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Ordination Paper

In Partial Fulfillment of the Ordination Requirements of the American Baptist Churches

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23       **A. Biographical Sketch and Call to Ministry**

24           In October of 1995, five months before I was born, my father was called to pastor Brewster  
25 Baptist Church on Cape Cod. Beginning with the baby shower the church threw for my mother  
26 that fall, Brewster Baptist would be my church home and the place I learned about Jesus for the  
27 next eighteen years. In Brewster, a small tourist town full of vacation homes, a town which did not  
28 have a supermarket or even a stoplight, church was central to the community and since I was a  
29 pastor's kid in the parsonage next door, church was a constant part of my life.

30           While I cannot pinpoint a particular moment when I became a Christian, when I was ten  
31 years old, my older brother was getting baptized and I wanted to be baptized as well. My theology  
32 was not well-developed at that time, but I did feel the same sense of right and wrong in my  
33 conscience that I can now recognize as the Holy Spirit at work in me, a reliable sign of faith. At  
34 that age, I had begun to believe in Jesus as my savior. In the years shortly after this, I moved from  
35 Sunday School into the church youth group and began serving in the media booth where I clicked  
36 through the PowerPoint slides during worship.

37           In those formative years, my parents always set a strong example of Christian living,  
38 showing my brother and me how to pray, teaching us the scriptures, and practicing what they  
39 preached. As I have grown older and learned more about the many ways people are raised, I am  
40 especially grateful to have had such wonderful Christian parents. It is easy to believe that Jesus  
41 loves you when your parents set an example of that love and tell you about Jesus all the time. My  
42 family was the primary means God used to lead me to faith.

43           As a teenager I attended Nauset Regional High School, a public school of about 1,000  
44 students. While few students or teachers were explicitly anti-Christian, the vast majority of people  
45 there were apathetic towards Christianity; Jesus simply did not matter to them. In high school I

46 began to learn that following Jesus sometimes meant doing something different from everyone  
47 else, and to learn how to explain my faith to others.

48         After graduating from Nauset, I went to Harvard College. Coming from a small town and  
49 a rural, public school I had no idea what I was getting into there. The Harvard students were smart,  
50 they were successful, most of them were very rich or were going to become very rich soon after  
51 they graduated, and they were in the prime of life, 20 years old, they had everything going for  
52 them. Yet they were not happy. They were miserable. They worried all the time about their future  
53 and their friends and their money and their status. Many were anxious or depressed. Many got  
54 drunk on the weekends and on the weekdays. There was a suicide most semesters. I had no  
55 expected Harvard to be like this and at times it was easy to fall into that same culture of worry and  
56 obsessive striving.

57         After an unsatisfying freshman fall at the Memorial Church on campus which had  
58 incredible music but little community and even less of the Bible, I began attending Somerville  
59 Community Baptist Church. It was just over a mile from my dorm and the pastor, Rev. David Lee,  
60 was a family friend. The church was small, probably around 60 people on a Sunday, and there  
61 were no other Harvard students there. The congregation welcomed me like family and unlike at  
62 school, no one there cared about my grades, my future career prospects, or anything like that. The  
63 congregation welcomed me simply as a brother in Christ.

64         I distinctly remember one Sunday in that very snowy winter of 2014-15 when I had trudged  
65 through almost a foot of powder only to find that there was, of course, no worship. I had not yet  
66 gotten on the email list so I had not heard about the closure. But there was pastor David and his  
67 wife Mina at the church, just in case anyone, perhaps an absent-minded college student, tried to

68 attend worship in a blizzard. We talked, David prayed for me, and I walked back to campus. That  
69 is what the Somerville church was like and that is what all churches should be like.

70         What struck me most about the people at Somerville Community Baptist was their joy. In  
71 the world's eyes these people were much worse off than Harvard students. Many of these people  
72 had significant health issues or were nearing the end of their lives, many were poor, many had  
73 trouble speaking English. Yet it was clear that these people were happier than Harvard students.  
74 They had something the Harvard students did not, Jesus Christ.

