



American Baptist Churches of the  
**Great Rivers Region**

# **MINISTERIAL STANDARDS, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Adopted by the GRR Regional Ministry Board

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# GREAT RIVERS REGION MINISTERIAL STANDARDS, POLICIES and PROCEDURES

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Background*

Ordination is the act of the church which, in the name of God, delegates to a qualified person who has responded to the call of God, a wide range of ministerial functions and responsibilities. For decades Baptists have celebrated the autonomy of the local church. We have joined in voluntary association with each other for education, mission, and related endeavors of the church that can best be done jointly. Thus, the local Baptist church retains its right to decide for itself, but also recognizes its interdependence with other Baptist churches and organizations for many of the supports that are needed in full ministry. The following principles are basic in our common ministry among all the churches.

1. It is the right and responsibility of the local church to ordain those whom it recognizes as being called of God. That ordination may be particular for the local church or it may be general on behalf of all churches of like faith and order. It is done in consultation with associated churches.
2. Because of the mobility and itinerancy of the ordained clergy, it is physically impossible for the ordaining church to be responsible for the faithful service of the ordained for the many years of an individual's ministry. Thus, over the years, there has been a *de facto* expectation on the part of the local church that the denomination plays an important role in the counseling, consulting, monitoring and continuing recognition of the clergy for service. The Regions are charged with this responsibility.
3. The Registry of Ministerial Leaders of the ABC/USA should be reflective of the present as well as emerging nature of ministry.

### *Historical Perspective*

One of the commonly held convictions of Christian churches in our ecumenical age is that all Christians are, by nature, ministers, who participate in Christ's own ministry. This fact is made graphic in the baptism of the individual Christian. It is spelled out in the doctrine of "the priesthood of all believers," which means that within the corporate responsibility of the congregation each Christian intercedes with God for all people and serves them in every way according to the guidance of God. Baptists coupled this conviction with the assertion that any member of the church could be called upon to exercise all ministerial functions and responsibilities, even though this did not ordinarily happen. When a radical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was combined with a strictly independent concept of the local church, with each congregation directly responsible to Christ, and its officers having no standing outside its membership, there seemed to be little practical or doctrinal foundation for a special order of ministry, the ordained ministry.

But the actual situation was not that simple. Baptists have long possessed a "separate" or "set-apart" ministry, and from earliest times this "set-apart" ministry has served a constituency wider than the local congregation. Ordination has tended to be the setting apart (by the call of God and the action of the church) of one of the many ministers to perform special functions of ministry, functions performed on behalf of the community of faith.

Among American Baptists, ordination generally constituted a recognition by many

congregations that an individual has had a call to this representational and specialized ministry and met the necessary qualifications for carrying it out. Although most often a local congregation took the initiative in ordaining that individual, it did so in cooperation with other congregations. This participation of a group of churches in ordination gave the rite much more than merely local significance. In fact, if the ordination was carried out according to the standards of the American Baptist Churches, it represented a denominational recognition of the individual's call and qualifications for the ordained ministry of Christ's universal church.

In the primitive church, the rite of ordination came to a climax in the act of "laying on of hands." This act indicated that the person so ordained was not only consecrated to God's service, but was also commissioned to serve on behalf of those who laid on hands (See Acts 6:6 and 13:3; I Timothy 4:14; II Timothy 1:6). In addition, this act and the accompanying prayer, which invoked God's grace upon the ordained, implied the ordinand's authority to share the functions and responsibilities of those who laid hands upon the individual.

This meaning has continued to be central to ordination. Today, the act of laying on of hands signifies and focuses in one person the ministry of many persons who in themselves represent the wider Church and Jesus Christ.

### *American Baptist Standards for Ordination*

In American Baptist life, churches are the only ordaining authority. Ordination is neither a right nor an entitlement to be claimed by an individual. A church prayerfully ordains, not to endow with power nor to confer social status, but as a public affirmation of what God has already done. A church chooses to ordain a person because they have discerned evidence of a Godly call, have witnessed gifts of ministry, have seen satisfactory preparation for ministry, and accept the candidate to minister among them.

American Baptists affirm that ordination requires the candidate for ordination is serving in a place of service, i.e. an American Baptist Church or other ABC Ministry. Because ordination is the process that a church enters to affirm the calling, giftedness, and service of the candidate, ordination cannot be detached from a place of service.

Churches may license individuals for a variety of reasons. For example, licensure may affirm a specialized kind of ministry (home visitation, children's ministry, etc) or be part of sending a student to seminary. However, the Great Rivers Region does not treat licensure as a necessary pre-requisite for ordination. Likewise, there are circumstances in which a "commission" rather than an ordination or license may be appropriate (e.g., a short-term mission trip).

While only churches ordain, it is a consequence of our associationalism that churches seek the advice and counsel of partner churches in the process of ordination. The prerogative for churches to perform ordinations is preserved by calling this process of advice and counsel "recognition." While the hope is that churches will participate in this "recognition" process, local churches have the final say on whom they will and will not ordain.

The most important prerequisite for ordination, the call of God to a specialized ministry, does not readily yield itself to particular standards that a denomination or local congregation might establish. This is why the call must be tested by other prerequisites or standards, especially those having to do with educational standards,

evidence of gifts and character for ministry, clarity about the proposed type of service in which the candidate intends to serve as an ordained minister. In these three areas it is quite appropriate that the local and the wider church (in the case of denomination, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.) establish standards for ordination.

