

## **Ordination to the Pastoral Ministry**

### **The Meaning of Ordination**

Christians have practiced ordination since New Testament times. In different eras, and in different churches, it has assumed different characteristics. Seventh Day Baptists practice ordination as a formal dedication of a person to a particular ministry. It is ordination to a task, with the blessings of the church. It is done in confirmation of the inward call of God which the ordinand professes, and it affirms trust in him or her as one who will faithfully serve Christ. Since ordination is for life, and may in time involve the life and work of several congregations and the reputation of the Church of Jesus Christ, haste should be avoided in calling anyone to ordination. However, it is appropriate for the local church to do so when they believe a member has demonstrated the call of God to the diaconate or the pastoral ministry.<sup>1</sup>

The church issuing a call to ordination of a candidate for pastoral ministry has the responsibility to consider the candidate's sincerity, faith, doctrinal understanding, morality, ability and training for gospel ministries.<sup>2</sup> This is a process involving considerable preparation and a number of steps, but the act itself consists of a simple, but solemn and prayerful, laying on of hands. An ancient symbolic gesture indicating the bestowal of trust, the laying on of hands was practiced by the New Testament church in setting apart Christian servants. A very personal act, in which representatives of God's people touch the candidate (usually on the head), ordination among Seventh Day Baptists is usually performed by all of the ministers present, including those from other denominations. It is done without any conception of "apostolic succession" or the belief that it bestows special qualities or transfers spiritual endowments to the ordinand. The act of ordination is functional, not sacramental.

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter will focus on ordination to the pastoral ministry, with the ordination of the diaconate being similar.

<sup>2</sup> See also, "Ordination and Sexual Conduct," below.

The authority for ordination lies in the local congregation. It is the congregation which calls one of its members to service and leadership. It is the congregation which ordains. However, each local church has a responsibility, not only to the candidate and to itself, but also to the entire Seventh Day Baptist denomination (and to the Christian world in general) to act responsibly and in the true spirit of the New Testament precedent. Two advisory bodies assist a local Seventh Day Baptist church in the ordination process: the Ordination Preparation Committee, and the Ordination Council.

### **The Call to Examination**

The local congregation formally begins the process of ordination by voting to call the candidate to examination, and if he or she is found qualified, to ordination. The motion may be stated as follows:

*Whereas Brother/Sister \_\_\_\_\_, a member of this church, has given evidence that he (or she) is called of God to the Gospel ministry; and whereas we believe the time has come when he should be formally set apart to that work; therefore, be it*

***Resolved:** First, That we call Brother/Sister \_\_\_\_\_ to examination, with a view to the ministry, and to ordination, provided that upon examination it appears to us that the time has come for such an action; Second, That we form an Ordination Preparation Committee to examine his (or her) credentials; Third, That we call an Ordination Council to consider and pass upon the fitness of Brother/Sister \_\_\_\_\_, said council to meet with us at \_\_\_\_\_ o'clock (A.M./P.M.), on the \_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ [Year] and; Fourth, That we invite sister churches in this association and the Seventh Day Baptist Council on Ministry to send delegates to said council.*

### **The Ordination Process<sup>3</sup>**

#### **Ordination Guidelines**

##### Introduction

Ordination is the responsibility of the local church. The following General Conference guidelines are not requirements for ordination or for future possible accreditation. However, information gathered in the ordination process may be helpful in the accreditation process, as well. These suggested guidelines are designed to assist local churches to better fulfill their ordination responsibilities and to assist candidates in their preparation for the Ordination Council.

##### Review of the Ordination Process

1. It is recommended the Council on Ministry be consulted regarding available ordination guidelines before the local church calls the candidate to examination.
2. Ordination candidate prepares his/her credentials.
3. Ordination Preparation Committee of the local church examines the credentials of the candidate to ensure the preparedness of the candidate for the Ordination Council.
4. Ordination Council is called with association and denominational representation to examine the candidate and make a recommendation to the local church.

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<sup>3</sup> "Ordination Guidelines" and "Ordination and Sexual Conduct," Conference Minutes, SDB Yearbook (1992), pp. A22-A24.

5. Following receipt of a recommendation from the Ordination Council, the local church makes the final vote on the ordination of the candidate.
6. Ordination service is planned and carried out by the local church to take place no earlier than 27 days following an affirmative vote by the local church.  
The Ordination Preparation Committee of the local church will assist in the preparation of the candidate for the Ordination Council. Here are the suggested guidelines the church may wish to use for this new committee.

### The Ordination Preparation Committee

In order to encourage the preparedness of the ordination candidate, we urge local churches to establish an Ordination Preparation Committee.

### Purpose of the Ordination Preparation Committee

To carefully review the credentials of the candidate to see if they are in order for an Ordination Council and recommend that the church proceed with the examination and call to ordination.

### Membership of the Ordination Preparation Committee

The Ordination Preparation Committee will be chosen by the local church. It can be established as a new group or an existing group in the local church (diaconate, Advisory Board, etc.) may be chosen for this purpose.

### The Role of the Ordination Preparation Committee

The Ordination Preparation Committee should meet to carefully review the following suggested credentials of the candidate.

1. A written statement of the candidate's Christian experience.
2. A written statement of the candidate's call to the Christian ministry. A statement of the spouse's support in this call would also be desirable and encouraging.
3. A verification of the candidate's educational background.
4. A resume of the candidate's work experience and/or previous ministry experience.
5. A written doctrinal statement on each segment of the Seventh Day Baptist Statement of Belief.
6. Three letters of reference regarding his/her moral character. One of these letters should be from a person outside the church but from the community where the person is ministering.

