to discussion and determines when the congregation is ready to make a decision on the matter. The chairperson decides whether proper decorum is being maintained and may rule a speaker, a motion, or a procedure as being out of order.

A certain decorum is a necessary for a discussion to genuinely bring out the best wisdom of the congregation. However, the level of formality will vary depending on the discussion and the type of meeting. As a general rule, the chairperson should not influence the discussion by offering personal opinions. If the chairperson feels it is helpful to give a personal opinion on an item of business, an assistant chairperson can take the place of the chairperson who can then speak as a fellow member. The chairperson's first responsibility is to ensure that a good process is followed in the discussion.

Everyone speaking in the discussion should address the whole assembly. Members should stand when addressing the assembly and should first address the chairperson. Only after the chairperson has recognized the speaker should they begin to address the assembly. When someone wishes to question an individual member, they should address the question to the chairperson. Personal remarks are out of order. Two members may not engage in a dialogue on the floor; statements must be made to the chairperson.

If a member has spoken to a question once, they may not speak a second time so long as any member who has not previously spoken desires the floor. After others have spoken, he or she is permitted to speak again, but should not ask for the floor more than three times on one issue.

## **Good Decisions**

Once discussion has occurred, the chairperson should determine if the group is coalescing in a similar direction. If so, the chair can call for a formal decision. If not, the chair can announce that the item will be tabled until another meeting to make a decision.

Formal decisions can be made either by consensus or voting. To make a decision by consensus, almost everyone present will consent to the direction, even if this may not be their first choice. A consensus need not be absolutely unanimous but should have only one or two detractors. After some discussion, and when it appears that a consensus has been reached, the chairperson should clearly state the consensus as he or she perceives it, and ask the group if there are any who disagree with the summary or who are not willing to work with this decision. People who disagree should each be given the opportunity to explain what about the proposed decision is still uncomfortable to them. Further discussion then ensues, seeking ways to address the discomfort. Once all are willing to work with the direction summarized by the chairperson, it can be recorded as a consensus decision. If someone calls for a vote, the chairperson should accommodate the request.

## **Motions, Seconding, and Voting**

Congregations normally follow “Robert’s Rules of Order” in making decisions by vote. The reason a congregation follows these guidelines is to help ensure that decisions are made fairly. These procedures help prevent any one person from exercising undue power or persuasion. They allow decisions to be made carefully and deliberately.

However, these rules are not Holy Scripture. The law of love is always paramount. Leaders should be familiar with these rules and know how to lead a meeting without intimidating people who do not have the lingo, or who do not have experience with business meetings.

As a general rule, a vote should not be taken until the chairperson has good reason to believe it will pass. If the discussion suggests that there is not enough unity for the vote to pass, it is better to table the motion (see below) for more discussion at a later meeting, or have the motion withdrawn (see below). Especially on significant questions, a vote is a good way to ratify a decision that has largely been reached by discussion, but a divisive way to make a decision that could go either way.

Avoid taking “straw votes” on weighty matters, that is, votes to merely determine where the mind of the congregation is at the moment, without counting as a decision. Often these votes demand more clarity from

members than they are prepared to express and can easily be confusing to those involved.

## Motions

1. A motion can occur at any time in the discussion. A motion is a proposal by a member stating one way a question can be solved.
  - a. The form of a simple main motion is: “I move that we support Jane Doe as our church missionary.”
  - b. The form of a complex main motion is: “I move the adoption of the following resolution: That we support Jane Doe with \$300 a month for the next year, and that the mission committee review this decision after one year and return to the congregation at that time for a permanent decision.”
  - c. Complex main motions should be in writing and, if necessary, printed copies should be available to the members. The chairperson has the right to require that any main motion be put into writing by the mover and deposited, if passed, with the secretary.
  - d. The chairperson should not normally make a motion. It could be made either by a representative of the presenting committee (in the case of Jane Doe, the mission committee), or a congregant.
  - e. A motion must be seconded before it can be discussed. If no one is willing to second a motion, it is not discussed, and the chairperson simply states that the motion fails for lack of seconding. This is to ensure the congregation’s time is not taken up with ideas that do not have sufficient merit.
  - f. Once a motion has been seconded, the chairperson announces that the motion is now before the membership for discussion. The mover may speak to the motion first. This privilege is for the sake of clarification of the motion.
  - g. The chairperson must not allow two separate motions to come before the membership at the same time.
  - h. When a motion has been seconded it must be voted on at the meeting unless the group agrees to dispose of it in another way. There are several motions that can be voted on without discussion. For example, a motion to adjourn, a motion to table or withdraw a motion, and a motion for an immediate vote.

