



# GUIDELINES FOR ORDINATION, LICENSING AND COMMISSIONING

## PURPOSE

The purpose of a ministerial credential is (1) to acknowledge God's call upon a person's life for ministry; (2) to verify that this person meets the qualifications and standards of SW Church Connection for ministerial credentials; and (3) to provide legal status in the exercise of that person's ministry. A ministerial credential is given by the church and is held in trust by the individual. The credential remains with the person so long as the standards of the ministry are maintained.

Credentialed ministry will be carried out under the authority of the ordaining church. If a credentialed person moves, the ministry will then be continued under the authority of the church where they have their membership. That church carries the responsibility of being the custodian of accountability for the credentialed person.

## GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR CANDIDATES BEING ORDAINED, LICENSED AND COMMISSIONED

1. They must be members in good standing of a SWCC church.
2. They must be above reproach as to character (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) and meet all the standards for their particular credential.
3. They must have training adequate for their area of ministry.
4. They must hold to sound doctrine in accordance to and in full agreement with SWCC and their local church.
5. They must undergo an examination by their church and be confirmed by a committee or council appropriate for their ministry.
6. They shall agree to maintain membership and accountability to a local church even if their responsibilities go beyond the immediate ministry of the local church.
7. They shall complete all prescribed steps for their credential as outlined in the policy standards for that credential.

## PROCEDURES FOR MINISTRY RECOGNITION AND CREDENTIALING

### Definition:

- A. Ministry is defined as those Christian services for which churches, as well as governmental and social agencies have determined that commissioning, licensure, or ordination are appropriate. The transfer and revocation of these credentials is subject to the discretion of the local church.
- B. Commissioning is designed for qualified men and women who are set apart for the ministry. Because the office of elder is gender specific, licensure and ordination is reserved for qualified men.

### Types of ministry credentials:

#### 1. Certificate of Commissioning for Ministry:

A certificate of commissioning for ministry is the recognition by a local church after verification that a person has been called of God and is qualified for Christian ministry. Commissioning for ministry is issued for a defined purpose and period of time, subject to the conditions established by the local church.

A certificate of commissioning may be issued to candidates involved in local church, para-church, mission, institutional, chaplaincy, and evangelism ministries where the commissioning church views such recognition as appropriate.

#### 2. License for Ministry:

A license is an expression by a local church recognizing in one of its people, evidences of God's calling and gifting for ministry. It is granted upon examination and approval by that church and is issued for a defined purpose and period of time, according to the church's governing documents. A license concludes upon the holder's leaving the issuing church. It is not usually transferred from one church to another. However, it may be transferred if the receiving body acts to accept that license.

Timothy was charged, "*Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands.*" In the normal process of one's calling there should be that time of making certain of God's appointment to serve in a vocational ministry.

It is reasonable that during this period of training and / or internship, a person is involved in a local church ministry and has responsibilities which extend far beyond the normal involvement of a layman.

Some examples of these might be:

1. A theological student who is the pastor of a small church.
2. A graduate of seminary who is called to a full-time ministry and is not yet ready for Ordination.
3. A retired person serving as a minister of visitation and / or desiring a chaplaincy position in a hospital.
4. A person who is serving as an Associate Pastor in a church.

Licensing is never to be construed as Ordination or a substitute for it.

The license for ministry may provide a credential acceptable for recognition by governmental and social agencies.

It is important to note that the License does give the authority to perform all the duties of an ordained man within that local church. One of the questions that may be asked by the Internal Revenue Service is whether or not the person licensed by the church is able to perform all the sacerdotal duties of the church: child/parent dedications, baptisms, weddings, funeral services, etc.

Licensing must have time limitations which will be established by the church and faithfully enforced. The suggested maximum without reviewing the status of the licensee is two years, although many churches prefer to review this matter annually, and extend it for one year at a time.

The decision to license a staff person for the work of the ministry or extend a license, should be properly recorded in the minutes of the church.

A license can be revoked or withdrawn should there be sufficient reason for the local church to find it necessary to take such action (I Timothy 5:19).

A suitable Certificate of License should be provided to the staff person by the local church and this should be displayed in the office or ministry area where that individual serves.

### 3. Certificate of Ordination to Ministry:

A certificate of ordination is given by a local church after examination and recommendation by an appropriate council and is granted to a man from that church who is called, qualified and gifted to be a minister of the gospel of Christ.

