

vineyardusa[®]

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP HANDBOOK

VERSION 3.0

Welcome to the Vineyard USA National Leadership Handbook

Before you dive in, allow me to offer a word about what you're reading.

As you will quickly see, this document contains careful descriptions of the policies and processes that govern the ways we agree to relate to one another as Vineyard pastors and Vineyard churches. It is the product of nearly two years of sustained reflection, drafting, and conversation among pastors and leaders throughout our movement.

However, this handbook is much more than a collection of policies and processes. Rather, it is an authentic witness to the God-honoring relationships that form the heart of the Vineyard — a movement built on Spirit-led connections between people, churches, leaders, and the Lord. From the beginning, this has been our way, and it must always remain so.

In 1993, John Wimber described the Vineyard as a “denomination” whose structures are intended to provide “accountability, coherence, and encouragement” to its churches and its people. In steering a course “between chaos and denominationalism,” Wimber envisioned Vineyard churches joined not only by common theology and mission — but also by mutual affection, shared accountability, and a commitment to walk together in God’s presence.¹

That vision continues to shape us. Vineyard USA is a relational movement. At our best, we are a family of churches whose life together is marked by trust, joy, and cooperation. As such, the policies and processes described in these pages — whether for ordination and endorsement, for church planting or adoption, or the many other consequential moments in the life of a Vineyard church — are not merely administrative steps. Rather, they are ways by which we live out our calling together, ensuring that our relational connections remain rooted in love, truth, and Spirit-led discernment.

As you read, you will find much significant practical guidance for the healthy operation of a Vineyard church. It is my prayer that you may also see the deeper story at work: that is, God gathering us as a movement of churches into a shared life of worship, mission, and mutual care.

The ultimate purpose of this handbook is to help us continue to write that story together for years to come.

Sincerely,



Jay Pathak
National Director, Vineyard USA

¹ John Wimber, “The Vineyard Movement: Steering A Course Between Chaos and Traditional Denominationalism” in *Vineyard Reflections* (October/November 1993)

About the Vineyard USA National Handbook

Version 3.0 - To Be Ratified by Vineyard USA Leadership Council (March 2026)

Version 2.0 of the National Leadership Handbook was previously ratified in March 2024 and remains the current governing standard until replaced. Version 3.0, presented here, is the latest proposed update. Version 3.0 will become the authoritative standard 180 days after the date of ratification, at which time it will fully replace Version 2.0 as the authoritative standard. This new version builds upon the foundations established in Versions 1.0 and 2.0, retaining previously ratified content while correcting inaccuracies and typographical errors, and incorporating substantial updates and enhancements.

To ensure transparency, text carried forward from Version 2.0 is displayed in **blue, magenta** text reflects similar content from Version 2.0 that has been rephrased or contains minor word choice changes, and all other text reflects newly developed or revised provisions unique to Version 3.0. This approach preserves continuity, highlights changes, and upholds our commitment to clarity and accountability in the ongoing development of this standard.

Version 3.0 - Introduction

Nothing written in the Handbook abrogates anything written in the Bylaws, which define the legal nature of the non-profit corporation that is Vineyard USA. Rather, the Handbook functions as a supplementary ecclesiastical document that accurately and thoroughly describes the way in which Vineyard USA **is structured to operate**, as well as the ways in which recognized leaders within Vineyard USA agree to relate to one another.

Version 2.0 - Ratified by Vineyard USA Leadership Council (March 2024)

In Version 2.0, the following Sections were included/updated:

- Section 1 - Provisional Policies
- Section 3 - Officers
- Section 4 - National Team
- Section 5 - Regions and Areas
- Section 6 - Associations
- Section 8 - National Ministries
- Section 9 - Ordination and Credentialing

Version 1.0 - Ratified by Vineyard USA Executive Team (December 2021)

Version 1.0 of the Vineyard USA National Leadership Handbook (hereafter “the Handbook”) is intended only to be a minimally sufficient accompaniment to the new Vineyard USA Bylaws (hereafter “the Bylaws”), which **became effective** on January 1, 2022. As such, this version **only covers** some dimensions of the Board of Trustees, as well as some dimensions of the role of the Council.

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SECTION 1. VINEYARD USA GOVERNANCE & POLITY

SECTION 1.1. PROVISIONAL POLICIES

Where necessary or not yet addressed in the Vineyard USA (VUSA) Leadership Handbook, the Board of Trustees may enact policies and procedures outlined in previously adopted Vineyard USA Bylaws (2020 *being the most recent governing document*) and previously issued authoritative documents. In all matters expressly outlined in the 2022 Bylaws and Vineyard USA Leadership Handbook, stated policies will supersede those outlined in previous Bylaws.

Section 1.1.1. Provisional Policies Sunset Clause - While Section 1.1. remains in effect and necessary, its review date will be extended to March 1, 2026, with its anticipated sunset date aligned to the ratification of version 4.0 of the National Leadership Handbook in March 2028.

Section 1.1.2. Review Date - Section 1.1. will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees in consultation with the Leadership Council no later than March 1, 2026, as part of the ratification process for version 3.0 of the National Leadership Handbook.

SECTION 1.2. BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Section 1.2.1. Relevant Bylaws - This Handbook will not reiterate the contents of the Bylaws. The Bylaws describe essential elements of the roles, responsibilities, and procedures of the Board of Trustees in Article IV, Article VI, and throughout.

Section 1.2.2. Job Description - Alongside all that is written in the Bylaws, the role of a member of the Board of Trustees is:

- To be a trusted advisor to the National Director and National Leadership Team.
- To keep the National Leadership Team accountable for fulfilling the mission of Vineyard USA, ensuring good stewardship of the Vineyard's legacy and continuity going forward.
- To be legally and fiscally responsible for Vineyard USA, within legal limits.
- To be enthusiastic supporters of the mission of Vineyard USA, using time, treasure, and talents.

Section 1.2.3. Compensation - While the Bylaws make provision for the reasonable compensation of Trustees who are not employees of Vineyard USA, all Trustees are currently uncompensated for their work.

Section 1.2.4. National Director - The National Director shall serve as a member of the Board of Trustees at all times, except in the event of an emergency as defined in the Bylaws. The National Director may serve as the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees. The National Director may also appoint another member of the Board of Trustees to serve as Chairperson.

Section 1.2.4.1. Selection of the National Director - A formal process for the selection of the National Director shall be developed by the Board of Trustees and presented for ratification by the Vineyard USA National Leadership Council no later than March 2028. In the event of an emergency prior to the ratification of this process, Section 1.1. Provisional Policies shall be applied.

Section 1.2.4.2 Financial Oversight and Budget Approval - The National Director or his/her designee shall be responsible for preparing the annual operating budget of Vineyard USA. The Board of Trustees shall review and approve the annual budget, review the results of an annual financial audit, and exercise fiduciary oversight of Vineyard USA's financial affairs in accordance with the bylaws and applicable law.

Section 1.2.5. Chairperson of the Board - The Board of Trustees shall approve a Chairperson appointed by the National Director by a simple motion approved by a quorum. **In collaboration with the National Director, the Chairperson is responsible for setting the agenda for Board meetings.**

Section 1.2.6. Executive Committee - The Board of Trustees will have an Executive Committee, consisting of the Chairperson, the National Director, and at least one other Trustee. The Executive Committee will be responsible for administering the appointment of new Trustees.

Section 1.2.7. Appointing New Trustees - The standard process for appointing new Trustees will be as follows:

1. The Vineyard USA National Leadership Council (elsewhere named as "NLC", "Leadership Council", or "Council"), which consists of all Regional, Association, and Area Leaders, will submit nominations of new Trustee candidates to the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees.
2. Upon receiving these nominations, the Executive Committee will confirm with each nominated candidate that, if appointed, they would serve as a Trustee.
3. The Executive Committee will submit a list of candidates to the Board of Trustees, which will then vote on the next Trustees to serve, **subject to confirmation by the Council of Vineyard USA.**
4. The names of the newly selected Trustees will be submitted to the Council of Vineyard USA for ratification.

Section 1.2.8. Term of Office - Per the bylaws, each Trustee, with the exception of the National Director, will have a term limit of three years. Each term is renewable three times, by vote of the other Trustees. After three consecutive terms, a Trustee must vacate his or her seat for at least one term, unless no other Trustee is available to serve for such term. A National Director will remain a Trustee throughout the duration of his/her appointment.

SECTION 1.3. OFFICERS

The officers of this corporation shall be a President/National Director, Secretary, Treasurer, and such other officers the President/National Director may appoint. A person, other than the President/National Director, may hold more than one of these offices. Officers other than the President/National Director need not be members of the Board of Trustees. This corporation may have a Chairperson of the Board of Trustees as noted in Section 1.2.5.

SECTION 1.4. NATIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAM

In September 2020, the governing body of Vineyard USA, formerly known as the Executive Team, voted to approve a proposal to hire a National Leadership Team for Vineyard USA. The National Leadership Team, therefore, consists of individuals employed by Vineyard USA, with their selection and retention being at the discretion of the National Director or his/her designee. Members of the National

Leadership Team shall not be members of the National Leadership Council and shall not exercise voting authority related to the National Leadership Council. Any participation of a National Leadership Team member in the work of the National Leadership Council may occur only in accordance with the limitations and conditions outlined in Section 1.7.4.

Section 1.4.1. National Leadership Team - The National Leadership Team shall serve as the executive-level leadership employed by Vineyard USA, providing strategic oversight, guidance, and support for the advancement of the organization’s mission, vision, and values. The National Leadership Team is accountable to the National Director, who is, in turn, accountable to the Board of Trustees. The composition and specific titles within the National Leadership Team may be determined and adjusted by the National Director or his/her designee as necessary to fulfill its responsibilities. The current National Leadership Team members can be found [here](#).

Section 1.4.2. National Staff - Vineyard USA employs additional staff to accomplish the established goals and objectives of Vineyard USA.

Section 1.4.2.3. Oversight and Control - All employees of Vineyard USA shall operate under the authority of the organization as directed by the National Director. The National Director shall have primary responsibility for supervising, directing, and evaluating employees, and may delegate supervisory duties to other designated leaders as appropriate. The Board of Trustees retains ultimate oversight authority to ensure that all employment practices, organizational policies, and personnel decisions align with the mission, values, and policies of Vineyard USA.

Section 1.4.2.4. Limits of Oversight and Control - Contractors serving Vineyard USA are expected to comply with the mission, values, and policies of the organization while performing their duties. However, because contractors are not employees, Vineyard USA’s oversight is limited to the scope of their contracted work and the terms of their agreements.

Translocal Leaders of Vineyard USA may serve in their translocal role either on a voluntary basis or under a contractual arrangement with Vineyard USA. In all cases, Translocal Leaders remain relationally connected to and accountable within a local Vineyard church, whether or not they are currently employed by one.

When a Translocal Leader is employed by a local Vineyard church, oversight and accountability for their local vocational role remain with that church. When a Translocal Leader is not employed by a local church (for example, a retired pastor or leader serving without local employment), accountability remains grounded in their recognized standing and relational accountability within a local Vineyard church.

