



Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

Procedures for Priesthood Release for Cause

Introduction

The 2019 World Conference approved WCR 1316—Priesthood Release for Cause. This resolution rescinded WCR 1192—Ministerial Silence and Appeal. WCR 1316 provides improved language and better alignment with the *Ministry and Priesthood* initiative.

Supervising administrative officers, such as pastors, mission center presidents, or apostles, have important responsibility in the support, development, and guidance for priesthood. To help those who serve in this administrative responsibility, the First Presidency is providing updated procedures when addressing actions that result in the release for cause of priesthood authority.

This procedural document expresses the core principles that inform the essence of priesthood ministry. We also have described mutual understandings to provide clarity on expectations for supervising administrative officers and priesthood.

We encourage supervising administrative officers to be familiar with these procedures. Even more, we hope you will use the principles and mutual understandings to form a deeper awareness of the essential ministry priesthood bring into the life of the church and its mission.

Principles

- a. All disciples “are called according to the gifts of God unto them” (Doctrine and Covenants 119:8b). Some are called to priesthood ministry as a focus of their call as disciples.
- b. The priesthood should “be made up of those who have an abiding faith and desire to serve [God] with all their hearts, in humility and with great devotion” (Doctrine and Covenants 156:8a).
- c. “Priesthood is a sacred covenant involving the highest form of stewardship of body, mind, spirit, and relationships. The priesthood shall be composed of people of humility and integrity who are willing to extend themselves in service for others and for the well-being of the faith community” (Doctrine and Covenants 163:6a).

- d. Priesthood members are expected “to continually magnify their callings through spiritual growth, study, exemplary generosity, ethical choices, and fully accountable ministry” (Doctrine and Covenants 163:6c).
- e. God “ultimately is concerned about behaviors and relationships that uphold the worth and giftedness of all people and that protect the most vulnerable. Such relationships are to be rooted in...Christ-like love, mutual respect, responsibility, justice, covenant, and faithfulness” (Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a).
- f. Church policies “provide a clear way for disciples to respond to [priesthood] calling. They also define the difference between a sense of call as potential and the need to align one’s life with principles of moral behavior and relationships that promote the well-being of the church community” (Doctrine and Covenants 165:4b).
- g. All presiding administrative church officers should uphold the “worth and giftedness” of all persons impacted by administrative actions and “protect the most vulnerable” (Doctrine and Covenants 164:6).

Mutual Understandings

- a. Priesthood members agree to serve according to the church’s expectations for Christian and ministerial conduct and to uphold the current version of “Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry” at www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/priesthood/Covenant-Principles-English.pdf.
- b. Priesthood members provide affirmative ministry consistent with current versions of the church’s official documents such as the current version of *Sharing in Community of Christ*. When there is personal disagreement with a position, priesthood members are guided by *Faithful Disagreement: Definition and Principles* at www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/FAITHFUL-DISAGREEMENT-PRINCIPLES.pdf.
- c. A priesthood member can be released from priesthood by presiding administrative church officers for established causes outlined below.
- d. Releasing a priesthood member for cause is an administrative action that does not affect church membership.
- e. Administrative policies and procedures should assure that a priesthood member subject to release:
 - i. Is informed of the allegations in writing. Where possible, personal contact by the presiding administrative church officer is encouraged.
 - ii. Has reasonable time to consider the allegations.
 - iii. Has opportunity to resolve the relevant issues, if possible and appropriate, before administrative action is taken.

- iv. Has opportunity to appeal the decision to release for cause to the next-higher presiding administrative church officer.
- f. All priesthood status changes will be reported to the World Church secretary through established procedures.

Causes for Release

- a. Conviction of a serious crime as defined by applicable laws.
- b. Deliberate disregard of church law as expressed through church bylaws, relevant World Conference Resolutions, First Presidency official rulings, and current World Church policies and established practices.
- c. Deliberate disregard of the properly exercised authority, action, or direction of a presiding administrative church officer.
- d. False, misleading, or malicious statements meant to harm the church. This includes print, broadcast, and social media (electronic) communications.
- e. Deliberate failure to preserve confidential information given with the expectation of ministerial confidentiality, with the understanding that reporting mandated by law or when physical harm of self or others is likely are exceptions.
- f. Such other disregard for the principles of ministerial conduct as may result in the loss of power and standing to minister effectively.

An additional cause is priesthood inactive status for at least three years.

Administrative Procedures

- 1. When possible, pastoral ministry to clarify and resolve issues should be offered before taking administrative action. A supervising administrative officer may involve other priesthood members in efforts to resolve situations. However, inability to improve an issue should not cause an unwise delay in acting or invalidate the action taken.
- 2. If a priesthood member is convicted of a serious crime as legally defined where the crime occurred, then release for cause is required immediately. If a priesthood member is charged with a serious crime, but a legal verdict regarding innocence or guilt has not occurred, the appropriate action is priesthood suspension until the matter is decided.

When the supervising administrative officer decides that release for cause should occur, the following procedures apply:

- 3. The supervising administrative officer sends written notice of release for cause to the priesthood member with a copy to the next-level supervising

administrative officer. Personal contact by the supervising administrative officer also is encouraged, when possible.

4. The written notice should include an explanation of:
 - a. The reason(s) for release for cause and general supporting evidence.
 - b. The opportunity to appeal the decision to the next-level supervising administrative officer within sixty (60) days from the effective date of the action.
 - c. How to initiate an appeal and present evidence relevant to the appeal.
5. When the priesthood member receives notification from the supervising administrative officer, either in person or through written communication, the priesthood member must stop functioning in priesthood ministry, regardless of intent to appeal.

