

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES ROCHESTER GENESEE REGION

Ordination Review Committee Procedures

PROCESS FOR REVIEW OF MINISTERIAL STANDING

The ABC R/GR **Process for Review of Ministerial Standing** document contains the policies and procedures for the review of ministerial standing of professional church leaders of the ABC R/GR. All policies and procedures are subject to improvement and revision at any time.

“He Took Our Infirmities and Bore Our Diseases”

(Matthew 8:17)

PREAMBLE: Strengthening the spiritual health and vitality of the Region’s constituent churches and their professional leaders are important roles for the ABC/RGR and the Region’s professional staff. Programs, services, and pastoral care are ways in which support and assistance are provided to local churches and their professional leadership. When allegations and/or issues of compatibility between a professional church leader and congregation emerge, these allegations are handled within the ongoing service and care of the Region.

However, when there are allegations and/or evidence of clergy behavior that is inconsistent with the Region’s standards of personal and professional conduct, policy on Sexual Misconduct and/or ABC R/GR Code of Ethics, there will be a formal process to review the alleged clergy’s ministerial standing in ABC R/GR.

This review must be seen as part of an ongoing process of care in which concerns for justice, reconciliation, and healing, for congregations and the individuals are the intent of the process. However, when there is evidence of professional, ethical, sexual and/or financial misconduct that puts congregations and individuals at risk, it is necessary to review the ministerial standing of professional church leaders to protect the integrity of the church and the safety of the community.

The Ordination Review Committee (ORC) is responsible for the Review of Ministerial Standing in ABC R/GR.

All participants shall exercise great care to assure that the allegations and the process shall remain confidential unless a decision is reached which requires notification. Consequently, the members of the ORC are **required** to sign a confidentiality agreement.

ORC CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, _____, hereby acknowledge that all discussions pertaining to the ORC Process for Review of Ministerial Standing are strictly confidential. This includes but is not limited to verbal and written discussions during the meeting, and minutes from the meetings. I also understand that failure to abide by this agreement will be considered a breach of professional and ethical conduct.

Signature: _____

Name (PRINTED): _____

Date: ___ - ___ - ___

THE REVIEW OF MINISTERIAL STANDING COMMITTEE

While all members of the ORC will be advised about allegations that necessitate the convening of a review of ministerial standing, a total of five members will be voting members of the actual review committee. The Chair of the ORC will appoint five members of the ORC to serve as the Review of Ministerial Standing Committee (RMSC). The ORC Chair may serve as the Chair of the RMSC or at his/her discretion, designate one of the five appointed members to serve as chair of the RMSC. The Executive Minister will be an ex- officio, non-voting member of the RMSC.

To avoid the impact of conflicts of interest, a member of the ORC will *automatically* recuse him/herself from any discussion or vote relating to a matter where there is a potential for or the existence of a conflict of interest and state publicly that there is a personal conflict. The procedures noted below have been adopted to avoid the impact of conflicts of interest.

PROCEDURES TO AVOID THE IMPACT OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

A member of the ORC will *automatically* recuse him/herself from any discussion or vote relating to a matter where there is a potential for or the existence of a conflict of interest and state publicly that there is a personal conflict.

The ORC policy and procedures to avoid the impact of conflicts of interest will be included on the agenda of all Review of Ministerial Standing meetings. The voting ORC members will be reminded that their eligibility to participate in a discussion or vote is a result of no known conflicts of interest.

(Effective date: September 14, 2006)

PROCESS STEPS

1. **Written Allegations:** Formal allegations regarding a professional church leader are to be addressed to the Executive Minister of the Region. Allegations involving the Executive Minister should be sent to the Chair of the Ordination Review Committee. The allegations must be made in writing, specific in content, and signed. The RMSC will only act on allegations, related to the following categories:
 - Personal/Professional misconduct or malpractice of an ethical, sexual, or financial nature.
 - Violation of the expectation the church has for ethical behavior for its professional church leaders, as articulated in the Code of Ethics of the Statement of Personal Conduct of the ABC R/GR.
2. **Pastoral Intervention:** When formal charges have been made, there is an ongoing need for pastoral intervention for the professional church leader his or her family/significant others, and the congregation being served. These pastoral interventions will be coordinated by the Executive Minister and/or by members of the ORC, if the Executive Minister is being reviewed.

3. **Informing the Accused of the Allegations:**

- The Executive Minister shall inform the person of the allegations, review and provide in writing information about the process of review.
- The Chair of the RMSC will send a letter with the allegations and the date of the meeting with the RMSC for a preliminary exploration of the allegations.

4. **Preliminary Exploration:**

- The RMSC shall meet separately with the person(s) who made the allegations as well as with the person(s) in question to explore the allegations and to determine what steps to take.
- The RMSC may, in the event of an emergency situation, temporarily suspend recognition of ordination. During this period of temporary suspension the RMSC shall convene a review hearing to consider the matter fully. Written notice of this decision shall be given to the accused and to the appropriate denominational bodies. NOTE: The temporary suspension can **not** be appealed.
- The accused may dispute the allegations in full or in part, and develop with the RMSC a plan to deal with the situation without utilizing the full process of the review hearing. Note: If this option is pursued and a mutually acceptable plan is developed and accepted, the review process ends and can not be appealed.
- The accused may dispute the allegations and the RMSC may decide to utilize the review hearing process to investigate and make a decision about the allegations.