The removal of a Translocal Leader from their translocal responsibilities does not transfer or create any employment or oversight by Vineyard USA. Vineyard USA does not assume employment or general oversight of Translocal Leaders beyond expectations of alignment with its mission, values, and standards of conduct as they relate to the translocal role.

SECTION 1.5. REGIONS AND AREAS

SECTION 1.5.1. REGIONS

Vineyard USA will utilize geographic Regions to support national organization, to foster relational connection, and, where appropriate, apply policies and procedures. Regions will be based on any number of factors. The primary goal of regional structuring is the ongoing support of local churches and their connection to each other, area and regional leadership, and the national ministries. Every Vineyard church shall be assigned to a designated region. Regions are primarily structured to support the connection of approximately 40-80 churches with geographic proximity as the primary consideration.

Effective January 2022, Vineyard USA designated nine (9) Regions:

- Eastern
- Southeast
- Gulf Coast
- Great Lakes
- Midwest Central
- Midwest North
- Mountain
- Northwest
- Southern California

Section 1.5.1.2. Regional Leaders - The Regional Leader (RL) serves the Super Regional Leaders and the National Director. Each Region is served by a single Regional Leader, or, in some cases, two Regional Leaders.

Section 1.5.1.2.1. Appointment to Office - The Regional Leader(s) is appointed by the designated Super Regional Leader. This appointment is then confirmed by the Associations Director and the National Director. While the final decision rests with the designated Super Regional Leader, the needs and context of the local churches that the Regional Leader(s) will serve will be taken into account. As such, the designated Super Regional Leader will actively seek and incorporate input from Lead Pastors throughout the selection process.

Section 1.5.1.2.2. Communication Lines, Interaction, and Evaluation - The Regional Leader(s) is a member of the Leadership Council. He/She is directly responsible to the Super Regional Leaders.

Section 1.5.1.2.3. Term of Office - The Regional Leader(s) serves a five (5) year term. He/She may succeed himself or herself. Should he/she be requested by the National Director to serve an additional term or terms, he/she will be nominated to the additional terms by the designated Super Regional Leader and confirmed by the Associations Director and the National Director. The Regional Leader may be removed from office by request of the designated Super Regional Leader, National Director, or by a majority vote of the Board of Trustees. If the designated Super Regional Leader or National Director is under disciplinary action that could result in removal by the Board of Trustees, they are not permitted to make any changes to Regional Leaders.

Section 1.5.1.2.4. Duties and Responsibilities - The Regional Leader(s) is responsible for leading the designated region in cooperation with national leadership by casting vision, developing translocal leadership, overseeing pastoral care, and fostering connection. Additional duties may include:

- Carry out all administrative assignments given by the National Office.
- Report to the Super Regional Leaders and National Director as requested.
- Give an annual financial report to the National Office for all funds spent by the Region.
- Encourage every church to report in the annual census administered by the National Office.
- Update data from Vineyards in the Region in the Vineyard USA database as requested by the National Office.
- Identify and recommend Area Leaders for appointment in conjunction with the Super Regional Leaders.
- Serve the National Organization as requested by the National Director.

Section 1.5.2. Areas - Each Region of Vineyard USA will be subdivided into Areas. Areas will be based on any number of factors. The primary goal of Area structuring is the ongoing support of local churches and their connection to each other, area and regional leadership, and the national ministries. Every Vineyard church shall be assigned to a designated area. Areas are structured to support the connection of approximately 5-10 churches with geographic proximity as the primary consideration.

Section 1.5.2.1. Area Leaders - The Area Leader serves the Regional Leader, Super Regional Leaders, and the National Director. Each Area is served by a single Area Leader, or, in some cases, two Area Leaders.

Section 1.5.2.1.1. Appointment to Office - The Area Leader(s) is appointed by the Regional Leader(s) with input from the designated Super Regional Leader. This appointment is then confirmed by the the designated Super Regional Leader and Associations Director. While the final decision rests with the Regional Leader(s), the needs and context of the local churches that the Area Leader(s) will serve will be taken into account. As such, the designated Super Regional Leader and designated Regional Leader(s) will actively seek and incorporate input from Lead Pastors throughout the selection process.

Section 1.5.2.1.2. Communication Lines, Interaction, and Evaluation - The Area Leader(s) is a member of the Leadership Council. He/She is directly responsible to the Regional Leader(s).

Section 1.5.2.1.3. Term of Office - The Area Leader(s) serves a five (5) year term. He/She may succeed himself or herself. Should he/she be requested by the designated Super Regional Leader to serve an additional term or terms, he/she will be nominated to the additional terms by the Regional Leader(s) and then confirmed by the designated Super Regional Leader and Associations Director. The Area Leader(s) may be removed from office by the Regional Leader(s) in consultation with the designated Super Regional Leader or by request of the designated Super Regional Leader, National Director, or by a majority vote of the Board of Trustees. If either a Super Regional Leader or National Director is under disciplinary action that could result in removal by the Board of Trustees, they are not permitted to make any changes to Area Leaders.

Section 1.5.2.1.4. Duties and Responsibilities - The Area Leader(s) is responsible for leading the designated area in cooperation with the national and regional leadership, developing translocal leadership, overseeing pastoral care, and fostering connection. Additional duties may include:

- Carry out all administrative assignments given by the National Office.
- Report to the Regional Leader(s), Super Regional Leaders, and National Director as requested.

- Give an annual financial report to the Regional Leader(s) for all funds spent by the Area.
- Encourage every church in the designated area to complete the annual census administered by the National Office.
- Update data from Vineyard churches in the area as requested by the National Office.
- Identify and recommend additional Area Leaders for appointment in conjunction with the Regional Leader(s) and Super Regional Leaders.
- Serve the National Organization as requested.

Section 1.5.3. Training and Oversight of Regional and Area Leaders - The national leadership of Vineyard USA provides training and oversight to all Regional and Area Leaders. Vineyard USA shall assess the competency and effectiveness of its Regional and Area Leaders through an annual review process that includes feedback from those they serve. This ensures accountability and fosters continuous development in alignment with organizational values and mission. At any time, a pastor may submit a written petition to request a review of a leader's effectiveness by sending an email to the designated Super Regional Leader.

SECTION 1.6. ASSOCIATIONS

Associations serve two basic purposes:

1. Establishing intentional environments for leadership development, mentoring, and hospitality, within the structure of Vineyard USA, for historically underrepresented pastors and leaders.
2. Establishing formal structures by which voices representing groups of historically underrepresented pastors and leaders are consistently heard at the national leadership table of Vineyard USA.

Section 1.6.1. Definition - Associations are intentional environments for leadership development, mentoring, and hospitality, within the structure of Vineyard USA, for historically underrepresented pastors and leaders.

Section 1.6.2. Ethnic Associations - Ethnic Associations exist to foster fellowship among pastors and leaders, support the development of new congregations and ministries, and help identify and raise up emerging leaders within their communities. Each ethnic Association shall relate to the broader Vineyard movement in the United States through the representation of its leadership and jointly recognized policies.

Section 1.6.2.1. Recognition - A list of ethnic Associations shall be kept current and may be amended by the Leadership Council. Effective January 2022, Vineyard USA has recognized the following three (3) ethnic Associations:

- Black Pastors and Leaders Association
- Asian American and Pacific Islanders Association
- Hispanic Association

Section 1.6.3. Other Associations - Vineyard USA may at its determination recognize other Associations. A list of other Associations shall be kept current and may be amended by the Leadership Council.

Section 1.6.3.1. Recognition - A list of other Associations shall be kept current and may be amended by the Leadership Council. Effective January 2022, Vineyard USA recognized the following Association:

- Women's Association

Section 1.6.3.2. Establishment of a New Association - A group seeking recognition as an official Association of Vineyard USA shall submit a written request to the Associations Director for consideration. The Associations Director shall propose such recognition to the National Director and the Board of Trustees for review, after which it shall be submitted to the Leadership Council for ratification. The Associations Director or National Director may also propose the withdrawal of recognition from any association, following the same process.

Section 1.6.4. Association Leaders - The Association Leader serves the Associations Director and the National Director. Each is served by a single Association Leader, or, in some cases, two Association Leaders.

Section 1.6.4.1. Appointment to Office - An Association Leader is appointed by the Associations Director. This appointment is confirmed by the National Director. Each Association is served by a single Association Leader, or, in some cases, two Association Leaders.

Section 1.6.4.2. Communication Lines, Interaction, and Evaluation - An Association Leader(s) is a member of the Leadership Council. He/She is directly responsible to the Associations Director.

Sections 1.6.4.3. Term of Office - The Association Leader(s) serves a five (5) year term. He/She may succeed himself or herself. Should he/she be requested by the National Director to serve an additional term or terms, he/she will be appointed to the additional terms by the Associations Director and approved by the National Director. The Association Leader(s) may be removed from office by a simple request of the Associations Director, National Director, or by a majority vote of the Board of Trustees. If either the Associations Director or National Director is under disciplinary action that could result in removal by the Board of Trustees, they are not permitted to make any changes to Association Leaders.

Section 1.6.4.4. Duties and Responsibilities - The Association Leader(s) is responsible for leading the designated Association in cooperation with national leadership, developing translocal leadership, overseeing pastoral care, and fostering connection. Additional duties may include:

- Carry out all administrative assignments given by the National Office.
- Report to the Associations Director and National Director as requested.
- Give an annual financial report to the National Office for all funds spent by the Association.
- Encourage every church to complete the annual census administered by the National Office.
- Update data from Vineyard churches as requested by the National Office.
- Identify and recommend additional Association Leaders for appointment.
- Serve the National Organization as requested.

Section 1.6.5. Training and Oversight of Association Leaders - The national leadership of Vineyard USA provides training and oversight to all Association Leaders. Vineyard USA shall assess the competency and effectiveness of its Association Leaders through an annual review process that includes feedback from those they serve. This ensures accountability and fosters continuous development in alignment with organizational values and mission. At any time, a pastor may submit a

written petition to request a review of a leader's effectiveness by sending an email to the Associations Director.

SECTION 1.7. VINEYARD USA NATIONAL LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Section 1.7.1. Relevant Bylaws - This Handbook will not reiterate the contents of the Bylaws. The Bylaws describe elements of the roles, responsibilities, and procedures of the Vineyard USA Leadership Council in Article IV, Article VI, and Article XII.

Section 1.7.2. Definition - The National Leadership Council consists of all Regional Leaders, all Association Leaders, and all Area Leaders.

Section 1.7.3. Responsibilities - The Council is responsible for nominating and ratifying new members of the Vineyard USA Board of Trustees, ratifying changes to the Vineyard USA National Leadership Handbook, and ratifying changes to the Vineyard USA Statement of Faith.

Section 1.7.4. Composition, Eligibility, and Voting Authority - The Vineyard USA National Leadership Council is composed of translocal leaders who serve Vineyard churches through recognized regional, area, and association leadership roles.

