

# **Recommended Procedures**

---

**for Ordination,  
Commissioning,  
and Recognition  
for the  
Christian Ministry  
in the  
American Baptist Churches**

Adopted by  
The Professional Ministries Team  
& The Ministers Council  
American Baptist Churches USA  
Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851



Effective January 1, 1994, the Commission on the Ministry  
was renamed the Ministerial Leadership Commission.

## PREFACE

The church, as a growing organism, experiences change, adapts to its life situation and adjusts to the requirements of its ministry setting. One of those areas of necessary change is that of requirements for ordination.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the National Ministerial Leadership Commission identified the following issues that warranted a review of our current ordination standards:

- changing demographics;
- changing seminary populations;
- changing leadership needs for the church (more bi-vocational, multi-cultural, etc.)
- changing awareness of how God currently is calling and preparing persons for ministry today;
- an awareness of increasing forms of non-traditional theological education.

The National Ministerial Leadership Commission began a review of the ordination standards in January 1992. Task forces from each of the sectional commissions took portions of text to study and made recommendations. Theological and historical papers were presented. All-commission gatherings were held in Green Lake, Wisconsin 1994 and 1996. In May 1996 the National Ministerial Leadership Commission joined partner commissions from the East, West, and Midwest to struggle with, discuss, and vote to accept this as our current document. The document also went before the Ministers Council Senate and all the caucuses for their suggestions and review.

This is not the first time this document and the process for recognition of ordination has undergone change. In 1975-1980 the Commission on the Ministry engaged in a similar process to deal with the issue of sexist language in the document and to do a comprehensive study of ordination, licensing, and commissioning. The result of that work was a working document "Recommended Procedures for Ordination, Commissioning, and Recognition for the Christian Ministry in the American Baptist Churches," adopted by the Commission on the Ministry and the Ministers Council of ABC/USA, in October 1980.

The following procedure serves as a guideline uniformly accepted throughout the ABC/USA for churches, associations, and regions to follow as they discern the call of God in persons lives for the high calling of set apart ministry.

Revised - May, 1997

PMT Revisions proposed in May of 2011  
Voted by MC Senate in August 2012

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

I.	Introduction	
	Background	5
	Historical Perspective	5
	Definitions and Terms Used in This Document	6
II.	American Baptist Standards for Ordination	
	Discerning God’s Call	7
	Congregational Response to God’s Call	7
	Education/Experience	8
	Track I	8
	Track II	9
	Track III	10
III.	Recognition of American Baptist Ordination	
	The Candidate	11
	The Local Congregation	11
	The Department of Ministry	12
	The Ordination Council	12
	Types of Service	14
IV.	Change of Status of Recognition of Ordination	
	Voluntary Change	15
	Withdrawal of Recognition	15
	Inactive Status	15
V.	Procedure for Recognition of Non-American Baptist Ordinations	16
VI.	Commissioned Missionaries and Commissioned Ministers	17
	Addendum 1: Establishing a Pattern of Life-Long Learning	19
	Addendum 2: Summary	21
	Addendum 3 - The Ordination Service	22

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

Ordination is the act of the church by which, in the name of God, it delegates to a qualified person who has responded to the call of God a wide range of ministerial functions and responsibilities.

Baptists long have both celebrated the autonomy of the local church and joined in voluntary association with each other for mission endeavors best accomplished by the wider Christian community. Thus the local Baptist church retains the right to decide for itself but in matters of faith and polity also recognizes interdependence with other Baptist churches and organizations as beneficial to full ministry. Likewise, the proposed recommended procedures for ordination seek to honor the needs and contributions of the local church while strengthening the associational principle. These procedures also draw from the strengths inherent in the autonomy of the local church and from the relationships of those congregations with regions and the wider American Baptist organizations.

This document represents the interests of many stakeholding bodies within American Baptist life, including the clergy themselves, local ABC congregations, regions and committees, commissions and national boards, and the Ministers Council. Some of these interests are detailed in the statements below.

1. It is the right and responsibility of the local church to ordain those whom it recognizes as being called of God. That ordination may be particular for the local church or it may be general on behalf of all churches of like faith and order. It is done in consultation with associated churches.
2. Because of the mobility and itinerancy of the ordained clergy, it is physically impossible for the local ordaining church to be responsible for the faithful service of the ordained for the many years of an individual's ministry. While most regions offer counseling, consulting, continuing education, and continuing recognition of ordination, the individual clergyperson is also charged with the responsibility to engage in appropriate preparation for the ministry, to seek out adequate support while in the ministry, and to maintain a commitment to high ethical standards throughout their career.
3. Because God calls people into the ministry of varying age and background, there are various practices in the American Baptist Churches regarding the timing and form of ordination.
4. Even though diversity and variability characterize our life together as American Baptists, ABC congregations desire certain core elements among their clergy including a clear call to the ministry, skills conducive to performing that ministry, emotional maturity, embracement of the ABC Ministerial code of ethics, willingness to be a part of associational life, understanding of American Baptist polity, and a commitment to life long learning and development as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Professional Registry of the ABC, U.S.A. should be reflective of the present as well as emerging nature of ministry.

