

## Honoring Those Who Have Served Our Churches

### *Emeritus Policies and Practices for Pastors, Deacons and Trustees Within the ABCNJ Family*

By Rev. Dr. Lee B. Spitzer

ABCNJ Executive Minister and Senior Regional Pastor

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In response to an email enquiry from one of our region's churches, I issued via Constant Contact a call for input concerning how our churches handle the issue of honoring pastors and other leaders by giving them an Emeritus title.

Here is the text of the email:

*Churches may honor a pastor by designating him or her as **Pastor Emeritus** after their retirement from active ministry. We are seeking to discover how many of our churches have or have had a Pastor Emeritus, and what are your policies regarding this honorary position.*

*Please reply to this email to answer the following questions:*

- 1. Do you currently have a Pastor Emeritus at your church?*
- 2. What are the policies and guidelines you employ to choose a pastor for this position?*
- 3. What are the policies and guidelines regarding the role of the Pastor Emeritus in your church (responsibilities and privileges)?*

In the past week, I have received over 50 responses from pastors and lay leaders – filling up 7 pages of typed text! A number of Pastors Emeritus were among those who took the time to share. Thank you so much! Although many churches do not have a Pastor Emeritus, a number of you said you wanted to know the results of my research. I want to thank everyone who provided me with stories and insights.

What follows is a summary of what I heard from all of you – and even from some colleagues outside ABCNJ. I have quoted from your reflections liberally (and made minor grammatical changes when necessary). ABCNJ does not have an official policy on conveying the Emeritus title and this report should not be interpreted as being such. Each ABCNJ church is free to create its own policies and practices, but I do hope that the wisdom shared by our family will guide churches so that they will remain healthy and faithful fellowships.

### **A Summary of the Feedback from across the Region**

1. Most ABCNJ churches have not given Emeritus status to either a pastor or lay leader, and they do not have a policy statement to guide any decisions in this regard.
2. Among the churches (perhaps 20%) that either currently have a Pastor Emeritus or did so at one time in the past, the decision to honor a long serving pastor or lay leader was usually made by congregational vote. In one case, a board voted instead of the church (for a Deacon Emeritus). Neither the decision nor the responsibilities/privileges of the Pastor Emeritus was dictated by a written policy. For example, at Chesterfield Baptist Church, Robert Davidson is Pastor Emeritus. According to the current pastor, Ed DeSilva, "we never created a policy to accompany the title. It is more honorary than functional, as Bob desired it to be."

Reflecting on his experience as a pastor at FBC, Mt. Holly, Robert Santilli writes:

"First Baptist of Mt. Holly does have a pastor emeritus, Rev. Guernsey Hackler, who served the church prior to my coming from 1950 to 1974. A year after my coming in 1975, some people in the congregation wanted to honor Guernsey. The Board of Deacons discussed, brought a recommendation to the congregation at a regularly scheduled business meeting and the congregation voted its approval. We had a service recognizing Guernsey for his years of faithful service and put a plaque with his picture in the entry foyer of the church. Where it is now I cannot say. There were no responsibilities connected with this designation. There are no policies or guidelines that were adopted. It was seen as a purely honorary designation but one which carried with it deep appreciation."

Similarly, the pastor of FBC Woodstown, Daryle Cook, writes:

"First Baptist Church of Woodstown does have a Pastor Emeritus: Rev. Dr. Howard Taylor. The honorary appointment was made in 2001 following his retirement; recognizing thirty years of ministry in this church. A framed photograph with dates, etc. commemorates the appointment. FBC has no "policies or guidelines" regarding this... we simply feel blessed to have Pastor Howard and his wife Gail as a part of our church family. They are part-time residents, making themselves available to minister whenever and wherever they can."

3. The practice of honoring a pastor as Emeritus crossed ethnic boundaries: I heard of examples from African-American, Euro-white and Latino churches that have a Pastor Emeritus. Similarly, African-American and Euro-white churches indicated that they had awarded Deacon Emeritus honors to retired Deacons. Here is a very interesting report from one of our Korean pastors, Joshua Pyon:

"Usually Korean churches have elder pastors. I think that elder pastors are emeritus pastors. Korean churches have general rules for the position. First, the (Emeritus) pastor has to have served his church more than 20 years as a good pastor. And if the church nominates the pastor as an emeritus pastor, the church pays the elder pastor 50~80% of his salary for his whole life. This rule encourages Korean pastors serve one church faithfully at all possible. I think that this rule is very useful for church growth."

