

## GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES FOR ORDINATION

### A Working Consensus of the Grand Rapids Association of Regular Baptist Churches Adopted: December 13, 2006

#### 1. Definition

- a. "Ordination is the formal and public recognition of the call of God upon a man to the Gospel ministry by a local church. This ministry is variously described by the New Testament. The office is sometimes referred to as that of pastor or pastor-teacher (*Ephesians 4:11*), other times as that of elder (*Acts 20:17; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1*), bishop ("overseer," *1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7; Philemon 1:1; 1 Peter 5:2*), minister (*2 Corinthians 3:6; Ephesians 3:7; 6:21; Colossians 1:7, 23; 4:7; 1 Timothy 4:6*), and steward (*1 Corinthians 4:1*). Public recognition of a man's fitness for the work of the ministry is a process in which a local church evaluates a man's qualifications for the work and his record in the work, and then formally sets that apart with a solemn invocation of God's presence and assistance in his ministry."  
(*Guidelines for Ordination*)
- b. "Ordination recognizes God's appointment of a man to ministry and is the leadership's way of commending him to the congregation . . . Ordination involves God's appointment of men to ministry, which appointment godly men who are already leaders subsequently recognize and authenticate according to God's Word." (Richard Mayhue, *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry*, p. 137)

#### 2. Purpose (adapted from Richard Mayhue, *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry*, p. 138)

- a. To identify and certify men truly called and equipped by God as a minister of the gospel.
- b. To eliminate men seeking ministry credentials who are not called by God.
- c. To give a congregation great confidence that their leaders are genuinely appointed by God.
- d. To furnish a standard of accountability for the church concerning a man's ministry.
- e. To commend a man publicly to the ministry wherever God's will takes him."

#### 3. Biblical Foundation

- a. The laying on of hands is consistently used in the Scriptures to communicate "transfer" and identification. In certain cases, it involved the transfer of authority and/or leadership (*Lev. 24:14; Num. 27:22-23; Acts 6:5-6; 9:17; 13:1-3*). When considered in context, certain passages specifically connect the laying on of hands with the pastor/elder office (*1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6*). Ordination, in some sense, involves the passing of a sacred trust. Every pastor has a duty to serve as a humble, committed guardian of the gospel ministry. For this reason, the pastor should make it his prayerful priority to attend ordination councils whenever invited in order to help guard this sacred trust and to encourage those whom God has called.
- b. Two other word groups describe this activity. The first is *καταστασις*. It is translated as either "ordain" (KJV) or "appoint" (NAS, NIV). It literally means "to put in charge" (*Acts 6:3; Tit. 1:5*). The second is *χειροτονεω*. It literally means to choose or select by the raising of the hand (*Acts 14:23*).

#### 4. Historical Pattern

##### a. Early Church

- i. The early church fathers clearly saw ordination as the pattern left to us by the apostles. It was clearly cited by Clemente and the *Didache*.
- ii. Tertullian noted some of the things that would constitute a poor ordination. He critiqued, "Their ordinations are hasty, irresponsible and unstable. Sometimes they appoint novices, sometimes men tied to secular office, sometimes renegades from us, hoping to bind them by ambition as they cannot bind them by truth" (*De praescriptione haereticorum*, chapter 42).
- iii. Cyprian clearly understood the importance of both "the council" and the local, ordaining church. He wrote, "Wherefore you must diligently observe and practice, according to divine tradition and apostolic usage, what is observed by us and in almost all provinces, namely, that for the proper celebration of ordinations the neighboring bishops of the same province should assemble with the people for whom a head is to be ordained, and a bishop should be elected in the presence of the people who are thoroughly acquainted with the life of each candidate . . . in order that by the votes of all the brethren and by the judgment of the bishops assembled in their presence, the episcopate might be conferred and hands imposed on him" (Cyprian, Epistle 67).

