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... to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

—Ephesians 4:12-13

#### Introduction

What is a code of ethics, and why is it important? The team that worked together to draft this learning guide considered these crucial questions. The dictionary defines *code* as "a system of principles or rules such as a moral code" and *ethics* as "moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conducting of an activity." With these definitions, a code of ethics could be defined as either something binding or something aspirational; a legal document or a set of principles and practices we desire to live into. But what if we thought of this code of ethics as a covenant we make with ourselves, our colleagues, our communities of care and practice, our denomination, the Church, and the wider world?

That is to say, living into this code of ethics is not just something one agrees to pro forma and then forgets. What if we consider this code a living word, one that inspires and guides each of us to best practices as called clergy, as set aside ministers of the Gospel? We are reminded of the hymn that makes a covenant claim for committed discipleship, "I bind my heart this tide to the Galilean's side...I bind my soul this day to the neighbor far away, to the stranger near at hand, in this town, and in this land...I bind my heart and soul to the God, the Lord of all...I bind myself to peace, to make strife and envy cease. My God, fasten sure the cord of my service to the Lord!"

Perhaps the words of this old hymn will prove inspirational to take seriously the Covenant and Code of Ethics of the Ministers Council ABCUSA to be a sacred covenant in our desire to be the best possible ministers of the Gospel we can be—in service to Christ, the neighbor, the stranger, the community, and to God.

The team from the national Ministers Council that worked on this set of guidelines consider it a tool for reflecting on and learning about the code of ethics and what it means for us in our living and in our practice of ministry in diverse settings and contexts.

The structure of this document is simple: A statement on each section of the code of ethics from one of the members of our working team is followed by questions to stimulate thinking together by colleagues. The statements are to give you some of the work of the people who have been deliberating about this code of ethics over the course of 2022. These writers are as diverse as the assemblage of American Baptist pastors. You will find differences in perspective and approach to these concerns throughout the guide. We believe this reflects the rich diversity represented in the Ministers Council nationally. None of our reflections nor the code itself are chiseled on stone tablets brought down from on high. Please consider this document as a guide that will help us all know and understand better the gifts and responsibilities of our call and the richness of our diversity as we apply what we discover to our own lives and practice of ministry.

In thinking together about the code of ethics, we recognized a number of important qualities that might inform both our learning about and commitment to the code. Chief among these is love, which ought to underpin all our living and working. We do not mean love in a sentimental sense, but love born of the recognition that God desires the well-being of all creation. Other qualities include accountability, respect, integrity, compassion, care, mindfulness, and curiosity. You will find each of these raised in the following reflections on the code. We pray you will benefit from our work as we have each benefitted from our work together in creating this learning guide.

Blessings on your journey! Alan, Florence, Jacki, Jacqueline, Jerrod, Juan, Mary, Rick See biographical information at end of document

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#### **Covenant Guidelines**

#### for Learning and Growing in our Living and Ministry

Speaking the truth in love, we grow up in every way into Christ.

-a paraphrase of Ephesians 4:15

In our relationships with those outside the Order, we show the same Christ-like love, and gladly give of ourselves, remembering that love is measured by sacrifice.

Francis of Assisi

Love isn't a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like "struggle."

- Fred Rogers

Speaking truth in love to one another and to those to whom we are responsible, we have identified a number of principles to which we point as we make use of this learning guide.

- 1. As guided by the Spirit and this code of ethics, I recognize that it is fully my responsibility to live and work in an ethical manner within myself and with my *responsibility* to live and work in an ethical manner within myself and with my colleagues, neighbors, strangers, communities, and all creation.
- 2. We encourage all to approach the guide with a *humility* that understands none of us has enough knowledge to address all of life's challenges or gifts, for that matter. There should always be room to learn and grow.
- 3. It takes *courage* both to find my own voice to contribute my thinking to the conversation and to recognize that I need to be learning and growing always.
- 4. *Curiosity* asks me to listen intently to my teachers, leaders, and colleagues with a commitment both to learn and to question or challenge respectfully.
- 5. We must practice *compassion* and *care*, as Jesus did throughout his life and ministry, recognizing the need to feel with another in order to establish relationships that enliven, heal and save.
- 6. Regardless of any differences I may encounter, I will still address others with *respect*, seeing how I might learn and grow from a respectful encounter, if I am willing to open myself to it.
- 7. To learn and grow, I will commit myself to *listen intently* for perspectives, truth, and

- wisdom I might otherwise miss by not being sufficiently tuned in to an encounter or conversation.
- 8. Guided by the Holy Spirit, I will approach both my living and working with full *intentionality* to be the best minister I can be within the framework of this code of ethics.
- 9. Recognizing that Baptists believe in soul freedom and American Baptists have no controlling hierarchy, we raise a concern for *accountability*. Without a formal, restrictive structure, how do we hold one another accountable for adhering to the code of ethics and following best practices in our ministry? We journey together with fresh commitment to hold one another accountable as part of our commitment to compassion and care. We understand that it often requires courage and grace to speak the truth in love, shorting neither truth nor love in the process.

#### Some Possible Uses for This Learning Guide

- 1. Pastoral and lay leaders might read it and discuss it together. This would enable persons in local churches to understand the ethical covenant to which their pastor is accountable.
- 2. Ministers might use it for individual reflection.
- 3. Multiple staff churches might conduct an in-house study series.
- 4. Clergy groups might use it for a single study or select parts of special interest for a study series. Ministers Council chapters in particular might initiate such a series.
- 5. Clergy groups meeting for other purposes might discuss one section each meeting as a professional reflection piece.
- 6. Small groups at national meetings could use it, or it could be used in special meetings such as training for interim ministry or orientation for new clergy.
- 7. Seminaries could use it as part of the ministry formation process.
- 8. Search committees could use it as they seek pastoral leadership to better understand the ethical expectations for pastors. This could also enable search committees to recognize this value of calling a candidate with American Baptist standing.
- 9. Regions might incorporate it in the process of ordination and credentialing pastors coming from other denominations.

#### **Editorial Process**

The editorial team for this updated guide was recruited prayerfully with hope that our collective insights might represent wisely the range of ministry settings in which ABC ministers serve. This included a range of ministry contexts, culturally rooted insights, and theological voices. We were indebted to the team of ten contributors to the first edition published in 2006 as a project of the Professional Excellence Committee, and especially to editors Michael Harvey and Dee Dee Turlington. We especially appreciated the themes of dialogical learning named in that guide and applied that to our writing methodology. (We also hoped our final product would serve the purposes of dialogical learning for many years to come.)

After two visioning sessions in the fall and winter of 2021–2022, we met for collegial conversation about each section as a group, compiling notes on themes and potential updates prior to individual writing assignments. We held group sessions throughout 2022, and we reviewed individuals' contributions as a group in January 2023. Thus, the final document is the work of the whole team. Publishing professional Dr. Rachael Lawrence provided some editorial feedback as a courtesy; and the current copy will be shared with diverse focus groups of our denominational family before final release.

