Course Syllabus

Course Title: Clergy Ethics

Semester: June 26 & 27, 2026

Instructors: Rev. Mark Mahserjian-Smith & Rev. Kelly Legg

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Course Description

This course is designed to help ministerial leaders better understand the various ethical issues that impact one's ministry. Clergy Ethics is REQUIRED for ALL levels of recognized credentialing within ABCOPAD and ABC/USA.

Course Objectives

Participants will have directed experiences, both in class and out, emphasizing the character needs and ethical issues confronting leaders in contemporary ministerial settings. This course will focus on three areas relating to Clergy Ethics: money, sex, and power, with additional areas impacting the ethical behavior of ministerial leaders being discussed.

Online Class Format

This is a synchronous course. The class will be held as a one-weekend intensive and will convene via Zoom. Participation in the full course is required and, wherever possible, students will be asked to keep their camera on to best engage in the classroom experience. The link will be provided via email.

Required Texts

Ethics for Christian Ministry: Moral Formation for Twenty-First-Century Leaders by Joseph E. Trull & James Carter. (May be purchased via Amazon here.)

Clergy Ethics Case Studies, accessed online here.

Recommended Texts

A full list of recommended documents & supplemental resources may be found on the Clergy Ethics page of the ACTS website located here.

Submission Instructions

Assignments requiring submission (for both pre- & post-class) should be sent as PDF or Word Documents to both instructors at their email addresses found above.

Pre-Class Assignments (due by 5 PM on Friday, June 26)

1) Read *Ethics for Christian Ministry: Moral Formation for Twenty-First-Century Leaders* in full.

2) Read *Clergy Ethics Case Studies* in full. Answer the questions after each study (for your personal use) and be prepared to discuss each in class.

3) Convene a Congregational Ethics Team (CET; explained below) to read & discuss case study #1 ("Time For the Family") using the questions provided below. Afterward, **submit** your responses to the following questions in concise, bullet form.
    a. Review together all of the questions provided at the end of case study #1.
    b. What information from your textbook sheds light on the case study?
    c. What are some of the biblical passages that relate to this case study?
    d. How is your ministry affected by the issues discussed in this study?
    e. In what ways does this case study intersect with the ABCUSA Ministerial "Clergy Code of Ethics" and "Covenant for Ministry" (found on the resource page)?
    f. What have you learned from your CET members' perspectives on this case study?

    g. CET membership:
        i. Invite 3 or 4 laypersons from your congregation with whom you already have a comfortable working relationship.
        ii. Team members may be representatives of the Pastoral Relations Committee, Deacons, Church Officers and/or any active church member.

4) View and take notes (for your personal use) on the video *Strong in the Lord* found on our resource page. Be prepared to discuss in class.

5) View and take notes (for your personal use) on the video *Not In My Church* found on our resource page. Be prepared to discuss in class.

6) Select an accountability partner with whom you plan to meet regularly as support & encouragement to maintain ethical boundaries in life and ministry. Your accountability partner may not be your spouse. He/she should be the same sex as you and someone known for supporting & encouraging both your ministry and personal life. He/she must be a Christian but does not have to be in your local church.

Class Requirements

1) Participate actively in the synchronous class meetings, utilizing the knowledge gained

from the textbook & your reflections on the case studies & videos.

Post-Class Assignments (due by 11:59 PM on August 7)

1) **Write a reflection paper** which connects and is informed by your reading of the textbook, the course teaching, the reflections by your CET on the case study "A Time for Family," and the personal ethics statement you created. This should be **4-6 pages,** double-spaced in length not including the title page.

2) **Write a Personal Ethics Statement** that is concise and memorable. The CET would be an excellent "sounding board" and resource for aiding in the development of the Personal Ethics Statement. This should be **1 page** in length and suitable for framing.

3) **Turn in a signed copy of the American Baptist Covenant and Code of Ethics**. This will be placed in your file at the region office. It is a covenant you make with the churches that you serve and continues into retirement**.**

4) **Submit the names of your CET members & accountability partner** via this Google Form.

Grading

This is a Pass/Fail course. Success is contingent upon both participation in the synchronous portion of the class and satisfactory completion of all pre- and post-class assignments as outlined above by the deadlines assigned.

Plagiarism policy:

A.C.T.S. defines Plagiarism as "using someone's ideas, words, or data, without proper acknowledgement, as one's own original work." To avoid plagiarism, you must 1) cite the original author every time you use his or her exact written or spoken word (by enclosing them with quotation marks if fewer than four lines or indenting as a block quote if four or more lines) or 2) paraphrase someone's written or spoken words and recognize the author/source in the body of the text or as a footnote. Plagiarism is an act of dishonesty and violation of academic integrity.

If an Instructor determines that an act of plagiarism has occurred, after talking with the student, the Academic Dean will be notified. Possible consequences will be considered, including: a failing grade for the work, a failing grade for the entire course, asking the student to redo the assignment, etc.

COURSE SCHEDULE

FRIDAY EVENING, June 26

6:00 – 6:20 Welcome & community building
6:20 – 6:30 Orientation
6:30 – 7:30 Case Study #1 – *Time for Family*
7:30 – 7:45 Break

7:45 – 8:45 Case Study #4 – *Romantic Interest*
8:45 – 9:00 Video Discussion: *Strong in the Lord*
9:00 Closing prayer

SATURDAY, June 27
8:00 – 8:15 Devotions & prayer
8:15 – 9:15 Case Study #3 – *Nominating Church Officers*
9:15 – 9:30 Post-class assignments
9:30 – 9:45 Break
9:45 – 10:45 Case Study #6 – *Should Pete Be Reinstated?*
10:45 – 11:00 Video Discussion: *Not In My Church*
11:00 – 11:15 Break
11:15 – 12:00 Case Study #5 – *The Family Income*
12:00 – 12:30 Lunch
12:30 – 1:30 Case Study #2 – *Pastor Leaving*
1:30 – 2:00 Question & Answer session and Wrap-up