Employees of Vineyard USA may not serve as voting members of the National Leadership Council.

A Vineyard USA employee may serve on the National Leadership Council only as a non-voting member when the relevant Council seat is shared with another appointed translocal leader (for example, in an Area or Association served by two leaders), or when serving in an interim or provisional capacity. In such cases, the Vineyard USA employee may participate in the work of the Council but shall not exercise voting authority.

Translocal leaders who receive stipends, honoraria, or contractual compensation from Vineyard USA for specific services or initiatives are not considered employees for the purposes of this section, provided their Council role arises from a recognized translocal leadership appointment rather than staff employment.

When a Leadership Council seat is held by an individual who is ineligible to exercise voting authority, the appointing authority for that Region, Area, or Association may designate another duly appointed translocal leader from that same body to exercise voting authority for that seat.

Such designation must be documented in writing, does not create an additional seat on the National Leadership Council, and remains in effect only for the duration of the ineligibility or appointment.

SECTION 1.8. NATIONAL MINISTRIES AND INITIATIVES

The National Director, either by personal appointment or through a resolution adopted by a majority of the Board of Trustees then in office, may designate a ministry or initiative as a national ministry or initiative of Vineyard USA. The National Director may also appoint the team members who will lead and carry out the work of that national ministry or initiative.

SECTION 2. NATIONAL LEADERSHIP HANDBOOK PURPOSE, PROCESSES & PROTECTIONS

SECTION 2.1. THE PURPOSE OF THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP HANDBOOK

The purpose of the Vineyard USA National Leadership Handbook is to serve as a supplementary ecclesiastical document to the Vineyard USA Bylaws. It clarifies the relational and organizational commitments within Vineyard USA and provides guidance about the practical function of the interdependent relationships and commitments between Vineyard USA, Vineyard pastors, and Vineyard churches.

Section 2.1.1. Nature of Vineyard USA - Vineyard USA is an association of locally governed, affiliate churches that voluntarily choose to relate to one another and to Vineyard USA through mutual commitment to the confession of faith, values, vocation, and practices of the Vineyard movement, as demonstrated by adherence to and cooperation with the policies and procedures outlined in this National Leadership Handbook together with the Trademark License.

Section 2.1.2. Affiliate Church Status and Criteria - All Vineyard USA affiliate churches are independently incorporated nonprofit religious organizations in the U.S. and are responsible for their own finances, legal compliance, and governance. Each affiliate church must complete and maintain all applicable federal, state, and local requirements necessary to operate as an incorporated nonprofit religious organization in its specific geographic location.

An affiliate church of Vineyard USA may hold one of two designations based on the stated criteria.

Section 2.1.2.1. Church Plant - A church plant is a Vineyard worshipping community in the early stages of development. It is typically characterized by its recent launch, smaller size, and ongoing formation of leadership, structure, and community life. Church plants are committed to the theological, relational, and organizational commitments outlined in this Handbook and are actively supported through Vineyard church planting structures.

Section 2.1.2.2. Established Church - An established church is a Vineyard worshipping community that has completed the formative stage of church planting and no longer receives direct structural support through Vineyard church planting processes. While established churches vary widely in size, health, and context, they typically function with more developed leadership, governance, and organizational structures. Like all affiliate churches, established churches are committed to the theological, relational, and organizational commitments outlined in this Handbook and participate in Vineyard USA's cooperative processes.

The Lead Pastor(s) of an established church shall hold Vineyard USA ordination and endorsement credentials, in accordance with Section 3.3.7. Churches will be expected to come into compliance with this provision by December 31, 2028. When a New Lead Pastor is appointed to an established church, the church may request a grace period of up to two (2) years to allow the pastor to secure ordination and endorsement.

SECTION 2.2. THE RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY OF LOCAL CHURCH GOVERNANCE

The National Leadership Handbook (NLH) of Vineyard USA recognizes and affirms the inherent right and responsibility of each local church to self-govern. The NLH shall not usurp or supersede the authority of the local church in matters of its internal governance and operations. This principle of local church autonomy is fundamental to the cooperative relationship between churches affiliated with Vineyard USA.

Section 2.2.1. Limits of Oversight and Control - In recognition of the fundamental principle of local church autonomy affirmed by the Handbook, the conduct of all pastors, staff, and volunteers associated with local churches remains the sole and exclusive responsibility of the local church's oversight and control. The Handbook shall not be construed to usurp or supersede the authority of the local church in matters pertaining to its internal governance and operations, specifically including, but not limited to, the oversight and control of the conduct of its pastors, staff, and volunteers. Furthermore, the NLH shall not be interpreted to shift any liability for the conduct of pastors, staff, or volunteers of this local church to Vineyard USA.

SECTION 2.3. PROTECTION OF PROPERTY

Unless otherwise stated in a separate agreement specifically related to such property, all property, both real and personal, owned by a Vineyard Church now and in the future, is and shall be solely and exclusively owned by that Church and, consistent with respective state law, shall not be subject to any trust interest or any other claim of ownership by Vineyard USA or any other ecclesiastical jurisdiction to which that Church may now or in the future be subject.

SECTION 2.4. NATIONAL LEADERSHIP HANDBOOK RATIFICATION PROCESS

Vineyard USA is committed to a ratification process that ensures all Vineyard Lead Pastors will have the opportunity to review proposed updates to the National Leadership Handbook and offer input before new policies and procedures are ratified by a vote of the National Leadership Council.

Section 2.4.1. Definition - Ratification is the action of giving formal approval to an update, clause, or amendment to the National Leadership Handbook, thus making it authoritative.

Section 2.4.2. Preliminary Review and Input - An update, clause, or amendment that is to be considered for ratification will be distributed to the Leadership Council and all Lead Pastors of Vineyard churches for preliminary review no less than 180 days prior to the date of a planned ratification vote. Vineyard USA will provide a 45-day period for review and a formal process for Lead Pastors to provide input related to any update, clause, or amendment that is to be considered for ratification.

Section 2.4.3. Final Review - Following the Preliminary Review and Input period, a final draft of any update, clause, or amendment that is to be put before the National Leadership Council for ratification will be distributed to the Leadership Council and all Lead Pastors of Vineyard churches no less than 45 days prior to the date of a planned ratification vote.

Section 2.4.4. Ratification Vote Requirements - An update, clause, or amendment can only be added to the National Leadership Handbook with a three-quarters ($\frac{3}{4}$) majority affirmative vote of the National Leadership Council (NLC). All votes will be counted, documented, and final tallies made

available for review to all Lead Pastors no more than 30 days after the date of ratification.

Section 2.4.5. Ratified Handbook Implementation - Once ratified, the updated version of the National Leadership Handbook will take effect 180 days after the date of ratification.

SECTION 2.5. THE RIGHT TO APPEAL AND REJECT FUTURE VERSIONS OF THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP HANDBOOK

Any Vineyard church, through its Lead Pastor acting on behalf of the church and with the authorization of its governing body, retains the right to appeal or reject any future provisions or revisions of the National Leadership Handbook (NLH) published by the Association of Vineyard Churches (also known as Vineyard USA or VUSA). While each ratified version of the National Leadership Handbook is an authoritative document for the relationships between Vineyard USA, Vineyard pastors, and Vineyard churches, any Vineyard church reserves the right to evaluate and appeal or reject, in its sole discretion, any subsequent versions of the Handbook. Appeals or rejection of a ratified version of the Handbook must be communicated to Vineyard USA prior to the date on which the newest version of the Handbook takes effect.

Section 2.5.1. Process of Appeal - The church acknowledges that appealing a ratified version of the NLH iteration will result in the church being deemed "Good Standing - Pending Appeal" with Vineyard USA. "Good Standing - Pending Appeal" does not affect the church's affiliation with Vineyard USA, standing, and related privileges within the organization.

Section 2.5.2. Written Notification of Appeal - Appeals of a ratified version of the Handbook must be communicated to Vineyard USA in writing by the Lead Pastor, acting on behalf of the church and with the authorization of its governing body, prior to the date on which the newest version of the Handbook takes effect. Written appeal should be submitted via the [Handbook Appeal Form](#) provided by Vineyard USA. The content of the Appeal Form will be shared with the designated Super Regional Leader, Regional Leader(s), and Area Leader(s) of Vineyard USA. As determined by the Super Regional Leaders, additional representatives from Vineyard USA may be included in the review process.

Section 2.5.3. Content of Written Appeal - The appeal shall include the following:

1. Specific clause within the NLH which is being appealed (this must be a newly ratified clause or amendment)
2. Rationale for Appeal
3. Proposed resolution based on the spirit and intent of the specific NLH clause being appealed
4. Proposed local church governance action (i.e., board resolution, existing policy in place, etc.)

Section 2.5.4. Resolution of Appeals - The designated Super Regional Leader manages the appeal with input from the designated Area and Regional Leaders. The designated Super Regional Leader may also solicit input from Association Leaders. Managing the appeal includes receiving the written appeal, acknowledging it, reviewing its clarity, rationale, proposed resolution, and alignment with the NLH's intent, gathering further information if needed, determining and communicating a decision (which may involve accepting, rejecting, or negotiating an alternative resolution), and documenting the final resolution for Vineyard USA records. Vineyard USA is committed to resolving appeals in a timely manner.

If the designated Super Regional Leader has a clear conflict of interest related to the matter under appeal, the National Director or his/her designee may assign responsibility for managing the appeal to another appropriate member of the National Leadership Team.

SECTION 2.6. PROCESS OF REJECTION

The church acknowledges that rejecting a future NLH iteration will result in the church being deemed "Out of Compliance" with Vineyard USA. While this "out of compliance" status does not automatically sever the church's affiliation with Vineyard USA, it will affect the church's standing and any related privileges within the organization outlined in Section 3.4.1. The church understands that being deemed "out of compliance" may result in disaffiliation.

Section 2.6.1. Written Notice of Rejection - Rejection of a ratified version of the Handbook must be communicated to Vineyard USA in writing prior to the date on which the newest version of the Handbook takes effect. The written rejection must be submitted by the Lead Pastor, acting on behalf of the church, and must be authorized by the church's governing body. Written rejection should be submitted via the [Handbook Rejection Form](#) provided by Vineyard USA. The content of the Rejection Form will be shared with the designated Super Regional Leader, Regional Leader(s), and Area Leader(s) of Vineyard USA. As determined by the Super Regional Leaders, additional representatives from Vineyard USA may be included in the review process.

Section 2.6.2. Content of Written Rejection - Written notice of rejection shall include the following:

1. Specific clause for which the NLH is being rejected
2. Rationale for Rejection
3. Proposed remedy if other than Disassociation/Disaffiliation
4. Proposed timeline for desired remedy

Section 2.6.3. Resolution of Rejections - The designated Super Regional Leader manages the Notice of Rejection, with input from the designated Area and Regional Leaders. The designated Super Regional Leader may also solicit input from Association Leaders. Managing the Notice of Rejection includes receiving the written rejection, acknowledging it, reviewing its clarity, rationale, proposed remedy (if any), gathering further information if needed, determining and communicating a decision (which may involve accepting, rejecting, or negotiating an alternative resolution), and documenting the final resolution for Vineyard USA records. Vineyard USA is committed to resolving rejections in a timely manner.

