

American Baptist Churches of Connecticut

Policy and Process Related to Questions of Fitness for Professional Ministry

Introduction and Definition

There are times when questions may arise regarding fitness in the practice of professional ministry. These questions focus on issues of confidence keeping, truth-telling, extending ministry in areas unrelated to present places of service, behavior acutely unbecoming a professional minister and other concerns related to breaches of the *Covenant and Code of Ethics for Ministerial Leaders of American Baptist Churches*. Behaviors such as those named above are unethical and may constitute a breach of this Covenant and Code of Ethics, signed by all persons who are commissioned or ordained within American Baptist Churches of Connecticut.

Bringing a Complaint

1. When such a question arises, a complaint should be reported to the Executive Minister and/or Associate Executive Minister of ABCCONN, who will in turn notify the Chair of the Commission on the Ministry that such a complaint has been received.

2. The Executive Minister and/or Associate Executive Minister, Chairperson of the Commission on the Ministry and President of the Ministers Council (or his/her designee) will informally consider the merit of the complaint.

3. If it appears that further steps should be taken, the Associate Executive Minister and Chairperson of the Commission, in consultation with the Executive Minister, will ask the person/s bringing the complaint to put in writing the complaint, giving details related to specific incidents being cited as unethical and a breach of the *Covenant and Code of Ethics for Ministerial Leaders of American Baptist Churches*.

A. A copy of the Policy and Process Related to Questions of Fitness for Professional Ministry shall be provided to the person/s bringing the complaint.

B. The subject of the complaint shall be notified that such a complaint has been received and the nature of the complaint. The subject will be given a copy of the Policy and Process Related to Questions of Fitness for Professional Ministry.

C. Both complainant/s and the subject of the complaint shall be given assurance that such complaints are taken very seriously and that they will receive timely updates on the process of responding to the complaint.

4. If it appears that no further action needs to be taken, all parties will be notified that the complaint was found to be without merit.

5. The Associate Executive Minister and Chairperson of the Commission on the Ministry, in consultation with the Executive Minister, shall appoint a Response Team comprised of Commission members and other experienced persons as appropriate to assess, investigate, and respond to the complaint.

6. In extreme or unusual circumstances, the Executive Minister will notify American Baptist Personnel Services (ABPS) that the person about whom the complaint is brought will not

have their ABPS profile released for placement purposes until the complaint is fully adjudicated. The Executive Minister may also request a temporary emergency suspension of the person's Recognition of Ordination until a complete investigation can be made and a decision rendered.

Process for Responding to a Complaint Related to Fitness for Ministry

1. The Response Team, once assembled, shall meet in a timely fashion to consider its response to the complaint.

2. The Response Team shall meet with both the person/s bringing the complaint and the person/s about whom the questionable behavior is made in order to gain firsthand reports concerning the behavior in question.

3. If at all possible, the work of the Response Team shall be completed within 45 days from the date of receipt of the written complaint.

A. The person about whom the complaint is received shall be invited to bring with her/him one person who may serve as an advocate. If this person is an attorney, a reminder will be given that this is an ecclesiastical process and is not a legal or civil proceeding. If no such person is available to serve in this capacity of advocate for the accused, one can be provided.

4. The Response Team shall gather other information as needed to clarify and deepen their understanding of the situation and to assess the best courses of action that would be intended to rectify the questionable behavior and bring reconciliation and healing to all parties.

5. Possible outcomes may include the following recommendations for action to the Commission on the Ministry:

A. If there is no evidence or insufficient evidence to support the validity of the complaint, the accused will be restored to full privileges.

B. Recognition of Ordination is temporarily suspended until such time as corrective, restorative and healing activity has taken place, and readiness for ministry can be reassessed.

C. Recognition of Ordination is permanently withdrawn, with further recommendations for activities undertaken for healing.

D. Activities be undertaken that are intended to lead to correction, healing, and restitution to wholeness for both the subject of the complaint and/or, if desirable, the community/persons bringing the complaint.

Activities that seek to bring correction, repentance, healing and restitution can include:

- course with a counselor or therapist who has been recommended and approved by the Commission on the Ministry
- engagement of a spiritual director
- completion of courses in specific areas such as money management, anger management, or boundary keeping in the ministerial role
- assessment by The Center for Career Development and Ministry
- reading related to the issue/s raised in the complaint
- other activities as deemed appropriate by the Commission on the Ministry

DEFINITIONS

Recognition of Ordination: In our tradition, ordination is by the local congregation, working with partner churches. The denomination does not ordain; it recognizes (or chooses not to recognize) ordinations of a local church or of other denominations. A person may voluntarily give up the recognition of his or her ordination. The denomination may choose to withdraw or suspend recognition of ordination either for cause or after a period of inactivity.

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 (90) days in the event of an unusually grave or emergency situation by the Executive Minister, Associate Executive Minister, or the Commission on the Ministry. Written notice of an Emergency Suspension shall be sent to the American Baptist Personnel Services, 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: The recognition of ordination may be suspended for a specific period of time in order to implement a program prescribed by the Commission on the Ministry, or in the event of an unusually grave or emergency situation. The conditions of the suspension must be clearly stated. Suspension is intended to interrupt the pastoral selection process while severe allegations are being explored or while a prescribed program is being implemented. Notice of a suspension will be given to American Baptist Personnel Services, the Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board (MMBB), the Regional Executive Ministers Council, the church (or church organization) now being served, and any other bodies which have relied on American Baptist recognition for endorsement, approval, or recognition.

Withdrawal of Recognition of Ordination means that the American Baptist Churches, USA no longer recognizes the validity of an ordination. Notice of the withdrawal of recognition shall be given to American Baptist Personnel Services, The MMBB, 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.

The Region: The process of recognition of ordination in the denomination is decentralized; a Region acts on behalf of the whole denomination in recognizing, failing to recognize, allowing recognition to lapse, or withdrawing recognition of ordination. There is reciprocity among ABC bodies, with all Regions and Nationals agreeing to accept the process as applied in other partner Regions.

Commission on the Ministry: In this document, Commission on the Ministry is part of ABCCONN's structure which is charged with the responsibility for recognition (and suspension or withdrawal of recognition) of ordination.

Review Hearing: The process by which allegations against an individual are reviewed and a decision is rendered. This is not a criminal or civil process, but is rather a church process by

which the churches, through the work of the Commission on the Ministry, are seeking to order their life together under the leading of God's Holy Spirit.

IMPLICATIONS

There are different kinds of implications of a decision by the Commission on the Ministry 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 of ABCUSA
- that the American Baptist Personnel Services will seek to deactivate any use of the person's profile
- that all ABC Regions will be notified of the action,
- that MMBB will be notified of the action

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

Approved by the Commission on the Ministry 5/30/2007, forwarded for review to

1. Ministers Council Executive Committee; (9/6/07)
2. Department of Congregational Leadership and Renewal; (10/17/07)
3. ABCCONN Executive Committee for vote and recommendation to the Board of Managers for adoption. (10/30/07)
4. ABCCONN Board of Managers voted to adopt as policy on November 13, 2007.