We have retained the basic structure of the 2006 Guide with fairly brief essays followed by reflection questions that invite meaningful personal inventory on each topic. We standardized the inclusion of Scripture in each section.

Throughout the document, readers will find implicit and explicit commitment to distinctives for Baptists in ministerial leadership. We are grateful for the resources of our tradition that deepen our capacity to name our own convictions while being in respectful and non-coercive relationships with others. We endeavor to offer a product that refrains from making Euro-American settings the cultural norm for ministerial leadership. We honor the ministries within and outside of the local church and hope this guide meaningfully supports those in specialized ministries. Finally, we acknowledge the great benefit of illustrative stories for case study, as well as resources for further reading. Curation of these will be done in a national interactive medium in fall 2023. An interactive curation of a bibliography is underway on the Ministers Council website and Facebook group.



# The Covenant and Code of Ethics for Ministerial Leaders of the American Baptist Churches USA

Having accepted God's call to leadership in Christ's Church, I covenant with myself, my colleagues, my communities of care and practice, my denomination, the church, and the wider world 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.

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.

#### **CENTEREDNESS**

I know, my God, that you search the heart and take pleasure in uprightness; in the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things.... —1 Chronicles 29:17

Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or are absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel. — Philippians 1:27

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 dignity, maintain the discipline and promote the integrity of the vocation to which we have been called.

When we talk of the call to ministry, our stories about receiving and responding to that call may differ, yet they are all blessedly variations on the same theme. God calls people to serve, and the local church (in the American Baptist tradition) is where our gifts are recognized, nurtured, and yea verily, often stretched and challenged. This initial call often leads to the local church discerning along with us that God indeed has equipped us to preach, to teach, to care and to serve. Again, the multitude of ministry fields proliferate, sometimes sending us far beyond our sense of horizon, and we begin the journey to serve Christ and the Gospel.

The code of ethics roots our commitments to our calling in *centeredness*. To be a minister of

the Gospel, we must keep ourselves centered in Christ, so that we may be effective witnesses and bearers of grace. Ways of measuring our ministry's effectiveness may differ. Yet we should be continually asking ourselves how we have grown in our personal love for God as revealed in Jesus Christ. This is a question we should invite ourselves (and our colleagues) to explore and examine.

While we are *church professionals*, we are also disciples who are frail, vulnerable, and in need of spiritual, physical, and mental replenishment. We know our insufficiencies all too well and often; yet, returning to the well is always an opportunity to recharge and renew. Keeping centered helps us find our path forward.

Spending time with colleagues, in formal or informal gatherings, to talk about centeredness cannot be stressed enough. How we exercise our gifts and call to ministry will differ, yet all ministers have a common need for centeredness, and collegiality with American Baptist colleagues or via ecumenical/interfaith clergy groups can help us regain balance and hear in the lives of our colleagues a good word or provide that good word to them. We are indeed in this work together, and the dignity, discipline and integrity of our vocations depend on it. God has called us all as individuals into ministry. Yet we are better at our callings when we encourage and support our colleagues in this burdensome yet joyful life in ministry.

#### **Questions for Consideration:**

- 1. Discuss the definition of *vocation* as found in the biblical witness and other sources on Christian ministry most helpful over the years. How has your life been reshaped (or needed to change again) to follow that vocation? How does your present calling reveal a new understanding of your call to ministry?
- 2. Recall some situations when I needed the help of a colleague. Who did I call? Why?
- 3. Am I a member of a collegial support group? If so, how has it been helpful to me? If not, how might I get involved in one?
- 4. Recall some situations when I needed the help of a colleague. Who did I call? Why?
- 5. Am I a member of a collegial support group? If so, how has it been helpful to me? If not, how might I get involved in one?

#### See Additional Scriptures:

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Corinthians 16:15-16; Romans 15:7-22; James 3:1; Hebrews 13:7; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Romans 16:1-16; Philippians 1:1; 3:1-13; 2 Timothy; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 13:1-3; 20:17-35)\*

(\* Scriptures as cited in ABCUSA Policy Statement on Ordained Ministry, <a href="https://www.abc-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ordain.pdf">https://www.abc-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ordain.pdf</a>)

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.

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Discipline can be a harsh-sounding word to some, perhaps rooted in our past experiences where a negative understanding of this word was formed (or continues to remain operative at least in the back of our minds). As Richard Foster's classic *Celebration of Discipline* reminds us, much good can come out of finding a way that resonates with us to be more spiritually attentive and open to the Spirit's leading.

Further, Foster and many others remind us that many rich streams of Christian spirituality will help us find focus and connect us to the greater sense of interconnection in our challenges and our pathways to serve God and the communities in which we are called to serve. Finding a path forward needs a compass, and our commitments to personal and collegial spiritual practices will help us immensely.

Collegiality also helps us keep attuned and find advice for a tune up. More often, we tend to stay within ourselves, and even then, it takes great effort to bring the riches of spiritual disciplines to the depths within ourselves. We know that ministry can be chaotic, demanding, and draining, even as it is also rewarding. Finding day-to-day self-support within is a challenge, so prayer, scripture, silence, and other practices will grow only into habits with our choices to do so.



#### **Questions for Consideration:**

- 1. What personal spiritual disciplines do I practice regularly? How do I integrate the mind, body and spirit in maintaining centeredness? Are there opportunities to practice these disciplines also in collegial settings to help others as well?
- 2. Have I considered using a spiritual director to deepen my walk with God?
- 3. How much time do I spend with my family and individually with members of it? How much of that is quality time?
- 4. Have I become familiar with current wisdom about avoiding sexual temptation and boundary violations? Am I in touch with my own sexual drives/needs and confident I am attending to them in ways appropriate to my calling and position? (see I Corinthians 6:12-20, 7:1-9 and I Thessalonians 4:1-8; do not neglect examination of attitudes, as well as actions in this area, as pornography has become epidemic since the internet made it so readily and privately available Philippians 4:8).
- 5. How does my engagement on social media reflect my spiritual life? Can I maintain a spirit of grace in my comments and postings that honors my call? How can my witness online reflect my convictions while maintaining good boundaries? How does my social media voice match with what I say in public as a pastor, and how do I carefully separate personal sentiments from being misconstrued as reflective of my employing ministry?
- 6. Do I practice the stewardship principles I preach? Have I applied budgeting techniques to my household finances? (see I Timothy 6:6-10)
- 7. Do I regularly exercise, monitor diet, get checkups, and keep Sabbath? Which of these do I need to prioritize and improve? What role might the care of regular checkups with a physician, a therapist, or a spiritual director play in my personal well-being and wholeness?
- 8. When did I last attend a continuing education event for personal or professional development? How might I plan now to do so soon? Have I checked with my Ministers Council chapter or my colleagues in regional or denominational work about upcoming opportunities as well as grants that may be available?

