

CHURCH POLICIES

Section 4.0

Pastoral Duties/ Responsibilities

4.4 Member Relationships

4.4.2 Discipline Policies

4.4.2.1 Suspension and Disfellowship - Member

Suspension and Disfellowship - Member

Introduction

Godly unity is to be a hallmark of the Church of God (Ephesians 4:11-15). There must be appropriate loving discipline within the church to help, protect and preserve what God is building. Paul explained that it is God's will that there be peace in all the congregations. "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Since the elders are given the responsibility to care for the flock (1 Timothy 3), there are biblically based measures an elder may employ under extreme circumstances. These procedures are Suspension and Disfellowshipping (1 Corinthians 5:11-13, Romans 16:17). While the words "suspension" and "disfellowshipping" are not found in Scripture, their meanings are embedded in God's Word.

The methods that may be used as a last resort to handle situations such as division or sin that affect the congregation are suspension and disfellowshipping.

This policy is established to clarify the meaning and application of these disciplinary measures.

Defining the Terms

Suspension is the act of instructing someone not to attend church services and other church functions on a temporary basis. This is primarily done for the benefit of the one suspended, but there may be occasions in which it is done to protect the congregation. It may also serve as an example to the congregation when a significant number of members are aware of the serious nature of the infraction.

Disfellowshipping is the church-initiated exclusion of a person from the membership roles of the church and from attending church services and all church activities until such time as fruits of repentance are demonstrated.

Reasons

1. Causing division (Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10).
2. Habitual sin (1 Corinthians 5:11).

Purposes

The reasons for suspension and disfellowshipping should be love and concern for the individual involved and also for the care and protection of the affected congregation(s) and Church. They are tools for teaching and protection, not for retaliation. As tools of last resort, they should only be used after the ministry has exhausted efforts to instruct, reason and warn. In addition to the more immediate function of protecting the congregation, the proper use of suspension or disfellowshipping is God's way of helping some individuals come to understand that unless they repent and allow themselves to be led by God's Holy Spirit, their very salvation could be at stake (1 Corinthians 5:5).

The purpose of suspension is used as an initial attempt to cope with an extreme behavior of a member of the church. It is usually for a specified period and is utilized to aid the member involved in re-evaluating his/her spiritual condition. An additional purpose would be to protect the membership from an individual's behavior. The hopeful outcome of suspension is the restoration of the individual to a sound spiritual state and to the fellowship of the church.

Disfellowshipping an individual is the most extreme step taken in handling a member's unacceptable behavior. Disfellowshipping has two primary purposes: 1) to enable the affected member to work through his/her spiritual difficulty while being denied fellowship with the Church. 2) To protect the Church as a whole from being affected by the individual's situation. The hopeful outcome of the use of this measure is that the disfellowshipped individual will ultimately be restored to a sound spiritual state and to the fellowship of the Church (2 Corinthians 2:1-8). Disfellowshipping usually involves an indefinite period of time.

Application

Paul instructed the Corinthian congregation to remove a member from their fellowship (disfellowship) because of the seriousness of the member's sin and the potential for this type of sin to spread throughout the congregation (1 Corinthians 5:1-13). In this chapter Paul includes the two primary reasons for disfellowshipping a person:

1. Love and concern for the person involved, hoping he will repent of his sin (verse 5).
2. For the protection of the rest of the congregation (verse 6).

Paul showed by his example that the ministry of Jesus Christ needed to properly handle situations that threatened the spiritual well being of a member and the peace and stability of the Church.

Proper use of disfellowshipping can prompt an individual to repent of sin, can prevent sin from affecting others, and can preserve unity. This is a God-given responsibility of the ministry. The authority God has given to His ministry is to be used to serve others. It must be used appropriately and in such a way as to express God's love for His children. Using this as a basis for understanding, it is clear that suspending or disfellowshipping someone from services should not be taken lightly. It should not be done out of personal frustration. It should not be done as an easy way to "rid ourselves of a problem."

Suspension and disfellowshipping should be used only after efforts to teach and help the member. It should be used as a tool to help the individual recover himself/herself from his/her unacceptable ways. The exercising of such authority by the ministry must be done very gently and after showing much patience and care (2 Timothy 2:24-26). It is strongly recommended that before such action is taken that the ministry involved should pray fervently to God and be certain they have all the facts in the situation. He should consult with his Regional Pastor or international equivalent prior to enforcing such strong measures. It should be noted that there may be very rare circumstances where quick action might be necessary and where the process listed below may not be followed (Jude 22-23).

Appropriate Steps in the Process of Suspension or Disfellowshipping

1. If a church member causes serious division or if a member is habitually sinning to the point that it is seriously affecting the peace and unity of the congregation and/or the spiritual well being of a member, the pastor needs to clearly and plainly explain the seriousness of the situation to the



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person(s) involved. The purpose of this meeting is to encourage repentance of such attitudes or actions that are violating Scripture and threatening the peace and unity of the congregation. It would also serve as a warning to the person(s) involved (2 Thessalonians 3:15). It is our hope that such a warning given in love would cause the person to see his/her error and to repent. (The pastor should document this visit and warning to the affected party.)

