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FOSTERING  
ETHICAL CULTURE  
IN RCCGNA

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This is a response to the commission by the Redeemed Christian Church of God North America (RCCGNA) Board of Trustees to institute a Department of Ethics and Morals in the office of the Chairman, Board of Coordinators. It is borne out of a need for all ministers to walk in the true Spirit of Christ, in love and fellowship, seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace while pursuing the vision and mission of the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

To be a minister is to respond to God's call to fulfill His will and purpose. A call to ministry is the call to minister with God, not a call to minister for God. It is serving God and God's purposes as a servant. A servant is a person at the disposal of another. So, a minister is at the disposal of God. Primarily, all Christians are called "to be with" in order "to be sent out" by the caller (Mark 3:14). Every believer has the same calling in principle but is placed in different locations to influence the culture. The minister in this sense serves in the local church.

The church is a hospital for the sick, a gym for the healthy, a laboratory for testing out the new life in Christ and a school for the creation of new character.<sup>1</sup> How then does the minister walk through the tension of caring for the weak in the midst of the strong, new spiritual babes learning the ropes with matured ones who are cracking bones? As it is with every vocation, there is a need for a code of ethics. A Code of Ethics is more than dos and don'ts. We must remember that every calling entails a relationship with the caller (belonging to God), a way of life (being) and serving (God and His purposes).<sup>2</sup> A Code of Ethics is beyond rules and regulations.

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1. David W. Gill, *Becoming Good: Building Moral Character* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000). 59

2. R. Paul Stevens, *Doing God's Business: Meaning and Motivation for The Marketplace* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006), 22

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## Why Ethics?

Fundamentally, ethics is about protecting people from harm and promoting their healthiness and happiness. We are daily bombarded with a litany of moral breaches and ethical violations, Ministers are not immune from these ethical meltdowns. Ethical violations do constitute obstacles to effective ministry that can affect generations. Prophet Nathan told David: “But you have given the enemies of the Lord great opportunity to despise and blaspheme Him” (2 Sam 12:14).

We subvert the cause of Christ when we exploit or betray the trust of people in and outside the church. We are called to live lives worthy of ambassadors of Christ, our ministerial duties must be undertaken virtuously as we seek to advance God’s kingdom on earth. The call of God to the ministers (as to every believer) embraces all relationships: family, neighbors, authorities, members of the church.

Ethics and weather are like the same thing. Everybody talks about ethics but nobody does much about it until its violation or lack of observance comes with a fiery wind and storms. Defining ethics is like defining the weather. Weather is a combination of observable facts interfacing in a given place at a particular time. Meteorologists say that weather is about current activity, as opposed to climate, which refers to the average atmospheric conditions over longer periods of time. Weather influences the way humans feel. Sometimes we feel hot, cold or somewhere in between. It is for this reason that many Christians attempt to present a set of principles to navigate the contours of the demands of the several relationships. However, the foundation of ethics for Christians (nay ministers) should not be rules that don’t get applied at pressured times but in the changeless character of God.

## Virtue Approach

Traditionally, ethics has been approached in one of four ways:

- > Command approach that takes the likes of Ten Commandments as guides
- > Consequences approach that seeks to justify every decision based on the best outcome for the greatest number
- > Community approach that justifies outcomes based on the culture of the community
- > Character or virtue approach that states that ethical behavior flows from a virtuous character.

Virtue refers to abilities and capabilities that enable one to achieve excellently on an intended purpose. Virtues are habitual tendencies to do good. Through time tested doctrinal teachings, the Redeemed Christian Church of God has laid an emphasis on character building. It practically stresses the adage that "Charity begins at home" and that "today's conduct determines what happens tomorrow"

In the scriptures, virtues serve to demonstrate a behavior that matches God's character; it is for this reason that one is said to act ethically when one's conduct is in sync with God's character. The triad of divine characteristics emphasized in the scriptures impact on decision making process: Holiness, Justice and Love. Christian ethics demands that all three be taken into consideration for ethical decision. Holiness without justice and love becomes hypercritical legalism. Justice without holiness and love results in harsh outcome while love that is divorced from holiness and justice leads astray. These are the three characteristics that the ministers' code of ethics titled Covenant of Virtue will be based on.

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## Leadership and Ethics

Ethics is central to leadership as leaders help to establish and reinforce organizational values. Leaders play a major role in establishing and regulating the ethical ambient of any organization. An ethics based approach to Leadership described and identified some leadership styles in organizations.<sup>3</sup>

- Leaders with unethical styles use their positions for their benefits or for a special group at the expense of others. These leaders use positions as a platform for ego-boosting rather than accomplishing good and also seek retribution against those with opposing and conflicting views.
- Ethically neutral leaders do not take time to reflect on any subtle ethical issues; mostly due to lack of awareness, discernment or moral courage.
- Ethical leaders encourage feedback and dialogues. They mostly bring attention to critical issues, promote honest and candid discussions, manage competing perspectives and facilitate the decision making process in a timely manner. These leaders make sacrifices for the common good and show uncommon courage. These leaders are called servant-leaders as they are highly concerned about empathy, empowerment, healing, openness, listening and equality.

Promoting organizational-centered ethics or ethics based leadership does not eliminate individual-centered ethics. Acknowledging organizational influence does not remove personal responsibility although individuals are predisposed to be influenced by the organization.

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3. Jonathan P. West, and Evan M. Berman, eds., *The Ethics Edge*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: International City/County Management Association, 2006).

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After all, what individuals do is often affected by the organizational culture. This is why the Psalmist declares “How blessed is the one who does not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand in the pathway with sinners, or sit in the assembly of scoffers!”Ps.1:1 (N.E.T). Where someone is standing shows where he or she had been sitting.

### **Notes**

Gill, David W. *Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

Gill, David W. *Becoming Good: Building Moral Character*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Hill, Alexander. *Just Business: Christian Ethics for The Marketplace*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997.

Stevens, R. Paul. *Seven Days of Faith: Every Day Alive With God*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 2001.

Stevens, R. Paul. *Doing God’s Business: Meaning and Motivation for The Marketplace*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006.

West, Jonathan P., and Evan M. Berman, eds. *The Ethics Edge*, 2d ed. Washington, D.C.: International City/County Management Association, 2006.