



Baptist Churches

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Guidelines for Discipline and Restoration to Ministry of Leaders in Baptist Churches

1. Discipline and restoration of members after inappropriate behaviour is a difficult problem that many churches will have to face from time to time. It is not a new phenomenon; there are many instances in Scripture where counsel is given to God's people, e.g. Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-8; 2 Corinthians 2:5-8; Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 5:19-20.
2. There are particular difficulties when a leader in the church is to be disciplined (e.g. pastor, elder, deacon, youth leader). There is recognition both of the serious nature of the sin and its consequences, and of the necessity of working towards repentance and restoration.
3. While not condoning sin, we recognise as a fact of life that people, including leaders, may sin and fail, and the challenge of God's people is always to deal not only with the sin but more importantly with restoration of the one who has sinned. The way we fulfil our responsibilities in this area will be a good measure of the real strength of the church.
4. The following guidelines have been prepared to assist in working through these issues, if and when they arise.

Initial Investigation and Discipline

5. Process of Discipline.

- 5.1 Where the leadership of the local church becomes aware of an alleged failure (1 Timothy 5:19) of one of its leaders to conform to conduct consistent with the Biblical pattern of leadership, the leadership should normally act in the following ways:

Advise the Accreditation Committee, through the Director of Ministries, of the situation and seek advice and support;

Set-up a sub-committee from the church membership to examine the matter under consideration; and

Invite the Accreditation Committee to nominate two to three persons to be part of the investigating sub-committee.

- 5.2 The task of the sub-committee is to thoroughly investigate the situation and then to make recommendations to the church leadership and as appropriate to the church membership.
- 5.3 Should that investigation lead the sub-committee to hold the person to be guilty of the alleged conduct, recommendations made should keep in mind the following:

Discipline to be appropriate to the case;

The need for adequate nurture and care being available for the person or persons involved;
and

The possibility and desirability of restoration.

- 5.4 Discipline needs to be appropriate to each case and applied in a way that will build-up the high standard of calling to Christian Leadership. Discipline is with a view to repentance and restoration.
- 5.5 Where possible the discipline and restoration process should be carried out within the church where the failure has occurred. The leadership will need to exercise judgement about making the matter public in the church. There are clear examples in Scripture where it is expected that discipline and restoration will often be conducted in private on a one to one basis. Equally there are clear examples where it is necessary to publicly deal with the matter in the church (Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Timothy 5:19-22, Titus 1:10-16). Issues that need to be considered when deciding on the appropriate course of action are:
- How serious was the offence?
 - Was it a momentary lapse in the pressure of the moment or was it persistent premeditated sin?
 - How public is it and how public is it likely to become?
 - How will it affect the on-going ministry of the person?
 - How will it affect the on-going ministry of the church?
- 5.6 At each stage in this process confidentiality is vital, not in order to conceal or minimise an offence, but to avoid harmful gossip. A church must always remember that the restoree has individual rights that must be upheld. Libel and defamation are real issues and have to be guarded against. In a situation where the church or its leaders have been careless or unwise, a person could take legal action. Care needs to be taken that the affected person does not feel unreasonably provoked and is being heard.
- 5.7 In the interests of confidentiality consideration has to be given as to what information is appropriate for the Church Meeting and what information is to be conveyed to the wider congregation.
- 5.8 Out of concern for the Church being served, Pastors and other Leaders may be requested to resign or relinquish pastoral responsibilities while the matter is being investigated. The person under investigation should withdraw from all preaching and speaking engagements and not accept any leadership role in the church or wider until the issue is settled.
- 5.9 The sub-committee will interview the person involved. In the case of a married person, the spouse, if not present initially, may be interviewed separately. Whether other people are interviewed will depend on the specific case. Interviews may take place with the person/persons wronged. The sub-committee should continue its enquiries until it is satisfied it has a thorough understanding of the situation. It would normally be an important part of the enquiry process to bring together the aggrieved parties to clarify understanding of the issues, and to promote the healing process.

- 5.10 While the need for prompt attention will be apparent the sub-committee should not feel the need to act in haste so long as the investigation is progressing. Allowing time for the person concerned to accept responsibility may lessen the trauma for all concerned in the process and may enable a more appropriate form of discipline.
- 5.11 During the period of investigation the sub-committee should satisfy itself that the person is receiving appropriate pastoral and counselling care. It may also be necessary to ensure this care is available beyond the investigation.