4. In most of the situations, the Emeritus title was seen to be purely honorary and conveyed no privileges of continued leadership and influence over church life and policy. One pastor wrote, "Thus far, only deacons and two former pastors. The title is honorary and when you have a servant who has served for decades, it is the church's way of saying thank you for your commitment to the Lord and the church. Due to the elderly status, the person does nothing thereafter and gets nothing other than the title." One congregation (FBC Lincoln Gardens, Somerset) does provide a monthly stipend to its Emeritus pastor even though he has no responsibilities.

5. In some cases, the Pastor Emeritus was given opportunities to preach, sit on the platform, offer prayers during service, and provide guidance on church matters. Paul McKay, an Emeritus Pastor at Margate Community Church, reports that although he no longer collects a salary from the church, when he preaches, he is given an honorarium. In addition, he does some hospital visitation. In general, he is seen as just a member of the church that he has been in for many decades. Another Emeritus Pastor, Jerry Fortunato, writes,

"We never took our membership out of the church. Therefore, we are still full members with all membership privileges, in addition, I will assist the Pastor in preaching when he is absent, serve as an advisor to him and the various Boards and to be available to the church....I will reimbursed only when I am preaching. The flexibility allows me to serve other churches when called upon."

Many of us have had the privilege of knowing and working with Dr. James Scott – an extraordinary pastor and denominational leader (on both the national and regional levels). Bethany Baptist Church in Newark made him Pastor Emeritus in 2000, when he retired. Bethany's Chairman of the Board of Deacons writes,

"Dr. Scott served as our pastor for over 37 years and provided enlightened spiritual leadership for our congregation. It was for that reason that the church elected to honor him with Emeritus status. There are no special privileges associated with the honor other than always being welcome to preach at Bethany, to offer advice and counsel when he feels inclined to do so and to always have our best wishes for his health and well being."

Dr. John Hayward is a Pastor Emeritus at FBC, New Brunswick. He describes the process that gave him this status and how he lives out the position:

"I see the title as a token of the affection from a church I have served along side for 36 years. An Emeritus Pastor must have contributed greatly to the life of the church. He/she must have served a significant time with the congregation. Recognition must come from the governing board and then a vote by the church in annual session. In my circumstance I absented myself from these sessions. I allowed the transition to be clarified by my complete absence from church for several months. I was asked by the pastor to preach that Easter which signaled my return to church life. Responsibilities: Represent the church in church and community usually as Dr. Marquez's fill in. Be a pastor to pastor. Privileges: the right of a member to speak and to serve as pastor's colleague as a member of the team. Provide pastoral services only with the approval of pastor."

6. Successful experiences with awarding people Emeritus status require good relationships between those honored and those currently serving the church. John Hayward observes:

“My first reaction is that it is an honor that comes to the honorable. In all the instances I recall each retiring pastor had considerable time with his/her people. There was a track record so to speak. All of the Emeritus pastors I have in mind were acquainted with their successors. At First Baptist New Brunswick Dr. Gilman was followed by Dr. Shearer, Dr. Ramos by Dr. Marquez and myself by Dr. Marquez. In each situation there was mutual trust, sharing, and personal knowledge.”

Similarly, Rodger Harris, pastor at Mt. Hermon in Irvington, writes:

“Rev Jeremiah Ford serves as Pastor Emeritus but its a position of honor and holds no weight as for pastoral power. We have a great relationship... I believe we have been so successful because the transition of roles is one that have empowered both of and church. He gladly defers to me as his pastor and does so publicly. I always give opportunity to allow him to express himself.”

7. A few respondents issued cautions in granting Emeritus status too soon to lay leaders who still have the capacity to be active in service. One church gave someone a Deacon Emeritus title with no responsibilities after he became too ill to attend services regularly, in order to honor many years of faithful service. An REMC colleague of mine shares that it is possible for Emeritus Deacons, for example, to misunderstand the nature of the honor: “I had active deacons for whom it had become seen as an entitlement for service and a position of perpetual authority, not an honor.” And Rodger Harris warns: “I believe the trouble begins when the pastor emeritus forces himself on the new pastor. The new pastor must be able to listen and validate the history of the church and the former pastor.”