75         As I spent those next four years at Harvard, I came to understand that following Jesus  
76 means not following the normal ways of this world. I studied philosophy and the classics, wrestling  
77 with the big questions of life and learning Ancient Greek so I could read my New Testament. I  
78 found myself more and more convinced of the truth of Christianity and felt a need to live out my  
79 faith more seriously. At this time I was also involved in a Christian fellowship on campus as well  
80 as writing for the school's Christian journal, the Harvard Ichthus.

81         As I entered my senior year, I began to think more seriously about what I would do with  
82 my life. Up to this point I had had no definite career plans. I had always considered going into the  
83 ministry, as I imagine many people consider doing whatever job their parents have. And since my  
84 father, my grandfather, and two great-grandfathers all served as pastors, ministry seemed like a  
85 natural fit, though my father was always careful not to push me in that direction. Since he had  
86 grown up in a similar situation, he understood the pressures and expectations on the son of a pastor.  
87 Despite my interest, I felt that I needed to spend more time serving the church and more time  
88 maturing before I could commit to the ministry.

89         I had loved my poetry classes in college and had an interest in teaching so I pursued a  
90 Master of Fine Arts in Poetry at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore after graduation. My

91 responsibilities as a graduate student and instructor were quite small so I was free to make serving  
92 my church a top priority. The church was called the Village and it met in what had once been the  
93 Hampden Baptist Church, a beautiful but decaying stone building in a gentrifying neighborhood.  
94 The church was only 10 years old and many members only stayed briefly as it primarily attracted  
95 students and young professionals in the city for just a few years.

96         At the Village, I led a small group Bible study, taught Sunday School, and helped with the  
97 building. Serving the church was fulfilling and my gifts were confirmed by the encouragement and  
98 mentoring of others. In the spring of my second year in Baltimore, covid hit and I moved back to  
99 Cape Cod as everything became remote. I graduated that spring with my MFA, but served as a  
100 lecturer for Johns Hopkins the following academic year remotely. My small group continued to  
101 meet over zoom as did a ministry apprenticeship program with my pastor. At the same time, I  
102 resumed attending Brewster Baptist, where I filmed the live stream and led a young adult Bible  
103 study. With so much else canceled, I had plenty of time for church.

104         After I moved back home, I learned that the upper-level humanities teacher at the local  
105 Christian school, Trinity Christian Academy, had retired when his physician told him he should  
106 not teach in person during the pandemic. Providentially, the school discovered it needed a teacher  
107 just a few weeks before the school year which was also when I had just officially decided not to  
108 return to Baltimore and to look for more work on Cape. The timing was perfect. That year, while  
109 teaching remotely for Johns Hopkins, I also taught high school in person.

110         Every day I led devotions for my 9th and 10th graders. Every day I taught the Bible for the  
111 11th and 12th graders. Every day I taught World History and English from a Christian perspective.  
112 Every day I was in a workplace centered on Christ. I loved it. I loved talking about Jesus, loved  
113 teaching, and loved helping to create a Christian community. Ministry seemed more and more to

114 be my call. But as much as I loved the job, it paid me less than my students made at Stop and Shop  
115 and I was living in my parents' basement.

116 That winter, I thought hard about what I wanted to do and talked to many people about  
117 different options. I applied to seminary, but also to other teaching jobs and considered staying at  
118 Trinity. Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary offered me a significant scholarship and after  
119 much prayer I decided to turn down a job offer and begin studying for full time pastoral ministry  
120 so that I could spend my time doing what I loved and what was most important. Before I could  
121 decline the job offer, though, the next morning I received an email that the offer was revoked; the  
122 teacher who they thought was leaving, would be staying and they had no spot for me. God had  
123 made it very clear what I was supposed to do. In the fall of 2021, I began studying for a Master of  
124 Divinity degree at Gordon Conwell and intended to serve in pastoral ministry here in New  
125 England.

