

REGISTRATION OF ECCLESIASTICAL ENDORSING ORGANIZATIONS

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook establishes policy for registration of faith groups as ecclesiastical endorsing organizations by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This Handbook defines the requirements for registration as an ecclesiastical endorsing organization and procedures for obtaining such registration.
- 3. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VHA Directive 1111 (to be published).
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Office of Chaplain Service (301/110C) is responsible for the contents of this VHA Handbook.
- 5. DOCUMENTS RESCINDED:** None.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This document is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of September 2005.

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REGISTRATION OF ECCLESIASTICAL ENDORSING ORGANIZATIONS

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook defines the procedures for registering an ecclesiastical endorsing organization.

2. BACKGROUND

a. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for Chaplain (see Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook 5338.3, dated March 2, 1998) 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. Historically, VA has accepted endorsements from only those bodies (henceforth known as agents) designated by ecclesiastical endorsing organizations “recognized” by the Armed Forces Chaplain Board (AFCB). AFCB “recognizes” faith groups in accordance with criteria established in the Department of Defense (DOD) regulations. VA has never independently “recognized” ecclesiastical endorsing organizations. The DOD regulations provide that a group may only be “recognized” for the purpose of endorsing candidates for chaplaincy if it presents a candidate fully qualified for military chaplaincy; therefore, a religious faith group that wishes to provide chaplains only to VA is precluded from recognition. For such cases VA is establishing policy to independently register religious faith groups.

c. Appendix A lists religious faith groups that are, as of this date, recognized by the AFCB. For current information on recognized ecclesiastical endorsing organizations, and the individuals authorized by those organizations to issue endorsements, contact the VA National Chaplain Center at (757) 728-3180.

3. SCOPE

a. A religious faith group wishing to endorse applicants for VA Chaplaincy must obtain registration as an ecclesiastical endorsing organization in accordance with the requirements and procedures given in this Handbook. VA will accept endorsements signed by the agents designated by registered religious faith groups.

b. All religious faith groups recognized by the AFCB, as of the issue date of this Handbook, will automatically be registered contingent only upon receipt of certification by the group that it agrees to abide by all VA and VHA regulations, policies, and issuances on the qualification and endorsement of clergy for service as VA chaplains. Organizations recognized in the future by the AFCB may be registered with VA upon receipt of certification by the religious faith group that it agrees to abide by all VA and VHA regulations, policies, and issuances on the qualification and endorsement of clergy for service as VA chaplains.

c. A religious faith group that seeks registration with VA must apply to the VA National Chaplain Center on VA Form 10-0379, Ecclesiastical Endorsing Organization Verification/Reverification Information, (except for DOD-recognized groups which VA registers in accordance with subpar. 3b).

d. Every three years, each ecclesiastical endorsing organization registered with VA, but not recognized by DOD, shall provide written verification to the VA National Chaplain Center that it continues to meet the requirements of paragraph 5.

e. Registration of a religious faith group as an ecclesiastical endorsing organization is solely for the purpose of identifying clergy to meet the religious and spiritual needs of VA patients. Registration by VA does not imply any approval by VA of the theology or practices of a religious faith group, nor does it obligate VA to employ any members of the group. VA's mission to provide health care to veterans is always paramount, and VA reserves the right to restrict or prohibit any practices which it deems detrimental to the health or safety of patients.

4. DIRECTOR, CHAPLAIN SERVICE

a. The Director, Chaplain Service, VA National Chaplain Center, approves registration of religious faith groups as ecclesiastical endorsing organizations in accordance with the requirements in paragraph 5.

b. The Director, Chaplain Service may revoke VA registration of any ecclesiastical endorsing organization that no longer meets the requirements of paragraph 5. Before taking such action, the Director must give written notice to the ecclesiastical endorsing organization stating the reasons for the proposed revocation. The organization has 60 days to provide a written reply. This reply will be carefully considered in making a final decision.

