

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

Introduction

The original idea was that this was to be a “Teaching Piece” on the Code of Ethics. After working through this, I see that it is actually a “Learning Piece,” or a tool for learning about the Code of Ethics. The difference is that the word *teaching* sets up a hierarchical model, but the word *learning* is more democratic.

The structure of this Learning Piece is simple: A statement on each section of the Code of Ethics from one of the members of the Professional Effectiveness Committee is followed by questions to stimulate thinking together by colleagues. The statements are to give you some of the thinking of the people who have been deliberating about the Code of Ethics at the national Ministers Council Senate for several years. These writers are about as diverse as could be gathered in a committee of American Baptist pastors. Though they had disagreements, they were of the same mind in regard to the final revision of the Code of Ethics. You can see their differences in the statements. I have left each page unsigned, because I am hoping that each statement and each set of questions will be used without prejudice.

I have provided a simple set of “Guidelines for Thinking Together.” In a group study, it is wise to appoint one person to be a facilitator of the process. This person would remind the group of the guidelines, help keep the conversation on track, and keep the conversation within the time limits agreed upon. One of the leaders of the dialogue movement, Peter Senge says, “A good facilitator always walks a careful line between being knowledgeable and helpful in the process at hand, and yet not taking on the expert or doctor mantle that would shift attention away from members of the team, and their own ideas and responsibilities.” I have found it is best to keep the number in the groups between 8 and 12, so that everyone has an opportunity to contribute.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Dialogue is sacred conversation.” It was his understanding that each person knows some of the truth. He believed that by listening and speaking to one another we begin to understand the power of love about which Jesus spoke. When we think together about the Code of Ethics we are working on the power of love in our lives as Ministers of the Gospel of Jesus. It is not always said out loud, but the bottom line of “The Covenant and Code of Ethics for Ministerial Leaders of American Baptist Churches” is love.

---Michael Harvey, Editor

Covenant Guidelines for Thinking Together

“Speaking the truth in love, we grow up in every way into Christ.” ---Ephesians 4:15

I ask for three gifts from God for this learning experience:

1. *Humility* that understands that I do not have enough knowledge for life's problems.
2. *Courage* to contribute my thinking to the conversation.
3. *Curiosity* to listen intently to my colleagues and to inquire thoughtfully of my colleagues.

Some Possible Uses

1. Pastoral and lay leaders might read it and discuss it together.
2. Ministers might use it for individual reflection.
3. Multiple staff churches might do an in-house series of studies.
4. Clergy groups might use it for a study or a series, or select parts of special interest.
5. Clergy groups meeting for other reasons 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.

Contributors

Shelley Aakre - Vermillion, South Dakota
Charles Brown - Fairfield, California
David L. Chapman - Roanoke, Virginia
David Wood - Lincoln, Vermont
Debra Hickman - Baltimore, Maryland
Dee Dee Turlington - Westfield, New Jersey
Mark Jervis - Gillette, Wyoming
Michael Harvey - Worcester, Massachusetts
Michelle Holmes - Berkeley, California
Thomas Gilmore - Cleveland, Ohio

Thank you to the former members of the Professional Effectiveness Committee who have worked hard over the years in thinking together about the Covenant and Code of Ethics.

Dee Dee Turlington and **Michael Harvey**, Co-editors

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

Section 1

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.

Different ecclesiastical bodies come into existence for particular reasons. The Lutheran Church grew out of the convictions of Martin Luther, who was disenfranchised by the Roman Catholic Church. The Church of England came about because corruption in the church created a vacuum that easily allowed the political rulers to declare themselves “head of the church.” There are some denominations which form around doctrinal issues and others that come about because of a desire to practice their faith in a particular way. (See LaTourette’s History of Christianity).

Simplistically, we might say we Baptists are a denomination because our forebears disagreed with the Church of England about their reading of the Scriptures, but we all know there is much more to it than that! Our Baptist forebears hammered out some basic principles of freedom, responsibility, and church organization that are consistent with Biblical teaching and supportive of the church’s mission. We need to hold in trust these distinctive traits which are gifts from our forebears: *Soul Freedom, the Authority of Scripture, the Priesthood of All Believers, Local Church Autonomy, Voluntary Association and Believer’s Baptism*. They should be more than words to us, for the creative tension of these traits make us a unique group of churches filled with dynamic diversity and united in the particular purpose of proclamation!

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’s convictions lead him or her away from the historic convictions and covenant commitments of a local church, humility and respect for the larger community of faith suggests that resignation of the minister is an honorable solution.

