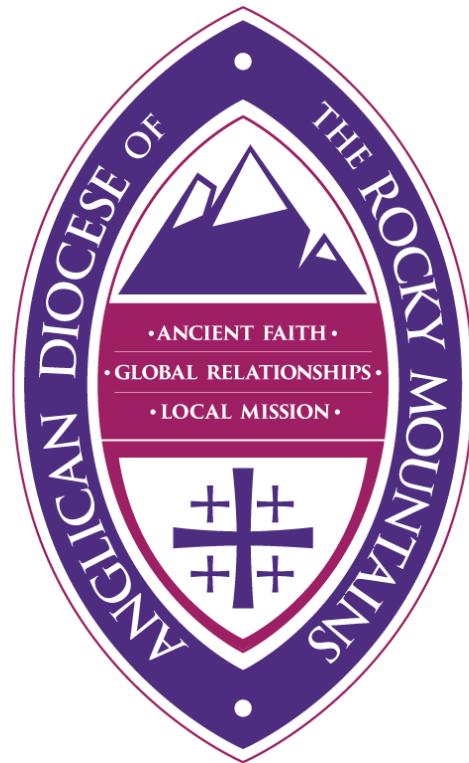


# Keeping the Feast

GUIDANCE ON CHURCH DISCIPLINE  
AND THE EUCHARIST



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# Keeping the Feast

## AN OVERVIEW OF GUIDANCE ON CHURCH DISCIPLINE AND THE EUCHARIST FOR THE DIOCESE OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

Church discipline and excommunication (withholding the Sacrament) are always awkward, uncomfortable, and difficult. Yet, they must also be undertaken, and with great care and thoughtfulness. The concern of church discipline is primarily twofold: 1) the spiritual health of the sinner and 2) the spiritual health of the Church.

### I. THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE EUCHARIST

Any discussion of church discipline must begin with the Eucharist itself, which is a central act of worship of the gathered church. The Eucharist (or the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion) is a means of grace that we are called to steward, through our language and practice, in a way that is faithful to Scripture and the teaching of the Church. Our canons provide that all baptized *Christians in good standing with their church*, regardless of denominational background or affiliation, are invited to commune.

### II. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND POLITY

As our desire is to welcome all *baptized Christians in good standing with their church* to share in the Eucharist, such commitments create an internal tension—raising the question of what it means for Christians to be *in good standing with their church*. How a church understands its organizational structure and defines its membership will be critical in the exercise of church discipline.

### III. THE ROLE OF THE CLERGY, PASTORAL CARE, AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE (FOR MEMBERS)

With regard to church membership and polity the role of the clergy is complex. In short, the maintenance of congregational integrity requires: 1) pastoral relationships and knowledge of congregants, 2) pastoral attention to congregant's public reputation (that is, pastors knowing what the rest of the congregation knows), and 3) pastoral leadership in the congregants' love for each other, so that they give friendly warning and eventually solemn caution to those turning away from God's ways. In cases of unrepentant sin, formal church discipline processes will follow on from the execution of plans of pastoral care.

### IV. PASTORAL CARE IN OTHER DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

Certain sins and, as a result, certain circumstances for pastoral care can be especially complex. The threshold of *grave of and immediate scandal* is a complicated, difficult, and sometimes moving target. Particular care will need to be given in such situations.

### APPENDICES

We must also consider how the Bible portrays church discipline, the legal implications of church discipline processes, and the removal of someone from the community of believers. It will also be helpful to consider particular cases of church discipline as a matter of training.

# Keeping the Feast

## GUIDANCE ON CHURCH DISCIPLINE AND THE EUCHARIST FOR THE DIOCESE OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

“For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore, let us keep the feast.” This sentence, often said in the context of a Eucharistic service, was actually written by Paul amid his plea for the Corinthians to exercise church discipline. It continues: “not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”<sup>1</sup> With these words, Paul connects the gospel (Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection), the Eucharist (Passover, feast), and personal holiness (the metaphor of leaven contrasting wickedness and living in the truth). A scandalous case of overt and unrepentant sin was polluting the church. The leaven of this sin needed to be “purged out” that their gathering—including the celebration of the Eucharist—would properly indicate that they are the unleavened bread of Christ Jesus.

Church discipline and excommunication (withholding the Sacrament) are always awkward, uncomfortable, and difficult. Yet, they must also be undertaken, and with great care and thoughtfulness. The concern of church discipline is primarily twofold: 1) the spiritual health of the sinner (to “gain your brother,” Matt 18:15) and, as indicated above, 2) the spiritual health of the Church. The guidance in these pages is offered to help you—the clergy, the Parish Council, and the church—think through different aspects of the Eucharist, church polity, church discipline, and the theological considerations that lie behind them.

### I. THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE EUCHARIST

As the goal of this document is to explore the intersection of the Eucharist, polity, and church discipline, we begin with a consideration of the Eucharist itself. Any deliberation about the best boundaries for *keeping the feast* that the Lord has entrusted us should start with the same spirit of humility and reverent awe we bring to the Eucharist itself.

#### 1. *What is the Eucharist?*

The Eucharist, along with the reading and preaching of Holy Scripture, is central to Christian worship. That Christians throughout the centuries have described their experience of what happens at the Eucharist as *mystery* and *sacrament* (“outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace”<sup>2</sup>) is to acknowledge our inability to plumb the depths of the work God does in us through our participation in this gift. Although our foundational documents such as the *Articles* and *Homilies*, together with the *Book of Common Prayer*, provide an authoritative framework for our understanding of the Eucharist, the grace of this mystery cannot be precisely or exhaustively measured. Thus, we are bound to maintain a robust, symbolic, biblical language to move toward a deeper, fuller, more awe-filled *Eucharist*. Consider this Eucharistic language and imagery drawn from Scripture and tradition:

- The Eucharist as a *feast*, at which hungry multitudes are fed with bread from heaven by the abundant mercy of God, in the precise measure they need.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor 5:7b-8 (KJV). All other Scripture references, unless otherwise marked, are from the ESV.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Book of Common Prayer* (1662).

<sup>3</sup> See John 6:1-59.

- The Eucharist as the fulfillment of the types of Passover and the worship of the Temple; an unbloody *sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving*.<sup>4</sup>
- The Eucharist as foreshadowing *the great marriage supper of the Lamb*, enacting and prefiguring the eternal and heavenly worship of the Church of God, encompassing every nation, tribe and tongue and every order of creation.<sup>5</sup>
- The Eucharist as a *participation* in the body and blood of Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>
- The Eucharist as a participation in *heavenly worship*, joining the priestly people of God with unending song of angelic contemplation: *holy, holy, holy*.<sup>7</sup>
- The Eucharist as a sign and means of unity as the Body of Christ.

Given this multiplicity of language and imagery, any kind of reductive treatment of the Eucharist should be avoided. Receiving the sacrament is not a mere token of being part of one form or another of a Christian ingroup. Nor is the sacrament a tactic for the clergy to gain leverage over the souls committed to their charge. The Eucharist is truly a means of grace that we are called to steward, through our language and practice, in a way that is faithful to Scripture and the teaching of the Church, and as transparent as possible to the infinite depths of what we participate in and celebrate.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Who should participate in the Eucharist?

In deference to the significance of this sacrament as gift (*or as a means of grace*), our Diocese has maintained table boundaries that can be seen as relatively generous. Our canons provide that all baptized *Christians in good standing with their church*, regardless of denominational background or affiliation, are invited to commune.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, our default is to consider the sacraments a divine entitlement to Christians who are committed to our charge. We believe it is our responsibility to administer the signs and symbols of God’s grace with a pastoral care and patience that fits this sacred task. Thus, while we embrace all discipline that attends effective Christian discipleship, we regard excommunication with special gravity and seriousness. Our Diocese considers excommunication an extreme pastoral intervention. It should not be undertaken without considerable deliberation and notification to the Bishop.

Beneath this approach is an implicit recognition that Christ is truly present, and God truly acts in and through these gifts. Our participation at the Eucharist does not merely *express* the faith and unity we have in Christ, or our holiness or spiritual maturity. By the work of God’s Spirit, participation in the Eucharist is *constitutive and creative*. As a means of grace, the Eucharist strengthens our faith, unity and holiness. We are God’s holy people, who share in God’s holy gifts, *not* because we have earned or deserved it through our moral achievement, theological understanding, or depth of emotional and spiritual sensitivity. Rather, by His grace God has chosen us in Christ, poured His Spirit upon us, and made us partakers of His holiness.

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<sup>4</sup> See Heb 13:10-16.

<sup>5</sup> See Rev 19:6-10.

<sup>6</sup> See 1 Cor 10:14-22.

<sup>7</sup> See Rev 4:8. Cf., Isa 6:3.