126 In the spring of 2022, after I received my license to preach, I was put on pulpit supply and  
127 preached eight Sundays at the First Baptist Church of Mansfield. On my third Sunday there, I  
128 brought along another seminary student, Marci, to play the piano. We soon began dating and got  
129 married that summer exactly six months after we first went to Mansfield together. That summer  
130 Mansfield also offered me the position of pastor. Since it was a part time position, I could balance  
131 this pastorate with seminary studies. I began as pastor there in October of 2022 and Marci and I  
132 have had a wonderful time serving that church. This experience has given me both internal and  
133 external confirmation of my calling as a pastor. After I graduate from seminary in May of 2024, I  
134 have been called to a full-time pastorate at the First Baptist Church of Manchester, New  
135 Hampshire.

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137 **B. Theological Statement**

138 **1. God**

139 God is the creator and sustainer of all things.<sup>1</sup> He exists in three equal persons, the Father,  
140 the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three are God and all three are one. This is what we mean by the  
141 trinity.

142 God is outside of time; God existed before God created the universe.<sup>2</sup> God is beyond what  
143 we can understand, but God seeks to make himself known to us.<sup>3</sup> God is just, true, merciful,  
144 gracious, and slow to anger.<sup>4</sup> God's attributes do not contradict or oppose each other, but exist in  
145 harmony. His justice in no way goes against his mercy. God is holy and God is love.<sup>5</sup> This harmony  
146 between all God's treat is called divine simplicity.

147 God the Father is transcendent; he exists outside of his creation and intervenes in creation.  
148 The Father is omnipotent. Whatever he wills, he does.<sup>6</sup> The Father is sovereign. Whatever happens  
149 in the universe is under God's control. While many things in creation are not desired by God, for  
150 example, God does not desire murder or any other sin, whatever happens has been permitted by  
151 God. The Father is omniscient.<sup>7</sup> He knows all things, past, present, and future. Even though God  
152 knows what we will do before we do it, this does not mean we are not making a free choice. Just  
153 as knowing what a person chose in the past does not mean that person was not free to do otherwise,  
154 so too God's knowledge of our future choices does not mean we are not free to do otherwise. The

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:1

<sup>2</sup> Colossians 1:17

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 55:8

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 34:6-7

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 4:8

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 115:3

<sup>7</sup> Proverbs 15:3

155 Father is omnipresent.<sup>8</sup> Wherever we go in his creation, he is there. There is no place where we  
156 can be fully removed from God's presence.

157 The Father loves his creation, loves mankind, and loves each of us. The Father seeks to be  
158 known by each of us. He does this through his Son and through the Holy Spirit.

## 159 **2. Jesus Christ**

160 God the Son is the perfect image of God the Father.<sup>9</sup> While the Father transcends creation,  
161 the Son exists within creation expressing what the Father is like. Though the Son is in creation,  
162 the Son was not created. Rather the Son existed before creation. The Son is begotten by the Father,  
163 not made. The term begotten is used because the Son is not another created being who was made,  
164 but an uncreated being who always existed with the Father.<sup>10</sup> The Son took part in creation and  
165 man was made according to his image.

166 For our sake, the Son was sent by the Father to save us from sin and death.<sup>11</sup> The Son took  
167 on flesh in the person of Jesus. He is fully man and fully God. He was born of the virgin Mary in  
168 Bethlehem. He performed many miracles and declared himself to be the Son of God in fulfillment  
169 of the scriptures. He lived a sinless life and set an example of how we all should live. He suffered  
170 unjustly on the cross and took the punishment we all should have received for our sins. He died.  
171 On the third day, he came back to life, proving his divinity and foreshadowing our own  
172 resurrection. Jesus showed himself to many people, alive and in a resurrected body, until he  
173 ascended into heaven.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Psalm 139:7

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 1:3

<sup>10</sup> John 1:1

<sup>11</sup> John 3:16

<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:6; Acts 1:9



174 All these things were predicted by the Old Testament and recorded by the New Testament.  
175 Jesus is the promised messiah, also called the Christ, the Son of Man, the Son of David, and many  
176 other titles.

177 Before he ascended, Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission.<sup>13</sup> He sent them to teach  
178 all the nations to do what he had commanded them. This is the mission of the Church. Jesus  
179 empowered the disciples to do this by sending them the Holy Spirit and by promising to be with  
180 them until the end of the world when Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead.

