A Guide for Pastors

Is there someone in your congregation who is planning to go into the ordained ministry? If so, there are steps he or she will need to fulfill in order to prepare for ordination to the Christian ministry. Getting ordained nowadays is a lot more complicated than it used to be. As a pastor, you have a shepherding role to play in this process; the church, the candidate and TABCOM also have responsibilities to fulfill. This guide has been prepared to help you understand the current requirements, so that you may provide pastoral support and guidance. Together, we can help tomorrow’s pastors prepare to minister effectively to God’s people in a changing world.

Getting Started

The ordination process begins when the church of which he/she is a member grants the preordination license. You should counsel with the candidate about her/his intentions and sense of call. Invite the candidate to preach and/or lead worship; a sermon is a good way for the candidate to articulate the call and ask for the church’s affirmation. The church should vote to grant a preordination license, only if the candidate is:

- a person who has confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior
- a stable person of good reputation
- preparing for the Christian ministry as a professional vocation

No church should make this decision without careful consideration and prayer. If church members have any concerns about the candidate’s suitability for the ministry, these should be shared with honesty and sensitivity. All candidates are required to take part in a candidacy assessment from an approved center for career development. This program provides candidates with the opportunity to reflect on their own suitability for ministry, based on vocational and psychological testing. The Center for Career Development and Ministry (30 Milton Street, Suite 107, Dedham, MA 02026) is an approved center. For information call (781) 329-2100, or visit www.ccdmin@aol.com. Churches are to encourage candidates to take this first step and help by paying a portion of the cost for this career assessment. Early professional confirmation of a candidate’s calling is a good investment in the future.

The Preordination License

Once the church votes a preordination license, the Executive Minister of TABCOM should be notified immediately. TABCOM will provide a “Notification Form.” When this information is received, TABCOM will record the candidate’s license in its yearbook and send a certificate to be presented to the candidate, along with a Pastor’s packet. You will need the materials in the packet as you shepherd your candidate through the process. The candidate will also receive a packet of materials. Now is a good time to review with the candidate all the steps in the ordination process and assure him/her of your ongoing support. The process is designed to help the candidate be as fully prepared as possible for effective pastoral ministry. Making the most of every step will take some planning.

The Church will need to renew the license annually ...

... and communicate its validation to the Executive Minister of TABCOM. Six renewals are allowed, after which a candidate’s file will be permanently closed. An extension may be requested by writing to the Committee on Ministerial Preparation. Renewal indicates the church’s continued willingness to affirm the candidate’s call to ministry.

The Association Committee on Ministry will arrange to meet with you and the licensee for an Initial Interview within three months.

The purpose of this interview will be to acquaint the candidate with the Association Committee on Ministry. The interview will focus on the licensee’s Christian Pilgrimage and potential for ministry. The Association Committee or its designated representative will answer questions and work together with you to provide guidance about the ordination process. Licensees are encouraged to be involved in the life and ministry of their Association. A summary of the interview and any recommendations will be placed in the licensee’s preordination file.
The Candidate will need to:
Participate in a candidacy assessment at an approved career development center and sign the Release Form for Evaluation Materials to release the evaluation to the Committee on Ministerial Preparation. The candidate may submit a written response to the evaluation.

Enroll in the Watchcare Program
The name and phone number of the coordinator may be obtained by calling the Ministerial Preparation Committee, at TABCOM (781-320-8100, x109). The coordinator will assign or approve a Watchcare Pastor to meet with the candidate for guidance, support and orientation to TABCOM. The Watchcare Program takes 8-12 months to complete (a 4 month plus 1 day option is also available). The second semester of the candidate’s second year in seminary is a good time to begin.

