Ethics for Congregations
Leader Guide

Introduction

Since 1996 congregations have studied the Ethics for Congregations polity statement in variety of ways. These studies usually take place around pastoral transitions as search committees meet the steps of composing the congregational profile.

Yet, exploring and understanding ethical and healthy conduct for congregations does not need to wait for a pastoral transition.

We have provided a presentation deck, congregational inventory, case and bible studies to help support a local study of the Ethics for Congregations polity.

Structuring a Study

The PowerPoint Slide deck is designed to cover the entirety of the paper. Of course, every study is different so leadership can adapt the slide deck based on time and audience. The basic structure moves from introduction to assessment:

I. What is Congregational Ethics?
II. Scriptural understandings of the church
III. The Congregation's Relationships (Introducing the structure and key points of the Code of Ethics)
IV. Case Studies
V. Congregational Ethics Inventory

Facilitators of the study should prioritize the Code of Ethics and Inventory if time is limited. The Case Studies, however, offer a way to connect the affirmations of the Code of Ethics with common scenarios.

Facilitators should also set guidelines for conversations during the training, especially when the Case Studies are used. These should include:

-Ask questions rather than state assumptions.
-Speak for yourself (use "I" statements) rather than talk about others.
-Seek to understand rather than judge.

Below is a chart listing the case studies and the parts of the Code of Ethics that can relate to the scenario. When working with the case studies be sure to note:

-The details are limited on purpose.
-Each scenario can involve persons acting in good faith and with the best of intentions.
-At the same time, each scenario can involve persons who are not aware of policies or best practices.
-Allow time to explore how people might address the concerns.

Finally, congregational ethics is messy. There are dual relationships, historical conflicts, and deeply held values at play. Addressing ethical concerns in community involves both strength and grace. We need strength to be able to speak with one another about how our actions impact others and shape perceptions. And we need grace as we guide one another on the way to healthy relationships and the journey of discipleship.

Case Study 1	A.4. Our integrity also challenges us to work in a transparent manner to the extent that we avoid Dual Relationships or Conflicts of Interest. E.4. … We entrust our leaders with the work of the church and expect them to avoid asserting undue influence in the matters of the congregation or seeking favors by nature of their position.
Case Study 2	E.1. We strive to be fair and equitable in our support of our staff, adopting the Guidelines for Pastor's Salaries and Benefits as our guide for determining what is adequate compensation. When diverting from these guidelines we will adjust expectations and time requirements appropriate to scale.
Case Study 3	E.5. … We ask that our members not seek to influence decisions outside of established open forums through alternative and closed meetings or by campaigns through alternative media—in letters, by phone, or on the internet.
Case Study 4	A.1. We strive to live by the gospel injunction that our yes be yes, and no be no, especially in regards to civil statutes. We honor the creative work of others by abiding with copyright permissions and compensating those who share their creative work with us.

Case Study 5	D.2. We address promptly incidents of dissent among us and have a method in place for seeking resolution and reconciliation. D.4. We endeavor to maintain an environment and program free of sexual, psychological, or physical abuse and harassment, giving special attention to the protection of children, the elderly, and the disabled.
Case Study 6	A.2. We embody our traditional posture of separation of faith from politics by refraining from using our non-profit status to support political candidates.
Case Study 7	A.5. We strive to be witnesses to Christ's peace in our relationships with one another and our wider community, … E.2. We provide a supportive and nurturing culture for our staff through an advisory committee which meets regularly with staff members in an advocacy and counseling capacity. … E.5. We conduct business openly, except when the agenda may deal with confidential personnel matters, and expect transparent and honest dialog from all our members at all times. …
Case Study 8	D.4. We endeavor to maintain an environment and program free of sexual, psychological, or physical abuse and harassment, giving special attention to the protection of children, the elderly, and the disabled. In the event of an accusation of abuse or harassment we will deal with it forthrightly, promptly, and fairly, in order to stop the behavior in question, minister to all victims, effect change in the violator, and seek reconciliation.