

## **Disciplinary Guidelines**

(The use of the masculine pronoun in this document or the use of “brother” or “brethren” is meant to imply both genders.)

### **Discipline – Its Definition, Subjects and Aims**

- A. Discipline is the exercise of the authority which the Lord Jesus has given to His church to benefit those who are in sin, to promote the church’s purity, and to vindicate Christ’s honor.

The term has two senses:

1. The one referring to the whole government, inspection, training, guardianship and control which the church maintains over its members, its officers and its boards;
  2. The other a restricted and technical sense, signifying judicial process.
- B. All members of Christ’s Church are subject to its discipline and entitled to the benefits of discipline. Specifically, members of New Life Community Church are subject to its discipline and entitled to its benefits. This is affirmed by each person who becomes a member of New Life Community Church when they respond to the question: “Are you willing to submit to the authority of the spiritual leadership of this congregation as those who uphold its Constitution, who care for our spiritual well-being, and who must give an account to the Lord on the last day” (NLCC Constitution, Article VI, Section B). Furthermore members promise in the Covenant of Discipleship “to exhibit a Christ-like care and watchfulness over each other by faithfully encouraging, exhorting, and admonishing one another... according to the steps in Matthew 18:14-17” (NLCC Constitution, Article VI, Section C).
- C. The exercise of discipline is highly important and necessary. In its proper usage discipline maintains:
1. The glory and honor of God whose name is claimed by His children (Romans 2:24; 1 Corinthians 6:20; Ephesians 5:25-26),
  2. The purity of His Church (1 Corinthians 5:6-13; 1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 2:17),
  3. The keeping and reclaiming of disobedient sinners (1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 2:6-8; 1 Timothy 1:20). Discipline is for the purpose of godliness (1 Timothy 4:7); therefore, it demands a self-examination under Scripture.

Its aims, so far as it involves judicial action, are the rebuke of offenses, the removal of scandal, the vindication of the honor of Christ, the promotion of the purity and general edification of the church, and the spiritual good of offenders themselves.

- D. Christ has given His church power and authority for discipline (Matthew 16:19; 18:17-20; John 20:21-23; 1 Corinthians 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 2:6-8; Titus 3:10). However, the power which Christ has given the church is for building up, and not for destruction. It is

to be exercised as under an administration of mercy and not of wrath (2 Thessalonians 5:14-15). As in the preaching of the Word the wicked are doctrinally separated from the good, so by discipline the church authoritatively separates between the holy and the profane. In this it acts the part of a tender mother, correcting her children for their good, that every one of them may be presented faultless in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Thessalonians 3:13).

- E. Scriptural law is the basis of all discipline because it is the revelation of God's Holy will. Proper disciplinary principles are set forth in the Scriptures and must be followed. They are:
1. Instruction in the Word (2 Timothy 2:25-26);
  2. Each individual Christian's responsibility to admonish one another (Matthew 18:15, Romans 15:14; Galatians 6:1);
  3. If the admonition is rejected, then the calling of one or more witnesses (Matthew 18:16);
  4. If rejection persists, then the Church must act through her court (Matthew 18:17) unto admonition, suspension, excommunication and removal (See *Church Censures* for further explanation).

Steps (1) through (4) must be followed in proper order for the exercise of discipline.

## **Offenses**

- A. An offense, the proper object of judicial process, is anything in the doctrines or practice of a church member professing faith in Christ, which is contrary to the Word of God. Nothing, therefore, ought to be considered by any court as an offense, or admitted as a matter of accusation, which cannot be proved to be such from Scripture.
- B. Offenses are either personal or general, private or public; but all of them being sins against God, are therefore grounds of discipline.
- C. Personal offenses are violations of the divine law, considered in the special relation of wrongs or injuries to particular individuals. General offenses are heresies or immoralities having no such relation, or considered apart from it.
- D. Private offenses are those that are known only to a few persons. Public offenses are those that are notorious.