Section 2.6.4. Rejection of Handbook and Disassociation Process - The church acknowledges that if a proposed remedy is not accepted, or if no remedy other than disassociation or disaffiliation is proposed, the rejection of a ratified version of the NLH, as per section 2.6., will result in the implementation of the disaffiliation or disassociation processes as determined by Vineyard USA.

SECTION 2.7. ESTABLISHMENT OF FORMAL THEOLOGICAL AND ECCLESIOLOGICAL POSITIONS

The National Leadership Team is accountable for leading a transparent and consultative process that engages churches and pastors to clarify, and when necessary, articulate the theological and ecclesiological positions of Vineyard USA. According to the ratification process outlined in Section 2.4 of the National Leadership Handbook, all such positions must be approved by the Leadership Council.

SECTION 2.8. NATIONAL LEADERSHIP HANDBOOK POLICY REVIEWS AND UPDATES

Policies shall be reviewed at least once every two years to assess their effectiveness, relevance, and alignment with the mission and values of the organization. Recommendations for revisions and adjustments may be offered by Vineyard USA or submitted by any Lead Pastor as part of the preliminary review and input period of the ratification process described in Section 2.4.2. All proposed changes shall follow the established ratification procedures outlined in Section 2.4. and shall not take effect until duly approved through that process.

SECTION 3. STANDING, COMMITMENT & PARTICIPATION

SECTION 3.1. GOOD STANDING POLICY

This policy outlines the criteria and procedures for determining the standing of affiliate churches within Vineyard USA, ensuring accountability, alignment with Vineyard values, theology, and practice, and support for pastoral and church health. This policy aims to provide a framework for fostering health and accountability within Vineyard USA, maintaining a strong and unified national community of local Vineyard churches.

SECTION 3.2. DESIGNATIONS OF STANDING

Vineyard USA will utilize the following three designations to reflect the standing of an affiliate church in relation to Vineyard USA:

- **Good Standing:** This designation signifies that a church is operating in alignment with the established policies and procedures outlined in the Handbook.
- **Good Standing - Pending:** This designation indicates that a church is in good standing but is undergoing a specific review, addressing identified area(s) of concern, or has made an appeal.
- **Out of Compliance:** This designation indicates that a church is not meeting the established criteria for good standing and requires support to address identified deficiencies.

SECTION 3.3. GOOD STANDING CRITERIA

The following criteria will be used to determine the standing of a local Vineyard church:

- Bylaws establishing or maintaining formal affiliation with Vineyard USA
- Affiliate Member Financial Contribution
- Completion of Annual Census
- Compliance with an Active Trademark License Agreement
- National Endorsement of Local Ordination Credentials of Lead Pastor(s)
- Designated Board Member on file with Vineyard USA
- Cooperation with the Policies and Procedures outlined in the Handbook
- Active participation within the designated Vineyard USA Area

Section 3.3.1. Bylaws Establishing Formal Affiliation to Vineyard USA - Every Vineyard church shall establish affiliation with Vineyard USA in the church's bylaws. The bylaws shall articulate the church's agreement to adhere to the requirements of the National Leadership Handbook of Vineyard USA.

Section 3.3.1.1. Approved Bylaw Templates and Amendments - Vineyard USA shall furnish each Vineyard church with officially approved bylaw templates, along with any subsequent amendments, to ensure compliance with this requirement. These templates and amendments are available [here](#).

Section 3.3.1.2. Bylaw Updates Provided to Vineyard USA - Every Vineyard church shall have on file with Vineyard USA the most current version of its local church bylaws, confirming formal affiliation and agreement to adhere to the most recently ratified version of the Vineyard USA National Leadership Handbook. Local church bylaws may not limit this agreement to a specific version of the Handbook. If a church finds itself unable to adhere to a future revision, it retains the right either to reject or appeal the Handbook through the process outlined in Section 2.5. or to disaffiliate from Vineyard USA in accordance with Section 5.6.

Section 3.3.2. Affiliate Member Financial Contribution - Every Vineyard church shall contribute 3% of its general fund to Vineyard USA annually.

Section 3.3.2.1. Certification of Financial Contribution - Vineyard USA may request, at its sole discretion, a financial report to verify 3% contribution.

Section 3.3.2.2. Church Identifier - Church identification number must be included on the contribution.

Section 3.3.2.3. Frequency of Contribution - Vineyard USA requests that churches send their financial contributions on a monthly basis. Contributions may be made by check or electronically. Electronic payments may be submitted at: <https://give.vineyardusa.org/>.

Section 3.3.2.4. Adjustments to the Affiliate Member Contribution Percentage - Vineyard USA will follow the outlined National Leadership Handbook ratification process to implement any future adjustments to the contribution percentage.

Section 3.3.3. Census Completion - Every Vineyard church shall complete the annual census within the timeline established by Vineyard USA (generally during the first quarter of each year).

Section 3.3.4. Trademark License Agreement - Every Vineyard church shall have an active Trademark License Agreement on file with Vineyard USA. If a church violates any provision of this Handbook, the Trademark License may be terminated by Vineyard USA.

Section 3.3.4.2. Updates to the License - It is the prerogative of Vineyard USA to update the Trademark License Agreement as deemed necessary. Trademark License (“License”) is effective as of the date listed on the signature page (the “Effective Date”) by and between Vineyard USA, a nonprofit corporation of the State of Texas (“Licensor”) and the church listed on the signature page of the License (“Licensee”).

The Trademark License governs the use of Vineyard USA’s trademarks and related legal conditions of affiliation and does not alter or replace the leadership expectations, processes, or relational commitments outlined in the National Leadership Handbook.

Section 3.3.5. Designated Board Member - Every Vineyard church shall establish a Designated Board Member on file with Vineyard USA. Designated Board Member contact information will be requested and updated as part of the Annual Census.

Section 3.3.5.1. Designated Board Member Criteria - Designated Board Members shall be selected from among the independent board members of the local church. An independent board member is one who is not an employee of the local church, spouse of a local church employee, or any entity affiliated with the local church, or a person having a direct or indirect business relationship with the local church that creates a conflict of interest.

Section 3.3.5.2. Purpose of Designated Board Member - Designated Board Members shall serve,

when needed, as a liaison between Vineyard USA and a local Vineyard church. A Designated Board Member is identified by the local church leadership to engage Vineyard USA when an issue arises that may impact the ability of Vineyard USA to communicate with the Lead Pastor of the local Vineyard church or in other exceptional cases where national engagement is necessary. Issues may include:

- Support for crisis situations
- Support in case of illness or death of Lead Pastor
- Support in resolving conflict involving the Lead Pastor
- Provide support at the request of the Lead Pastor or governing board
- Consistent lack of communication and/or participation
- Credible allegations of misconduct or mismanagement against leadership
- Disassociation and disaffiliation processes

Section 3.3.6. Participation in Cooperative Processes - Every Vineyard church shall participate in the cooperative processes outlined in the Handbook. These are structured processes designed to support mutual discernment, accountability, and shared identity within the Vineyard movement. Churches are expected to engage in these processes with a posture of mutual and affectionate cooperation. These cooperative processes are:

- Ordination & Endorsement
- Starting an Affiliate Vineyard church
- Adopting into Vineyard USA
- Disassociating from Vineyard USA
- Disaffiliation of a Vineyard church

Section 3.3.7. National Endorsement and Local Ordination of Lead Pastor(s) of Vineyard Churches - Every established Vineyard church shall be led by a pastor who holds local ordination credentials and a national endorsement from Vineyard USA. Vineyard USA will expect all churches to come into compliance with this provision by December 31, 2028.

When a new Lead Pastor is appointed to an established Vineyard church, the church may request a grace period of up to two (2) years from the date of appointment to allow the pastor to secure local ordination credentials and national endorsement. During an approved grace period, the Lead Pastor must be actively engaged in the ordination and endorsement process for the church to remain in good standing.

Churches that require an exception to this policy or a grace period must do so by writing ordination@vineyardusa.org and securing approval from their designated SRL prior to the expiration of the relevant deadline.

Section 3.3.7.1. Ordination Endorsement and Church Plants - Church plants, as defined in Section 2.1.2.1., may be led by pastors who are not ordained and do not hold a Vineyard Ordination Endorsement. This allowance applies only while the church holds church plant status. In order to be reclassified as an established church, as defined in Section 2.1.2.2., the Lead Pastor must be ordained and endorsed in accordance with Section 3.3.7. The deadline for meeting this requirement for all established churches is December 31, 2028, as specified in Section 3.3.7.

Section 3.3.7.2. Acknowledgement of the National Leadership Handbook - Upon appointment as a Lead Pastor of a Vineyard USA affiliate church, the pastor shall be required to acknowledge receipt of the current Vineyard USA National Leadership Handbook and affirm his or her intent to operate in accordance with its policies, processes, and relational commitments.

This acknowledgment does not supersede the authority of the local church or its governing documents but reflects the pastor's willingness to participate in the shared commitments that define leadership within Vineyard USA.

Section 3.3.8. Participation in the Designated Area - At a minimum, every Vineyard church shall regularly participate in Area meetings and maintain relationships with the designated Area Leader(s). This shall include:

- Responding to the communication of the Area Leader(s).
- Regular participation and reasonable engagement in Area functions and relationships.
- Developing and maintaining relationships with other Vineyard pastors within the designated Area.

Section 3.3.8.1. Participation in Regional, Association, and National Opportunities - As able, Vineyard churches are encouraged to participate in Regional, Association, and/or National opportunities that support their relational connections, as well as vocational and professional development.

SECTION 3.4. "GOOD STANDING" DESIGNATION

This designation indicates that a church has met the minimum requirements outlined in Section 3.3.

Section 3.4.1. Benefits of Good Standing

- Eligible for unrestricted participation in Vineyard USA training, cohorts, and programming.
- Eligible for translocal leadership opportunities.
- Eligible for Leadership Council appointment.
- Eligible to participate in informal advisory groups that support ongoing decision-making processes.
- Eligible to participate in the cooperative processes outlined in the Handbook.
- Eligible to participate in the appeals processes outlined in the Handbook.
- Eligible to serve on the Board of Trustees for Vineyard USA.

SECTION 3.5. "GOOD STANDING - PENDING" DESIGNATION

This designation indicates that a church is in Good Standing but is undergoing a specific review, addressing identified area(s) of concern, or has made an appeal related to the policies and procedures outlined in the Handbook.

Section 3.5.1. Notification of "Good Standing - Pending" Status - Vineyard USA leadership will communicate the specific areas of concern to the church. A plan of action will be developed between the church and Vineyard USA to address the identified concerns. Regular progress reports will be submitted by the church to Vineyard USA. Vineyard USA will provide support and resources to assist the church in achieving Good Standing. A timeline will be set for the review process.