## ORDINATION

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of setting aside men to ministry is rooted in the Scriptures and in the subsequent practice of the church. Ordination is a practiced pattern in the New Testament. Men were recognized publicly as being set apart by God for vocational ministry (Acts 6:5,6; 13:2,3; 14:23; I Tim. 4:14). Since New Testament times, the church has consistently "ordained" men. Ordination has traditionally found favorable public recognition. Both the church and society, in varying degrees, recognize the place and validity of Ordination. In many cases, Ordination is the requirement of the State for the fulfillment of recognized, legitimate ministerial functions.

Ordination is both a privilege and responsibility of the local SWCC church; however, the actions of the local church in Ordination are far-reaching. They affect all the churches within our Association and those of "like faith" outside our Association. In light of this, it is imperative that Ordination be properly understood, seriously approached, uniformly practiced and widely respected.

Ordination is not the conferring of power or grace; rather, it is the clear recognition that God by His Grace and Sovereignty has called a man to Himself for specific, vocational ministry among His people. Ordination is the recognition by the church of God's giving a gifted man to the body of Christ for service (Ephesians 4:11-16).

The process, at a minimum, involves three steps:

1. Recognition by the individual that he has been gifted and set apart by God for ministry (I Cor. 9:16; I Tim. 1:12; 2:7).
2. Recognition, through observation and examination, by and at the request of that individual's own church, that he has been gifted and set apart by God for specific ministry (I Tim. 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-9).

3. A public service in which this recognition is declared (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23; I Tim. 4:14)

Historically the local church has determined who is ordainable. Since involvement in an Association means cooperation among its churches, the following general guidelines are suggested:

Ordination should be limited to those men who are set aside for direct involvement in the ministry of God's Word to the hearts and lives of people. Evidence of recognized effective ministry of the candidate should be seen, preferably including his already having been licensed by his church.

### **ORDINATION: ITS PROCESS (OVERVIEW)**

This process begins with a local church that believes that one of its men has been called and prepared by God for vocational ministry in the office of elder in the local church. It then seeks to recognize this call in a formal manner. The following steps are offered to help a church proceed confidently and carefully in the ordination process. A candidate for ordination may be brought before the church, in accordance with the bylaws of the church.

The local church is encouraged to examine the candidate:

1. By the leadership of the ordaining church.
2. By the members of the ordaining church.
3. By a pre-ordination committee.
4. By an ordination council composed of messengers from other SWCC churches.

All actions of the church recognizing the call of God in the candidate's life must be officially recorded by the church. In assisting a candidate to prepare for the ordination process, the counsel of a pre-ordination committee may be requested. The purpose of the pre-ordination committee is to assist the candidate in preparation of a written doctrinal statement, to help him in his oral defense of the document, and to give aid and counsel to the local church. The pre-ordination committee shall:

1. Review the candidate's general qualifications: conversion, call and character. The ordaining church should appoint three to six people from its membership to meet with the pre-ordination committee. These members should be able to attest to the candidate's character, business and family relationships as well as his ability to communicate the Word of God.
2. Assess his doctrinal strength by reviewing his doctrinal statement with him.
3. Assist the local church in the ordination process.

The final step in the process is the calling of an ordination council. This council assists the local church by further examining the candidate. It should be made up of messengers from no fewer than five churches, with a minimum of five (5) pastors involved. Members of the church calling the council will participate as observers only. The candidate, his family, and members of the calling church will be excused when the council goes into executive session. The council also represents the broader interests of SWCC and brings a further measure of objectivity to the ordination purpose.

When a local church calls an ordination council, it is seeking the wisdom of the messengers from sister churches who are invited to examine the candidate for ordination. The local church is encouraged to consider seriously the recommendation of the council.

Upon approval, ordination will be recognized by SW Church Connection and recorded at the SWCC Ministry Center.

## ORDINATION: ITS REVOCATION

Ordination is a recognition conferred in trust by a local church upon a qualified minister. Ordaining churches bear the responsibility of being the custodian of that entrustment upon every man they ordain. Whenever a church calls a man who is ordained by another church, it bears the responsibility of investigating carefully his character and will become the primary custodian of the accountability for the ordination entrusted to him. The calling church should also communicate this fact to his previous church and SWCC.

