

## ECCLESIASTICAL ENDORSING ORGANIZATIONS

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE.** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook revises procedures regarding the acceptance of ecclesiastical endorsements of individuals who wish to work as chaplains for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES.** This Handbook defines the requirements for acceptance of ecclesiastical endorsements from religious organizations.
- 3. RELATED DIRECTIVE.** VHA Handbook 1111.2, Spiritual and Pastoral Care Procedures.
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE.** The Office of Chaplain Service (111C) is responsible for the contents of this VHA Handbook. Questions may be addressed to 757-728-7062.
- 5. RESCISSIONS.** VHA Handbook 1111.1, dated September 30, 2000, is rescinded.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This VHA Handbook is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of September 2010.

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## ECCLESIASTICAL ENDORSING ORGANIZATIONS

### 1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook defines the administrative procedures and requirements that religious faith groups must meet to provide ecclesiastical endorsements of individuals for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Chaplaincy.

### 2. BACKGROUND

a. The VA qualification standard for Chaplain (see Veterans Affairs (VA) Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix F1) requires ecclesiastical endorsement “by the official national endorsing body of the faith group or denomination, certifying that the applicant is in good standing with the applicant’s group or denomination; and stating that the individual is, in the opinion of the endorsing body, qualified to perform the full range of ministry required in the VA pluralistic setting.”

b. Previous policy provided that VA accepted ecclesiastical endorsements from any religious organization “recognized” by the Armed Forces Chaplain Board (AFCB). Most religious organizations that provide ecclesiastical endorsements of individuals for VA Chaplaincy have done so by virtue of that recognition. The Department of Defense (DOD) has revised its policy (DOD Directive 1304.19, issued June 11, 2004; and DOD Instruction 1304.28, issued June 11, 2004) such that it no longer “recognizes” religious organizations. However, DOD continues to require religious organizations to meet administrative filing requirements in order to endorse individuals for military Chaplaincy.

### 3. SCOPE

a. A religious organization wishing to endorse applicants for VA Chaplaincy must meet the requirements specified in paragraph 5 and provide documents to the National VA Chaplain Center as specified in paragraph 6. Endorsements must be signed by the properly designated endorsing agent of a religious organization in order to meet the endorsement requirements of the VA chaplain qualification standard.

b. Acceptance of an ecclesiastical endorsement by VA does not imply any approval by VA of the theology or practices of a religious organization, nor does it obligate VA to employ the endorsed individual or any other members of the organization.

c. VA’s mission to provide health care to veterans is always paramount, and VA reserves the right to restrict or prohibit within its facilities any practices that it deems detrimental to the health or safety of patients.

### 4. AUTHORITY

a. The Director, Chaplain Service, VA National Chaplain Center, determines acceptability of ecclesiastical endorsements in accordance with the requirements in paragraphs 5 and 6.

b. The Director, Chaplain Service may refuse to accept ecclesiastical endorsements from a religious organization that no longer meets the requirements of paragraph 5. Before taking such action, the Director must give the organization written notice, stating the reasons, and giving the religious organization a reasonable opportunity to provide a written reply that must be carefully considered in making a final decision. If the final decision is that the religious organization no longer meets the requirements to provide ecclesiastical endorsements, the Director must inform the religious organization, and all VA chaplains endorsed by the religious organization, in writing. Religious organizations informed that they may no longer endorse individuals for VA Chaplaincy due to lack of administrative compliance with the policy in this Handbook may resubmit the required documents. If a religious organization is no longer able to endorse individuals for VA Chaplaincy in accordance with this policy, all ecclesiastical endorsements issued by that religious organization are considered to be withdrawn.

## **5. REQUIREMENTS FOR ACCEPTANCE OF ECCLESIASTICAL ENDORSEMENTS FROM RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS**

a. To provide ecclesiastical endorsements to VA, a religious organization must meet the following seven requirements:

(1) Be organized and function exclusively or substantially to provide religious ministries to a lay constituency.

(2) Possess authority to both grant and withdraw initial and subsequent ecclesiastical endorsement.