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# 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.

Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God and bring their cases to God. — Exodus 18:17-18

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. — Acts 2:2-3

The world has changed drastically. Every day we are faced with new challenges, such as violence, poverty, mental health crises, disasters, and epidemics, that invite us to seek new ways to serve and shepherd our congregations. These new challenges, on many occasions, open doors for us to serve not only our congregation but also society (participation in boards of directors, volunteering in a community organization). These opportunities must be seized in ways that allow us to broaden and deepen our ministries.

The first church confronted a challenge. For that reason, the first deacons were selected in order to allow the apostles to prioritize their primary callings. The concern for equitable distribution of food within the community was handed off to others gifted for the task, so the twelve could devote themselves "to prayer and to serving the word." This wise distribution of duties enabled the word of God to continue to spread (Acts 6:1-7).

Paul's primary calling was as an apostle to the Gentiles. Nevertheless, when the situation demanded it, he interrupted his missionary travels to deal with important issues among the churches, and between his churches and the mother church in Jerusalem. Paul received relief funds from churches and delivered them to the elders in Judea (Acts 11:27-29). Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to discuss with the apostles and the elders the question of Gentiles having to be circumcised to be saved (Acts 15).

Many nonprofit and community organizations want ministers and pastors to sit on their boards of directors or be part of their governing bodies. These opportunities can be seen as a way of service and evangelism in the community. It is important that when we take on these responsibilities to recognize our time limits, gifts, talents, and possibilities. To have a clear understanding of the reason why we have taken such a responsibility. These should not and cannot become our focus or priority. We must seek every day to be aware of our duties and responsibilities with those who have called us to serve them.



#### **Questions for Discussion:**

- 1. What are my primary obligations? How have I judged them to be primary?
- 2. What added responsibilities, paid or volunteer do I find myself assuming, or being asked to assume?
- 3. What of those added responsibilities might enhance, rather than interfere with, the overall effectiveness of my ministry?
- 4. Are there situations today that seem to demand taking time from my primary obligations in order to deal with them? Are there individuals in my community who can oversee some responsibilities while I give attention to these situations?
- 5. Are there duties I have assumed that might better be delegated to other gifted individuals?

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#### D. I will not seek personal favors or discounts on the basis of my ministerial status.

Then Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him; here are the oxen for the burnt offering and the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the Lord your God respond favorably to you." But the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will buy them for you for a price; I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and oxen for fifty shekels of silver. — 2 Samuel 24: 22-

"You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions."

— Acts 20:34

While still in seminary, a young pastor took on leadership at a small church in Chicago. One day, after unintentionally running a flashing red light, he was pulled over by a city police officer. The officer took his license and returned a few minutes later with a ticket in hand. Before handing it over, he asked, "Where do you work?" The pastor replied, "I serve at First Baptist Church." At that, the officer grew irritated: "Why didn't you tell me you were a minister? We don't give tickets to ministers."

The pastor was stunned—but not because he had expected or wanted special treatment. The thought that came to mind: "I haven't been in this racket very long."

It's a revealing moment. Ministry can, at times, be mistaken for status rather than service. It can be tempting to accept perks or favors that seem harmless, yet contradict the very heart of the Gospel. Faith rooted in justice and equality cannot coexist with privilege that exempts some from accountability. When discounts or exceptions are offered in hopes of gaining favor with God or the church, the misunderstanding is deep.

We believe in the priesthood of all believers. No one stands above the rest when it comes to

justice or grace. Running a red light deserves a ticket, no matter the collar or the title. Because grace is not a loophole, and justice is not for sale. A minister is a servant leader, following the example of Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve.

There was a time—not long ago—when clergy privileges were a given. Free games of golf, haircuts, movie and sports tickets, and even restaurant meals, were offered to those of the cloth. Lest we get the wrong idea, it was not always meant as favoritism. There was (and still is for some communities) a sort of a barter system where folks offered what they could to their pastors, knowing they could not pay them well.

It is important to remember the different cultural practices of gratitude. What may appear to be an act of bribery or a quid pro quo is often an expression of gratitude. In some cultures, offering free or reduced- price services or giving some financial contribution is an act of appreciation and respect for pastoral work. It is important for us to always remember that we are called to serve and not to be served.

For example, a farmer offered a bushel of potatoes to his pastor. The pastor, wanting to do the right thing, refused the gift. The old farmer paused and said, "It says in the Bible that there is blessing in giving." (See Luke 6:38) The minister agreed that this was true. The farmer then said, "Well are you going to allow me to be blessed here or not?" This is the right spirit. There are also "thank you gifts" that genuinely appreciate what the minister might do for a family or individual. But there is a fine line between receiving appropriate expressions of thanks and conveying an expectation of gifts. If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, then *understanding of our position* must be in the heart of the pastor. There is also the issue of advocating for decent compensation for clergy. Favors and discounts do not make up for inadequate compensation in communities where such compensation is possible.

Luke 20:46 tells us Jesus' words: "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and love respectful greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets." We, as ministers, are privileged to be involved in people's lives. Because of potential challenges in the community, we are vulnerable to those who would curry favor from us. We must not give even the appearance of evil, plagiarism and we must not in any way place ourselves above others because of our position.

It is essential that the pastor/minister make clear to the congregation the possible implications and unintended consequences that such acts of gratitude might have in the church and in the community.

#### **Questions for Consideration:**

- 1. How might I handle being offered favors or discounts because I am clergy, even though I am not seeking them?
- 2. Are there situations where something I receive creates a stumbling block to an onlooker's faith walk?
- 3. In what spirit am I receiving gifts from church members and community members?
- 4. What would I say to a colleague who wears a collar or other sign of being clergy to get favors or discounts?
- 5. One of the leaders of the church invites me to use their family hot tub while they are away. What do I say to that offer?
- 6. A local merchant offers me a discount if I will say prayers for his ill child. How do I respond?
- 7. I have visited a non-member during a serious illness and following the funeral the widow gives me a check for \$2500. What do I do?
- 8. Church deacons or leaders offer me cash and gifts instead of a salary package. Should I accept such an offer? What should I do if I refuse?



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

As ordained, licensed or commissioned ministers of the Gospel, we have been called apart to be *leaders* in the church of Jesus Christ. With leadership comes authority and power that must be handled responsibly. Our authority comes from God who modeled servant leadership in taking on human form, living and working among us (see Philippians 2: 6-8). God has given us capacity to work toward transforming lives and the world in which we live. With the gift of that capacity, we must never take advantage of or hurt others (Galatians 6:22-26). The Bible urges that we are treat all people with love and grace and not to cause harm to anyone, especially those who are vulnerable as well as those who are placed in our care (Psalms 3:29, Romans 13:10, Matthew 7:1). We are called to use our gifts to be the body of Christ and build up God's Beloved Community (Ephesians 4:11-13). We are not to seek personal glory or benefit or to do damage to the body of Christ, to that Beloved Community or to God's blessed Creation (Genesis 1; 2 Corinthians 2:17, Colossians 3:17).