## **ORDINATION STANDARDS FOR GRR**

**All applications for standard ABCUSA ordination must include the following:**

1. ABC history and polity course A functional knowledge of American Baptist history and polity which may be satisfied by a seminary-level course on both the history and polity of American Baptists or by a study course approved by the Region.
2. Professional ethics (boundaries) course The candidate's professional ethics and intention of cooperation must be affirmed by accepting the *Covenant and Code of Ethics of the Ministers Council of the American Baptist Churches*. In addition, all persons seeking ordination will have completed a course in professional ethics offered either by a seminary or a region. This course will consider areas such as professional boundary issues, relationships, confidentiality, ethics in financial matters, and other related issues that can dramatically affect the relationship between pastor and people.
3. Candidacy assessment by *Midwest Ministry Development Center* Ordained ministry involves more than an academic attainment; it calls for ongoing pastoral competence, emotional and spiritual maturity, and consistent Christian character. Therefore candidates for ordination will complete a comprehensive career and candidacy assessment program sponsored by or in consultation with a regionally accepted Career Development Center within three years prior to meeting with COMSAO.
4. Place of service in an ABC Ministry in the GRR Although examination in anticipation of ordination may occur, the act of ordination will not take place until the candidate has a specific, permanent call (which includes compensation) to a position in one of the following fields of service:
  - a. Parish ministry within the Great Rivers Region, including all staff who exercise ministerial functions;
  - b. American Baptist mission service on the home or foreign field in which ministerial functions will be exercised;
  - c. Some specialized ministries (e.g. institutional, military, academic chaplaincy, seminary faculty, pastoral counseling, or staff in a church-related institution, where preaching, teaching, and/or pastoral work is required);
  - d. Staff service, involving educational or pastoral functions of an American Baptist agency, a council of churches, or some other ecumenical ministry appropriately related to

the American Baptist Churches.

Any candidate whose proposed type of service does not fall into one of the above categories (e.g., a full-time evangelist) may consult with the Regional Executive Minister regarding the application of regional policies.

## 5. Appropriate education

Approved educational tracks are limited to:

I. The traditional pattern of BA plus an advanced Master's level degree. Because there is so much variability in curriculum and degree titles, regardless of what the degree is called, the following minimal coursework must be documented in the official transcript:

- Old Testament survey (2 credit hours)
- New Testament survey (2 credit hours)
- Christian Theology (2 credit hours)
- Preaching and worship (2 credit hours)
- Pastoral Leadership/Administration (2 credit hours)
- Supervised field experience
- American Baptist History & Polity
- Professional Boundaries (Ethics)

Educational programs that are deficient in any of these may be completed through Alternative Ministerial Education (below)

II. The alternative pattern of education in GRR (Alternative Ministerial Education; AME Program) (please see below for more details regarding "Track III").

Consistent with provisions in **Recommended Procedures** prepared by the Ministers Council and the Ministerial Leadership Commission in 1994, the Great Rivers Region has adopted a Regional Ordination Program as an educational alternative to Track I. This is only an educational alternative, all other requirements still apply. The candidate must be sponsored by a congregation affiliated with ABCUSA through GRR, and complete the approved course of study.

Alternative Ministerial Education (AME) was created by the Regional Ministry Board of the Great Rivers Region for the purpose of providing an alternative, non-traditional education for ministers. It was anticipated that these would be primarily pastors serving "family" or "pastoral" size churches and/or bivocational pastors. When the newest standards were proposed by ABCUSA in 1994, alternative education was gathered under the umbrella of "Track III" in the educational scheme. Its intent remains the same. Our desire is not to create an obstacle for potential pastors, but to provide another avenue by which to prepare persons for even more effective ministry. However, the completion of courses does not guarantee ordination or placement as a minister. AME is administered by a Dean, who is appointed by the Executive Minister.

1. Enrollment in AME begins in a conversation between the church, the candidate, the Area Minister (or AME Dean). If AME seems to meet the needs, then
2. The church endorses the candidate for admission into the program. The church will consider evidence for a call to ministry, the journey of faith, Christian character, leadership experience, and understand why ordination is being sought.

3. The application is reviewed by the AME Dean. Following approval, the candidate is then free to pursue the prescribed courses, in no given order. The courses include: *New Testament Survey, Old Testament Survey, Introduction to Christian Theology, Preaching and Worship, Principles of Pastoral Leadership/Administration, Practice of Congregational Ministry, ABC History and Polity, Professional Boundaries*, and two electives of the student's choice, with the approval of the Dean.

The coursework may be satisfied by any combination of (a) appropriate GRR course offerings, OR (b) analogous coursework at an accredited community college, college, or seminary, OR (c) accredited online or self-study courses, OR (d) examination credit. Normal progress is expected to be the completion of two courses each year, which will result in completion of the program in four years. Candidates may apply to the Dean for a one-time extension in response to personal circumstances.

4. The Region will maintain and offer on a regular schedule three mandatory courses: ***ABC History & Polity*** and ***A Sacred Trust (Boundary Issues for Clergy and Spiritual Teachers)***, and ***Practice of Congregational Ministry*** . The candidate will become eligible for regionally-recognized licensure upon the completion of these three courses. This licensure will remain in effect only five years, during which the candidate is expected to complete the course of study and pursue ordination.
5. When all the coursework has been completed, the church then takes action to endorse the candidate for ordination through the usual process of regional recognition.
6. The candidate is eligible to enter the usual process for ordination, **but ordination is not guaranteed.**

## OVERVIEW OF THE ORDINATION PROCESS

### For those who have never been ordained before:

The candidate must meet all standards, *including place of service in GRR*<sup>1</sup> Please see **Overview of the Ordination Process** below for more details.