##### b. Reformation & Puritan Period

- i. Luther distinguished himself from the Roman Catholic Church by stating that the ordination established an individual into an office but did not convey certain powers to the individual himself.
- ii. Richard Baxter reacted against the abuses of ordination that had infiltrated the Roman Catholic Church. He wrote, "It is a strange conceit, therefore, of the Papists, that ordination by the hands of man is of more absolute necessity in the ministerial office, than the calling of the Holy Ghost. God hath determined in his Word, that there shall be such an office, and what the work and power of that office shall be, and what sort of men, as to their qualifications, shall receive it. None of these can be undone by man, or made unnecessary. God also giveth men the qualifications which he requireth; so that, all that the Church hath to do, whether pastors or people, ordainers or electors, is but to discern and determine which are the men that God hath thus qualified, and to accept of them that are so provided, and, upon consent, to install them solemnly in this office. What an obligation, then, is laid upon us, by our call to the work! (Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 54).

##### c. Baptist Considerations

- i. **Autonomy of the Local Church** – Baptists believe that each local church is independently controlled, governed, and directed. And there is no single statement of faith for all Baptist churches. Submitting to the recommendation of an "outside" council can result in tension. It is important, however, that autonomy does not become an excuse for arrogance. "The Faith" is not something that is simply determined by one isolated church. We exist within a deeper stream of Christian orthodoxy (1 Cor. 14:36-38). Churches which conduct "in-house" ordinations run the risk of "chronological snobbery." They devalue those that have suffered in defense of the faith that has once for all been entrusted to the saints.

Consider the example of Antioch in seeking to reach broader agreement with the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15). It is our desire to voluntarily submit to one another in order that the purity of the gospel can be preserved.

- ii. Priesthood of the Believer – Baptists believe that all believers have equal priesthood in the body of Christ. Ordination seems to set a class of men apart as “more priestly.” While pastor/elders do have a unique role of authority within the body of Christ, they are in no way superior over other believers. They are also (like the church) under the authority of the Chief Shepherd.

## 5. Process

- a. Identification & Training – The local church identifies a man and his gifts, observes him in his service for God, and actively disciples him toward competency in doctrinal belief and ministry practice.
  - i. The ordaining local church carries the greatest weight of responsibility for the preparation of the ordination candidate. They have been able to assess the candidate’s character, obedience, giftedness, service, and evidence of a call to ministry. A council is simply unable to effectively observe the candidate over a period of time in matters of daily life and ministry. A representative from the ordaining church should be able to report to the council regarding these issues.
  - ii. The candidate should have ample opportunity and time to serve in his local church. He should be observed in a variety of ministry and service settings. During this time of service, there should be strong evidence regarding the candidate’s character and call to ministry.
  - iii. During this initial period, the local church may choose to offer licensure to the prospective candidate. The licensing period serves as a time of testing in the ordination process, during which the church appoints the candidate to perform the duties of an ordained man. While ordination is for life (unless the ordained man disqualifies himself), licensure lasts for only a given period of time and is subject to renewal.
  - iv. There should be a strong mentoring relationship between the candidate and the pastor/leadership team of the ordaining church. If a mentor(s) is not available in the ordaining church, a mentor(s) should be secured from sister churches.
  - v. It is recommended that the preparation for an ordination council begin a minimum of 9-12 months in advance of convening the council. This allows the candidate to develop and write on one area of doctrine each month. The month prior to the ordination council, the church leadership should hold a trial examination to give the candidate a practice opportunity.
  - vi. A doctrinal paper should be prepared for presentation to the ordination council. It should include background information, testimony of conversion, call to ministry, philosophy of ministry, doctrinal statement. The candidate should also be prepared to address areas of practical theology (i.e.: pastoral theology, current issues, moral & ethical questions, etc.).
  - vii. The church might wish to conduct a pre-interview with a smaller group of veteran pastors. This would avoid the embarrassment of a public disapproval for the candidate and the ordaining church. It would also alleviate the pressure placed on the council to endorse an unworthy candidate. A representative from this

committee could also give a summary report during the deliberations of the ordination council.