To claim the title and role of ministerial leader (pastor, counselor, teacher, chaplain etc.) automatically includes awesome responsibility. While we believe in the priesthood of all believers, there are claims and expectations that come with being set aside to serve the church in a professional or called capacity. These responsibilities must not be taken lightly, and our commitment to competence for them is of utmost spiritual significance.

This area of competence is both broad and deep. Underlying the challenges and nuances involved with the need for competent practice, we note the need for mindfulness. As clergy, we need to pay careful attention to the obvious challenges as well as the subtle nuances that might lessen our effectiveness or impair our ministry. This is an invitation to consider matters of context and power broadly and deeply before we act.

Competence comes with the necessity of both initial training and continuing education in the field of ministry. However, *one size does not necessarily fit all*; we recognize that there are differences in culture and context that help to shape what may constitute competence. Clergy must train and practice accordingly.

None of us is a lone ranger in ministry; nor should we undertake our calling and our work in

isolation. We are called in community, and we serve in community. For the sake of our competence, it is important that we seek out wise counsel and support of others: counselors, coaches, consultants, spiritual guides, mentors and colleagues when faced with ethical questions. Seeking such counsel is itself an indispensable competency for ethical ministerial practice.

#### **Questions for Consideration:**

- 1. How do I define power, authority, and vulnerability? How do these terms relate to ministry in general and specifically my ministry in a given setting?
- 2. How would I describe my leadership style? How do I obtain support for my ideas and plans?
- 3. How do I establish and hold boundaries in a situation of counseling or care?
- 4. I am alone in the office, when a person I find attractive comes to see me for help. How do I handle this situation?
- 5. I am a single pastor who would like to date an individual in my congregation. How do I handle this situation?
- 6. How do I handle conflict in my setting? For example, I feel strongly about the direction the church, institution, agency, program, should go in ministry. Unfortunately, there is one member of the board or staff who disagrees with my vision and is very influential in the decision making. How do I respond?
- 7. How do I advocate for children in my church? What steps can I take to give children power in their lives? What steps do I take to ensure the safety and well-being of children and youth?
- 8. I have been told by someone in my congregation that they suspect the youth director has molested one of the teenagers while at camp. How do I respond?
- 9. If you get extra money or benefits, how does it relate to your salary?
- 10. When do we say to ourselves and to those for whom we are responsible, "I could this but...what do you think? What is your understanding and wise counsel concerning this challenge?"

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# B. I will not plagiarize; I will be truthful in all my communication and give due credit to others' words.

"See, therefore, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who use their own tongues and say, "Says the Lord." — Jeremiah 23:30

Pay to all what is due them: taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom is due, honor to whom honor is due. — Romans 13:7

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines plagiarism as: "to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own; use (another's production) without crediting the source." In the age of the Internet, it has never been easier to "cut and paste" sermon material... or more tempting. Though accurate statistics are not available, the practice of downloading and preaching entire sermons written by others has become quite widespread. Some pastors have admitted to finding themselves addicted to the ease of sermon appropriation.

Getting caught may mean the loss of your ministry, division in the church, and exposure in the media. All of these are ultimately harmful to our witness in the world.

But consider the other impacts of preaching plagiarism:

- It is unfair to the person who did the work; in fact, plagiarism is legally the theft of intellectual property.
- It is unfair to the church, and a violation of trust. A congregation covenants with their minister to study and share a fresh word for *that* congregation.
- It is poor stewardship of our gifts and the privilege of education.

  It keeps us from growing as preachers and developing our own unique voice.

The argument can be made that there is nothing new under the sun. Certainly, excellence in preaching will include study and synthesis from great Christian thinkers, from ancient to modern.

When you quote someone, use a key idea or a sermon outline; you need to give credit to the writer. This is an attribution.

Oral attribution *is* different. A sermon is not a term paper and does not require elaborate footnote-style references. Attribution can be quite simple:

- Another pastor tells a story about...
- I came across an approach to a sermon by so-and-so, and I want to share it with you.
- As one biblical scholar has put it...
- Attribution notes can be shared in the bulletin as well.
- There are indeed many grey areas when deciding when and how to provide attribution. Nevertheless, here are some helpful guidelines:
- When in doubt, give credit.
- Preaching an entire borrowed sermon should be done rarely and with full attribution.
- If it didn't happen to you, don't claim that it did.

#### **Artificial Intelligence and Plagiarism**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has quickly become a part of our everyday life, integrated into diverse fields. For the preacher, it offers opportunities for streamlining daily work, including sermon preparation. AI also represents great ethical challenges and temptations.

Artificial Intelligence differs from other sources of potential plagiarism because it is notpersonal; that is, there is no individual from whom we are "stealing" ideas. Nevertheless, the ethic boundaries are similar: do not copy from Artificial Intelligence in a way that it would be wrong to copy from another writer or preacher.

For the working preacher, ethical uses of AI abound. One of the most significant advantages of using AI in sermon preparation is its ability to access and analyze large amounts of information quickly. Grammar and style checks can help us refine our language and ensure that our sermons are clear, concise, and free of grammatical errors. AI might suggest a variety of metaphors and illustrations. AI can also introduce us to diverse perspectives and ideas that we might not have considered.

Even research uses come with a warning: never use something from Artificial Intelligence that you have not verified. AI chatbots regularly make factual blunders and have been known to invent sources entirely.

There is a clear line between using AI for research and using it as a "ghostwriter." We must not use Artificial Intelligence in sermon preparation in a way that shortcuts the process of study and meditation on God's word that people expect from a faithful preacher.

Authentic preaching is relational and Spirit-powered. Pastor Hershael York has noted, "the ultimate failure of a chatbot's sermon lies in the fact that it 'lacks a soul.' Without that empathetic consciousness, a chatbot-composed sermon cannot include genuine insights based on personal spiritual experience. And without that essential element of embodied human awareness, true preaching is simply not possible."

#### **Questions for Consideration:**

Below are some of the stresses that can lead a preacher to be tempted to violate pulpit integrity through plagiarism. Think about what advice you might give in each situation.

- 1. It's Saturday night, I had a horrible week, and I am not ready to preach tomorrow. How could this situation be avoided? How could it be dealt with?
- 2. I just can't seem to get a handle on how to put together a good sermon. *What are some possible solutions?*
- 3. I'll never be able to come up with anything as good as those celebrity preachers. *How would you respond to this?*
- 4. I am just so weary, my heart is not in it anymore. What would you suggest to this pastor?

