

Community of Christ

Priesthood Calling, Ordination, and Ministry in All Nations

Interim Policies for USA:

Authorizing and officiating same-gender marriages, civil unions, and legal relationships

**Authorizing and officiating same-gender covenant commitment services
Ordination of priesthood of same-gender orientation**

Preface

This document is an overview of administrative policies for priesthood calling, ordination, and ministry **in all nations**. Additional policy details are found in the most current edition of the *Church Administrator's Handbook* and First Presidency official statements.

Introduction

Priesthood is a covenant relationship with God and the church community. It involves committing one's life to bring blessing to others through the sacraments and an exemplary life of discipleship devoted to Christ's mission.

Priesthood calling and ordination involve God's grace-filled initiative in human life and people's humble response. Ordination is a sacred act of covenant-making that includes God's promise to bless priesthood members and the church community as priesthood members faithfully serve.

The following foundational principles relate to faithful priesthood ministry. Consistent application of these principles results in fulfilling, effective, and joyous priesthood ministry. These principles define "active" priesthood ministry.

Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry

(For all priesthood members and ordinands)

Priesthood faithfulness begins with faithful discipleship. Faithful discipleship emerges from ongoing faith and spiritual formation. The constant call is to follow the Living Christ and to abide in increasing measure in God's love and vision for creation. Being comes before doing.

The following expectations will help me serve as a faithful priesthood member. In response to God's sacred call and priesthood authority granted by Community of Christ, **I covenant to...**

- Engage in ongoing faith and spiritual practices to deepen my relationship with God and others through study and spiritual formation.
- Affirm and promote Christ's mission of invitation, compassionate ministries, and justice and peacemaking; helping prepare others for Christ's mission; and partnering with other priesthood in leading congregations in Christ's mission.

- Provide ministry consistent with the church’s identity, mission, message, and beliefs as expressed in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs, 3rd Ed.* (www.CofChrist.org/ourfaith/SharingCofChrist-3ed.pdf) and other current official documents.
- Model an ethical, moral, and holistic lifestyle.
- Model generosity as a regular contributor to mission tithes (local, mission center, and worldwide ministries) according to my true capacity.
- Protect the safety and well-being of children and youth, including, where applicable, being a Registered Children and Youth Worker.
- Actively participate in congregational life or similar church expressions when congregational life is not available.
- Participate annually in educational or spiritual formation experiences offered by my congregation, mission center, apostolic mission field, or World Church.
- Develop and implement a plan for ministry that uses my gifts to advance Christ’s mission.

Administrative Procedures

The following statements highlight church policies regarding priesthood matters. They are provided to help church officers fulfill their responsibilities and to inform all priesthood members.

Priesthood Calls

The priesthood calling process includes:

1. Recommendation for ordination by the appropriate administrative officer in response to the spirit of discernment, wisdom, and divine direction. Full attention should be given to all elements of the “Recommendation for Ordination Form” in the *Church Administrator’s Handbook: 2005 Edition*, on page 88.
2. Confirmation of necessary administrative approvals as specified in current policies.
3. Presentation of call to the candidate for prayerful consideration once administrative approvals are received.
4. Demonstration of support by a vote in a conference of the appropriate church jurisdiction.

Priesthood Ordination

1. The sacrament of ordination provides formal authority to function within a specific priesthood office in the church.
2. An ordination normally is performed by two members of the priesthood authorized to ordain people to a specific office. In some cases situations in local areas may require the ordination to be performed by one authorized priesthood member.
3. The ordinand and the administrative officers will choose the ordaining priesthood members. Qualifications for priesthood who can officiate in the sacrament of ordination can be found in the *Church Administrator’s Handbook: 2005 Edition*, page 28.
4. The ordination is reported by the congregation or mission center recorder. Where possible, the congregation or mission center recorder should report details of the ordination to the Office of Membership Records at International Headquarters.

5. Recording of the ordination at International Headquarters results in the World Church secretary issuing a priesthood license, which certifies the individual as an ordained minister in Community of Christ.