### **Historical Perspective**

One of the commonly held convictions of churches today is that all Christians are ministers who participate in Christ's own ministry. This is evidenced in the baptism of the individual Christian and in the doctrine of "the priesthood of all believers," where within faith communities individuals inspired by the Holy Spirit are both competent and responsible for approaching God on behalf of themselves and others.

Baptists further asserted that any member of the church could be called upon to exercise all ministerial functions and responsibilities, even though this did not ordinarily happen. When a radical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was combined with a strictly independent concept of the local church, with each congregation directly responsible to Christ, and its officers having no standing outside its membership, there seemed to be little practical or doctrinal foundation for a special order of ministry, the ordained ministry.

But the actual situation was not that simple. Baptists long have possessed a "separate" or "set-apart" ministry that has

served a constituency wider than the local congregation. Ordination has tended to be the setting apart (by the call of God and the action of the church) of one of the many ministers to perform special functions of ministry on behalf of the community of faith.

Ordination historically has been understood by many American Baptist congregations as affirming that an individual has had a call to this specialized ministry and has met the necessary qualifications for carrying it out. Although most often a local congregation has taken the initiative in ordaining that individual, it did so in cooperation with other congregations. This participation of a group of churches in ordination has given the rite much more than merely local significance. In fact, if the ordination was carried out according to the standards of the American Baptist Churches, it represented a denominational recognition of the individual's call and qualifications for the ordained ministry of Christ's universal church.

In the primitive church, the rite of ordination climaxed in the act of "laying on of hands." This act indicated that the person so ordained was not only consecrated to God's service and thus made holy, but also was commissioned to serve on behalf of those who laid on hands (see Acts 6:6 and 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:6). In addition, the act and the accompanying prayer, which invoked God's grace upon the ordained, implied the ordinand's authority to share the functions and responsibilities of those who laid hands upon the individual.

This meaning has continued to be central to ordination. Today, the act of laying on of hands signifies and focuses in one person the ministry of many persons who in themselves represent the wider church of Jesus Christ.

### **Key Concepts Contained in This Document**

1. **Department of Ministry:** Department of Ministry refers to a regional or associational body charged with the recognition of ordination. Department of Ministry is the generic term for what is called by various names such as Ministerial Leadership Commissions, committees on ordination, area committees, or equivalent committees of associations and/or regions.
2. **Licensing:** "Licensing" as used in this document, is a preliminary step toward ordination. Licensing as described here should be distinguished clearly from licensing given to "licensed lay preachers" or "licensed lay ministers" by some local churches.
3. **Sponsor:** A "Sponsor" is a person selected by the candidate to present the candidate and draw from the candidate his or her theological convictions and understanding of ministry for the ordination council.
4. **Local church ordinations that occur apart from the three tracks:** A local church ordination in which the local church ordains the candidate apart from regional or an associational processes is referred to only as a "local church ordination" rather than a "regionally recognized ordination." It is defined by and limited to the life and ministry of a particular congregation.
5. **Regionally recognized ordination:** A regionally recognized ordination is one in which the candidate has met certain preparatory requirements for ordination as specified by the region.
6. **Certified lay minister:** A person who has completed a certified lay ministry program by an ABC region or seminary and has been certified by the region will be known as a "Certified Lay Minister." Additional steps are recommended, as outlined in Track III, for a certified lay minister to become ordained.
7. **Eligibility for call:** Eligibility for call is a separate issue from ordination. Persons interested in receiving search assistance should contact the region(s) in which they desire a local church pastoral call or position.
8. **Pastor:** "Pastor" is generally used to refer to the individual/s in formal pastoral leadership.
9. **Reverend:** The term "Reverend" is generally reserved for those who are ordained.

## II. AMERICAN BAPTIST STANDARDS FOR ORDINATION

### 1. DISCERNING GOD'S CALL

The most important prerequisite for ordination, the call of God to a specialized ministry, does not yield itself to particular standards which a denomination or local congregation might establish. This is why the call must be tested by other prerequisites or standards and be discerned through the processes of ordaining, commissioning, and recognizing ordinations. Because a call to the ministry is lived out among institutions of ministry, it is quite appropriate that the local and the wider church (in the case of denomination, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.) establish standards for ordination.

