

MICHIGAN REGION OF THE MISSIONARY CHURCH

Policy on Lifestyle Issues and Credentialing (June, 2017)

The Michigan Region of the Missionary Church has maintained a long-term policy requiring all credentialed ministers and their spouses to abstain from the use of alcohol and other potentially harmful items such as tobacco and illicit drugs. The Region has upheld this policy as a leadership standard to model a lifestyle that honors the Lord and to serve as a godly influence on others.

In 2016 the Ministry Leadership Council of the Missionary Church adopted the following statement clarifying the use of alcohol in regard to credentialing:

Based upon the fact that abstinence is not mandated in the Scriptures and that our statement in the Constitution of the Missionary Church calls for us to not injure our influence or bodies by the use of alcohol, the Ministry Leadership Council suggests that the credentialing process across the Missionary Church be sensitive to the various views within our denomination on this matter. We ask for respect for all positions of conscience, recognizing that for some abstinence is a preferred position.

A position of abstinence is not required for credentialing from a denominational perspective. Nevertheless, in light of Romans 14:19-23, regardless of one's position regarding abstinence or moderation, we strongly urge that church leaders across the entire Missionary Church carefully consider their example and influence.

In response to that decision, the Regional Oversight Council on June 7, 2016 decided that abstinence continues to be the preferred, recommended position of the Region, but that credentialed ministers are to be granted freedom of conscience in this matter, recognizing that they are fully accountable before the Lord and the leadership of the local church for their choices and actions.

The Region's current abstinence policy used in the credentialing process has been modified to reflect this change and will be presented to all future candidates for credentialing and any Missionary Church minister transferring to the Michigan Region. The attached document entitled, "Biblical Examination of Lifestyle Practices" is a companion document to this statement of policy.

CREDENTIALING PROCEDURE:

When a candidate applies to the Michigan Region or one of its Districts for credentialing:

1. The credentialing committee will review the candidate's answer to the lifestyle question(s) on his or her application.
2. The credentialing committee will present this document to each candidate stating our preferred position of abstinence for pastors and spouses.
3. If the candidate takes a moderation/occasional use view on alcohol, the credentialing committee will still credential the candidate (assuming all other credentialing items are in order), but will ask that candidate to place themselves under the authority of their local church leaders and the appropriate District or Regional leaders for guidance and oversight.

A Biblical Examination of Lifestyle Issues

Michigan Region, Missionary Church (June, 2017 ed.)

For many years in our Michigan District/Region we have asked credentialed pastors and their spouses to abstain from the consumption of alcohol and from the use of tobacco and other potentially harmful substances such as marijuana and addictive and/or illegal drugs. This was a requirement designed to protect the testimony of our churches and the reputation of our pastors.

Recently the regional leadership and the Committee on Ordination and Licensing (COOL) modified that position in response to changing perspectives within our denomination as a whole. This examination of biblical principles is designed to help pastors make Christ-honoring decisions in these matters and to explain why the Michigan Regional leadership maintains a preference for a position of abstinence.

The regional leaders affirm a position of abstinence as our preferred and recommended standard for pastors and church leaders in the Michigan Region. It is our conviction that abstaining from alcohol and tobacco is the most direct path to a reputation regarding these issues that is above reproach in our culture. While Scripture does not specifically prohibit a moderate consumption of alcohol or the use of tobacco, we believe there are strong and compelling reasons to abstain from these things as pastors and church leaders. As followers of Christ we are called to fulfill the Great Commission which is our vision and mission as the Michigan Region. To that end we are to live in ways that bring glory to Christ and that draw unbelievers to him as the One who alone can transform lives.

We base our view on several biblical principles:

- 1. Alcohol and tobacco are clearly glamorized in our culture as part of a life of license and recklessness. We as Christians are exhorted to live a different lifestyle from the world around us.** (2 Cor 6:14-7:1; Col 3:5-10)

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? ¹⁵ What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

“I will live with them
and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they will be my people.”

¹⁷ Therefore, “Come out from them
and be separate,
says the Lord.
Touch no unclean thing,
and I will receive you.”

¹⁸ And, “I will be a Father to you,
and you will be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty.”

7.1 Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Colossians 3:5-10

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

- 2. The damage that alcohol and tobacco bring to the human body and to families and relationships should make us want to distance ourselves from personal involvement.** (Rom 12:1-2; 1 Cor 6:12-20)

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³ You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

- 3. Pastors and leaders are held to a higher standard of behavior in Scripture and are to be models for believers to follow.** (1 Cor 4:15-16, 11:1; 1 Tim 4:16; James 3:1)

1 Corinthians 4:15-16, 11:1

Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. ¹⁶ Therefore I urge you to imitate me. ¹ Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

1 Timothy 4:16

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

James 3:1

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

- 4. We are to be sensitive to the possibility that our actions may cause a weaker or more vulnerable Christian to stumble and fall into sin. We also want to affirm and help those in our churches who are recovering from addictions. We are to be willing to set aside our freedom to encourage another believer to be strong in their struggle. (Rom 14:21; 1 Cor 8:9-13)**

Romans 14:21

It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.

1 Corinthians 8:9-13

Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. ¹² When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

- 5. We also realize that these principles apply to a wider range of issues than alcohol and tobacco use. They can also apply to proper exercise and care for our bodies, moderation in what we eat, balance between work and rest, and choices we make in entertainment. (1 Cor 10:23-26, 31; 1 Peter 1:14-19)**

1 Corinthians 10:23-26, 31

"I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive. ²⁴ No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

²⁵ Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, ²⁶ for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." ³¹ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

1 Peter 1:14-19

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.

¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."^[a]

¹⁷ Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

- 6. Scripture prohibits drunkenness but does not command abstinence. So, when and if a Christian does consume alcohol, it is to be in moderation. The line into drunkenness is never to be crossed.** (Eph. 5:18; James 3:17)

Ephesians 5:18

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,

James 3:17

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

Additional Note: We certainly commend anyone's efforts to stimulate spiritual conversations and a willingness to reach people outside the context of the church building. We are not convinced, however, that participating in drinking alcohol or smoking is essential to connecting with those who don't know Jesus. This aspect of a church's ministry should also be discussed and accepted or limited by a decision of the church's leadership.

- 7. Too often we have taken a legalistic approach to the issues of abstaining from alcohol or tobacco. We have held them up in pride as a badge of "holiness" or have used our personal convictions to judge or condemn other believers.** (Matt 23:2-5; Luke 6:41-42; Gal 5:1)

Matthew 23:2-5

"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. ³ So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.

⁴ They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. ⁵ "Everything they do is done for people to see:

Luke 6:41-42

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴² How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Galatians 5:1

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

- 8. Our goal is to live by the Spirit's direction, not under a list of rules. Jesus has set us free from the law and we are to rest in that freedom with joy.** (John 15:1-8; Romans 7:4-6, 14:1-4, 12; Gal 5:13, 16; Eph 5:1-2)

John 15:1-8

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes^[a] so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in

you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Romans 7:4-6

So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. ⁵For when we were in the realm of the flesh,^[a] the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. ⁶But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

Romans 14:1-4, 12

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ²One person’s faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

¹²So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

Galatians 5:13, 16

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

¹⁶So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Ephesians 5:1-2

Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children ²and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.