

COVENANT OF RELATIONSHIPS

between
American Baptist Churches of the Great Rivers Region
and
Cooperating Member Congregations

I. INTRODUCTION

Because American Baptists understand their relationship to God through Jesus Christ as a freely accepted covenant, it is fitting that relationships of organizations created by Christians be governed by mutually agreed upon covenants.

The American Baptist Churches of the Great Rivers Region is a fellowship of autonomous yet interdependent churches in Illinois and Missouri, joined together to accomplish certain stated purposes related to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Believing that the strength of our fellowship lies in voluntary cooperation and unity, this Covenant of Relationship is presented as a reasonable expectation regarding participation by each member congregation within the Region. It represents a desire that each congregation set a goal of surpassing any stated minimal expectations in its obedience to the mandate of sharing the Gospel throughout the whole world.

The purpose of the Great Rivers Region is set in Article II of the Bylaws:

The purposes and activities of the Region shall be to promote the work of the Kingdom of God within the Baptist tradition as conceived by its member churches. Consistent with this general purpose, the Board may occasionally specify purposes and goals for clarity, focus, or short-term emphasis. In all cases, its work shall be solely of a religious nature.

In keeping with that, the Regional Ministry Board has specified that the purpose of the Region is to *challenge, empower, assist and represent American Baptist faith communities as we live out our ministry together. Our vision is healthy congregations and institutions engaged in effective Christian ministry locally and globally. Our specific aims for the next decade are to: (1) Plant 50 new churches, (2) Welcome 25,000 new believers, (3) Develop and enhance congregational ministry tools, (4) Identify, recruit, and empower 200 ministerial church leaders, and (5) Promote our identity and heritage as Christians and American Baptists.*

Each congregation is also encouraged to develop or review its own Purpose Statement--their "reason for being" as they enter this Covenant of Relationship.

II. REGIONAL RESOURCES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The American Baptist Churches of the Great Rivers Region and its covenanting congregations have mutual responsibilities. The Region covenants to make available the following resources, leadership and support for its member congregations:

1. Counseling congregations in evangelism, discipleship, community ministry, church renewal, planning and organization.
2. Providing consulting services for churches in the selection of pastoral and other professional staff as well as assisting Professional Church Leaders in relocation.
3. Assisting congregations in identifying and meeting the social concerns of the church and community.
4. Providing information and interpretation regarding the resources, publications and professional leadership opportunities available to partner churches.
5. Providing regular communications regarding the mission and ministry of the Great Rivers Region.
6. Providing financial counsel for churches regarding budgetary concerns, stewardship, and building projects.
7. Providing education and training opportunities for congregational leaders and ministers.
8. Providing camping and retreat opportunities for children and youth.
9. Providing a channel for local church contributions toward the American Baptist Mission Support of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.
10. Nurturing a supporting fellowship among clusters of American Baptist churches for mutual benefit.
11. Making available the services of regional staff ministers for pastoral counseling, church programming and local staff relationships.
12. Providing a channel for producing and distributing annual statistical reports concerning the work of cooperating congregations and related organizations.

In addition, within the limits of the Region's staff time and resources, other tailored resources, support and leadership may be developed to meet the needs of particular congregations.

III. EXPECTATIONS OF MEMBER CONGREGATIONS

The intent of this Covenant can be met by congregations which are at different states in their development. Both sets of expectations which follow--Beginning and Desired--are not expressed as ultimate objectives and therefore could and should be surpassed.

A. Beginning Expectations of Covenanting Congregations

These expectations are the foundation of a genuine family relationship, but upon which it will build to its fullest capacity to express our joint calling to God's ministry. Each congregation covenants to:

1. Accept and publicize the Purpose Statement of the Great Rivers Region and American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.
2. Support regional, national and international mission and ministries by working toward the goal of a tithe (10%) of the congregation's annual income (exclusive of building payments) to United Missions or other designations through the Great Rivers Region. Churches with multiple denominational alignments are expected to distribute their mission support proportionately.
3. Consult with the Regional Staff Ministers of the ABC/GRR in pastoral selection.
4. Participate annually in ongoing programs or activities of the Great Rivers Region. This can be done by the pastor and lay persons (*i.e.*, attend an Area Annual Meeting, a Regionally sponsored training event, meeting of American Baptist Women's Ministries/American Baptist Men/American Baptist Youth/Camping and the Regional Convention.)
5. Provide an annual statistical report on the form provided by ABC/GRR and the ABC/USA.

B. Challenge Objectives For Covenanting Congregations

For congregations who have met or surpassed the Beginning Expectations, the American Baptist family's desire is that they continue to progress "from strength to strength" though Challenge Objectives for increasing participation.

1. Share their financial resources through the American Baptist Mission Support, beginning with an amount equal to 10 percent to its annual income exclusive of building payments, and going beyond 10 percent according to the church's strength and resources. (Refer to earlier statement for dually aligned congregations.)
2. Make provision that the majority of their benevolence giving goes to American Baptist Mission Support versus other non-American Baptist forms of benevolence giving.
3. Appoint delegates allowed for the Area and Regional Convention as well as for the Biennial Convention of the ABC/USA.
4. Encourage their members to participate in Area, Regional and National meetings.

5. Provide leadership for regional programs, including camping, the Regional Ministry Board, and committees and task forces.
6. Participate in the annual mission offerings of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. (America For Christ, World Mission Offering, One Great Hour of Sharing and Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering).

The American Baptist Churches of the Great Rivers Region joins your congregation in this Covenant Relationship. Together we can participate in a regional, national and worldwide missionary enterprise.

IV. MONITORING THE RELATIONSHIP

1. The Region will monitor its responsibilities listed below. The Regional Ministry Board will review this Covenant and make certain the Region is fulfilling its covenantal obligations. The Region's performance of its expectations will be evaluated periodically or at the request of the church.
2. It is expected that covenanting churches shall fulfill the Beginning Expectations listed below. A church that does not show progress toward meeting the Beginning Expectations will be offered the opportunity to counsel with Regional representatives in order to increase compliance.
3. This Covenant is intended to increase the interdependent life and mission of the covenanting partners while respecting the appropriate autonomy of the congregation. Together we claim the unifying power of the Holy Spirit as we seek to live out our faithful obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

On behalf of _____ Church at _____
 _____ Date _____

On behalf of Area _____, American Baptist Churches/Great Rivers Region
 _____ Date _____

On behalf of The American Baptist Churches of the Great Rivers Region
 _____ Date _____