- Application materials received by GRR office. An “ordination paper” will be included.<sup>2</sup>
- When all materials are in, candidates are interviewed by COMSAO.
- COMSAO reports its decision to the church and the Area. If positive, then the Area proceeds with examination. Decisions of COMSAO are final.
- An Examination Council is arranged by regional staff as assigned by the Executive Minister (normal the Area Minister). If the findings of the Council are positive, the church is advised to initiate plans for ordination.
- Church ordains and reports to COMSAO.
- Region makes the appropriate report to the ABCUSA.

### For those who have been ordained in another denomination and are now serving a GRR church:

The candidate must meet all standards, *including a place of service in GRR*.<sup>1</sup>

- Application materials received by the GRR office. This will include a paper with the same format as the “ordination paper”<sup>1</sup>.
- In addition to the above materials, the applicant must ask their most recent judicatory leader to send a letter affirming that they were in good standing when they left that denomination.
- When all materials are in, candidates are interviewed by COMSAO.
- COMSAO approves or rejects the application. Decisions by COMSAO are final.
- Region makes the appropriate report to ABCUSA.

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<sup>1</sup> “Place of service” is as defined on page 4 of this manual. It must be a permanent, compensated position. Student pastorates and interims normally do not qualify; part-time is o.k. This process should not be initiated until the candidate has such a place of service.

<sup>2</sup> The “ordination paper” includes a description of personal faith experience, call to ministry and the topics of doctrine of God (Trinity), authority of scriptures, doctrine of salvation, spiritual development (discipleship), our purpose in life and final destiny, the purpose and place of the church in today’s world, the ordinances of baptism and Lord’s Supper, personal commitment to the ABC, role of the minister and the relationship of the local congregation to the American Baptist Churches, ecumenical witness, and women in ministry. This paper will provide the basis for the Examination Council.

## ABBREVIATED STEPS TO ORDINATION

1. Church, candidate and Area Minister meet to review procedures and establish a course of action. *Normally the ordaining church is the “place of service.”*
2. Application materials are submitted to COMSAO<sup>3</sup> These include: *Completed application information form Endorsement by the church References Educational transcripts Documentation of ABC History & Polity Documentation of Professional Ethics training Candidate assessment (Midwest Ministry Development Center) Ordination paper (the outline provided and page limits must be followed)*
3. COMSAO meets with candidate (after all application materials are received) This interview is not to be confused with the “examination.” The work of COMSAO is credentialing by: (a) assuring that all the documentation is in order (b) addressing issues which may have arisen as part of the candidate assessment by Midwest Ministry Development Center (c) questioning about ethical boundary issues and fitness for ministry (d) ascertaining the congeniality of the person for ministry in American Baptist life [key issues today are women in ministry, ecumenism, theological diversity, and support of ABC mission & ministry] (e) reviewing the Ordination Paper with the primary intent of helping prepare the candidate for the Examination Council, (f) establishing personal relationship with the candidate
4. COMSAO makes recommendation to the appropriate Area committee
5. The Area convenes an Examination Council (Area procedures vary on how this is done)
6. The Examination Council announces its findings and recommendation
7. The church (usually the “place of service”) plans and conducts ordination service

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<sup>3</sup> COMSAO is the *Council on Ministerial Standing and Ordination*. The Regional Ministry Board adopts ministerial standards and policies regarding ordination, and has assigned the execution of those policies and procedures to COMSAO. The Council is composed of six ABCUSA-recognized clergy in good standing, who have been appointed by the President of GRR. The Executive Minister serves as the Recording Secretary.

## CONTRIBUTORS TO THE ORDINATION PROCESS

### ROLE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH CONGREGATION

The process of ordination begins and ends with the local congregation that is the “place of service” for the candidate.

- The appropriate board or committee of the church to which the candidate belongs shall meet with the candidate and Area Minister to gain information as to eligibility for ordination. Once local church leaders are satisfied that the candidate is ready for ordination, they recommend that candidate to the Council on Ministerial Standing and Ordination (COMSAO).
- After a positive recommendation by COMSAO, and a positive report of the associational/area Examination Council, a date for ordination and order of service can then be set by the candidate and the church.
- The church invites appropriate regional leaders to participate in the ordination service.
- The Church Clerk reports the ordination, in writing, to COMSAO.

### ROLE OF THE CANDIDATE

After conferring with appropriate church leaders, the candidate should seek counseling from his/her Area Minister as to procedures leading to ordination. The candidate may select an advocate. The role of the advocate is to “stand beside” the candidate throughout the process.

The candidate is responsible for:

- Submitting documents as required by the COMSAO, including a signed Code of Ethics and a Candidate Assessment Report from the Midwest Ministry Development Center.
- Obtaining an official transcript from all schools attended that documents successful completion of work and graduation (if appropriate).
- Providing written references as required by COMSAO.
- Meeting with COMSAO and other groups in the process of ordination.

### ROLE OF THE REGION

The Region does not ordain candidates. In conversation with ABCUSA, the Regional Ministry Board adopts **Ministerial Standards and Policies** which govern the process for “recognized” ordination within the Great Rivers Region. The Regional Ministry Board has assigned the execution of those policies and procedures to the *Council on Ministerial Standing and Ordination* (COMSAO). The Council is composed of six ABCUSA-recognized clergy in good standing, who have been appointed by the President of GRR. The Executive Minister serves as the Recording Secretary. COMSAO serves to validate the credentials of candidates.

