

Partners in Ministry

Introduction to Ethics Documents Study Guides

by Rich Cohrs

It is an exciting time whenever a congregation calls a church worker. The congregation and the worker each have expectations, goals and some reservations on how the new partnership will work out. Congregations look for an enthusiastic, hard-working, charismatic worker who will seek the lost and influence ministry. Workers look for congregations that will welcome them into the family, take care of their needs and offer an exciting, hassle-free opportunity for ministry.

Most of the time congregations and workers find that their initial expectations and goals were somewhat unrealistic; however, they soon come to an understanding and ministry continues to grow. Often, the longer the worker remains at the congregation the greater the opportunity for conflict, misunderstandings, and hard feelings.

It is not uncommon for workers and congregation members to have problems with one another. Most of the time differences can be easily resolved by honest discussion and sharing. However, there can come a time when the congregation and the worker find themselves not being able to rationally talk to and with each other. When this happens, ministry stops and congregations divide.

The Ethics Documents developed by the Michigan District have been written in order to establish the ways that the congregation and the worker will conduct themselves in order to prevent conflict. By having clear expectations and guidelines in place, workers and congregation members can avoid misunderstandings and conflict.

In order to help congregations and church workers develop clear and consistent guidelines

for relationship, companion documents to the Ethics Documents have been written. These Study Guides are designed to be used by Boards, church councils, workers and any group responsible for the interaction between workers and congregations. For example, the Elders would use the Study Guides on how they relate to and with the Pastor. The Board of Education would use the Study Guides to review and clarify their relationship with the teachers. Church Councils would use the Study Guides in order to determine how the congregation relates to their professional church workers.

Church workers are encouraged to use the Study Guides individually and corporately. All the professional church workers in the congregation are encouraged to study the Ethics Documents together. Groups of church workers are natural opportunities for study – circuit meetings, conferences and the like allow workers to study and relate outside of their current congregation status.

The Study Guide is formatted to not only review the Ethics document, but to help the congregation and the worker personalize and internalize the principles found in the Ethics Documents.

As the councils, boards, faculties, etc. review the documents, each section is highlighted with an overview. The Study Guides ask review questions so that each person comes to the same understanding of the intent of the section.

In addition to the review questions, each section contains at least one scenario to be studied. These scenarios are designed for realistic discussion on how the congregation or the worker will relate to the specific section of the

The following is from the Study Guide for congregations:

Pastor Gutgenug avoids family vacations due to the expense. He is not able to afford to fly himself, his wife and their six children and he cannot afford the time or the expense of driving them anywhere. He compromises with his family by letting the kids camp outside and by having day dates with his wife.

He has thrown himself into the ministry and is very content to be involved helping his members. He has remarked, “No one member of the congregation expects a perfect pastor, but considered together, they do.” When asked to explain he replies, “Member A may not care if I am faithful in hospital visits, but member B does. Member C may not care if I have the best sermons, but member D does, etc.” So he has dedicated his life to serving the needs of his congregation. His wife and family encourage him to take a day off, but when he does, he is often interrupted by members calling for his help or advice.

1. What dangers are ahead for Pastor Gutgenug in his personal, family and ministry life?
2. What safeguards can the congregation put in place to honor his time away from the congregation?
3. Is there a way for the congregation to help Pastor and his family experience a “real” vacation? If so, what would be the impact for the family and the congregation?

Ethics document. The scenarios are written to help the congregation or worker discuss the “grey” areas of the Ethics documents by presenting realistic situations that can cause tension.

A special feature contained in the Study Guide for the workers is a section titled “A Look in the Mirror.” This section is for private and personal reflection by the worker. The opportunity for personal reflection allows the worker to incorporate the Ethics Documents into daily life and interactions.

The Ethics Guidelines are designed to foster Christian interactions between workers and congregation members. The Study Guides are written so that congregation members and workers can personalize and internalize the guidelines. May God bless the use of these documents.

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The Ethics Documents and Study Guides may be downloaded at www.michigandistrict.org.

