

## Calvary Baptist Church of Denver CO and ABCUSA Ordination Recognition

**Concern:** To enable ABCUSA recognition of a local church's ordination of persons who meet all of the requirements for ordination outlined in the *American Baptist Policy Statement on Ordained Ministry*.

**Background:** Calvary Baptist Church of Denver Colorado was founded in 1881 and has been a very active and loyal member of ABCUSA and the Rocky Mountain Region (ABCRM) since those organizations were established. Many Calvary members have held major leadership positions at both the regional and national levels and Calvary has been a significant supporter of missions, both locally and worldwide.

- **Calvary's Mission:** To be a Christ-like community that experiences and shares God's love.
- **Calvary's Purpose:** Loving God, loving others and serving the world.
- **Calvary's Vision:** Calvary Baptist Church of Denver is a dynamic, Christ-centered, multigenerational congregation that is committed to passionate worship, intentional faith development, unconditional hospitality, risk taking mission and service and extravagant generosity.
- **Calvary's Inclusion Statement:** Calvary welcomes and affirms all people as children of God from every cultural and religious background, sexual orientation, family composition, physical and mental ability, economic means, race, age and gender.
- **Calvary's Tagline:** **Open to All, Closed to None** (which encapsulates who we are).

**The current issue:** Since Calvary adopted our Inclusion Statement in 2011, we have attracted many new and diverse members. One of these is the Rev. Arthur Leon (Lee) Tredwell, a gay man who is in a monogamous relationship with his partner. Lee was ordained to ministry by the New Bethel Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN in 1983 and was the founding pastor of Christ Temple in Brooklyn Park, MN from 1998 to 2007. He has an M.A. in Religion and Theology from the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities (2006) and is presently a Ph.D. candidate in the Joint Program of the Iliff School of Theology and the University of Denver. Calvary knows Lee to be a man of God, a strong and powerful preacher, a dynamic leader and teacher, and a caring and committed Christian.

Upon feeling a call to interim ministry and desiring for that ministry to be within ABCUSA, Lee contacted ABCRM to let them know of his wishes. He was referred to Calvary by the Rev. Dr. Larron D. Jackson, the Denver Cluster Ministry and Mission Coach of ABCRM. After visiting Calvary and experiencing our inclusivity and warm welcome by our members and staff, Lee joined our church on July 12, 2015.

Last summer Lee met with our Senior Pastor, the Rev. Anne Jernberg Scalfaro, indicating his desire to become an Interim Pastor within ABCUSA. He then met with the Church Council (Calvary's Board of Directors) to share his journey and desire to pursue an ABCUSA ordination through Calvary. After hearing Lee's testimony, the Council unanimously endorsed Lee for ordination and established an Ordination Council (five members and one pastoral member) to support and guide him in this process. Throughout the past year Lee has shared his many and varied gifts for ministry with our congregation.

Soon after the process was initiated, Calvary learned that the "*ABCRM Statement on Homosexuality*", adopted by the Annual Gathering in 2006, prevented the Region's Ministerial Leadership Committee (MLC) from considering Lee's application because he is gay, despite the fact that he meets and exceeds all the requirements for ABCUSA ordination recognition. Although Calvary knew it had the local church

autonomy to ordain Lee, the “*ABCRM Statement on Homosexuality*” prevented the Region from extending the same ordination recognition benefits as it does to other candidates.

Calvary does not want to infringe on the local autonomy of other congregations. Rather Calvary wants to be able to exercise its own autonomy and have that autonomy recognized by ABCRM and ABCUSA. “*For American Baptists the local church is the fundamental unit of mission in denominational life...Baptists always have maintained the need for autonomous congregations, responsible for articulating their own doctrine, style of worship and mission.*” (*10 Facts You Should Know About American Baptists* – <http://www.abc-usa.org/10facts/>)

Anne Scalfaro had numerous conversations with ABCRM Executive Minister, the Rev. Dr. Steven Van Ostran, other region executives and pastors as well as leaders of ABCUSA trying to find a way out of this dilemma. Despite these efforts there seemed to be no adequate resolution to the issue of the recognition of Lee Tredwell’s ordination.

