

Heart of Texas Mission Center

Commentary on Principles of Priesthood Morality



Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

Commentary on Principles

After initial discussion, the 2016 World Conference referred a resolution on "Issues of (Priesthood) Morality" to the First Presidency. Referral is a parliamentary action that encourages the Presidency to act as determined best for the church. The referred resolution called "for meaningful and respectful dialog among members and priesthood about how individual, family, and congregational activities, lifestyle, and choices can be aligned more closely and more faithfully with the values and morals lifted up in the Enduring Principles and Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a–b." The Presidency believes a common understanding of the Enduring Principles and the principles in Section 164:6a–b is important for such a discussion. The Enduring Principles help define the character and identity of our church. They arise from our response to the foundation of our faith—God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit—and our sacred story as a people. The Enduring Principles:

- Grace and Generosity
- Sacredness of Creation
- Continuing Revelation
- Worth of All Persons
- All Are Called
- Responsible Choices
- Pursuit of Peace (Shalom)
- Unity in Diversity
- Blessings of Community

Descriptions of the Enduring Principles are found in *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Ed. and at www.CofChrist.org/enduring-principles. The sub-points under each principle offer additional explanations. Also there have been articles in the *Herald*, and the church has produced videos exploring the meaning of the Enduring Principles. This statement is commentary on the principles outlined in Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a–b. By providing these basic explanations, the Presidency is responding to its responsibility to be the "leading interpreters...of the laws and revelations of God..." (WCR 386). The Presidency has received significant input from other church leaders representing various cultures while developing this commentary.

Commentary: The Principles

Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a–b identifies the following principles of moral behavior and relationships:

- The worth and giftedness of all people
- Protect the most vulnerable
- Christ-like love

INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
1001 W. Walnut St., Independence, MO 64050 USA

Heart of Texas Mission Center

Commentary on Principles of Priesthood Morality - Continued

- Mutual respect
- Responsibility
- Justice
- Covenant
- Faithfulness

These principles apply to ethical relationships in general and specifically to recently raised topics like sexual ethics, drinking intoxicants, and priesthood morality. The Presidency gives particular attention to these principles and the Enduring Principles as it considers policy questions. So, what do these principles mean?

- **The worth and giftedness of all people** means affirming that each person has equal worth as a child of God. Therefore, each one should have the same opportunity to express her or his potential and gifts in families, congregations, the worldwide church, and society. Characteristics like economic status, caste, sex, gender identity, age, race, ethnicity, body type, or physical or mental ability should not be used to assign people to a lesser position. Human diversity should never be the basis for assumed superiority, discrimination, or oppression. Rather, Community of Christ invites all to respond to God's call with the gifts God has given them.
- **Protect the most vulnerable** entails giving high priority to concern for the defenseless, dependent, weak, impressionable, and the least secure in families, congregations, and larger societies. The most vulnerable always include children and the child-like, regardless of age. It also may include the poor, sick, or elderly. In larger society, protecting the most vulnerable means high-priority concern for those most affected or potentially harmed by a situation, decision, or action. This may include persons or groups that historically are viewed as inferior or regularly discriminated against. Identifying the "most vulnerable" in various situations is vital when evaluating and developing church policies.
- **Christ-like love is self-giving love.** It is found where the salvation, well-being, and growth of others are primary in one's thoughts and actions. It is charitable, grace-filled, patient, and forgiving. It reflects God's love and demonstrates a spirit of generous servanthood. Christ-like love includes love of self and others, but it is not selfish. It affirms our integral relationships with each other by bearing each other's burdens and giving oneself for the well-being of others and the community.
- **Mutual respect** refers to healthy regard and concern for others as they would like you to treat them. Mutual respect is equitable, just, and reciprocal to the greatest extent possible. Sometimes mutual respect involves personal restraint and deference. It may feel demanding because respect for one person may cause us to choose that relationship over another, such as choosing to protect the most vulnerable. Mutual respect is not domineering, coercive, or one-sided.
- **Responsibility** means we are accountable (answerable) before God, the church community, and others. A responsible person responds to situations by making informed decisions and being morally answerable for his or her actions and related consequences. Responsibility is making wise judgments and just decisions that consider the potential effect of one's actions on others, the church, the most vulnerable, and creation. All disciples and priesthood members are called to make Responsible Choices.