5. REQUIREMENTS FOR REGISTRATION AS AN ECCLESIASTICAL ENDORSING ORGANIZATION

To become registered with VA as an ecclesiastical endorsing organization, a religious faith group must:

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

b. Possess ecclesiastical authority to both grant and withdraw initial and subsequent ecclesiastical endorsement.

c. Present an applicant for VA Chaplaincy who meets the qualification requirements in VHA Handbook 5338.3.

d. Be recognized by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) as a tax-exempt religious organization.

e. Provide to the VA National Chaplain Center the name, title, mailing address, and telephone number of the designated agent authorized to issue ecclesiastical endorsements to VA.

f. Agree to abide by all VA and VHA regulations, policies, and issuances on the qualification and endorsement of clergy for service as VA chaplains.

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

h. Submit a completed VA Form 10-0379, to the Director, Chaplain Service, along with the following documentation:

- (1) An explanation of the structure of the organization (copies of by-laws, constitution, etc.).
- (2) A copy of the membership requirements of the organization.
- (3) Documentation indicating the qualifications and requirements for membership in the clergy (education, licensing and ordination, professional experience).
- (4) Documentation of IRS status of the religious faith group.
- (5) The name, address, and telephone number of each person seeking endorsement for VA chaplaincy.

6. DEFINITIONS

a. **Ecclesiastical Endorsement.** Ecclesiastical endorsement is a written official statement, by the official national endorsing agent of the religious faith group, 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 perform the full range of ministry required in the VA pluralistic setting (see VHA Handbook 5338.3, subpar. 3a.(1)).

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

c. **Registered Ecclesiastical Endorsing Organization.** Registered ecclesiastical endorsing organization means a religious faith group that has been registered with VA in accordance with the policies given in this Handbook.

**RELIGIOUS FAITH GROUPS REGISTERED AS ECCLESIASTICAL
ENDORISING ORGANIZATIONS**

A

ADVENT CHRISTIAN GENERAL CONFERENCE
AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL ZION CHURCH
ALBANIAN ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF AMERICA
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF LUTHERAN CHURCHES, THE
AMERICAN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION
AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES IN THE USA
AMERICAN CARPATHO-RUSSIAN ORTHODOX GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES, THE
AMERICAN MISSIONARY FELLOWSHIP
AMERICAN MUSLIM ARMED FORCES & VETERANS AFFAIRS COUNCIL
ANGLICAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, THE
ANGLICAN EPISCOPAL DIOCESE SOUTH, INC.
ANGLICAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, THE
ANGLICAN RITE CATHOLIC CHURCH, THE MILITARY DIOCESE OF THE
ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA
APOSTOLIC CATHOLIC ORTHODOX CHURCH, THE
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD, GENERALCOUNCIL OF
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD, INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP
ASSOCIATE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
ASSOCIATE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, THE
ASSOCIATED GOSPEL CHURCHES
ASSOCIATION OF INTERNATIONAL GOSPEL ASSEMBLIES, INC.

B

BAPTIST BIBLE FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL
BAPTIST GENERAL CONFERENCE
BAPTIST MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
BEREAN FUNDAMENTAL CHURCH COUNCIL, INC.
BETHEL MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION, INC.
BIBLE CHURCHES CHAPLAINCY
BIBLE FELLOWSHIP CHURCH
BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
BRETHREN CHURCH, THE (Ashland, OH)
BUDDHIST CHURCHES OF AMERICA
BULGARIAN EASTERN ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF THE U.S.A., CANADA AND
AUSTRALIA