<sup>8</sup> According to the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*, the sacraments are “effectual signs of grace” which “not only quicken, but also *strengthen and confirm our faith*” in Christ (Article XXV). The Lord’s Supper is a *partaking* of the body and blood of Christ in a “heavenly and spiritual manner” (Article XXVIII). The Articles stress that faith in Christ is the means by which such gracious benefits are received.

<sup>9</sup> See *The Canons of the Anglican Church in North America*, Title I, Canon 10, Section 3.

None of this implies, however, that there should be *no* boundaries to the sacramental fellowship. In some Christian circles, *open communion* has come to mean an indiscriminate distribution of the Lord's Supper in the name of hospitality. In such cases, pastoral leadership practices disregard whether or not communicants have been joined to the church through baptism or intend to cleave to it through repentance and faith. Such a practice would violate our canons, which notes that there are qualifications for "rightly and worthily receiving the Supper of the Lord with faith" and prohibits reception of the sacrament for those who are in "open, willful and unrepentant sin" or "living a notoriously evil life."<sup>10</sup>

We must resist and reject indiscriminate distribution as incompatible with our polity and as standing wholly outside the discipline of biblical, historic, and classical Christianity.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. *What need is there to articulate who the Eucharist is for?*

Articulating table boundaries is essential. It entails teaching that the Lord's Supper is a prerogative of the baptized faithful (those who, though sinners, intend to follow in the way of Christ, obey his commands, and live the new life that he brings and offers).<sup>12</sup> Through these boundaries, we acknowledge the real distinction between the Church and the world that will exist until Christ comes again in glory. This is not to suggest an *us versus them* or *insiders versus outsiders* mentality. And yet, an essential distinction within humanity remains: Those who are *in Christ* and those who are *in Adam*.<sup>13</sup> God calls those who are *in Christ* to share in the ministry of Christ, who was broken and poured out for the life of the world, and who raised up dead Adam and incorporated us into the new Adam. In Christ, the ultimate and glorious unity of a restored humanity has been revealed. Nevertheless, it still awaits its full and final consummation. Maintaining boundaries at our table recognizes this tension.

In our pastoral ministry, we will inevitably encounter cases that will require us to make careful and prayerful practical decisions about when and how participation in the sacraments may need to be restricted as a part of the exercise of discipleship in good pastoral care and congregational leadership. With this brief contemplation of the grace and stewardship of the sacrament, the question remains as to how this view can be applied in the local church.

#### *Practical Steps*

- Plan how to teach proactively on the Eucharist, its meaning and significance through the study of Scripture and our foundational documents (the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*, the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Homilies*).
- Be familiar with the Diocesan canons and Prayer Book rubrics relevant to participation in the Holy Eucharist.

## **II. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND POLITY**

Our desire is to welcome all *baptized Christians in good standing with their church* to share in the Eucharist, yet the Eucharist should also be guarded diligently and with great care. Such commitments

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<sup>10</sup> See *The Canons of the Anglican Church in North America*, Title II, Canon 3, Section 2 and the 2019 ACNA revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* (Huntington Beach: Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019), 143.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Cor 11:27-29. For a historical view, one can consider the writings of Justin Martyr, Ignatius of Antioch, and the epistle known as 1 Clement. See also K.W. Noakes, "The Eucharist: From the Apostolic Fathers to Irenaeus," in C. Jones (ed.), *The Study of Liturgy* (London: SPCK), 210-212.

<sup>12</sup> See Article XVI of the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*.

<sup>13</sup> See 1 Cor 15:22. Cf., Rom 5:12-21.

create an internal tension—raising the question of what it means for Christians to be *in good standing with their church*. For visiting Christians (not typically a part of the local worshipping community), it raises different questions (to be addressed in *Section IV*).

For the local church, this question of *good standing* is typically answered within the bounds of church polity (or membership). That is, conceptions of church membership significantly affect the role of the clergy as it relates to church discipline. Because polity in the Anglican tradition runs counter to most Evangelicals' experiences of membership, its articulation must be part of teaching and guiding congregations regarding church discipline.

### *1. How do Anglicans understand Church Membership?*

Historically, Anglican polity has differed from the Puritan and subsequent Presbyterian and Congregationalist understandings of membership in that they tended to utilize *boundaries* of moral attainment or intellectual assents for membership or table fellowship. Such *boundaries* include community covenants, membership statements, and tests. The Puritans opted for proven "communities of visible saints"<sup>14</sup> operating under covenants that included rigorous church discipline in order to maintain the covenant boundaries. Instead, Anglicans held to the *parish model* and its invitation to participate in the Eucharistic liturgy.

The Eucharist, along with the reading and preaching of God's Word, remains the notional center of a parish, with emphasis on open access to the means of grace for all baptized Christians (a center-set rather than the Congregational bounded set).<sup>15</sup> Moving towards the Table to receive the Body and Blood implies repentance and acceptance of the Gospel account of salvation. Membership, as such, is considered in terms of *membership in the Body of Christ* more than to a particular community. Maintaining the integrity of the community, therefore, requires clear communication of that implication.

In traditional Anglican ecclesiology, regular gathering at a particular Table (a local church) *implies* submission to the doctrine and discipline of the Church (and to the pastor as shepherd). Both the passing of the Peace and the Eucharistic meal communicate corporate and pastoral affirmation of each congregant's desire for peace with others and a holy life.<sup>16</sup> The possibility that the Eucharist may be denied to a particular person is the exception that demonstrates the normal affirmation. Therefore, membership in a local body and *implied* submission are demonstrated by regular reception of the Lord's Supper in a local church. A yearly occasion for regular communicants to sign

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<sup>14</sup> Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012); Edmund Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 76, et al.; Geoffrey Nuttall, *Visible Saints: the Congregational Way, 1640-1660* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957).

<sup>15</sup> See Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, 5.lxvii. "It is on all sides plainly confessed, first that this sacrament is a true and a real participation of Christ, who thereby imparteth himself even his whole entire Person as a mystical Head unto every soul that receiveth him, and that every such receiver doth thereby incorporate or unite himself unto Christ as a mystical member of him, yea of them also whom he acknowledgeth to be his own; secondly that to whom the person of Christ is thus communicated, to them he giveth by the same sacrament his Holy Spirit to sanctify them as it sanctifieth him which is their head."

<sup>16</sup> See *The Canons of the Anglican Church in North America*, Title I, Canon 10, Section 2.



the Church Register records their regular and *explicit* association with that local body. In short, a regular communicant *is* a member of a local body.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. How do Anglicans practice Church Membership?

The practice of local church membership, as understood above, requires an understanding of the responsibilities of the members. One possibility is a codified form of membership. Some local churches in the Anglican tradition have moved in the direction of the Puritan tradition by developing a more elaborate and particular form of church membership beyond being a baptized member of the Church catholic—typically articulated in a *membership covenant*. This approach typically includes a preparation class in which the community standards and assumptions are articulated, followed by a written consent to abide by these standards in order to be a voting member of the legal body, to serve on a Vestry, or perhaps fill a ministry leadership role. What this approach aims to elicit is *the voluntary consent of the governed*, or the acceptance of the clergy's authority and all corresponding standards. It also aims for agreed upon norms and for clarity of understanding among regular communicants.

*Membership covenants* aim for laudable goals of mutual understanding and submission. But properly understood, this *voluntary consent of the governed* is already inherent in our baptismal covenant and our coming to the Eucharist. Receiving the supper is a declaration of a desire for holiness and a willingness to be corrected and directed according to the Word. For congregants new to Anglicanism, it will be wise for Catechesis or a *new members* class to clearly communicate this understanding of the Eucharist, as well as to regularly teach our theology by referring to the language of the Eucharist. The importance of such teaching, as well as further practical suggestions for its implementation, will be considered in section III.

In following this view of membership, it becomes apparent that a high view of the Sacraments in the life of the church—as understood in Anglican ecclesiology—requires an associated high view of the clergy's pastoral functioning. *As such, the stress of communicating the idea of congregational integrity (and of maintaining it) is laid on the clergy.*

### Practical Steps

- Determine the parish's approach to membership. Will it be informal or formal? Will the understanding of membership be endorsed verbally or through a written covenant?
- Determine how members will be prepared for membership. What form of catechesis will be used? What does a membership class include?

## III. THE ROLE OF THE CLERGY, PASTORAL CARE, AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE (FOR MEMBERS)

With regard to church membership and polity the role of the clergy is complex. In short, the maintenance of congregational integrity requires: 1) pastoral relationships and knowledge of congregants, 2) pastoral attention to congregant's public reputation (that is, pastors knowing what the rest of the congregation knows), and 3) pastoral leadership in the congregants' love for each other, so that they give friendly warning and eventually solemn caution to those turning away from God's ways. The larger the church, the greater the challenge for the clergy to perform direct pastoral

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<sup>17</sup> A *regular* communicate is one who participates in the life of the church, including the Lord's Supper, often. The precise definition of *regular* will vary from parish to parish, but should be more than *occasional* (e.g., Christmas and Easter), but does not require consistency so measured as to be a form of legalism.

functioning. Yet, certain responsibilities remain on the clergy and are best understood within the larger field of pastoral care.

