

Introduction

Ordination of clergy is good polity. With few exceptions in its history, the church has found it expedient to formally set apart persons for leadership positions within its ministry. (See Appendix 1).

Ordination implies recognition by the local church, in consultation with a body of like-minded churches, that an individual has received both a calling and gifting of God to vocational ministry.

The churches of Converge MidAmerica expect that those who are ordained should have prepared themselves for ministry through rigorous training in theology and leadership skills. Ordination should only be sought by those whose calling and giftedness has been tested by experience in ministry, enhanced by education and confirmed by those to whom and with whom they have ministered.

We believe that it is important to distinguish between licensure and ordination. While the civil authorities make no distinction between the two in granting certain privileges and responsibilities, we believe that licensure should be granted to those who fall under the following categories:

1. Are taking preliminary steps toward ordination.
2. Are serving in a probationary or interim ministry capacity.
3. Are serving for a specified period of time.
4. Are serving in a ministry capacity limited to the special needs of a particular church or organization.

While licensure does not require the candidate to be examined by a council of representatives from like-minded churches, it is strongly recommended that all licensed personnel should undergo a careful examination by the licensing church as to their doctrine, lifestyle, and character as well as their capabilities concerning their specific ministry responsibility.

The following Steps to Ordination are intended to help churches as they call and ordain pastors. While these recommendations are not binding, they will be conducive to good order and effective service.

Steps to Ordination

1. **Call.** The candidate for ordination shall be able to:
 - A. Give a clear testimony of personal experience of conversion through faith in Christ Jesus.
 - B. Give a clear testimony of response to the call of God to the ministry of the church.

- C. Give a clear testimony of the confirmation of the call to ministry through effective ministerial experience and the affirmation, response, and support of the body of Christ (see Appendix 2).
 - D. Give a clear Statement of Faith.
2. **Preparation.** The candidate for ordination shall give evidence of appropriate educational preparation to fulfill the candidate's particular call. Seminary training or comparable rigorous training in theology and leadership is expected. Churches are to take seriously their collective and individual responsibility in assisting candidates to prepare for ministry through offering appropriate experiences of ministerial responsibility and evaluation of the character, call and giftedness of the individual.
3. **Placement in a local church.** The candidate for ordination shall fulfill the following expectations:
- A. Hold membership in the ordaining church.
 - B. Hold a formal call to ministry within the ordaining church, or the public recognition by that church of the candidate's call to some form of Christian ministry (see Appendix 2).
 - C. Have received confirmation by the ordaining church that the candidate's personal qualities, character, and spiritual gifts are suitable for an ordained ministry.
 - D. Demonstrate skills in:
 - a. The understanding and interpretation of the Bible
 - b. The comprehension of theology and church history
 - c. The understanding of and adherence to the Converge statement of faith.
 - d. The distinctives of Baptist theology and practice.
 - e. Oral and written communication (See Appendix 2)
 - E. Demonstrate an understanding of the candidate's leadership role in the life of the church, style of ministry, and personal and vocational goals (See Appendix 2)
4. **Initiation of the Ordination Process.** The authority to ordain belongs to the local church. This authority is exercised when the local church makes a formal decision to initiate ordination procedures for a candidate. It is the responsibility of the church to communicate this decision to Converge MidAmerica and to request that the Ordination Coaching Team meet with the candidate.
5. **The Recommendation of the Ordination Coaching Team.** The purpose of the Ordination Coaching Team is to assist the candidate in refining the candidate's presentation to an ordination council and to advise the candidate on the candidate's readiness to be presented to such a council. On the basis of its findings, the team will advise the ordaining church as to the perceived fitness and readiness of the candidate.

In ordination, the local church should proceed with careful regard for the concerns and expectation of its sister churches in Converge. An ordained minister of one of our churches represents our entire movement. The candidate shall be referred by the ordaining church to the Ordination Coaching Team for a preliminary review of the candidate's preparation.

The Team will be assembled by the Converge MidAmerica office after having received all the written materials from the candidate (See Section 6C below). The Team shall examine the candidate's testimony of Conversion and Call (see Appendix 2) and Statement of Faith (see Appendix 2), recognizing that a personal call and understanding and commitment to Baptist theology make up the foundations for ministry within Converge.

Since there is much more to the practice of ministry than personal experience and orthodox theology, the pastor's ability to motivate people, manage conflict, communicate a vision, and handle crisis are essential to an effective ministry. Thus, the Team shall also review the candidate's "Statement of Pastoral Leadership", including the candidate's theology of ministry, professional goals, and goals for the candidate's present ministry (see Appendix 2).