- Upon the recommendation of the church, COMSAO receives the information in

order to document that the candidate has met all the requirements for “recognized” ordination.

- When all the documentation is in order, COMSAO invites the candidate to meet with them for an interview. This interview is not a doctrinal examination of the candidate, but is intended to discern their fitness for service within the range of American Baptist churches represented in GRR. COMSAO (1) assures that all the criteria for a “recognized” ordination have been met, (2) reviews the assessment report from Midwest Ministry Development Center in order to determine the candidate’s fitness for ministry, and (3) reviews the Ordination Paper for the purpose of helping prepare the candidate for the Examination Council. COMSAO will report its decision to the appropriate Area Committee and the church through the Area Minister.
- After the ordination occurs, COMSAO enters the action in the Professional Registry and makes the appropriate reports to ABCUSA.

## **ROLE OF THE AREA**

- The Area continues the work of the Region in a variety of ways, always with the same intent and always subject to COMSAO approval. The Area will follow its own procedures for the examination of the candidate and making a recommendation to the church. (*please be aware that Areas handle this in different ways*)
- The Committee is responsible for the examination of the candidate by an Examination Council (please see below for details). The Examination Council may consist of: (1) a standing Area Committee, or (2) the Pastor and one lay person invited from each church in the vicinity of the host church.
- The Examination Council is scheduled and convened following the report from COMSAO. While only members of the Examination Council may ask questions and finally vote, the examination will be open to the host church membership. When the Council gathers it will select a Moderator, who is not from the petitioning church.
- The Recording Secretary (usually the Area Minister) will record the proceedings and final disposition of the examination, and send a written report to the church and COMSAO. The final disposition may be: (1) ordination should proceed, OR (2) ordination should be deferred, giving specific reasons and how they can be rectified, OR (3) ordination should not take place.
- In the event of an adverse decision, the petitioning church may appeal to COMSAO. COMSAO will arrange a meeting which will include the Moderator and Secretary of the Examination Council, two representatives from the petitioning church, the candidate, the advocate, and all members of COMSAO. Following the investigation, COMSAO members will vote whether to uphold, reject, or modify the findings of the Examination Council. The decision of COMSAO is final.

## EXAMINATION COUNCIL

The Examination Council (called an “ordination council” in some settings) is convened according to Area procedures (subject to the approval of COMSAO) when authorized by COMSAO. If there is not a standing Area committee responsible for this work, then an *ad hoc* committee is gathered which consists of the Pastor and one lay person from each church in the vicinity of the “home” church (meaning the church that will be conducting the ordination).

The purpose of the Examination Council is for ministerial colleagues and lay persons to determine the candidate’s readiness for ministry. While only members of the Examination Council may ask questions and vote, the examination will be open to the home church membership.

When the Examination Council convenes, it should select a Moderator for the examination. The Moderator must not be a member of the petitioning church. The Area Minister (or another appointee by the Executive Minister) will serve as the Recording Secretary for the proceedings.

Because key decisions are made by the Examination Council, an ordination service should not be planned before the Council has met and announced its decision.

While the exact form of the examination may vary, the sequence should include:

1. Record the presence of all voting members.
2. Identify the Recording Secretary (usually the Area Minister)
3. Identify the Advocate (if any) who introduces the Candidate
4. Ask the Secretary to read letters requesting and authorizing the examination.
5. Invite the Candidate to present a prepared statement.
6. Proceed with the orderly questioning of the candidate. The Ordination Paper written by the Candidate should provide the major outline for questioning. The Council functions to elicit responses and to understand, not to debate or convert.
7. When the questioning is completed, the voting members of the Council go into closed session to discern the eligibility for ordination, and then votes on a recommendation: (a) ordination should proceed, OR (b) ordination should be postponed, with reasons and procedures to satisfy the postponement, OR (3) ordination should not occur.
8. The Moderator will then announce the decision publicly.
9. The meeting will be adjourned, and the Recording Secretary will insure that the decision will be verified in writing to the church and COMSAO.
10. If the decision is adverse, the petitioning church may appeal to COMSAO. COMSAO will arrange a meeting which will include the Moderator and Secretary of the Examination Council, two representatives from the petitioning church, the candidate, the advocate, and all members of COMSAO. Following the investigation, COMSAO members will vote whether to uphold, reject, or modify the findings of the Examination Council. The decision of COMSAO is final.

## CHANGE OF STATUS

1. **Voluntary Change** Any individual may request that recognition of their ordination be withdrawn by writing to the Executive Minister. Restoration of this person to active recognition may be accomplished only by the recommendation of COMSAO, after examination and proof of the individual's continued call, skill, and aptitude for ministry.
2. **Withdrawal of Recognition** Withdrawal of recognition of ordination will normally be done by COMSAO, only after Ecclesiastical Review (see below). However, ministers who lead their churches to leave the Region will automatically have the recognition of their ordination withdrawn. If the church joins another American Baptist region, recognition will be transferred to that region (subject to the rules, regulations, and procedures of that region). If the church leaves ABCUSA, contrary to the wishes of the minister, and the minister wishes to maintain status in ABCUSA while seeking placement in an ABC church, they will be granted "temporary" status in the professional registry of the Great Rivers Region.
3. **Inactive List**

When a person is no longer functioning in ministry in a recognized part of the American Baptist Churches, mission and structure, the name of the individual will automatically be reported to ABCUSA. The person may be restored to active recognition within a five-year period upon appropriate review by the COMSAO after determining readiness for continuing ministry and after a call to a place of service.

