

Pastoral Letter
to
The Alliance Family of Churches
Franklin Pyles, President
pylesf@cmacan.org

Dear Colleagues in Pastoral Leadership:

Statement on Borrowing/Plagiarism

The issue of giving credit to our sources when we speak has walked with preachers and religious writers through the ages. In some times and societies the standard has been quite low, so that it really didn't matter so much who said or wrote a particular thing. However, times have changed.

This issue has become particularly important in an enhanced electronic communications climate – smart phones accessing Google while the sermon is being preached – so that practices which may have been acceptable in previous years are no longer acceptable. For this reason, the District Superintendents have agreed on the following guidelines and have asked me to communicate them to all Licensed Workers by means of this pastoral letter. These guidelines will not cover every possible scenario, but are intended to provide a protocol for proper conduct in writing and speaking.

These guidelines recognize a different level of accountability for oral communications such as sermons, than for written communications such as articles. But it is necessary to maintain a high level of integrity in regards to giving credit and honour to those to whom it is due and not receiving credit and honour when it is not deserved when we preach and teach.

1. If an entire sermon is used verbatim, the source and author must be clearly referenced, both in writing and orally when the sermon is preached. That is, in the bulletin or in a handout the fact that you are preaching another's sermon or teaching another's lesson must be clearly stated and the source presented. As well, you must say this orally at the time of presentation so that the listeners clearly understand that someone else originally composed this material.
2. If someone's sermon text and outline are followed closely, but not verbatim, in oral preaching this also should be referenced in writing and orally when the sermon is preached. This may be done simply by putting into the church bulletin: "The sermon "David and Goliath" was first preached by Pastor John Smith" or,

“The material for the sermon “David and Goliath” is drawn in part from a sermon by Pastor John Smith.”

3. When text or audio is placed on the internet, this constitutes publishing. In no cases may a sermon or article that has been written/delivered by someone else be published, on the internet or otherwise electronically or in hard copy, under a name other than the true and original author.
4. It is not expected that sermons or lessons will be footnoted; however, preachers and teachers should be careful to be sure that the listeners understand that certain brilliant phrases that were in fact written by someone else – were written by someone else. Something like this will do: “as another pastor has said: ‘xxx xxxxx’” or, “as C.S. Lewis observed: ‘xxx xxxxx.’”
5. When writing papers or articles that are turned in for classes, as part of ordination requirements, or for publication in any format including blogs, any and all quotations or key ideas from other sources should receive proper attribution in a format acceptable to that particular publication.
6. It is never acceptable to claim credit for a work written and published by someone else. This does not mean that letters and communications cannot receive assistance from other writers who know they are helping to write your article or communication piece. Writers can and should seek counsel as to when it is ethically required to acknowledge other contributors to a published piece.

As I mentioned above, over the past decade, with the advent of electronic search engines, the standard has risen. Even though it may sometimes seem cumbersome to give attribution, in the end it lets people know that we are operating with integrity, and that increases the weight of what is being said. So if you have a question, solve it by giving attribution.

I trust that you will find these guidelines both useful and encouraging. It is possible to bring forward the wonderful thoughts and insights of godly people. When we do it properly, our listeners will receive it as a blessing.

With sincerity,

Franklin Pyles

Franklin Pyles, President
The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada