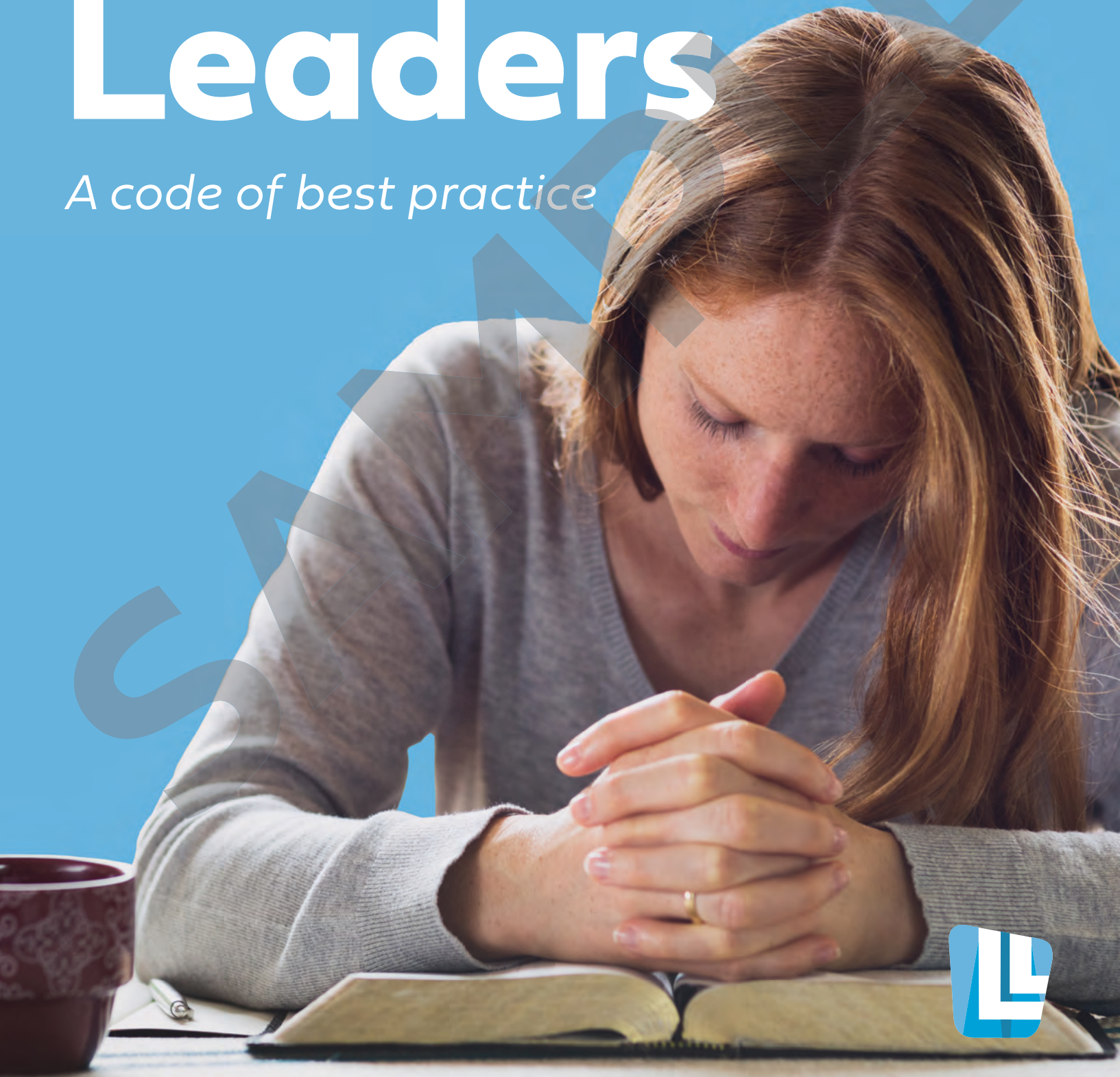


Conduct of Christian Leaders

A code of best practice



Living Leadership is a collaborative network of people captivated by the grace of God and committed to growing leaders who live joyfully in Christ and serve him faithfully, because joyful, faithful leaders make joyful, faithful disciples.