5. **Review Hearing Notice:** When a review hearing is scheduled, all parties involved are to be notified and informed about the process. The hearing should be not less than thirty (30) calendar days nor more than ninety (90) calendar days following notification.

A written copy of the allegations, a description of the review hearing procedure, and a notification of his or her rights (the right to meet with the RMSC, the right to present evidence including witnesses on his or her behalf, and the right to have an advocate, who is NOT an attorney present at the hearing). If the accused fails to appear, the RMSC may proceed.

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

- a. The hearing shall be fair, impartial and confidential--for the accused, the complainant and the wider church family. The hearing participants will be urged (but NOT mandated) to sign a statement of confidentiality.

**REVIEW OF MINISTERIAL STANDING
PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT**

I, _____, hereby acknowledge that all discussions pertaining to the ORC Process for Review of Ministerial Standing are strictly confidential. This includes but is not limited to verbal and written discussions during the meeting.

Signature: _____

Name (PRINTED): _____

Date: ___ - ___ - ___

- b. The RMSC may specify the amount of time allowed for presentation of the allegations for the defense and for summary statements.
- c. **The hearing shall follow this outline:**
- (1) Silence in prayer.
 - (2) Introductory statement.
 - (3) Reading of the allegations.
 - (4) Presentation of information or testimony supporting the allegations.
 - (5) Presentation of information or testimony refuting the allegations, including opportunities for the person in question, and/or by his/her witnesses and/or advocate (who is NOT an attorney) to speak.
 - (6) Questions by the RMSC to any of those offering information, testimony refutation, or response.
 - (7) Closing statement by the accused or his/her advocate.
 - (8) 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.
- d. Following the hearing, the RMSC may request a follow-up meeting and information from the person(s) making the allegations for further clarification. RMSC will meet in executive session and will make its decision.

7. **Notification of Decision:** The RMSC shall notify all parties of the decision within thirty (30) calendar days of the review hearing. In the event a person is exonerated, that person shall receive a letter acknowledging this action, a copy of which shall be sent to those making the allegations. If there is a decision to suspend or withdraw the recognition of ordination, the American Baptist Churches USA and its covenanting partners, the original ordaining church, the church being served or in which membership is held, other denominations where the clergy has dual ministerial standing, recognition or affiliation 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 (does not include temporary suspensions associated with the review of ministerial standing) or withdrawn may appeal the decision to the Executive Board of the Region.

All Executive Board participants shall exercise great care to assure that the appeals process shall remain confidential unless a decision is reached which requires notification. Consequently, the members of Executive Board are **required** to sign a confidentiality agreement.

ABC R/GR EXECUTIVE BOARD CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, _____, hereby acknowledge that all discussions pertaining to the Appeals Process for Review of Ministerial Standing are strictly confidential. This includes but is not limited to verbal and written discussions during the meeting, and minutes from the meetings. I also understand that failure to abide by this contract will be considered a breach of professional and ethical conduct.

Signature: _____

Name (PRINTED): _____

Date: ___ - ___ - ___

- The appeal must be received by the Executive Minister within 30 days of date of the RMSC's decision letter.
 - The appeal must be in writing, must state the reasons for appealing, and present an alternative plan. The Executive Board, in an executive session, may consider any matter it deems relevant in reaching its decision and may, at its discretion, meet with the professional church leader (without the professional church leader's attorney), or the Executive Board may choose to base its decision solely upon a review of the file. The Executive Board will resolve the appeal within 90 days of the date of the appeal letter and will communicate its decision in writing. The Executive Board's decision shall be 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 needs to be intentional effort made at reconciliation and healing. The church and/or the Region 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: If there is a desire to be reinstated and to have an ordination recognized again, the candidate must begin the process by meeting with the Executive Minister. If the Executive Minister feels the candidate is ready to begin the ordination review process, the candidate will meet with ORC.

The ORC will review the appropriate documentation about the prior action so that full information will be available to them. The original action, subsequent history, and present qualifications for ministry, will be reviewed with the candidate. A written decision will be sent to the candidate within fifteen (15) calendar days of the meeting.

If the ORC discerns that there is evidence of a call and that the candidate possesses the gifts and qualities for ordained ministry, the ORC will determine a plan with specific requirements to be reinstated.

Custody of Records of Review of Ministerial Standing Procedures

The ORC Committee, RCMS and Executive Board members participating in the appeals process, will surrender **all** documents associated with the allegations, review and appeals processes upon completion of the deliberations.

A complete set of all documents associated with the review and/or appeals process will be retained by the Executive Minister and stored in a **secure, restricted access** file. All adverse findings and recommendations will become a part of the professional church leader's permanent personnel file.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS PROCESS

The decision by the RMSC to suspend the recognition of a professional church leader's ordination will mean:

- 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.

The decision by the RMSC to withdraw the recognition of a person's ordination will mean:

- that a person's name will be deleted from the Directory of Professional Church Leaders of the ABCUSA, and 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 affect 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.

Approved by the ORC September 14, 2006

Approved by the Executive Board November 15, 2006

Adopted by the ABCRGR Delegates February 11, 2007

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF THE ROCHESTER/GENESEE REGION
1100 SOUTH GOODMAN STREET
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK 14620