Complete the M.Div degree (Track I)
Or, in some instances, satisfy equivalency standards. See Steps in the Ordination Process, Appendix B for Track II and Appendix C for Track III specifications. The following areas of study are required:

- Introduction to Old Testament
- Introduction to New Testament
- Preaching
- Systematic Theology
- Church History
- Educational Ministries
- Church Administration
- Pastoral Care
- American Baptist History and Polity
- Professional Ethics
- At least one academic year of Field Education and/or internship

Submit the following documents (See “Steps in the Ordination Process” for specific details.)

Obtain from the proper institution/person the following documentation: (Please have this information mailed directly to TABCOM at least 6 weeks prior to the desired interview date.)

- Initial Interview Summary
- Letter from Watchcare Coordinator showing completion of Watchcare Program
- Official Course Transcript from the registrar of the seminary (If pursuing Track II or III, a copy of the approved Theological Educational and Experience Plan and statement of satisfactory fulfillment.)
- Statement from Dean regarding expected completion of course work if degree will not be granted by the time of the review
- Candidate Evaluation from an approved center for career development
- Evaluation from CPE Supervisor (optional)
- Four character references (Watchcare Pastor, Lay person, Ordained Minister, Area Minister/Field Ed. Supervisor) in sealed envelopes

Submit the following accumulated information in the folder provided:

- Self Disclosure and Release Form for Ministerial Preparation (signed and witnessed)
- Signed and dated Code of Ethics
- Signed Release Form for the Center for Career Development evaluation
- Personal Statement including autobiographical sketch, spiritual journey and commitment to ABCUSA

Contact the sponsoring church after the previous steps have been completed and the information submitted has been verified and approved. The church will then complete the Request For Appointment form and submit it to TABCOM.

TABCOM will schedule the candidate for an interview. TABCOM notifies the Committee on Ministerial Preparation and notify her/him of the location, date and time. The Committee will review the candidate’s materials and conduct the interview. In executive session the Committee will vote to recommend that:

1) the candidate continue in the ordination process, or
2) the candidate be delayed until further preparations are completed, or
3) the candidate not proceed in the ordination process.

The Committee on Ministerial Preparation will discuss its decision with the candidate and, in the case of a delay, will assign a committee member to provide ongoing support. In the case of a delay or denial, the Chairperson of the committee will notify you.

If the vote of the Committee on Ministerial Preparation is for the candidate to proceed toward ordination, the decision will be communicated to the Commission on Ordained Ministry, the licensing church, the Watchcare Pastor, and the Association Committee on Ministry. The candidate will receive a letter from the Chairperson of the Committee on Ministerial Preparation stating the decision and will be encouraged to contact the Association Committee on the Ministry, so that next steps may be taken toward completing the ordination process.

If the final vote of the Committee on Ministerial Preparation is for the candidate not to proceed toward ordination, the candidate, the licensing church, and the Commission on Ordained Ministry will be notified. The candidate’s file will be permanently closed.

**The Ordination Council**

The candidate will meet with the Association Committee on the Ministry to review the entire content of the ordination paper.

The licensing church will call an Ordination Council with advance notice of 30 days. The Ordination Council will meet to examine the candidate. A person seeking to be ordained should present evidence of the following:

- a call to the vocation of a professional Christian minister
- dedication to the cause of Christ
- character of moral integrity and responsibility
- a sufficient grasp of doctrine and polity to be entrusted with the pastoral oversight of a church
- a sufficient preparation for adequate performance of requisite ministerial functions.

If the vote of the Ordination Council is favorable, the candidate and the licensing church will arrange an ordination service to be held at least three weeks after the Council.

**The Ordaining Church should:**

- invite the Executive Minister or a representative to take part in the Ordination Service.
- conduct the Ordination service
- send a copy of the service to TABCOM.

**TABCOM will:**

- send an ordination certificate (three weeks notice required to provide the certificate)
- seal and retain the candidate’s ministerial preparation file
- record the ordination with ABC/USA.

**The Shepherding Pastor**

Your odyssey is now complete. You have provided valuable support and guidance to one called by God into the Christian ministry. You have cooperated with TABCOM and your Association to help the candidate prepare for the challenges of doing Christ’s ministry in the world today. Thanks be to God!