### *1. What is the role of the clergy?*

According to the Ordinal, one of the roles of a Priest is that of a watchman. The Bishop exhorts the Ordinand “to be a messenger, *watchman*, and steward of the Lord.” A watchman looks out for danger against individual sheep and the flock. Later the Bishop articulates a central duty of the Priest: “bring those in your care . . . to maturity in Christ, that there be among you neither error in religion nor immorality in life.”<sup>18</sup> The Ordinal connects the goal of Christian maturity with the attendant result—right thinking and right behavior as set forth in Holy Scripture.

For a number of reasons, a Priest may be tempted to neglect this aspect of pastoral ministry. However, to do so is to neglect an explicit duty of ordained pastoral leadership and one of the means God uses to help people grow in Christlikeness. We approach this ministry not as sinless authoritarians, but as fellow sinners who have been called by Christ to be a shepherd to the flock he loves.

### *2. How might the clergy establish a context for correction?*

The clergy should utilize their role as teacher in order to create a context for pastoral correction and admonition. The Rector of a parish should educate all clergy, parishioners and the Parish Council on the place of church discipline in the life of the church, pointing to relevant Scripture passages. Leaders in the local church should know the Diocesan canons related to church discipline. Furthermore, it is recommended that clergy explain to new or prospective church members the relationship between church membership, participation in the Eucharist, and church discipline within the Anglican tradition and our Diocese. The clergy should point out the criteria which may lead the church to begin a formal disciplinary process (see below for such criteria). Transparency on these matters will minimize misunderstanding and, in a worst-case scenario, legal liability.<sup>19</sup>

The clergy should occasionally instruct the entire church in the meaning of participation in the Eucharist through sermons and teaching. They should note that at the Eucharist, we offer God’s gracious invitation to all baptized Christians, yet participation implies faith in Christ and repentance for sin.<sup>20</sup> Occasionally, especially during penitential season such as Lent, the clergy may want to preface the liturgy to the Eucharist with remarks on the role of faith and repentance as an integral part of worthy reception. On such occasions, clergy may wish to use “The Exhortation” from the 2019 ACNA *Book of Common Prayer*.<sup>21</sup>

Given our culture of moral relativism and confusion, churches need to provide clear teaching on scriptural, orthodox Christian moral standards. The content of such teaching should present a positive, grace-filled vision of biblical morality, expressing understanding towards those who

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<sup>18</sup> ACNA *Book of Common Prayer* (2019), 489.

<sup>19</sup> A lack of clarity can lead to painful consequences for pastors and church members. For an example, listen to the experience of one church plant that was fuzzy about the involvement that LGBTQ persons might have in their congregation: [gimletmedia.com/shows/startup/llhewv/church-planting-4-the-conversation](https://gimletmedia.com/shows/startup/llhewv/church-planting-4-the-conversation). Regarding the legal issues, while the First Amendment generally gives churches great latitude on matters of church membership and discipline, there have been cases where courts have intervened. For guidance, see Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company, “Avoid Church Lawsuits” in Appendix 3.

<sup>20</sup> See *Section I* for more information about the suggested content of teaching.

<sup>21</sup> *Book of Common Prayer* (Huntington Beach: Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019), 147-148.



struggle or disagree. However, the clergy should not shrink from clearly articulating scriptural standards and the sober prospect of God’s judgment on those who remain unrepentant.

Teaching about scriptural, orthodox Christian morality could also become integrated into the regular curriculum of the parish. Such teaching could be disseminated in age-appropriate ways, throughout the curriculum for youth and children. Churches could host special seminars or workshops for adults and parents that articulate what Christians believe and why we believe it, while answering questions and concerns.

In sum, intentional preaching, instruction and parish education around issues of church membership and spiritual accountability is necessary. Through these, a context is created in which church discipline and its relationship to reception of the Eucharist is, at least, intelligible.

### 3. *What is Church Discipline?*

Church discipline can be defined as taking specific actions to correct or censure an unrepentant member of the community with the hope of repentance and reconciliation. Article XVI of the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* concisely articulates an important reality for the faithful Christian:

After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and by the grace of God we may arise again and amend our lives.<sup>22</sup>

The pattern of sin, repentance, faith, and obedience that brings a Christian to the point of saving faith also persists in the life of that Christian, even after Baptism. The primary context in which this pattern should be reflected upon and experienced is within the church community. As such, it is the responsibility of the church and her leaders to consider and perhaps address the sins of the believers in the community, even to the point of exercising *church discipline*—or taking specific actions to censure an unrepentant member of the community with the hope of repentance and reconciliation. The means of censure in our Diocese is *excommunication* (or denying a person the Sacrament of the Eucharist and, possibly, participation in the services of the church community). Our Diocesan Canons specify as much:

No one shall receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion who is in open, willful, and unrepentant sin. With pastoral care from the Rector, such prohibition shall continue until there is repentance and restoration of the penitent.<sup>23</sup>

The tendency of many churches is to find ways to avoid situations of formal discipline, usually stopping short of or bypassing anything like an official process. Such a process is demanding in every sense, emotionally taxing, socially uncomfortable, and challenging to explain both inside the church community and outside. Nevertheless, churches must be aware of the presence of sin, its effects in their communities and consequences of not addressing it.

The need to address sin at the broadest level, of course, is typically handled through public preaching and teaching. More specific sins for particular individuals can be addressed directly through discipleship and pastoral care. Likewise, the expression of our theology of sin and redemption in the Eucharist is typically handled through public teaching and statements of

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<sup>22</sup> Article XVI, the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*, as found at [bcponline.org/Misc/histdocs.html#articles](http://bcponline.org/Misc/histdocs.html#articles).

<sup>23</sup> See *The Canons of the Anglican Church in North America*, Title II, Canon 3.

expectation within the liturgy itself (commonly called *fencing the Table*). Despite these proactive measures, a process of discipline may be necessary in some cases—those in which a person remains unrepentant. Several questions emerge: When is church discipline necessary? What is the point of a discipline process? What might it look like? In general, how should the clergy, church leadership, and church membership navigate the numerous and complex issues related to church discipline? It undoubtedly starts with pastoral care.

#### *4. How should the clergy approach pastoral care for unrepentant?*

Even with a clear understanding of the Eucharist and membership in the community, cases of unrepentant sin requiring action are inevitable. What should a pastor do if he suspects or learns that a communicant is in “open, willful, and unrepentant sin?”

The ACNA *Book of Common Prayer* provides an important rubric.

If the Priest knows that a person who is living a notoriously evil life intends to come to Communion, the Priest shall privately instruct that person not to come to the Lord’s Table until he or she has given clear proof of repentance and amendment of life. The Priest shall follow the same procedure with those who have done wrong to their neighbors and are a scandal to the other members of the Congregation, not allowing such persons to receive Communion until they have made restitution for the wrong they have done.

When the Priest sees that there is enmity between members of the Congregation, the Priest shall speak privately to each of them, telling them that they may not receive Communion until they have forgiven each other. And if the person or persons on one side truly forgives the others and desire and promise to make up for their faults, but those on the other side refuse to forgive, the Priest shall allow those who are penitent to come to Communion, but not those who are obstinate.

In all such cases, the Priest is required to notify the Bishop as soon as possible (within fourteen days at the most) giving reasons for refusing Communion.<sup>24</sup>

We must keep in mind that the ultimate goal of pastoral care in such a situation is spiritual transformation: repentance and restoration.<sup>25</sup> Such an outcome can only be achieved through the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the clergy’s initial and continual response should be fervent prayer. As we pray for the spiritual maturation of those under our charge, we follow the example of our Lord and His Apostles.<sup>26</sup>

Beyond this first step of prayer, the clergy must then take particular steps to follow up with the person. After learning of the circumstances, and assuming it is appropriate, the clergy should arrange to meet with the person. Circumstance may dictate the timing and urgency of such a meeting. If the person is a minor, parental consent and/or presence may also be necessary.<sup>27</sup> Pastors will want to

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<sup>24</sup> *Book of Common Prayer* (Huntington Beach: Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019), 143.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix 1 for the biblical background to this posture of repentance and forgiveness.

<sup>26</sup> See Luke 22:32 and Eph 3:14-19.

<sup>27</sup> It is worth noting, at this stage, that the clergy may wish to handle cases of discipline up to and including excommunication somewhat differently depending on the age of the person. If the church practices paedocommunion, there is an obvious added responsibility of the clergy toward assess the fitness of the child for the table. Such a responsibility will need to be exercised in concert with the child’s parents.

consider the extent to which the behavior is public knowledge (*the greater the notoriety, the greater the urgency*) and the gravity of the sin (*the more destructive the sin, the greater the urgency*). Pastors will also need to practice patience towards new members and new Christians. When meeting with a church member with the goal of admonishment, it is necessary for the pastor to ask *careful and probing questions*. The questions could be designed to discern: 1) the level of commitment to Jesus Christ as a disciple, 2) the understanding of Scripture as it relates to specific areas of concerns, and 3) the impact of the sinful behavior on others (e.g., church, family, community). The answer to such questions will help pastors determine the appropriate response and the urgency of making such a response.