### 2. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE TO GOD'S CALL

#### A. *Significance*

1. Even though God calls individual persons into the ministry, such personal calls are experienced and practiced in community. That is why the response of the local church to one's call is a significant part of the ordination process. Ultimately, it will be the local church who ordains a person for ministry service. Through ordination, a local church, well acquainted with the candidate, is making public the fact that, in their discernment, the individual possesses the ability and the spiritual and emotional qualities necessary for ministry, and that the academic training required for ordination has been received. Thus, once a person believes that they have received a call to ministry, that person should share such good news with their local church as well as the regional department of ministry in which the local church is a member. This provides the opportunity and the impetus for the church, both on the local and the wider level, to be involved in preparations for the ordination as well as to be a part of the Ordination Council.
2. By receiving the candidate under their "watchcare," a local church and the department of ministry are expected to give regular counsel in regard to vocation and professional training. Such counseling should be performed by the pastor, appropriate board or committee of the church, or the department of ministry. Such relationships with the local church and the regional department of ministry should be maintained throughout the person's journey toward ordination.
3. As a part of the congregational response to call, a congregation should consider supporting the candidate in tangible as well as intangible ways. In addition to the emotional support and encouragement, a congregation is encouraged to contribute financially to the candidate's educational and assessment expenses necessary for ministry preparation. Many ministerial candidates graduate with enormous debt that can be difficult to repay during their ministerial years of service.

#### B. *Licensing*

1. As a part of the congregational response to the person's call, the local church may license the candidate to preach the gospel. While confusion has sometimes occurred around this issue, the historic licensing is a "license to preach the gospel" and is a recognition of God's initial call upon the person to serve as an instrument of God's voice and grace in the world. A license to preach does not automatically carry with it permission to conduct weddings or funerals as such practices are governed by state standards and often vary greatly from one state to the next. All such rituals should be performed with the appropriate permission of the state and only in consultation with the pastor of the local church.
2. Any person desiring a "license to preach the gospel" should make known the desire to the pastor and the appropriate committee of the church where he or she is a member. The appropriate committee should then initiate dialogue with the candidate and take action regarding a recommendation for licensing.
3. There are a variety of practices in the denomination which determine whether the Region or Association participates in the particular process of licensing. In any case, a local church licensing should be performed

in consultation with the regional department of ministry.

4. In lieu of a “license to preach the gospel” the congregation may desire to commission the candidate to teach or serve in some way that is more connected to the candidate’s ultimate goal of ministerial service.
5. It is made clear to the candidate that the license is granted in anticipation of ordination and that it is valid for a maximum of four years or until such time as the congregation revokes it.

### **3. EDUCATION/EXPERIENCE**

#### **Three Tracks toward Ordination**

There are three preparatory educational tracks which a candidate for ordination and ministry may pursue. Track I is considered to be the track most candidates will pursue in the American Baptist Churches. Any candidate wishing to pursue Track II or Track III MUST secure the written permission of the regional department of ministry PRIOR to entering either of these tracks and meet all requirements of these tracks.

The candidate for ordination shall meet the following educational standards:

#### **Track I**

This track is viewed as the standard track toward ordination and is the most recommended option among ABC regions.

- A. The education prerequisites as adopted by the American Baptist Convention in 1961:



RESOLVED, That the “educational standards of four years of college and three years of seminary (the A.B. and B. D. [now M.Div.] degrees or their standard equivalents) be the educational prerequisites for the recognition by the American Baptist Churches of candidates ordained after and including January 1, 1965. This action is not retroactive. It will in no wise affect the manner in which American Baptist Churches pastors ordained before January 1, 1965, shall be recognized. This action is accompanied with a call to all local ordination councils and local churches to prepare . . . prospective candidates for the implementation of this standard in 1965” (1961 ABC Year Book, pp. 37-38).

It is a common understanding that North American seminaries will be accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. In those cases where seminary education takes place in other than North American settings, refer to Track II. A person who has already been ordained through an organization recognized as a constituency of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) should be accepted as a person with a Track I ordination with no additional review of ordination required, recognizing that eligibility for call is a separate issue as outlined in the definitions of this document. The credentials of persons holding international degrees who have not yet been ordained should be reviewed using Track II requirements.

- B. A functional knowledge of American Baptist history and polity. This normally can be satisfied by a seminary-level course on both the history and polity of American Baptists or by a rigorous self-study course approved by the candidate’s Region.
- C. The candidate's professional ethics and intention of cooperation must be affirmed by accepting the Covenant and Code of Ethics of the Ministers Council of the American Baptist Churches. All persons seeking ordination will have completed a course in professional ethics offered either by a seminary or a region. This course will consider areas such as professional boundary issues, relationships, confidentiality, ethics in financial matters, and other related issues which can dramatically affect the relationship between pastor and people.
- D. Candidacy assessment. Ordained ministry involves more than academic attainment; it calls for ongoing pastoral competence, emotional and spiritual maturity, and consistent Christian character. Therefore, candidates for ordination will complete a comprehensive career and candidacy assessment program sponsored by or in consultation with an American Baptist related Career Development Center within five years prior to examination by the regional department of ministry. (Candidates of Track I are encouraged to complete this requirement no later than the first year of their seminary preparation.)