When an ordained minister conducts himself in a manner that: 1) violates Biblical standards (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9); 2) espouses beliefs opposed to the doctrinal position of the fellowship of SWCC churches, he has violated the trust of his ordination and disqualified himself from ministry. Under these conditions his ordination should be revoked.

The church in which a man is a member or is serving may initiate the revocation of an ordination certificate. Upon receiving written charges against an ordained man from two or three people that the board of the church finds initially credible (1 Timothy 5:19-25), the church should organize itself in such a way as to investigate thoroughly each accusation. Any investigation should be done with great care and concern for the truth. It is important for the church to notify the man of the accusations and the impending investigation. Only after the accused man is given every opportunity to present his side of the situation should the investigation proceed. They should seek impartial advice by calling a council composed of representatives from other SWCC churches. Minutes of the proceedings and decisions shall be put in writing with copies sent to the accused man. When the charges have been sufficiently verified, the church should proceed with revocation.

If the church is the church that ordained the man, it should:

- no longer recognize the ordination;
- require that he surrender his ordination certificate;
- inform SWCC of its action;
- notify the appropriate governmental agencies that the man is no longer credentialed;
- outline steps for restoration of the man where that is possible and appropriate.

If it is not the church that ordained the man, it should:

- no longer recognize the ordination;
- formally request that he surrender his ordination certificate;
- notify the ordaining church and request that they investigate the accusations and take appropriate action;
- inform SWCC of its action;
- outline steps for restoration of the man where that is possible and appropriate.

**APPENDIX A: INSTRUCTIONS TO THE CHURCH REGARDING ORDINATION**

The first action of the church toward the ordination of a candidate is to examine the candidate's conversion, call, and doctrine as outlined under "Ordination: Its Process." During an official business session, the church shall vote to seek the counsel of sister churches in examining the candidate as to his qualifications for ordination.

The church shall notify the pre-ordination committee of its action requesting the committee to meet with the candidate. This letter of notification should set forth the candidate's name, age, residence, educational background, and the character of the work to which he has been called as a minister, as well as a copy of his doctrinal statement.

The ordaining church should appoint three to six people from its membership to meet with the pre-ordination committee. These members should be able to attest to the candidate's character, business and family relationships as well as his ability to communicate the Word of God.

If the pre-ordination committee recommends the candidate pursue ordination, then the ordaining church should send a letter calling for a council and should enclose a copy of the candidate's doctrinal statement. The following is a suggested form for the letter calling the council:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

To The \_\_\_\_\_ Church of \_\_\_\_\_.

Dear Brethren:

You are requested to send your pastor, staff, and one or two brethren to sit in council on (Date) at (time) to consider the propriety of setting apart, to the work of the gospel ministry, our brother, (name of candidate). The council will meet at (place, address).

The following churches have been invited to participate in the examination of (candidate's name). (List the churches invited to examine the candidate.)

Signature,  
(Church Clerk)

=====

Upon receiving notification of a favorable recommendation from the Ordination Council, the church should vote to proceed with the ordination.

The date for the public service of ordination should not be set until all the procedures in these guidelines have been completed.

The church should, prior to the Ordination Council, obtain an Ordination Certificate (available at Christian bookstores) in order that the members of the Council may sign it.

After ordination has been conferred, the local church must forward a copy of the certificate to SWCC.

## APPENDIX B: THE PRE-ORDINATION COMMITTEE

If a church so desires, a pre-ordination committee can assist them in evaluating and preparing candidates for ordination. A church may seek the help of the SW Church Connection Ordination Committee or seek the counsel of three or four nearby pastors to serve as a pre-ordination committee.

The pre-ordination committee first meets with a committee appointed by the church to evaluate the candidate's character, family relationships, reputation in the community, legal, financial and business relationships.

The candidate's wife should then be interviewed to insure she is supportive of her husband's pursuit of vocational ministry. The candidate's relationship with his children should be examined.

