



PROCEDURES FOR DISCIPLINING SCOM MEMBERS

For Use in SCOMAF Zones, SCOM UCS and Secondary School SCOM Branches

September 2020

Clarifications can be sought from:

The General Secretary
Student Christian Organization of Malawi
Post Office Box 657
Lilongwe
Malawi

+265 887 20 80 16

E-mail: scommalawi@gmail.com

1. Background

Acts of sin and misconduct whether done wilfully or ignorantly are not new in the Christian faith. When these have been committed, elders are supposed to take steps that will correct the brother/sister in a manner that will preserve the faith of the estranged brother or sister. The need to guide SCOM leadership at national, regional, and branch levels to restore wandering believers lovingly has led to the development of these procedures.

The procedures have been developed in line with the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ as presented in Matthew 18:15-17:

¹⁵ "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' ¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

The procedures are to be applied to every SCOM member and they are not independent of the SCOM Code of Conduct. By this, it is meant that the implementation of the procedures will help the ministry to implement the SCOM Code of Conduct which does not have clear provisions for disciplinary processes in the case of its breach.

2. The Purpose of Discipline

Disciplinary processes in the church are implemented for purposes of restoring a brother or sister who have gone astray, as well as, defining the values and beliefs of the system. In SCOM, the purpose of the disciplinary processes is the spiritual restoration of fallen members and the consequent strengthening of the ministry and glorifying of the Lord. When a sinning believer is rebuked and he or she turns from his/her sin and is forgiven, he/she is won back to fellowship with the body and with its head, Jesus Christ.

In administering discipline leaders should not aim at throwing people out of the ministry or feed themselves with self-righteous pride. Leaders should not aim at embarrassing people or to exercise authority and power in some unbiblical manner.

The guidelines also recognise that a member can be said to have sinned when in fact he or she has not sinned or committed any misconduct. It is the goal of these procedures to establish whether a misconduct or sin has actually occurred or not so as to protect members who may suffer from mere backbiting. In this case, SCOM will not apply disciplinary sanctions on members that are not supposed to face these.

3. Disciplinary Courts

SCOM shall have branch, zonal, regional and national disciplinary courts. Primarily, disciplinary cases shall be heard in a zone or branch where the member who is alleged to have sinned or committed a misconduct belong. By this, the procedures place the primary role of taking care of the spiritual lives of members are in the zonal or branch committee. Branch and zonal courts are expected to conclude all the matters before

them to avoid discussing people's spiritual lives in many courts. Referrals to higher courts are thus expected to be made under exceedingly rare circumstances. When a matter is referred to a higher court, the lower court will no longer consider it until its final determination.

Higher courts (Regional and national disciplinary courts) shall primarily handle cases of misconduct by office holders at that level who committed the misconduct while exercising their duties. Disciplinary courts at this level will more likely relate to organisational misconduct. For example, if a regional treasurer misappropriates resources that belong to the region or a regional Chairperson has a sour relationship with one of the regional committee members, the regional committee will handle the disciplinary case; if the same person is alleged to have been involved in sexual immorality, this will be handled by his/her zonal committee but the regional committee will be informed of the outcomes of the disciplinary processes.

Higher courts will also be handling appeals by members feel that their case was unfairly handled. The determination by the national court in the referral case shall be considered final.

At each disciplinary court, the executive committee shall set up a disciplinary panel when there is a disciplinary case to handle. Members of the disciplinary panel shall be carefully selected by the executive committee to consider spiritual maturity and the ability to handle the case at hand. Both executive and non-executive members of the branch or zone shall qualify to be part of the disciplinary panel. The chairperson of the executive shall not be part of the disciplinary panel because the outcome of the panel shall be reported to the chairperson.

4. The Disciplinary Process

A disciplinary process shall be instituted after an allegation of sin or misconduct by a member had been brought to the attention of the committee. The allegation can be brought by another member or it may be an allegation that has become public information in the media.

A member who brings an allegation to the committee should provide as much information as possible and be ready to serve as a witness in the case. When an allegation has been brought, a disciplinary process shall follow three main steps which includes investigating the allegation, private discipline, and disciplinary hearing.

4.1 *Investigating an Allegation*

All allegations that have been brought to the attention of the committee shall be investigated before the disciplinary processes start. At this stage, the committee will aim at establishing the truth about the allegations. One or two members will be

assigned to investigate on the allegations. If the investigations involve interviewing the concerned brother, it should be made to him or her that the investigating brethren are just establishing the facts.

Outcomes of the investigations could be either of the following:

- 4.1.1 The allegations is false. The disciplinary processes will be discontinued;
- 4.1.2 The allegations are true. The case shall proceed to the private discipline stage.

If the allegations were brought by a member, the outcome of the investigations should be communicated to him to appreciate his/her role as well as make him/her aware of the truth in case the disciplinary action is discontinued.

4.2 Private Discipline

Basing on the teaching of our Lord Jesus, this stage will aim at restoring a brother or sister after it has been established that he/she was involved in wrongdoing. In some cases, implementation of private disciplining can be part of the investigations of the allegation.

