



Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

Priesthood Status Categories

Effective September 1, 2019

One of the church's roles is to support and equip priesthood members for meaningful and effective ministry. This support includes priesthood status categories that encourage faithfulness and respond to changing personal circumstances. **The categories:**

1. Active
2. Leave
3. Emeritus
4. Suspension
5. Inactive
6. Release

In this document, "supervising administrative officer" refers to pastor, mission center president or designee, apostle or designee, or other administrative officers.

Report all changes in priesthood status categories to the World Church secretary.

Active

Active priesthood members engage in ministry and embody the **Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry**. The principles are based on what contributes to faithful priesthood ministry. Consistent application of these principles results in fulfilling, effective, and joyous priesthood ministry throughout life.

Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry

Priesthood faithfulness begins with faithful discipleship. Faithful discipleship emerges from ongoing faith and spiritual formation. The constant call is to follow the Living Christ and to abide in increasing measure in God's love and vision for creation. Being comes before doing.

The following expectations will help me serve as a faithful priesthood member. In response to God's sacred call and priesthood authority granted by Community of Christ, I covenant to:

- Engage in ongoing faith and spiritual practices to deepen my relationship with God and others through study and spiritual formation.
- Affirm and promote Christ's mission of invitation, compassionate ministries, and justice and peacemaking; help prepare others for Christ's mission; and partner with other priesthood in leading congregations in Christ's mission.

- Provide ministry consistent with the church's identity, mission, message, and beliefs as expressed in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*, 4th ed. (www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Sharing-in-Community-of-Christ-4thEd-WEB.pdf) and other current official documents.
- Model an ethical, moral, and holistic lifestyle.
- Model generosity as a regular contributor to mission tithes (local, mission center, and worldwide ministries) according to my true capacity.
- Protect the safety and well-being of children and youth, including, where applicable, being a Registered Children and Youth Worker.
- Participate in congregational life or similar church expressions when congregational life is not available.
- Participate annually in educational or spiritual-formation experiences offered by my congregation, mission center, apostolic mission field, or World Church.
- Develop and implement a plan for ministry that uses my gifts to advance Christ's mission.

Leave

The *leave* category supports wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships. It is for priesthood members who need rest, renewal, healing, or a concentrated time of education and development. *Leave* is appropriate when a priesthood member needs a break from priesthood ministry and responsibilities with *the clear intent of returning to active ministry*.

Leave also is appropriate when a priesthood member has significant personal burdens or stresses that are best managed by stepping away from priesthood ministry for a time *with the clear intent of returning to active ministry*.

Leave is appropriate, but not mandatory, during dissolution of marriage unless the divorce petition alleges illegal conduct or unchristian behavior that could cause *release* from priesthood if proven true. If such conduct is alleged, see the *suspension* category.

Leave is requested by a priesthood member and approved by the supervising administrative officer for up to one year.

A priesthood member on *leave* does not participate in public or sacramental ministry without prior approval by the supervising administrative officer. A priesthood member on *leave* retains her or his priesthood certificate.

Emeritus

The *emeritus* category recognizes and honors long and faithful service curtailed by health or age-related conditions. This category is requested in writing by the priesthood member and approved by the supervising administrative officer. However, the supervising administrative officer may suggest it as a pastoral consideration.

A priesthood member *emeritus* does not participate regularly in public or sacramental ministry. A priesthood member *emeritus* occasionally may participate in public or sacramental ministry with prior approval of the supervising minister.

The proper title for a priesthood member in this category is the name of the priesthood office plus *emeritus*. For example: Elder Emeritus or Priest Emeritus.

A priesthood member *emeritus* retains his or her priesthood certificate.

Suspension

Suspension removes from active ministry priesthood members who are facing legal charges or accusations of unchristian conduct that may adversely affect ministry or make it unacceptable to a congregation or the World Church.

Suspension is applied by the supervising administrative officer and lasts up to one year. During *suspension*, a priesthood member does not participate in priesthood ministry. If charges or accusations have not been resolved after one year, *suspension* may be extended in six-month increments.

Suspension provides time to address charges or allegations that may or may not be valid. No assumptions are made about guilt or innocence until proceedings officially conclude.

This category helps protect the suspended priesthood member, congregation, mission center, and World Church from certain risks. As an example, a serious allegation leading to conviction could put the church at risk if a person were allowed to remain in active priesthood ministry during an investigation or trial.

