

GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER LAY PASTORS (VLP)

Introduction—In order to fulfill the North American Division (NAD) goal of planting new churches, additional personnel is needed and that can be partially met by using volunteers to assist regular pastoral teams. Additionally, due to the trend of assigning more churches to conference-employed pastors, volunteer lay pastors can perform a valuable service to the churches in the NAD. A volunteer lay pastor is an individual who has not been professionally trained for ministry, has not worked as a licensed or ordained/commissioned minister, and is not a ministerial retiree. These guidelines are provided so that the church in the NAD recognizes the valuable service of VLPs and, at the same time, follow denominational policies, laws, and regulations.

Role and Function of a VLP —1. *Purpose*: The purpose of the VLP program is to provide pastoral assistance to a church or company under the oversight of a designated supervising pastor.

2. *Focus*: The specific function of a VLP depends on the needs of the congregation or group where the VLP serves. In consultation with the supervising pastor, the VLP needs to focus on areas such as preaching, conducting the Lord's Supper, visitation, evangelism, planning, and overseeing other church meetings and programs.

3. *Teachings and practices*: The VLP needs to know and follow the teachings and practices of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This includes, but is not limited to, believing in and supporting the Fundamental Beliefs and following Seventh-day Adventist practices, such as faithful stewardship.

4. *Reports to supervising pastor*: The VLP reports to the supervising pastor. The supervising pastor will give leadership to the VLP by adhering to these guidelines, conference policies, and input from the conference ministerial secretary who is the conference coordinator of VLPs. Since the VLP is under the direction of the supervising pastor, the function and contact information for the supervising pastor needs to be communicated in bulletins, web listings, etc.

5. *Ordained elder*: The VLP must be an elected elder of the congregation (if it is a company or group, then of the sponsoring church). It is recommended that the VLP not serve as the head elder.

6. *Relationship to head elder and other elders*: The VLP functions under the direction of the supervising pastor and is an extension of the supervising pastor's ministry. In view of that relationship, the VLP needs to follow the policies and guidelines defining the relationship between pastor and elders. These policies and guidelines are stated in the *Church Manual* and amplified in the *Minister's Handbook* and *Elder's Handbook*.

7. *Limitations of role*: The VLP is not authorized to organize or disband churches, officiate (though may participate) in the ordination of elders, deacons, or deaconesses, or conduct counseling therapy. The VLP may participate in weddings, only as permitted by conference policy and applicable laws and regulations.

8. *Baptizing*: The VLP, who is also an ordained elder, may baptize as recommended by the supervising pastor and approved by the conference president, as stipulated in the *Church Manual*.

9. *Church Board*: As an elder, the VLP is a member of the Church Board. The pastor, according to the *Church Manual*, is the chair of the Board. The pastor has the authority to appoint an elder to serve as the chair and thus the supervising pastor may designate the VLP (who is an elder) to be board chair. The chairing of the Board by the VLP is at the sole discretion of the supervising pastor.

10. *Tithe, offerings, and reports:* The VLP will follow the denominational policies regarding the receiving of tithe and forwarding tithe and non-local offerings to the conference. The VLP will also work with the congregation to make certain reports, such as clerk and baptismal reports, are submitted to the conference.

11. *Not a Path to Ministry:* The VLP is a volunteer and recognizes that the VLP program is not a path to ministry. The path to ministry is outlined in NAD *Working Policy* and those wishing to enter full-time ministry need to follow it.

12. *No remuneration:* The VLP is not a conference employee and will not receive any compensation from the conference, congregation, or individuals for pastoral functions. The conference may arrange to reimburse the volunteer for travel and other approved expenses. Any such arrangements must be stated in the Condition of Volunteering form that will be signed by the conference and the VLP.

13. *Denominational policies:* The VLP needs to know appropriate policies and procedures (such as the *Church Manual*, *Minister's Handbook*, *Elder's Handbook*, and conference policies) and follow them.

Qualifications and Ethical conduct of a VLP—1. *Theological:* The VLP, under the leadership of the supervising pastor, will exercise great care to use resources that are in harmony with denominational teachings. This includes, but is not limited to, resources for sermons.

2. *Background check:* The VLP will undergo a background check as stipulated in the NAD *Working Policy*.

3. *Financial integrity:* The VLP will neither solicit nor accept financial gifts from members or visitors.

The Conference and the VLP—1. *Administrator of the plan:* The conference is the administrator of VLPs. It is the responsibility of the conference coordinator to explain the VLP program to the volunteer, the supervising pastor, and the congregation.

2. *Conference coordinator:* The ministerial secretary, or designee, is the conference coordinator for VLPs.

3. *Training and evaluation:* It is the responsibility of the conference coordinator of VLPs to provide training and resources to the VLPs and supervising pastors. Initially the VLP shall receive a minimum of 20 hours training and thereafter at least 20 hours of training each year. Additionally, the conference coordinator, in consultation with the supervising pastor and congregation, shall conduct an annual evaluation of the VLP. If needed, the evaluation may be conducted more frequently.

4. *Length of appointment:* The conference executive committee appoints a VLP for a period of one year. With input from the supervising pastor and conference ministerial secretary, the appointment may be renewed. Either party may terminate the agreement with notice to the other.

5. *Communicate with the congregation:* It is the responsibility of the conference, along with the supervising pastor, to explain the role of the VLP and make certain that the VLP is properly introduced to the congregation.

6. *Identification card:* The conference will provide a completed identification card for each VLP (template provided by NAD).

7. *Business card:* The conference will provide a business card template.

The Division and the VLP—1. *Provide guidelines:* The North American Division will provide and update, as needed, guidelines for the VLP program.

2. *Advisory Committee:* The Division will appoint a VLP advisory committee. The committee chair will be the division ministerial secretary; the secretary will be the division associate ministerial secretary who coordinates the VLP program.

3. *Resources:* The Division ministerial association will provide training resources, Condition of Volunteering form to be completed by the conference and the VLP, identification cards template for the conference to complete, and business card template.