**Track II** (Adopted by the General Board, September 27, 1973)

This track is the “equivalency track,” in which an equivalent degree or years of experience may be substituted for up to three years of higher education.

- A. The primary education prerequisite for the recognition of candidates for ordination within the American Baptist Churches is reaffirmed to be four years of college and three years of seminary (the B.A. and M.Div. degrees or their equivalents). "College," "seminary," or "higher education" are terms used throughout this document to mean post-high school study in regionally or nationally accredited institutions of higher education, such study to have been done for credit while enrolled in a degree program.
- B. "Their equivalent" may mean an experiential equivalent verified by the appropriate committee of the region as provided in this document. It may also mean another educational sequence (e.g., Th.M. or Ph.D. in religion) or include international degrees which may be approved by the department of ministry of the regional judicatory.
- C. Exceptions to the educational prerequisite are not encouraged, but in certain instances individuals may apply for the recognition of their ordination without having completed four years of college and three years of seminary on the following conditions:

1. Experience as an equivalent to educational preparation is granted on the basis of two years of satisfactory professional growth and ministerial performance for every one year of academic preparation that is lacking in the candidate's background, seven years of higher education being the norm.
2. The maximum experiential equivalency which may be granted is six (6) years, the equivalent to three (3) years of higher education.
3. To merit consideration as an exception to the educational prerequisite, the candidate's professional experience must meet the following criteria:
  - a. It must have been within the broad range of professional leadership categories recognized by the registry of professional leaders of the ABCUSA. Any requests to consider paraprofessional experiences must include substantiating evidence from third parties.
  - b. It must have been full-time experience (twenty hours per week or more).
  - c. It must be verified as to length and satisfactory professional growth and ministerial performance by the appropriate committee of the region, in which the candidate is presently serving. "Satisfactory professional growth and ministerial performance" is understood to include (in the judgment of such committees):
    - satisfactory learning through the work experience;
    - satisfactory growth in self-understanding and in understanding the nature and work of ministry;
    - satisfactory competence in interpreting the Christian Gospel;
    - satisfactory competence in understanding the forces shaping church and society; and
    - satisfactory competence in leading the church community.
  - d. Evidence concerning the individual's periodic involvement in professional continuing education experiences is required. The number and extent of such experiences will be weighed by the committee and utilized as one index of the candidate's seriousness in pursuance of professional competency.
  - e. A functional knowledge of American Baptist history and polity. This can normally be satisfied by a seminary-level course on both the history and polity of American Baptists or by a rigorous self-study course approved by the candidate's region.
  - f. The candidate's professional ethics and intention of cooperation must be affirmed by accepting the Covenant and Code of Ethics of the Ministers Council of the American Baptist Churches, signified by signing. All persons seeking ordination will have completed a course in professional ethics offered either by a seminary or a region. This course will include attention to areas such as professional boundary issues, relationships, confidentiality, ethics in financial matters, and other related issues which can dramatically affect the relationship between pastor and people.
  - g. Candidacy assessment. Ordained ministry involves more than academic attainment; it calls for ongoing formation of pastoral competence, emotional and spiritual maturity, and Christian character. Therefore, candidates for ordination or recognition of non-ABC ordination shall complete a comprehensive career and candidacy assessment program sponsored by or in consultation with an American Baptist related Career Development Center within five years prior to examination by the regional department of ministry.

### **Track III**

This track is known as the "Regional Training" track to ordination. The following requirements must be fulfilled to qualify for this track:

- A. Candidates must be sponsored by an American Baptist congregation.
- B. Candidates must provide evidence of satisfactory completion of a lay pastor program from a U.S. or

international Seminary or an ABC Region.