It is important to note that Matt 18:15-20 is often seen as laying out a particular process for church discipline.<sup>28</sup> Using the model put forward there, the involvement of the clergy is likely the second of the three steps (with the first step having occurred between two members). Church discipline is not the sole purview of the clergy: “those who are aware of the sin are those who should first deal with the sin.”<sup>29</sup> However, once the clergy is involved it will be wise to involve other clergy, or a representative of the Parish Council before escalating the process to excommunication. If the person is a minor, it may also be appropriate or necessary to involve family members. It is also at this point that it may be wise to notify the Bishop.

#### 5. *What is open, willful, and unrepentant sin?*

A distinction can be made between those who are struggling with private sins or are ignorant of their sins and those whose sin is open, willful, and unrepentant.

In some cases, people are struggling in general, but lack the self-awareness to understand their struggles as sin. In the case of a struggling or ignorant congregant, the clergy’s aim is to patiently bring them to the knowledge of the truth, with the goal of repentance and growth in holiness. Pastoral care in this case will likely mainly consist of appeals to and explanation from Scripture and, perhaps, additional sources. A member who is struggling with a sinful habit or action, but sorrowfully acknowledges his or her sin, should be encouraged to continue to come to the Eucharistic Table and to view such a practice as a means of grace and source of spiritual strength. The clergy or their designate will want to meet regularly with such a parishioner for prayer and accountability. The clergy may also wish to refer the congregant to Christian counseling, a trained psychologist, an accountability group, or a healing prayer ministry.<sup>30</sup>

However, the impenitent or obstinate congregant is one who is aware and, yet, refuses to acknowledge their sin nor take any steps to change their thinking, their behavior, or to make amends. The sin is, in other words, *willful* and *unrepentant*. It may not be the case that the sin is open, in terms of what is known by the community. And in such a case, *the breadth of impact on the church community would play a deciding role in determining appropriate pastoral action*. Such pastoral action would be based on the process outlined in Matthew 18.<sup>31</sup> It is recommended that the clergy, while maintaining privacy, records all church discipline steps and decisions in writing—both informal and formal.

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<sup>28</sup> See Appendix 1 for more on this process.

<sup>29</sup> Bishop Ken Ross, “Discipleship and Correction,” 3 [unpublished paper].

<sup>30</sup> See question 6 in this section for an example of a pastoral care plan.

<sup>31</sup> See Appendix 1.

### 6. *What does repentance look like and how much obedience is needed?*

Repentance is not merely words nor is it merely actions (both in terms of the person as well as possibly making amends to a wronged party), but it is a shift in the heart. Psalm 51 gives an extensive, poetically beautiful picture of repentance. In it, David asks for his knowledge, the condition of his heart, the words of his mouth, and his actions to coalesce into a single state of being before God—a transformation from a transgressor who is filthy in sin to one who is pleasing to God having been cleansed of iniquity. When looking for signs of true repentance in a person, the clergy should be looking for appropriate words acknowledging and a substantive understanding of the sin, a contrite heart and desire to change the sinful activity, a real shift in behavior, and a desire to repair the damage caused by the sin. If any of these is missing, the clergy should continue to teach and disciple the person to a richer understanding and embracing of repentance.

The Rector or his representative may prescribe a pastoral care plan, suitable to the penitent and the particular sin. Kevin Miller, an ACNA priest, suggests elements of such a plan include:

- Accountability to the Rector or another, older person of the same gender. Schedule regular meetings to check in on progress. The goal is not looking for perfection (“zero falls”), but progress (“fewer falls and faster rises”).
- Receiving prayer ministry regularly (on Sunday morning or at meeting with prayer ministers at another time).
- Go to counseling to understand the motives behind the sin cycle. This may involve signing a release so the counselor can inform the Rector or accountability partner of progress or setbacks.
- Fasting. In addition to fasting from food, this may involve fasting from a relationship, from the internet, social media, television, or any other problematic behavior. The goal is to remove sources of temptation.
- Involvement in a small group that emphasizes spiritual discipline, transformation, and healing.<sup>32</sup>

The final recommendations that Miller mentions relate to more public sins and those who are unrepentant. Pastoral action appropriate to such circumstances will be discussed in the next section.<sup>33</sup> Although a plan of action is desirable, obedience, of course, is more of a condition of the heart and will than it is an observable objective set of actions. Thus, the clergy should hope to see an obedience that is out of love for God,<sup>34</sup> bears witness to the Christian faith,<sup>35</sup> and demonstrates a true knowledge of God and living faith.<sup>36</sup>

### 7. *How should someone under discipline relate to the church community?*

In general, Anglican polity allows for considerable freedom in thinking through how a person may relate to the church during a discipline process. There are four things that the clergy or Parish Council must consider.

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<sup>32</sup> It can be useful to check with the Diocese on healing ministries. Our Diocese occasionally provides resources or hosts conferences on spiritual healing and care.

<sup>33</sup> Kevin Miller, “Church Discipline for Repetitive Sin,” *Christianity Today*, May 22, 2009, as found at [christianitytoday.com/pastors/2009/spring/churchdisciplinerepetitivesin.html](http://christianitytoday.com/pastors/2009/spring/churchdisciplinerepetitivesin.html) (accessed August 6th, 2019).

<sup>34</sup> See 1 John 5:2-3.

<sup>35</sup> See Matt 5:16 and 1 Pet 2:12.

<sup>36</sup> See Heb 11:6, 1 John 2:3-6, and Jas 1:22-25.

First, in the final stages of church discipline, the discipline process may involve the withholding of the Sacrament. Further thinking on this action is considered in the next part of this section. But simply withholding the Sacrament is, itself, not necessarily a public act. This will depend on how the distribution of the Eucharist is handled in your church, the size of the church, and the observation of other members.

Second, it may be wise to remove the person from serving the church in various capacities (e.g., small group leader, nursery worker, greeter) until the discipline process has been completed. So long as the person is in unrepentant sin and its effects are known, it will undermine (or *leaven* in the words of 1 Cor 5:6-8) the ministry of the church. Depending on the person's type and level of service, this may require the discipline process to be made public in some sense.

Third, it may become necessary at a point in the discipline process to notify the church membership at large of the discipline process and some minimal amount of detail to explain and exhort to refrain from gossip. Public disclosure serves two purposes: 1) making clear to the person that the discipline process is a serious one and that their *status* in the church has shifted, and 2) helping the church members know how to better relate to, pray for, and care for the person under discipline. In the cases of particularly "grave and notorious," where its effects are widely known, public disclosure may become more urgent.<sup>37</sup>

Fourth, the church discipline process assumes that a person remains in the community. They should be compelled to repentance rather than treated as a member, but the hope is that they remain in the church as to be confronted by the gospel. Yet, the Apostle Paul envisions circumstances in which the church may need to put someone out of the community in both 1 Cor 5:1-13 and 2 Tim 2:20-3:9.<sup>38</sup> In both cases, the person remaining has become disruptive to the church and begun to tarnish the church's witness to the unbelieving world. In such cases, it may be necessary to ask the person to refrain from even coming to church services. As we saw earlier, the clergy has a responsibility to be a watchman, which includes watching the flock and protecting it from wolves.<sup>39</sup>

*8. Should a person who is in the midst of a discipline process continue to receive communion until the process is completed?*

In some sense, this question is as much a matter of pastoral care as it is a question of discipline. It may be helpful to follow the Church of England's canonical reasoning here:

If a minister be persuaded that anyone of his cure who presents himself to be a partaker of the Holy Communion ought not to be admitted thereunto by reason of malicious and open contention with his neighbours, or other grave and open sin without repentance, he shall give an account of the same to the bishop of the diocese or other the Ordinary of the place and therein obey his order and direction, but so as not to refuse the sacrament to any until in accordance with such order and direction he shall have called him and advertised him that in any wise he presume not to come to the Lord's Table: Provided that in case of grave and immediate scandal to the congregation the minister shall not admit such person, but shall give an account of the same to the Ordinary within *\*seven days* after at the furthest and

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<sup>37</sup> The phrasing of "grave and notorious sin" is an archaic phrasing of "grave and immediate scandal," as referenced in Convocations of Canterbury and York, *Canons of the Church of England*, B16.

<sup>38</sup> See Appendix 4 for further exegetical work on the reference to 2 Tim 2:20-3:9.

<sup>39</sup> Acts 20:28-30.



therein obey his order and direction. Provided also that before issuing his order and direction in relation to any such person the Ordinary shall afford to him an opportunity for interview.<sup>40</sup>

Following this canon strictly preserves a clarity of process and assumes a disposition of mercy. Communion would not be restricted until the final stage of the process of discipline and not without the Bishop's approval. At the same time, there is a reasonable exception in cases of "grave and immediate scandal to the congregation," in which case the Bishop is still informed immediately thereafter.