Priesthood Ethics

1. The ethical standards expected of those who are called and ordained to serve in the priesthood are presented in the “Priesthood Standards and Qualifications” portion of the “Recommendation for Ordination Form” in the *Church Administrator’s Handbook: 2005 Edition*.
2. In addition, Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a provides clear guidance for moral behavior and relationships by listing ethics principles: **Christ-like love, mutual respect, responsibility, justice, covenant, and faithfulness**. To ensure clarity, Section 164:6b identifies types of behaviors and relationships that are not moral: **selfish, irresponsible, promiscuous, degrading, or abusive**.
3. Additional priesthood ethics statements will be developed in the future and will be considered part of priesthood policies when made available.

Priesthood Ministry and Ordination

1. The church’s general policy is that ordination authorizes priesthood members to provide priesthood ministry wherever they live or travel. There is also a policy that priesthood ministry coming from outside a church jurisdiction should be approved by the appropriate church officers serving both the jurisdiction of residence and the jurisdiction in which the priesthood member will travel. Usually, this applies to ministry from outside one’s mission center, but mission centers may establish their own procedures for congregations within the mission center (See: *Church Administrator’s Handbook: 2005 Edition*, page 20). The basic principle is that requesting or receiving priesthood ministry is the responsibility of pastors, mission center presidents, supervising apostles, and other presiding officers of the church.
2. Priesthood members are not required to accept an invitation to officiate in an ordination. If, for any reason, a priesthood member is unable or unwilling to officiate in an ordination, the priesthood candidate should be referred to another priesthood member in an appropriately sensitive and pastoral manner.

Ordination of Individuals in Same-sex/Gender Marriages or Long-term Committed Relationships

1. If a policy is approved for a nation that permits people in same-sex/gender marriages or long-term committed relationships to be ordained, that policy is applicable only in that nation. In nations where same-sex/gender relationships are not legal, serious harm and disruption to individuals, church organization, and mission could be caused by offering ministry from people in same-sex/gender marriages or long-term committed relationships. Therefore, there will be nations where the priesthood ministry of people in same-sex/gender marriages or long-term committed relationships should not be offered and will not be accepted (see Appendix).
2. If a nation has a policy that permits people in same-sex/gender marriages or long-term committed relationships to be ordained, a person in such a relationship must be a citizen or permanent resident of the nation, reside in the nation, and be registered as a church member there to be considered for a priesthood call. If an ordained person in a same-sex/gender marriage or long-term committed relationship moves to a nation with policies that do not allow for ordination of such persons, the person’s priesthood license will not

- be removed simply because of that move. However, as stated above, there will be nations where the priesthood ministry in committed, same-sex/gender relationships should not be offered and will not be accepted.
3. Priesthood members will be allowed to ordain those in same-sex/gender marriages or long-term committed relationships only in nations where civil law and church policy permit such marriages or long-term committed relationships as legally recognized. Priesthood members must always abide by church policies and civil laws in the nation where they are offering ministry.
 4. Priesthood members can travel to a nation where church policy allows ordination for those in same-sex/gender marriages or long-term committed relationships and be the officiating priesthood minister, provided they have approval from the pastor and the mission center president of the jurisdiction of residence, as well as the jurisdiction in which the ordination is to take place. If no congregational participation is involved, only the mission center presidents must approve.
 5. In mission centers that have congregations in two or more nations that have different national policies, congregations must abide by the policies of the nation where the congregation is physically located.
 6. Priesthood members are always responsible for determining how their involvement in ordination for those in same-sex/gender relationships will impact their ability to bring effective ministry in their home congregation, mission center, field, or nation.