Appeal Process

1. A person may appeal the action by sending written notice to the next-level supervising administrative officer, who will serve as the appellate officer. The written notice should indicate whether the released priesthood member requests a personal hearing with the appellate officer. The written appeal may be sent through the mail (post) or email. A receipt indicating the letter or message was received should be requested, when possible.
2. The appellate officer will arrange to hear the appeal within ninety (90) days. If a personal hearing is requested, the appeal may be heard in person or through video conference. The released priesthood member may provide evidence to support the appeal. The released priesthood member may be represented in the appeal process by another church member invited to participate by the released priesthood member.
3. When requested by the released priesthood member, the appeal may be heard by the appellate officer and a panel of two high priests (including bishops) selected by the appellate officer. If high priests are not available, elders may be selected.
4. After hearing the appeal, the appellate officer or panel will decide the matter within sixty (60) days. The appellate officer or panel will decide if the release is correct procedurally and materially, based on available evidence. If a panel is involved, a majority of panel members must agree on the decision.
5. The appellate officer will provide written notification to the released priesthood member and the supervising administrative officer who enacted the release. The written notification will indicate if the appeal is upheld and the reasons why or why not.

6. There is no further right of appeal unless the released priesthood member believes the appeal process was fundamentally unjust or administratively improper. Fundamentally unjust means the appeal process did not attempt to objectively consider information and input from the priesthood member and supervising administrative officer. Administratively improper refers to the procedural correctness outlined in this document. If the released priesthood member believes the appeal process was fundamentally unjust or that administrative procedures were not followed correctly, the matter may be appealed in writing to the next-level supervising administrative officer for a final decision within sixty (60) days. The next-level supervising administrative officer will review the case and determine if the further appeal is in order. If the appeal is in order, an appellate review will be scheduled. If the next-level supervising administrative officer assesses that the first appeal was conducted in a just manner and upheld the correct administrative procedures, the released priesthood member will be notified that a further appeal is not in order.
7. If the First Presidency releases a priesthood member, the appellate body is the Standing High Council.
8. The decision of a supervising administrative officer, appellate officer, or appellate body is final unless significant evidence is discovered that could change the decision. Additional evidence can be submitted by the released priesthood member, supervising administrative officer, or appellate officer. The last officer or appellate body to consider the matter determines if the additional evidence is significant enough to warrant reconsideration. Consultation with the next-level supervising administrative officer is in order with the understanding the next-level supervising administrative officer cannot make recommendations or suggest a decision for the appellate officer or body. The supervising administrative officer can help the appellate officer or body only in raising questions that will help the appellate officer or body to determine if the additional evidence is substantial. If a priesthood member has been released without cause and later a supervising administrative officer obtains information that establishes cause for release, the supervising administrative officer must follow the procedures for release for cause.
9. **All changes in priesthood status should be recorded with the World Church through established procedures when they occur. All relevant information about the status change should be sent to the World Church secretary for inclusion in World Church confidential files for future reference.**

Process for Coming to a Decision to Release for Cause

When receiving a report of a priesthood member's violation of ministerial conduct, the following process should be considered:

1. The supervising administrative officer should attempt to receive information in writing of the alleged or observable behavior.
2. Effort should be made to interview others who observed the reported behavior.
3. The supervising administrative officer should schedule a meeting with the priesthood member to discuss the claims that have been reported.
4. The supervising administrative officer should consider the following questions as part of the decision-making process:
 - a. Has pastoral guidance been provided to the priesthood member in the past?
 - b. Was the priesthood member given sufficient warning and opportunity to correct behavior?
 - c. Has the priesthood member been convicted of a serious crime defined by local laws?
 - d. Has the action of the priesthood member demonstrated complete disregard for the principles of ministerial conduct (e.g.: adultery, abuse of alcohol or drugs, etc.)?
 - e. Is the offense or disruptive behavior a first-time occurrence or a pattern?
 - f. Has the priesthood member lost the power to minister effectively with those in the congregation or mission center?
5. Consulting with the pastor's counselors or other members of a pastoral team is appropriate before deciding. Those consulted should be reminded of the requirement for confidentiality.

Glossary

Appeal: A formal request to the next-level supervising administrative officer to have a decision reversed.

Appellate Officer: The supervising administrative officer who receives, hears, and decides an appeal.

Cause: Official reason(s) for removing priesthood authority as defined by WCR 1316.

Next-level Supervising Administrative Officer: The supervisor of the officer who made the original decision.

Panel: The supervising administrative officer and two high priests (including bishops) who hear and decide an appeal. If high priests are not available, elders may be used.

Materially Correct: The release was based on the proper cause(s) as defined by WCR 1316 with supporting evidence.

Personal Hearing: A meeting to hear an appeal in person (face-to-face) or through video conference.

Priesthood Status: The category of the priesthood member, such as active, inactive, suspension, leave, release without cause, release for cause, etc. See “Priesthood Status Categories” at www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Priesthood-Status-Categories-11052019.pdf.

Procedurally Correct: A release for cause occurred according to the administrative procedures described in this document.

Release for Cause: A supervising administrative officer removes priesthood authority from a member for a stated reason (cause).

Status Change: A supervising administrative officer moves a priesthood member into a different priesthood-status category. All priesthood-status changes should be recorded in World Church Membership Records through established procedures. Any relevant documentation should be forwarded to the World Church secretary to be placed in World Church confidential files for future reference.

Supervising Administrative Officer: The person who supervises priesthood in a church jurisdiction such as pastor, mission center president, apostle, or official designees.

Written Notice: A letter or email that announces and documents an official action or response.