



# Covenant of Relationships

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## American Baptist Churches of New Jersey

### COVENANT OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN

#### AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF NEW JERSEY AND MEMBER CHURCHES

American Baptists understand their relationship to God through Jesus Christ as a freely accepted covenant. We also believe and understand that the local body of believers is autonomous. It is fitting, therefore, that relationships of organizations created by Christians be bound together by mutually accepted covenants.

God has called us to be the covenant people of God, living in loving relationship with our Creator and Redeemer, and with one another. Our covenant relationships and responsibilities to each other are rooted in the unconditional love of God, who has called us to live a life that expresses the full dimensions of that love and who has sent us to witness to all people concerning God's grace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We as Christians believe that we have been led by the Spirit of God to give expression to our faith and purpose in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior through the local church. We believe that this same Spirit calls us into a wider relationship as American Baptist Churches of New Jersey, in order that we may better accomplish common purposes related to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God.

We therefore covenant with one another and with God, to be associated as a fellowship of churches committed to a common purpose, and sharing in common activities and fellowship. As American Baptist Churches of New Jersey - both as a regional organization and as local churches - we trust that our relationship will surpass any list of expectations as we seek to be obedient to the mandate of sharing the gospel throughout the whole world. Our life and actions, both as persons and as churches, are to be consistent with the confession of faith we have made and the covenant vows we have taken. Through God's divine grace, we are called to be responsible to one another in our relationships within congregations and with each other in the wider fellowship.

### WHAT MEMBER CHURCHES CAN EXPECT FROM THE REGION

American Baptist Churches of New Jersey and its member churches have responsibilities to each other. The member churches agree to maintain a regional organization which will make available resources, support and leadership for its member churches.

The following are presented as basic expectations that member churches can have in fellowship with the state organization:

## **Opportunities for Wider Fellowship and Vision**

Hold Annual Session - inspiration and business.

Provide resource ideas, resource materials, and resource persons.

## **Mission**

Serve as an agency for mission in New Jersey and elsewhere.

Serve as a channel for relating churches to the worldwide mission of American Baptist Churches in the USA.

Serve as a channel for other cooperative efforts in ministry and resources.

## **Leadership Training**

Conduct training events for local churches in such areas as: evangelism, mission, stewardship, Christian education, youth work, current issues and public matters.

## **Resources**

Provide counseling regarding pastoral selection.

Provide consultation for planning, problem solving, goal setting and new forms of ministry.

Provide counseling regarding an adequate Christian education program.

Provide counseling in meeting public and social needs.

Furnish literature designed to help the local church in its many aspects of ministry.

Provide financial counseling regarding budgets, property and investments.

Furnish information regarding American Baptist Churches in the USA and its wide variety of resources.

## **Support**

Nurture fellowship among the associations of churches.

Provide staff to serve the local churches as needed.

Sponsor various programs designed to support pastors and church leaders.

Provide financial aid (where deemed good stewardship).

## **WHAT THE STATE ORGANIZATION CAN EXPECT FROM MEMBER CHURCHES**

Member churches have responsibilities to one another to share in the work of American Baptist Churches of New Jersey. These expectations are the foundation upon which each member church is expected to build in its pursuit of a genuine family relationship as a part of this body.

The following are basic expectations that the regional organization can have in fellowship with the member churches:

### **Participation in the Fellowship**

Consider goals and objectives of American Baptist Churches of New Jersey and American Baptist Churches in the USA.

Participate in the fellowship of American Baptists by encouraging participation and attendance at the Annual Session, and association meetings.

Cooperate in activities with sister churches by: (a) inviting sister churches to participate in events sponsored by the member church; and (b) accepting the invitation of sister churches to participate in their events.

Complete each year the annual report and send it to the office of the American Baptist Churches of New Jersey.

### **Sharing the Mission**

Promote and contribute to American Baptist Mission Support. Consult with the staff of American Baptist Churches of New Jersey regarding giving goals that take into account several factors, including historical patterns of giving, size of congregation, growth record, other relationships and commitments. Each member church is to contribute to the American Baptist Mission Support not less than 2 percent of its total income, exclusive of building funds.