## **Church Censures Defined and Described**

- A. The censures, which may be inflicted by church courts, are admonition, definite suspension from office, indefinite suspension from office, removal from office, suspension from the Sacraments, and excommunication. The disciplines of admonition or

definite suspension from office are administered to an accused who, after they are found guilty of offense, satisfy the court as to their repentance and make appropriate restitution. The others are for an accused person who, upon being found guilty, remains unrepentant.

- B. Admonition is the formal reproof of an offender by a church court, warning him of his guilt and danger, and exhorting him to be more circumspect and watchful in the future (1 Thessalonians 5:12).
- C. Suspension from office is the temporary exclusion of a church officer from his (her) office to include all responsibilities and privileges, until such time as they are permanently removed or reinstated. This may be definite (a set time) or indefinite as to its duration. With respect to church officers, suspension from Sacraments must always be accompanied by suspension from office. But suspension from office is not always necessarily accompanied with suspension from Sacraments.
- D. Definite suspension (a set amount of time) from office is administered when the credit of religion, the honor of Christ, and the good of the delinquent demand it, even though the delinquent has given satisfaction to the court of their repentance. When considering the suspension of an elder, the elder being considered is entitled to vote against his own suspension (see SECTION 301, B, 8).
- E. Indefinite suspension from office is administered to the unrepentant offender until he exhibits signs of repentance, or until by his conduct, the necessity of excommunication is required. For an elder to be indefinitely suspended by the Board of Elders, a 2/3 vote of the Board of Elders is required. When considering the suspension of an elder, the elder being considered is entitled to vote against his own suspension (see SECTION 301, B, 8).
- F. Removal from office is the permanent expulsion of an officer from his church position. In order for the person to return to office, they would need to go through the same procedure as someone who had never held that office. Removal from office may be accompanied with the infliction of other censure. Removal of elders can be done by 2/3 vote of the Members present at a Business Meeting. The Board of Elders cannot remove an elder. He can only be suspended either definitely or indefinitely (see NLCC Bylaws, Section 201, A).
- G. Suspension from the Sacraments is the temporary exclusion from those ordinances, and is indefinite as to its duration. There is no definite suspension from the Sacraments.
- H. Excommunication is the excision of an offender from the communion of the church. This censure is to be inflicted only on account of gross sin (for example, those found in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15) or heresy (for example, Galatians 1:9; 1 Timothy 1:20) and when the offender shows himself uncooperative and unyielding.

The design of this censure is to operate on the offender as a means of reclaiming him (1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20), to deliver the church from the scandal of his offense (1

Corinthians 5:1-2), and to inspire all with fear by the example of his discipline (1 Corinthians 5:6-7).

Excommunication means that the offender is expelled from the fellowship of the church (1 Corinthians 5:13). Members of Christ's church are not to associate with the offender (1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 2 Thessalonians 3:14), not even to eat with them (1 Corinthians 5:11). They are to keep away from the offender (2 Thessalonians 3:6), but not to regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother (2 Thessalonians 3:15). The offender is to be shunned, but shunned with tears.

Of course, Christian family members who live in the same house as the offender are not expected to shun the person under excommunication. Due care should be taken to ensure that family members of a person under excommunication are not also shunned by the church.

### **The Parties in a Case of Church Discipline**

- A. Jurisdiction for a judicial process involving church members shall be in the Board of Elders of New Life Community Church.
- B. Most cases of church discipline are dealt with in the privacy of an elder meeting (interpreting Matthew 18:17, "tell it to the church," as allowing for either a meeting with the leaders of the church or the whole church itself). If an injured party requests that an issue be decided by the whole body (i.e. church members), then these reasons must be stated to the Board of Elders. The decision to hear the case in privacy of an elder meeting or before the whole church rests with the Board of Elders. The group hearing the case is called the "court."
- C. An injured party shall not become a prosecutor of personal offenses without having tried the means of reconciliation and of reclaiming the offender, required by Christ.

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witness" (Matthew 18:15-16).

