COMISS Network Guidelines

Approved at the January 2026 Annual Forum in Silver Spring, MD.

I. Name, Purpose, Mission and Objectives

a. The name of this group is COMISS Network; incorporated as a 501.c3 in Atlanta, Georgia.
b. The purpose of the COMISS Network is to provide its membership with a unique forum for communication, networking, and advocacy.
c. The Mission of the COMISS Network is to serve as the pre-eminent network of professional organizations, institutions, and faith communities that promotes and supports collaboration among its member organizations which are committed to the theological and clinical education and the competent practice of interfaith spiritual care through chaplaincy and pastoral counseling and research in specialized settings.
d. The Vision of the COMISS Network is to facilitate advocacy for specialized ministry by developing and sharing evidenced based best practices in chaplaincy and pastoral counseling and research.
e. The Objectives of the COMISS Network are:
    i. To provide a forum for dialogue among its member organizations.
    ii. To encourage shared programs/resources toward creating greater collaboration among specialized ministries.
    iii. To advocate professionalism in standards and in the provision of interfaith-based care and counseling.
    iv. To educate our constituency and various publics about the value of professional interfaith-based spiritual care and counseling.
    v. To propose and plan initiatives that further our mission, vision, and purpose.
    vi. To promote ongoing research in order to establish evidence-based spiritual care and counseling.

II. Membership:

a. Membership is available to organizations which subscribe to the purpose, mission, and objectives of COMISS. Organizations applying for membership and those renewing current membership may self-select the organization's membership category. The characteristics of each category are recommended guidelines for assisting the organizations in selecting the most appropriate category for membership:
    i. Professional Certifying or Accrediting Organization: These organizations certify individuals for the practice of and or training for professional spiritual care. They will demonstrate how certified chaplains, pastoral counselors, or other pastoral care professionals conform to a code of ethics that prohibits proselytizing, conflicts of interest, and crossing of professional

boundaries. Or, organizations in this category accredit institutions, facilities, centers, or systems for the practice, education, and training of chaplains, pastoral counselors, and/or other spiritual care professionals.

ii. Religious Endorsing Bodies: These organizations include faith groups, denominations, or religious organizations which endorse individuals of their respective group for chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and/or other professional spiritual care ministries. A Religious Endorsing Body will be able to demonstrate a process of endorsement which includes on-going accountability between the endorser and the endorsed individual. Also, these organizations will be able to demonstrate recognition as a religious endorsing body. They will be able to demonstrate that they are recognized as a 501 (C) (3) religious organization and have primarily a lay constituency.

iii. Professional Membership Organizations: These organizations exist as groups of chaplains and/or other pastoral care professionals whose work focuses on ministry in specific specialized settings. These organizations may be for profit or not for profit.

iv. Chaplain and Pastoral Counselor Employing Organizations or Agencies: These organizations utilize the services of chaplains and/or pastoral counselors who are certified by one of the Certifying Organizations of the COMISS Network. These organizations may be for profit or not for profit, but they must demonstrate, via their mission statement and table of organization, that they operate in accordance with the purpose, mission,-and objectives of the COMISS Network.

v. Academic and Educational Institutions: These institutions prepare students for chaplaincy/ specialized ministry through academic degree programs and/or conduct research related to ministry in specialized settings. These institutions are accredited by an accrediting organization recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and/or the U.S. Department of Education.

vi. Friends of COMISS: These organizations are ready to embrace the purpose and mission of COMISS Network, and are either not yet organized sufficiently to apply for membership in one of the categories listed in Membership sections i through v in these Guidelines, or those who are sufficiently organized would like to learn more about the COMISS Network. Ordinarily, organizations apply for full membership within 1-2 years. Friends can attend COMISS Network activities, will not be voting members, and will be asked to pay modest dues.

III. COMISS Network Forum

a. Membership
    i. Members in good standing are current in membership dues and have filed all reports required.
    ii. Each member organization may be represented by up to three participants.
    iii. There will be one vote per member organization in good standing.
b. Annual Forum
    i. The COMISS Network will gather for one or more meetings annually in Forum.
    ii. All Forum business will be presented for agenda approval to the COMISS Network Leaders no later than 24 hours prior to the opening of the Forum.
    iii. The conduct of business at the Annual Forum will include presentations, discussion and action on:
        1. Annual reports
        2. Financial report
        3. Presentation of a budget and its adoption
        4. Election of officers
        5. Election of nominating committee
        6. Presentation of new members
        7. Proposed new initiatives
    iv. All mailings pertaining to an upcoming Forum are to be sent to the member organizations.

