

Code of Ethics for Lay Preachers to be Introduced

A Code of Ethics, that will guide Lay Preachers in the exercise of their ministry, was adopted at the March meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee.

The Code of Ethics for Ministers of the Word, Deacons, Youth Workers, Community Ministers and Lay Pastors, established at the 9th Assembly in 2000, did not address the specific responsibilities of Lay Preachers but the new Code of Ethics will clearly define expectations and areas of accountability.

While the responsibilities of Lay Preachers are more limited than the other Specified Ministries, it is important to recognise that they do have a degree of influence and power in the life of the church.

Joan McRae-Benson, Chairperson of the National Lay Preachers Committee in Victoria, says she is "delighted" with the development. She points out that though Lay Preachers are required to undertake study and assessment, which means they are well prepared for their duties, the Code of Ethics will help them be aware of the boundaries of their role. For example section 2.3 of the Code requires that Lay Preachers do not seek to meet their personal needs through their ministry; that clear boundaries are recognised and observed (ie. the relationship and behaviour are appropriate); and show respect, sensitivity and reverence for others as well as a non-abusive use of power.

The National Lay Preachers Committee stated that the proposal for the new Code of Ethics was based on the recognition that any influence and power arising from the exercise of the ministry of Lay Preachers brings with it certain expectations and that the Code of Ethics offers assurance for congregations and the church community that a high level of responsibility will be exercised by Lay Preachers as they seek to lead people in the worship of God.