



Covenant and Code of Ethics for Ministerial Leaders of American Baptist Churches, USA

Having accepted God's call to leadership in Christ's Church, I covenant with God to serve Christ and the Church, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, to deepen my obedience to the Two Great Commandments: to love the Lord our God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love my neighbor as myself.¹

In affirmation of this commitment, I will abide by the Code of Ethics of the Ministers Council of the American Baptist Churches and I will faithfully support its purposes and ideals. When needed, I will seek out best practices from others and share my guidance when it might edify and empower wise choices for others. As further affirmation of my commitment, I covenant with my colleagues in ministry that we will hold one another accountable for fulfillment of all the public actions set forth below in this Code of Ethics.

CENTEREDNESS

- A. I will grow in and show my personal love for God as revealed in Jesus Christ in my life and ministry, as I strive together with my colleagues to preserve the dignity, maintain the discipline and promote the integrity of the vocation to which we have been called.
- B. I will strive for a disciplined life by tending to my mental, physical, spiritual and emotional well-being in such ways as keeping hours of prayers, devotion and rest, endeavoring to maintain wholesome family relationships, sexual integrity, financial responsibility, constructive use of social media, and regularly engaging in educational and leisure activities for ministerial and personal development.
- C. I will strive for balance and will work toward being fully present in my obligation to the church or employing group to which I have been called.
- D. I will not seek personal favors or discounts on the basis of my ministerial status.

COMPETENCE

- A. I will not use my ministerial status, position or authority knowingly to abuse, misguide, negatively influence, manipulate, or take advantage of anyone, especially children. I will be

¹ Editors' Note: Paragraph One of the 2006 Covenant and Code of Ethics was not revised in any way during the proposed revisions process. We regret that some readers have encountered a circulated version with a portion of lines 2-3 mistakenly omitted. This document reflects the intentions of the 2019-2022 subcommittee and its presentations for the November 19, 2020 vote.

constantly mindful of my ministerial status, position, and authority, and will use them to advocate for those in need.

- B. I will not plagiarize; I will be truthful in all my communication and give due credit to others' words.
- C. I will report all instances of abuse as required by law to the appropriate agency. In any case involving persons working in ABC ministry, I will also report the circumstances to the appropriate regional and/or national denominational representative.
- D. I will hold in confidence and treat as confidential communication any information provided to me with the expectation of privacy. I will not disclose such information in private or public except when, in my practice of ministry, I am convinced that the sanctity of confidentiality is outweighed by my well-founded belief that life-threatening or substantial harm will be caused.
- E. I will not proselytize from other Christian churches.

COLLEGIALITY

- A. I will respect and recognize the variety of calls to ministry among my American Baptist colleagues, and other Christians.
- B. I will seek to support all colleagues in ministry by building constructive relationships wherever I serve, both with the staff where I work and with colleagues in neighboring churches.
- C. I will work to gain greater awareness and sensitivity to colleagues who experience discrimination on any basis in order to discern and undertake my obligations for support.
- D. I will, upon my resignation or retirement **discontinue my ministerial leadership roles** with my former constituents and will not make ministerial contacts in the field of another ministerial leader without request and/or consent.
- E. I will advocate adequate compensation for my profession. I will help lay persons and colleagues to understand that ministerial leaders should not expect or require fees for pastoral services from constituents they serve, when these constituents are helping pay their salaries.
- F. I will hold in trust the traditions and practices of our American Baptist Churches; I will not accept a position in the American Baptist family unless I am in accord with those traditions and practices; nor will I use my influence to alienate my congregation/constituents or any part thereof from its relationship and support of the denomination. If my convictions change, I will resign my position.

Signed _____ Date _____

PRESENTATION ON CODE OF ETHICS MOTION
Biennial Business Meeting | Ministers Council ABCUSA
November 19, 2020

The national Leadership Team of the Ministers Council has received and approved the Proposed Revisions to the national Covenant and Code of Ethics as presented by the Revisions Subcommittee on October 18, 2020 for distribution in advance of tonight's business meeting. We're thankful for the work of Revs. Jacki Belile, Jerry Bertelson, Dan Hopkins and Steve Neal on this project since the Chapter Representatives launched the task in Summer of 2018.

