



Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

September 15, 2025

To Community of Christ in the U.S.A.,

Greetings in the peace of Jesus Christ. This letter informs you that the Council of Twelve and First Presidency approved a new policy on Priesthood and Cohabitation for the United States. In short, living in a monogamous, cohabiting partnership is no longer an automatic reason to be disqualified from ordination or continued service in priesthood, as long as all other church policy expectations are met.

This change is the result of a faithful, multi-year journey. It included dialogue and prayerful discernment, as well as close policy review.

Important actions that led to this decision include:

- 2010: Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a–b was adopted. This passage changed the church's approach from rule-based restrictions to principle-based ethics. This emphasized Christ-like love, mutual respect, justice, covenant, and the worth of all people as guiding values for relationships and priesthood.
- 2016: A formal commentary reinforced this principle-based framework. It encouraged ethical discernment of circumstances over rigid rules in matters of sexual ethics, priesthood morality, and personal conduct.
- 2019: The First Presidency clarified that cohabitation outside of marriage was not compatible with priesthood status under the existing policy. They also announced a comprehensive review in collaboration with the Standing High Council and World Church Leadership Council.
- 2023: World Conference Resolution (WCR) 1327 was passed. It affirms marriage as a sacred covenant and authorizing apostles to define marriage-related policies within cultural contexts. This resolution laid the groundwork for field-level adaptations.
- 2023–2024: During an interim period in the USA, priesthood members were not released for cohabiting, but new calls were paused. This allowed time to gather feedback from leaders and members on how their ministry is received and discern a response.
- February 2025: A national survey of USA members revealed that about 75% expressed full or moderate support for recognizing monogamous, committed cohabiting relationships as compatible with priesthood ministry.
- 2025: Based on this feedback and the authority granted by WCR 1327, the Council of Twelve and First Presidency enacted the new policy without requiring a national conference vote.

This policy affirms the principles of covenant, mutual respect, responsibility, justice, and Christ-like love as foundational to all relationships. These values are rooted in Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a and the Enduring Principles. They guide ethical relationships and priesthood morality. The policy reflects the

USA FIELD APOSTLES

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evolving cultural and ethical context in which we live and minister. It also upholds Community of Christ's ethical standards and sacred stewardship expected of priesthood members.

We recognize that members across the USA will receive this news with a range of responses. Organizational change is rarely easy—but it can be deeply faithful. We remain committed to open and respectful dialogue as we walk together in faith.

For questions about how the new policy may apply to individual circumstances, please contact your pastor or mission center president.

Your Companions on the Journey,

Apostles supporting the church in the USA Field,

Matthew Frizzell

Kat Hnatyshyn

Richard James

Lachlan Mackay

Shannon McAdam

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Community of Christ

USA Apostles

TO: Membership in USA
RE: Policy on Priesthood and Cohabitation
DATE: Oct 31, 2025

Sections

- General Considerations
- Process
- Concerns and Opposition

General Considerations

1. Q: Why is there a new policy on priesthood and cohabitation for the USA Field?

A: The new policy is the result of consideration after World Conference Resolution (WCR) 1327 was passed in 2023. It also responds to Doctrine and Covenants 164:6.

WCR 1327 recognized diverse definitions, practices, and laws governing marriage across nations and cultures of the church. It designated the Council of Twelve responsible for definitions, guidelines, practices, and policies regarding marriage and marriage-like relationships where the laws, cultures, and traditions for marriage are similar. During the interim conference period of 2023 and 2025, the Council of Twelve worked with the First Presidency on the implementation of WCR 1327, particularly for the USA, Canada, Europe, and Australia.

The USA Apostles believe the previous policy on priesthood and cohabitation needed further consideration. There was growing diversity of viewpoints on marriage in the field. Doctrine and Covenants 164:6 offers principles for “questions arising about responsible human sexuality; gender identities, roles, and relationships; marriage and other issues.” Consensus is that these principles are primary.

The new policy does not change policies and expectations of priesthood conduct, ministerial ethics, or application of ethical principles set forth in Doctrine and Covenants 164:6. Its only action is to clarify that a monogamous cohabitating partnership is a marriage-like relationship that is not, alone, grounds for releasing someone from priesthood or preventing a call from being processed.

2. Q: When the 2013 USA National Conference voted to support marriage and ordination with LGBTIQA+ persons, the requirement was that anyone being considered for priesthood must seek the highest level of legal commitment available in their jurisdiction for marriage. What's changed since then?