From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required, and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded. — Luke 12:48b, c

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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.

And this you do as well: You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. You ask, "Why does he not?" Because the Lord was a witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. ... So look to yourselves, and do not let anyone be faithless to the wife of your youth. —Malachi 2:13-14, 15b)

But he would not listen to her, and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her. Then Amnon was seized with a very great loathing for her; indeed, his loathing was even greater than the lust he had felt for her. Amnon said to her, "Get out!" —2 Samuel 13:14-15

All these things my hand has made, so all these things are mine, says the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit who trembles at my word.—Isaiah 66:2

If any think they are religious and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. —James 1:26

Unfortunately, there are many forms of interpersonal abuse. Some only think of it in the context of marriage. However, it can show up in dating relationships and other family relationships as well. It may take the form of physical abuse, which can include slapping or punching. It may manifest as coercive and controlling or isolating behavior. It may show up as sexual abuse (i.e., rape, which can also happen in marriages or financial manipulation.)

Abusive behaviors such as these can happen to those of any age, and children and the elderly are most vulnerable. In relationships, victims are predominantly women, but men can also be abuse victims. Abuse can also manifest as adultery, which destroys trust. Cases of serial infidelity can be most devastating for the partner who attempts to rebuild broken trust after one incident only to have that fragile trust broken again.

When someone in your beloved community discloses abuse, be careful not to seek conjoint meetings with the person identified as the abuser. Clergy may want to do this to facilitate restoration of the relationship. However, disclosure can often be the most dangerous thing to

do for the one who is being abused.

Disclosure can result in various forms of retaliation that can ultimately be severe enough to result in loss of life.

The first best support clergy can offer to the one who discloses abuse is belief that the person who is disclosing is honest. Connct the person to supportive community resources. Partner with the supportive community services to make sure you can facilitate safety for the person who has disclosed if that person stays in your beloved community. Once you know, based on collaborative conversations with the community supporters and the person who needs the support, how to facilitate safety for that person, you can then seek guidance for best strategies to help in working with the one who has been accused of abuse. Such a person will need to establish scaffolding accountability systems. Identify trusted (but separate) resources that will facilitate accountability with truth-telling over a long enough period of time to help you assess whether any repentance is temporary or transformational (refer to Isaiah 66:2 and James 1:26).

Abusers must face what they have done. Abusers must take responsibility for what they have done in regard to the abused and to the community. But we must not think of punishment as the answer to abuse. Abusers need treatment, too. They need treatment so that they can find wholeness in their own lives, and so that they will not be a threat to others. Justice and mercy must be kept together.

#### Please note:

Children are in a special place of weakness and dependence upon adults. When children are abused, they often see themselves as having done wrong. **Ministers not only need to report all forms of child and adult-related abuse based on the current state and regional laws**, they should also follow through to see that the abused finds help to deal with the effects of abuse in his or her life. This is a part of speaking the truth in love.



#### **Questions for Consideration:**

- 1. Have I built connections to supportive community agencies which I can contact when I need help in supporting church members? Do I have a resource list for treatment of abusers and for counseling victims?
- 2. Have I educated myself through supportive community services like trainings or workshops so I know the signs of abuse and of the other kinds of issues that require referral for support like mental health and substance abuse issues?
- 6. How do I respond to a person who asks for an assurance of confidentiality before he or she will talk with me?
- 4. What do I do in a situation where I see some signs of abuse or suspect abuse but have no solid evidence or confession?
- 5. What do I do in a situation where a woman has been abused but does not want to leave or press charges? Note: many partners stay because of financial or community needs and because of loving the partner regardless of the behavior.
- 7. Where and how do I report abuse in my state?

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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.

When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but the prudent are restrained in speech.

-Proverbs 10:19

The purposes in a human mind are like deep water, but the intelligent will draw them out. — Proverbs 20:5

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths but only what is good for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. — Ephesians 4:29

#### **Confidentiality Expectations**

Clergy are expected not to contribute to gossip. What is shared with them that is not governed by legal limitations should remain with them alone. If any information is to be shared beyond the conversations between the clergy and the given church member(s), permission must be obtained by the clergy from the person or persons who provided that initial information. This way, the church member(s) can make informed decisions about what happens regarding what they shared.

For an informed decision to be made, there must be a conversation in which the pastor identifies the people with whom that information might be shared. The conversation should also explore the pros and cons for sharing the information beyond the pastor. This includes making sure (a) that all parties understand why a given information should be shared, (b) that clear expectations for potential follow up actions are identified, and (c) that possible unintended consequences which could result from disclosing the given information are discussed.

There should be clear policies for appropriate behavior of the pastor and church staff as well that includes an understanding of consequences. Consider the following verses:

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will face stricter judgment (James 3:1).

If your brother or sister sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If you are listened to, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If that person refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church, and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a gentile and tax collector (Matthew 18:15-17).

Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another, and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so that you must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony (Colossians 3:12-14).

People who hold special positions in churches are sometimes treated as if they are beyond experiencing consequences. Behavior that causes disharmony or damage to others, is not a representation of being an ambassador of Christ. Silence about such behavior is a twisted form of confidentiality, which only damages the body of Christ. It should not be permitted nor facilitated by church leadership. Leadership should speak the truth that encourages change, in love, so that all "will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ" (Ephesians 4:15).

We know that all things work together for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

My brothers and sisters, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted (Galatians 6:1).

In all things, offering yourself as a model of good works in your teaching offering integrity, gravity and sound speech that cannot be censured (Titus 2:7-8a).

#### **Confidentiality Limitations**

This code speaks to the need for clergy to maintain appropriate boundaries. However, while the church is a place for protection for those in need, there are some limits on the parameters of protection permitted to clergy.

It is important for protestant clergy to remember that they are not Catholic priests. There is no confessional in the Baptist denomination and declarations that church members make to clergy are not sacrosanct. It would be unethical to encourage any beliefs or expectations to the contrary.

Clergy are also subject to the laws of their states and so must make every effort to understand what limits the laws place on their ability to maintain confidentiality of certain issues away from certain protective governmental institutions. For example, in Massachusetts, clergy are mandated reporters of situations of abuse under the law. This means that they need to reach out to the appropriate authorities should they be informed of situations of abuse regarding protected populations, notably, children, the elderly, and intellectually challenged populations. This means that clergy have an ethical duty to know the laws for mandated reporting in their state.

Pastors are ethically responsible to share generally and in private meetings with church

members the limits of confidentiality. They may not be able to provide absolute privacy about certain situations because some populations are protected by law and clergy share a role in their protection.