Questions for consideration: *Read 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 converge?

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

Section 2

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

The Apostle Peter was sent by God to Cornelius the Roman centurion and there received a life-changing revelation. He had believed that the Good News was intended only for the Jews. In Acts 10:34-35 Peter proclaims his new revelation: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts people from every nation who fear God and do what is right." (See 2 Corinthians 5:16-18).

The Apostle Paul in Galatians 3 speaks clearly of the promises of God, being given to those who have faith in Jesus Christ. He says, "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." (See John 17:20-23; Luke 9:49-50).

In Ephesians 4:11 Paul recognizes the variety of calls to ministry that are found among us. He writes, "The gifts Christ gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry." (See 1 Corinthians 12).

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? Have I prayerfully studied the question? Do I understand the reasoning of colleagues who feel differently?
3. How do I show respect for clergy of other denominations?
4. How do I show respect for colleagues who are of different ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds than my own?
5. What do I do to promote respect and unity among colleagues?
6. Am I familiar with my region's ordination standards and procedures? Do I watch for and encourage individuals who might be called to the ministry?
7. If an individual sought my help in entering the ministry, what would I advise?

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

Section 3

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.

The unity of the church, its leaders and the laity is central to the carrying out of God's will. The monotheism that Jesus Christ taught was revolutionary in the Greco-Roman world. In the same manner that Christ taught that God was one, he also indicates that the Church is one.

The idea of one unified Church serving one unified God is defended by the Apostle Paul to the Church of Corinth. In I Corinthians 1:13 ("Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?") Paul is speaking to a Church that has taken various stances on various teachings and has divided itself accordingly. This is causing great weakness within the Church. It is hindering the Church's function and work for Christ.

Paul speaks of the source of the church's unity to the same group of believers when he says, "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. Now the one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building." (I Corinthians 3:6-9). Here scripture tells us plainly that we have been called to work together to build up God's Church, and that God in turn will use our collective efforts to build the Church.

Based on these scriptures, which proclaim that God is one and therefore, we, too, must be one, we must work to build up positive relationships that unite the Church. These efforts must lie within the Church of which I am a part and touch every other extension of the Church in the community and in the world.

Questions for Consideration:

1. What are the scriptures mentioned above 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. Am I involved in my local ministerial association? How do I express my faith in ecumenical and inter-faith gatherings?
5. Am I involved in local and regional denominational activities and/or fellowship groups? Spend time in prayer and self-examination to discern if God is directing you to greater involvement or leadership.

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

Section 4

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 to constituents they serve, when these constituents are helping to pay their salaries.

“Lord you keep them humble and we’ll keep them poor.” This is an old saying that has jokingly echoed in our church circles for generations. Problem is, all too often, it has seemed more reality than just a joke.

The Bible clearly says that the worker is worthy of his/her wages.

The Old Testament taught the principle that “you shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain” (Deuteronomy 25:4), which the New Testament applies to the apostles bringing the good news and to elders who preach and teach. See I Corinthians 9:3-14 and I Timothy 5:17-18.

In addition, Israelite priests were supported by portions of the offerings brought by the people. See Deuteronomy 18:3-5 and 25:4; Leviticus 2:3 and 10:13; Numbers 3:48-51 and 18:8-9.

Other New Testament references to compensation for ministry include Luke 10:7 and Galatians 6:6.

Questions for consideration:

1. In what ways might I advocate for adequate compensation for my profession? (See the Ministers Council “Minister/Church Agreement” document; online at www.ministerscouncil.org.)
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?

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

Section 5

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

I became the pastor of a small church in Chicago while I was in seminary. One day I ran a flashing red light and was pulled over by a Chicago policeman. He took my license and went to his car to write out a ticket. He came back to give me the ticket, and said, "Where do you work?" I said, "I am the pastor of the First Baptist Church." He became irate with me. "Why didn't you tell me you were a Minister? We don't give tickets to Ministers." I didn't say it, but I was thinking, "I'm sorry, but I haven't been in this racket very long." Sometimes it is a racket, and sometimes we are tempted to participate in the racket.

What is wrong with participating in the racket? It goes against the values of our faith. We believe in equality not privilege. Sometimes favors and discounts are given because the giver has the mistaken notion that it will gain them favor with God or the church. We believe in justice for all. If I run a red light then I should be treated justly according to the law. We believe in the priesthood of all believers. The 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, hair cuts, 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 barter system where folks offered what they could to their pastors, knowing they could not pay them well.