## AN ECCLESIASTICAL PROCESS FOR REVIEW OF MINISTERIAL STANDING

### PREAMBLE

In the context of the ongoing care for the churches and their professional church leaders, there are occasions in which allegations in violation of *The Covenant and Code of Ethics for Professional Leaders* by the American Baptist Churches in the USA may be raised about a professional church leader. Frequently these allegations are handled within the ongoing service and care of the Region. In those rare instances in which a satisfactory resolution cannot be reached, it may be necessary to have a more formal process of review of recognition of ordination with professional church leaders. This review must be seen as part of an ongoing process of care in which a concern for justice, reconciliation, and healing, for both the congregation and the individual(s), is a primary goal of the process. For this reason all participants shall exercise great care to assure that the allegations and the process shall remain confidential unless some decision is reached which requires notification.

One of the reasons for which a Region exists is to strengthen the spiritual health and vitality of its constituent churches and their professional leaders. Programs, services, and pastoral care are ways in which this central concern is expressed for local churches and their professional leadership. Personal, professional, and pastoral care for professional church leaders is an ongoing process. One aspect of that process is the whole area of recognition of ordination, by which the whole denominational family gives affirmation and support to clergy.

The Regional Ministry Board has assigned COMSAO both the responsibility for the recognition of ordination and for the ecclesiastical review of the recognition of ordination. This process is to be guided by the biblical mandate of Matthew 18:15-17. The goals are, first of all, to deal directly with the person (verse 15), then with a small, more informal group (verse 16), and only when the process has failed to bring resolution to move before the church, represented by COMSAO (verse 17).

It must be stressed that this is an ecclesiastical process conducted within the confines of the church's structure and polity. It is not a legal process. We are, however, bound by our commitment to justice and fairness for all concerned. As an ecclesiastical process there is no official role or place for attorneys in this review process. If any involved parties wish to seek legal counsel, they must do so outside the official review process. Attorneys are not permitted to participate in the preliminary exploration, the review hearing or the appeal process.

### PROCESS

**1. Written Allegations:** When allegations about a particular professional church leader have not been resolved in the ongoing process of service and care of a Region, formal allegations are to be addressed to the Chair of COMSAO, with a copy to the Executive Minister of the Region. The allegations must be specific in content, made in writing, and signed. These allegations, which may come from Region staff, other professional church leaders or from lay persons, are to be related to the following categories.

Delinquency of a moral, ethical, or financial nature, which brings the church into disrepute.

Violation of the expectation the church has for ethical behavior for its professional church leaders, as articulated in the *Covenant and Code of Ethics for Professional Church Leaders of the ABC/USA*.

These allegations do not include issues of compatibility between a professional church leader and congregation.

**2. Pastoral Intervention:** When the normal processes have failed to bring resolution, and formal charges have been developed, there is an ongoing need for pastoral intervention for the persons making allegations, the professional church leader in question, their families, if any, and the congregation being served. These pastoral interventions may be done by members of the Region staff or by members of COMSAO.

**3. Informing the Person of the Allegations:** COMSAO shall inform the person in writing of the allegations, providing him or her with information about the process of review, and requesting a meeting with the person for a preliminary exploration of the allegations.

**4. Preliminary Exploration:** COMSAO, either as a body or through at least three delegated representatives, shall meet with the person making allegations to clarify the allegations or respond to any questions. In a separate meeting, COMSAO, either as a body or through delegated representatives shall meet with the person in question to explore the allegations and determine what steps to take. If either person fails to appear, COMSAO may proceed. There are five possible courses of action. They are:

- a. COMSAO may discover that there is no warrant for a review hearing and exonerate the person.
- b. The person may acknowledge the truth of the allegations and work with COMSAO in deciding which of the actions listed under #6, c. below will be followed.
- c. COMSAO may, in the event of an unusually grave or emergency situation, temporarily suspend recognition of ordination for a period of not more than ninety (90) days. During this period of temporary suspension, COMSAO shall convene a review hearing to consider the matter fully. Full notice of this decision shall be given to the person in question and to the appropriate denominational bodies.
- d. The person may dispute the allegations in full or in part, and yet work out with COMSAO a plan to deal with the situation without utilizing the full process of the review hearing.
- e. The person may dispute the allegations and COMSAO may decide to utilize the review hearing process to investigate and make a decision about the allegations.

All persons are allowed to seek whatever counsel is appropriate, including legal counsel, in preparation for the preliminary exploration. However, attorneys are not allowed to participate in Review Hearings or possible appeals.

**5. Review Hearing Notice:** When a Review Hearing is scheduled all parties involved are to be notified and informed about the process and how to prepare for it. All parties are to be supplied with a written copy of the allegations, a description of the review hearing procedure, and a notification of his or her rights. These include the right to be present, the right to present evidence including witnesses on his or her behalf, and the right to have an advocate (not an attorney) present. This advocate may be clergy or lay, and is intended to provide support and assistance (not legal advice) to the person

throughout the process. The hearing should be not less than thirty (30) days nor more than ninety (90) days following notification.

**6. The Review Hearing:** The Hearing is held to investigate thoroughly the allegations.

a. The Hearing shall be fair, impartial and confidential—for the person in question, the persons making the allegations, and the wider church family. COMSAO may specify the amount of time allowed for presentation of the allegations, for the defense and for summary statements. If a person fails to appear, COMSAO may proceed.