### 181 **3. Holy Spirit**

182 God the Holy Spirit is not transcendent like the Father, nor a flesh and blood human being  
183 like Jesus, but a spirit who directs and comforts us.<sup>14</sup> The Holy Spirit leads us on the right path as  
184 Christians, sometimes through a feeling, a sense of right and wrong, sometimes through dreams,  
185 and sometimes we hear from the Spirit directly as he tells us what to do. The Holy Spirit is also  
186 the Comforter who while Jesus is physically absent from us, gives us God's peace and reminds us  
187 of his love. The Holy Spirit enables us to live holy lives and to fulfill the mission of the Church  
188 through both directing us towards the right actions and comforting us in our struggles.

### 189 **4. Humanity**

190 Humans are finite, created beings made according to the image of God.<sup>15</sup> By created we  
191 mean that unlike God, we are dependent on others for our existence. By finite we mean that unlike  
192 God we are limited in our knowledge, in our power, and in all our abilities. By the image of God,  
193 we mean that like God, we are able to choose what we do and our actions can reflect God's

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<sup>13</sup> Matthew 28:18-20

<sup>14</sup> John 16:7-14

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 1:27

194 character. For example, a merciful human is an image of God's mercy. The image of God gives  
195 every human inherent value, and the image of God is perfectly expressed in his son Jesus Christ.

196 Human beings were made by God to have dominion over his creation<sup>16</sup> and to care for it  
197 as Adam did for the garden of Eden. To that end and because it was not good for man to be alone,  
198 God made woman to help man in this mission.<sup>17</sup> Taken from Adam's side, Eve was Adam's equal  
199 and they were commanded to multiply and fill the earth. From the beginning before humans sinned,  
200 God created both man and woman. He made them both in his image and so both of equal worth.  
201 From the beginning, each had a different role and God joined them in marriage.

202 Humanity was made without flaws but was tempted by the devil and sinned. Sin has broken  
203 humanity. Our desires, our thoughts, our character, our physical bodies no longer work as God  
204 intended and on their own, they lead us further and further away from God.<sup>18</sup> We call the  
205 brokenness caused by sin being fallen. We have all fallen from the flawless original design God  
206 had for humanity.

## 207 **5. Salvation**

208 However, God loves us and has provided a means for us to be restored from our fallen  
209 state. Through the cross, Jesus took the punishment we deserved for our sin. If we believe in him,  
210 we will be saved from the ultimate consequences of our sin; God will give us eternal life in heaven  
211 instead of death in hell. Also in this life now instead of growing farther and farther from God, God  
212 will sanctify us and help us to live, think, and feel as he intended, thus restoring his image in us  
213 which was distorted when we first sinned. God's salvation restores us to right relationship with  
214 him. This is in the individual aspect of salvation.

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<sup>16</sup> Genesis 1:28

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 2:28

<sup>18</sup> Romans 5:12

215            Salvation also has corporate and universal aspects. Through the cross, Jesus has not only  
 216 reconciled us individually to God, but also corporately reconciled all who believe to another in the  
 217 Church.<sup>19</sup> Although the kingdoms and families of this world are broken by sin, in the Church God  
 218 has created a new kingdom and a new family for all who believe. Universally, sin has broken not  
 219 only humans, but all of creation.<sup>20</sup> God will not only save our souls individually and the church  
 220 collectively, but the created world as well which will be restored in the fullness of time.<sup>21</sup>

## 221            **6. Scripture**

222            The Bible is the Word of God. The entire Bible is divinely inspired and is essential to our  
 223 lives as Christians.<sup>22</sup> The Bible is God's message to us telling us what God is like. Jesus is the  
 224 perfect image of God and the Bible tells us all about Jesus and how we can have salvation through  
 225 him. The Bible is at the center of our Christian life. As individuals, the Bible is our guide to  
 226 everyday life and is at the center of our devotional lives. As local churches, the Bible is the  
 227 authority to which we appeal in matters of practice and doctrine, and it is central to worship where  
 228 we hear the scriptures proclaimed and explained. As members of the global Church stretching  
 229 through many nations and the historic Church stretching through thousands of years, the Bible  
 230 keeps us centered on Jesus no matter our time or place.