Section 3.5.2. “Good Standing - Pending” Restrictions - As determined by Vineyard USA, the local church may be subject to limitations on its eligibility for the opportunities outlined in Section 3.4.1. Additionally, the local church may be subject to increased oversight and reporting requirements.

SECTION 3.6. “OUT OF COMPLIANCE” DESIGNATION

This designation indicates that a church is not meeting the established criteria for Good Standing and requires support to address identified deficiencies. Additionally, Out of Compliance status may be utilized for the following reasons:

- Significant or persistent deviation from Vineyard USA's Statement of Faith and/or other formally recognized articulations of Vineyard theology and practice.
- Demonstrated patterns of mismanagement.
- Unwillingness to address misconduct.
- Failure to meet the requirements of the agreed-upon plan of action from a previous "Good Standing - Pending" status.

Section 3.6.1. Notification of “Out of Compliance” Designation - Following a review process, the church will be provided with a written notification of the specific areas of non-compliance. Based on the seriousness of the situation, a reasonable period of time will be given to the church to respond and address the concerns. Vineyard USA will offer support and resources to help the church return to good standing when possible. If the church fails to address the concerns, Vineyard USA may implement disciplinary measures, including but not limited to suspension of affiliation or disaffiliation from Vineyard USA.

Section 3.6.2. “Out of Compliance” Restrictions - A local church designated Out of Compliance will be ineligible to participate in the opportunities outlined in Section 3.4.1.

SECTION 3.7. THE RIGHT TO APPEAL DESIGNATED STANDING

Every Vineyard church retains the right to appeal its designated status.

Section 3.7.1. Written Notification of Appeal - Appeals of a designated status must be communicated to Vineyard USA in writing and should be submitted via the [Designated Standing Appeal Form](#) provided by Vineyard USA. The content of the Designated Standing Appeal Form will be shared with the designated Super Regional Leader, Regional Leader(s), and Area Leader(s) of Vineyard USA. It may also be shared with one or more Association Leader(s). As determined by the National Director or his/her designee, an additional representative from Vineyard USA shall be included in the review process.

Section 3.7.2. Content of Written Appeal - The appeal shall include the following:

1. Rationale for appeal
2. Proposed resolution

Section 3.7.3. Resolution of Appeals - The designated Super Regional Leader manages the appeal with input from the designated Area and Regional Leaders. The designated Super Regional Leader may also solicit input from Association Leaders. Managing the appeal includes receiving the written appeal, acknowledging it, reviewing its clarity, rationale, proposed resolution, and alignment with the NLH's intent, gathering further information if needed, determining and communicating a decision (which

may involve accepting, rejecting, or negotiating an alternative resolution), and documenting the final resolution for Vineyard USA records. Vineyard USA is committed to resolving appeals in a timely manner.

If the designated Super Regional Leader has a clear conflict of interest related to the matter under appeal, the National Director or his/her designee may assign responsibility for managing the appeal to another appropriate member of the National Leadership Team.

SECTION 4. CONDUCT, CONFLICT & COMPETENCY

SECTION 4.1. PASTORAL COMPETENCY

Vineyard USA will utilize the criteria outlined [herein](#) to support the training of, and the assessment of, pastoral competencies, ensuring alignment with Vineyard pastoral theology and practice. This document will be periodically reviewed and may be updated to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness.

SECTION 4.2. PASTORAL CONDUCT & ETHICS

Vineyard USA is a member of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and has identified the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) Code of Ethics for Pastors as a guiding resource for pastoral conduct and acknowledges the wisdom of its general themes. Vineyard USA or its local churches may refer to this code for guidance when addressing ethical concerns.

- [Click here for the PDF in English](#)
- [Click here for the PDF in Spanish](#)

SECTION 4.3. CONFLICT AND PEACEMAKING COMMITMENTS

Vineyard USA and its local churches will utilize the principles and procedures outlined in this section for relational peacemaking among Vineyard pastors, aiming to foster unity and promote the health of our relationships and ministries. Pastors and leaders within Vineyard USA are called to embody the reconciling love of Christ. Recognizing that relational conflict is a reality in any community, we commit to addressing disagreements with humility, integrity, and a focus on restoration.

Section 4.3.1. Relational Commitments - These [relational commitments](#) are designed to help Vineyard USA establish clear biblical guidelines for relational policies that honor God and promote peace and unity within Vineyard USA. The spirit and intent of this document will govern all processes of relational reconciliation between Vineyard pastors/translocal leaders and those with whom they have unresolved relational conflict or disunity. **NOTE** - *The commitments have been adapted from Relational Wholeness 360 to address Vineyard pastors and translocal leaders.*

Section 4.3.2. Conflict & Peacemaking Processes - From personal strategies to professional conciliation, Vineyard pastors shall utilize all available approaches to address and resolve disputes effectively. This shall include and escalate as needed, the following:

- Personal Peacemaking
- Assisted Peacemaking
- Professional Peacemaking

Section 4.3.3. Implementation, Accountability & Conclusion

- **Training** - Regional and national leadership will provide training and/or resources related to peacemaking principles to Vineyard pastors.
- **Accountability** - Pastors will be accountable to the principles, procedures, and commitments outlined in this policy.
- **Conclusion** - By embracing these principles and procedures, Vineyard pastors and leaders commit to fostering a culture of relational health and unity among Vineyard pastors. We believe that through Christ's reconciling power, we can resolve conflict in a way that honors God and strengthens the Association of Vineyard Churches.

SECTION 4.4. SAFEGUARDING

Vineyard USA is committed to fostering a safe and caring environment for all individuals, especially children, young people, and vulnerable adults. We believe that accountability is essential to this commitment. This policy reflects Vineyard USA's commitment to accountability by offering a clear and confidential process for reporting concerns without fear of retaliation.

While Vineyard USA will respond to allegations of misconduct with fairness and compassion, the primary responsibility for implementing and maintaining comprehensive safeguarding policies rests with each affiliated local church. Vineyard USA provides guidance and support but does not assume operational control or liability for the day-to-day safeguarding practices of individual churches.

Section 4.4.1. Scope of Policy - This policy applies to leaders, pastors, staff, and volunteers of Vineyard USA and its affiliated churches. It addresses all forms of misconduct, including but not limited to:

- Sexual misconduct, abuse, or harassment
- Physical, emotional, or spiritual abuse
- Exploitation or neglect
- Breaches of fiduciary duties or financial mismanagement
- Abuse of authority or power
- Other conduct that is illegal, unethical, or violates established policies

Section 4.4.1.1. Limits to Scope of Policy - Allegations of misconduct against staff, leaders, or volunteers of an affiliated Vineyard church reported to Vineyard USA will be referred directly to the Lead Pastor(s) and/or the church's governing body for review and action. The local church bears responsibility for investigating and resolving allegations involving its employees, leaders, and volunteers.

In cases of serious allegations—such as sexual misconduct, abuse, or criminal activity—the Lead Pastor(s) or governing body must promptly notify Vineyard USA by notifying the church's designated Super Regional Leader. Vineyard USA provides guidance and accountability when appropriate, but does not assume operational control or direct liability for the actions of local church personnel.

All allegations involving potential violations of law, including child abuse, must be reported to the proper civil authorities in accordance with mandatory reporting laws. This referral process ensures that allegations are addressed at the appropriate level of governance while maintaining clear channels for communication, accountability, and pastoral care.

Section 4.4.2. Confidential Reporting Mechanism - Recognizing the importance of an independent and unbiased process, Vineyard USA will manage a confidential reporting mechanism. This ensures that all allegations are received and reviewed, and provides a safe and secure avenue for reporters.

Key Principles of the Reporting Mechanism:

- **Anonymity** – Reports can be made with a true name or anonymously.
- **Confidentiality** – Vineyard USA and any of its agents will not identify any reporter by name without the reporter's express, informed consent.

- **Independent Review** – Vineyard USA or its agents will assess each report and, where appropriate, determine an appropriate response and resolution.
- **Encouraging Reporting to Authorities** – This mechanism is not a substitute for the prompt reporting of criminal activity to law enforcement. If there is a risk of immediate harm, individuals should first contact local authorities or dial 911.

Section 4.4.3. No Retaliation Clause - Vineyard USA strictly prohibits and will not tolerate any form of retaliation against an individual who makes a good-faith report of a concern under this policy. Any adverse action taken against a reporter, witness, or participant in an investigation is a violation of this policy.

- Retaliation includes, but is not limited to, termination, demotion, harassment, or any other form of intimidation or discrimination.
- Any person found to have engaged in retaliation will be subject to disciplinary action.

Section 4.4.4. Review, Response, and Resolution - Upon receiving an allegation, Vineyard USA or its designated agents will conduct an initial review to determine the appropriate course of action. The initial review will work to assess the credibility, severity, and scope of the concern and identify the appropriate pathway for response.

Those conducting the initial review must not be the subject of the allegation, nor should they have close personal, familial, or professional relationships that could reasonably be seen as compromising their impartiality. Vineyard USA is committed to ensuring all assessments and any subsequent investigations are impartial and free from undue influence.

Allegations involving potential violations of civil or criminal law—especially child abuse and other serious legal concerns—will be handled in accordance with applicable mandatory reporting laws. Vineyard USA’s process does not replace legal obligations and does not delay reporting when mandated by law.

Possible responses following the initial review may include, but are not limited to:

1. **Referral to Local Church, Law Enforcement, or Other Authority** – In cases where the matter is primarily the responsibility of the local church leadership, or when legal or regulatory authorities must be involved.
2. **No Further Action** – If the concern is determined to be unfounded, outside of Vineyard USA’s jurisdiction, or without sufficient evidence to proceed.
3. **Informal Resolution** – Addressing the matter through guidance, mediation, or restorative conversation when appropriate and mutually agreed upon by the parties involved.
4. **Pastoral Support and Care** – Offering pastoral care, counseling referrals, or support for those impacted by the allegation, including the reporting party, the accused, and affected congregations.
5. **Monitoring or Advisory Measures** – Requiring temporary adjustments to ministry responsibilities, increased supervision, or other precautionary steps while monitoring the situation.
6. **Formal Investigation** – When necessary, Vineyard USA will work with the local church leadership to initiate a thorough, impartial investigation to determine findings and recommendations for further action. Vineyard USA will cooperate with the local Vineyard

church in regards to investigations. In cases where the nature of the allegations or the safety of those involved warrants it, Vineyard USA may initiate a formal investigation and require the church and its leadership to participate.

The outcome of the initial review will guide next steps to ensure the process is fair, thorough, and consistent with Vineyard USA's commitment to integrity, accountability, and care for all parties.

Section 4.4.5. Role-Specific Safeguarding Requirements - While the safeguarding commitments outlined in this section apply broadly to leaders, pastors, staff, and volunteers of Vineyard USA and its affiliated churches, certain safeguarding requirements are specific to defined leadership roles within the Vineyard USA organizational structure.