We do this by providing training (Formation), support (Refresh), and Resources.

www.livingleadership.org

Purpose

This Code provides a basis on which leaders in churches and Christian organisations can commit to serve faithfully according to ethical standards and within appropriate boundaries.

Commitment to ethical standards

Christian leaders are called to be servants of others for Christ's sake (2 Corinthians 4:5). For this reason, they must commit to ethical standards that reflect the character of Christ and the nature of the gospel, acting at all times with honesty and integrity and in a manner consistent with Christian love. We suggest that this includes a commitment to embody the ten ethical standards outlined in the following commitment

For what we preach
is not ourselves,
but Jesus Christ as
LORD, and ourselves
as your servants
for Jesus' sake

- 2 CORINTHIANS 4:5

As a Christian leader I commit:

- 01 **To honour every person I serve without favouritism**, regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age or socioeconomic status, by speaking truth in compassion.
- 02 **To listen carefully to persons I serve without condemning or prejudging them**, allowing them the time, freedom and security to express themselves.
- 03 **Never to force, coerce or manipulate another person** into a decision or course of action, even when I disagree with their beliefs or behaviour.
- 04 **Never to misuse or abuse another person's trust** by subjecting them to any form of abuse (physical, sexual, psychological, material or discriminatory), exploiting them in any way (including financially, sexually or emotionally), breaking confidentiality, or treating them as merely a means to an end rather than acting for their wellbeing in Christ.
- 05 **To avoid unhealthy dependency** on me from persons I serve or from me on persons I serve, but rather modelling and encouraging faithful dependence upon God.
- 06 **To ensure safety** for myself and persons I serve as far as possible, including maintaining safeguarding standards and seeking medical or other assistance when necessary.
- 07 **To glorify God**, rather than building a name for myself, by acknowledging him as the only Saviour and Lord and giver of every good gift, and by working hard for him.
- 08 **To acknowledge my limitations**, so that my service flows from dependence on God's grace without unduly impacting negatively my own health and so that people in need receive the help they require from those best able to provide it.
- 09 **To honour my family** by ensuring that the demands of ministry do not compromise their wellbeing and that my responsibilities to those who are most dependent on me are not neglected.
- 10 **To seek to be accountable** to biblical standards of leadership and to other leaders, including by working in a team whenever possible, serving within agreed leadership structures, and submitting to those who have legitimate authority over me within my congregation or denomination.

Establishing boundaries

Boundaries are intentional limits set upon our thoughts and actions as an expression of biblical wisdom in order to protect us and those we serve from real or perceived risk of harm and to preserve the reputation of the gospel and our churches and organisations.

Boundaries reduce the risk of wrong behaviours in ministry but cannot remove every potential for unethical actions. Agreed boundaries should never be transgressed but may not be sufficient in all circumstances. Leaders should always take whatever additional measures are necessary and reasonable to uphold the ten ethical standards.

The ten ethical standards should be worked out through the application of boundaries in five areas: safeguarding; confidentiality; money, sex and power; communication; and personal limitations.

This Code of Conduct establishes minimal principles in each of these areas. Leaders and the congregations or organisations they serve should discuss these principles and create a set of specific principles tailored to their specific contexts and needs.

SAMPLE

Serving wisely within boundaries

The establishment of boundaries is important, but the agreed boundaries must also be implemented in appropriate ways, including at least the following three principles:

Agreed boundaries and ethical standards should be transparent

They should be published in a place and format that is readily accessible and clear to those who serve with the church or organisation and those who are served by it. It is recommended that people working in the name of the church or organisation routinely inform those they serve about the boundaries that may affect them.

Leaders benefit from godly accountability partners

Every leader should have one or more accountability partners to whom he or she can be open and honest and who has been granted permission to ask about adherence to the ethical principles and agreed boundaries. For married leaders, this should include their spouse. It is also beneficial to be accountable to a supervisor or co-worker within the church or organisation and to a trusted person outside the church or organisation.