A: We recognize the policy change is small but significant. Cohabitation as monogamous committed partners no longer automatically disqualify someone for ordination or active priesthood ministry. The journey to this policy has many aspects. We will note three important changes.

First, the USA field continues to change. Since the 2013 USA National Conference, federal laws defining marriage have changed. Religious and legal definitions of marriage have become more polarized in our nation's political and religious divide. Attitudes and practices concerning marriage and marriage-like relationships also vary based on age, financial circumstances, religious beliefs, and other factors. In this environment, Doctrine and Covenants 164:6 offers guidance on what is most important for understanding marriage, human sexuality, and covenant relationships.

Second, the 2023 World Conference passed WCR 1327. This resolution designated the Council of Twelve responsible for definitions, guidelines, practices, and policies regarding marriage and marriage-like relationships where the laws, cultures, and traditions for marriage are similar. It authorized the Council to consider the position on cohabitation and marriage for the fields in which it served.

Third, the USA Team of Apostles received feedback from the USA Field. In February of 2024, the USA Apostles surveyed the field on the question of priesthood and persons cohabiting in committed monogamous relationships. They received over 1300 responses. Approximately three-quarters of respondents indicated moderate or full support for the following positions:

- Healthy relationship principles apply to committed relationships regardless of marriage.
- Cohabitating in a monogamous, committed relationship that upholds healthy relationship principles does not prevent a priesthood member from ministering effectively.
- Cohabitating in a monogamous, committed relationship that upholds healthy relationship principles should not prevent an individual from being called to priesthood.

This indicated a high level of support for the position that cohabitation in a monogamous, committed relationship that upholds healthy relationship principles should not prevent someone from ordination and ministering as priesthood.

3. Q: Are there other faith groups that allow priesthood (clergy) or lay ministers to cohabit without getting married?

A: Yes. However, understanding the answer requires further explanation.

First, faith groups define marriage and marriage-like relationships differently. Community of Christ, like Catholicism, identifies marriage as a sacrament. Not all Christian denominations and faith groups do. Differing beliefs and practices result in different requirements for ministers.

Secondly, how faith groups decide what is acceptable and unacceptable differs. Noted above, many Protestant denominations recognize marriage as a holy covenant, but not a sacrament. The United Methodists are an example. In such cases, local laws regarding marriage may be primary. Because some states recognize common law marriage, some faith traditions recognize common-law marriage to equal marriage. In these cases, cohabitation as a part of common law marriage could be acceptable depending on the faith community, local laws, or circumstances.

Further, faith groups define what marriages or marriage-like relationships are acceptable at different levels of organization. Congregational Christian denominations like the Baptists or United Church of Christ may decide what ministers and marital situations are acceptable at the congregational level. In congregationalist churches, congregations have final autonomy even if conferences have positions on these matters.

In sum, the Council of Twelve Apostles initially inquired about this question and found varying definitions and answers. It is difficult to make a list of which faith groups allow priesthood (clergy) or lay ministers to cohabit given differing definitions and practices of marriage as a covenant. In general, faith groups that closely align individual religious standards with celibacy and/or marriage require one or the other of its ministers.

4. Q: Is there a standard for “monogamous, cohabitating partnership” for pastors, mission center leaders, or church officials to use?

A: Not currently. Pastors and mission center leaders are encouraged to treat those in monogamous cohabitating partnerships as we would married couples. Personally inquire whether candidates for ordination or priesthood members cohabitating with others are in monogamous committed relationships. They are also encouraged to provide pastoral support for these relationships as they would other married couples, including in the event of difficulties, separation, or death.

5. Q: Is there a suggested period for someone to cohabit before we decide they are committed?

A: No. While this may seem appropriate, the church does not have a standard for married couples regarding dating and courtship, engagement period, or length of marriage before ordination is considered.

We encourage pastors and mission center leaders to personally inquire whether candidates for ordination or priesthood members are in monogamous committed relationships if cohabitating with their partner. Approach the situation as they would ask of marriage. Affirm the importance of covenant commitment. They are also encouraged to provide pastoral support for these relationships as they would other married couples, including in the event of difficulties, separation, or death.

6. Q: Does the new policy apply only to congregations physically located in the USA? Some mission centers in the USA also have congregations outside the United States.

A: The new policy applies to members and residents within the United States. In most circumstances, it would not apply to congregations physically located outside the USA. It does apply to ministers living in the USA and approved for guest ministry outside the USA.

