

# Proposed Forms for Discipline for a United Federation

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## Prefacing Comments

The URCNA currently uses the “Form for Excommunication” and the “Form for Readmission” as found in the 1976 Psalter Hymnal. The CanRCs have matching forms which are very close in content: it is clear that the forms have a common root. The CanRC forms, however, are a bit more up to date in language and provide helpful cross references to scripture. The CanRC forms include the announcements as part of the form, whereas in the URCNA each church drafts its own announcement. The CanRCs also have a form for excommunication of non-communicant members.

Given how we would not be engaging in in depth study into the forms as we did with the church order articles, and given how the discipline forms have a long history, we decided that we should restrict ourselves as much as possible to making only linguistic and stylistic modifications.

Given how the CanRC forms are more up to date linguistically, and given how only the CanRCs have a form for excommunication of non-communicant members, we decided to use the CanRC forms as templates. The CanRC forms, however, use the NIV84 Bible translation. Due to time constraints we continued with this but also decided to highlight this as something that should be subject to review.

Below are the actual forms that have been drafted.

## Form for Excommunication of Communicant Members

### *First Announcement*

Beloved in the Lord:

The consistory informs you with sorrow that a member of the congregation has become guilty of sin against the \_\_\_\_\_ commandment(s). In spite of several earnest admonitions, there is no evidence of repentance. Therefore the consistory had to suspend this member from the communion of the Lord’s Supper. However, this silent discipline has not led to repentance. To its great sorrow, the consistory is now obliged to proceed to public discipline. We therefore make this

known to you and seriously exhort you to pray to the Lord that He may bring this member of the body to repentance.

### ***Second Announcement***

Beloved in the Lord:

The consistory has previously informed you that a member has become guilty of sin against the \_\_\_\_\_ commandment(s). This member was suspended from the Lord's Supper because of refusal to repent. In spite of continued discipline no true repentance has become apparent. On the contrary, all admonitions remained fruitless. The only result was a further hardening of heart. Therefore, having obtained the concurring advice of classis, we now with sorrow proceed to the second step of public discipline and make known to you the name of the unrepentant member, namely \_\_\_\_\_ (name). We seriously exhort you to admonish this brother (sister) continually in love. Pray that the Lord may bring about repentance so that the sinner may be saved and the sin be banned from the congregation.

### ***Third Announcement***

Beloved in the Lord:

On two occasions the consistory has had the sad duty of informing you that our brother (sister) \_\_\_\_\_ (name) is guilty of sinning against the \_\_\_\_\_ commandment(s). You heard that he (she) remained impenitent and therefore was suspended from the Lord's Supper. Since that time no true repentance has been shown and all admonitions have remained fruitless. Therefore, to our great sorrow, we now inform you that if brother (sister) \_\_\_\_\_ (name) does not come to repentance, he (she) will be excommunicated from the church of Christ on \_\_\_\_\_ (date). For the last time we exhort you to admonish him (her) most urgently and in love. Pray that it may please the Lord to lead him (her) to repentance so that the impenitent member is restored and excommunication is prevented.

### ***The Excommunication***

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ:

The consistory has announced to you that brother (sister) \_\_\_\_\_ (name) has persisted in grievous sin. The purpose of these announcements was that by your prayers and admonitions he (she) might turn to the living God and thus be delivered from the power of Satan who has taken him (her) captive. To our deep sorrow, however, no one has informed us of any evidence of true repentance, although he (she) was warned by many. His (Her) guilt, which was already serious, has only become all the greater because of his (her) persistence in sin. We have shown much patience with him (her), but now

are compelled to proceed to the ultimate remedy given us by the Lord in His Word, namely, excommunication. This excommunication is intended to make this brother (sister) ashamed of his (her) sins, to ensure that this corrupt member does not affect the whole body which is Christ's church, and to prevent the blaspheming of God's Name. Christ Jesus has assigned the exercise of discipline to His office-bearers with the words, *"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"* (Mt 18:18).

Because he (she) obstinately persists in his (her) sin, we as the elders of the church of God in this place, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ excommunicate \_\_\_\_\_ (name) from the church of the Lord.