6. Process of Restoration.

- 6.1 **Discipline.** Successful restoration will require a willingness to submit to the continuing discipline of the church through its leaders on the part of the restoree and a willingness by the church, particularly those directly responsible for the restoration process, to face and honestly and firmly raise the issues that must be resolved for restoration to occur. An individual may choose not to go through a restoration process and a church and its leaders may have no alternative but to accept that.
- 6.2 **Identification of issues.** Any process of restoration should identify both the long and short term issues that need to be addressed. In some cases there could be issues that require a lifetime of care and attention. Other issues will be able to be resolved in the immediate restoration process. All issues need to be clearly identified as either short or long term so that there is minimal chance of confusion between restorers and restoree. Restoration must be seen as a process in which the restoree's character and potential are being re-evaluated and proved, so far as is possible, to allow the identification of potential future ministry, that will have the confidence of the church membership.
- 6.3 **Appointment of restorers.** After consultation with the restoree, there should be a minimum of two and a maximum of three people appointed to meet with the restoree on all occasions when progress is being evaluated and new steps are being put in place. Restorers need to be persons of spiritual maturity with gentleness, humility and firmness (Galatians 6: 1-2). Restoration can be a demanding process that can result in a severe emotional drain on both restorers and restoree alike. It is important therefore that the burden is not being carried by one person alone as a restorer. Likewise it is a time of intense personal struggle on the part of the restoree, who both needs and deserves the intimacy and confidentiality of a small counselling group.

7. Stages in restoration.

- 7.1 **Character more than gifts.** It is important to recognise that the qualities for Christian leadership relate more to the character of the person than their giftedness. There are clear standards of character that are expected of Christian leaders and it is in this area that restoration must principally be addressed (1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9). One must guard against premature return to ministry because of obvious giftedness. To allow demonstration of repentance and change time must be allowed for the working through of issues.
- 7.2 **Milestones.** Clear milestones should be established so that both restorers and restoree have identifiable measures of progress by which the restoration process can be judged. These milestones need to be written in terms that are relevant to the restoree and their

circumstances and should be expressed in terms that demonstrate behavioural and attitudinal change rather than activities and tasks. Any timetables that are drawn up should be for the guidance of the restorers and should be modified as necessary based on the progress of the person under restoration.

- 7.3 **Appropriate ministry.** It must be understood by all parties involved in the restoration process that restoration to ministry will be progressive but may not lead to the same dimensions of ministry held at the time of failure. The process of restoration should carefully consider whether it is appropriate for the restoree to take on the same ministry again. Where restoration is being carried out with the knowledge of the church membership, recommendations should be made for the church to consider.
- 7.4 **Safeguards in ministry.** When restoring a person to a particular area of ministry, it is important to establish with the restoree the safeguards that will be put in place to minimise the chance of re-offending. These steps should be as clear and as specific as possible so that there can be no confusion about what is required of the person.
- 7.5 **Other affected parties.** In any restoration process, careful consideration must be given to other parties that may have been affected. This will include the person's spouse and immediate family and any other affected people and their families. The pastoral care of such people is as important as that of the leader.
- 7.6 Reconciliation of hurt people is important and should be carefully considered. It is not always possible to bring about full reconciliation in the short or even long term. In assessing the completion of the restoration process, the restorers may in the end have to make value judgements about whether the restoree has indeed been willing to seek reconciliation.
- 7.7 Where professional counselling is indicated, some funding may be available through the Director of Ministries.
- 7.8 **Recognising completion.** In any public restoration process there must be a point of finality where the church members meet to consider the recommendations of those responsible for the restoration process and formally declare that the process is completed to the satisfaction of the church. The areas of ministry open to the restoree should be specifically recognised by the church. In the case of a restoree who was formerly on the List of Accredited Persons in Ministry, re-instatement will be considered by the Council upon request of the person and recommendation of the Church.
- 7.9 If the matter is being dealt with confidentially, the same requirement exists for completion of the restoration process to be formally accepted by restorers and restoree.

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