Process

7. Q: How does someone seek priesthood reinstatement from voluntary or involuntary release due to cohabitation?

A: An excerpt from the Church Administrator's Handbook on reinstatement is reproduced below:

Reinstatement

A member may be reinstated to a priesthood office from which they were released voluntarily or

involuntarily. This is achieved through personal request and approvals of supervising officers in the administrative line according to established procedures. Reinstatement does not require re-ordination. A new priesthood certificate will be issued when an approved action is reported to the World Church secretary.

- People who currently have priesthood suspended or were released from priesthood for cohabiting with their partner should reach out to their pastor for consideration of priesthood reinstatement. Pastors will contact mission center presidents to begin the reinstatement process.
- The member seeking reinstatement to the office from which they were released voluntarily or involuntarily should submit a personal written request. The individual may also request to be reinstated to an office previously ordained.
- To proceed, the request must be approved by supervising officers in the administrative line according to established procedures. Typically, this is the pastor and mission center president for Aaronic priesthood and Elder. Apostles are included on World Church Minister offices.

8. Q: Is reinstatement automatic?

A: No. There may be other reasons that prevent or slow reinstatement. For example, an individual may no longer wish to be reinstated, has ceased to attend or affiliate with Community of Christ, or be in circumstances for which priesthood would not be appropriate. In addition, if the priesthood member was released or suspended for three or more years, it may be appropriate to ask the individual to take the course for their priesthood office again. If there are questions, we encourage pastors to use discretion and contact mission center officers for additional guidance.

9. Q: How long do you think this reinstatement process will take?

A: It depends on the circumstances of the individual involved and if any requirements for reinstatement are made. We recommend that the pastor or mission center president reach out to their Field Support Minister if you feel the administrative process is being delayed or ignored. (For more information, see Questions under the section “Process”).

10. Q: What if a priesthood member affected by the previous policy is no longer active?

A: Pastors are encouraged to reach out to members hurt or adversely affected by the previous policy, if they feel led or it is appropriate. Reconciliation is essential for community, as is pastoral care.

If reconciliation results in a former priesthood member’s desire for reinstatement, the member must submit the request themselves according to process. Intent to re-engage participation in community and ministry is important to discuss and clarify. If it’s been more than three years, the USA Apostles recommend asking the former priesthood member to retake the priesthood office course.

11. Q: Will the church check giving patterns before reinstating priesthood?

A: A review of giving patterns to local and worldwide mission tithes is done with all requests for reinstatement to active priesthood. This is in accordance with the principles of generosity upheld for all disciples and priesthood.

12. Q: Does someone in a monogamous cohabiting partnership now eligible for a priesthood call need to be a Registered Youth Worker and take the required priesthood courses for their call?

A: Yes. Youth Worker Registration is required for priesthood.

13. Q: Does the priesthood member need to retake the course of their priesthood office before reinstatement?

A: Working with a mentor and reviewing the priesthood course(s) is recommended with all reinstatement requests.

14. Q: If a request for reinstatement has already been submitted to our former Apostle, does it need to be resubmitted?

A: Before submitting an additional request for reinstatement, please inquire with your Field Support Minister on the status of that request.

15. Q: If cohabiting people want their relationship to be religiously blessed without a registered legal marriage, will ministers be able to do that?

A: The church does not support officiating the sacrament of marriage as a “covenant commitment” ceremony or without registering the marriage legally. The sacrament of Evangelist Blessing is available to individuals, couples, households or families, and groups. If laws or protections change, the church may respond accordingly.

Concerns and Opposition

16. Q: What if I disagree with the new policy?

A: It is important to consider the new policy does not change policies and expectations of priesthood conduct, ministerial ethics, or application of ethical principles set forth in Doctrine and Covenants 164:6. Its only action is to clarify that a monogamous cohabitating partnership is a marriage-like relationship that is not, alone, grounds for releasing someone from priesthood or preventing a call from being processed.

We affirm that the church upholds faithful disagreement. The church’s statement on faithful disagreement may be found on Our Ministry Tools (<https://cofchrist.org/our-ministry-tools/>).

We encourage those who disagree to prayerfully reflect, explore their conscience, and consult their pastor and/or mission center president. Disagreement does not nullify the policy. Former priesthood members seeking reinstatement are free to submit their request in writing according to procedures.

17. Q: What if members or priesthood in my congregation disagree or object to the new policy?

A: We trust leaders will listen to disagreement and objection with care. Invite open dialogue to voice disagreements, listen to other perspectives, and seek reconciliation. Common consent does not mean full

agreement. Rather, consent respects the responsibility of leaders to act with the permission of the people and/or authority of their role. The church upholds faithful disagreement.