6. Calling the Ordination Council

- A. Upon recommendation of the Ordination Coaching Team, the ordaining church shall call an ordination council. An ordination council consists of clergy and lay delegates (at least 10) from at least four Converge MidAmerica churches. It is important that the council be scheduled to allow for maximum participation by both lay and clergy delegates.
- B. At least four weeks prior to the date of the council, the convening church shall send a written invitation to area Converge churches, requesting that the pastor and two other delegates be sent. It is recommended that these churches be called and a commitment secured to assure a good attendance at the ordination council. The convening church shall authorize three of its leaders to be delegates. The Converge MidAmerica office shall be notified and a representative invited.
- C. The convening church shall send each responding church a set of written materials or digital equivalent prepared by the candidate. These materials shall consist of the candidate's Testimony of Conversion and Call, Statement of Pastoral Leadership, and Statement of Faith (see Appendix 2).
- D. The convening church shall invite an appropriate person from among the delegates to serve as chair of the council, shall provide that person with the opportunity to adequately prepare for leadership of the council, and shall appoint them as chair. The convening church shall appoint someone to serve as clerk of the council.
- E. Converge MidAmerica is expected to use its resources to encourage participation by the invited churches.

7. Conducting the Ordination Council.

- A. The church chair shall organize the council by:
 - a. Calling for the reading of the church minutes authorizing the council.
 - b. Calling for the reading of the report of the Ordination Coaching Team.
 - c. Validating the credentials of the delegates.
 - d. Nominating and electing the convening church's candidates for the offices of chair and clerk of the council.
- B. The chair of the council shall conduct business of the council by:

- a. Presenting the candidate to the council to provide opportunity for determining how the candidate fulfills the norms for ordination.
- b. Providing opportunity for the council to ask questions of the candidate for clarification of the views expressed and the experience described in the written materials.
- c. Eliciting appropriate testimony from members of the convening church as to the fruitful demonstration of the candidate's personality, character, and spiritual gifts in edifying that congregation.
- d. Conducting a closed session in which the council shall determine the candidate's fitness and readiness for ordination.
- e. Informing the candidate of the decision of the council and communicating the decision to the Converge MidAmerica office.
- f. Instructing the clerk to provide the convening church with the minutes of the council. The minutes shall include information as to the composition and leadership of the council and a verbatim record of the council's actions.
- g. Announcing the date of the Ordination Service. It would be preferable that this date be at least 2 weeks after the Council has met.
- h. Adjourning and dissolving the council.

8. The Ordination Service

- A. An ordination service is a service of worship and praise to God and includes singing, prayers, Bible readings, a sermon, and exhortations to both the ordaining church and the candidate.
- B. The specific act of ordination involves the following elements:
 - a. The affirmation of ordination vows by the candidate (see Appendix 3)
 - b. The laying on of hands by the leaders of the ordaining church and ordained persons present.
 - c. The prayer of ordination.
 - d. The presentation of the Certificate of Ordination to the ordained which is issued by the Converge MidAmerica office.

9. Transfer / Recognition of Ordination. When an ordained minister moves from one Converge church to another:

- A. The responsibility for the supervision of the candidate's ordained status is transferred to that church. When an ordained person accepts a call to a form of ministry that does not itself provide for church membership (e.g., chaplaincy), the church of which the ordained is a member shall be responsible for the supervision of the candidate's ordination standing.
- B. It is recommended that a service of installation shall be held shortly after the new minister begins their duties. This service is to formally recognize the minister's call to the new congregation and to celebrate that event. In addition to the home church, representatives of neighboring sister churches and representatives of other local churches in the community should be invited to attend. Supervision over the minister's ordination then rests with the church in which they currently serve.

- C. When an ordained Converge minister accepts a call to a non-Converge church, they should transfer their ordination to the new denomination or fellowship in accordance with the policies of that body. If they are serving a ministry other than a church and transfer their membership to a non-Converge church, they should seek the blessing of that new church and denomination upon their ministry and subscribe to any policies regarding ordination that are part of their participation in a new fellowship.
- D. We encourage churches which call ministers who have not been ordained in Converge to examine the candidates to determine that their doctrine and practice is in accordance with the doctrine and practices of Converge MidAmerica. We encourage churches to either receive or affirm previous ordination or to encourage such staff to seek ordination through Converge MidAmerica procedures.

10. Revocation of Ordination

Should a minister be found living a life unbecoming a servant of the Lord or proclaiming teachings contrary to the Word of God specifically and Baptist beliefs in general, the church may call a council to hear the charges and the minister's defense. Upon recommendation of the council, the church will then revoke the minister's ordination certificate and announce the revocation in Converge press. It should be understood that only the church of which the minister is a member could take such action.

Attached Appendices Include:

- 1. Biblical Basis for Ordination
- 2. Documents to be prepared for the Ordination Coaching Team
 - a. A statement of your conversion and call to ministry
 - b. Your statement of faith
 - c. A statement on your understanding of pastoral leadership.
- 3. Ordination Vows
- 4. Converge Affirmation of Faith
- 5. Affirmation of Ministerial Ethics in Converge
- 6. Sample Letter Calling an Ordination Council
- 7. Sample Credentials
- 8. Sample Ordination Service