C

CAMELBACK BIBLE CHURCH
CEDAR MILL BIBLE CHURCH
CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS
CHAPLAINCY FULL GOSPEL CHURCHES, INC.
CHARISMATIC EPISCOPAL CHURCH, THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNION OF
CHINMAYA MISSION WEST
CHRIST COMMUNITY CHURCH
CHRIST-IMMANUEL MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION
CHRISTIAN AND MISSIONARY ALLIANCE, THE
CHRISTIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH U.S.A. (Old Catholic)
CHRISTIAN CHURCH (Disciples Of Christ)
CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA
CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND CHURCHES OF CHRIST
CHRISTIAN EVANGELICAL CHURCHES OF AMERICA, INC.
CHRISTIAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
CHRISTIAN SCIENCE
CHRIST'S CHURCH FELLOWSHIP
CHURCH OF CHRIST
CHURCH OF CHRIST (HOLINESS) U.S.A., THE
CHURCH OF GOD (Anderson, IN)
CHURCH OF GOD (Cleveland, TN)
CHURCH OF GOD (HOLINESS)
CHURCH OF GOD, GENERAL CONFERENCE
CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST, INC., THE
CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY, THE
CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS, THE
CHURCH OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST OF THE APOSTOLIC FAITH, INC.
CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD
CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN BRETHREN
CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE
CHURCH OF THE UNITED BRETHREN IN CHRIST
CHURCH ON THE ROCK, INTERNATIONAL
CHURCHES AND MINISTERS INTERNATIONAL, FELLOWSHIP OF
CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN CHRISTIAN UNION
CHURCHES OF GOD, GENERAL CONFERENCE
COLUMBIA BIBLE CHURCH
COMMUNITY CHURCH OF GREENWOOD, INC.
CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN AMERICAN SAMOA, THE
CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCHES, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
CONGREGATIONAL METHODIST CHURCH, THE
CONSERVATIVE BAPTIST OF AMERICA
CONSERVATIVE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE
CONSERVATIVE LUTHERAN ASSOCIATION

CONTINENTAL BAPTIST CHURCHES
CONVENTION OF ORIGINAL FREE WILL BAPTIST
COOPERATIVE BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP, INC.
CORAL RIDGE BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP
CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, THE
CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, THE

E

ELIM FELLOWSHIP
EPISCOPAL CHURCH, THE
EPISCOPAL MISSIONARY CHURCH, THE
EPISCOPAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA
EVANGEL FELLOWSHIP OF MINISTERS AND CHURCHES
EVANGELICAL CHURCH ALLIANCE
EVANGELICAL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
EVANGELICAL CONGREGATIONS & MINISTERS, ASSOCIATION OF
EVANGELICAL COVENANT CHURCH, THE
EVANGELICAL EPISCOPAL CHURCHES, THE COMMUNION OF
EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH OF AMERICA
EVANGELICAL FRIENDS INTERNATIONAL
EVANGELICAL GOSPEL ASSEMBLIES MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL, INC.,
ASSOCIATION OF
EVANGELICAL METHODIST CHURCH, THE
EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

F

FAITH CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL CHURCH
FEDERATED ORTHODOX CATHOLIC CHURCHES UNITED SACRAMENTALLY
FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST, THE
FREE LUTHERAN CONGREGATIONS, ASSOCIATION OF
FREE METHODIST CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA
FREE WILL BAPTISTS, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
FULL FAITH CHURCH OF LOVE
FULL GOSPEL FELLOWSHIP OF CHURCHES AND MINISTERS INTERNATIONAL
FULL GOSPEL PENTECOSTAL ASSOCIATION, THE
FUNDAMENTAL BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP OF AMERICA
FUNDAMENTAL METHODIST

G

GENERAL BAPTIST, GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF
GENERAL CHURCH OF THE NEW JERUSALEM, THE
GLOBAL NETWORK OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES

GRACE BRETHREN CHURCHES, NATIONAL FELLOWSHIP OF
GRACE GOSPEL FELLOWSHIP
GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA
GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF VASILOUPOLIS

H

HOLY CATHOLIC (Anglican Rite), THE
HOLY SPIRIT ASSOCIATION FOR THE UNIFICATION OF WORLD CHRISTIANITY

I

IFCA INTERNATIONAL
IGLESIA METODISTA DE PUERTO RICO
INDEPENDENT CATHOLIC CHURCH INTERNATIONAL, THE
INDEPENDENT CHURCHES AFFILIATED
INDEPENDENT METHODISTS, THE ASSOCIATION OF
INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH
INTERNATIONAL CHURCH OF THE FOURSQUARE GOSPEL
INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION OF FAITH MINISTRIES, INC.
INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF COMMUNITY CHURCHES
INTERNATIONAL MINISTERIAL FELLOWSHIP
INTERNATIONAL PENTECOSTAL HOLINESS CHURCH
ISLAMIC SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