Priesthood Ministry and Marriage

Aaronic priests and Melchisedec priesthood members are eligible to perform wedding ceremonies in all nations, subject to any legal restrictions of the governmental jurisdiction in which the wedding will occur. In addition, the following policies apply:

1. Marriage preparation should begin six months to one year before the marriage ceremony. While exceptions may occur, adequate time must be provided for premarital discussions between the officiating minister and the couple.
2. All marriages should be reported by the congregation or mission center recorder, and the officiant should follow all reporting requirements established by civil authorities.
3. For information concerning marriage standards, preparation, reporting requirements, marital discord, termination, remarriage, and other related topics, see the relevant sections on marriage in the *Church Administrator's Handbook: 2005 Edition*. In the case of previous divorce, the officiant must confirm the divorce is recorded with the church authorities prior to solemnizing the marriage, if the marriage involves a Community of Christ member or members. In situations of multiple divorces, the minister also should check with World Church officers for any additional information or guidance.
4. Priesthood members traveling into an area to perform a marriage must receive approval from the mission center president and apostle of the jurisdiction of residence, as well as from the jurisdiction in which the marriage is to take place. When a Community of Christ congregation is involved, approval by the pastor of the congregation where the sacrament is to take place is also required.

Priesthood Ministry and Heterosexual Marriage

The following statement will be used for heterosexual marriages:

The sacrament of marriage as celebrated in Community of Christ should be aligned with Doctrine and Covenants 111:2b. Thus, during the exchange of vows, the couple should be asked:

You both mutually agree to be each other's companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others, during your lives?

After the couple answers in the affirmative, the officiating minister pronounces the couple "husband and wife" in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by virtue of the laws of the country and authority vested in him/her. Then, the officiating minister typically offers this blessing:

May God add his blessings and keep you to fulfill your covenants from henceforth and forever. Amen.

Priesthood Ministry and Same-sex/Gender Marriage

If a nation has an officially approved policy that permits priesthood members to perform same-sex/gender marriages where they are legal, the following policies apply:

1. The following statement approved by the First Presidency will be used for same-sex couples during their marriage:

You both mutually agree to be each other's marriage companion, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other and from all others during your lives?

After the couple answers in the affirmative, the officiating minister pronounces the couple married in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by virtue of the laws of the country and authority vested in him/her. Then, the officiating minister typically offers this blessing:

May God add his blessings and keep you to fulfill your covenants from henceforth and forever. Amen.

2. For statements to use with civil unions or legal relationships please refer to the USA interim policy for authorizing and performing same-gender civil unions and legal relationships.
3. Priesthood members are not required to perform same-sex/gender marriages.
4. Priesthood members will not be allowed to perform same-sex marriages in nations where World Church policy or civil laws do not allow it. Priesthood members must always abide by church policies and civil laws in the nation where they are offering ministry.
5. Priesthood members can travel to a nation where the church policy allows priesthood members to perform same-sex marriages and be the officiating minister, if certain conditions are met: compliance with all relevant national and local government regulations and certifications.
6. Priesthood members are always responsible for determining how their involvement in solemnizing same-sex marriages would impact their ability to bring effective ministry in their home congregation, mission center, nation, or field.



INTERIM POLICIES FOR USA ONLY

Preface

The following interim policies are approved for implementation in the USA beginning March 31, 2014. These interim policies will be implemented in accordance with all World Church policies regarding marriage and ordination. The church in the USA will follow these interim policies for two years. At the end of this time the interim policies will be evaluated and revised as needed.



Reference: [WCR] Policy Number: National Policy-USA 70.00
[*Church Administrator's Handbook: 2005 Edition 6G;*] Effective Date: March 31, 2014
[Doctrines and Covenants 17; 163; 164] Revision Date:
[*Priesthood Manual 2004*]
[Ministry and Priesthood planning]
[National Conferences: General Questions and
Answers, May 22, 2012]

USA INTERIM POLICY FOR RECOGNIZING SAME-GENDER MARRIAGES, CIVIL UNIONS, AND LEGAL RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction for Same-gender Marriages

Same-gender marriage is permitted in some places but not everywhere in the USA. Some states and other governmental units (e.g., the District of Columbia) permit same-gender marriages. Some permit, instead, same-gender civil unions or legal relationships such as domestic partnerships. Others, however, do not permit or recognize same-gender marriages, civil unions, or legal relationships from other states.