All persons involved in the Review Hearing process are allowed to seek whatever counsel is appropriate, including legal counsel, in preparation for the hearing. However, attorneys are not allowed to participate in the Review Hearing process.

b. The Hearing shall follow this outline:

- (1) Prayer
- (2) Opening statement
- (3) Introduction
- (4) Statement about how the hearing will be conducted.
- (5) Reading of the allegations.
- (6) Presentation of information or testimony supporting the allegations.
- (7) Presentation of information or testimony refuting the allegations.
- (8) An opportunity will be given for those making the allegations to respond to the presentation of refutation.
- (9) An opportunity will be given for the person in question, or by his/her representatives, to respond to this response.
- (10) Questions by COMSAO to any of those offering information, testimony, refutation, or response.
- (11) Closing statement by those making the allegations or his/her designated representative.
- (12) Closing statement by the person in question or his/her designated representative.
- (13) Prayer for continuing guidance and comfort for those involved in this situation, and for those who are given the responsibility to come to a decision.
- (14) Executive session of the COMSAO.

c. Following the Hearing, COMSAO deliberates in closed session and makes its decision from the following options:

- (1) Exonerate the person.
- (2) Exonerate the person and take steps to stop continued allegations.
- (3) Develop a plan for addressing the issues short of censure, suspension of recognition of ordination or withdrawal of recognition of ordination.
- (4) Censure the person, but allow the recognition of ordination to stand.
- (5) Suspend the recognition of the person's ordination.
- (6) Allow the person to voluntarily relinquish recognition of ordination.
- (7) Withdraw the recognition of the person's ordination.

**7. Notification of Decision:** COMSAO shall notify all parties who were contacted concerning the allegations of the decision within fifteen (15) days of the Review Hearing. In the event of suspension or withdrawal of recognition of ordination, the Executive Minister will notify ABCUSA, the Regional Executive Ministers Council, the Ministers Council, the original ordaining church, the church (or church organization) being served at the time of the allegations, the church (or church organization) now being served, and

any other bodies which have relied on American Baptist recognition for endorsement, approval, or recognition shall also be notified.

**8. Appeal:** A person whose recognition of ordination has been suspended or withdrawn may appeal the decision to the Regional Ministry Board. The President will appoint a Review Committee of five persons, who are members of the Board, but not affiliated with the church(s) in question. This Committee will review the process, the information, and the basis for the previous decision within sixty days. Their decision will be reported to the accused and the Regional Ministry Board. The decision is final.

**9. Pastoral Follow-up:** There is a need for pastoral care throughout the process, but particularly following a Review Hearing. Once the Hearing is complete, decisions made and actions taken, there will be intentional efforts at reconciliation and healing. The church needs to offer ongoing support and concern to those who made the allegations or who were wronged, and find ways to express forgiveness and grace to those who have been disciplined.

**10. Reinstatement:** A person's ordination may be subsequently recognized again, if there is a desire to be reinstated. COMSAO will meet with the person to review the original action, subsequent history, and present qualifications for ministry. An adverse decision may be appealed as in 8 above.

## **The Re-instatement Hearing**

(Adopted by COMSAO 4 April 2005)

The purpose of the re-instatement hearing is to explore the possibility of re-instating the recognition of an ordination that has been withdrawn, suspended, or surrendered. The meeting shall be conducted in an atmosphere of impartiality and fairness, justice and compassion for petitioner, the wider church family, and all involved parties. The Hearing will be open only to those who have been specifically invited to participate. This is not a legal action, and attorneys will not be permitted to participate. However, the petitioner may be permitted to bring an advocate for personal support. If proper notification has been given, the Hearing may proceed in the absence of the petitioner or any other parties.

This is the outline of the Re-instatement Hearing:

### A. Preliminary Actions

1. COMSAO receives a written request from the petitioner.
2. COMSAO reviews the information and issues.
3. COMSAO decides if to proceed and how (this may include a preliminary meeting with the petitioner); and reports that decision to the petitioner.
4. COMSAO makes arrangements for the hearing.
5. COMSAO notifies relevant parties of the hearing.

### B. The Hearing Proper

1. Opening Comments by the Chair of COMSAO
  - a. Purpose of the meeting
  - b. Opening prayer
  - c. Introduction of persons in attendance
  - d. Reading the reinstatement request
2. Review the past behavior
  - a. Brief factual presentation of the offensive conduct and its consequences, with care to protect the identity of persons
  - b. The petitioner and other relevant parties may respond to the facts of the case
3. Review the current situation
  - a. Brief factual presentation of remedial action to this point
  - b. How is the petitioner presently engaged in ministry or service?
4. Anticipate the future
  - a. Why is the petitioner seeking reinstatement?
  - b. What kinds of future ministry is the petitioner seeking?
  - c. What are the plans for self-care, growth, and discipline to prevent future misconduct?
  - d. Relevant parties may respond to these plans
5. Closing Comments
 

The petitioner and others will be given opportunity to make a brief closing appeal to COMSAO
6. COMSAO deliberates in closed session

After prayerful deliberation, COMSAO may make one of three decisions: first, to deny the petition for reinstatement; second, to postpone reinstatement with specific conditions that need to be met, and a follow-up hearing; third, to reinstate ordination status (which may be with or without restrictions).

7. COMSAO reports its action to the petitioner.

8. If the recognition of ordination has been reinstated, then the appropriate persons/institutions will be notified of the action in writing. (The petitioner, former church, present employer, ABCUSA, other ABC regions).