2. After a reasonable amount of time has passed from the first warning and if there were insufficient change in the attitude or action of the person(s), it would be wise to give a second warning to the individual(s) involved. This principle may be drawn from Titus 3:9-11. Though Paul is specifically talking about heresy, the principle is a good one to follow generally. This second warning may serve the purpose of emphasizing the seriousness of the situation, as well as demonstrating the pastor's desire to patiently work with the individual(s) involved, instead of just excluding the person(s) from the congregation. (Once again documentation ought to be made of the visit and the second warning.)
3. If there is insufficient change after the second reasonable warning, the individual(s) should be suspended from the church, until genuine repentance is evidenced. Suspension of a person should only occur after the pastor can demonstrate a record of instructions and warnings on the issues of concern. The pastor should seek the input and counsel of the elders in the area or a neighboring pastor before taking such action. On the other hand, it is not recommended that the membership be publicly notified of any suspensions, unless it becomes absolutely necessary. The intent of a private suspension is to encourage the individual to repent and then to return to the church. Notifying the membership of the suspension can make it harder for the person to feel comfortable returning to church. Once a person is suspended, the minister should not desert that person. It is the responsibility of the minister to follow up with further counsel and encouragement as needed and appropriate. Sermon tapes should be offered to those who are suspended.
4. Though suspension is normally recommended to precede disfellowshipping, there can be situations where this is not necessary. If a situation is very serious and the pastor assesses that disfellowshipping is warranted without first suspending the person, it can be done. However, the pastor should discuss the situation with his regional pastor and/or with Ministerial Services to see if others agree with his assessment. Disfellowshipping should generally be used after a suspension where there has been no satisfactory response or repentance. It is important to notify any individuals who are being disfellowshipped. It is preferable that this be done in person in as gentle as and kind manner as possible. If notification in person is not possible, then notice can be done over the phone or in a letter. If a letter is used, care should be taken to mention only that disfellowshipping was necessary "for cause", without writing the details. The individual(s) disfellowshipped should be told that they could contact the ministry for counseling, direction, and encouragement. It should also be noted that the church is desirous of their repentance and return.

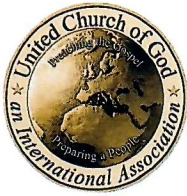
5. On a rare occasion it may be necessary for the church to actually announce to the congregations that a person has been disfellowshipped and removed from the church, as was the case in 1 Corinthians 5. Paul gave some brief instructions on this subject in Romans 16:17-18 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15. This announcement would be made to protect the church from confusion and division from a person who would try to disrupt the church. These cases would be the rare exception, and would need to be handled with care and discretion to not disclose more than is absolutely necessary. Pastors should review what they plan to announce with their Regional Pastor (or international equivalent) prior to making such public. Since our hope is repentance of the disfellowshipped person, it is clear that the announcing of a person being disfellowshipped should only be done in extreme cases that threaten the unity and peace of the church.

In such cases a generic announcement such as the following should be read in the churches: "In accordance with the biblical commands, the doctrine and long standing practices of the church, we are sometimes required to announce that certain people have been (*suspended or disfellowshipped*). It is our unpleasant duty at this time to notify you that (*Mr. and/or Mrs. or Ms.*)_____ has/have been (*suspended or disfellowshipped*). The church does not, and you should not, bear any ill will toward (*Mr./Mrs./Ms.*)_____. Rather, you should pray that God will grant (*him/her*) repentance."

Conclusion

One of the most encouraging accounts dealing with disfellowshipping in the Scriptures is the account in 2 Corinthians 2:3-11. Here Paul reports that the person he instructed the congregation to disfellowship in his previous letter (1 Corinthians 5), had later repented and was now to be restored to the fellowship of the church. This demonstrates benefit that can come from properly using disfellowshipping as a tool.

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4.4.2.2 Policy for Member Appeal to the Council of Elders

Policy for Member Appeal to the Council of Elders

PREAMBLE:

The care of the brethren is one of the major responsibilities entrusted to the ministry (1 Timothy 3:5; 2 Corinthians 1:24). Section 8.10 of the Bylaws of the United Church of God, an International Association (hereafter “UCGIA” or “the Church”) was written to ensure that the members may have a process to address what they perceive to be mistreatment through the improper use of disciplinary measures. The Council of Elders has established this policy for appeal by the Church membership.

Bylaw Article 8.10 RIGHT OF APPEAL:

“All lay members of UCGIA have the right to appeal any disciplinary or other adverse actions or decisions against them to the Council, by following the process of appeal approved by the Council or within the Rules of Association.”