A priesthood member in the suspension category retains his or her priesthood certificate.

If a legal proceeding results in a conviction of a serious crime defined by applicable laws, or if other behaviors such as misuse or abuse of priesthood privileges or disregard for the principles of ministerial conduct result in the loss of capacity to minister effectively, the priesthood member should be *released for cause*. Refer to WCR 1316 and Procedures for Priesthood Release for Cause.

A decision to place a priesthood member in the *suspension* category may be appealed according to established procedures.

Inactive

If a priesthood member is not active, the initial and ongoing response should be pastoral ministry to encourage participation. A supervising administrative officer should determine, if possible, the reason for inactivity and provide pastoral ministry. Perhaps a category like *leave* or *emeritus* is more appropriate.

However, some situations that cause extended priesthood inactivity are not easily resolved or result from a loss of sense of priesthood calling. In these instances, it is proper to assign the priesthood member to the *inactive* category.

A priesthood member may request, in writing, to be placed in the *inactive* category. Also, a supervising administrative officer may assign a priesthood member to this category. A priesthood member may remain in the *inactive* category up to three years. After three years in the *inactive* category, the supervising administrative officer acts to *release* the priesthood member for inactivity.

A priesthood member in the *inactive* category does not participate in public and sacramental ministry without the prior approval of the supervising administrative officer.

The *inactive* category is for:

7. A priesthood member who does not want to continue in active priesthood ministry and has no desire to return to active priesthood ministry in the foreseeable future. This priesthood member also can request *release without cause*.

8. A priesthood member who is not participating in the life of Community of Christ and who has no plans to do so in the foreseeable future.
9. A priesthood member who becomes “unknown” to the church because of a lack of response to communications and opportunities to express continuing commitment.

An *inactive* priesthood member retains her or his priesthood certificate.

A priesthood member may be returned to *active* status by personal request and action by the presiding officer.

Release

Release removes priesthood authority, responsibilities, rights, and expectations. This category does not change membership status. Released priesthood members are church *members in good standing* unless they are excommunicated or expelled through other proceedings.

A priesthood member is *released* by action of the supervising administrative officer according to established procedures. There are three kinds of *release*:

1. **Release without Cause:** Changing life circumstances or personal conscience may lead a priesthood member to conclude the need to be released from priesthood. *Release without cause* happens by request of the priesthood member and action by the presiding officer. Presiding officers may suggest the advisability of *release* as part of a decision-making process. However, someone should not be *released without cause* if *release for cause* is required.
2. **Release for Cause:** A presiding officer may remove a priesthood member’s authority to function as an ordained minister for cause. Causes for **release, as specified in WCR 1316**, include but are not limited to the following:
 - 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.
3. **Release for Inactivity**

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

A person released without cause, released for cause, or released for inactivity from priesthood does not retain a priesthood certificate.

Release for cause or for inactivity may be appealed according to established procedures.

Return to a Priesthood Office Previously Held

At times and for specific reasons active priesthood members may request to set aside their current office and be reinstated to a priesthood office previously held. This is achieved by personal request and action by the supervising administrative officer. Reinstatement to a priesthood office previously held does not require re-ordination. A new priesthood certificate will be provided when the action is reported.

Reinstatement of a Priesthood Office Set Aside

A priesthood member may be reinstated to a priesthood office that was set aside for the purpose of returning to a previously held priesthood office. This is achieved through personal request and approvals of supervising administrative officers in the administrative line according to established procedures.

Reinstatement does not require re-ordination. A new priesthood certificate will be issued when an approved action is reported to the World Church secretary.

Priesthood Office Support

Aaronic Priesthood

The Presiding Bishopric is the presidency of the Aaronic Order and provides education and support for deacons, teachers, and priests.

Melchisedec Priesthood

The First Presidency has overall responsibility for the Melchisedec Order. Education and support for the following priesthood offices are delegated to the following leadership groups and presiding officers:

- Elders—The Council of Twelve Apostles through supervising administrative officers
- Seventies—The Council of Presidents of Seventy in association with the Council of Twelve Apostles
- High Priests—The Council of Twelve Apostles in association with the President of the High Priests Quorum
- Bishops—The Presiding Bishopric in association with the Council of Twelve Apostles
- Evangelists—The Council of Twelve Apostles and the Presiding Evangelist
- Apostles—Director of Field Ministries and the president of the Council of Twelve Apostles