He (she) is now excluded from the fellowship of Christ and from His kingdom. Therefore he (she) may no longer use the sacraments and no longer has any part in the spiritual blessings and benefits which Christ bestows upon His church. As long as he (she) persists in sin, let him be to you as a pagan and an outcast (cf. Mt 18:17).

### ***Warning to the Congregation***

We exhort you, beloved Christians, not to look on him (her) as an enemy. On the contrary, try to warn him (her) as a brother (sister). But do not associate with him (her) so that he (she) may be ashamed and come to repentance (cf. 2 Thess 3:14-15).

This excommunication, beloved, is a warning for us all. Fear the Lord and be cautious for, *"...if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"* (1 Cor 10:12). For the sake of your eternal salvation, continue in true fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ together with all upright believers.

You have seen how our excommunicated brother (sister) began to fall and gradually came to ruin. Learn from this how subtle Satan is in bringing man to destruction (cf. 2 Cor 2:11) and how he causes him to despise God's Word and His sacraments.

Therefore, resist evil from the very beginning.

*Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith* (Heb 12:1, 2).

*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour* (1 Pet 5:8).

*Pray so that you will not fall into temptation* (Lk 22:46).

*Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts* (Heb 4:7).

*Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling* (Phil 2:12)

Let everyone repent of his sins lest our God humble us again and we have to grieve for another member of the body. Living in godliness and unity, be our crown and joy in the Lord.

Since it is God, however, who works in us both to will and to work for His good pleasure (cf. Phil 2:13), let us call upon His holy Name with confession of our sins.

### **Prayer**

Righteous God and merciful Father, before Your holy majesty we blame ourselves for our sins. We acknowledge that we are deserving of the sorrow and grief caused by the excommunication of \_\_\_\_\_ (name). Surely, we all are worthy to be excluded from Your presence because of our many transgressions. But, O Lord, be gracious to us for Christ's sake. We repent of our sins and ask for Your forgiveness. Work in us by Your Spirit so that, knowing more and more our sin, Your judgment, and Your grace, we may endeavor to please You. Help us to avoid the evil influence of the world and of those who have strayed from You. We pray that the excluded member may become ashamed of his (her) sins and return to You, for You have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Help us, Your people, always to welcome those who return to You. Kindle in our hearts love and zeal that, by our admonitions as well as by our example, this excommunicated person and others who live in unbelief may be brought back to You. Bless our endeavors so that we may rejoice again over him (her) for whom we now mourn. In this way may Your holy Name be praised, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Or: ...through our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”*)

### **Form for Readmission**

#### **Announcement**

Beloved in the Lord:

On \_\_\_\_\_ (date) our brother (sister)

\_\_\_\_\_ (name) was excommunicated from the church of Christ. The consistory now informs you with gratitude that this remedy has borne fruit. The Lord has blessed our admonitions and prayers so that \_\_\_\_\_ (name) has repented and has requested to be received again into the communion of the church.

Since it is God's gracious will that we receive penitent sinners with joy, and since all things should be done in a fitting and orderly way (cf. 1 Cor 14:40), we

inform you that at the next celebration of the Lord's Supper we shall loose him (her) from the bond of excommunication and readmit him (her) to the fellowship of the saints. If any of you should have a valid reason against the readmission, you should notify the consistory within \_\_\_\_\_ week(s). Meanwhile let us thank the Lord who has shown His grace to this lost sheep and let us beseech Him to perfect His work in him (her) to eternal salvation.

### ***Readmission According to the Scriptures***

Beloved Congregation:

We have recently informed you of the conversion of \_\_\_\_\_ (name), to the end that, with your approbation, he (she) might be received again into the church of Christ. No one has brought forward any objection against this readmission, and therefore we will now receive him (her) again into the communion of saints.

The Lord Christ instructed His church to excommunicate impenitent sinners and said, *"Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven."* However, He immediately added, *"...and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"* (Mt 18:18).