Donald Shaner has had lots of experience in this area. Here is his reflection:

“In my dealing with this issue I have suggested that an eligible pastor would (1) be entering into retirement, although not becoming inactive; (2) have had a tenure at the church of considerable length, perhaps at least 15 years; and (3) have had a notable ministry that the church wishes to recognize... Finally, when I became pastor at Calvary, Clifton, I was able to lead the church to electing my friend, Bill Webb, as pastor emeritus after 18 years of ministry. It was a good arrangement. His name was on the bulletin along with the senior and associate pastors, and he graciously shared in some weddings and funerals as appropriate, and he preached on some occasions. I know that I could have worked with Bill without the title, but he deserved it, and the congregation seemed very happy with it. On a Sunday morning we had a special presentation of a certificate and he preached.”

### **Final Thoughts and Suggestions**

There are a significant number of churches that have honored loved and respected Pastors and Deacons by granting them Emeritus status. After listening to all the voices that have participated in this regional conversation, here are some of my thoughts and reflections. Remember that the region does not have a policy on the Emeritus issue; please consider these points my personal contribution to the conversation. Each Baptist church is autonomous and has the right to create its own policies and practices.

In my own ministry, I have had a very positive experience with a Pastor Emeritus when I served at FBC Lincoln, Nebraska. In fact, I initiated the honoring of the pastor, and we were both installed during the same service. From the start, Rev. Wes Hustad was a steadfast supporter of my ministry – as was his wife, Vivian. Although the position was honorary (and unpaid), he visited members for me and participated in the worship service (Scripture reading/prayers) until he was physically unable to do so. We became friends as well as colleagues. Serving in this matter helped him to feel needed in retirement, and I appreciated his wisdom and knowledge of the church's history. As Executive Minister here in New Jersey, I initiated the practice of having Past Presidents of our region's Council invited to our Executive Committee meetings; in essence, they are Emeritus. Although they do not have "a vote," our Executive Committee has benefited from their wisdom and practical advice.

My counsel moving forward includes:

- I would recommend that a church create and approve a written policy regarding the awarding of Emeritus Status to Pastors and/or Deacons and other lay leaders before conveying the honor on people. The policy should state the criteria necessary for the position (years of service, retirement, above reproach service record) and privileges and responsibilities conferred by the honor.
- If a church already has an Emeritus Pastor or Lay Leader but no written policy or statement of understanding, I would encourage the church and honored leader to create one that accurately describes the relationship.
- The written policy should be very brief – one page (or even just one or two paragraphs) should do. It does not need to be included in the church's constitution or by-laws. At the end of this report, I have added both a Pastor Emeritus Ministry Description and Service of Installation from First Baptist Church of Colorado Springs, CO (downloaded from the ABCUSA Ministers Council website: <http://www.ministerscouncil.com/OnLineManual/PastorEmeritusInfo.aspx>)
- If your church does compose a policy statement on the Emeritus issue, please send a copy to the ABCNJ region office so that we can share the results of your work with others.
- American Baptist Emeritus Pastors should conduct themselves in accordance with the principles of our denomination's Code of Ethics. Emeritus Pastors should support the work of the current pastor and accept that it is an honorary position and not a position of continuing authority or power.
- Honoring Deacons and other lay leaders as Emeritus is more difficult to address. Since most of our churches impose term limits on service, calculating when a lay leader has "retired" from active service is problematic. Regardless of whether a church has deacons,

deaconesses or trustees “for life” or by term, I would encourage congregations to hold off bestowing Emeritus honors until it is clear the lay person can no longer (for health or age reasons) be actively involved in the day to day administration of the church’s affairs.

I sincerely hope that this conversation and my report have helped to stimulate good reflection in churches around the region. Once again, thanks to everyone who contributed to this fascinating dialogue!

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lee B. Spitzer". The signature is written in a light gray or blue ink.