#### Appeals.

As provided in the official Ordination Standards, Procedures, and Policies of the Great Rivers Region, a person whose recognition of ordination has been suspended or withdrawn may appeal the decision to the Regional Ministry Board. The President will appoint a Review Committee of five persons, who are members of the Board, but not affiliated with the church(s) in question. This Committee will review the process, the information, and the basis for the previous decision within sixty days. Their decision will be reported to the accused and the Regional Ministry Board. The decision is final.

### IMPLICATIONS

There are different kinds of implications of a decision by COMSAO to suspend or withdraw the recognition of a person's ordination. It will mean:

- that a person's name will be deleted from the Directory of Professional Church Leaders in the Great Rivers Region and the change will be reflected in the national database.
- that the American Baptist Personnel Services will deactivate any use of a person's profile, and
- that all ABC Regions will be notified of the action.

Depending on the requirements of other bodies, this decision may directly effect an endorsement, approval, or recognition which was predicated on ABC action; in some instances this may mean termination of employment. Depending on the laws of the state, this decision may mean that a person will no longer be authorized to perform pastoral functions such as weddings, funerals, and/or pastoral counseling.

Unanimously adopted by the Board of Managers, ABC/GRR  
November 9, 1993.  
(revised 2004)

## DEFINITIONS

**Recognition of Ordination:** In Baptist tradition ordination is by the local congregation, working with the partner churches. The denomination does not ordain; the Region recognizes (or chooses not to recognize) ordinations of a local church, or in other denominations. "Recognition" is the formal process by which standards, ministerial preparation and character are verified by churches in association. While we urge formal "recognition" as an affirmation of associational life, persons who have been called to serve churches in the Great Rivers Region will be received and treated as *bona fide* ministers of their churches even if they have not gone through the process of "recognition." Historically, regions have "reciprocated" in acknowledging the "recognition" that has been granted (or withdrawn) by another region. However, reciprocity is not guaranteed. The Region may choose to withdraw recognition of ordination either for cause or after a period of inactivity. A person may also voluntarily surrender the recognition of his or her ordination.

**COMSAO:** In this document, COMSAO refers to the *Council On Ministerial Standing And Ordination*. This Council is that part of the structure of the Great Rivers Region which is charged with the responsibility for recognition (and withdrawal of recognition) of ordination.

**Review Hearing:** The process by which allegations against an individual are reviewed and a decision is rendered either for or against the individual. This is not a criminal or civil process, but is rather a church process by which the churches are seeking to order their life together under the leading of God's spirit.

**Censure** is an official statement of COMSAO expressing disapproval of a behavior as unbefitting one who has been recognized to practice as an ordained minister in the Great Rivers Region. It is offered as a warning, indicating that further similar conduct is unacceptable and could lead to suspension or withdrawal of recognition of ordination.

**Emergency Suspension of Recognition of Ordination** is intended to interrupt the ministry and pastoral selection process while the investigative and decision-making process proceeds. The recognition of ordination may be suspended for a period not to exceed ninety (90) days in the event of an unusually grave or emergency situation. Written notice of an Emergency Suspension shall be sent to the American Baptist Personnel Service, Regional Executive Ministers Council, the church (or church organization) being served, and any other bodies which have relied on American Baptist recognition for endorsement, approval or recognition.

**Suspension of Recognition of Ordination** is a withdrawal of recognition of ordination for a specific period of time in order to implement a program prescribed by the COMSAO. The conditions of the suspension must be clearly stated. Notice of a suspension will be given to the American Baptist Personnel Services, the Regional Executive Ministers Council, the original ordaining church, the church (or church organization) being served at the time of the allegations, the church (or church organization) now being served, and any other bodies which have relied on American Baptist recognition for endorsement, approval, or recognition shall also be notified.

**Withdrawal of Recognition of Ordination** means that the Great Rivers Region, and cooperating organizations, no longer recognizes the validity of an ordination. Notice of the withdrawal of recognition will be given to ABCUSA, American Baptist Personnel Service, Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board, Regional Executive Ministers Council, the original ordaining church (if known), the church (or church organization) now being served, and any other bodies which have relied on American Baptist recognition for endorsement, approval, or recognition.

## SEXUAL HARRASSMENT POLICY

The American Baptist Churches of the Great Rivers Region, seeking to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, affirms its responsibility to create and maintain an atmosphere free of all forms of sexual harassment. We define sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual advances, sexual coercion, request for sexual favors, and inappropriate verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such behavior is an affront to God and human dignity is inconsistent with Great Rivers Regional practices and management philosophy, is prohibited by law and will not be tolerated.

Unanimously approved by Board of Managers of the Great Rivers Region  
on May 17, 1994

## COVENANT OF RECIPROCITY

The Great Rivers Region of the American Baptist Churches covenants with the other ABC Regions to recognize and act upon the actions of any other Region regarding suspension, withdrawal or reinstatement of recognition of ordination as long as the initiating Region followed an officially adopted ecclesiastical process for review of ministerial standing.

Unanimously approved by Board of Managers  
of the Great Rivers Region on May 17, 1994

## GRR RMB 0602.5.g

*Adopted unanimously by the Regional Ministry Board of the Great Rivers Region at the regular meeting on 3 February 2006.*

*The report of Task Force 0602 was unanimously adopted on 28 April 2006. As a result, this document (RMB 0602.5.g) was reaffirmed as the "defining summary of already existing regional policies and expectations regarding the issue of homosexuality. All activities under the authority of the RMB (including staff, programs, publications, councils, area functions, etc.) will be conducted within the boundaries set by that document. Regional staff that knowingly and willfully violate or disregard regional policies and procedures, including this one, in the course of their regional duties are subject to disciplinary action as provided for in the existing personnel policies established by the RMB."*

- We affirm the 1984 ABCUSA General Board **American Baptist Policy Statement on Family Life** (7036:6/84) that says, in part, "We affirm that God intends marriage to be a monogamous, life-long, one flesh union of a woman and a man, who in response to God's call leave father and mother and cleave to one another. We affirm God's blessing and active presence in marriage relationships so entered in response to God's call."
- We affirm the 1992 resolution adopted by the General Board of ABCUSA (8200:10/92), which says: "We affirm that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching."