Among Christians there is some disagreement about the necessity of using each step in the case of general offenses. There are Scriptural passages related to general offenses in which the first steps of Matthew 18:15-16 seem to have been skipped, for example 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 and Galatians 2:11-14. However, since we are not apostles with special gifts of discernment, Matthew 18:15-16 should be followed even in the case of general offenses. Even though the sin is against a group of people, someone should act as the initial person to "show him his fault, just between the two of you." This person acting on behalf of the group will need to be the one to see the process through to its conclusion. The only possible exceptions to this rule would be in two cases: (1) when the offender is

intentionally avoiding meeting with a brother or (2) when the offender is abusing others (either sexually, physically, or in the consistent teaching of heresy). In these cases the Board of Elders will define “intentional avoidance” and what constitutes “abuse.” If intentional avoidance or abuse is occurring, the Board of Elders may judicially investigate the offense and act according to the rest of these Guidelines.

- D. The case may be conducted either by any person appearing as prosecutor or by a prosecutor appointed by the court. In personal offenses the injured party typically serves as prosecutor [Matthew 18:17 reads “If he refuses to listen to them, you (2<sup>nd</sup> person singular) tell it to the church...”]. The injured party may choose another communing member of the congregation to act on their behalf as prosecutor. No professional counsel is permitted to appear before the court.
- E. When the prosecution is instituted by court, the previous steps required by our Lord in the case of personal offenses are not necessary. There are many cases, however, in which it will promote the interests of religion to send a committee to converse in a private manner with the offender, and endeavor to bring him to a sense of his guilt, before instituting actual process.
- F. Great caution ought to be exercised in receiving accusations from any person who is known to indulge a malignant spirit towards the accused; who is not of good character; who is himself under censure or process; who is deeply interested in any respect in the conviction of the accused; or who is known to be litigious, hasty or unloving.
- G. Every voluntary prosecutor shall be previously warned that if he fail to show probable cause of the charges, he may himself be censured as a “slanderer of the brethren.”
- H. When the accused is an officer of the church, during the process of trial all his official functions may be suspended at the court’s discretion; but this shall never be done in the way of censure.
- I. In the discussion of all questions arising in his own case, the accused shall exercise the rights of defendant only, not of judge.

### **General Provisions Applicable to All Cases**

- A. It is incumbent on every member of a court of Jesus Christ engaged in a trial of offenders, to bear in mind the inspired injunction:

“Brothers, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).

- B. Process against an offender shall not be commenced unless the injured party or other persons undertake to make out the charge or unless the court finds it necessary, for the honor of religion, to take the step.
- C. The charge shall be reduced to writing and must contain the following:
1. A statement of the charge or charges.
  2. Names of witnesses known to support the charge(s).
  3. A brief mention of evidence known to support the charge(s).
- D. When a charge is laid before the Board of Elders, nothing shall be done at this first meeting, unless by consent of parties, except:
1. To determine if the court should institute judicial process. In making this determination the Board of Elders should consider the following: Have the steps of Matthew 18:15-16 been followed? Do the charges raise a strong presumption of guilt? Are the character and motives of the injured party genuine?
  2. To appoint a prosecutor,
  3. To order the indictment drawn and a copy, along with names of witnesses then known to support it, served on the accused, and
  4. To cite all parties and their witnesses to appear and be heard at another meeting which shall not be sooner than ten days after such citation.

At the second meeting of the court the charges shall be read to the accused, if present, and he shall be called upon to say whether he be guilty or not.

If the accused confesses, the court may deal with him according to its discretion; if he plead and make issue, the trial shall proceed.

Accused parties may plead in writing when they cannot be personally present. Parties necessarily absent should have counsel assigned to them by the court.