- viii. The church might also solicit feedback on the candidate through personal references. Individuals to be contacted may include: the candidate's pastor, parents, professors, academic advisors, past employers, and prior churches with which he has ministered. This would help address the qualifications that are posed in *1 Timothy 3:1-7* concerning attitudes, ambitions, maturity, and testimony to those outside the faith.
  - ix. The church congregation should vote to call an ordination council to examine the candidate, with the action duly noted in the church records and communicated by the church clerk.
  - x. A letter of invitation should be sent by the church to the sister churches in its area association. Included in that letter would be the purpose, the name of the candidate, and the time and place where the council will convene. The letter should also include a brief summary of the candidate's background, including schooling and ministry experience. The letter should be sent a minimum of 90 days before the convening of the council. Special invitations may be sent to individuals or churches outside the immediate area. Those sending an RSVP should receive a copy of the candidate's doctrinal statement and other materials pertaining to the candidate's background no later than 30 days prior to the council. The church should urge its own members to attend the examination of the candidate. Those members, unless approved ministers, will not be considered members off the council.
- b. Examination – The local church calls for a council of messengers from other churches of like faith and practice. Based on the doctrinal examination, the council provides the ordaining church with a recommendation as to how they should proceed.
- i. Doctrinal Competencies for the Candidate
    1. An overview of the biblical story that declares God's plan for the ages.
    2. A clear review of the fundamentals of the faith.
    3. A clear understanding and embracing of the doctrinal distinctives held by the ordaining church. As a fellowship of Baptist churches, the candidate should be in harmony with the doctrinal position of the Regular Baptist movement. We will generally follow the New Hampshire Confession of Faith (1833).<sup>1</sup> This is a commonly accepted baptistic standard and a root document for the GARBC doctrinal statement.<sup>2</sup>
    4. An ability to grasp key theological truths and define significant theological terms.
    5. An ability to be conversant in declaring Biblical truth. This includes his use of the scriptures in giving a defense, the ability to recall and quote the Scriptures from memory, the ability to teach and explain the text, and the

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<sup>1</sup> The New Hampshire Confession of Faith (1833) and information about its formation can be found at <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txh/newhamp.htm> (accessed 11/13/2006).

<sup>2</sup> The GARBC doctrinal statement can be found at <http://www.garbc.org/artfaith.php#articles.sanctif> (accessed 11/13, 2006)

ability to defend a particular viewpoint through the use of Scriptural arguments.

6. An ability to apply doctrine to contemporary issues.
7. Since this is a Baptist church, the candidate should demonstrate the ability to articulate the Baptist tradition and polity.

ii. General Guidelines

1. The pastor or official representative from the ordaining church should be present to convene the council and to introduce the candidate.
2. Only one candidate for ordination should be presented at a council.
3. The ordaining church should not have a vote in the ordaining council proceedings inasmuch as the council is an advisory body to the church.
4. The ordination council should not be scheduled on the same week as the subsequent ordination service. This will allow both the candidate and the council to be relieved of any additional pressure due to time constraints, family and friends who have traveled great distances to attend the assumed service, etc.
5. If a luncheon will be scheduled as a part of the day's proceedings, it should be scheduled in such a way as not to pressure the council too hurry the proceedings. Providing a meal prior to the meeting can also establish a sense of community with those present.

iii. Possible Order of Events

1. The church clerk (or other church representative) reads the official church letter that was sent to convene the council. The roll call of the churches and other invited guests present is made and record kept of those in attendance.
2. Nominations for a moderator of the council are received. A moderator is selected and leads the remainder of the council session. The moderator has the responsibility of leading, regulating, and directing the examination time of the candidate. He helps maintain proper procedures and decorum during the council. He should help keep the council moving in a proper direction, should suppress discussion of irrelevant matters, and assure that the candidate has the opportunity to properly respond.
3. The moderator leads the council in the selection of a clerk. The clerk is responsible to prepare detailed minutes of the proceedings, record those who are seated on the council, and insure that members of the council sign the ordination certificate.
4. The candidate and his wife (if applicable) are introduced and allowed to share testimony of conversion.
5. The examination begins with the candidates call to ministry.
6. The examination continues with the candidate defending and articulating his doctrinal position.
7. A motion is made to end the examination.
8. The candidate and his family are excused.