Same-gender legal relationships and the procedures by which they are established under applicable law vary between the states in the USA and other governmental units that permit them. Some states grant couples in same-gender legal relationships the same rights and duties as spouses. Others, however, grant them some, but not all, of those rights and duties.

For purposes of policy administration:

All states and other governmental units will be included in the term "state."

All same-gender "legal relationships" defined by some states in different ways (e.g., domestic partnerships) in which couples have rights and duties under law the same as or similar to those of spouses will be included in the term "legal relationship," regardless of specific local legal rights, duties, and terminology. The term "legal relationship" is different than marriage or civil union.

Interim Policy

1. Same-gender marriages, civil unions, and legal relationships that are valid under applicable law and in accordance with this policy will be treated like marriages within the church in the USA. The church has a long-standing policy of recognizing and recording civil or legal marriages, whether sacramental or not.
2. Same-gender marriage, civil union, and legal relationship terminations will be treated like marriage terminations within the church in the USA.
3. For a same-gender couple's relationship to be in accordance with this policy, the couple is expected to establish the most equivalent relationship to marriage (marriage, civil union, or legal relationship) that applicable law permits. If applicable law later changes and permits a more equivalent relationship to marriage, a same-gender couple is expected to establish the most equivalent relationship to marriage (marriage, civil union, or legal relationship) that applicable law then permits. This situation may occur if the couple's state(s) of permanent legal residence changes applicable law, or if the couple changes their state(s) of permanent legal residence.
4. If a same-gender couple later establishes a more equivalent relationship to marriage, they will be eligible (but not required) to have another Community of Christ ceremony that establishes or recognizes the establishment of that relationship.



Reference: [WCR] Policy Number: National Policy-USA 70.01
[Church Administrator's Handbook: 2005 Edition 6G;] Effective Date: March 31, 2014
[Doctrine and Covenants 17; 163; 164] Revision Date:
[Priesthood Manual 2004]
[Ministry and Priesthood planning]
[National Conferences: General Questions and
Answers, May 22, 2012]

**INTERIM POLICY FOR AUTHORIZING AND PERFORMING CEREMONIES
THAT ESTABLISH OR RECOGNIZE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SAME-
GENDER MARRIAGES, CIVIL UNIONS, AND LEGAL RELATIONSHIPS
ONLY IN THE USA**

Performing Same-gender Marriages, Civil Unions, and Legal Relationships

In the USA, Community of Christ Atonic priests and Melchisedec priesthood members are eligible to officiate at ceremonies that establish or recognize the establishment of same-gender marriages, civil unions, and legal relationships in states where applicable law permits such marriages, civil unions, and/or legal relationships, and they have met the legal requirements to officiate at such ceremonies.

Interim Policy

1. Community of Christ prescribes certain procedures within the marriage, civil union, and legal relationship ceremony itself.

Ceremonial Vows

The following covenant statement approved by the First Presidency will be used for same-gender couples during the celebration of:

Marriage—*You both mutually agree to be each other's marriage companion, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition: that is keeping yourselves wholly for each other and from all others during your lives?*

Civil union—*You both mutually agree to be each other’s covenant companion, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition: that is keeping yourselves wholly for each other and from all others during your lives?*

Legal relationship—*You both mutually agree to be each other’s covenant companion, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition: that is keeping yourselves wholly for each other and from all others during your lives?*

2. An Aaronic priest or Melchisedec priesthood member is not required to perform any marriage, civil union, or legal relationship ceremony with which he or she is uncomfortable. He or she should refer the couple to another priesthood member in an appropriately sensitive, pastoral manner.
3. According to existing policy, any marriage, civil union, or legal relationship ceremony at a congregational facility requires approval from the pastor of the congregation. Use of a church campground requires approval from the mission center president. Using other church-owned property requires administrative approval from the First Presidency’s office.
4. Nothing in this policy is intended to, or should be construed to, violate or oppose the federal or state laws of the USA. A couple in a same-gender marriage must satisfy the current legal definition of the state where the couple resides. With respect to that marriage, civil union, or legal relationship, a couple must abide by the legal rights and responsibilities defined by the state where the couple resides.
5. If there are conflicts between the provisions of this policy and the laws of the USA, immediately contact your mission center president and apostle.