He taught us that excommunication does not take away all hope of salvation. For God has sworn by Himself, saying, *"As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live"* (Ezek 33:11). Therefore the church keeps hoping and praying for the repentance and return of the lost sinner, always eager to receive the penitent. The apostle Paul commanded the saints at Corinth to forgive and comfort the brother who had been reprovved and had come to repentance. He exhorted them to reaffirm their love for him lest he should be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow (cf. 2 Cor 2:5-7).

Christ also teaches us that the sentence of absolution, passed upon a repentant sinner according to the Word of God, is considered binding by the Lord: *"...whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"* (Mt 18:18). For this reason no one who truly repents should have even the slightest doubt that he is certainly received by God in grace, as Christ has declared, *"If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven..."* (Jn 20:23).

### ***Questions***

\_\_\_\_\_ (name), before we proceed to remove your excommunication and thereby readmit you to the church of Christ, we request that you answer the following questions.

Do you declare with all your heart before God and His church that you are sincerely sorry for the sin and stubbornness for which you were justly excluded from the church?

Do you also truly believe that God has forgiven all your sins for the sake of Christ's blood and now receives you in grace?

Do you, therefore, desire to be readmitted to the church of Christ and do you promise, by the grace of the Lord, to live from now on in all godliness according to the Word of God?

\_\_\_\_\_ (name), what is your answer?

### **Answer**

I do.

### **Readmission**

As elders of the Church of Christ, together with the Church here assembled (1 Cor 5:4), we, with the authority of Christ declare you, \_\_\_\_\_ (name) to be absolved from the bond of excommunication. We receive you again into the church of the Lord with joy and gratitude, and declare that you share in the fellowship of Christ, of the holy sacraments, and of all spiritual gifts and blessings of our Savior which God promises to and bestows upon His church. May the eternal God, through His only Son Jesus Christ, preserve you in His grace to the end. *“The one who calls you is faithful and He will do it”* (1 Thess 5:24). Amen.

### **Charge**

Beloved brother (sister), be assured in your heart that the Lord Himself has received you in grace. Be diligent to guard yourself against the subtleties of Satan, the wickedness of the world, and the sinful desires of the flesh, lest you again become entangled in sin. The love of Christ has brought you back; love Him, for He has forgiven you much. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit who has promised in your baptism to dwell in you, sanctifying you to be a member of Christ.

Beloved congregation, receive \_\_\_\_\_ (name) in love. Rejoice and be thankful, for this brother (sister) was dead and is alive; he (she) was lost and is found (cf. Lk 15:32). Rejoice with the angels, for Christ said, *“I tell you that in the same way there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine persons who do not need to repent”* (Lk 15:7). Look on him (her) no longer as a stranger but as a fellow citizen with the saints and a member of the household of God (cf. Eph 2:19).

Since there is no good in ourselves, let us with praise and thanksgiving implore the Lord Almighty for His grace.

## **Prayer**

Gracious God and Father, we thank and praise You through Jesus Christ that You have granted this brother (sister) godly grief and repentance unto life and have caused us to rejoice in this.

Give him (her) Your grace that he (she) may become more and more assured of the complete remission of all his (her) sins, and may derive from this assurance unspeakable joy and delight to serve You.

Since for a time he (she) has grieved us by his (her) sins, grant that he (she) may now edify us by his (her) conversion. Grant that he (she) may walk steadfastly in Your ways until the end.

Father, teach us by this example that with You there is forgiveness so that You may be praised. Grant that we together may serve You with childlike fear and obedience all the days of our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with You and the Holy Spirit is the one only true God. Amen.

(Or: ...through Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose Name we conclude our prayer: *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen”* )

## **Form for the excommunication of non-communicant members**

### **First Announcement**

Beloved in the Lord:

The consistory informs you with sorrow that a non-communicant member, who was by baptism incorporated into the Christian Church, has become guilty of sin against the \_\_\_\_\_ commandment(s). In spite of several earnest admonitions, there is no evidence of repentance. Therefore the consistory, to its great sorrow, is now obliged to proceed to public discipline. We therefore make this known to you and seriously exhort you to pray to the Lord that He may bring this member of the body to repentance.