- C. Candidate must also complete three years of satisfactory professional growth and ministerial performance. The candidate's professional experience must meet the following criteria:
1. It must have been full-time experience (twenty hours per week or more).
  2. It must be verified as to length and satisfactory professional growth and ministerial performance by the appropriate committee of the region, in which the candidate is presently serving. "Satisfactory professional growth and ministerial performance" is understood to include (in the judgment of such committees):
    - satisfactory learning through the work experience;
    - satisfactory growth in self-understanding and in understanding the nature and work of ministry;
    - satisfactory competence in interpreting the Christian Gospel;
    - satisfactory competence in understanding the forces shaping church and society; and
    - satisfactory competence in leading the church community.
- D. A functional knowledge of American Baptist history and polity. This normally can be satisfied by a seminary level course on both the history and polity of American Baptists or by a rigorous self-study course approved by the candidate's region.
- E. Candidacy assessment. Ordained ministry involves more than academic attainment; it calls for ongoing formation of pastoral competence, emotional and spiritual maturity, and Christian character. Therefore, candidates for ordination will complete a comprehensive career and candidacy assessment program sponsored by or in consultation with an American Baptist related Career Development Center within five years prior to examination by the regional department of ministry
- F. The candidate's professional ethics and intention of cooperation must be affirmed by accepting the Covenant and Code of Ethics of the Ministers Council of the American Baptist Churches. All persons seeking ordination will have completed a course in professional ethics offered either by a seminary or a region. This course will include attention to areas such as professional boundary issues, relationships, confidentiality, ethics in financial matters, and other related issues which can dramatically affect the relationship between pastor and people.
- G. Candidates will be examined on issues of conversion and Christian identity, call to ministry, biblical and theological convictions (including Baptist history, polity, structure, and function), pastoral competence, and character (including ministerial ethics and spiritual disciplines).

### **III. STEPS TOWARD A REGIONALLY RECOGNIZED ORDINATION**

**A regionally recognized ordination requires action on the part of the candidate, the local church, and the region. The recommended actions for these three are outlined below.**

#### **A. The Candidate**

1. After conferring with his/her pastor, the candidate will seek counsel from the region's department of ministry as to procedures leading to a recognized ordination in that region.
2. The candidate will be responsible for submitting documents as required by the region.
3. The candidate will inform the pastor and the appropriate local church committee concerning his/her readiness to proceed with the ordination process.
4. The candidate will give input to the selection of a sponsor by the department of ministry. The role of the sponsor is to dialogue with the candidate in order to bring clarity and focus to his or her theology, self-understanding, approach to ministry, and leadership style as the candidate drafts his or her paper as well as

conduct the ordination council.

## **B. The Local Congregation**

1. The appropriate board or committee of the church to which the candidate belongs will meet with the candidate to gain information as to eligibility for ordination. If this is the same church that licensed the candidate, then the board or committee needs only to be informed of the progress toward and the readiness for ordination since the time of licensing.
2. The appropriate committee and the pastor, if they consider the candidate ready for ordination, will recommend that the department of ministry meet with the individual prior to the calling of an ordination council. The appropriate local church committee will supply the department with all information at its disposal.
3. When the department of ministry recommends the candidate for ordination, the local church should then vote to call an ordination council.

## **C. The Department of Ministry**

1. On recommendation of the appropriate local church committee, the Department of Ministry will meet with the candidate prior to licensing (if pursued) and again prior to ordination.
2. In addition to working with the candidate to select an appropriate sponsor for the candidate, the department will ascertain:
  - a. Whether the candidate meets the standards for ordination;
  - b. Whether the candidate understands the nature of an Ordination council and will be prepared to meet with one;
  - c. Whether the candidate has given proper attention to the preparation, writing, and delivery of statements to be presented to the council regarding (1) choice of vocation and call to the ministry, (2) Christian experience, (3) academic and field preparation, and (4) general comprehension of Christian doctrine and practice, including an understanding of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit; an understanding of the Bible and its use; the purpose and place of the church in today's world; an understanding of the ordinances as practiced in American Baptist Churches; personal commitment to the ABC; the role of the minister; and the relationship of the local congregation to the American Baptist Churches and to its ecumenical witness;
  - d. Whether the candidate understands and subscribes to the Covenant and Code of Ethics developed by the Ministers Council.
3. The department, if it judges it appropriate, will recommend that the candidate's local church call an ordination council.
4. The department will make it clear to the candidate and the candidate's local church that a date for the proposed ordination service will not be set until after the ordination council has met and voted to recommend the candidate for ordination.

## **D. The Ordination Council**

**The ordination council may be a standing committee within the region, may be identical to the region's department of ministry, or may be formed anew for each candidate pursuing a regionally recognized ordination. These three options along with their responsibilities are detailed below.**

### ***1. Council Membership Options***

- a. Some regions may have a standing committee on ordination. Such standing committees will typically be composed of clergy and laity, with membership established on a rotating class basis to encourage continuity in method and action.
- b. The standing council may be identical to the department of ministry of the regional administrative unit or a subgroup responsible to the department.
- c. If there is no standing council, the ordination council should include one member of the clergy and one lay person from each of the association-member churches and at least one representative from

the regional unit. A quorum will consist of representation from at least one-third of the member churches plus one representative from the region.