The following individuals are required to complete a background check through a process approved by Vineyard USA, no less than once every five (5) years:

- Members of the Board of Trustees
- Members of the National Leadership Team and other Vineyard USA employees
- Members of the National Leadership Council
- Lead Pastors of Vineyard USA affiliate churches
- Ordained and endorsed Vineyard pastors

In addition, individuals serving in these roles are required to promptly disclose to Vineyard USA any material changes to their background or criminal record, including arrests, charges, convictions, or substantiated allegations, whether or not such matters result in formal prosecution.

Failure to complete a required background check or to disclose relevant changes may result in a review of the individual's standing, role, or eligibility to serve, in accordance with the policies and processes outlined in this Handbook.

Section 4.4.6. Implementation and Local Church Policies - This policy represents Vineyard USA's overarching commitment to accountability. It is designed to complement, not replace, the safeguarding and reporting policies of local Vineyard churches.

Affiliate churches must have a current child protection policy. While Vineyard USA does not prescribe a specific format, the policy must reflect applicable legal requirements and a clear commitment to safeguarding children and youth.

Vineyard USA recommends that all affiliated churches maintain their own comprehensive safeguarding policies and make the Vineyard USA confidential reporting mechanism an accessible resource for their communities.

SECTION 4.5. PASTORAL DISCIPLINE

This policy clarifies the framework for church discipline concerning Vineyard pastors (ordained, licensed, or commissioned by affiliate churches). Vineyard USA affirms the local church's primary authority and responsibility, as outlined in its governing documents, for overseeing local church matters, including the discipline of pastors. Vineyard USA's role in such matters is to support the local church in fulfilling its responsibility through resourcing, training, guidance, counsel, and, when necessary, accountability, which may include a change in the affiliate church's standing, revocation of

the national endorsement of a pastor's local ordination credentials, or the disaffiliation of a local church. Both Vineyard USA and its affiliated churches are committed to exercising church discipline rooted in biblical principles. This policy seeks to foster an environment of accountability, repentance, and restoration, ensuring all processes are conducted with integrity, fairness, and a commitment to the spiritual well-being of individuals, the local church community, and Vineyard USA.

Section 4.5.1. Guiding Principles Related to Pastoral Discipline - All disciplinary actions related to pastors take place under the local church's primary authority and responsibility, with Vineyard USA offering support, counsel, and—when necessary—accountability. Whether a process is initiated by the local church or involves Vineyard USA's engagement, all actions will be guided by principles that center the well-being of those affected, seek truth and justice, and pursue holistic restoration.

Guiding Principles:

1. **Biblical Foundation** - Decisions and actions are grounded in scripture, emphasizing love, grace, justice, forgiveness, and the pursuit of holiness and reconciliation. Processes reflect God's heart for protecting the vulnerable and bringing healing where harm has occurred.
2. **Safety and Care for Those Harmed** - The safety, dignity, and well-being of individuals who have experienced harm are prioritized at every stage. Pastoral discipline processes will actively seek to prevent further harm, offer support, and provide appropriate pastoral and/or professional care for those impacted.
3. **Confidentiality with Compassion** - Information related to disciplinary matters will be handled with the utmost discretion and privacy. Communication will be guided by compassion, shared only on a need-to-know basis, balancing confidentiality with the responsibility to protect those at risk and to foster trust in the process.
4. **Fairness and Impartiality** - All situations will be approached objectively, without bias or favoritism. Both those raising concerns and the pastor in question will be treated with respect, ensuring that each voice is heard and considered with sensitivity to trauma and power dynamics.
5. **Trauma-Informed Due Process** - Individuals facing disciplinary action will receive clear communication regarding concerns, an opportunity to be heard, and the chance to respond to allegations. Processes will be trauma-informed, recognizing that fear, shame, or past experiences may affect participation, and appropriate support will be offered to all parties involved.
6. **Restoration and Healing Focus** - The aim is holistic restoration—seeking repentance, reconciliation, and healing for both the individual and the community. Restoration efforts will proceed at a pace that respects the healing needs of those harmed and prioritizes community safety, rather than rushing to resolution.
7. **Transparency (Within Limits)** - While maintaining confidentiality, the process will be as transparent as possible for those directly involved. Steps, decisions, and reasoning will be communicated clearly to foster understanding, trust, and accountability.
8. **Documentation and Accountability** - All processes and decisions will be appropriately documented to ensure consistency, accountability, and clarity. Records will include actions taken to protect and support those who have experienced harm.

Section 4.5.2. Implementation and Accountability

- **Training** - National and Regional leadership will provide training and/or resources related to

- the discipline of Vineyard pastors and care of reporting victims.
- **Accountability** - Pastors will be accountable to the principles and procedures outlined in this policy.

SECTION 5. COOPERATIVE PROCESSES & RECOMMENDED POLICIES

SECTION 5.1. A RELATIONAL MOVEMENT: FOUNDATIONS FOR COOPERATIVE PROCESSES

Section 5.1.1. Foundations for Cooperative Processes in a Relational Movement - Vineyard USA has often been described as a “relational movement.” At our best, we highly value and honor the God-given, Spirit-led relationships that animate the heart of our movement. This relational foundation shapes how we cooperate across local, regional, and national levels. The processes outlined in this section—ordination and endorsement, church planting and release, church adoption, and more—are not simply procedural. They are designed to express mutual and affectionate cooperation among churches, leaders, and ministries who seek to follow Jesus together in shared calling, shared accountability, and shared mission. The processes outlined in Section 5 are specific to Vineyard USA and its affiliated churches and are intended to serve our unique relational structure, values, and mission.

Each process described below flows from this shared relational commitment and reflects our desire to hold one another in love, truth, and Spirit-led discernment.

SECTION 5.2. ORDINATION AND ENDORSEMENT

Section 5.2.1. Rationale for and Benefits of a National Credentialing Process - The rationale for and benefits of national credentialing include the following:

- Recognition of God’s calling to and gifting for those who are clearly called and set apart for lifetime service.
- Interdependency between the local church, area, regional, and national leadership, to ensure a commitment to and alignment with Vineyard USA beliefs, values, and vocation.
- Accountability to the local church and to Vineyard USA, in matters of doctrine, practice, and morality.
- Demonstrates a commitment to personal and professional development.
- Strengthens the demonstration of ministerial status as it relates to IRS tax guidelines.

Section 5.2.2. A Foundation for Ordained Ministry - Scripture teaches that each believer has been given one or more gifts in order to serve Jesus and His Church (Eph. 4:7). In addition, some believers have received the call of God upon their lives for ordained ministry and have been given gifts for the task of equipping God’s people to carry out the works of service which build up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11, 12). Those called to ordained ministry are chosen and appointed by God, affirmed by the local church, and subsequently recognized, endorsed, and supported by Vineyard USA (Acts 13:3, 1 Tim. 4:14, 2 Tim. 1:6).

Section 5.2.3. A Cooperative Process of Ordination, Credentialing, Endorsement, and Revocation - Vineyard USA’s approach to credentialing reflects our identity as a relational movement. The processes described here are not merely administrative; they express our shared commitment to identifying, equipping, and affirming those called by God to serve as pastors and leaders. Ordination and endorsement are acts of mutual and affectionate cooperation, undertaken in love for Jesus, His Church, and those He has set apart for vocational ministry.

The recognition and endorsement of ordained pastors has long been a central way the Church ensures interdependence, accountability, and faithfulness among its leaders. In this spirit, Vineyard USA partners with local churches to affirm qualified pastors for ministry and uphold a shared standard for leadership.

- Endorse the ordination credentials of all Vineyard pastors ordained prior to June 1, 2025, who are still actively engaged in ministry and in relation to a local Vineyard church or national ministry.
- Establish and maintain a process to endorse the ordination credentials of Vineyard pastors seeking to be ordained after June 1, 2025.
- Establish and maintain a process for the renewal of credentials for all ordained Vineyard pastors, which will be put into effect no later than June 1, 2027.
- Develop, articulate, and evaluate the standards for ordination.
- Establish and maintain programs, partnerships, and training resources that will support pastors in their journey to ordination and beyond.
- Establish and maintain a process to revoke the credentials of ordained Vineyard pastors found in substantial violation of the ordination standards to which he/she agreed.

In cooperation with Vineyard USA, local Vineyard churches will therefore:

- Amend their governing bylaws to acknowledge the Vineyard USA National Leadership Handbook and the policies and procedures therein.
- Participate in the attestation process that will endorse the ordination credentials of all active Vineyard pastors ordained prior to June 1, 2025.
- Participate in the credentialing process that will include a recommendation from the governing body of a local Vineyard church and the approval and endorsement of that church's designated Area, Regional, and Super Regional Leaders for Vineyard pastors seeking ordination after June 1, 2025.

In cooperation with Vineyard USA and local Vineyard churches, candidates for Ordination will therefore:

1. Complete an [Application for Ordination](#).
2. Be recommended for ordination by the governing body of a local church or a national ministry of Vineyard USA.
3. Provide written responses from a selection of questions related to personal history, sense of call, training, experience, and education.
4. Demonstrate a lifestyle consistent with biblical standards of Christian conduct.
5. Demonstrate a clear call of God that is individually discerned and corporately affirmed by the local church and witnessed through a history of service to the local church.
6. Demonstrate an acceptable level of biblical/theological training for ministry, whether formal and/or informal, as well as commitment to ongoing education and training in line with their calling.
7. Provide written recommendations from the candidate's spouse (if married), close family member or friend, and designated trustee of the recommending church or ministry.
8. Demonstrate a cooperative spirit with the purposes of Vineyard USA and commitment to relational connection to Vineyard USA.
9. Complete a background check.

Section 5.2.3.1. Endorsement of Transferred Credentials of Ordination - In cooperation with Vineyard USA and local Vineyard churches, candidates seeking an endorsement of ordination credentials from a non-Vineyard church or another denomination will therefore:

1. Complete an [Application for Ordination](#).
2. Be recommended for endorsement by the governing body of a local church or a national ministry of Vineyard USA.
3. Provide written responses from a selection of questions related to personal history, sense of call, training, experience, and education.
4. Provide written recommendations from the candidate's spouse (if married), close family member or friend, and designated trustee of the recommending church or ministry.
5. Demonstrate a cooperative spirit with the purposes of Vineyard USA and commitment to relational connection to Vineyard USA.
6. Complete a background check.

Section 5.2.4. Credentialing Authority

- Vineyard USA has the responsibility of articulating the standards of ordination and carrying out the policies and processes associated, which are reflected in the Handbook.
- Those seeking ordination in Vineyard USA will be recommended by the governing body of a local Vineyard church, and approved and endorsed by that church's designated Area, Regional, and Super Regional Leaders. When necessary, the process may be amended. Any amendments to the process will be clearly articulated to the candidate and the recommending church.
- Upon approval and endorsement by Vineyard USA, the oversight and control will remain the responsibility of the governing body of a local Vineyard church as outlined in its bylaws.
- A Vineyard USA endorsement is a recognition of ministerial standing within the movement, affirmed through the pastor's relationship with their local church, affirmed by its governing body, and supported by area, regional, and national leadership.