#### **Questions for Consideration:**

- 1. What is your understanding of the expectations and limitations of confidentiality?
- 2. What is the policy at your church for behavior of leadership, and what are the consequences for violations, especially if unharmonious behavior is a frequent occurrence?
- 3. What are the laws in your state for clergy mandated reporting?
- 4. What steps would you take to explore sharing a confidence with others with a church member who gave you a confidence that you believe needs to be shared for the benefit of the member and for the situation?

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#### E. I will not proselytize from other Christian churches.

At that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord. — Zephaniah 3:9

And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'— Matthew 28:18-20

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' — Acts 1:8

Why not proselytize? What is the difference between sharing our faith and proselytizing? And why is refraining from this a matter of professional ethics? Is this not a matter of variance in doctrine or style of witness?

Indeed, both the Great Commission and Christ's ascension words of charge to us convey a

vision of Christian faithfulness to evangelism that places us in an outward expanding trajectory of sharing and witness. Across our American Baptist family, we may hold diverse convictions about the techniques and aims of various modes of evangelism. But we would all agree that sharing our faith in humble ways that do not dishonor Christ or damage the reputation of the Body of Christ is our *mandate*. It encompasses how we live our lives of witness, and the words we use to testify to our trust in the Good News of Jesus' saving grace.

The word proselytize comes from the Greek *proselytos*, meaning "newcomer" or, specifically, "new convert." Our ethical commitment stated above to *not* proselytize members of other churches is not equivalent to refraining from such evangelistic witness as described in Scripture.

Rather, we are concerned here with the context: other churches' members. Since matters of ethics do involve mindful use of our power, and our awareness of self and context, we strive not to unwittingly damage relationships or spiritual growth. Refraining from proselytizing from *other churches* is a commitment to responsibilities such as these:

- a. To avoid contributing to division among other Christian's communal relationships, as attempting to *poach* might do;
- b. To support the thriving relationships among other assemblies of believers, including by an avoidance of courting new members whose spiritual growth might best be served by working out unsatisfying dynamics in their present church home;
- c. To support the growth of—or not do discouraging harm to—fellow ministers who may need to overcome ways they are not serving their congregants optimally;
- d. To monitor and purify our own motivations where we might be tempted to rivalry, competition or pride in recruiting people who are disappointed elsewhere.

Of course, we offer hospitality and inclusivity to those seeking a new church home, ever mindful of our duty to support disciples' wisdom about their desires and needs as they grow in Christ.

There are so many who have not yet known the joys of salvation and the life of committed fellowship with other believers. We are to be working for the sake of God's Reign, bringing anyone in need of this into the Body of Christ. To undertake evangelism with ministerial excellence, we submit our motivations and habits to the scrutiny of the Holy Spirit. Pondering the ethics of proselytizing is a practice of self- examination as we seek to avoid unintentional exploitation of seekers in vulnerable situations.

We do further acknowledge that our ABC ministerial family holds varying convictions about the nature of Christ's salvation, and whether members of other religious traditions or none ought to be proselytized at all. Or whether there are such settings such as chaplaincy or counseling where the setting itself warrants what one Ministers Council member calls a theology of restraint. Our specialized ministries have much to teach us about maintaining integrity of conviction *without* proselytizing, truly requiring both centeredness and competence.

#### **Questions for Consideration:**

- 1. What do I believe about the Holy Spirit's presence and formation in the particular beliefs and practices of other Christian churches, perhaps different from my own?
- 2. How does the Baptist conviction of local church freedom influence my thoughts and actions about other churches' ministries?
- 3. How would I offer pastoral care to one who's left another church amid difficult circumstances?
- 4. What are ethical ways to reach out to those without church affiliation in my community? Are there ways of reaching out that are unethical? Why?
- 5. What can I do to build good relationships with the other Christian churches in my community? Their pastors?
- 6. How should I respond when a member of another church visits my church? How should I respond if that person wants to join the church I serve?

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#### COLLEGIALITY

A. I will respect and recognize the variety of calls to ministry among my American Baptist colleagues, and other Christians.

He himself granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. — Ephesians 4:11

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. — Romans 12:3-8

We make the commitment to collegial relationships as ministers seeking excellence. What exactly does that have to do with ethics? A part of collegiality is an appreciation of the many different vineyards God is tending through the varied callings to distinctively gifted leaders. As professional clergy, we serve in local churches, counseling, chaplaincy and administration. We serve in academic settings, denominational, local church and parachurch settings. We serve in music, in retreat and camp hospitality, and in campus ministry and Christian education. We serve as writers, and at dinner church and in wilderness outings and in prisons. We serve as bi-vocational ministers; we carry professional obligations into seasons of relative retirement. We labor as licensed and commissioned leaders, on alternative paths distinct from ordained roles.

As Baptists, we believe ALL are ministers, and these named above are distinctive, essential and interdependent forms of leaders' equipping of others. An ethical leader cultivates a genuine respect for the variety of trained leadership roles, as well as the lay ministers with whom we collaborate.

An ethical minister maintains a posture of learning and interdependence in this complex modern ministry ecosystem, in order to grow in interdisciplinary wisdom and humility. Our wisdom, and thus our ethical compass, is better tuned when we do so. When we show disinterest in or disrespect for others' callings, our own capacity is diminished. When we fail to advocate for each other's honor and material support, our own instincts for best practices may be dulled.

Cultivating respect and extending recognition for a variety of calls strengthens the bonds that make our collective work most fruitful. Through respect and recognition, we encourage one another, and such sustaining makes a difference in our Kingdom labors. It is in our relational power to bless or to diminish one another. This has been demonstrated throughout history when we have placed limits on who God can call to ministry.

We cannot keep up with every innovation or be equally versed in all the treasures of wisdom in the varied practices of ministry. But we can actively seek interdisciplinary learning with colleagues in different fields and see each other's significance through Christ's eyes. In solidarity and receptivity, we excel for the glory of Jesus Christ!

#### **Questions for Consideration:**

- 1. How do I show respect for those colleagues who do not share my particular calling?
- 2. How do I feel about women in ministry? LGBTQ believers? Have I prayerfully studied the question? Do I understand the reasoning of colleagues who feel differently?
- 3. How do I show respect for clergy from other denominations?
- 4. How do I show respect for colleagues who are from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds than my own?
- 5. What do I do to promote respect and unity among colleagues?
- 6. Do I watch for and encourage individuals who might be called to the ministry?

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# 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.

Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other, but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? — Ecclesiastes 4:9-11

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. — John 15:13

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. — Galatians 6:2 "I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants

and the one who waters have one purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor. For we are God's coworkers, working together; you are God's field, God's building."
— I Corinthians 3:6-9.

We affirm that an active orientation toward supportive, constructive relationships with fellow staff and other ministers impacts the fruitfulness of our individual and collective ministries. This includes our ethical sense as we wrestle with challenging dilemmas within our sphere of work, whether in the local church, chaplaincy, counseling or other specialized settings. Indeed, constructive relationships are the arena in which our 3C's (Centeredness, Collegiality and Competence) intersect.