**2. *Authorizing a Meeting of the Ordination Council***

The call for an ordination council will come from the local church upon the recommendation of the regional department of ministry or its standing council. Preparatory actions of the council will include:

- a. convening of the council by the chairperson of the standing council or by the moderator of the association;
- b. with the candidate's permission granted, conducting a background check of the candidate;
- c. reviewing of letters from the local church and the department of ministry authorizing the calling of the council and stating that the candidate meets the standards for ordination.

### 3. *Conducting the Ordination Council Meeting with the Candidate*

The ordination council meeting should include:

- a. roll call of the churches in the association (if appropriate);
- b. election of a moderator for the council, if necessary. (The moderator of the association or the chairperson of the department of ministry may serve in this capacity.);
- c. appointment of a clerk by the moderator (or election by the council) if necessary;
- d. recognition of the sponsor selected by the Department of Ministry.
- e. presentation of prepared statements; and
- f. questioning of the candidate. The sponsor will take a leadership role in the questioning period. The council must recognize that it is called to understand the views held by the candidate, not to change them.

### 4. *Possible Actions to Be Taken by the Council*

- a. After excusing the candidate, a discussion of eligibility for ordination should follow.
- b. The council should then vote on recommending one of the following options to the local church, that:
  - ordination should proceed; or
  - ordination should be deferred to some future date, stating the reasons; or
  - ordination should not take place.
- c. *Records:* The clerk will keep minutes of the council meeting and will file records of the council's action with the local church, with the association or the appropriate regional body, and with the department of ministry. Following the ordination, the clerk will report the ordination to the regional unit, which in turn is responsible for the inclusion of ordained persons in the Professional Registry of the ABC, U.S.A. The regional unit will report the ordination to the Professional Registry of the ABC, U.S.A., Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, 19482-0851.
- d. *The Ordination Certificate:* The clerk of the Council or Region will provide the ordination certificate. The clerk is responsible for purchase of the certificate, its proper preparation, and obtaining the necessary signatures.

## E. **Types of Ministry Service**

There are a variety of ministry settings for which ordination is appropriate. These include:

- A. parish ministry, including all staff who perform ministerial functions;
- B. mission service nationally or internationally in which ministerial functions will be performed;
- C. specialized ministries (e.g., institutional, military, academic chaplaincy, seminary faculty, pastoral counseling, or staff membership in a church-related institution, where preaching, teaching, and/or pastoral work is required);
- D. staff service, involving educational or pastoral functions of an American Baptist agency, a council of churches, or some other ecumenical ministry appropriately related to the American Baptist Churches.

Any candidate whose proposed type of service does not fall into one of the above categories may consult with the Department of Ministry, or its equivalent in his/her region.

#### **IV. “Change of Status of Recognition of Ordination”**

##### **A. *Voluntary Change***

Any ministerial leader may request that recognition of his or her ordination be withdrawn by writing to the appropriate executive minister and/or the Professional Registry of the ABC, U.S.A.

Restoration of this person to active recognition may be accomplished only by the recommendation of the regional department of ministry, after examination and proof of the individual’s continued call, skill, and aptitude for ministry.

##### **B. *Withdrawal of Recognition***

The department of ministry of the region has responsibility for the recognition of ordination, as well as for the review and the withdrawal of recognition. A process for this review has been adopted by each region. In most cases, it includes written notification to the individual, personal consultation, and a review hearing. Any ministerial leader may request a copy of your region’s Ecclesiastical Process for Review of Ministerial Standing.

Reinstatement of recognition of ordination can only occur by a vote of the same group where the action first took place. One region may not reinstate or overturn another region’s decision to withdraw one’s recognition of ordination.

##### **C. *Inactive Status***

1. When a person no longer is functioning in ministry in a recognized part of the American Baptist Churches mission and structure, the name of the individual will be coded as inactive in the Professional Registry of the ABC, U.S.A. The person may be restored to active recognition within a five-year period upon appropriate review by the regional department of ministry after determining readiness for continuing ministry and after call to a place of service.
2. The department of ministry should review those persons that the region has coded as inactive annually. If at the end of the five-year period the person still is unrelated to the structure and function of American Baptist ministry, his/her name will be removed from inactive status.
3. After such a removal, restoration to active recognition will take place only after thorough review by the appropriate regional department of ministry to determine the person’s qualifications for ministry in view of the prolonged period of inactivity.