## 231            **7. The Church (and its role in society and the world)**

232            The Church is the family of all who have been adopted by God through faith in Jesus.<sup>23</sup>  
 233 The Church is an invisible community of all believers throughout history and across the globe, not

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<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 2:14-16

<sup>20</sup> Romans 8:19-23

<sup>21</sup> Isaiah 11:6-9

<sup>22</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16

<sup>23</sup> Ephesians 1:5

234 a single, human institution. The Church is made visible in individual, local churches where  
235 believers gather to live together according to Jesus' teachings.

236         The role of the Church is to fulfill the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples  
237 of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and  
238 teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."<sup>24</sup> As the Church we are to go into  
239 the world and lead all of the peoples of this world follow Jesus. We are to make disciples and bring  
240 all the nations to faith in Christ. We are to baptize them and bring them fully into the Church  
241 community as equal members with us. We are to teach them to obey Jesus and show them how to  
242 live like Jesus lived.

243         By making disciples who obey all that Jesus taught, the Church changes the world.  
244 Disciples of Jesus live like Jesus who "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed  
245 by the devil, for God was with him."<sup>25</sup> Disciples of Jesus do good wherever they go in every part  
246 of life and society. In turn, Christians promote justice, grace, hope, goodness, and love in the home,  
247 in business, in government, in the arts, and in every place where they go, but we must not confuse  
248 this secondary effect of the Church's mission with its primary mission. The Church exists primarily  
249 to make obedient disciples of Jesus. These disciples then do good wherever they go. It is by  
250 fulfilling her primary mission of making disciples that the Church changes the world for the better.

251         Nevertheless, the relationship between the Church in the world is always one of  
252 opposition.<sup>26</sup> The Church is in this world but not of it.<sup>27</sup> The values Jesus taught and which the  
253 Church seeks to follow will always be out of step with the world around us. We are pilgrims and  
254 have no true home here on earth. Although the Church is called to help and be a blessing to the

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<sup>24</sup> Matthew 28:18-20

<sup>25</sup> Acts 10:38

<sup>26</sup> 2 Timothy 3:12

<sup>27</sup> John 17:14-18

255 world, we should expect opposition and even persecution from the world around us because that  
256 is what happened to Jesus, whose example we follow.

257         In the world today, the Church finds itself more and more in conflict with the world outside  
258 of it. The Church itself is also changing: in the global West we are smaller and weaker than we  
259 have been in a long time, while in the global East and South the Church is growing in unexpected  
260 ways. Today as fewer and fewer Americans faithfully follow Jesus or even call themselves  
261 Christian, the church's role in society is especially clear: We must lead others to saving faith in  
262 Jesus and make obedient disciples of Jesus.

### 263                 **8. The Ordinances (Baptism and the Lord's Supper)**

264         Jesus established two ordinances for his followers: baptism and communion. Both  
265 ordinances are outward signs of inward realities. Like wedding rings, the ordinance are public  
266 symbols of how a person feels and what a person has done on the inside. Like wedding rings, the  
267 ordinances have no special power in themselves, they merely represent something extremely  
268 special and powerful.

269         Baptism marks the entrance of a person into the church. It is a public recognition by the  
270 church and the person baptized that he or she believes in Jesus for salvation.<sup>28</sup> Baptism should be  
271 done when a person says they believe in Jesus and the local church believes that person is speaking  
272 truly. Baptism is done by fully immersing a person under water in the name of the Father and the  
273 Son and the Holy Spirit. Baptism is a public, outward symbol of the baptized person's saving faith.  
274 In baptism, the local church and the individual testify to each other and to the world, that this  
275 person is a Christian. This doctrine of believer's baptism is at the heart of our Baptist heritage and  
276 was at the root of our separation from other church bodies.