9. Council meets in executive session to discuss the candidate's fitness for ordination.

iv. Nature of the Examination

1. Council members should restrict their activity to prayerfully considering the qualification of the candidate for ordination. Members should refrain from seeking to declare their own doctrinal positions in argument or in persuasion. The council meets to consider the doctrinal position of the candidate and not those of the council members.
2. Questioning should be thorough, but should not involve the use of questions intended to intentionally confuse or embarrass the candidate.
3. The moderator should kindly but firmly suppress discussion that aims to promote personal biases among council members, or demonstrations of an argumentative spirit.
4. Avoid questions that lead to fruitless speculation (i.e. "Where did Cain get his wife?"). Instead, seek to ask questions that give opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate his grasp of Scripture and biblical theology (i.e. "Can you help me understand the theme and flow of the book of Romans?").
5. The council shall maintain perfect candor and honesty in judging the candidate's worthiness for ordination and avoid factors of sympathy or favoritism in making their recommendation(s) to the church.

v. Procedure for Recommendation

1. The council votes to recommend, not recommend, or recommend with reservation
2. The ordination council may recognize evidence of the divine call of the candidate to the pastoral office, but be convinced that he is not fully prepared to assume immediate responsibility of the duties of that position. It may be the council's recommendation that the candidate seek licensure from the local church. (See Section 5.a.iii for more information on licensure).
3. The ordination council could recommend that the council reconvene at a later date to re-examine certain areas of deficiency. If the deficiency is deemed minor, then a recommendation for ordination could be given that also encourages further monitored study in areas where the candidate shows need of improvement.
4. The council's written recommendation and minutes of the proceedings should be submitted by the council clerk to the ordaining church.
5. The ordination document should be signed by those officially seated on the ordination council.
6. It is recommended that a love offering be received by the council to secure a gift book for the candidate's personal library.
7. The candidate, his family, and other guests are invited back to the assembly and informed by the moderator regarding the findings and recommendations of the council.
8. Having fulfilled its obligations, the ordaining council shall then adjourn.

- c. Affirmation – A public service is conducted at a later date. At this service, the candidate's gifts are recognized, his fitness for the ministry affirmed, and he is acknowledged as a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
  - i. Do not schedule an ordination service until after the Ordination Council's recommendation is received.
  - ii. Allow sufficient time for possible re-examination to take place if necessary.
  - iii. The Ordination Council should be represented at the Ordination Service by its moderator or clerk when possible.
  - iv. The following documents should be presented to the candidate: the letter of invitation, the Ordination Service bulletin, the ordination document, subsequent press releases, and the minutes of meetings.

## **6. Subjects of Ordination**

- a. Ordination should be for those men who are called to the gospel ministry.
- b. Ordination standards should remain consistent regardless of the specific area of call (i.e. pastor, missions, chaplaincy, evangelist, etc.).

## **7. Revocation of Ordination**

- a. Understanding that it is the local church that ordains, it must also be the local church that rescinds the ordination.
- b. Grounds for revocation would include: 1) compromise of blameless character (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1), 2) compromise of his stated doctrinal convictions.

## **8. Recommended Resources**

- a. "Guidelines for Ordination," a paper prepared by the Genesee Valley Independent Baptist Pastor's Fellowship of Western New York, 1986.
- b. *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry*, John MacArthur, editor, 1995.
- c. *The Star Book for Ministers*, Edward T. Hiscox, 1878.
- d. *Criswell's Guidebook for Pastors*, W. A. Criswell, 1980.
- e. *The Doctrine and Administration of the Local Church*, Paul R. Jackson, 1980.