

Proposed Code of Conduct for Ministers

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Status of Paper	Decision
Draft Resolution	41/1. The Council receives the report.
Alternative Options to Consider, if Any	The Council may determine that a code of conduct for ministers is unnecessary.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	A report of the work of the Code of Conduct working party in response to a recommendation arising from the Past Cases Review.
Main Points	Background A code of conduct for ministers? Future work
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	<i>Courage, cost and hope: The report on the Past Cases Review 2013-2015</i> (2015) The Church of England's <i>Guidelines for the professional conduct of the clergy</i> (revised edition) (2015)

Summary of Impact

Financial	There may be some costs involved if a code is produced as a physical resource
Personnel	Staff within the Conference Office and the Discipleship and Ministries Cluster will be involved in the development of a draft code
Legal	None anticipated
Wider Connexional	It is anticipated that a code will enable excellence in practice and accountability through supervision for presbyters and deacons
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Similar codes have been produced by ecumenical partners, including the Church of England
Risk	The risks of not taking every opportunity to enable excellence in practice and accountability through supervision are highlighted by the Past Cases Review

Background

1. One of the recommendations of the report of the Past Cases Review which was received by the 2015 Conference was 'That serious consideration be given to producing a Code of Conduct for ministers along the lines of that produced by the Church of England' (p. 27). The Assistant Secretary of the Conference in asking staff in the Conference Office to look at this noted that there was also a piece of work being undertaken by the Connexional Leaders' Forum which had set up a small group to consider a code of conduct for ministers. These two pieces of work have been brought together in a Code of Conduct working party which met for the first time in January 2016 and now presents this interim report.
2. The membership of the working party is: Deacon Eunice Attwood, the Revds Kenneth Howcroft (Chair), Jennifer Hurd, Dr Jonathan Hustler, Paul Martin, Julian Pursehouse, Paul Wood, and Ms Gill Dascombe.

A code of conduct for ministers?

3. The working party, at its meeting in January, considered both the necessity and appropriateness of a code of conduct for presbyters and deacons. The chair undertook to detail the earlier discussions in this area and noted that there had been resistance to the notion in the past. However, the group concluded:
 - i. that the existence of the document produced by the Church of England (and other, similar documents) was indicative of the expectation that there be documented standards against which professionals can be held to account;
 - ii. that it is essential to the covenant relationship with the Conference that ministers behave in a manner fitting to those who are representative of the Church and be accountable for the way in which they exercise their ministry;
 - iii. that the concerns leading to the recommendations of the Past Cases Review need to be dealt with as an essential part of a code of conduct, but that any such code also needs to deal with expectations of conduct in other areas of ministry;
 - iv. that much of what would need to be in a code of conduct already exists in various forms but could helpfully be brought together into one point of reference;
 - v. that the content of a code of conduct could not be separated from consideration of the processes in which it would be employed, and that those processes would need to be rigorous and systematic;
 - vi. that this piece of work therefore cannot be seen in isolation from other recommendations of the Past Cases Review and in particular the development of supervision for all presbyters and deacons in the active work; and
 - vii. that any such code would need to 'have teeth' so that breaches of the code might be triggers for action under Sections 04 or 11 of Standing Orders.

4. It was agreed that members of staff in the Conference Office should work on compiling an index of the Conference's statements and guidance on living under discipline as a basis for the proposed code.

Future work

5. It was agreed that the working party would report to the Methodist Council in April 2016 that it had given serious consideration to the matter and agreed that although many materials exist for a minister to live under discipline, they could effectively be brought together in one place in order to enable excellence in practice and accountability through supervision. The working party will liaise with the supervision working group in order to ensure that the resulting resource forms an effective part of the supervision process. Such a resource is wholly consistent with our tradition but also a response to society's expectations of 'professionals'. The working party will aim to bring a draft code to the Methodist Council in January 2017 in order that it might be presented to the 2017 Conference.

*****RESOLUTION**

- 41/1. The Council receives the report.**