*9. How do you keep someone being disciplined from simply moving to another church?*

In the United States, we live in an era of abundance. In most places, there are several church options for a Christian. For an unrepentant church member, the temptation to simply move to another local church will undoubtedly arise. Yet, for both membership in a church and church discipline to be meaningful, such a temptation must be resisted. The clergy and/or Parish Council must consider the following:

- It is best to start with open and direct conversation with the person early in the process. Once the topic of church discipline is introduced, the clergy should inform the person that simply transferring out indicates a deficient understanding of church membership. Likewise, it may be appropriate to inform the person that the church can inform another church that the person is under discipline, should such a move take place.
- Watch and wait. In the ideal situation, the person never visits another church, but follows through the process to repentance and restoration in your church. Yet, if the person starts attending another church, it is likely that others in your church will become aware. Indeed, the public dimension of church discipline may bring this information to your attention. In such a case, it is best to, again, start by contacting the person directly. If you have not already, at this point you must inform the person that you can and will inform the clergy of their *new* church that they are under discipline in your church.
- Should it be necessary, you may wish to write a letter to the clergy or Council of the person's new church. While it may be helpful if the letter is from the clergy, it may also be wise to include the Parish Council in the composition and sending of the letter. The letter itself should disclose that the person is under discipline at your church. It is unwise to be more specific or include details (and possibly a violation of privacy laws). The goal of the letter is for the clergy at the new church to take the up the issue with the person.
- Should the person return, their misunderstanding of church membership and discipline will need to be addressed in addition to the sin which began the discipline process.

*10. What is the Parish Council's role?*

In our Diocesan Canons, one of the stated roles of the Parish Council is to provide care for the Rector according to his needs, in whatever ways are appropriate for the laity. Since the weight of shepherding and ensuring the integrity of the gathered body at the Eucharist falls heavily on the pastor, the Parish Council ought to be a source of strength and counsel for the clergy in the case of discerning the impact of a congregant's sin.

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<sup>40</sup> Convocations of Canterbury and York, *Canons of the Church of England*, B16. Please note, the ACNA standard is fourteen days to notify the Bishop, not seven. In the Diocese of the Rocky Mountains, we follow the ACNA standard.



Typically, the clergy alone cannot determine the scope of a person's influence or the degree to which a sin has become public. In the confidentiality of the Council, such discernment will be a help to the pastor in determining both the gravity and breadth of impact and, therefore, how broadly the response should be known.

As a member of the clergy, how much you share with the Parish Council on pastoral issues is at your discretion, but it will likely be in your best interest and the interest of church cohesion for you to seek their counsel and give them fair warning when a congregant's sin has become very open and your attempts at correction have failed. If you are going to advise a member not to receive communion on the basis of unrepentance, the Council should probably be informed. In the event that refusing communion becomes necessary, you are required to inform the Bishop, at which time it would also be wise to inform your Parish Council (if you have not already).<sup>41</sup>

#### *11. What principles might a Parish Council consider in thinking through Church Discipline?*

As clergy and Parish Councils proactively consider church discipline processes, it will be important for them to identify principles to guide them in their thinking. As such, we recommend:

- *Posture of Forgiveness:* The starting point and persistent manner for every step of a discipline process, both informal and formal, must be a posture of forgiveness. The biblical mandate for church discipline as well as the consistent advice of our Canons clearly identifies the aim of any process being the "restoration of the penitent." Discipline, therefore, must be enacted by those who are consciously disposed towards showing mercy and seeking the forgiveness of the disciplined person.<sup>42</sup>
- *Abundance of Clarity:* Because church discipline can include a censure with a public dimension, and requires the awareness of the church community, it is imperative that the process be explained clearly to all involved parties. This begins with a clear understanding of *membership/polity* and a clear articulation of what is actually happening in Holy Communion (including *fencing*). Without clarity in these matters from the beginning as well as a clear step-by-step articulation of the process of discipline, the emotional intensity of discipline will be felt to be punitive and could cause fractures in the community.
- *For the Good of All:* The responsibility of a Rector is three-fold, to the Bishop and Church catholic in maintaining sound doctrine and practice, to the individual being disciplined, and to the local church community. While the aim of a discipline process is the restoration of a disciplined person, the process is necessary in the first place in order to protect the church community and the purity of the faith. As such, decision made by the clergy must take these various responsibilities into account.
- *Protect Privacy:* Church discipline is, in some sense, a necessarily public process, the end of which may include someone visibly being denied the Sacrament of Holy Communion. We must remember that we live in an age in which gossip is prevalent as ever and in which technology provides an astounding speed at which gossip can be shared. Everything must be done to protect the privacy of the person such that public disclosure does not interfere with a process oriented toward restoration. Sin is, fundamentally, against God (while not denying its effects on his people). Repentance is the goal. Yet, sin may also be public. As such, the extent to which the public sin of a person affects the witness of the church (in Holy

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<sup>41</sup> In the case of sin that violates the civil law, the Parish Council must be informed of actions involving law enforcement. The Bishop should be contacted as well as the Diocesan Chancellor.

<sup>42</sup> See Appendix 1.

Communion and beyond), public disclosure of the discipline process might be necessary. The scope of disclosure should match the scope of notoriety (i.e., knowledge of the disciplinary process should be made known in basic outline to those directly affected by it). Likewise, repentance and restoration should be disclosed in the same manner and to the same extent that the discipline process has been made known.

- *Disposition of Mercy:* Processes of discipline are very rarely so straightforward as to be black and white. Gray areas abound when dealing with sin. Likewise, it is always tempting for Christians to want to treat the symptoms of a disease and to immediately move to reacting to and addressing problems without adequately considering the underlying disease. As such, it is essential that clergy and those involved with these processes listen, give the benefit of doubt, prayerfully and deliberately consider underlying sin and struggle, and act only on the basis of thorough reflection. It may be helpful to think of the process as ministering to someone in need more than purging the person (or community) of sin. A disposition of merciful and gracious understanding will help clergy to understand and care for the person. Likewise, it will help all to be grateful for the process (which may, to benefit of all, reveal underlying sins and attitudes that can be addressed helpfully).

In practical terms, it is advisable throughout any church discipline process to bear in mind the principles of abundant clarity and protecting privacy, especially in forms of communication. For example, having multiple people representing the wronged party is important—though this should be restricted to the church leadership (Bishop, clergy, Parish Council). It is assumed that the Bishop will be informed once the process is being discussed at the Parish Council level. He will necessarily begin to play a role in the process once excommunication is being considered.

In terms of communication with the person, it would be wise to handle communications first in face-to-face meetings, followed up with formal written summaries of the conversation and outlining next steps. It may also be wise to mail hard copies of correspondence throughout the processes, rather than relying only on more easily misconstrued and indiscriminately distributed emails. And when emailing, it is important to visibly copy the other church leaders involved so that language cannot be later taken out of context. In all cases, all communication should be prayerfully and thoughtfully produced, and considered by multiple parties (the church leadership as well as the Bishop at later stages) for content and tone. The church (represented by the clergy) must speak with one voice.

#### *Practical Steps*

- Determine the clergy's approach to pastoral admonishment. Is there a formal process that the clergy is expected to follow before escalating the matter to the Council or Bishop? Each church should have a written policy and set of procedures.
- Set specific guidelines regarding particular sins (especially those relating to sex and gender, the family and household, etc.). What additional steps may be required (e.g., referring a person to counseling, etc.)?

#### **IV. PASTORAL CARE IN OTHER DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES**

Certain sins and, as a result, certain circumstances for pastoral care can be especially complex. There are a few different and important ways of thinking about such situations. You might consider it from the seriousness of the sin—that is, the hold it has on the person, the depth of the sin in the person's life. You might consider it from the effects the sin has—the consequences of the sin for the person and others. You might consider it from the notoriety of the sin—the public perception of the sin and how it affects the witness of the both the Church and the local church. Determining where

a sin falls in these various categories can be rather complex. That is, the threshold of “grave and immediate scandal”<sup>43</sup> is a complex, difficult, and sometimes moving target.

*1. Which sins qualify as “grave and immediate scandal” or notorious?*

The considerable creativity God has given man has, for thousands of years, been directed at creating new and imaginative ways of sinning against him. God holds all sin accountable (see Rom 3:9-20, for example). As such, there is no biblical hierarchy of sin. This sentiment is beautifully captured in statements such as “all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment”<sup>44</sup> or very simply “you were dead in the trespasses and sins.”<sup>45</sup> It is also eloquently stated in our so-called prayer of humble access: “We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table.”<sup>46</sup> All sin is, in this sense, grave.