As American Baptists, we have collaborated with and gleaned lessons from significant national ecumenical research about this, including research regarding the "Together in Ministry" Covenant Groups in which we've invested in recent decades. When we spend time nurturing spaces of trust, grace, vulnerability and continuous learning, we are more likely to avoid being *lone rangers* in ministry. We are more likely to exchange good counsel, to extend warnings to one another, and to practice truth-telling in love. We are more likely to be sustained in dry or challenging times, and to weather temptations to exploit or be diminished by conflict. Sharing the case studies of our daily ministry challenges, informally or formally, allows the Holy Spirit to use us to encourage and equip each other. When we are connected in constructive relationships, the joy of our common labors may be safeguarded, and this can contribute to our sustainability in ministry.

The extent to which we engage in collegial ecumenical or interfaith relationships may vary due to our geographical location, theological boundaries or current capacity. Nevertheless, living out an ethic of intentional respect, however the shape of our actual current collaboration, bears witness to Christ's character at work in us: His living and interconnected Body!

Building constructive relationships with fellow staff, particularly junior or senior colleagues, requires mindfulness, self-awareness and Biblical humility. Ethical collaboration across our staff portfolios often requires honesty in feedback, restraint from over-burdening one another, or selfless advocacy for one another. Tools for mutual understanding should be encouraged, such as work style inventories, Myers- Briggs, Enneagram, etc. Spiritual practices may also be undertaken corporately in a manner which deepens intimacy and trust.

Caring about constructive relationships, we embrace diversity and difficulty for the sake of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We tend to what He is building in and through us. By making our thoughts of alienation, competition or division captive to Him, we live out our discipleship *professionally*; we are enabled to contribute to flourishing rather than diminishing in the vineyards in which we serve.

#### **Questions for Consideration:**

- 1. What are the above scriptures saying to me and to the Church in general?
- 2. What steps might I take to build constructive relationships between members of the clergy at the church I serve? Between clergy and lay ministers or lay leaders?
- 3. How might I support other ministries in my community?
- 4. How can I be involved in my local ministerial association so that my faith can be expressed in ecumenical and interfaith gatherings?
- 5. Do I spend time in prayer and self-examination to discern if God is directing me to greater involvement or leadership locally and ecumenically?

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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.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) — John 4:7, 9

There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. — Galatians 3:2

As a people whose forebears came together in response to intolerance, American Baptists have cherished freedom and pursued it for millions around the world. American Baptists have a rich history of advocacy for equality, inclusiveness, and diversity. Our history reflects our commitment to push back against the many forms of discrimination in our world.

We are each called to a greater understanding of how the lives of our colleagues are impacted by discrimination in its many forms: **gender**, **race**, **ethnicity**, **age**, **marital status**, **national origin**, **physical impairment**, **disability**, **sexual orientation**, **and gender identity**. Indeed, we are challenged to consider how we ourselves have been impacted by discrimination, and how we may have been involved (even unwittingly) in perpetuating it.

We acknowledge that we may have beliefs and experiences that vary widely on these issues, as do our churches. In the Baptist tradition, we affirm each believer's right and obligation to interpret Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and within the community of faith. We

also respect the autonomy of the local church. Our challenge is to come to topics of dissenting conviction with open minds and hearts, recognizing that we all have more that we can learn as we explore and understand more deeply. We lift up respectful dialog as a healthy means to understanding.

With this, we are challenged to support and respect our colleagues, understanding that we can *disagree but not discriminate*. The goal of increasing awareness acknowledges that all of us are on a journey. We are challenged to build constructive relationships, working together even if we are not always on the same page about everything. This is a growing edge for any and all of us.

Look well to the growing edge! All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born; all around us life is dying and life is being born. It is the extra breath from the exhausted lung, the one more thing to try when all else has failed, the upward reach of life when weariness closes in upon all endeavor. This is the basis of hope in moments of despair, the incentive to carry on when times are out of joint and men have lost their reason, the source of confidence when worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash. Look well to the growing edge!— Civil Rights theologian Howard Thurman

#### **Questions for Consideration:**

- 1. What have been your experiences of being included and excluded in your own ministry?
- 2. When you look at the list, do you see places where you have shifted in any of the categories?
- 3. What does it mean to support a colleague, personally and publicly, even when you have significant differences in belief around these issues?

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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.

Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him." John answered, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the

bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease." — John 3:25-30

And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people but rather as fleshly, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still fleshly. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not fleshly and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not all too human?

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and each will receive wages according to their own labor. For we are God's coworkers, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

According to the grace of God given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Let each builder choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 3:1-11

Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus—my brother and coworker and fellow soldier, your messenger[a] and minister to my need, for he has been longing for[b] all of you and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, in order that you may rejoice at seeing him again and that I may be less anxious. Welcome him, then, in the Lord with all joy, and honor such people, because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me. — Philippians 2:35-30

Leaving well requires proactive care in several areas:

- (1) self-care on the part of the parting pastor whose season of service is closing;
- (2) care for God's congregation who is vulnerable to grieving emotions and power leveraging opportunities; and (3) care to secure a promising atmosphere for the new person in the pastoral office.

The above passages give guidance highlighting the value of properly managing transitions in spiritual leadership.

Pastoral transitions are inevitable, whether they happen in the more common sequence of resignation or retirement followed by the arrival of the new pastor; whether a new pastor is brought in for a transitional season with the outgoing pastor; or whether an interim pastor is appointed to accommodate the search and selection season. In either case, ethical boundaries

must be clearly stated and understood by all parties to avoid unethical chaos. Toward this end, it would be wise for there to be some form of trusted consultation for both the parting pastor and the congregation.

Even in cases where pastors retire and are given honorary emeritus status, it still requires the same kind of decrease and ethical restraint so as not to cause political confusion. Leaving well requires disinterested disengagement that allows all parties to "grow" through the transition separately and respectfully.

#### **Questions for Consideration:**

- 1. What kinds of tensions, conflicts, and confusions might arise if a former pastor continues ministerial relations with former constituents after a new pastor is in place?
- 2. How do I distinguish pastor/congregant relations from friendship? Is it good to make such a distinction?
- 3. Define "ministerial leadership relations."
- 4. One does not have to intend to be divisive in order to actually be so. Since the bonds of affection between pastor and congregants do not cease when the pastor changes roles, former congregants quite naturally turn to their former pastor during crises or life events, if that pastor is accessible.

Given this dynamic, discuss:

- When a pastor leaves a pastorate, what contact with former congregants is acceptable?
- How should a pastor handle requests from former congregants?
- What services can a former pastor legitimately do at a former church if the new pastor requests it or gives consent?

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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.