**V. PROCEDURE FOR THE RECOGNITION OF  
NON-AMERICAN BAPTIST ORDINATIONS  
(Adopted by the General Board, September 26, 1973)**

1. The congregation, agency or organization which desires to call a person who has been previously ordained by another denomination either nationally or internationally initiates the process by communicating with the department of ministry in the region where the ministry is to occur. The person, the agency, or the congregation indicates intention to have the person's previous ordination recognized.
2. The individual upon his/her own request, or the request of the local congregation or agency, appears before the regional department of ministry, standing council of ordination, or other appropriate body. The committee undertakes the following functions at this meeting:
  - A. A review is made of the "letter of ministerial standing" which the individual has secured from his/her present denomination. Under certain circumstances, some documentation may no longer be possible to obtain.
  - B. Discussion focuses on the individual's: 1) personal background, faith, baptism, and ministerial experience; 2) educational background (including transcripts or other forms of certification of graduation); 3) character references; and 4) written request for the recognition of his/her prior ordination.
  - C. The committee determines the adequacy of the person's understanding of Baptist history and polity. If no polity and history course has been completed, the committee should make specific recommendations to the individual in this regard.
  - D. During the discussion the candidate should state his/her reasons for entering the ministry of the American Baptist Churches and his/her intention to participate in its agencies. The committee also should determine whether the candidate understands and subscribes to the Pledge of Ministers of American Baptist Churches and Code of Ethics developed by the Minister's Council.
  - E. The person must meet Track I, II, or III's standards, including the ethics course and candidacy assessment, and have received affirmation by a comparable ordination council process.
3. The committee should vote to (or not to) recognize the person's previous ordination.
4. The person, upon receiving recognition of his/her ordination, completes negotiations with the local church body, agency or organization regarding his/her position within its professional ministry.
5. The committee should communicate to the petitioning local congregation or agency its recommendation that, after the person has been received into an ABC congregation's membership, an appropriate service of installation (or recognition) be held.
6. The committee should forward certified copies of its recommendation to recognize the ordination to the region:
  - A. for its listing of ministers and
  - B. listing in the Professional Registry which is part of the American Baptist Churches Information System (ABCIS)
7. Finally, the Committee should provide for the individual a letter, signed by the chairperson and the executive minister of the administrative area, stating that his/her previous ordination has been recognized by the committee and giving the appropriate date of the action.



**VI. COMMISSIONED MISSIONARIES AND  
COMMISSIONED MINISTERS  
(Adopted by the General Board in June, 1980)**

Commissioning in the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. will be recognized in the following two categories:

- commissioned missionaries
- commissioned ministers

Commissioning recognized by the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. (herein the “ABC”) may be conducted by national boards and regional boards (herein “commissioning boards”) according to the following standards for commissioning:

**1. Qualities expected:**

- A. vital spiritual experience, a growing Christian faith, and commitment to the church’s world mission;
- B. evidence of strength of character and personality;
- C. experience of a call to Christian service;
- D. membership in an American Baptist Church and support of the Statement of Purpose of the ABC.

**2. Task requirements**

- A. The service for which the candidate is commissioned must be full-time employment in ABC-related work.
- B. The candidate will be commissioned for a specific task or type of service. Commissioning ends when the task or service is terminated.
- C. The candidate will be required, in the task, to be responsible for program administration and interpretation of the Christian faith.

**3. Education requirements:**

- A.
  - 1. graduation from a member seminary of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States or Canada, or
  - 2. graduation from an accredited four-year college with a bachelor’s degree, plus the specified level of graduate work required to qualify for the vocational task.
- B. A directed course of study in the areas of the theological disciplines is required for all candidates who do not have a recognized theological degree, applying under A-2 (above) prior to commissioning; such course is to be determined by the Commissioning Board.
- C. In the case of missionary appointees, when both husband and wife are commissioned, it is recognized that either husband or wife may fulfill the task description for which the couple is recruited. In such situations, college education is the normative minimum requirement for the spouse.
- D. Under certain unusual circumstances, the Ministerial Leadership Commission may approve other qualifications as equivalents.

**4. Additional qualifications as determined by the Commissioning Board**

*Commissioning of Missionaries*

In the act of commissioning of missionaries, men and women are validated for designated ministries across lines and barriers of culture, ideology, race, geography, or nation. In their service as missionaries they represent the ABC. The boards of National and International Ministries appoint missionaries on behalf of ABC. Under certain circumstances, the regional boards may desire to commission persons for missionary recognition. As a basis for denominational recognition, the definition and standards for missionary commissioning by any board should be those outlined in these recommended procedures.

*Commissioned Ministers:*

The recognition of commissioned ministers provides validation to lay men and women who respond to the call of God to serve in ministries other than those of a commissioned missionary. Such commissioning will apply to ministries of non-ordained persons expressly performed as assignments of regions and national boards in fulfillment of aspects of their Christian witness and mission. These boards commission ministers on behalf of the ABC. As a basis for denominational recognition, the definition and standards for commissioning by any board should be those outlined in the rules of the Ministerial Leadership Commission.