(3) Be recognized by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) as a tax-exempt religious organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

(4) Agree to abide by all Federal, VA and VHA laws, regulations, policies, and issuances on the qualification and endorsement of persons for service as VA chaplains, federal employment, and veterans health care.

(5) Agree to notify the VA National Chaplain Center of any withdrawal of an existing ecclesiastical endorsement.

(6) Provide to the VA National Chaplain Center the information and documents specified in paragraph 6 of this Handbook.

(7) Acknowledge that:

(a) Acceptance of an ecclesiastical endorsement by VA does not imply any approval by VA of the theology or practices of a religious organization, nor does it obligate VA to employ the endorsed individual or any other members of the organization;

(b) VA's mission to provide health care to veterans is always paramount, and VA reserves

the right to restrict or prohibit within its facilities any practices that it deems detrimental to the health or safety of patients;

(c) Individuals endorsed by the organization shall function in a pluralistic environment and will support directly and indirectly the free exercise of religion by all patients, family members and others authorized to receive VA health care.

b. All ecclesiastical endorsing organizations registered with VA under this Handbook and as of this date are considered to meet all requirements of this paragraph. *NOTE: These organizations are listed in Appendix A.* VA will continue to accept endorsements signed by the agents designated by the listed organizations for 3 years (i .e., 2008), at which time the organization must submit written verification as specified in subparagraph 6c.

## **6. PROCEDURE FOR DESIGNATING AN ECCLESIASTICAL ENDORSING AGENT**

a. A religious organization that wishes to endorse individuals for service as VA chaplains must submit a signed VA Form 10-0379 to the National VA Chaplain Center along with the following information and documents:

- (1) An explanation of the structure of the organization (copies of by-laws, constitution, etc.).
- (2) A copy of the membership requirements (if any) of the organization.
- (3) A description of the qualifications and requirements that an individual must meet in order to conduct all the religious offices, functions, sacraments, ordinances, ceremonies, rites, and/or observances required to meet the needs of patients of the organization (including any of the following that apply: education, licensing and/or ordination, professional experience).
- (4) A copy of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) document giving the group tax-exempt status as a religious organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

b. The Director, Chaplain Service, takes no action on an initial request to designate an ecclesiastical endorsing official unless the religious organization presents an applicant for VA Chaplaincy who meets all qualification requirements (other than endorsement) of VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix F1. Upon presentation of a qualified applicant, as determined by the Board of Excepted Service Examiners, and verification that an organization meets the requirements of paragraph 5, the Director must notify the organization, in writing, that it has been designated an ecclesiastical endorsing organization.

c. Once an organization has been notified (see subpar. 6c), VA will accept ecclesiastical endorsements for 3 years from that organization without requiring any further documentation, unless VA has substantial evidence that an organization no longer meets the requirements of paragraph 5.

d. Every 3 years, each ecclesiastical endorsing organization must provide written verification to the VA National Chaplain Center that it continues to meet the requirements of paragraph 5.

e. By January 1<sup>st</sup> of each year, each religious organization must provide the National VA Chaplain Center with an alphabetical listing of individuals endorsed for VA Chaplaincy.

## 7. DEFINITIONS

a. **Ecclesiastical Endorsing Organization.** Ecclesiastical endorsing organization means a religious faith group that meets the requirements of paragraph 5 and has properly designated an endorsing agent in accordance with paragraph 6 of this Handbook.

b. **Ecclesiastical Endorsement.** Ecclesiastical endorsement is a signed statement, by the official national endorsing agent of an ecclesiastical endorsing organization, certifying that an individual is in good standing with that religious faith group, and stating that the individual is, in the opinion of the endorsing agent, qualified to conduct all offices, functions, sacraments, ordinances, ceremonies, rites, and/or observances required to meet the needs of patients of this particular group.

c. **Official National Endorsing Agent.** Official national endorsing agent means the individual designated by an ecclesiastical endorsing organization to issue official ecclesiastical endorsements to VA of individuals within the particular religious faith group.