Heart of Texas Mission Center

Commentary on Principles of Priesthood Morality - Continued

Responsibility, however, assumes ability to respond. Some cultural and legal situations prevent persons from making the choices they believe are right.

- **Justice** has many forms, including respecting human rights, fairness, equality, fulfillment, and restoration. Justice is not about revenge. Justice finds meaning in the scriptural vision for right and healthy relationships in the reign of God. Justice comes when right and healthy relationships are nurtured in reconciliation, redemption, and restoration. A just outcome fulfills God's purposes and potential in people's lives. Justice is shared concern and action for the common good. Christ calls Christians to work for justice when others are being oppressed or have limited choices.
- **Covenant** is a particular expression of a sacred relationship, promise, and commitment between God and people. Covenant is more than a personal feeling or intent. It is not a restrictive obligation as understood in some nations. In scripture, covenant always begins with God's grace and reconciling purpose in human lives and our response. Covenant with God blesses persons, families, and congregations with vision, guidance, and divine help for righteous living. In the church, covenant with God is established and sustained through sacraments that involve shared worship, rituals, symbols, and priesthood ministry. Entering into sacred covenant helps us live moral lives and grow in healthy relationships with God, others, the church community, and the Earth.
- **Faithfulness** is fidelity to God and others throughout one's lifetime. Faithfulness involves loyalty, honesty, devotion, dependability, and trustworthiness. To be faithful is to be true and responsible to God and others with one's calling, word, agreements, promises, and covenants. Faithfulness brings belief and ethics together by uniting them in our covenant with God through baptism, confirmation, and responsibility to one another in Christ.

To ensure clarity and guide ethical decisions, Doctrine and Covenants 164:6b emphasizes that the principles cited do not allow for "selfish, irresponsible, promiscuous, degrading, or abusive relationships." These terms help clarify behavioral boundaries when questions arise. Again, what do these terms mean?

- **Selfish** means one is self-centered to the point of harming or excluding others. Selfishness leads to gratifying one's own needs and desires at the expense of others without seeking their consent. It is a lack of full comprehension of how one's actions and behaviors impact others and the world. To be selfish is to be egotistic and self-absorbed.
- **Irresponsible** behavior is careless and negligent. It often is reactive or impulsive and lacks self-control. Irresponsible behavior takes risks without considering possible options and outcomes. It includes making decisions under the influence of illegal or controlled substances or avoiding responsibility by blaming others for undesired, negative, or destructive results. Irresponsibility is often the cause of unintended or unwanted consequences. People are not irresponsible if the action in question was forced on them against their will.
- **Promiscuous** behavior is indiscriminate, permissive, and unrestrained. Transient, casual sexual relationships are promiscuous and unacceptable. Promiscuity seeks self-gratification without consideration of or responsibility for the welfare or ethical concerns of others. It rejects the common good. Consent is not the only criteria for determining

Heart of Texas Mission Center Commentary on Principles of Priesthood Morality - Continued

appropriate interaction. An encounter between consenting adults still can be promiscuous.

- Degrading behaviors and relationships diminish, humiliate, and shame others, treating them as objects. Degrading behaviors undermine the worth of persons and the relationships of the community. They damage or destroy the promise of healthy relationships.
- Abusive words and behaviors harm people, relationships, or creation. Abuse can be physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, sexual, or neglectful. Abuse can happen because of unequal power in a relationship. Through words and actions, this power is used to harm, insult, manipulate, or cause fear. Abuse can lead to irreparable harm or death.

Principles are not sufficient in themselves to guide ethical decision-making. Principles must be carefully considered and applied with wisdom and discernment to particular moral questions. The Presidency, World Church Leadership Council, and Standing High Council are using these statements to inform our consideration of various issues, including questions of priesthood morality raised at the recent World Conference. The Presidency encourages the church to become familiar with these principles and explanations in anticipation of upcoming responses to particular issues.