By way of 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 an expectation of gifts. If beauty is in the eye of the beholder then understanding of 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 20:46ff tells us Jesus' words: "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love to be greeted with respect in the market places, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets." We, as ministers, are privileged to be involved in people's lives and because of our place in the community are vulnerable to those who would curry favor. We must not give even the appearance of evil and we must not in any way place ourselves above others because of our position.

Section 5 continued

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

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 on-looker'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 in order 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?

The Covenant and Code of Ethics for Ministerial Leadership of American Baptist Churches

Section 6

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 ministerial and personal development. I will seek to maintain good health habits.

A review of the two letters to Timothy provides helpful guidelines and goals in the area of wholesome relationships and healthy living. Paul tells fellow-minister Timothy that the aim of instruction in the Lord is “love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith” (I Timothy 1:5). “While physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way” (I Timothy 4:8). “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15).

At the heart of disciplined, healthy living is a vital relationship with Christ. Giving time to prayer and personal devotions makes space for the Holy Spirit to move, speak, convict, guide, transform, and empower. This inner work of grace and spiritual growth will strengthen convictions and commitments to healthy habits in every other area of life: family, sexuality, finances, recreation, personal/professional development. In all these areas the minister honors Christ by living responsibly and with integrity.

Questions for consideration:

1. Prayer, meditation, study, solitude, fasting, confession, worship, celebration, service, discernment, simplicity...what spiritual disciplines do I practice? Spend time in prayer and meditation to discern in which area God is asking you to grow. See Proverbs 25:28, Matthew 4:4 and 6:33.
2. How much time do I spend with my family and individually with members of it? How much of that is “quality” time?
3. 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 internet made it so readily and privately available – Philippians 4:8)
4. Do I practice the stewardship principles I preach? Have I applied budgeting techniques to my household finances? (see I Timothy 6:6-10)
5. Do I regularly exercise, monitor diet, get check ups, and keep Sabbath? Which of these do I need to prioritize and improve? (See Ministers Council publication “Healthy Habits for Ministers”)
6. When did I last attend a continuing education event for personal/professional development? How might I plan now to do so soon?

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

Section 7

I will recognize my primary obligation to the church or employing group to which I have been called, and will accept added responsibilities only if they do not interfere with the overall effectiveness of my ministry.

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 in order to be saved (Acts 15).

“Added responsibilities” refers to things like teaching in local colleges, guest preaching, serving on boards of community agencies, and denominational roles; it does not refer to additional means of support if a ministry position does not provide full-time compensation. Paul was proud of the fact that he supported himself as a tent-maker during much of his ministry.

- In Acts 18:1-4, Paul works with Aquila and Priscilla, all tent-makers, and preaches on the Sabbath.
- Paul’s letters to Corinth and Thessalonica refer to self support while ministering to the believers: I Corinthians 4:12 and 9:3-6, 15-18, II Corinthians 11:7-9, I Thessalonians 2:9, II Thessalonians 3:7-9

Questions for Discussion:

1. What are my primary obligations?
2. What added responsibilities do I find myself assuming, or being asked to assume?
3. What 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?

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

Section 8

I will personally and publicly support my colleagues who experience discrimination on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, age, marital status, national origin, physical impairment or disability.

Biblical Foundation:

God is a God of Love and God loves everyone.
(See John 3:16, Ephesians 2:4-5, I John 4:10)

God is not a respecter of persons, and neither should we discriminate for any reason.
(See Acts 10:34, Romans 10:12, Galatians 3:27-28)

We are commanded by God to love one another, even as Christ loved us and gave himself for us.
(See Matthew 22:37-40, I John 4:11, John 15:12)

It is permissible to hate that which is evil and to hate that which is not pleasing to God. It is not permissible to hate the person. Dislike or hate the action, but not the person.
(See Psalm 119:113, 163; Matthew 5:44)

Jesus lived on the margins and was constantly demonstrating compassion to the least of these. Jesus ate with sinners and loved the unlovable. Jesus forgave sin and blessed those in need. Jesus healed the sick instead of shunning them. Jesus set free those who were bound and delivered those who were imprisoned. Jesus clearly loved everyone. However, Jesus did not love sin. We are all told to do as the woman who was forgiven, to “go, and sin no more” (John 8:11; see also John 5:14).

Peter is shown in Acts 10:9-33 that God loves all people and calls for us to love all people. As Christians we are to look beyond our differences and preferences and love everyone equally.

