

Priesthood Status Categories

Date for Implementing – July 1, 2017

The church desires to support and equip priesthood members for meaningful and effective ministry. This support includes priesthood status categories that encourage faithfulness and are responsive to changing personal circumstances. The categories are:

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

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

All priesthood status category changes should be reported to the World Church Secretary.

Active

Active priesthood members are committed to 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*, 3rd ed. (<http://www.cofchrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Sharing-in-Community-of-Christ-3rd-edition.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 responsibilities for a time 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 officer for up to one year.

A priesthood member on *leave* does not participate in public or sacramental ministry without approval by the supervising 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 officer. However, the supervising 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 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 priesthood members from active ministry who are facing legal charges or accusations of unchristian conduct that may adversely affect one's ministry or make it unacceptable to a congregation or the World Church.

Suspension is applied by the supervising 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 also helps protect the congregation, mission center, and World Church from certain risks. A serious allegation leading to conviction could put the church at risk if a person is 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 trial, legal proceeding, or investigation results in loss of capacity to minister by reason of proven moral turpitude, conviction of a felony, misuse or abuse of priesthood privileges, or other disregard for standards of Christian conduct, the priesthood member should be *released* involuntarily.

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. A supervising 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 officer may assign a priesthood member to this category. A priesthood member remains in the *inactive* category for up to three years. After three years in the *inactive* category, action is taken by the supervising officer to involuntarily *release* him or her.

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

The *inactive* category is for:

1. 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*.
2. 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.
3. A priesthood member who becomes “unknown” to the church because of 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 from a priesthood member. 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 presiding officer according to established procedures.

There are three kinds of *release*. The first two are:

1. **Voluntary:** Changing life circumstances or personal conscience may lead a priesthood member to conclude he or she should be released from priesthood. Voluntary *release* 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 voluntarily released if involuntary release is required.

2. Involuntary: A presiding officer may remove a priesthood member's authority to function as an ordained minister for cause. Causes for ***involuntary release***, as specified in WCR 1192, include but are not limited to the following:

- Conviction of a felony or other serious crime
- Conduct constituting moral turpitude
- Willful disregard of church law, administration, or the properly exercised authority of a supervising administrative officer
- Willful failure to preserve or maintain a shared confidence
- Misuse or abuse of priesthood privileges
- Such other disregard for the standards of Christian conduct as may result in loss of power to minister effectively

A person voluntarily or involuntarily released from priesthood does not retain his or her priesthood certificate.

Involuntary *release* may be appealed according to established procedures.

The third type of *release* is:

3. To a Priesthood Office Previously Held: An active priesthood member may be *released* from his or her current office and reinstated to any priesthood office previously held. This is achieved by personal request and action by the supervising 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

A member may be reinstated to a priesthood office from which she or he was voluntarily or involuntarily released. This is achieved through personal request and approvals of supervising 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 officers
- Seventy—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—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 Council of Twelve Apostles