- E. In drawing the indictment, the times, places and circumstances should, if possible, be particularly stated, that the accused may have an opportunity to make his defense.
- F. The citation shall be issued and signed by the moderator by order and in the name of the court. He shall also issue citations to known witnesses, as either party shall nominate to appear on his behalf.
- G. When an accused person shall refuse to obey a citation, he shall be cited a second time. This second citation shall be accompanied with a notice that if he does not appear at the time appointed (unless providentially hindered, which fact he must make known to the court), or that if he appear and refuse to plead, he shall be dealt with for his defiance.
- H. When an accused person is found defiant, he shall be immediately suspended from the sacraments (and if an officer from his office) until such time as the offender has repented

of his defiance and given satisfaction in relation to the charges against him. If after further endeavor by the court to bring the accused to a sense of guilt, he persists in his defiance, he shall be excommunicated from the church.

- I. The time which must elapse between the serving of the first citation on the accused person, and the meeting of the court at which he is to appear, shall be at least ten (10) days.
- J. If deemed expedient there may be a person or a committee appointed, which shall be called the Judicial Committee, and whose duty it shall be to digest and arrange all the papers, and to prescribe, under the direction of the court, the whole order of the proceedings. The members of this committee shall be entitled, notwithstanding their performance of this duty, to sit and vote in the case as members of the court.
- K. When the trial is about to begin, it shall be the duty of the moderator solemnly to announce from the chair that the court is about to pass to the consideration of the case, and to enjoin on the members to recollect and regard their high character as judges of a court of Jesus Christ, and the solemn duty in which they are about to engage.
- L. In order that the trial may be fair and impartial, the witnesses shall be examined in the presence of the accused, or at least after he shall have received due citation to attend. Witnesses may be cross-examined by both parties, and any questions asked must be pertinent to the issue.
- M. When a court proceeds to the trial of a case, the following order shall be observed:
  - 1. The moderator shall charge the court.
  - 2. The indictment shall be read, and the answer of the accused heard.
  - 3. The witnesses for the prosecutor and then those for the accused shall be examined.
  - 4. The parties shall be heard: first, the prosecutor, and then the accused, and the prosecutor shall close.
  - 5. The roll shall be called, and the members may express their opinion in the case.
  - 6. The vote shall be taken, the verdict announced and judgment entered on the records.
- N. Either party may, for good reason, challenge the right of any member to sit in the trial of the case, which question shall be decided by the other members of the court.
- O. Pending the trial of a case, any member of the court who shall express his opinion of its merits to either party, or to any person not a member of the court; or who shall absent himself from any sitting without the permission of the court, or satisfactory reasons rendered, shall be thereby disqualified from taking part in the subsequent proceedings.
- P. Minutes of the trial shall be kept which shall exhibit the charges, the answer, and the testimony.

The parties shall be allowed copies of the minutes and record of the case at their own expense if they demand them.

- Q. No professional counsel shall be permitted as such to appear and plead in cases of process in any court; but an accused person may, if he desires it, be represented before the court by any communing member of New Life Community Church. A member of the court representing either the accused or the injured party shall not be allowed to sit in judgment in the case.

### **Witnesses and Evidence**

- A. All persons of proper age and intelligence are competent witnesses, except such as do not believe in the existence of God, or a future state of rewards and punishments. The accused party may be allowed, but shall not be compelled to testify; but the accuser shall be required to testify, on the demand of the accused. Either party has the right to challenge a witness whom he believes to be incompetent, and the court shall examine and decide upon his competency. It belongs to the court to judge the degree of credibility to be attached to all evidence.
- B. A husband or wife shall not be compelled to bear testimony against one another in any court.
- C. The testimony of more than one witness shall be necessary in order to establish any charge (Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16); however, in addition to the testimony of one witness, corroborative evidence be produced, the offense may be considered to be proved.
- D. No witness who is to be examined afterwards shall be present during the examination of another witness on the same case, if either party object. This rule does not apply to a member of the court who may be serving the dual function of providing testimony and sitting in judgment upon the accused.
- E. Witnesses shall be examined first by the party introducing them; then cross-examined by the opposite party; after which any member of the court, or either party, may put additional interrogatories. No question shall be put or answered except by permission of the moderator, subject to an appeal to the court. The court shall not permit questions frivolous or irrelevant to the charge at issue.
- F. The oath or affirmation to a witness shall be administered by the Moderator in the following or like terms:

Do you solemnly promise, in the presence of God, that you will declare the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, according to the best of your knowledge in the matter in which you are called to witness, as you shall answer it to the great Judge of the living and the dead?