J

JEWISH CHAPLAINS COUNCIL

K

KINGSWAY FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL
KOREAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF AMERICA
KOREAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, THE
KOREAN-AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

L

LIBERAL CATHOLIC CHURCH
LIBERTY BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP
LIBERTY BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP FOR CHURCH PLANTING, INC.
LIBERTY FELLOWSHIP OF CHURCHES AND MINISTERS, INC.
LUTHERAN CHURCH (Missouri Synod), THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, EVANGELICAL

M

MILITARY DIOCESE FOR THE PHILIPPINE INDEPENDENT CATHOLIC CHURCH, INC.
MISSIONARY CHURCH, INC.
MORAVIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

N

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EVANGELICALS
NATIONAL BAPTIST CONVENTION OF AMERICA, INC.
NATIONAL BAPTIST CONVENTION, U.S.A., INC.
NATIONAL MISSIONARY BAPTIST CONVENTION OF AMERICA
NEW TESTAMENT ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT BAPTIST CHURCHES
NORTH AMERICAN BAPTIST CONFERENCE

O

OLD HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH, THE
OPEN BIBLE STANDARD CHURCHES, INC.
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA, THE
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, THE

P

PENTECOSTAL ASSEMBLIES OF THE WORLD, INC.
PENTECOSTAL CHURCH OF GOD, INC.
PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES OF THE APOSTOLIC FAITH ASSOCIATION, INC.
PHILIPPINE INDEPENDENT CATHOLIC CHURCH
PLYMOUTH BRETHREN
POLISH NATIONAL CATHOLIC CHURCH OF AMERICA
PRESBYTERIAN & REFORMED JOINT COMMISSION ON CHAPLAINS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.), THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, THE
PRESBYTERIAN COUNCIL FOR CHAPLAINS & MILITARY PERSONNEL
PRIMITIVE METHODIST CHURCH IN THE U.S.A., THE
PROGRESSIVE NATIONAL BAPTIST CONVENTION, INC.

R

RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY (CONSERVATIVE), THE
RABBINICAL COUNCIL OF AMERICA (ORTHODOX)
REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA
REFORMED EPISCOPAL CHURCH
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA
REGULAR BAPTIST CHURCHES, GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF

REORGANIZED CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
RHEMA MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION
ROCK MINISTERIAL FELLOWSHIP
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, THE
ROMANO BYZANTINE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

S

SALVATION ARMY, THE
SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE U.S.A. AND CANADA
SERIAN EASTERN ORTHODOX EXARCHATE IN AMERICA
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS UNITED STATES, GENERAL CONFERENCE
SEVENTH-DAY BAPTISTS GENERAL CONFERENCE U.S.A. AND CANADA
SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION
SOUTHERN METHODIST CHURCH, THE
SOVEREIGN GRACE BAPTIST ASSOCIATION OF CHURCHES, THE
ST. ANDREWS EVANGELICAL CHURCH
STANDING CONFERENCE OF CANONICAL ORTHODOX BISHOPS
SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH, THE
SYRIAN EASTERN ORTHODOX EXARCHATE IN AMERICA

T

TRINITY FULL GOSPEL FELLOWSHIP

U

UKRANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
UKRANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE U.S.A.
UNION OF MESSIANIC JEWISH CONGREGATIONS
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION, THE
UNITED CATHOLIC CHURCH OF AMERICA
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
UNITED CHURCH OF RELIGIOUS SCIENCES
UNITED EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA
UNITED EVANGELICAL CHURCHES
UNITED FULL GOSPEL CHURCH
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, THE
UNITED PENTECOSTAL CHURCH INTERNATIONAL
UNITED PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES OF CHRIST, THE
UNITY CHURCHES, ASSOCIATION OF

V

VICTORY FELLOWSHIP OF CHURCHES

W

WESLEYAN CHURCH, THE
WESTSIDE CHRISTIAN FAMILY CHAPEL
WOODFIELD CHURCH, THE
WORLD BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP, INC.
WORLD COUNCIL OF INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN CHURCHES, THE