Section 5.2.5. Renewal of Endorsement - To ensure ongoing accountability, development, and alignment with the call of God and the shared standards of Vineyard USA, the endorsement of ordination credentials for all Vineyard pastors shall be renewed every three years from the date of initial endorsement. This renewal process shall include:

- Attestation to ensure continued ministry within Vineyard USA.
- Articulation of ongoing professional development, affirming the commitment to continuous growth and equipping for effective ministry.
- Confirmation by the Designated Board Member or Lead Pastor, or, in rare exceptions, a representative of a Vineyard USA national ministry.
- Endorsement by Super Regional Leader or his/her designee.

Section 5.2.6. Revocation of Endorsement - A Vineyard USA endorsement is a recognition of ministerial standing within the movement, affirmed through the pastor's relationship with their local church, affirmed by its governing body, and supported by area, regional, and national leadership. Endorsement is not a permanent entitlement and may be reviewed, continued, or withdrawn at the discretion of Vineyard USA. When a pastor is found to be in substantial violation of the standards under

which the endorsement was granted, Vineyard USA maintains a clear process for revoking the pastor's ordination endorsement. The process for revoking an endorsement is a cooperative effort between Vineyard USA and the pastor's local church leadership. The process will be guided by the principles of mutual and affectionate cooperation and is intended to be both relational and accountable.

This revocation process will include:

1. **Violation of Standards** - The endorsement revocation process is initiated when a pastor is found to be in substantial violation of the ordination standards. These standards include doctrine, practice, and conduct.
2. **Cooperative Review** - The local church leadership, in cooperation with Vineyard USA's area, regional, and national leaders, will review the situation. This review aims to be thorough, fair, and biblically sound.
3. **Withdrawal of Endorsement** - If the review determines that a substantial violation has occurred, the Super Regional Leaders will make the final decision regarding the revocation of the pastor's endorsement. This action signifies that the individual no longer meets the established standards for ordained ministry within the movement.

Revocation of endorsement is a serious matter that is not taken lightly. The process is a critical part of maintaining the integrity of Vineyard USA's leadership and ensuring that all pastors are held to the same biblical and relational standards.

Section 5.2.7. Licensing, Commissioning & Chaplain Endorsement - Vineyard USA recommends that all local Vineyard churches develop processes for temporary Licensing and/or Commissioning that serve the local church and individuals pursuing a call to ministry. Among other things, a process for temporary Licensing and/or Commissioning establishes a formal window of time for training, testing, and discernment in the life of a potential ordained pastor. These processes grant positional opportunity and provide delegated authority. It is during this time that the governing body of the local church can observe a developing pastor and assess their competencies, conduct, maturity, and morality. If, after several years of service, the individual or the governing body of the local church discerns the individual is no longer called to or competent in pastoral ministry, he or she can stop doing the function, and will also cease to hold the title. The processes below should not be used as an alternative to the Credentialing Process outlined above.

Section 5.2.7.1. Licensing - Provides a new(er) pastor with a year-to-year certificate that legally allows them to do all of the functions of the pastorate, including officiating weddings and funerals and leading in the church with pastoral authority. The governing body of a local church bestows a license for the function of the pastorate. To receive this position, a person should meet the qualifications for eldership as recorded in 1 Timothy and Titus. Vineyard USA affirms that both men and women, married and single, may be called and qualified to serve in pastoral roles. Vineyard USA recommends that this license be renewed annually by the governing body of the local church. A license is not trans-local.

Section 5.2.7.2. Commissioning - A process often used in the local church that allows individuals to operate with pastoral authority for short-term or specific tasks (i.e., a non-pastor staff member for jail

ministry). Some denominations commission missionaries for seasons of time as needed to serve in the mission field. A commission is not translocal.

Section 5.2.7.3. Chaplain Endorsement and Ordination - Vineyard USA has an established process for endorsing military and civilian chaplains. This process is distinct from the ordination process and national endorsement of ordination credentials. Should a chaplain seek ordination, the process noted above would serve as the guidelines for each candidate.

Section 5.2.8. Legal and Tax Implications - As statutes may vary state to state, it is the responsibility of the individual and the governing body of the local Vineyard church to be aware of the implications and legal requirements associated with ordination, licensing, and commissioning.

Section 5.2.9. Review - Section 5.1. Ordination and Credentials will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees in consultation with the Leadership Council no later than December 31, 2030.

SECTION 5.3. PROCESS FOR STARTING A VINEYARD CHURCH - CHURCH PLANTING AND RELEASE

Section 5.3.1. Rationale for and Benefits of a National Church Planting Process - The rationale for and benefits of a national church planting process include the following:

- Recognition of God's calling and gifting for those clearly called and set apart to initiate and lead new church communities, ensuring a strong foundation for spiritual and numerical growth.
- Cooperation between the local sending church, area, regional, and national leadership, to ensure a commitment to and alignment with Vineyard USA beliefs, values, and vocation in the establishment of new congregations.
- Accountability to the local sending church and to Vineyard USA, in matters of doctrine, practice, and morality within the new church plant.
- Demonstrates a commitment to ongoing personal and missional development for church planters and their core teams.
- Access to Vineyard USA training and partnerships that promote best practices for church planters.
- Strengthens demonstration of the legitimacy and recognition of the new church entity as it relates to organizational and legal guidelines, including potential non-profit status.

Section 5.3.2. A Foundation for Church Planting Ministry - Scripture teaches that each believer has been given one or more gifts in order to serve Jesus and His Church (1 Cor. 12, Eph. 4:7). In addition, some believers have received the call of God upon their lives to plant new churches and have been given gifts for the task of equipping God's people to carry out the works of service which build up the body of Christ and expand God's Kingdom (Eph. 4:11,12, Acts 1:8). Those called to church planting ministry are chosen and appointed by God, affirmed by the local sending church, and subsequently recognized, supported and released by Vineyard USA (Acts 13:3, 1 Tim. 4:14, 2 Tim. 1:6).

Section 5.3.3. A Cooperative Process for Church Planting and Release - The recognition and release of those set apart for church planting has long been understood by the Church as vital to establishing a cooperative and accountable process for launching trustworthy new congregations. The process of releasing a new church establishes a biblical vision for church multiplication, accountability between church planters, the local sending church, and Vineyard USA, and shared commitment to the community of churches within Vineyard USA. Therefore, in cooperation with local Vineyard churches,

Vineyard USA will:

- Establish and maintain a process to release Vineyard church plants.
- Develop, articulate, and evaluate the standards for church planting and release.
- Establish and maintain programs, partnerships, and training resources that will support church planters and their teams in their journey to launch and beyond.

In cooperation with Vineyard USA, local Vineyard churches will therefore:

- Participate in the church planting process that will include a recommendation from the governing body of a local Vineyard sending church and the approval and endorsement of that church's designated Area, Regional, and Super Regional Leaders for Vineyard church plants.
- Support the required assessments as determined by Vineyard USA.
- Support the required training as determined by Vineyard USA.

In cooperation with Vineyard USA and local Vineyard churches, candidates for church planting will therefore:

- Complete an [application for church planting](#).
- Complete the required assessments as determined by Vineyard USA.
- Complete the required training as determined by Vineyard USA.
- Complete a background check for the lead planter(s).
- Present a well-defined church planting proposal, including vision, mission, values, target demographic, outreach strategy, leadership development plan, and financial projections.

Section 5.3.4. Legal and Release Paperwork - Every Vineyard church plant will complete the required Legal and Release paperwork, which will include:

- Bylaws establishing formal affiliation to Vineyard USA and acknowledgment of the National Leadership Handbook
- Trademark License Agreement
- Background check for the church planter and spouse (for those who are married)
- Release Paperwork to be signed by the sending pastor, Area, Regional, and National Vineyard leaders

Section 5.3.5. Vineyard USA Start-up Funds - Upon completion of the Release Paperwork, Vineyard USA will provide the agreed-upon start-up funds.

SECTION 5.4. PROCESS OF CHURCH ADOPTION AND RECOGNITION

Section 5.4.1. Rationale for and Benefits of a National Church Adoption Process - The rationale for and benefits of a national church adoption process include the following:

- Cooperation between the area, regional, and national leadership to ensure a commitment to and alignment with Vineyard USA beliefs, values, and vocation in the establishment of new congregations.
- Accountability to Vineyard USA in matters of doctrine, practice, and conduct within the newly adopted church.
- Strengthens demonstration of the legitimacy and recognition of the new church entity as it relates to organizational and legal guidelines, including potential non-profit status.

Section 5.4.2. A Foundation for Church Adoption Ministry - Building on the profound biblical metaphor of adoption, the process of a local church being "adopted" into Vineyard USA finds its precedent in God's redemptive work. Just as a believer, once an outsider, is brought into God's family with the full rights and privileges of a child, a church community can be brought into the Vineyard movement. This is not merely a change of affiliation, but a spiritual and relational act. It signifies a church's transition from a state of disconnection to becoming a full member of the Vineyard family, embracing the movement's values, theology, and mission. This "adoption" is a mutual commitment, where the local church receives the support and accountability of the larger Vineyard community, and in turn, contributes its unique gifts and calling to the flourishing of the entire movement, reflecting the rich inheritance and shared identity that all believers enjoy as adopted children of God.

Section 5.4.3. A Cooperative Process for Church Adoption - The process for church adoption has long been understood as vital to establishing a cooperative and accountable process for integrating new congregations into Vineyard USA. The process establishes a biblical vision for church multiplication, accountability between church adopters, and shared commitment to the community of churches within Vineyard USA. Therefore, in cooperation with local Vineyard churches, Vineyard USA will:

- Establish and maintain a process for church adoptions.
- Develop, articulate, and evaluate the standards for church adoption.
- Establish and maintain programs, partnerships, and training resources that will support those adopting churches and their teams in their journey and beyond.

In cooperation with Vineyard USA, churches seeking to adopt will therefore:

- Participate in the church adoption process that will include engagement with the lead pastor(s), leadership team, and governing body of a church seeking adoption.
- Demonstrate a cooperative spirit with the purposes of Vineyard USA and commitment to relational connection to Vineyard USA.
- Receive the approval and endorsement of that church's designated Area, Regional, and Super Regional Leaders of Vineyard USA.

In cooperation with Vineyard USA and local Vineyard churches, candidates for church adoption will therefore:

- Complete an [application for church adoption](#).
- Complete the required assessments as determined by Vineyard USA.
- Complete the required training as determined by Vineyard USA.
- Complete a background check for the Lead Pastor(s).
- Initiate the Vineyard USA ordination application at the appropriate stage of the adoption process, as determined by Vineyard USA leadership. Provided the process concludes favorably, the Lead Pastor(s) will either (1) be ordained by their newly adopted Vineyard church and endorsed by Vineyard USA, (2) have existing ordination credentials recognized, transferred, and endorsed by Vineyard USA, or (3) be offered Vineyard ordination and endorsement as part of a dual affiliation arrangement.