2. Amendments. A motion to amend the motion can be moved and seconded, and then that amending motion must be finalized before the original motion can be addressed.
3. Referrals. An issue may be referred to a committee for more work before the membership votes on the question. This requires a motion to refer.
4. Withdrawals
  - a. A main motion may be withdrawn by the mover at any time before a final action is taken. The consent of the seconder is not required. A seconded motion is the property of the membership. The chairperson says: “\_\_\_\_\_ asks to withdraw his/her motion. Is there any objection? I hear none; therefore permission is granted.”
  - b. Should someone desire to retain the motion on the floor, they may object in which case withdrawing the motion requires a simple majority vote.
5. Closing Discussions
  - a. Discussion may be closed by general consent. The chairperson will say, “Are you ready for the question?” If no objections are raised, the group proceeds to the vote. Should there be an objection, the discussion must be closed by motion.
6. Tabling a Motion
  - a. When the group wishes to delay action on certain item, a motion is made to table the motion.
  - b. The motion to table may not be discussed nor amended, it needs to be seconded, and is passed by a simple majority.
7. Reconsidering and Rescinding a Motion
  - a. A group may realize later in the meeting that a motion was passed that was not in the best interest of the group. It may be returned for reconsideration by a motion, seconded and voted by a simple majority. This must happen at the same meeting the original decision was made. No question may be twice reconsidered.
  - b. A motion to rescind a motion moves to cancel a decision. It may be made at any time, regardless of time lapse, and requires a two-thirds vote to pass.
8. Voting
  - a. Before voting, the chairperson clearly states the motion and asks, “Are you ready for the question?” If there is no opposition, the vote is taken by show of hands or ballot.

- b. Normally, votes require 50 percent plus one vote to pass. There will be exceptions to this (for example in a vote to change the constitution) but these exceptions need to be decided on by the membership or stated in the constitution or bylaws.
- c. Any participant may move to vote by ballot. Such a motion is not debatable and must be brought to a vote at once. Any member may request an accurate count of hands. One request is sufficient to order a count.
- d. Members should not decline to vote without good reason.
- e. It is not customary for chairpersons to vote, but they may do so if the vote is taken by ballot. In no case should a chairperson vote by uplifted hand. Chairpersons may vote to break a tie if they have not previously voted.

## **Nominations and Elections**

The process to elect people to committees and other elected positions in the church is done by nomination.

1. When nominations are invited from participants at the meeting, the chairperson will say: Nominations are now open for the position of \_\_\_\_\_. Nominations do not need to be seconded.
2. When nominations are secured through the report of a nominating committee, additional nominations may always be made from the floor.
3. A motion to close nominations is not in order until the group is ready. When a member makes a premature motion to close nominations, the chairperson should ignore the motion and simply say: "Are there further nominations?" When the group is ready, the chairperson may ask if there are further nominations and, if none are given, declare nominations closed. The chairperson may also entertain a motion to close nominations.
4. Election by acclamation can happen when there is only one nomination for a position. When only one person has been nominated, and the group has decided that nominations cease, the chairperson can announce that this election has occurred by acclamation. However, acclamation should only occur if the constitution permits such a procedure, or if a two-thirds majority passes a motion to proceed in that way.



## Other Notes

1. The Secretary
  - a. The secretary records the decisions of the group and the procedures by which they were reached.
  - b. In the minutes, the secretary gives, in exact order, all the various items of business transacted, together with all motions relative to the item of business. Motions which fail to carry need not be recorded unless it is the wish of the membership.
  - c. The minutes must accurately reflect the business proceedings as they were carried out by the membership. Changes in the minutes are not made unless by vote of the membership.