

APPENDIX 11
THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND
CODE OF PASTORAL PRACTICE

Published at the direction of the Conference of 1988 for the information of
Ministers, Circuit Stewards and Society Stewards.
(Revised 2003)

Introduction

The Code of Pastoral Practice was originally published at the direction of Conference 1988 for the information of Ministers, Circuit Stewards and Society Stewards. It was felt that after some fifteen years the time had come to revise the Code and reissue it.

While the regulations dealing with the duties of a Minister are set out in the Manual of Laws, there is also an etiquette affecting personal relationships, practices, courtesies and sensitivities between Ministers and Circuits, which need to be recognised if Ministers are to work effectively as colleagues.

Mutual Support

Paragraph 4.01 reminds us that:

- (a) ministers are colleagues in the work of the Gospel.
- (b) ministers are to defend each other's character and reputation.
- (c) ministers are to be loyal to each other in the discharge of their ministerial duties.
- (d) ministers should not undermine the unity of purpose within the ministry whatever their individual interests.

The Itinerancy

The Conference recognises that the itinerancy is an essential principle of the life and well being of the Methodist Church. While recognising there is an element of flexibility within the stationing process, this can nevertheless be a cause of tension and apprehension for Ministers and their families. The Conference believes, however, that there is sensitivity and pastoral care exercised within the process.

Stationing

- (a) When a Minister is being moved, the question of a successor should be a matter for discussion between the Circuit and the District Stationer.
- (b) Equally, her/his own future appointment should be a matter for discussion between him/her and the District Stationer.

- (c) All discussions and consultations should be confidential.
- (d) Only when the draft of stations is published should the outgoing Minister liaise with her/his proposed successor concerning the change over.
- (e) At that stage the stewards may be encouraged to make contact with the proposed incoming Minister, recognising that the draft might be subsequently changed.

Leaving an Appointment

Any Minister leaving a Circuit for a new appointment:

- (a) should recognise that the newly appointed minister has sole responsibility for that Circuit.
- (b) should avoid any interference or involvement in her/his former appointment.
- (c) should not return to her/his previous Circuit to conduct weddings, funerals or baptisms, for pastoral visitation or any other function deemed to be part of the duties of the newly appointed Minister.
- (d) should not return for weddings, baptisms, confirmations, etc. even when these have been arranged in advance of her/his leaving the Circuit and are due to take place after he/she has left the Circuit. These should be performed by the newly appointed Minister.
- (e) should not accept an invitation to return to her/his previous circuit unless it is issued directly by the newly appointed Minister.

Responsibilities within Circuits

- (a) The Superintendent has full responsibility for the Circuit.
- (b) Any Minister appointed to a Circuit is responsible to the Superintendent of the Circuit to which he/she is appointed.
- (c) No Minister shall be involved with another Circuit without the invitation of the Superintendent of that Circuit.
- (d) In the event of the death of a Minister or Minister's spouse, the incumbent Minister (if he/she is not the Superintendent) shall immediately inform the Superintendent of the Circuit. The Superintendent shall immediately inform the District Superintendent, who shall inform the President and Secretary of the Methodist Church in Ireland and the Ministerial Secretary of the pension fund.
- (e) Superintendents of Circuits should keep in close contact with Circuit colleagues and especially with Probationers under their care.

Use of Time

Since much of a Minister's work is unstructured, it is imperative that sufficient time is given for essential tasks. These include:

- (a) the Minister's own spiritual and devotional life
- (b) reading and study
- (c) preparation for worship (baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals and Circuit responsibilities, etc.)
- (d) pastoral visitation
- (e) community and connexional responsibilities
- (f) family and leisure time

Time is not unlimited, so it is essential to apportion it according to priorities, recognising that there will always be the emergencies which inevitably alter a pre-prepared timetable.

Use of the Manse

The Manse is provided by the Church as a home for the Minister and her/his family. The use of the Manse for Church meetings where appropriate or necessary should be at the invitation and discretion of the Minister and should not provide a precedent for her/his successor.

The Minister should ensure that the Manse and its contents are properly cared for during her/his tenure. Each minister, when changing appointment, should leave the Manse and grounds as he/she would like to find them.

The Minister's spouse can, like any other member of the congregation, play an important role in the life of the Church, but he/she should not be regarded as an unpaid member of staff. Some Minister's spouses have a career outside the life of the Church, others do not. So it should be recognised that Minister's spouses have different gifts and interests and may wish to have different roles in the life of the Circuit.

Connexional Discipline

When Ministers affirm at Synod that they observe the discipline they are accepting the undertaking to administer the Church's work at Circuit, District and Connexional level.

This includes care with filling in registers, completing schedules on time, answering correspondence promptly and passing on money received on behalf of the Connexion or Circuit to the appropriate person without delay.

It is advisable that, as far as possible, Ministers should not handle money belonging to the circuit.

Membership of District and Connexional Committees should be regarded as a privilege which provides both responsibility and opportunity to serve the wider church.

Relationship with the Circuit

It is important that Ministers work closely with Circuit officials, committees and councils to establish a good relationship and have a mutual understanding of each other's expectations. It is useful to set agreed goals to work towards and monitor progress to avoid frustration. Priorities such as care of the sick and bereaved should be recognised.

The Representative Role of the Minister

The Minister has a representative role in the wider community, not just in relation to the local congregation, Circuit and the Methodist Church in Ireland, but most of all of Jesus Christ. It is vital that when in the public eye, Ministers conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to the occasion in terms of behaviour, public speaking and dress code, especially dress for funerals and the conduct of worship. Dignity and graciousness are qualities that commend the ministry and the gospel.