**ECCLESIASTICAL ENDORSING ORGANIZATIONS**

1. Advent Christian General Conference
2. African Methodist Episcopal Church
3. African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
4. Alliance of Baptists
5. American Association of Lutheran Churches
6. American Baptist Association
7. American Baptist Churches in the USA
8. American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic
9. American Council of Christian Churches
10. American Missionary Fellowship
11. American Muslim Armed Forces and Vets Affairs Council
12. Anglican Catholic Church in America
13. Anglican Church in America
14. Anglican Episcopal Diocese South Inc
15. Anglican Orthodox Church
16. Anglican Rite Catholic Church
17. Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
18. Apostolic Catholic Orthodox Church
19. Assemblies of God, General Council of
20. Assemblies of God, Int'l Fellowship
21. Associate Presbyterian Church
22. Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church
23. Associated Gospel Churches
24. Association of Evangelical Charismatic Ministries
25. Association of Independent Methodists
26. Association of International Gospel Assemblies Inc
27. Baptist Bible Fellowship International
28. Baptist General Conference
29. Baptist General Convention of Texas
30. Baptist Missionary Association of America
31. Berean Fundamental Church Council Inc
32. Bethel Ministerial Association Inc
33. Bible Churches Chaplaincy (formerly IFCA)
34. Bible Fellowship Church
35. Bible Presbyterian Church (General Synod)
36. Brethren Church (Ashland, OH)
37. Buddhist Churches of America
38. Calvary Chapel

39. Camelback Bible Church
40. Cedar Mill Bible Church
41. Central Conference of American Rabbis
42. Chaplaincy Full Gospel Churches Inc
43. Charismatic Episcopal Church
44. Chinmaya Mission West
45. Christ Community Church
46. Christian & Missionary Alliance
47. Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
48. Christian Church of North America
49. Christian Churches and Churches of Christ
50. Christian Episcopal Church
51. Christian Evangelical Churches of America Inc
52. Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
53. Christian Reformed Church in North America
54. Christian Science
55. Christ-Immanuel Ministerial Association
56. Christ's Church Fellowship
57. Church of Christ
58. Church of Christ (Holiness) U.S.A
59. Church of God (Cleveland, TN)
60. Church of God in Christ, Inc
61. Church of God Ministries
62. Church of God of Prophecy
63. Church of God, General Conference, Oregon, IL
64. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
65. Church of Lutheran Brethren
66. Church of the Brethren
67. Church of the Nazarene
68. Church of the United Brethren in Christ
69. Church on the Rock, International
70. Churches and Ministers, International Fellowship of
71. Churches of Christ in Christian Union
72. Churches of God, General Conference
73. Coalition of Spirit-Filled Churches
74. Columbia Bible Church
75. Community Church of Greenwood, Inc
76. Congregational Christian Church
77. Congregational Christian Church in American Samoa
78. Congregational Methodist Church
79. Conservative Baptist Assoc of America



80. Conservative Congregational Christian Conference
81. Conservative Lutheran Association
82. Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Inc
83. Coral Ridge Christian Fellowship
84. Cumberland Presbyterian Church
85. Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America
86. Elim Fellowship
87. Episcopal Church
88. Episcopal Missionary Church
89. Episcopal Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
90. Evangel Fellowship of Ministers and Churches
91. Evangelical Church Alliance
92. Evangelical Congregational Church
93. Evangelical Covenant Church
94. Evangelical Episcopal Church
95. Evangelical Episcopal Churches, Communion of
96. Evangelical Free Church of America
97. Evangelical Friends International
98. Evangelical Gospel Assemblies Ministries Int'l
99. Evangelical Methodist Church
100. Evangelical Presbyterian Church
101. Evangelicals, National Association of
102. Faith Christian Fellowship Int'l Church
103. Federated Orthodox Catholic Churches United
104. First Church of Christ, Scientist
105. Free Lutheran Congregations
106. Free Methodist Church of North America
107. Free Will Baptists, National Association of
108. Full Faith Church of Love
109. Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship
110. Full Gospel Fellowship of Churches and Ministers
111. Full Gospel Pentecostal Association
112. Fundamental Baptist Fellowship of America
113. General Baptist
114. General Church of the New Jerusalem
115. Global Network of Christian Ministries
116. Grace Brethren Churches
117. Grace Gospel Fellowship
118. Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of N. & S. America
119. Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Vasiloupolis
120. Holy Catholic Church (Anglican Rite)

121. Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity
122. Iglesia Metodista De Puerto Rico
123. Independent Churches Affiliated
124. International Council of Community Churches
125. International Christian Church
126. International Church of the Foursquare Gospel
127. International Council of Community Churches
128. International Convention of Faith Ministries Inc.
129. International Ministerial Fellowship
130. International Pentecostal Holiness Church
131. Islamic Society of North America
132. Jewish Chaplains Council
133. Kingdom Council of Interdependent Christian Churches and Ministries
134. Kingsway Fellowship International
135. Korean Evangelical Church of America
136. Liberal Catholic Church
137. Liberty Baptist Fellowship for Church Planting, Inc.
138. Liberty Fellowship of Churches and Ministers, Inc
139. Logos Global Network of Christian Ministries
140. Lutheran Church in America, Evangelical
141. Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
142. Maranatha Christian Fellowship, Inc (see Coalition of Spirit-Filled Ministries)
143. Messianic Jewish Congregations, Union of
144. Military Diocese for the Philippine Independent Catholic Church
145. Missionary Church, Inc
146. Moravian Church in America
147. National Baptist Convention of America Inc.
148. National Baptist Convention USA, Inc.
149. National Catholic Apostolic Church in the USA
150. National Jewish Welfare Board/Jewish Chaplains Council
151. National Missionary Baptist Convention of America
152. New Generation Church
153. New Testament Association of Independent Baptist Churches
154. North American Baptist Conference
155. Old Holy Catholic Church
156. Open Bible Standard Churches, Inc.
157. Original Free Will Baptists Convention
158. Orthodox Church in America
159. Orthodox Presbyterian Church
160. Pentecostal Assemblies of the World Inc

161. Pentecostal Church of God Inc.
162. Pentecostal Churches of the Apostolic Faith Association, Inc.
163. Philippine Independent Catholic Church
164. Plymouth Brethren
165. Polish National Catholic Church of America
166. Presbyterian & Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains
167. Presbyterian Church (USA)
168. Presbyterian Church in America
169. Presbyterian Council for Chaplains & Military Personnel
170. Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.
171. Rabbinical Assembly (Conservative), The
172. Rabbinical Council of America (Orthodox)
173. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America
174. Reformed Church In America
175. Reformed Episcopal Church
176. Regular Baptist Churches, General Association of
177. Rhema Ministerial Association
178. Roman Catholic Church
179. Romano Byzantine Synod of Bishops
180. Salvation Army
181. Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA and Canada (SCOBA)
182. Seventh-Day Adventists United States, General Conference of
183. Seventh-Day Baptists, General Conference USA and Canada
184. Southern Baptist Convention
185. Southern Methodist Church
186. Sovereign Grace Baptist Association of Churches
187. St. Andrews Evangelical Church
188. Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops
189. Swedenborgian Church
190. Syrian Eastern Orthodox Exarchate in America
191. Syro-Russian Orthodox Catholic Church (Romano Byzantine)
192. Trinity Full Gospel Fellowship
193. Truth Assemblies
194. Ukranian Orthodox Church of the U.S.A.
195. Unitarian Universalist Association
196. United Catholic Church of America
197. United Church of Christ
198. United Church of Religious Sciences
199. United Episcopal Church of North America
200. United Evangelical Churches
201. United Full Gospel Church

202. United Methodist Church
203. United Pentecostal Church International
204. United Pentecostal Churches of Christ
205. Unity Churches, Association of
206. Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches
207. Victory Fellowship of Churches
208. Wesleyan Church
209. Westside Christian Family Chapel
210. Woodfield Church
211. World Baptist Fellowship, Inc.
212. World Council of Independent Christian Churches