DEFINITION:

Church Member: An individual who has been duly baptized and possess God’s Holy Spirit is a member of the Church of God, regardless of organizational affiliation (Acts 2:38-39; Romans 8:9). However the term “Church Member” as used in this policy applies only to an individual who has been duly baptized and is considered to be a member in good standing of the UCGIA and may be listed on the membership roles of the Church (where available).

APPEAL CRITERIA:

A member who appeals to the Council of Elders of UCGIA and who seeks the Council of Elders’ determination on disciplinary actions and/or adverse ecclesiastical decisions, should have first sought a Christian resolution by following the biblical principles as outlined in Matthew 7:1-5; Matthew 18:15-18; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 and Galatians 6:1-2. Pending any appeal or review, any disciplinary action or other decision from which the appeal or review has been taken shall remain in force.

A Brief Description of the Appeal Process

1. Seek a resolution as outlined in Criteria section above.
2. Communicate verbally and in writing with the local pastor.
3. Communicate verbally and in writing with regional pastor and Ministerial Services Team (or international equivalents)
4. Communicate verbally and in writing to the Member Appeal Committee.
5. Appeal to the Council of Elders via the Member Appeal Form (Attached)

A full description of the appeal process can be found in the document “Procedure for Member Appeal to the Council of Elders”.



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4.4.2.2 Policy for Member Appeal to the Council of Elders

4.4.2.2.1 Procedure for Member Appeal to the Council of Elders

Procedure for Member Appeal to the Council of Elders

PREAMBLE:

This document describes the process to be used by church members when they wish to appeal what they perceive to be mistreatment through the improper use of disciplinary measures. It should be read in conjunction with the document "Policy for Member Appeal to the Council of Elders".

PROCESS:

1. The individual must first communicate (verbally, as well in writing or by email with the local pastor and seek resolution by openly discussing all matters that relate to the issue. (If the problem is a matter between the individual and the pastor himself, then the process begins with step 2, (providing the principles outlined in the "Criteria" section above have been followed.)
2. If the problem is not resolved at the local congregational level (step 1), the appealing Church member should communicate (verbally, as well as in writing or by email) with the regional pastor and the Ministerial Services Team (or international equivalents) responsible for the congregation in which the problem occurred. They should openly discuss all matters that relate to the issue of appeal. The regional pastor and the Ministerial Services Team (members of the team who have not been involved with the case thus far will be assigned to work with the case at this level) or international equivalents will confer in order to attempt to resolve the issue. In facilitating a resolution, the regional pastor and Ministerial Services Team (or international equivalents) must include the input and determination of the local pastor (if step 1 was not skipped because of the involvement of the local pastor in the issue). This should take no longer than **45 days**.
3. If the problem is not resolved at the second step and the Church member wishes to appeal to the Council of Elders, he/she must request a Member Appeal Form (attached) from the secretary of the Council of Elders. The appealing member must then submit the completed form via the secretary of the Council of Elders. This should take no longer than **30 days**.
4. The Member Appeal Form goes initially to the Ethics Committee of the Council for transmission to the Member Appeal Committee (MAC). This should take no longer than **15 days**.
5. In facilitating a resolution, the MAC must include the input and determination of those responsible for the ruling at the second step of this policy. The MAC shall review the written reports of the previous steps and, if necessary, conduct interviews and undertake any additional fact-finding it deems necessary to arrive at a proper decision. (If National Councils are responsible for the area, they should be involved in this step prior to the MAC receiving the case.) This should take no longer than **90 days**.
6. The decision of the Council of Elders, via the Member Appeal Committee, is final and binding on all parties. The case may only be reopened at the Council's discretion if substantive, new and relevant facts are discovered.

NOTE:

Upon entrance into an appellate process the pastor and/or elders of the appealing member's congregation should consider resolution of this matter to be a top priority in their ministry. The same ministry should provide him/her with spiritual support (e.g. telephone contact, personal visits, sermon tapes) while the appeal process is ongoing.

Both the ministry and the appealing member should exercise good faith and appropriate behavior throughout the appeal and support the ultimate decision. The pastor should agree with the appealing member what constitutes appropriate behavior during the appeal process. For example, not discussing the situation with other church members, etc. Any disagreement as to what constitutes appropriate behavior should be clarified with the regional pastor (or international equivalent).

Non-compliance by the member will result in termination of the appeal. Ministerial noncompliance will be dealt with by Ministerial Services (or international equivalent) and the Council will facilitate the continuation of the appeal.

Regardless of the time-lines included at certain steps of the process, it is incumbent upon all parties to the appeal to act expeditiously in order to conclude the appeal process without undue delay.

All information submitted in connection with an appeal to the Council of Elders must be kept in confidence. All parties involved at each level must document their opinions on the matter in writing. Materials submitted may not be reproduced by any means, except as such reproduction is necessary to facilitate a determination.