The question of what is scandalous or notorious, however, is more dependent on public perception and social norms than on precise biblical definitions. One need only look at recent media coverage of Christian scandals to see that a story of a pastor who is found out to be a habitual user of coarse language or is a shameless parking violator is not as likely to make the news as one who is found out to be abusive to his parishioners or caught in an affair. When it comes to the pastoral care of congregants, wisdom must be used in determining how grave and notorious the sin is and, as a result, what the pastoral care should include (especially whether it should include formal discipline and/or public notice). Generally speaking, sins that are also felonies and will involve law enforcement and or gain the attention of the news media should be considered grave and notorious. Sins with significant financial consequences and sexual sins, likewise, will tend to gain the attention of the local church and, very possibly, the wider community. And of course, sins that provoke strong responses in the community should be considered notorious. For example, in the Apostle Paul’s most severe instruction regarding church discipline, a case involving sexual immorality that “is not tolerated even among pagans,” (i.e., incest), he indicates that the church ought to “*deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.*”<sup>47</sup> We might extrapolate from this biblical example that the severe exercise of church discipline should certainly pertain in cases where the sin is so grave that even unbelievers consider the sin intolerable.

*2. What are sexual sins, and do they qualify as “grave and immediate scandal” or notorious?*

The New Testament uses a few broad terms to describe sexual sin, predominantly πορνεία (*porneia*, typically translated as *sexual immorality* or *fornication*) and often coupled with the concept of ἀκαθαρσία (*akatharsia*, typically translated as *impurity*). Sexual sin, as such, is any sin that defiles the human body with unnatural and biblically unsanctioned activity. In the words of the Apostle Paul, “the sexually immoral person sins against his own body,”<sup>48</sup> rendering them unacceptable to be presented to our holy God. Sexual sins include adultery, premarital (or any non-marital) sex, use of pornography, homosexual activity, polyamory, incest, bestiality, and so on. It is any kind of sexual activity that falls outside of biblical defined marriage.<sup>49</sup> “Let marriage be held in honor among all,

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<sup>43</sup> Convocations of Canterbury and York, *Canons of the Church of England*, B16.

<sup>44</sup> Isa 64:6.

<sup>45</sup> Eph 2:1.

<sup>46</sup> See the service of Holy Communion in the *Book of Common Prayer* (1662).

<sup>47</sup> 1 Cor 5:1-5.

<sup>48</sup> 1 Cor 6:18.

<sup>49</sup> See 1 Cor 7:2.

and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”<sup>50</sup> Sexual sins, if known, will typically be considered notorious or scandalous.

Again, public perception and social norms also factor into decisions concerning how grave and notorious sexual sin might be. In particular, social norms are shifting on questions of sexuality rather rapidly in the United States. For example, the primary diagnostic volume for psychological conditions, the DSM-IV (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*), published in 1994, included hypersexual behavioral disorder (i.e., sex addiction). The DSM-V, published in 2013, however, no longer included it. This suggests that social norms around the idea of sex addiction might be shifting.<sup>51</sup> Public attitudes about homosexuality, polyamory, and gender identity are, likewise, rapidly changing. Of course, as the *Anglican Church in North America* is known for particular positions on some of these issues, you need to be aware how church discipline for certain sexual sins will be understood publicly. This is not merely a question of pastoral care. It could very quickly become a question of public scandal.

### *3. How should cases of spousal abuse be treated?*

Special care needs to be exercised when dealing with cases of spousal abuse, especially as a matter of church discipline. Those engaged in the sin of spousal abuse are often well-practiced at manipulation and deceit. Power dynamics between genders will almost certainly play a significant role in the sin, the accusations against the sinner, and how both the sin and the accusation are perceived. As such, when a woman approaches male church leaders to report spousal abuse, it is wise to include mature female Christians in the conversation and subsequent processes. It may also be necessary to involve law enforcement, as physical abuse is a crime in most jurisdictions. With the consent of the abused, it should be reported to the proper authorities.<sup>52</sup> In order to demonstrate contrition, abusers will need to undergo a strict plan of pastoral care. They should be held to the highest standard of accountability, which will typically involve professional counseling by those who have expertise in this area. In such cases, the counselee should sign a release so that the counselor can inform the Rector or his representative of progress.

In some cases, the abuser will claim to have repented, but, unbeknownst to church leaders, the behavior will continue. In such cases, the church leadership will sometimes believe the abuser and then discipline the victim for not reconciling with the abuser. This, of course, is a tragic perversion of church discipline and must be guarded against rigorously. Thorough pastoral care plans, the involvement of others in the process (i.e., law enforcement, counselors, other ministry advocates) will be essential.

### *5. What are the boundaries for withholding communion from a non-member visiting the church?*

Everything written thus far assumes that the communicant is a baptized member or regular attender of the church. However, one can imagine a case in which a visitor or unknown person attends a worship service and even comes forward during the Eucharist. Our tendency will be to give the benefit of the doubt. But what happens when the person is known to be in unrepentant sin or even presents as likely to be (i.e., is clearly cross-dressing). One can also imagine a professing Christian,

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<sup>50</sup> Heb 13:4.

<sup>51</sup> It also factors in to whether insurance will cover therapy for such conditions, possibly affecting your pastoral care.

<sup>52</sup> Our default position is *with* consent. However, each church will need to be aware of the requirements in its jurisdiction. In some places, reporting is required even without consent.

but who has not yet been baptized, also coming forward during the Eucharist. How should we fence the table in these and similar cases?

It may be permissible for a minister to refuse the Eucharist to someone who comes forward for it, but this would be a rare occurrence. Viewing the Eucharist as a divine entitlement to Christians and as a means of grace disposes us to err on the side of mercy. Prefacing the Eucharist with appropriate language (either verbally or in a service bulletin), puts a burden on communicants to examine their conscience before receiving the elements and is consistent with the Apostle Paul's directions that communicants *examine themselves* to discern if they would partake in a worthy manner (1 Cor 11:27-32). Some people will, of course, receive the elements unworthily and to their own spiritual detriment. At his Last Supper, Jesus offered the bread to Judas Iscariot, his betrayer. A minister who provides the elements to those he knows are living contrary to the gospel may join his grief with "our Lord's grief at so many unworthy receptions of himself."<sup>53</sup>

Yet, there may be rare instances where allowing someone to take communion would cause a *scandal* to the community. *Scandal*, in this context, does not only mean that it will embarrass a person, but rather it is "an attitude or behavior that leads another to do evil."<sup>54</sup> Specifically, when the church leadership appears to sanction the sin of one, it can confuse or lead astray or provoke others. As such, ministers must be careful to consider offering the Eucharistic elements to someone who is a known unbeliever or someone who is engaged in habitual, grave sin that is known to the church community. To refuse the elements in such a case should be the judgment call on the part of the Rector, who would then also need to inform the Bishop of his action and rationale.

It is likely that an unbaptized believer who does come forward for the elements does not fall within the category of those who are committing grave sin or who would cause great scandal to the congregation. It is far more likely that such a person is simply ignorant of Anglican ecclesiology. In this case, it is better to instruct and encourage the person to follow the Lord's commandment to be baptized.

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<sup>53</sup> Edward Peters, "Fencing the Altar," *First Things*, November 2012, 20. See [firstthings.com/article/2012/11/fencing-the-altar](http://firstthings.com/article/2012/11/fencing-the-altar).

<sup>54</sup>Catholic Church, "Respect for the Dignity of Persons" in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2284.



## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: THE NEW TESTAMENT BACKGROUND TO CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Defining a biblical approach to *church discipline* is not simple. Various traditions have interpreted the small number of biblical passages that seem to address the topic in rather varying ways. For example, simply determining the necessity of church discipline is already task laden in complexities. From our perspective, it seems clear from the biblical passages typically associated with church discipline (Matt 18:15-20 and 1 Cor 5:1-8) that three factors must align to make it necessary: 1) the person potentially under discipline is a member of the church community (see also *Section II*), 2) the sin of the person is “grave and notorious” such that a formal process is necessary, and 3) the person remains unrepentant throughout the process.

#### 1. *What is the goal of discipline?*

It is the tendency of people to assume that discipline is a form of punishment that is punitive in nature. With a complex history as well as persistent popular views of transactional penance in the broader Christian faith (e.g., some modern practices of penance or satisfaction<sup>55</sup> in Roman Catholic traditions which are well documented in popular culture), it will be essential to demonstrate that the goal of discipline is *not* to punish or to require making amends, *per se*, in order to obtain absolution. But rather, the goal is a bit simpler. In both of the New Testament passages commonly used to shape processes of church discipline (Matt 18:15-20 and 1 Cor 5:1-8), it is clear that the goal of church discipline is repentance and forgiveness leading to reconciliation.