Conduct mission and stewardship education, which can include some of the following: use of mission speakers (missionaries, mission interpreters), use of ABC mission reading and viewing materials, interpreting needs of American Baptist institutions (colleges, seminaries, Christian centers, American Baptist Assembly, homes and hospitals).

Support the camps, conferences and retreats program of American Baptist Churches of New Jersey.

Cooperate in ministry with other Christian churches and religious bodies.

## **Taking Part in Leadership Training**

Make use of American Baptist Churches in the USA and ABCNJ resource materials in ministry settings.

Attend frequently leadership training events sponsored by American Baptist Churches of New Jersey in such areas as stewardship, evangelism, mission, creative arts and officers training.

## **Making Use of Resources**

Receive periodic visitation from the staff of American Baptist Churches of New Jersey to discuss and consult on matters of mutual concern.

Consult with executive minister and/or associate regional pastors when facing critical problems.

When calling a pastor, consider only those ordained in American Baptist Churches in the USA, or whose ordination would be recognized by the Committee on Professional Ministry and Church Relations, and are willing to cooperate in the work of American Baptist Churches of New Jersey and American Baptist Churches in the USA.

Encourage newly ordained pastors to be counseled by the Regional Ministry Team for a period of two years.

## **Giving Support**

Encourage persons from the church to invest their energies and skills in giving leadership to the regional organization, and the association as officers and members of committees and task forces that are designed to fulfill the goals and objectives of American Baptist Churches of New Jersey and American Baptist Churches in the USA.

## **CRITERIA FOR COVENANTING CHURCH**

In order to have a clear idea of which churches are active members in full relationship with American Baptist Churches of New Jersey, the regional organization shall keep a record of how churches are meeting the following criteria:

**Attendance:** Each member church shall be represented at the Annual Session of ABCNJ and at meetings of the Association.

**Mission Support:** Each member church shall support American Baptist mission by contributing annually a fair share of the congregation's total mission giving to American Baptist Mission Support, including United Mission, American for Christ or Region Offering. A fair share is understood to be not less than 2% of the church's income, exclusive of building funds.

Reporting: Each member church shall annually provide reports on forms supplied by ABCUSA and ABCNJ.

### **MONITORING OF COVENANT RELATIONSHIP**

The congregations which are party to this Covenant of Relationships shall monitor the performance of the regional body, American Baptist Churches of New Jersey, through their elected delegates to the Annual Session and special meetings of ABCNJ, and their elected representative on the Council. The region shall monitor the performance of member congregations through the Association to which they belong.

Each Association and staff members of American Baptist Churches of New Jersey shall maintain regular contact with member churches. Any church not participating in and contributing to American Baptist Churches for a period of two consecutive years will, by their lack of participation, be considered not desiring to continue in this covenant relationship with the rest of the body of ABCNJ.

The ABCNJ office shall send an annual report of a church's performance on meeting the criteria for a covenanting church to each member church and to the Association to which the church belongs. The Association shall have responsibility for visiting the church to discuss its relationship with American Baptist Churches and for dismissing that covenanting church. If a church resumes attendance, mission support and reporting, it shall be considered by the Association to be in full fellowship with American Baptist Churches of New Jersey.

If a church refuses to meet with representatives of the Association or to meet the criteria for a covenanting church, the Council may, upon recommendation of the Association to which that church belongs, vote to dismiss that church from membership in ABCNJ. Notice of such action shall be sent to the church prior to the meeting at which the Council is to vote, giving the church a chance to be heard during discussion on the matter. Any future reinstatement of membership in ABCNJ for a church that has been dismissed would be done through the process for receiving a new member church.

The Committee on Professional Ministry and Church Relations of ABCNJ shall annually review the covenant relationship of member churches within each Association. If the Committee finds that any Association is delaying the process or acting unfairly or unjustly in dealing with any church, it shall arrange to meet with representatives of the Association to discuss the matter.