The Subcommittee were the principal drafters, with language concerns and specific amendments made in response to the following **six feedback mechanisms**:

1. The Subcommittee's initial deliberations in response to a charge to propose “updates” as needed.
2. A survey of membership, distributed in English and Spanish, between October 2019 and January 2020, to which 297 respondents from 36 regions responded to initial 3 proposals and made additional recommendations. Respondents included Executive and Associate Regional staff.
3. Two special topical webinars on social media and “the ethics of health” in Spring & Summer 2020. Attendees included Executive and Associate Regional Staff.
4. Correspondence with Regional Executive Ministers in June, to which eight responded with feedback included in text revision and/or preparation notes for a 2021 revision to the Learning Guide.
5. Chapter Representatives, who hosted reports from the Subcommittee on their bi-monthly conference calls in August and October 2020.
6. Three chapter-specific meetings, two interchapter meetings and three “at large” Zoom meetings held since mid-September.

Here's a brief overview on the document, which is highlighted in blue and yellow. First, the **yellow highlights**, which show final text made in response to committee's initial three recommendations from 2019.

1. New language on expectations of “constructive” use of social media, revised from “proper” in initial draft, due to survey input. (*Centeredness, B*)
2. An additional sentence added to this paragraph about how we ought not misuse our power, by adding how we SHOULD use our power. “Advocate for those in need” is hoped to be theologically and politically inclusive language representing diversity of call, gifts and context and came in wake of survey response concerned with initial draft's use of language about “systemic injustice.” (*Competence, A*)
3. Lastly, a sentence here adds a commitment to refrain from plagiarism. (*Competence, B*)

A review of the **blue highlights**, which show additional revisions undertaken in response to member feedback November 2019-October 2020):

1. A sentence added to existing covenant language regarding our responsibility to seek and share counsel and best practices with one another. (*Paragraph 2 in Intro Covenant*)
2. Moving down, you see the entire document is reordered conceptually to follow 3Cs of Centeredness, Competence and Collegiality, with existing and new content aligned accordingly.
3. We see in the paragraph on disciplines, in addition to addition of social media, a new leading sentence regarding our commitment to multi-faceted “well-being.” This replaces language about healthy habits in existing document, attempting to be sensitive to subjective definitions of health by others and the dangers of discriminatory behavior based on prejudices of outward appearance. (*Centeredness, B*)
4. Next, in letter C: We have replaced language regarding a “primary obligation” to our employing body with language about our commitment to be “fully present”. This was in response raised by our bi-vocational ministers. (*Centeredness, C*)
5. Under Collegiality C, we've retained the item pertaining to our commitment to support one another when we face discrimination. This paragraph was amended in two stages, first to include additional dimension. We commit to *gain understanding and awareness around those experiences of discrimination*. Secondly, in response to feedback sessions held August 2020-October 2020 we were led to move the list of such examples – always doomed to be a partial list – from the main body to the Learning Guide. This means the statement focuses on overarching principle. In the Learning Guide, we will add to the current list (gender, race, ethnicity, age, marital status, national origin, physical impairment or disability) we will add sexual orientation and gender identity). It is our sincere hope that this change will allow us to continue pledging to a consensus-document, by elevating here the principles of solidarity and understanding, while elaborating in practice in depth on the testimonies to needs regarding discrimination across all these areas. (*Collegiality, C*)
6. Lastly, we responded to significant concern conveyed in the survey as well as chapter conversations, regarding our behavior when we transition out of an employment setting. We see this primarily as an education and accountability issue, for clergy and laity alike. It is our hope that this amended language serves those ends, as we replace “sever ministerial relations” with “discontinue ministerial leadership roles.” (*Collegiality, D*)

Note: All comments shared since November 2019 have been retained for potential use in Learning Guide revisions, as well as processes for accountability and collaboration with denominational leaders such as Executive Ministers.

In order for the revisions to be official, 2/3 of our active local chapters need to vote to approve. We ask that chapters complete this by 12/31/22.