Priesthood or members who faithfully disagree should be respected. If disagreement rises to conflict or harm within the congregation or its relationships, the mission center president may be contacted.

We also invite leaders to emphasize that the new policy does not change policies and expectations of priesthood conduct, ministerial ethics, or application of ethical principles set forth in Doctrine and Covenants 164:6. Its only action is to clarify that a monogamous cohabitating partnership is a marriage-like relationship that is not, alone, grounds for releasing someone from priesthood or preventing a call from being processed.

The church's statement on faithful disagreement may be found on Our Ministry Tools (<https://cofchrist.org/our-ministry-tools/>).

18. Q: Is the church moving away from the sacrament of marriage?

A: No. We encounter God through the sacraments, which connect people across the global church. Marriage is traditionally a lifelong, monogamous commitment between two people, involving covenants with God, each other, and their community. Customs and legal requirements for marriage vary worldwide. This policy does not replace the sacrament of marriage, which remains important to the church.

19. Q: It looks bad to have new apostles ordained and immediately make a change like this so quickly. Why did the new apostles act so quickly?

A: Assuming the new apostles acted quickly to change this policy is not accurate.

This topic has been part of discussion and discernment during the interim Conference period from 2023-2025 and included input from the field.

The current policy is the result of ongoing discernment within the Council of Twelve, World Church Leadership Council, and Standing High Council. Apostles ordained at the 2025 World Conference participated in developing the current policy in expanded sessions with the previous Council. Apostles and members in Canada, Europe, and Australia are in similar situations and different stages of consideration. Previous discussions regarding marriage and marriagelike relationships led to WCR 1327 in 2023. WCR 1327 granted the Council of Twelve responsibility for definitions, guidelines, practices, and policies regarding marriage and marriagelike relationships where the laws, cultures, and traditions for marriage are similar.

20. Q: I don't agree with the new policy and believe the USA should have had a national conference to discuss it. Why wasn't there a national conference?

A: There are several reasons why a national conference was not held to discuss this change. The reasons are procedural, theological, and concern stewardship.

Procedurally, WCR 1327 delegates responsibility for definitions, guidelines, practices, and policies regarding marriage and marriagelike relationships to the Council of Twelve for fields with similar laws, cultures, and traditions for marriage. The new policy was timely and responsive to WCR 1327. Two years

passed, which included a survey of USA church members, with over 1300 responses. The survey conveyed a level of support.

Scripturally, Doctrine and Covenants 164:7 permits church leaders to convene national or field conferences where possible and appropriate. It directs World Church officers to create and interpret church policies to meet the needs of the church and counsels timely resolution of pressing issues (see Doctrine and Covenants 164:7c).

In addition, the new policy does not change any policies concerning priesthood conduct, ministerial ethics, or the application of ethical principles set forth in Doctrine and Covenants 164:6. This passage emphasizes that “nothing within these principles condones selfish, irresponsible, promiscuous, degrading, or abusive relationships.” The new policy’s only action is to clarify that a monogamous cohabitating partnership is a marriagelike relationship that is not, alone, grounds for releasing someone from priesthood or preventing a call from being processed.

Stewardship was also considered. The time, resources, and costs of a national or field conference are considerable for both members and the World Church. Adequate preparation materials would need to be developed across the USA church. The time needed would preoccupy the USA Field for multiple years.

21. Q: I am uncomfortable explaining that ministers in my community can cohabitate without marriage. How can I respond?

A: Community of Christ’s shift from rule-based morality to ethical principles is foundational. Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a identifies six principles for behavior in relationships affirmed in the new policy, “against which there is no law.” The six principles are Christ-like love, mutual respect, responsibility, justice, covenant, and faithfulness. The Council of Twelve Apostles embrace this prophetic counsel.

These six principles fulfill the highest standards of covenant relationships for the USA field. We recognize that these principles often surpass the ethical standards and expectations lived out in legal marriage. We may fall short of these standards without consequences for priesthood. Doctrine and Covenants 164:6b instructs us, as leaders, to go deeper. It states that, “If the church more fully will understand and consistently apply these principles, questions arising about responsible human sexuality; gender identities, roles, and relationships; marriage; and other issues may be resolved according to God’s divine purposes.” We invite the USA church to journey together in more fully understanding what these principles mean for life together in Christ’s community.