Reference: [WCR] Policy Number: National Policy-USA 70.02
[*Church Administrator's Handbook: 2005 Edition 6G*]; Effective Date: March 31, 2014
[*Doctrine and Covenants 17; 163; 164*] Revision Date:
[*Priesthood Manual 2004*]
[*Ministry and Priesthood planning*]
[*National Conferences: General Questions and Answers, May 22, 2012*]

INTERIM POLICY FOR RECOGNIZING SAME-GENDER COVENANT COMMITMENTS ONLY IN THE USA

Introduction for Recognizing Same-gender Covenant Commitments Only in the USA

Covenant commitment relationships are recognized only by Community of Christ and have no legal rights according to federal and state civil and governmental laws. The provision for a covenant commitment relationship is to give opportunity to express the principle of sacred covenant between same-gender couples where state laws do not allow for same-gender marriage, civil unions, or legal relationships.

Interim Policy

For purposes of policy administration:

1. Same-gender covenant commitments will be available only in states where applicable law does not permit same-gender marriages, civil unions, and/or legal relationships, and only when both persons in a couple have permanent legal residence in such state(s). Only same-gender couples, therefore, will be eligible to make covenant commitments, because marriage is available to all heterosexual couples.
2. Same-gender covenant commitments that are in accordance with this policy will be treated like marriages only within the church in the USA.
3. Same-gender covenant-commitment terminations will be treated like marriage terminations only within the church in the USA.
4. For a same-gender couple's relationship to be in accordance with this policy, the couple is expected to establish the most equivalent relationship to marriage (marriage, civil union, or legal relationship) that applicable law permits. If applicable law later changes and permits a more equivalent relationship to marriage, a same-gender

couple is expected to establish the most equivalent relationship to marriage (marriage, civil union, or legal relationship) that applicable law then permits. This situation may occur if the couple's state(s) of permanent legal residence change applicable law, or if the couple changes their state(s) of permanent legal residence.

5. If a same-gender couple later establishes a more equivalent relationship to marriage, they will be eligible (but not required) to have another Community of Christ ceremony that establishes or recognizes the establishment of that relationship.
6. Either or both persons in a same-gender couple may terminate their covenant commitment in accordance with guidelines provided by the First Presidency.



Reference: [WCR] Policy Number: National Policy-USA 70.03
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[Priesthood Manual 2004]
[Ministry and Priesthood planning]
[National Conferences: General Questions and
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INTERIM POLICY FOR AUTHORIZING AND PERFORMING SAME-GENDER COVENANT COMMITMENT SERVICES ONLY IN THE USA

Introduction for Performing Same-gender Covenant Commitment Services

In the USA, Community of Christ Aaronic priests and Melchisedec priesthood members are eligible to officiate at ceremonies that establish same-gender covenant commitments in states where applicable law does not permit same-gender marriages, civil unions, and/or legal relationships, and when both persons in a couple have permanent legal residence in such state(s).

Interim Policy

1. Community of Christ prescribes certain procedures within the covenant commitment ceremony itself.

CEREMONIAL VOW

The following covenant statement approved by the First Presidency will be used for same-gender couples during the celebration of their covenant commitment:

- Covenant commitment**—*You both mutually agree to be each other's covenant companion, that is keeping yourselves wholly for each other and from all others during your lives?*
2. An Aaronic priest or Melchisedec priesthood member is not required to perform any covenant commitment ceremony with which he or she is uncomfortable. He or she should refer the couple to another priesthood member in an appropriately sensitive, pastoral manner.

3. According to existing policy, a covenant commitment ceremony at a congregational facility requires approval from the pastor of the congregation. Use of a church campground requires the approval of the mission center president. Use of other church-owned property requires administrative approval from the First Presidency's office.



