



Coming Soon

**Learning Guide
on the Covenant and Code of Ethics
for Ministerial Leaders of American
Baptist Churches-USA**

Available Fall 2024

FEATURING!

Diverse Authors, Unified Voice
Essays
Scriptural Connections
Questions for Discussion
Illustrations

A Baptist Voice for Covenantal Compassion and Accountability!

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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 includes a range of ministry contexts, culturally rooted insights and theological voices...After two visioning sessions in Fall and Winter 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. Group sessions were held throughout 2022, and individuals' contributions were reviewed as a group in January 2023. Thus, the final document is the work of the whole team. Pending editorial revisions will be finalized late this summer after our 1.0 draft is shared with diverse focus groups of our denominational family.

...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 which deepen our capacity to name our own convictions while being in respectful and non-coercive relationships with others. We have endeavored to create a tool 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 beginning the Fall of 2024.

INTRODUCTION

What is a code of ethics and why is it important? These are crucial questions considered by the team that worked together to draft this learning guide. 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 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 that we make with ourselves, our colleagues, our communities of care and practice, our denomination, the Church, 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 about. 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 each of 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, one 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 that is 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 that you will benefit from our work as we have each benefitted from our work together in creating this Learning Guide.

Blessings on your journey!

Learning Guide Editorial Team: *Alan, Florence, Jacki, Jacqueline, Jerrod, Juan, Mary, Rick*

THE EDITORIAL TEAM



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Rev. Dr. Randle "Rick" Mixon

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), and Pacific School of Religion (Berkeley, CA). His pastoral ministry includes interim pastorates for Dolores Street Baptist Church in San Francisco, CA and First Baptist Church (now United Church) in Granville, OH, 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.



Excerpts of Pending Document

CENTEREDNESS

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 asking ourselves how we have grown in our “personal love for God as revealed in Jesus Christ” is a question that we should invite ourselves (and our colleagues) to explore and examine.

Leaders 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).

COMPETENCE

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...

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.

COLLEGIALITY

We make the commitment to collegial relationships as ministers seeking excellence. What, exactly, does that have to do with “ethics”? ... 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...

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... When we are connected in constructive relationships, the joy of our common labors may be safeguarded and contributes to our sustainability in Christ's ministry.

SEE COMPLETE TEXT OF THE COVENANT AND CODE OF ETHICS AND THIS PENDING GUIDE AT WWW.MINISTERSCOUNCIL.COM. AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH, ADDITIONAL TRANSLATIONS PENDING.