## **ESTABLISHING A PATTERN OF LIFE-LONG LEARNING**

### *Guidelines for the First Three Years of Ordained Ministry in the American Baptist Churches*

#### The Importance of Life Long Learning in Ministry

Growth in ministry is a life-long process and is most effective when started early. Growth occurs through the informal learning experiences that take place in doing ministry as well as in those more intentional and formal components termed continuing education. When the informal and unexpected learnings are brought together with the formal ones, growth is possible.

Growth in ministry is both a personal and communal experience, and is most effective in a reflective environment where ministerial colleagues are engaged in dialogue. Ministry also takes place within the context of a vocational setting, and the minister's continuing education should involve those in that setting in the educational process (i.e. direction, accountability, applicability to current ministry and issues of lay involvement in learning where feasible).

Studies of church life demonstrate that ministers who engage with others in life-long learning practices are more effective, with significant benefits for the churches they serve. It is this concern for effective ministry that makes it appropriate to establish guidelines on life-long learning in the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

#### Experiences in Establishing the Pattern of Life-Long Learning

1. The minister is strongly advised to work with a mentor, preferably one appointed by the regional department of ministry. The mentor will be asked to meet with the new minister over a three- year period at least four times annually to reflect on the issues and concerns associated with the adjustment to ministry.
2. During the first three years of ministry the minister is strongly encouraged to be a part of a colleague or support group.
3. During the first three years of ordained ministry in the American Baptist Churches a minister is encouraged to complete 60 clock hours of life-long learning, with 30 hours being done in connection with the carrying out of the duties of ministry. The remaining 30 hours would be done in the more formal settings where colleagues in ministry are a part of the experiences.
4. It is recommended that those 60 hours of life-long learning will be done in the following three categories of learning (some being done in each):
  - a. Personal and Spiritual Life Development
    - 1) The ordained minister is encouraged to develop the “being” aspect of ministry which is primary to all others. This emphasis includes the leader’s emotional and spiritual growth through specific disciplines, caretaking of one’s intimate relationships, learning how to avoid burnout, and having self-esteem needs met outside of ministry.
    - 2) Being part of a support group where spiritual growth is encouraged and nurtured is crucial to personal and spiritual growth.
  - b. Biblical/Theological
    - 1) The ordained minister is encouraged to grow in such areas as historical and systematic theology, philosophy, hermeneutics, studies of contemporary culture and its impact on the life of the local church, psychology, ethics, etc. These disciplines provide the comprehensive theoretical framework whereby leaders may keep ministry focused in an ever-changing local, national, and international context.

- 2) The minister is encouraged to participate in courses of study, for example, in American Baptist polity and history, generational differences in understanding the church, the validity of ministry, etc.
- c. Practice of Ministry  
The ordained minister is encouraged to include skill building, for example, in such areas as worship preparation, Bible study, teaching, preaching, evangelism, administration, practical techniques in counseling, leadership styles and strategy, stewardship (including fundraising), etc. These are the practical, “how-to” disciplines, providing the necessary skills needed to carry out ministry in specific situations.

### **Summary of American Baptist Ordination Standards**

This summary is provided for your convenience. You can find the explanation of each of these actions in the complete manuscript.

1. Licensing (if pursued, by a local American Baptist congregation in coordination with their regional department of ministry).
2. Education:
  - a. Track I: 4 years of college and an M. Div. from an accredited seminary.
  - Track II: Equivalency (equivalent degrees or experience with a maximum substitution of 6 years of full-time ministry equal to three years of higher education).
  - Track III: Lay Pastor (regional or seminary lay pastor program from the US or another country, plus three years of full-time ministry experience).
  - b. American Baptist history and polity course
  - c. A course in professional ethics, and affirmation of the Covenant and Code of Ethics of ABC Ministers Council
  - d. Candidacy Assessment: complete at Ministry Development Council Career Center.
3. Meet with regional department of ministry prior to licensing (if pursued) and prior to ordination.
4. Ordination Council
6. Ordination Service

### **III. THE ORDINATION SERVICE**

1. The date of an ordination service will be publicly announced only after the ordination council has recommended that an ordination take place, and that there has been a call to a specific place of service.
2. Churches of the association or area and the regional department of ministry will be invited to send representatives to the ordination.
3. A recommended order of worship for the ordination service is included. Sample vows and charges are available from the Ministers Council or your regional office.

#### Sample Service of Ordination

Prelude

Doxology

Invocation and Lord's Prayer

Statement from the ordination council

Hymn

Reading from Scripture

Special Music

The Sermon

The Vows of Ordination

The Ordination Prayer with Laying on of Hands

The Charge to the Minister

The Charge to the Church

The Presentation of the Certificate of Ordination

Hymn of Consecration

The Benediction

Organ Postlude

Note: Edited by the  
Professional Ministries Team (PMT) - May 2011  
The PMT recommends that this document be reviewed every five years by the PMT or its successor