If, however, at any time a witness should present himself before a court, who for conscientious reasons prefers to swear or affirm in any other manner, he should be allowed to do so.

- G. When it is not convenient for a court to have the whole or perhaps any part of the testimony in any particular case taken in its presence, a commission shall be appointed, to take the testimony in question, which shall be considered as if taken in the presence of the court.
- H. Generally speaking, a member of the court who has given testimony in a case becomes disqualified from sitting as a judge, if either party makes objection. However, the decision of who shall be disqualified rests with the moderator, subject to an appeal to the court.
- I. An officer or private member of the church refusing to testify may be censured for contempt.
- J. If after trial before any court new testimony be discovered, which the accused believes important, it shall be his right to ask a new trial. The decision to grant (or not grant) the request for a new trial rest with the court.

### **The Infliction of Church Censures**

- A. When any member or officer of the church shall be found guilty of an offense the court shall proceed with all tenderness and shall deal with its offending brother in the spirit of meekness, the members considering themselves lest they also be tempted (Galatians 6:1).
- B. Church censures and the modes of administering them should be suited to the nature of the offenses. For private offenses, censure should be administered in the presence of the court alone, or in private by one or more members of the court. In the case of public offenses, the degree of censure and mode of administering it shall be within the discretion of the court, acting in accordance with paragraphs below which deal with particular censures.
- C. If the offense is known only to a few and is not aggravated in character, one or more members of the court should administer the censure of admonition in private. If the offense is public, the admonition should be administered by the moderator in presence of the court and may also be announced in public should the court deem it expedient.
- D. Definite suspension from office should be administered in the presence of the court alone or in open session of the court, as it may deem best, and public announcement thereof shall be at the court's discretion.

- E. Indefinite suspension from office or the Sacraments should be administered after the manner prescribed for definite suspension, but with added solemnity, that the indefinite suspension may be the means of impressing the mind of the delinquent with a proper sense of his danger. Indefinite suspension should also be administered under the blessing of God in order to lead him to repentance. When the court has resolved to pass this sentence, the moderator shall address the offending brother to the following purpose:

Whereas, you \_\_\_\_\_ (here describe the person as a teaching elder, ruling elder, deacon, or private member of the church) are convicted by sufficient proof (or are guilty by your own confession) of the sin of \_\_\_\_\_ (here insert the offense or offenses), we the Board of Elders of New Life Community Church (or members of New Life Community Church) in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, do now declare you suspended from the Sacraments of the Church (and/or from the exercise of your office), until you give satisfactory evidence of repentance.

To this shall be added such advice or admonition as may be judged necessary, and the whole shall be concluded with prayer to almighty God that He would follow this act of discipline with His blessing.

- F. Removal from office should be administered in the presence of the court alone or in open session of the court, as it may deem best, and public announcement thereof shall be at the court's discretion.
- G. Excommunication is to be administered according to one or other of the two modes laid down for indefinite suspension, or to be inflicted in public as the court may decide. In administering this censure the moderator of the court shall make a statement of the several steps, which have been taken with respect to the offending brother, and of the decision to cut him off from the communion of the church. He shall then show from Matthew 18:15-18 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 the authority of the church to cast out unworthy members, shall explain the nature, use and consequences of this censure. He shall then administer the censure in the words following:

Whereas, \_\_\_\_\_, a member of this church has been by sufficient proof convicted of the sin of \_\_\_\_\_, and after much admonition and prayer, obstinately refuses to hear the Church, and has evidenced no evidence of repentance: Therefore, in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, we the Board of Elders of New Life Community Church (or members of New Life Community Church) do pronounce him to be excluded from the Sacraments, and cut off from the fellowship of the Church.

Prayer shall then be made to God asking him to blessing this solemn action of the court that it may issue in the repentance and restoration of the offender, and in the establishment of all true believers.