"This shall be the priests' due from the people, from those offering a sacrifice, whether an ox or a sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder, the two jowls, and the stomach. The first fruits of your grain, your wine, and your oil, as well as the first of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him. For the LORD your God has chosen Levi out of all your tribes to stand and minister in the name of the LORD, him and his sons for all time. —Deuteronomy 18:3-5

He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way; I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!'And if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near. 'I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town. — Luke 10:2-12

The Bible clearly states that ministerial "workers are worthy of their wages." The issue of adequate compensation for ministers is complicated because we live in a culture of many unique congregational practices. Furthermore, there is no general standard unto which all must comply. Therefore, advocacy for adequate compensation is an on-going teaching opportunity awkwardly attended to by the ministerial beneficiary. Even the word compensation is not always clearly understood (i.e., cash salary or the inclusion of housing allowances, retirement benefits, etc.) And in some congregational cultures it also includes gratuitous appreciation gifts that are considered a supplemental part of general compensation.

In precept, compensation is a directed portion of the resources of the congregation set aside to support the pastor. Ideally, the congregation understands this as stewardship of their collective calling; when it is a fair compensation, the mutual ministry of pastor and congregation will be increased in vitality and sustainability.

Congregations and pastors should be in clear agreement about what is included in pastoral compensation and how it will be provided. From an ethical point of view, the assessment of additional fees for ministerial services is unethical if it is from constituents who are supporting the pastor's compensation. On the other hand, it is also unethical for there to be expectations of free services to those who are not supportive of the congregation's funding of the compensation. These matters should be clearly addressed in the pastor's written compensation agreement and explained in the policies and procedures of the congregation.

#### **Questions for Consideration:\***

- 1. In what ways might I advocate for adequate compensation for my profession?
- 2. What efforts might I make to educate lay persons that ministers are worthy of adequate compensation? (Contact MMBB for statistics on current compensation ranges)
- 3. Why should I, as a salaried minister, not expect fees for pastoral services from those who help pay my salary?
- 4. Should I, as a bi-vocational minister, expect or require fees for pastoral services from those I serve when they do not give me a living wage?
- 5. I perform the memorial service for a member of my church and tell the family no payment is expected. Following the advice of the funeral director, they send me a thank you note with a check for \$150. What should I do with the money?
- 6. I provide complete pre-marital counseling services and perform the wedding for a friend or distant relative of a member of my congregation. They do not pay me, but send a token thank you gift. What should I do?
- \*Questions retained from 2006 edition.

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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.

If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, make my joy complete:

be of the same mind, having the same love,
being in full accord and of one mind. —Philippians 2:1-2

American Baptists have a unique witness in the Baptist world as a family of faith. We are characterized by our diversity, which has been created through many decades of advocacy. We are committed to being a faith family amidst the reality that we gather together under our big umbrella as persons and churches who do not always completely share beliefs, styles, or emphases. We have a unique witness in a culture pervaded by deep divisions.

The Apostle Paul has important things to say to those of us who have the influence of leadership. In Philippians 2, he stresses the humility that regards others as better than oneself in the context of calling for the church to have the same mind and love.

When a minister receives ordination or standing in the American Baptist Churches, they are making a commitment to serve our churches and to continue to support the ABC family. When a minister's convictions lead him or her away from the historic convictions and covenant commitments of a local American Baptist church, humility and respect for the larger community of faith suggests that resignation of the minister is an honorable solution. Those who have signed the Code of Ethics and have then purposed to divide a church from the ABC are accountable to the larger family for their actions.

#### **Questions for Consideration:**

(Further reading from these texts will inform your discussion: Matthew 16:13-18, Philippians 2, Galatians 5, Ephesians and James 1:19-27)

- 1. When Jesus asks Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" does the question have implications for me? Does Peter's answer have implications for me?
- 2. What does Paul mean by "being of one mind" when we know there are so many differences in our wider community of faith?
- 3. How well do I understand the principles/practices that distinguish us as American Baptists?
- 4. Can I hold in trust the traditions listed above? Are there inherent conflicts among them? Which do I tend to prioritize?
- 5. Compare and contrast our nation's commitment to the democratic process and separation of church and state with the Baptist principles. In what ways do they overlap? Where do they diverge?

## Learning Guide Editorial Team

September 2021-January 2023



**Rev. Jacki Belile, CPC** is a pastor, life coach and spiritual director based in Chicago, Illinois. A lifelong Baptist, she has served four congregations and held numerous volunteer leadership roles within the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago, the local Ministers Council chapter and the Ministers Council ABC-USA. She serves currently as the Interim Program Administrator for the Ministers Council.



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**Rev. Dr. Juan Ángel Gutiérrez Rodríguez** most recently served as the interim pastor of the Hispanic Congregation at North Shore Baptist Church in Chicago. He has previously been a pastor in Chicago and Puerto Rico and a missionary with International Ministry ABC in Bolivia, Chile and Nicaragua



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In addition to working for a number of years as a Marriage and Family Therapist, Rick has taught marriage and family therapy and pastoral care and counseling at Holy Names University (Oakland, CA), Saybrook Graduate School (San Francisco), Pacific School of Religion (Berkeley, CA) and Berkeley School of Theology where he now serves as Affiliate Professor Pastoral Care. His pastoral ministry includes interim pastorates for Dolores Street Baptist Church in San Francisco, CA, First Baptist Church (now United Church) in Granville, OH, Fairview Community Church, Costa Mesa, CA, Old Cambridge Baptist Church, Cambridge, MA, and currently First Baptist Church, Ann Arbor, MI, as well as a 14.5-year tenure as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Palo Alto, CA.



**Rev. Alan V. Ragland, DMin**, is a retired African American ordained minister. He graduated from Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School (MDiv) and McCormick Theological Seminary (DMin). Rev. Ragland has served as Director of Pastoral Care a large metropolitan hospital, a full-time seminary faculty member, and as a congregational pastor. Also, he has worked with broad-based community organizing in two metropolitan areas, and he has served on several seminary boards, denominational committees, multi-congregational wellness initiatives. Alan has served most of his ministerial tenure as the Senior Pastor of Third Baptist Church of Chicago, from which he has retired with the distinction of Pastor Emeritus.

## Acknowledgements

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# A LIVING DOCUMENT! A Final Word from the Editorial Team

Public Release Draft 1.0... July 2025

We have always imagined this guide to be a living document.
We are pleased to release this first public draft (in English and Spanish) upon the occasion of the Biennial Mission Summit of the American Baptist Churches USA in Omaha, Nebraska.

Translation to additional languages is anticipated.

We hope you will begin using this tool for personal and group reflection in the coming months. We invite your contributions of additional Scripture, stories or resources for further study at www.ministerscouncil.com.

As we prepare for wider circulation, we welcome your feedback and questions by email to the national office of the Ministers Council ABCUSA (ministerscouncil@abc-usa.org).



Electronic copies in English and Spanish Available Here.