

A COVENANT OF CLERGY SEXUAL ETHICS

INTRODUCTION

This Covenant calls Baptist ministers to commit to God and the congregations they serve to be faithful to the biblical sexual ethic of fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness. Because sexual integrity is foundational to Christian life and ministry, we encourage ministers and congregations to discuss this or similar ethical covenants in the context of the theological foundations and definitions expressed below, and we urge ministers to sign and adhere to a covenant of sexual ethics. We suggest that signed covenants be kept by ministers with copies given to church officers.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Human sexuality is a good gift of God through which we become partners with God's creative intent for humanity (Gen. 1:27, 28, 31). Faithful sexual practice expresses the loving commitment of marriage and embodies the mutual intimacy between husband and wife (Gen. 2:18-25).

When we misuse our sexuality, God's creative intent is supplanted by destructive consequences. Raised to the status of idol, the good gift of sexuality mutates into the power of exploitation, selfishness, anger, and domination.

When sexual sin and abuse occur, Christian practice calls us to engage the work of justice, reconciliation, and healing. The work of justice involves repentance, restitution, and restoration. Justice builds the foundation for reconciliation by establishing conditions in which alienated and injured parties have the opportunity to heal. Healing can occur when the possibilities of justice and reconciliation are realized.

The relationship between ministers and congregants is based upon trust. In difficult times, church members turn to ministers for comfort, support, guidance, and assurance, expecting the minister to act as a pastor, shepherd, counselor, and friend. Church members trust ministers never to take advantage of them or to manipulate them, especially when they are most vulnerable.

The purposes of a covenant of sexual ethics for ministers are threefold:

- (1) To provide a framework for upholding sexual integrity among ministers;
- (2) To support and protect ministers by defining ethical norms;
- (3) To establish a process for achieving justice, reconciliation, and healing.

DEFINITIONS OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT BY MINISTERS

- **Sexual Relations Outside of Marriage**
- **Unwanted or Inappropriate Physical Contact**
- **All Other Sexually Oriented or Suggestive Behaviors, such as Overt and Covert Seductive Speech and Gestures**
- **The Use of Pornography**

A COVENANT of CLERGY SEXUAL ETHICS

PREAMBLE

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, called by God to proclaim the gospel and gifted by the Spirit to minister to the church, I dedicate myself to conduct my ministry according to the ethical guidelines and principles set forth in scripture and this covenant, in order that my ministry may be acceptable to God, my service beneficial to the Christian community, and my life a witness to the world.

COVENANT

As a minister called to serve God and God's people, I commit myself to the following norms of ethical conduct, for which I am accountable to God, to my colleagues in ministry, and to the church in which I serve.

- **I will demonstrate sexual integrity in ministry by understanding, respecting, and observing the boundaries of sexual misconduct as defined above.**
- **I will nurture my physical, emotional, and spiritual health, maintain enriching friendships, and build strong relationships with my spouse and family.**
- **I will develop relationships with God, my spouse, and close friends which encourage accountability and protect against temptation.**
- **I will recognize the special power afforded me in the pastoral office by never abusing that power in ways that violate the personhood of another human being, by assuming responsibility for maintaining proper boundaries in church staff/church member relationships, and by acknowledging that the congregant is always in a vulnerable position.**
- **I will avoid all forms of sexual exploitation and/or harassment in my professional and social relationships, even if others invite such behavior or involvement.**
- **I will not seek or accept sexual favors.**
- **I will exercise good judgment in professional and private conduct by avoiding situations which create the appearance of sexual misconduct.**
- **I will assume responsibility to report any reliable evidence of sexual misconduct by another minister to the appropriate person or committee.**
- **I will submit to the policies and procedures of the church when an allegation of sexual misconduct has been made, recognizing the importance of justice and due process procedures.**

CONCLUSION

As I seek to fulfill my responsibilities as a minister, I will strive to embody servant-leadership in all my relationships and to pattern my life and ministry after the example of Jesus Christ.

Signed _____

Date _____