- We affirm the **Confession of Faith** adopted by the General Board of ABCUSA in 1998 and endorsed by the Regional Ministry Board of the Great Rivers Region as part of our “common criteria” specifying the qualifications for church membership in GRR. That Confession says, in part: “American Baptists proclaim the Good News of the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, knowing that salvation (forgiveness of sins, release from guilt and condemnation, reconciliation with God) and eternal life are granted in grace to all who trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This Gospel is the central message of the Bible.”

We further affirm the 2005 amendment to that **Confession** including the line: “[We are a biblical people] who submit to the teaching of Scripture that God’s design for sexual intimacy places it within the context of marriage between one man and one woman, and acknowledge that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Biblical teaching.”

We further affirm that God’s redemptive love in Jesus Christ is available to all persons, and it is the high calling of each and every church to preach, teach and minister in such a way that God’s love for all persons is reflected.

- We affirm the **Covenant and Code of Ethics for Ministerial Leaders** adopted by the Ministers Council, which includes the promise: “I will maintain a disciplined ministry in such ways as keeping hours of prayer and devotion, endeavoring to maintain wholesome family relationships, sexual integrity, financial responsibility, regularly engaging in educational and recreational activities for professional and personal development.”
- We affirm the 1976 Ministers Council Senate resolution, which says in part: “We believe that the practice and advocacy of homosexual activity to be incompatible with Christian principles and grounds for denial of ordination; we also affirm that past homosexual practices, when disavowed, should not be a barrier to ordination.” We also note that the Great Rivers Region Ministers Council endorsed that same resolution.
- We affirm that immoral behaviors, including sexual intimacy outside the bonds of marriage, are grounds for clergy discipline and for withdrawing recognition.
- We affirm our long-standing covenantal expectation that churches seeking membership in the Great Rivers Region “will not ordain or call as pastor a practicing homosexual.” Churches which choose to do so risk their fellowship with other churches in this Region.
- We affirm that all the staff and programs of the Great Rivers Region will be consistent with the expectations of the above positions.
- We affirm that our Executive Minister has diligently informed this Board and our churches of these issues. We further affirm that he has accurately and faithfully represented the positions of this Board. We further affirm that we expect him to accurately represent our positions with the covenant partners of ABCUSA., including the Office of the General Secretary, the President of ABCUSA, the presidents of the program Boards of ABCUSA, and other interested parties.

We affirm that we are a covenant people and are deeply troubled that ABCUSA has been fractured. We call on all parties to prayerfully seek healing and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in dealing with these fractured relationships.

## **COMMISSIONED MISSIONARIES AND MINISTERS**

In some cases, commissioning may be more appropriate than ordination. Commissioning in the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. will be recognized in the following categories:

### **a. *Commissioning of Missionaries***

In the act of commissioning of missionaries, men and women are validated for designated ministries across lines and barriers of culture, ideology, race, geography, or nation. In their service as missionaries they represent the ABC. The Boards of National and International Ministries appoint and commission missionaries on behalf of ABC. Under certain circumstances, the regional boards may desire to commission persons for missionary recognition. As a basis for denominational recognition, the definition and standards for missionary commissioning by any board should be such as are outlined in denominational and/or regional policies and procedures. Churches are encouraged to consider commissioning members about to engage in short-term missions as a way of affirming the support of the church. These commissions should be for the length of the trip, and have no obligations to the Region or the denomination.

### **b. *Commissioned Ministers***

The recognition of commissioned ministers provides validation to laymen/women who respond to the call of God to serve in ministries other than those of a commissioned missionary. Such commissioning shall apply to ministries of non-ordained persons expressly performed as assignments of Regions, States, and Cities and National Boards in fulfillment of aspects of their Christian witness and mission. These boards commission ministers on behalf of the ABC. As a basis for denominational recognition, the definition and standards for commissioning by any board should be such as are outlined denominational or regional policies and procedures.

Commissioning recognized by the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. (herein "ABC") may be conducted by National Boards and Regional Boards (herein "Commissioning Boards") according to the following Standards for Commissioning:

#### **1. Qualities expected**

- a. Vital spiritual experience, a growing Christian faith, and commitment to the church's world mission.
- b. Evidence of strength of character and personality.
- c. Experience of a call to Christian service.
- d. Member of an American Baptist church and supportive of the Statement of Purpose of the ABC.

#### **2. Task requirements**

- a. The service for which the candidate is commissioned must be full-time employment in ABC-related work (20 hours or more).
- b. The candidate will be commissioned for a specific task or type of service. Commissioning ends when the task or service is terminated.
- c. The candidate will be required, in the task, to be responsible for program administration and interpretation of the Christian faith.

**3. Education requirements**

- a. Graduation from an accredited school with an appropriate degree. A directed course of study in the areas of the theological disciplines is required for all candidates who do not have a recognized theological degree.
- b. In the case of missionary appointees, when both husband and wife are commissioned, it is recognized that either husband or wife may fulfill the task description for which the couple is recruited. In such situations, college education is the normative minimum requirement for the spouse.

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