Finally, the pre-ordination committee should discuss the following areas with the candidate:

1. his conversion and assurance of salvation
2. his conviction of a call to the ministry
3. his character
  - a. marital status and testimony in his family
  - b. business relationships (debts, credit, etc.)
4. his educational qualifications for ministry
  - a. knowledge of the Bible
  - b. knowledge of church history
  - c. knowledge of Baptist history, polity and practice
5. his ability to communicate the Word of God
6. any areas of doctrinal differences or deviation from the doctrinal statements or general practices of SWCC churches

The pre-ordination committee should also:

1. examine the candidate's written doctrinal statement and make suggestions for improvement in accuracy, originality, clarity and completeness.
2. critique the candidate's ability to defend orally his doctrinal statement

The pre-ordination committee, having dismissed the candidate and the church committee shall make a written recommendation to the church. The recommendation may take one of the following forms:

1. that the church call an ordination council
2. that the church delay calling an ordination council until:
  - a. the candidate completes certain studies after which he would meet again with the pre-ordination committee for examination on those items
  - b. or until the candidate completes other specific deficiencies (such as formal course work, gaining certain experience, fulfilling legal or financial obligations, etc.)
3. that the church not call an ordination council

## APPENDIX C: SUGGESTED PROCEDURES FOR THE ORDINATION COUNCIL

1. Council session convened by temporary moderator (local pastor or other designee)
2. Prayer
3. Roll call of churches
4. Recognition of any guests present
5. Reading of the official action of the church
6. Reading of the recommendation of the pre-ordination council
7. Reading of the letter of invitation sent to the council members
8. Motion to form the council
9. Election of moderator of the council
10. Election of the clerk of the council (See Appendix D – below)
11. Introduction of the candidate and his wife
12. Prayer for the candidate
13. Sermon by the candidate
14. Examination of the candidate (See Appendix E)
15. Motion to close the questioning and move into executive session
16. Dismissal of the candidate and all guests
17. Decision of the council
  - A. Is the council satisfied that Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ is a Christian?
  - B. Is the council satisfied that Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ has experienced a divine call and has adequately prepared himself for a full time church vocation?
  - C. Does the council believe that Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s doctrinal views are in harmony with the Scriptures and the qualifications and standards of SWCC?
  - D. Are there any things the council wishes to direct to Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ in the way of recommendation or commendation?
18. Decision of the council presented to the candidate
19. Motion to dissolve the council
20. Prayer of dismissal

## APPENDIX D: INSTRUCTIONS FOR CLERKS OF ORDINATION COUNCILS

1. Keep a record of all of the proceedings of the council.
2. Attach a list of messengers (circulate a sign-up sheet at the council meeting).
3. Attach a copy of the doctrinal statement.
4. Attach a copy of the official action of the church.
5. Prepare a typed copy of your final minutes. Make four copies with your attachments:
  - Mail one to the candidate.
  - Mail one copy to the candidate's church.
  - Mail one copy to SWCC.
  - Keep one copy in your own files.



## APPENDIX E: EXAMINATION FOR ORDINATION

The candidate should be prepared to discuss these areas:

Conversion and Christian experience.

Character qualifications and relationships.

Call to the ministry.

Doctrinal views relating to the following:

1. Revelation and the inspiration of the Scriptures.
2. God: His nature, including His attributes and His works, embracing predestination, creation, and providence.
3. The Trinity
4. Satan
5. Angelic beings: elect angels, fallen angels
6. Man: his origin and fall
7. Sin: its character, transmission, and punishment
8. Christ: His Person and Work
9. The Holy Spirit: His Person and Work
10. Redemption: repentance, faith, regeneration, justification, sanctification, and preservation of the saints
11. The church: its nature, government, power, and responsibilities
12. The Ordinances: Baptism and the Lord's Supper
13. Baptist beliefs and church history
14. The doctrine of the last things: the second coming, the resurrection, millennial view, the final judgment, and the final state.

Practical Ministry

1. Philosophy of ministry
2. Personal experience in ministry
3. The application of doctrine to specific situations

## APPENDIX F: RECOGNITION OF EXISTING ORDINATIONS

The goal of the SWCC ordination procedure is to add a higher level of accountability and credibility to the ordination process. The following is the procedure for the recognition by SWCC of pre-existing ordinations.

Any man ordained by a SWCC church wishing to have his ordination recognized by SWCC and wishing to express his accountability to this Association of Churches, may present a photocopy of his ordination certificate to SWCC. The Ordination may then be recognized.

Any man ordained by a non-SWCC church who is serving in a staff position to which he was called by action of a SWCC church and wishing to have his ordination recognized by SWCC, and wishing to express his accountability to this Association of Churches, may present to SWCC a photocopy of his ordination certificate and a signed copy of his local church's doctrinal statement, indicating agreement with that doctrinal statement. The Ordination may then be recognized when the church confirms they called the man.