Suspected transgressions of boundaries must be handled appropriately

There should be a clear mechanism for people to report concerns if they think a leader has transgressed boundaries or acted in other ways that are inconsistent with the stated ethical standards. This should be communicated with the boundaries to people who serve in and are served by the church or organisation.

Churches and organisations should always take concerns raised about the behaviour of leaders seriously and respond in line with legal and biblical principles (e.g., 1 Timothy 5:19-20). Any criminal, or potentially illegal, behaviour should be reported to the proper authorities. All concerns should be handled with honesty and integrity, caring well for both the person raising the concern and the leader and seeking a resolution consistent with the gospel.

If a leader realises that he or she has transgressed an agreed boundary or acted inconsistently with the ten ethical standards, he or she should both seek forgiveness from God and confess the issue to those in authority to whom he or she is accountable, submitting to proper disciplinary procedures. If the transgression is also a crime, this will include declaring it to the proper authorities. Whenever possible, if appropriate within safeguarding principles, the leader should apologise to and seek restoration with persons who have been knowingly wronged.

The Five Boundary Areas

Area 1: Safeguarding boundaries

Boundaries to protect and honour children and vulnerable adults.

- 1.1 I will always work within the law and the Safeguarding Policy of my church or organisation.
- 1.2 When working with under 18s or adults at risk I will pay due attention to their needs and will act with gentleness, purity and patience, seeking to partner with their guardians or carers, with whom I will seek to maintain transparent and clear communication.
- 1.3 I will report any safeguarding concerns to the appropriate authorities and those responsible for safeguarding within my church or organisation.

Area 2: Confidentiality boundaries

Boundaries to protect the privacy of persons and the integrity of the trusting relationships that are key to interpersonal ministry.

- 2.1 I will not disclose information shared with me to anyone else without the person's prior knowledge and consent, except in circumstances agreed with my church or organisation.
- 2.2 When confidentiality cannot be maintained, I will encourage the person to disclose information to the appropriate authorities or agencies or will seek permission from the person to disclose it, but if the person does not agree I will disclose information on a 'need to know' basis without the person's consent.
- 2.3 If I feel that advice from a trusted colleague or supervisor would be beneficial, I will always seek it, but I will anonymise persons and generalise details to protect confidentiality unless the person gives me permission to share freely.
- 2.4 If I am married, I will, with the agreement of my church or organisation, establish a clear principle with my spouse about what information I will share with him/her. This standard practice will be known to those I serve but, even if it is my normal practice to share with my spouse, I will not do so if a person does not consent for me to do so.
- 2.5 Written or electronic records I keep will be accurate, factual, relevant, not excessive and, where possible, free from identifying information. I will keep them only for the specific purpose and time needed and will store them in a locked drawer or cupboard, or password protected folder and in line with the Data Protection Policy of my church or organisation.

Area 3: Boundaries around money, sex and power

Boundaries to reduce risk of temptation, wrongdoing or the appearance of wrongdoing in three areas in which transgression is particularly damaging.