**Final Package of required documents should be mailed to:** Committee on Ministerial Preparation, TABCOM, 20 Milton Street, Dedham, MA 02026.
APPENDIX I

LICENSEING AND ORDINATION

A. Local Church License To Preach
1. A person seeking to be granted a license to preach by a local church shall:
   a) Be a person who has accepted Jesus the Christ as Lord and Savior
   b) Be a person of good reputation in the community, emotionally stable, a proven leader in his church, and have the ability to communicate.
   c) Be an active member in good standing of a cooperating TABCOM church.
2. A local church license to preach shall be valid only in the church granting the license.

B. Pre-Ordination License
A person planning to become an ordained minister shall first secure a pre-ordination license from the church of which he/she is a member. To obtain such a license, the candidate shall:
   a) Be a person who has accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
   b) Be a stable person of good reputation.
   c) Be preparing for the Christian ministry as a professional vocation.
The candidate’s church shall counsel with the candidate regarding the Christian ministry and shall provide an opportunity for the candidate to preach and/or conduct public worship. After favorable action by the church, a suitable pre-ordination license shall be presented to the candidate.
The Commission on Ordained Ministry of TABCOM shall be notified in order that:
   a) Such licensing may be properly recorded in the Yearbook of The American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts. The license shall be validated annually by the Church.
   b) Such candidate for the ministry shall be enrolled in the Watch Care Program of the Committee on Ministerial Preparation.

C. Ordination
1. Ordination is the recognition by the church of one called by God into the Christian Ministry as a professional vocation. The evidences of such a call are:
   a) A commitment of life to Christian discipleship.
   b) An inner conviction which the one called identifies as from God.
   c) An endowment of such abilities as are requisite for a Christian minister.
   d) An opportunity to render a Christian ministry consistent with the character of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.
2. A person seeking to be ordained should present evidence of the following:
   a) A call to the vocation of a professional Christian minister.
   b) A dedication to the cause of Christ.
   c) A Character of moral integrity and responsibility.
   d) A sufficient grasp of doctrine and polity to be entrusted with the pastoral oversight of a church.
   e) A sufficient preparation for adequate performance of requisite ministerial functions.
3. Such evidence shall be gathered, presented, and transmitted as outlined below. The candidate will be provided with copies of any recommendations made by the commission and/or its committees.
   a) The candidate shall present to the Committee on Ministerial Preparation of the Commission on Ordained Ministry in documentary form evidence that:
      1) Instruction at the seminary level has been completed satisfactorily. It is required that the following areas of study be covered: Bible, Preaching, Theology, Church History, Educational Ministries, Church Administration, Pastoral Care, and American Baptist History and Polity.
2) The candidate holds an M.Div. degree or its equivalent from an accredited theological seminary. If such degree is not offered, a special committee shall be convened under the Equivalency Provision for examination of the candidate. (See Appendix II.)

3) A current pre-ordination license certifying the church’s concurrence in the candidate’s undertaking to prepare for and to exercise a Christian vocation.

4) Participation in the Watchcare Program or a satisfactory equivalent for at least one year.

5) Satisfactory completion of at least one year of supervised Field Education and/or Internship or a satisfactory equivalent.

6) Vocational and psychological assessment relative to the candidate’s aptitude for ministry.

7) The opportunity of rendering a Christian ministry consistent with the character of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

8) The action of the local church, proposing to be the ordaining church, requesting certification on behalf of the candidate.

9) A cooperative attitude toward the ABC/USA and subscription to the Code of Ethics of the Ministers Council of ABC/USA.

b) The Committee on Ministerial Preparation shall submit a report to the Commission on Ordained Ministry regarding the candidate’s credentials.