Section 5.4.4. Legal and Release Paperwork - Every Vineyard church adoption will complete the required Legal and Release paperwork, which will include:

- Bylaws establishing formal affiliation to Vineyard USA and acknowledgment of the updated

- bylaw affiliation and National Leadership Handbook
- Trademark License Agreement
- Release Paperwork to be signed by your Area, Regional, and National Vineyard leaders.

SECTION 5.5. PROCESS OF DISASSOCIATION

An affiliate church may terminate the affiliate relationship (disassociate) for any reason per the process outlined in this section. While the termination clause of the active Trademark License Agreement on file with Vineyard USA defines the legal parameters for disassociation, the process in this Handbook reflects Vineyard USA's strong desire for good faith engagement—prioritizing mutual understanding, healthy separation, and the possibility of reconciliation. In spirit and intent, this process outlines the relational commitments we hold and, in principle, supersedes the termination clause in the Trademark License.

For Reference: 2017 Trademark License Termination Clause - 12. TERMINATION: (a) Either party may terminate this license for any reason upon sixty (60) days prior written notice to to the other party; (b) Licensor may immediately terminate this License in the event that Licensee (i) ceases to be affiliated with Vineyard USA, (ii) conducts itself and/or hold itself out as having a position inconsistent with Vineyard USA's "core values," "statement of faith," and any other formal or informal theological or ecclesiastical position taken by Licensor, (iii) violates the terms of this License; and/or (iv) fails to maintain the 3% giving responsibilities established by Licensor. In the event of termination, Licensee shall immediately discontinue use of the Trademarks and all rights granted herein shall revert to Licensor. Continued use of the Trademarks by Licensee following a termination shall constitute infringement.

Section 5.5.1. Written Notification of Intent - The Lead Pastor shall provide Written Notification of Intent to Disassociate, which shall be received by Vineyard USA at least six (6) months prior to disassociation. Written notification should include the rationale for disassociation with as much detail and documentation as possible. This written notification should be sent to the designated Super Regional Leader, Regional Leader(s), and Area Leader(s), and include the Designated Board Member on file with Vineyard USA per Section 3.3.5.

Section 5.5.1.1. Acknowledgement of Written Notification of Intent - The designated Super Regional Leader of Vineyard will acknowledge in writing via email the receipt of the Written Notification of Intent to Disassociate and reply to all parties noted on the initial correspondence.

Section 5.5.2. Lead Pastor Engagement - Within 30 days of the Written Notification of Intent to Disassociate, the designated Super Regional Leaders (and/or other appropriate representatives of the National Leadership Team or Leadership Council) will meet with the Lead Pastor(s) to discuss the concerns noted in the Notification of Intent. This confirmation meeting is intended to document issues, address concerns, clarify misunderstandings, identify any unresolved offenses, and identify the internal processes that have been undertaken to address the matters at hand.

Section 5.5.2.1. Summary of Lead Pastor(s) Concerns - Within 30 days of the Lead Pastor(s) confirmation meeting, the designated Super Regional Leader will provide, in writing, a summary of the conversations and issues identified. As appropriate, this summary will include supporting documentation that clarifies the position of Vineyard USA on the matters at hand.

Section 5.5.3. Local Church Governing Body Engagement - Within 30 days of the Lead Pastor(s) confirmation, a conversation shall occur between the designated Super Regional Leader (and/or other appropriate National Leadership Team representative) and the governing body of the local church. This meeting is intended to document issues, address concerns, clarify misunderstandings, identify any unresolved offenses, and identify the internal processes that have been undertaken to address the matters at hand. This meeting is further intended to ensure that the governing body has completed its responsibilities and due diligence in advance of a final decision to disassociate from Vineyard USA.

Section 5.5.3.1. Summary of Concerns and Proposed Resolution - Within 30 days of the governing church body confirmation meeting, the designated Super Regional Leaders will provide, in writing, a summary of the Lead Pastor(s) and Governing Body conversations and issues identified. As appropriate, this summary will include supporting documentation that clarifies the position of Vineyard USA on the matters at hand.

Section 5.5.3.2. Proposed Resolutions - If Vineyard USA believes the concerns do not warrant disassociation, Vineyard USA may propose a resolution to the matters at hand for the consideration of either party.

Section 5.5.4. Notice of Disassociation - Following the process outlined above, should the affiliated church remain committed to disassociation, it shall submit notice via the [Disassociation Form](#) provided by Vineyard USA. The content of the Disassociation Form will be shared with the designated Super Regional Leader, Regional Leader(s), and Area Leader(s) of Vineyard USA. The date of the Disassociation Form submission shall constitute the start of the sixty (60) days outlined in the Trademark License Agreement.

Section 5.5.5. Relational Expectations - Vineyard USA will expect the following relational commitments of the disassociating church:

- Communication with the Regional Leader(s)
- Communication with the Area Leader(s)
- Communicate with Lead Pastors of Vineyard churches in the designated area
- Attending to any unresolved offenses or conflicts that are identified

Section 5.5.6. Trademark License and Usage - In the event of disassociation, the local church shall discontinue use of the trademarks as outlined by the Trademark License Agreement, and all rights granted herein shall revert to Vineyard USA. Continued use of the Trademarks by Vineyard church following a termination shall constitute infringement.

SECTION 5.6. PROCESS OF DISAFFILIATION

Vineyard USA may terminate the affiliate relationship (disaffiliate) with a Vineyard church for any reason, per the process outlined in this section. While the termination clause of the active Trademark License Agreement a church has on file with Vineyard USA defines the legal parameters for disaffiliation and gives Vineyard USA the right to terminate an affiliate relationship without cause upon 60 days' notice, or immediately with cause, the process in this Handbook reflects Vineyard USA's strong desire for good faith engagement—prioritizing mutual understanding, accountability, healthy separation, and the possibility of reconciliation. In spirit and intent, the National Leadership

Handbook Disaffiliation Process outlines the relational commitments to one another and, in principle, supersedes the Termination Clause in the Trademark License.

For Reference: 2017 Trademark License Termination Clause - 12. TERMINATION: (a) Either party may terminate this license for any reason upon sixty (60) days prior written notice to to the other party; (b) Licensor may immediately terminate this License in the event that Licensee (i) ceases to be affiliated with Vineyard USA, (ii) conducts itself and/or hold itself out as having a position inconsistent with Vineyard USA's "core values," "statement of faith," and any other formal or informal theological or ecclesiastical position taken by Licensor, (iii) violates the terms of this License; and/or (iv) fails to maintain the 3% giving responsibilities established by Licensor. In the event of termination, Licensee shall immediately discontinue use of the Trademarks and all rights granted herein shall revert to Licensor. Continued use of the Trademarks by Licensee following a termination shall constitute infringement.

Section 5.6.1. Written Notification of Intent to Disaffiliate - Written notification shall include the rationale for Disaffiliation with as much detail and documentation as possible. This written notification shall be sent to the Lead Pastor(s) and Designated Board Member on file with Vineyard USA.

Section 5.6.2. Lead Pastor Engagement - Within 30 days of the Written Notification of Intent to Disaffiliate, the designated Super Regional Leaders (and/or other appropriate representatives of the National Leadership Team or Leadership Council) shall meet with the Lead Pastor(s) to discuss the concerns noted in the written notification. This meeting is intended to document issues, address concerns, clarify misunderstandings, and/or identify any unresolved offenses.

Section 5.6.3. Local Church Governing Board Engagement - Within 30 days of the Written Notification of Intent to Disaffiliate, the designated Super Regional Leader (and/or other appropriate National Leadership Team representative) shall meet with the governing body of the local church. This meeting is intended to document issues, address concerns, clarify misunderstandings, identify any unresolved offenses, and identify the internal processes that have been undertaken to address the matters at hand. This meeting is intended to inform the governing body that it has completed its responsibilities and due diligence in advance of a final decision to disaffiliate from Vineyard USA.

Section 5.6.4. Summary of Concerns and Proposed Resolution - Within 15 days of meeting with the governing body, the designated Super Regional Leader will provide, in writing, a summary of concerns to the Lead Pastor(s) and governing board. As appropriate, this summary will include supporting documentation that clarifies the position of Vineyard USA on the matters at hand. If Vineyard USA believes the concerns do not warrant disaffiliation, Vineyard USA may propose a resolution to the matters at hand for the consideration of either party.

Section 5.6.5. Notice of Disaffiliation - Following the process outlined above, should Vineyard USA remain committed to disaffiliation, it shall submit a written Notice of Disaffiliation to the Lead Pastor(s) and Designated Board Member. The date of this written notice shall constitute the start of the sixty (60) days outlined in the Trademark License Agreement.

Section 5.6.6. Lines of Communication - Vineyard USA will communicate the disaffiliation and its corresponding rationale to:

- Vineyard USA Board of Trustees

- Vineyard USA National Leadership Team and staff
- Regional Leader(s)
- Area Leader(s)
- Vineyard churches in the designated area
- Those with which there may be unresolved offenses or conflicts

Section 5.6.7. Trademark License and Usage - In the event of disaffiliation, the local church shall discontinue use of the trademarks as outlined by the Trademark License Agreement, and all rights granted herein shall revert to Vineyard USA. Continued use of the Trademarks by a Vineyard church following a termination shall constitute infringement.

SECTION 5.7. RECOMMENDED POLICIES

Vineyard USA recommends that every affiliate church utilize the Vineyard Policy Pack to develop essential policies for adoption within the local church. Each policy template has been reviewed by lawyers and professionals with subject-area expertise. However, you may need to update the draft policies to align with state-specific requirements, local regulations, and details specific to your local context.

Section 5.7.1. Recommended Policies - The current list of Vineyard USA-approved policy templates is available [here](#).

APPENDICES

The appendices contain supporting materials referenced in the Handbook and other NLH-related resources. Each linked appendix resource is available online and will be updated as needed to remain current.

APPENDIX A. EMBEDDED WEBPAGE LINKS

- [Vineyard USA Trustees](#)
- [Vineyard USA National Leadership Team](#)
- [Vineyard USA Regions and Regional Leaders](#)
- [Vineyard USA Associations and Association Leaders](#)
- [Affiliate Member Financial Contribution](#)
- [Chaplain Endorsement](#)

APPENDIX B. EMBEDDED DOCUMENTS

- [Vineyard USA Bylaws](#)
- [Vineyard Bylaw Templates and Amendment](#)
- [Be-Know-Do: The Identity of a Vineyard Pastor](#)
- NAE Code of Ethics for Pastors
 - [Code of Ethics for Pastors \(English\)](#)
 - [Code of Ethics for Pastors \(Spanish\)](#)
- [Relational Commitments](#)
- [Recommended Policies](#)
 - [Vineyard Policy Pack \(English and Spanish\)](#)

APPENDIX C. EMBEDDED FORMS

- [Handbook Appeal Form](#)
- [Handbook Rejection Form](#)
- [Designated Standing Appeal Form](#)
- [Application for Ordination](#)
- [Application for Church Planting](#)
- [Application for Church Adoption](#)
- [Disassociation Form](#)

APPENDIX D. RESOURCE MATERIALS

- [Responsibilities of Affiliate Churches, Pastors, and Governing Bodies](#)