Questions for consideration:

1. Does God expect us to love one another regardless of our differences?
2. Whom does Jesus declare to be my neighbor, and how should I treat my neighbor?
3. Is it possible to separate a person's actions and behavior from the person they are?
4. Why is it important to show public support for other Christians? How might I demonstrate support of someone experiencing discrimination?
5. How can I be loving and at the same time not support behaviors or actions that displease God?
6. Should I discriminate against others because of their sexual orientation?

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

Section 9

I will not proselytize from other Christian churches.

We serve in a world that needs Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for the harvest." (John 4:35). This was true in New Testament days and it is true for our day as well. The world, at home and away, is looking, searching, wanting, seeking something - and that something is Jesus Christ. If we are looking for numbers, for members for our own churches, then proselytizing from other Christian churches is a much quicker and easier way. If however, we are seeking to win people to Jesus Christ, if we are seeking to make disciples of those who do not know Jesus, then the harvest fields of the world are plentiful.

By definition, to proselytize from other Christian churches is an attempt to bring into our specific churches those worshipping at other churches. The church is not going to grow for God's honor and glory if we are in the process of simply "trading members." We are to be working for the sake of God's Reign, bringing in the true harvest, those outside the church.

Let us recognize the diversity of ways God can work in different Christian churches and experience the joy of genuine harvest.

Questions for Consideration:

1. Do I respect the diversity and particular beliefs of other Christian churches enough to maintain integrity concerning proselytizing from them?
2. What are some new ways to reach out to the un-churched of my community?
3. How can I more easily identify the un-churched in my community?
4. What can I do to build good relationships with the other Christian churches in my community?
5. 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?

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

Section 10

I will, upon my resignation or retirement, sever my ministerial leadership relations with my former constituents, and will not make ministerial contacts in the field of another ministerial leader without his/her request and/or consent.

The competing influences of multiple preachers and teachers in Corinth contributed to that community's confusion and fracturing, for various groups were identifying with Paul, Apollos, or Cephas (See I Corinthians 1:11-13 and 3:1-4).

Paul's vision is that of God's servants working together to build the church: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." The work of each builder will be tested at the judgment day, and those who divide and destroy the temple of God (the church) will face condemnation. (See I Corinthians 3:5-17).

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?

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

Section 11

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.

The church must serve as a place of protection, but it cannot serve that purpose above the purpose that God has given the church. In order to hold any information in confidence that has the potential of harming someone, I must put the desire of that individual above the design of God (as laid out in scripture).

There are two great commandments articulated by Jesus in the gospel narratives (Matt. 22:37-40), that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind and that likewise, we should love our neighbors as ourselves. The love of God is reflected by loving those who are around us, for we read in 1 John 4:7-8 that, if we do not love others, we do not truly know God, because God is love. Our ability to love is the outward evidence of our relationship with God. It is for this reason that we must make ourselves available as counselors to those who need godly guidance and as confidants to those who need a place of protection.

However, it is our obligation in demonstrating the love of God not to do harm as we counsel our neighbor, nor should we allow our neighbor to be harmed by others. Keeping our promise to someone is not loving that person if our promise is something that will harm that person or someone else. We are then complicit in a person's destruction under the guise of friendship and confidentiality. It is for this reason that I am free to break the vows of confidence to the individual when my vows of confidence are opposed to the will of God by being complicit in harming my neighbor.

Each State has its own laws about Clergy-Penitent Privilege with regard to Child Abuse, Spousal Abuse and the Future Threat of Violence. We therefore also need to be aware of the laws where we serve, so that we can be on firm legal footing as well as spiritual footing.

Questions for Discussion:

1. A Church member confesses that he has physically abused his spouse in the past. What should I say and do?
2. A person who is not a member of the Church tells me that he is abusing his spouse. What should I do?
3. An adult confesses in confidence to the sexual abuse of a child several years ago, saying that it is no longer happening. What should I say and do?
4. I have been told something in confidence in the presence of someone else. Is the conversation covered by Clergy-Penitent Privilege?
5. How do I reconcile confidentiality and a person who is suicidal?

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

Section 12

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

As ministers of the Gospel, we have been set apart to be leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ. With leadership comes authority and power that must be handled responsibly. Our authority comes from God who modeled true leadership by becoming a human who took on the nature of a servant (See Philippians 2: 6-8). God has given us the power to transform lives, not to take advantage of or hurt each other (See Galatians 6:22-26). The Bible speaks clearly that we are to treat all people with love and grace and not to cause harm to anyone, especially those placed in our care (See Psalms 3:29, Romans 13:10, Matthew 7:1). We are called to use our gifts to build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13). We are not to seek personal glory or benefit or to do damage to the body of Christ (2 Corinthians 2:17, Colossians 3:17).