#### *Matthew 18:15-20*

While the passage is often viewed as elaborating on a church discipline process, it is perhaps reductionistic to say that this is its only point or even the main point. Several factors complicate this common view including two rather significant details: 1) While the word ἐκκλησία is used, there is no Matthean context for what the word means and it is at least anachronistic (if not incorrect) to read our ecclesiology into the passage.<sup>56</sup> 2) The entire process is initiated and driven by an individual in the context of a someone sinning specifically against them, not some broader sin without a wronged party who is driving the process but is rather being addressed by the church from the beginning.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, the context makes clear that the process outlined is wholly oriented toward forgiveness and reconciliation. The preceding passage (Matt 18:10-14) is a parable of Jesus concerning a lost sheep, the point of which has to do with rejoicing over the sheep who had gone astray (more so than over the 99 who did not). In our passage itself, the point of the process is articulated in verse 15: “If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.” And the following passage (Matt 18:21-35) is introduced with Peter asking a question about the extent to which

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<sup>55</sup> See 4.1459-1460 of the *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*.

<sup>56</sup> The word ἐκκλησία, which comes to mean *church* is used three times in the Gospels: Matt 16:18 and twice here in our passage. To the extent that these three instances are presented as Jesus’s words, well before the establishment of the Church at Pentecost, it is somewhat difficult to know what Jesus means in context.

<sup>57</sup> This is particularly evident that in the final phase of the process articulated in Matt 18:17: “If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector.” The *telling* in the first phrase and the *you* in the second phrase are both singular, suggesting that the process is completed by the wronged individual from 18:15 and *not* the church. Indeed, the church does not *act* toward the sinning brother at all in this passage. Likewise, it is worth noting that Peter understood Jesus to be talking in individual—not corporate—terms here as his following question returns to the singular brother who sins. That is, Peter placed himself in the hypothetical Jesus articulated and understood it in singular terms.



he is to be forgiving someone (using the same *brother* language as in our passage). Jesus's response is overwhelming forgiveness, confirming the point with a parable on the judgment that comes to those who refuse to forgive. When seen in context, it is clear that to the extent that Matt 18:15-20 has something to say about a process of church discipline, it is very much embedded in section of the Gospel that is focused on the prioritization of forgiveness.

### *1 Corinthians 5:1-8*

This passage is less particular than Matthew 18 in its process, but does specifically address a church (rather than specifically a wronged party) responding to the notorious sin of a member. Apart from the historical context of the letter (addressed to the *church* in Corinth in 1 Cor 1:2), it is clear that Paul is addressing the Corinthians as a church in the related following context (see 1 Cor 6:1-8). In the passage itself, there are several references to a plural *you* (meaning the addressees of the letter), as well as a reference to these recipients being assembled (1 Cor 5:4). The end of the process is the 'handing over to Satan for destruction' of the sinner for the sake of the health of the church (using a metaphor of yeast in 1 Cor 5:6-8). But even with this seemingly extreme form of discipline in motion, Paul is clear that the goal is "that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord" (1 Cor 5:5). It should also be noted that the weight of obedience (the failure of which demands discipline) is reserved for those who both understand the relationship of obedience to the gospel and have become (through whatever process) an accountable member of the church community. In simpler terms, Paul is addressing a community of the faithful in his demand for discipline. Paul's approach to those outside the community does not focus on obedience and discipline, but rather on the simple gospel of Jesus Christ (see 1 Cor 2:1-16 and Paul's description of his evangelization of Corinthians in the first place).

In both of these passages, the goal of discipline is the salvation or restoration of the person through repentance and forgiveness. The alternative is removal from the church community for the sake of the church community. That is, it may become clear in this process that the person is actually fuzzier on the gospel than expected, very possibly not seeming to be a Christian. As we saw, 1 Cor 5:5 indicates removal with the 'hope of salvation.' Matt 18:17 indicates that the person is to be treated as a "Gentile and a tax-collector," those who are considered outside, and so to be evangelized in Matthew's Gospel—not ignored.<sup>58</sup> Accordingly, the goal of a discipline process is the repentance and reconciliation of the person.

### *2. What does a discipline process look like?*

Keeping in mind that the process outlined in Matt 18:15-20 is instigated and, in some sense driven by a wronged party, there is nevertheless an essential process found there that is more widely applicable. In cases of 'grave and notorious' sin, we may choose to view the person (himself) or the church community as the wronged party, in which cases it is likewise appropriate to view the Rector as the representative of the wronged party. This is coherent with Paul's less specific process implied in 1 Cor 5:1-8 (cf., 1 Cor 6:1-8).

Without being overly legalistic in our reading of Matthew 18, a discipline process should have three stages: 1) a stage in which the wronged party or the Rector as representative of the wronged party confronts the person personally and individually, 2) presuming there is no repentance, a stage in which others become involved in outlining the process and confronting the person, and 3)

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<sup>58</sup> See Matt 9:9-13 and 28:16-20, for example.

presuming there is still no repentance, a final and public phase in which the person is censured and the wider church community is informed.

## APPENDIX 2: EXAMPLES OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE<sup>59</sup>

### *Step 1: Addressing privately:*

Two believers work together at the same firm. They are both subordinates to a demanding boss who is mainly concerned about output. He requires late hours and unreasonable deadlines. These two see other supervisors in other divisions who are more reasonable and well-liked and, just as much, if not more, productive. They are tempted to envy. One of the believers is constantly running the supervisor down to anyone who listens. He speculates about his boss's personal life and gossips about it with other co-workers. The other believer, though tempted to engage in the same behavior, believes the best about her boss and aims to serve him and the company in spite of the difficulty (1 Peter 2:18-19). She takes her co-worker aside and shares her conviction that no one is served by complaining and gossip. She shares that the situation is hard for her too and she is tempted every day to react badly but is committed to work through it and pray for all involved. She asks her coworker to do the same. He thanks her for pointing this out, he apologizes for his behavior, and together they commit to follow Christ's example. He is won over by her gentleness, good example and attitude.

### *Step 2: Appealing to Christian Witnesses.*

A young, married couple is having difficulty communicating. Their family looks great every Sunday at church. They host a church Bible study, and the husband is known for his theological prowess. By all appearances, they are a model church family. Yet within their home, the husband demands submission from his wife and children and often erupts with angry outbursts. The wife endures while the children alternate between compliance and rebellion. Through prayer and Bible study, the wife becomes convinced that her husband is out of balance. He often quotes biblical passages regarding others' roles such as "wives submit to husbands" and "children obey your parents," but he never concentrates on passages applicable to himself, such as "husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church" or "live with your wife in an understanding way." One evening she humbly shares her concerns with her husband, and she receives the same reaction. She is told that it is his job to teach the Bible to the family, and that her bringing the issue up is another example of not being submissive toward his leadership.

Since she is convinced of the negative effect his posture is having on her marriage and her children, she approaches a mature couple in the congregation and asks for their input. They agree that things are out of balance and offer to sit down as couples and talk things through. The husbands know each other from church, and the younger respects the older man as a godly example of a husband and father. He respects the wife as well. In fact, in one of his more uncharitable moments, the younger man has urged his wife to be more like this older sister.

They sit down in the older couple's home for dinner. The older couple shares with him gently but firmly how his anger and tyranny are far from the example of Christ. Further, his wife's diligence in confronting him and asking for help is not a sign of disrespect but of love. He receives the correction and responds by asking for forgiveness from his wife and children. The couple agrees to step aside from leadership in the church for a season until their marriage and family are on a better footing. He agrees to a course of Bible study on inappropriate anger and servant leadership.

### *Step 3: Taking it to the Church.*

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<sup>59</sup> These examples are taken from Bishop Ken Ross's paper titled "Discipleship and Correction." It is recommended that church leaders read and discuss these examples as an exercise in thinking through how church discipline might apply in their context. The source of these particular examples is unknown.

A young man professes faith in Christ in college. He has trouble overcoming sexual temptation and turns to pornography often. He is told by his Christian friends that everyone struggles with sin and, though it is not God's best, he is a "baby" or "carnal" Christian who just has not grown up yet. They assure him that one day he will become more holy and somehow repent. He continues to consume pornography frequently and give in to other sexual temptations.

In time, he meets a woman at church with a similar background, they start to date, and they become sexually intimate. Soon they are regularly engaged in sexual intercourse together, but keep it secret from the church family. Meanwhile, the young man starts to read unorthodox theological materials which justify sexual relations outside of marriage. He comes to believe that a sense of love is the important component, rather than a marriage covenant. In his opinion, if there is a commitment to one person and not promiscuity, then God smiles on such relations. For financial reasons, he and his girlfriend move in together. Soon, through their behavior and conversations about relationships, a friend from church realizes that they are sleeping together and confronts them about the situation. They are very defensive and tell him that it is none of their business.