Although it appeared impossible to have Lee’s ordination recognized by our Region, the Calvary Ordination Council saw his gifts and calling to the gospel ministry. They clearly recognized the prophetic and pastoral ministry he offers to our community and the many communities he serves. Therefore, in July of 2016, on recommendation from Lee’s Ordination Council and on behalf of the congregation, the Calvary Council unanimously voted to ordain the Rev. Arthur Leon (Lee) Tredwell to the gospel ministry.

Lee’s service of ordination was conducted on August 14, 2016 in the sanctuary of Calvary Baptist Church of Denver CO. Among those officiating was the Rev. Dr. Cathie Kelsey, Dean of the Chapel/Spiritual Formation, Iliff School of Theology and the Rev. Dr. Mary Armacost Hulst, Pastor Emerita, Calvary Baptist Church of Denver and former President of ABCUSA.

**The future:** There needs to be the establishment of a clear way to permit Calvary Baptist Church of Denver and other ABCUSA churches to ordain persons who meet the ABCUSA standards for ordination and for that ordination to be recognized by ABCUSA. Using Calvary’s situation and ABCRM as an example, possible avenues to accomplish this include:

1. Calvary could join another region which does not have the same restrictions as ABCRM. This is not an attractive alternative for Calvary. Our Church has very close ties with our Region. Calvary members currently serve in the following positions in ABCRM: Immediate Past President of the Region, a member of the Region Board, and Chair of the Region Investment Committee. In the past, other members of Calvary have served as President of the Region, Board members and in other leadership positions. At a recent Calvary Council meeting there was a strong sense that we wanted to keep our ties with ABCRM, but must be able to ordain those members who have met all the qualifications for ordination and have those persons recognized as ordained by ABCUSA.
2. Calvary could “dually align” with ABCRM and another region whose theological values are in line with Calvary’s for such purposes as ordination. As it stands today, a local church may choose to be “dually aligned” with more than one national body (i.e., ABCUSA and Alliance for Baptists, ABCUSA and Progressive National Baptist Convention, ABCUSA and United Church of Christ) without limitations or consequences. If this is the case, then it seems logical that a local church could be

“dually aligned” with more than one region without limitations or consequences. This would be a way of preserving unity within geographic regions while preserving the autonomy of the local church. We understand that dual alignment with two regions is not possible today because of current policies within ABCUSA and recognize that administrative changes would have to be made to implement such an arrangement.

3. Another resolution might be to find a way within ABCUSA polity for a local church, following the “Recommended Procedures for Ordination, Commissioning, and Recognition for the Christian Ministry in the American Baptist Churches” to ordain a qualified candidate and have that person be recognized on “The Professional Registry of the ABCUSA”. This would be in keeping with our Baptist tradition that the journey to official ordination to the Gospel Ministry of Jesus Christ begins when an individual answers God’s call to minister as his or her vocation and when the local church, of which that individual is a part, sees evidence of that call and confirms that call in the individual. Ultimately, ordination in the Baptist tradition is granted by the local church – the people of God who have witnessed one’s calling, gifts and skills for ministry.
4. Other solutions that might be suggested?

Summary: Calvary Baptist Church of Denver requests that the appropriate bodies within ABCUSA seriously consider the issues raised by this concern and initiate a dialogue to find a solution that would be acceptable to all, while honoring our gracious and loving God. Such a conversation needs to take place in an open environment where the views of all members of ABCUSA can be heard without the imposition of preconceived concepts and ideas. Calvary is willing to help think through these alternative solutions (and any others if suggested) and to be of assistance in any way we can, including:

- Serving on a team to edit the appropriate policies;
- Helping to facilitate a break out discussion at a gathering of believers; etc.

Our desire is to find an appropriate solution that will serve the needs of ABCUSA’s diverse membership, honor the autonomy of the local church, and preserve and strengthen relationships across all elements of ABCUSA.

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