Children are especially vulnerable to the influence and actions of adults and need the protection of those with authority. Jesus held a special place for children (Luke 18:16) and warned his followers not to hinder their development in any way (Matthew 18:6, Mark 9:36-37). As ministers, we have an opportunity and an obligation to watch out for those who are in vulnerable positions in life (James 1:26-17).

Questions for Consideration:

1. How do I define power, authority, and vulnerability? How do these terms relate to ministry?
2. How would I describe your leadership style? How do I obtain support for my ideas and plans?
3. How do I establish boundaries in a counseling situation?
4. I am alone in the office, when a person of the opposite sex 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. I feel strongly about the direction the church should go in ministry. Unfortunately, there is one member on the church board who disagrees with my vision and is very influential with the other board members. 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?
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?

The Covenant and Code of Ethics for Ministerial Leadership of American Baptist Churches

Section 13

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.

“Speak the truth in love,” Paul wrote. That is a difficult but essential balance in our work as ministers. Sometimes the truth is clear, but love is always complicated. Take the case of abuse. The abused is always in a position of weakness in varying degrees. If the abused is an adult, then one could involve both the abused and the abuser in a conversation about the abuse. Sometimes this would endanger the abused. Sometimes the abuser is remorseful. Sometimes the abuser takes little or no responsibility for the abuse. Sometimes the abused has contributed to the situation. Sometimes the abused takes unjustified responsibility. As a Minister I must maintain integrity with the abuser, the abused, and the community, with its laws. My integrity must be the integrity of love, and my love must always be with integrity. Love is justice as well as mercy. To both the abuser and the abused I must speak the truth in love. I must remember justice as well as mercy.

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 child abuse, but they must 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. Let us also not treat the abuser as simply evil. Abusers must be faced with 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.

Questions for consideration:

1. How do I respond to a person who asks for an assurance of confidentiality before he or she will talk with me?
2. What do I do in a situation where I see some signs of abuse or suspect abuse, but have no solid evidence and no confession?
3. What do I do in a situation where a woman has been abused, but she refuses to deal with the abuse?
4. How does abuse in a family affect the larger community?
5. Where and how do I report abuse in my state?
6. Do I have a resource list for treatment of abusers and for counseling for victims?

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

Section 14

I will show my personal love for God as revealed in Jesus Christ in my life and ministry, as I strive together with my colleagues to preserve the dignity, maintain the discipline and promote the integrity of the vocation to which we have been called.

Even though I am a minister, I began my Christian journey like everyone else. We are all sinners and have to have a personal relationship with God. We accept Christ into our lives and develop our own Christian walk. Then some are called to be ministers. At a recent ordination service I heard the following, "Christ calls us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. He calls for us to sacrifice our belongings, our self, our thoughts, and secret corners, and our lives. He calls us to daily take up the cross - the cross so painful, an instrument of death. Being a minister of Christ is not just another career path. Leaders in the Christian community must model the sacrificial Christian life for their people. "Here I am, send me" (Isaiah 6:8).

Sometimes as ministers we are so set apart that we have a hard time striving together as colleagues. We get so caught up in our own ministry that we forget that all ministers are here for God's purpose and not their own. In the recent past, while serving as an interim minister for my husband while he served as a Chaplain in Iraq, I became ill and went through seven surgeries in two years. I felt the burden of being alone and sick. I felt the burden of having a husband deployed. I had difficulty doing my work, reaching out to the un-churched, and finding the strength to baptize individuals by immersion. I had to call our Executive Minister to help. He preached for me when I was in the hospital and he baptized people when I couldn't. I learned the hard way what it meant to "***strive together with my colleagues to preserve the dignity, and maintain the discipline and promote the integrity of the ministry to which I have been called.***" The Executive Minister kept telling me, "We are in this together for God's glory. Just because we are ministers, we are not immune to human suffering and when we ask for a colleague's help we are striving together for God."

Questions for consideration:

1. How do I deal with loneliness in ministry?
2. Recall some situations when I needed the help of a colleague. On whom 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. What personal spiritual disciplines do I practice regularly?
5. Have I considered using a spiritual director to deepen my walk with God?