- 3.1 I recognise that I could easily abuse or manipulate others due to the power imbalance between me and persons I serve, even if they are not obviously vulnerable and I have no intention to do so. I will seek to be aware of this risk and take wise measures to reduce it.
- 3.2 I will seek to become and remain aware of the 'soft' power I may exercise due to my position and seek to make this transparent to others so far as possible. I will seek feedback on and review of my leadership style and practices and its impact on others.
- 3.3 I will seek to practice accountability to trusted and godly others in my character, relationship with the Lord, motivations and priorities. I will aim to exceed the expectations of policies and will seek external accountability to wise and godly people wherever possible in my character, motivations and priorities.
- 3.4 I will make it a priority in my ministry to develop others to their full potential and to identify, acknowledge and develop others whose character and gifts suit them to spiritual leadership, including those whose gifting in any area exceeds my own. I will work to avoid favouritism or the development of an inner circle of people who affirm my opinions and will welcome the contributions of those who disagree, seeking to reach agreement under Christ.
- 3.5 I will seek to make decisions by consensus with others in my congregation or organisation who share responsibility for spiritual leadership, regarding them as partners with me for the sake of the gospel. I will never seek to circumvent the established decision-making structures in my setting.
- 3.6 I will not engage in sexualised interaction (physical, verbal or non-verbal) of any degree with persons under my leadership (other than my spouse if I am married).
- 3.7 If sexual interactions develop in a ministry relationship, or if I become aware of romantic feelings for a person, I will discuss this with an accountability partner and will consider passing ongoing ministry with the person concerned to another leader in an appropriately sensitive manner.
- 3.8 I will seek to exercise wisdom and will always maintain accountability in the location, duration and frequency of one-to-one meetings with those I lead and serve, especially those who may be at risk, and will keep them focused on the purpose for which they have been arranged. I will exercise particular caution around meetings with people towards whom I may experience sexual attraction.
- 3.9 I will handle money received as reimbursement or a gift for interpersonal ministry according to any rules established by my church or organisation. I will never ask for money or gifts unless authorised to do so by my church or organisation and will use any money received for the purpose for which it has been given.

Area 4: Communication boundaries

Boundaries to ensure communication by any means (e.g., phone, email, messaging, writing) is consistent with the gospel.

- 4.1 I will aim to make all my communication in interpersonal ministry transparent, factual, courteous and focused on ministry.
- 4.2 I will seek always to communicate transparently and honestly, commending the truth as I

understand it to people's consciences in the sight of God so that their response of obedience or disobedience will be to him rather than to me.

- 4.3 I will not intentionally access material that is pornographic or promotes violence or other immoral behaviours. I will consider using internet safety settings at a level that blocks obscene images and content on all devices I own. I will also consider installing accountability software.
- 4.4 I will never trivialise communication tending towards sexualisation but will discuss anything suspicious (e.g., flattery, sexualised or flirtatious language or provocative images) immediately with my spouse, supervisor or accountability partner, before it escalates. I will consider blocking further communication from persons from whom such communication is received.

Area 5: Boundaries recognising my limitations

Boundaries to pay attention to my own well-being and acknowledge the limits of my capacity and skills as I care for and serve others.

- 5.1 I will pay attention to my health in every respect (physical, emotional, relational and spiritual) by seeking to have adequate rest, sleep and exercise, to maintain a healthy diet and weight, to invest in trusting and supportive family relationships, and by abiding richly in Christ.
- 5.2 I will acknowledge my limits and aim to work within my abilities and competencies, being ready to delegate or refer to others when I reach my limits or when someone else is better able to do the task. I will endeavour to acknowledge my limitations to my church or organisation.
- 5.3 I will seek to work in an inter-dependent team with others whenever appropriate and possible. I will seek to develop true leadership teams in which there is collective input into, responsibility for and ownership of decisions under Christ's authority.
- 5.4 I will continue learning through reading, participation in courses and conferences whenever possible, and habitual prayerful reflection on experiences.
- 5.5 I will work within accountability to those who are over me in the Lord or who serve alongside me. I will also seek to be accountable to my spouse or another accountability partner in my personal life and discipleship.
- 5.6 I will say no, with the help of wise advisers, to requests for help or ministry if I have realistic concerns about my safety or competency or I am aware that my ability to function is impaired for any reason.
- 5.7 If a complaint is made against me, I will subject myself to the disciplinary processes of those with proper authority over me and will commit to speak the whole truth about my actions and words and those of others. If there is no body or person with authority over me and the complaint cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainants by my actions alone, I will seek help from external persons who are trusted both by me and by those who make the complaint. I will give these persons free rein to investigate the facts and will accept their decisions about actions I should take unless it is clear to me that those decisions are unbiblical or dishonouring to the Lord. I will seek to pursue repentance and righteousness in my response to any findings and to reject the temptation to deny the truth because of a desire for self-preservation, making the reputation of the gospel a priority over my own reputation.