### **Second Announcement**

Beloved in the Lord:

The consistory has previously informed you that a non-communicant member has become guilty of sin against the \_\_\_\_\_ commandment(s). In spite of continued admonitions and instruction no true repentance has become apparent. On the contrary, all admonitions remained fruitless. The only result was a further hardening of heart and a continued wilful disobedience to the covenant of God. Therefore, having obtained the concurring advice of classis, we now with

sorrow make known to you the name of the unrepentant member, namely \_\_\_\_\_ (name). Unless he (she) repents, the consistory will be obliged to excommunicate this brother (sister) from the communion of the church on \_\_\_\_\_ (date). We exhort you to admonish this member with affection and to pray to the Lord for his (her) conversion.

### ***The Excommunication***

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ:

The consistory has previously announced to you that brother (sister) \_\_\_\_\_ (name), by baptism incorporated into the Christian church, has persisted in grievous sin. The purpose of these announcements was that by your prayers and admonitions he (she) might turn to the living God and thus be delivered from the power of Satan who has taken him (her) captive. To our deep sorrow, however, no one has informed us of any evidence of true repentance, although he (she) was warned by many. In spite of many earnest admonitions he (she) obstinately denies communion with Christ and his church, which was signified and sealed to him (her) in baptism. We have shown much patience with him (her), but now are compelled to proceed to the ultimate remedy given us by the Lord in His Word, namely, excommunication. This excommunication is intended to make this brother (sister) ashamed of his (her) sins, to ensure that this corrupt member does not affect the whole body which is Christ's church, and to prevent the blaspheming of God's Name. Christ Jesus has assigned the exercise of discipline to His office-bearers with the words, *"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"* (Mt 18:18).

Because he (she) obstinately persists in his (her) sin, we as the elders of the church of God in this place, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ excommunicate \_\_\_\_\_ (name) from the church of the Lord.

He (she) is now excluded from the fellowship of Christ and from His kingdom. Therefore he (she) no longer has any part in the spiritual blessings and benefits which Christ bestows upon His church. As long as he (she) persists in sin, let him be to you as a pagan and an outcast (cf. Mt 18:17).

### ***Warning to the Congregation***

We exhort you, beloved Christians, not to look on him (her) as an enemy. On the contrary, try to warn him (her) as a brother (sister). But do not associate with him (her) so that he (she) may be ashamed and come to repentance (cf. 2 Thess 3:14-15).

This excommunication, beloved, is a warning for us all. Fear the Lord and be cautious for, *"...if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"*



(1 Cor 10:12). For the sake of your eternal salvation, continue in true fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ together with all upright believers.

You have seen how this baptized member began to fall and gradually came to ruin. Learn from this how subtle Satan is in bringing man to destruction (cf. 2 Cor 2:11) and how he causes him to despise God's Word and His sacraments.

Therefore, take care lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, departing from the living God (Heb 3:12). He admonishes us:

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" - which is the first commandment with a promise - "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:1-4).*

*Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older (1 Pet 5:5).*

*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful men, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever (1 Jn 2:15-17).*

But since it is God who works in us both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Phil 2:13), let us call upon His holy Name with confession of our sins.

### **Prayer**

Righteous God and merciful Father, before Your holy majesty we blame ourselves for our sins. We acknowledge that we are deserving of the sorrow and grief caused by the excommunication of \_\_\_\_\_ (name). Surely, we all are worthy to be excluded from Your presence because of our many transgressions. But, O Lord, be gracious to us for Christ's sake. We repent of our sins and ask for Your forgiveness. Work in us by Your Spirit so that, knowing more and more our sin, Your judgment, and Your grace, we may endeavor to please You. Help us to avoid the evil influence of the world and of those who have strayed from You. We pray that the excluded member may become ashamed of his (her) sins and return to You, for You have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Help us, Your people, always to welcome those who return to You. Kindle in our hearts love and zeal that, by our admonitions as well as by our example, this excommunicated person and others who live in unbelief may be brought back to You. Bless our endeavors so that we may rejoice again over him (her) for whom we now mourn. In this way may Your holy Name be praised, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Or: ...through our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be*

*done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”)*