IV. COMISS Network Leadership (Officers and At-Large Members)

a. Network Leadership shall be members of one of the member organizations of the COMISS Network in good standing.
b. The COMISS Network Leadership annual elections shall take place at the Annual Forum.
c. New COMISS Network Leaders will begin their terms of office at the conclusion of the Annual Forum.
d. The officers of COMISS Network will be:

    i. Chair
        1. Presides at all meetings of the COMISS Network Forum and the COMISS Network Leadership.
        2. Presents an annual report to the Forum.
    ii. Chair-Elect
        1. Assumes the duties of the Chair in absence or disability of the Chair.
        2. Serves as chair of Forum Program Planning Task Force.

iii. Treasurer
    1. Is responsible for preparing a budget for review by the COMISS Network Leadership and for approval by the Forum Membership.
    2. Provides financial reports to the COMISS Network Leadership and to the Annual Forum.
    3. Schedules an audit every three years with an outside professional auditor.

iv. Secretary
    1. Attends all sessions of the COMISS Network Leadership and Annual Forum and records all votes and minutes.

e. The officers of the COMISS Network will serve as the officers of the corporation and as such are responsible for its business and direction as approved by the COMISS Network.

f. At-Large Members: There shall be two at-large members elected at the Annual Forum by and from the membership groups to insure diversity.

g. Spiritual Care Week Committee Chair: The spiritual care week committee chair will be the liaison between the COMISS Network Leadership and the Spiritual Care Week Committee.

h. CCAPS Chair: The CCAPS Chair will be a member of the COMISS Leadership Team.

i. The COMISS Network Leadership will act on business responsibilities between meetings of the Forum. They will:
    i. Contract services
    ii. Hire and annually evaluate staff
    iii. Implement decisions of the Forum
    iv. Be responsible for the budget
    v. Engage the membership in strategic planning
    vi. Establish and appoint Task Forces as needed to support the mission and objectives.
    vii. Financial Mgt

j. Terms of Service

    i. The Chair and Chair-Elect will each serve one two-year term. The Chair-Elect succeeds the Chair. If the chair position is vacated before the end of the two year term the chair-elect will assume the position and fill the unexpired term (and afterward, fulfilling the term to which s/he was elected.) An election will be held at the next Forum to elect a succeeding chair-elect.
    ii. In the interest of continuity, a nominee for Chair-Elect is selected by the COMISS Network Leadership from the COMISS Network

Leadership or from former COMISS Network Leadership members who have served within the last 5 years.

iii. The Secretary, Treasurer and two Members-at-Large of the COMISS Network Leadership will serve a two-year term and may be re-elected to one successive term.

iv. The Chair-Elect and Treasurer will be elected in odd-numbered years; the Secretary and two At-Large members will be elected in even-numbered years.

v. Spiritual Care Week Committee members will serve a four-year term, and may be reappointed to a second term. The Chair will serve a three-year term and may be re-elected.

vi. CCAPS Commissioners will serve three-year terms and may be re-appointed to one successive term.

vii. Individuals who are completing an unfulfilled term are eligible to serve a two-year term and be re-elected to one successive term.

viii. The chair can appoint an individual for Secretary or Treasurer if the position is vacated prior to the Forum.

V. COMISS Network Staff and/or Outside Services

a. The Executive Administrator (Job Description on file)

b. The Bookkeeper (Job Description on file)

VI. Standing Committees and Commissions

a. A Nominating Committee of four (4) will be nominated and elected annually from the membership categories at the Annual Forum. They will be responsible for the process of nominations and conducting the election.

i. Solicit names from each of the membership groups.

ii. Secure agreement to being nominated from the nominee.

iii. Prepare the slate to be mailed to the membership with registrations packets for the Annual Forum.

iv. Conduct the election at the Annual Forum.

v. The Committee may receive nominations from the floor.

vi. They are administratively accountable to the COMISS Network Leadership.

b. The COMISS Commission for Accreditation of Pastoral Services consists of eight members.

i. The Network Leadership will appoint two commissioners drawn from the the COMISS Network Membership, one of which will be chair. When there is a commissioner vacancy, CCAPS will receive applications and then make their recommendation to the National Leadership who will make the appointment.

ii. CCAPS will:

1. Propose and revise CCAPS standards
2. Conduct accreditation site visits of pastoral services
3. Represent the COMISS Network to external national accrediting bodies
4. Submit an annual report to the Network
5. Recommend nominees to the Network Leadership for the at-large commissioners from outside the Network.

iii. COMISS Network Leadership will:

1. Approve membership criteria for CCAPS
2. Appoint CCAPS commissioners. The commissioners will elect their own chair from among themselves.
3. Approve policies, procedures, and standards of CCAPS.
4. Approve CCAPS accreditation recommendations for pastoral services.

c. Spiritual Care Week Committee

i. The purpose of the committee is to plan and implement the annual observance of Spiritual Care Week. A committee will be appointed by the COMISS Network Leadership from among the membership categories. The Spiritual Care Week observance is intended to raise awareness of the importance of pastoral/spiritual care. This includes, but is not limited to:

1. Determination of a theme for a three-year cycle in advance.
2. Promote and manage an opportunity for constituents to design and submit a graphic promoting a theme.
3. Produce publicity and educational materials to support the theme.
4. May contract with and supervise a manufacturer to supply materials
5. May supervise sale and distribution of materials

ii. The committee will nominate its own chair with approval by the COMISS Network Leadership.

iii. The committee will present an annual report to the Annual Forum.

VII. Amendments and revisions to the Guidelines

a. Will be developed as needed by the COMISS Network Leadership
b. Will be sent to the voting member of record of each member organization 60 days prior to the Forum.
c. Changes to the Guidelines shall be ratified by a simple majority of the voting members present at the annual Forum.

VIII. Required Quorum

a. At the COMISS Network Leadership meetings, a simple majority (one more than half of the Network Leadership) is sufficient to take action.
b. At the Annual Forum a simple majority of the voting members present is sufficient to take action.