4. The Commission on Ordained Ministry shall provide in written form to the candidate and licensing church and to the association Committee on the Ministry its recommendation. If that recommendation is to proceed with ordination, the licensing church and the association Committee on the Ministry shall:

a) Work with the candidate to insure his/her readiness for examination by an Ordination Council, and

b) Work together to insure that an Ordination Council is duly constituted for examination of the candidate, and in the subsequent act of ordination all is done regularly and in order.

5. The association Committee on the Ministry shall:

a) Review with the candidate his/her presentation to be made to the Ordination Council.

b) Make its own observation of the candidate’s readiness for the ministry which it may share with the Ordination Council.

c) Provide in written form to the ordaining church and to the clerk of the association a statement of the candidate’s readiness for examination by an Ordination Council.

d) Be available to give counsel in planning the Ordination Service.

6. The ordaining church, having the following documentary evidence …

- The recommendation of the Commission on Ordained Ministry
- The recommendation of the association Committee on the Ministry

… shall request in writing that an Ordination Council be called by the association.

7. Subsequent to the examination of the candidate, the Ordination Council shall provide to:

a) The ordaining /church

b) The candidate

c) The clerk of the association

d) The Commission on Ordained Ministry

e) The Executive Minister of TABCOM

f) a written record of its action and recommendation (as provided for in Section D.3.a.below) relative to the candidate’s readiness for ordination. Upon receiving the recommendation to proceed, the ordaining church and the candidate shall arrange a Service of Ordination.

8. The ordaining church shall notify TABCOM of its action and TABCOM shall provide the candidate with a certificate proclaiming that ordination.
D. Ordination Council

1. Calling of the Council

   a) An Ordination Council shall be called on a date agreed upon by the church and the association Committee on the Ministry by a letter sent by the association clerk on behalf of the church and the candidate.

   b) The notification of the Council shall be sent thirty (30) days in advance of the meeting to:

      1) The clerk and pastor of every American Baptist Church in the association.
      2) Special persons not to exceed four in number invited to participate by the church calling the Council with the approval of the association committee on the Ministry.
      3) Ex-officio delegates (See paragraph f below).

   c) The notice shall state the place, time, date and purpose of the Council.

   d) In exceptional cases, and upon the request of the church calling the Council, the requirement of the thirty (30) day notice may be waived by action of the chairperson of the Commission on Ordained Ministry and the chairperson of the association Committee on the Ministry, but in no case shall the notice be less than fourteen (14) days.

   e) The delegates shall include:

      1) The pastor and two other delegates of each invited church.
      2) Other ordained persons who are members of association churches and who have standing in TABCOM.
      3) Those persons invited under the provisions of Section D.1.b.(2) above.

   f) Ex officio delegates to be invited shall by the:

      1) Association moderator
      2) Association clerk
      3) Chairperson of the association Committee on the Ministry
      4) Area Minister
      5) Executive Minister of TABCOM

2. Organization of the Council

   a) The moderator of the association should convene the Council at the stipulated time and place.

   b) The clerk of the association should:

      1. Read the letter calling the Council
      2. Call the roll
      3. Act as secretary

   c) Non-delegates may be seated and, at the discretion of the Council, may participate with voice but without vote.

   d) Those delegates present shall constitute a quorum.

   e) When a Council has been established, the moderator of the meeting should be elected from among the association Committee on the Ministry.

   f) A suggested agenda for the Council would be:

      1. Prayer
      2. Statement by the clerk of the church calling the Council concerning:

         a) The granting of the candidate’s pre-ordination license.
         b) The vote of the church requesting the calling of the Council.
         c) Any pertinent information relative to the candidate’s professional experience.

      3. Statement of the recommendation of the Committee on Ministerial Preparation of the Commission on Ordained Ministry of TABCOM

      4. Statement of the recommendation of the association Committee on the Ministry.

      5. Introduction of the candidate who shall read a statement concerning his/her:
a) Christian experience
b) Call to the ministry
d) Understanding of American Baptist polity
e) Attitude toward the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. and its ecumenical witness.
f) The Council examination to this point is to be confined to ascertaining the facts concerning the candidate’s experience, ability, attitudes and viewpoints.
g) When the examination of the candidate has been completed, the Council may dismiss the candidate and all non-delegates from the room and then convene in executive session.