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<sup>28</sup> Acts 16:31-33

277 Communion marks our unity in Christ through the Church. In communion we reenact the  
278 Last Supper.<sup>29</sup> Like the disciples, we share in the bread and the cup which symbolize the body and  
279 the blood of Jesus. In taking communion we acknowledge that Jesus gave up his body for us, that  
280 he was broken for our sins, and we acknowledge that his blood has brought us into a new covenant,  
281 into a new relationship with God. While baptism marks our first entrance into the Church,  
282 communion marks our continuing participation in the Church. When we take communion, we  
283 reaffirm what we first affirmed at our baptism, that we believe in Jesus for our salvation.

284 Just as baptism is only be done when the church believes the person being baptized is a  
285 genuine Christian, so too the local church only gives communion to those the church believes are  
286 genuine Christians. The scriptures warn us that taking communion lightly and without proper  
287 belief is dangerous.<sup>30</sup> The local church does not share communion with someone who does not  
288 believe in Jesus or with someone whose severe, ongoing, unrepented sins call into question the  
289 genuineness of their faith.<sup>31</sup> Limitations on who shares in communion is an essential part of church  
290 discipline.<sup>32</sup>

## 291 **9. The Candidate's attitude toward the American Baptist Churches of the** 292 **United States of America, its ecumenical witness, and Code of Ethics**

293 Among Baptists, the local church has sole authority over itself and the members of a local  
294 church have authority over their own church. This is called congregational polity. The members  
295 of a particular congregation ultimately decide how that church should be run and what it should  
296 do, as opposed to a pastor, a council of elders, or a bishop having that final authority. For the sake  
297 of accomplishing the mission of the Church, individual local churches covenant together. Churches

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<sup>29</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

<sup>30</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:29

<sup>31</sup> James 2:18

<sup>32</sup> Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

298 cooperate locally at the regional and state level, nationally through the ABCUSA, and globally  
299 with other like-minded churches.

300         The ABCUSA is a denomination that coordinates between historically linked and like-  
301 minded Baptist churches in the United States. ABCUSA provides a way for local churches to  
302 partake in the larger mission of the church through regional, national, and global missions  
303 programs. ABCUSA also helps the local church fulfill its own local mission by assisting in the  
304 work of finding qualified ministers and by providing resources for ministry. The ABCUSA  
305 cooperates ecumenically with other networks of Christian churches in order to accomplish the  
306 work of the global Church.

307         The ABCUSA maintains a code of ethics for its pastors which requires a high standard of  
308 behavior for all clergy in fulfilling their vocation. I promise to follow the ABCUSA Code of Ethics.

309         I am grateful to be part of the ABCUSA and to have the opportunity to serve ABCUSA  
310 churches rather than churches of some other denomination. I once asked a friend at seminary why  
311 he was planning to work at a megachurch after graduation. His answer was simple: “they’re the  
312 people who taught me about Jesus.” My friend did not look through the thousands of different  
313 ways people have followed Jesus through the ages and decide that the only true form of Christianity  
314 was the modern American megachurch. My friend had come to faith in Jesus through that kind of  
315 church so from a debt of gratitude to that kind of church and from personal experience that they  
316 were leading people to Jesus, he wanted to help them continue that mission. I feel the same way  
317 about the ABCUSA.

318         A little over a hundred years ago, a Northern Baptist pastor in North Adams, Massachusetts  
319 shared the gospel with my great-grandfather, a young, uneducated Italian immigrant who the  
320 church was helping learn English. My great-grandfather committed his life to Jesus Christ and

321 passed that faith down through my family. My father, grandfather, and great-grandfather all served  
322 as American Baptist pastors in New England. It was in an American Baptist church where I grew  
323 up and went to Sunday School, where I experienced the joys of Christian fellowship, and where I  
324 was baptized. It was in another American Baptist church in college that my faith became more  
325 solid and became my own. Now I serve as the pastor of an American Baptist church. American  
326 Baptists are the people who taught me about Jesus. From personal experience I know that  
327 American Baptist churches lead people to Jesus and with gratitude I hope to help those same  
328 churches as they make disciples of our Lord, Jesus Christ.