Reference: [WCR] Policy Number: National Policy-USA 40.00
[*Church Administrator's Handbook: 2005 Edition* 6G; 4] Effective Date: March 31, 2014
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[National Conferences: General Questions and
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USA INTERIM POLICY FOR ORDINATION OF PRIESTHOOD OF SAME-GENDER ORIENTATION

Introduction for Ordination

Ordination of members of same-gender orientation in the USA is authorized and will follow the policies established by the church for ordination. Policies and procedures for initiating calls are outlined in the current *Church Administrator's Handbook: 2005 Edition*. The First Presidency provides guidelines for ethics and patterns of behavior that are applicable for all priesthood.

Interim Policy

1. God calls people to the priesthood according to God's freedom, wisdom, and purposes. Race, ethnicity, size, physical ability, sex/gender, and sexual orientation are not grounds for deferring the calling of a person or approval of an ordination to any priesthood office. Calls to the priesthood are processed and approved according to established policies and procedures that are the same for all persons.
2. Church members in same-gender marriages, civil unions, and legal relationships that are valid under applicable law and in accordance with this policy, or in covenant commitments that are in accordance with this policy, are eligible to be called to serve in the priesthood according to established procedures.
3. This policy pertains to the ordination of Aaronic and Melchisedec priesthood members from among church members who are citizens or permanent residents of the USA, reside in the USA, or whose church membership is recorded in the USA.
4. If a person in a same-gender marriage is approved for ordination, the sacrament of ordination for a person in such a relationship should occur within the legal

- jurisdiction of the USA. Any exception to this policy must be specifically approved by the supervising apostle or apostles involved.
5. An Aaronic priest or Melchisedec priesthood member will not be required to perform any ordination with which he or she is uncomfortable. The priesthood ordinand should be referred to another priesthood member in an appropriately sensitive, pastoral manner.
 6. Nothing in this policy is intended to, or should be construed to, violate or oppose the federal or state laws of the USA.
 7. If there are conflicts between the provisions of this policy and the federal or state laws of the USA, immediately contact your mission center president and apostle.

Distribution

This interim policy will be distributed to the following church leaders:

- WCLC members
- World Church Legal Services
- USA mission center officers, staff members, and employees
- All pastors in USA
- All priesthood members in USA
- Other field officers, staff, and employees, as needed

The nature of offering priesthood ministry by people in same-sex/gender relationships can be disruptive and even harmful in some nations. Following are lists of nations where ministry by priesthood in same-sex/gender relationships will not be accepted and nations where it may be accepted. These lists are provided to guide the church in its sensitivity to the different cultures that form the international body of Community of Christ.

Nations where priesthood ministry by people in same-sex/gender relationships would not be accepted:

Aruba	Republic of Haiti
Cayman Islands	Republic of Honduras
Commonwealth of Puerto Rico	Republic of India
Democratic Republic of Congo	Republic of Kenya
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka	Republic of Liberia
Dominican Republic	Republic of Malawi
Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal	Republic of Mozambique
Federal Republic of Nigeria	Republic of Nicaragua
Federative Republic of Brazil	Republic of Peru
Georgia	Republic of Sierra Leone
Islamic Republic of Pakistan	Republic of South Korea
Jamaica	Republic of the Congo
Japan	Republic of the Fiji Islands
Kingdom of Thailand	Republic of the Philippines
New Caledonia	Republic of Togo
Republic of Angola	Republic of Venezuela
Republic of Bolivia	Republic of Zambia
Republic of Botswana	Republic of Zimbabwe
Republic of China (Taiwan)	Russian Federation
Republic of Colombia	Ukraine
Republic of Côte d'Ivoire	United Mexican States
Republic of El Salvador	United Republic of Tanzania
Republic of Guatemala	

Nations where priesthood ministry by people in same-sex/gender relationships may be accepted, but requires administrative approval by appropriate church officers:

Argentine Republic	New Zealand
Federal Republic of Germany	Republic of Chile
French Polynesia	Republic of Hungary
French Republic	Republic of South Africa
Kingdom of Norway	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Kingdom of Spain	
Kingdom of the Netherlands	

Nations where priesthood ministry by people in same-sex/gender relationships has been approved by a national conference:

Canada

Commonwealth of Australia

United States of America