Rev. Dr. Lee B. Spitzer, ABCNJ Executive Minister and Senior Regional Pastor

## **Pastor Emeritus Ministry Description**

First Baptist Church of Colorado Springs

The position of “Pastor emeritus” is an honorary title, bestowed in retirement after years of distinguished pastoral service to the congregation. It is a sign of the love and affection the church has for one who has served it well, and who continues to demonstrate the potential for pastoral care. As an honorary position, it does not bring with it any monetary compensation, nor is it to be considered a regular ministry staff position. However, with the title comes a general understanding of the relationship between the Pastor Emeritus, the current Senior Pastor and staff, and the congregation as a whole. Some of these points follow.

The Pastor Emeritus shall:

1. Be able to represent the congregation in pastoral relationships, such as the conducting of funerals, weddings, baptisms, various forms of personal visitation, or denominational meetings, if the Pastor Emeritus wishes to do so. The performance of these pastoral duties generally would be at the request of members or others who have a longstanding relationship with the Pastor Emeritus, or at the request of the Senior Pastor, Executive Council, or Ministry Teams. In any case, it is expected that notification would be coordinated with the Senior Pastor. The Pastor Emeritus may receive monetary gifts or fees for the performance of pastoral duties at his own discretion.
2. Abide by the ABC-USA Ministers Council statement, “Ethics for Retiring Pastors and Those Who Replace Them.” This statement describes the need to negotiate ministry with the current pastor, and a process for mediation with the area Executive Minister.
3. Be free to worship with the congregation, and if requested by the Senior Pastor or Ministry Teams, may preach or participate in services. Preaching honorariums may be made available at the discretion of the congregation or its representatives.
4. Maintain a posture of support for the current leadership of the church. This would include refraining from public criticism or private conversations with church members that would reflect negatively on the church’s leadership or direction.
5. Abstain from positions of implied administrative authority within the church, such as serving in an elected capacity on the Executive Council or Ministry Teams.
6. Excuse himself from the regular life and ministry of the congregation in the event of personal conflict, at the formal request of the Senior Pastor, Executive Council, or Ministry Teams.

Adopted by the Executive Council February, 2006

## Service of Installation

Pastor Emeritus First Baptist Church of Colorado Springs

### **Dr. Robert A. Frykholm**

In grateful appreciation for his service  
to this congregation  
and the American Baptist Churches USA,  
by unanimous vote of the  
First Baptist Church of Colorado Springs,  
December 11, 2005.

In Thanks for Ministry

Dr. Michael Saylor

\* Litany of Installation

Rev. Desmond Hoffmeister

**Rev Hoffmeister:** *Dr. Frykholm, you have devoted your life to the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You have served the family of First Baptist Church and our denomination faithfully through the years.*

*We challenge you to continue to be an example of Christ in all you do and say. Remember the words of Jesus, "Whoever would lose their life for my sake will find it, and whoever would be the greatest among you, let them first be a servant of all." We call upon you to reaffirm your commitment to Christ and the Church.*

**Dr. Frykholm:** I reaffirm my ordination vows, believing with all my heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and accept the Holy Scriptures as inspired by God through the Holy Spirit. It is my sincere desire to continue to devote my life to the ministry of the Word, and to live my life in a way that will bring honor to my Lord.

**Rev. Hoffmeister (to the congregation):** *Do you, as the family of First Baptist Church, renew your commitment to work together with Dr. Frykholm so that more people will experience the saving grace of Jesus Christ? Will you be faithful in your service of Jesus Christ according to your abilities and opportunities?*

**Congregation:** *Yes, with God's help.*

**Dr. Frykholm (to the congregation):** I accept the invitation to be your Pastor Emeritus, and I now covenant with you that in the strength of our Lord Jesus Christ, I will live a holy life among you as an example and will faithfully attempt to bring glory and honor to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

**Congregation:** *In the name of Jesus, we as a congregation install you, Dr. Robert A. Frykholm, as Pastor Emeritus of First Baptist Church of Colorado Springs. May God bless our work together.*

Prayer of Dedication

Rev. Clint Walker

*Elected officers of the church and ordained clergy present are invited to join Dr. Frykholm and Rev. Walker at the front of the sanctuary for the prayer of dedication*

Presentation

To Bob and Marilyn Frykholm

Dr. Bruce Cook, Moderator;  
Mrs. Betty Lee Hill, Past Moderator