During private disciplinary process, a minimum of two and maximum of three believers will be sent to the brother who has committed a sin or an act of misconduct with the aim of making him/her realise that he/she has sinned or committed a misconduct. Upon accepting the wrongdoing, the brethren will lead the member to repentance. There will be four possible outcomes from the private disciplinary hearing:

- 4.2.1 The sinning brother or sister repents in response to the private confrontation, that brother or sister is forgiven and restored. Based on the type of sin or misconduct committee, the branch or zonal executive committee will decide on either of the following:
 - 4.2.1.1 Completely discontinue the case;
 - 4.2.1.2 Discontinue the case but put the brother or sister under another brother or sister's guidance for some time;
 - 4.2.1.3 Discontinue the case but suspend the brother from leading or visiting schools for some defined time as he or she will be observed;
 - 4.2.1.4 Discontinue the case but request the member for restitution of all wrongs. Restitution can be in a form of offering an apology, paying back stolen money, breaking ungodly relationships, etc; and
 - 4.2.1.5 Combination of decisions shall be allowed based on the cases.

- 4.2.2 The sinning brother or sister refuses to accept to have committed an act of sin or misconduct although there is adequate evidence that act of sin or misconduct was committed. Under this case, the member shall be requested to appear before a public disciplinary hearing.
- 4.2.3 The sinning brother or sister accepts to have committed sin or misconduct but refuses to repent and change. This member shall be requested to appear before the public disciplinary hearing.
- 4.2.4 The sinning brother or sister convinces the brethren that there was no act of sin or misconduct. The brethren will encourage him or her and discontinue the case.

4.3 Public Disciplinary Hearing

Public disciplinary hearing will be reserved for cases that were not concluded at the private disciplinary hearing. At the public disciplinary hearing, the alleged member will be allowed to bring witnesses. The branch or zonal committee shall also be allowed to bring witnesses. Witnesses shall be brought if the member did not act the act at the private hearing although the committee has adequate evidence. If the member accepted wrongdoing but was not repentant, the public disciplinary hearing shall not bring witnesses.

- 4.3.1 In case when the member refused to accept wrong doing during the private disciplinary hearing, the public hearing will follow the following procedure:
 - 4.3.1.1 The chairperson of the hearing shall read the allegation and ask the member whether he/she accept the allegation or not;
 - 4.3.1.2 If a member accepts the charge after step 4.3.1.1, the committee will suspend steps 4.3.1.3 to 4.3.1.5.
 - 4.3.1.3 The chairperson shall bring out the evidence they have including allowing witnesses to testify.
 - 4.3.1.4 The member will be asked to respond to the evidence and he/she will use his/her witnesses at this point.
 - 4.3.1.5 The committee will cross examine the member and all witnesses
 - 4.3.1.6 All witnesses and the member shall be requested to go out for the committee to make a determination of whether the act was committed or not.
- 4.3.2 If the member accepts act of sin or misconduct at the private disciplinary hearing or public disciplinary hearing, the committee shall choose any of the decisions under 4.2.1.
- 4.3.3 When the member refuses to accept but the committee finds evidence of act of sin or misconduct, the committee shall make any of the following determination:
 - 4.3.3.1 Suspend a member

- 4.3.3.2 Give a member sometime to reflect before the final determination is made
- 4.3.3.3 Ex-communicate a member
- 4.3.3.4 Refer the matter to a higher court.

4.4 *Conditions under suspension and ex-communication*

4.4.1 The following conditions shall apply to a member who is under suspension for committing an act of sin or misconduct:

- 4.4.1.1 The member shall cease to hold any position within the ministry;
- 4.4.1.2 Another member shall be assigned to assist a member until the ministry wins the member back;
- 4.4.1.3 The member shall not be allowed to preach or perform an activity within a SCOM meeting;
- 4.4.1.4 The member shall not be allowed to conduct branch visitations;
- 4.4.1.5 The member shall be allowed to attend SCOM conferences and any other gathering;
- 4.4.1.6 The member shall be encouraged to continue to attend SCOM meetings for the period of suspension; and
- 4.4.1.7 The member will be restored after the defined suspension period if the member who was following up on him can attest to the change in his life. The decision to restore him shall be communicated to the member.

4.4.2 The following conditions shall apply to a member that has been excommunicated

- 4.4.2.1 The member shall cease to hold any position within the ministry;
- 4.4.2.2 The member shall not be allowed to preach or perform an activity within a SCOM meeting;
- 4.4.2.3 The member shall not be allowed to conduct branch visitations;
- 4.4.2.4 The member shall not be allowed to attend SCOM conferences;
- 4.4.2.5 The member is allowed to attend SCOM meetings; and
- 4.4.2.6 The member will be allowed to apply for re-admittance if he realises his sins. When a member applies to re-join SCOM, the committee shall put him under observation for some time based on the case. During observation period, the committee shall decide on points under 4.2.1 that shall apply to the member.