3. Actions of the council
   a) The Council may recommend that the church:
      1. Proceed to ordain the candidate; or
      2. Postpone action pending clarification of some stipulated contingency; or
      3. Not ordain the candidate.
   b) Suitable opportunity for discussion should be allowed.
   c) The vote should be taken by roll call, with each delegate casting his/her vote, and stating the reason, if he/she chooses.
   d) The candidate shall be informed of the vote of the Council.
   e) Unless the Council must adjourn to another date for the continuance of the business under consideration, the final action is to dissolve the Council.

4. Records of the Council
   a) The clerk shall have the minutes sufficiently in order by the conclusion of the Council that they may be read and accepted, subject to the addition of a motion to adjourn.
   b) The clerk shall put the records in order and submit copies to:
      1. The candidate’s church
      2. The candidate
      3. The Commission on Ordained Ministry of TABCOM.
   c) The Commission on Ordained Ministry shall:
      1. Record these proceedings.
      2. Make proper certification of them to the candidate.
      3. Make certification of them to such denominational agencies as it deems advisable.
   d) The association Committee on the Ministry should offer counsel to the church on the proper procedures for ordaining the candidate, including the use of the Code of Ethics of the Commission on Ordained Ministry of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

E. Appeal Procedures
1. In the event of a vote by the Council that a church should not proceed with the ordination of a candidate, the following courses of action are open:
   a) The church may wait until the conditions which caused the adverse recommendation change sufficiently to warrant the calling of a new Council to examine the candidate.
   b) The Church, if it considers the decision of the Ordination Council to have been arbitrary and unfair, may appeal to the Commission on Ordained Ministry of TABCOM for a hearing.

2. The Commission, upon such an appeal, shall arrange for a meeting of its members, to which shall be invited the following:
   a) Moderator and clerk of the Council in question
b) Candidate  
c) Delegates from the candidate’s church  
d) Members of the association Committee on the Ministry  
e) Area Minister of the Area in which the church is located.  
f) Executive Minister of TABCOM.

3. The Commission, augmented as provided for in B. above, shall:  
   a) Be convened and presided over by the chairperson of the Commission.  
   b) Review the records of the Ordination Council.  
   c) Receive reports relative to its action.

4. Decide whether the evidence presented warrants the calling of a Council of Review.

F. Council of Review

1. A Council of Review shall be composed of the following with power to vote:  
   a) The pastor and two lay delegates from each church in the association;  
   b) Other ordained persons from the association who are in good and regular standing in TABCOM;  
   c) Members of the association Committee on the Ministry;  
   d) Members of the Commission on Ordained Ministry of TABCOM;  
   e) Area Minister of the area in which the aggrieved church is located;  
   f) Executive Minister of TABCOM.

2. The Council of Review shall be called and organized to examine the candidate in the manner customary for Ordination Councils.

3. The Council of Review may recommend that the church:  
   a) Proceed to ordain the candidate;  
   b) Postpone action pending clarification of some stipulated contingency;  
   c) Should not ordain the candidate.

4. When the decision of a Council is favorable, a suitable Service of Ordination shall be held, preferably no sooner than two weeks after the date of the Council of Review.

5. Should a church ordain a candidate contrary to the recommendation of the Council, the ordinate shall be without standing in TABCOM.

6. The minutes of the Council of Review shall be furnished to:  
   a) The Commission on Ordained Ministry which shall make them a part of its permanent records;  
   b) The Church of the candidate;  
   c) The candidate;  
   d) The association Committee on the Ministry.

G. The Service of Ordination

1. See “Ordination to the Christian Ministry in ABC/USA: Recommended Procedures.”

2. Consult the office of the Executive Minister of TABCOM for sample Orders of Service and vows.