The friend then asks two other church members who know the couple to meet with them and urge them to be reconciled with God. They meet the same response. The friends then ask the pastor of the church to sit down with them all and discuss the matter. The couple agrees to do so, but in the meeting the young man explains that Jesus is a forgiving Savior and loves sinners no matter what they do. He explains that having sexual relations outside of marriage may not be the best thing to do but no one is perfect. He further explains he plans on marrying his girlfriend anyway and therefore no one should make a fuss. He quotes, "judge not lest ye be judged" and "he who is without sin cast the first stone." The pastor and church friends again entreat them to repent, but they continue to justify their relationship. The pastor, after consulting with other church leaders, informs them they are no longer welcome to take communion at church. They are welcome to come and hear the word of God but as long as they seek to define the faith in an unbiblical manner they are not welcome at the Lord's Supper. The pastor and church members continue to pray for the restoration of the couple and to show them charity.

### APPENDIX 3: AVOID CHURCH DISCIPLINE LAWSUITS

The following is taken from “Avoid Church Discipline Lawsuits,” by the Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company (6400 Brotherhood Way, Fort Wayne, IN 46825).<sup>60</sup>

Traditionally, the courts have not involved themselves in cases of church discipline because of First Amendment privilege. When it comes to the discipline of church members or regular attenders, however, some civil courts have indicated a willingness to intervene in church affairs in the following circumstances:

- A church’s disciplinary actions amount to a deliberate and malicious campaign to ruin someone financially, politically, or psychologically.
- A church publicly divulges private details of an individual’s personal and private affairs—as a part of church discipline procedures - when that person is not clearly and voluntarily affiliated with the church.
- A church fails to consistently follow its established bylaws or disciplinary guidelines in relation to church discipline.

When considering church discipline matters, courts tend to balance the participant’s implied consent to the church’s authority with the participant’s right to withdraw that consent and leave the church. The greater the individual’s voluntary participation in the life of the church, the more likely a court will be to determine the individual consented to the authority of the church. For this reason, churches have the greatest legal protection when their discipline policies apply only to those who are clearly and voluntarily affiliated with the church.

#### *Risk Management Recommendations for Church Discipline*

The following recommendations may reduce the likelihood of a civil court intervening in the affairs of your church:

- Amend bylaws and/or disciplinary guidelines to limit their application, as well as divulging as little private personal information as possible during discipline proceedings. These documents should clearly explain to whom the church’s discipline authority applies. Church discipline should never apply to anyone who is not clearly and voluntarily affiliated with the church.
- Obtain informed consent to disciplinary policies from all members and regular attendees. Ideally, there would be a written statement signed by all persons subject to church discipline affirming that he or she understands and agrees with the policies.
- Teach regularly on church discipline so members and regular attendees remain aware of the biblical basis, purpose, and steps of discipline.

#### *Steps to Follow When Applying Discipline*

- Be consistent.
- Carefully follow your bylaws and/or disciplinary guidelines.

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<sup>60</sup> Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company, “Avoid Church Discipline Lawsuits.” For the article and resources, see [brotherhoodmutual.com/resources/safety-library/risk-management-articles/administrative-staff-and-finance/supervision-and-discipline/avoid-church-discipline-lawsuits/](http://brotherhoodmutual.com/resources/safety-library/risk-management-articles/administrative-staff-and-finance/supervision-and-discipline/avoid-church-discipline-lawsuits/)

- Avoid taking disciplinary action against anyone who is not clearly and voluntarily affiliated with the church.
- Always speak the truth in love.
- Communicate private information only to those who have a right and need to know. Public statements to the congregation should include only the biblical principle that has been violated, the identity of the violator, and the instructions from church leaders as to what sanction is being imposed.
- In discussing unproven allegations with leaders, be careful to distinguish between what is fact and what is merely allegation.
- Base all decisions on clearly explained biblical grounds. Ideally, all final church discipline decisions should be reduced to writing and retained in church records available only to authorized persons.
- Check with your legal counsel while developing your church discipline policy and before providing documentation of your disciplinary policies to an inquiring attorney.



#### APPENDIX 4: CORRECTION AND REMOVING SOMEONE FROM THE COMMUNITY

At what point should a person be removed from the community rather than being gently corrected? In 2 Timothy 2:20-3:9, Paul is wrestling with this very question. In the immediately preceding context in 2 Timothy, Paul writes to Timothy concerning false teachers—those who hold a theology and practice outside of orthodoxy—in the church in Ephesus. Indeed, this idea shows up repeatedly in Paul’s first letter to Timothy and every chapter of this second letter.

Paul gives his protégé an answer in the form of three sets of exhortations—introduced by a metaphor of a great house in verses 20-21. This house metaphor is not uncommon in Paul. This kind of language he uses to talk about the church in 1 Timothy 3—the church as a household. It’s the kind of language he uses to talk about people—vessels in Romans 9. And so, here we have a multi-layered metaphor of vessels in a house—all different kinds of leaders in God’s house—and focusing on the cleansed vessel, the one that in verse 21 is “ready for every good work.” This metaphor continues through 3:17, where we find that the cleansed vessel is the man of God, Timothy, who is “equipped for every good work.” But the metaphor only introduces the conclusion.

We’re still left with the questions: How is Timothy to handle his opponents? What is he to do?

##### 1. *Self-Examination (2 Tim 2:22)*

Paul’s starting point focuses on Timothy, not the opponents. Look at verse 22: “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” The man of God’s response to opposition begins with a long, hard look at himself. He is to flee youthful passions.<sup>61</sup> Timothy is not to engage in such debates, but to pursue righteousness instead. The command is an important corrective. The leader in the church needs to be a person who is not quick to battle with words, but rather, pursues “righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”<sup>62</sup>

##### 2. *Gentle Correction (2 Tim 2:23-26)*

When it comes to those who need to be corrected, Paul’s first words are significant: ‘Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies.’ It is important to note that he’s not saying avoid confrontation. He’s saying that how one gets into confrontation matters. Timothy can’t jump into foolish—that is literally moronic—arguments. He can’t be quarrelsome when he engages the unrepentant. He can’t be overly combative. Rather, he must be kind. *Kind* (ἡπιος) is a unique word in the New Testament, having a Classical background in medicine. He seems to use it as an extension of the metaphors he’s already used—the notion of “healthy doctrine” and the image from the preceding verses about cutting away the gangrene or cancer that is false teachers. In other words, the man of God must be soothing like a balm to everyone. He must patiently endure evil, ready to bite his tongue on the lesser errors—perhaps only for a time—so that he can deal with gospel issues: “Correcting...opponents with gentleness” while “patiently enduring evil.”

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<sup>61</sup> Of course, many see these two words together and immediately assume Paul is talking about sexual purity—which makes sense. Timothy is a young man, and young men are given to certain desires. However, the context makes clear that this is a different youthful passion. Paul is talking about the tendency of, particularly young men, to argue, to go to combat with words, to open their mouths without the benefit of intelligence or experience, name-calling and unfair criticism dressed up like a crusade for theological purity. Wrangling over words has never gone out of fashion.

<sup>62</sup> These ideas—faith, love, peace, pure—were already been introduced in the letter in the first chapter. It’s worth going back to look.

Why must he gently correct? Because God may call them back from this error. Verses 25-26 indicate as much. “God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil...” The goal of rebuke in verse 25—and this is important—the goal is one of *truth*. The context makes clear that this is the most central, gospel core, that which is found in the Scriptures. It is the good deposit from chapter 1. In the pastoral epistles, in places like 1 Timothy 2:4, or as we have seen here in 2 Timothy 2, *truth* is the term for that which rescues. It is the difference between saved and not saved—not the difference between right and wrong on lesser issues. *Truth* is the core message of the gospel, that Jesus came to save sinners through his death and resurrection.

If this is right, the question is one of fidelity to the gospel, and the measurement is whether the opponent *returns to the truth*.

### 3. *Determined Avoidance (3:1-9)*

Yet, some will not repent. Paul envisions a time wherein gentle rebuke doesn’t solve the problem, and other considerations must be made. He begins by describing this time. In verse 1, he introduces “the last days.” He is telling Timothy to understand his situation, understand the world around him. There are several descriptors that follow. And Paul is not even trying to be exhaustive. He’s being representative. The thread that runs through this list is being a lover of self. But this isn’t just a description of the opponents. This a description of the tendencies of the people, the people in the house, the people in the church. The false teachers, the opponents, the theologically wrong, those among them, are described in verses 6-9: “...those who creep into households and capture weak women...always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the *truth*...oppose[ing] the *truth*...corrupted in mind...disqualified regarding the faith.”

The opponents are learning, but never arrive at the *truth*. They are *initially* like those opponents described above, the ones being gently corrected, because there was hope that God might grant them repentance and knowledge leading to the *truth*. But these opponents rejected the *truth*. They refuse correction. They feign learning, becoming more and more persuasive, getting more and more entrenched in their wrong beliefs, becoming more and more successful, tickling the ears of their hearers. They learn, but they repel *truth*. They are presented the gospel, but they reject it. Paul’s simple exhortation regarding such opponents comes back in verse 5. “Avoid them!” Their folly will become plain. The destruction they bring will be evident. The lie will be exposed. It may be later, but God will not let this falsehood stand. Christ Jesus is coming back as a judge at the end of the last days.