When the Ordination Preparation Committee is convinced that the candidate's credentials are in order and that the candidate is prepared for the Ordination Council, the church should be notified. At this time the church is ready to call for an Ordination Council.

Please send a copy of the above credentials (letters and documents) to the Council on Ministry to be placed in the pastor's file.<sup>4</sup>

## **Ordination and Sexual Conduct**

### Ordination Standards

When a person has demonstrated a call to ministry it is appropriate for the local church to call that person to ordination. The church issuing a call to ordination has the responsibility to consider the candidate's sincerity, faith, doctrinal understanding, morality, ability, and training for gospel ministries.

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<sup>4</sup>Note: Of course, a copy of the above credentials should also eventually be made available to the Ordination Council.  
July, 1999 Accreditation (H 13-16) revised by vote of Conference 2004

### Ordination and Sexual Conduct

Sexual conduct is a significant part of the morality of a pastor being considered for ordination. Sex between a man and a woman in the bonds of holy matrimony is a beautiful, pure and powerful part of the marriage union. However, sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage--such as fornication, adultery, and homosexual activity--is contrary to the will of God (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10).

We recommend to local churches that they not ordain individuals to the gospel ministry who practice sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage or are unrepentant of sexually immoral behavior as defined by scripture.

### Accreditation and Sexual Conduct

We recommend that General Conference not extend or continue accreditation to individuals in the Gospel ministry who practice sexual activity outside the bonds of heterosexual marriage or are unrepentant of sexually immoral behavior as defined by Scripture.

### **The Ordination Council**

Upon receiving the recommendation of the Ordination Preparation Committee, the church makes its decision whether or not to continue the ordination process. In matters of such great importance to other congregations of the General Conference, as well as to the church considering ordination, there is a need to seek the help of fellow Seventh Day Baptists in shouldering this responsibility. So doing also adds to the solemnity of the proceedings. It is therefore expected that the church will request delegates from sister churches within the association and from the General Conference, who will be empowered to participate fully in the examination and ordination. The body gathered to assist in carrying out these actions is called the Ordination Council. It functions for the purpose of this one ordination only. Ordination without a council formed according to these guidelines is discouraged and cannot be expected to lead to accreditation by the General Conference.

The following procedure is recommended for continuing the ordination process.

- 1. Appointment of delegates.** The churches invited to participate in the examining council appoint delegates to the council. These often include the pastor and members of the diaconate, but should not be limited to these ordained members. A list of those appointed should be forwarded by the clerk of each church to the clerk of the church issuing the invitation, so that the will of each church is made clear. The ordaining congregation usually appoints a large delegation to the council (sometimes, "all members present").
- 2. Calling the council to order.** When the council assembles, the meeting is called to order by the moderator or clerk of the local church, or by some other individual appointed by the church. This person continues to preside until a clerk and moderator have been elected by the council. (Sometimes the local church has nominations for these offices ready to present at this time.)
- 3. Agenda of the council.** The following is a logical order of business for the proceedings.
  - a) Reading of the call.** Following the call to order, the action of the church in calling the council should be read.
  - b) List of delegates.** The list of delegates appointed and present should be compiled and read. New names may be added by the council itself.

- c) **Election of moderator and clerk.** These officers should be elected by the council of accredited delegates. However, the council often accedes to the will of the local church in this matter.
- d) **Prayer.** A season of prayer for God’s guidance is customary. It is a time of deep solemnity and need. The prayer may be short or extended, formal or informal.
- e) **Examination of the candidate.** The candidate for ordination is called upon to state his or her Christian experience and beliefs, and to describe his or her call to the ministry. It is customary for the candidate to present a prepared statement of the foregoing (which may be the same as was submitted to the Ordination Preparation Committee), but nothing prohibits an *extempore* presentation. At the close of the candidate’s statement, members of the council are free to question the candidate about any part of this statement, or about matters not included in it. In order to ensure that the examination remains orderly, it is conducted by the moderator of the council or by an “examiner” appointed by the council. The examination should be functional rather than formal. Its purpose is to reveal the fitness of the candidate and to satisfy all members of the council that they possess sufficient information about the candidate to make a recommendation with regard to ordination.
- f) **Vote of the council.** At the close of the examination, the council prepares to vote upon the candidate’s acceptability for ordination. The candidate and the candidate’s family members may be asked to leave the room while the council conducts its business in the presence of the other assembled people. However, this is not required when the council retires to another place for its deliberations. It is customary for this part of the agenda to be conducted apart from the candidate. Adequate time should be taken by the moderator to allow members of the council to comment on the matter before them. The council has two responsibilities:<sup>5</sup>
  - 1) To determine the candidate’s **fitness for ordination** and to vote: (a) to recommend that the church ordain; or (b) to recommend that ordination be postponed; or (c) to recommend that the candidate not be ordained. The motion may be similar to the following (shown including several variations in the wording):

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<sup>5</sup> See also item number 2 under, “The Ordination Service” below.

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*RESOLVED, That the examination of Brother (Sister) \_\_\_\_\_ has (has not) been satisfactory, and we recommend that he (she) be (not be) ordained that further consideration of ordination be postponed, until he (she) has sought further preparation gained greater experience.*

- 2) To determine the **agreement of the candidate's beliefs with the Seventh Day Baptist Statement of Belief**. The motion might take the following form:

*RESOLVED, That the council has found Brother (Sister) \_\_\_\_\_'s beliefs to be in accord with the beliefs expressed in the Seventh Day Baptist Statement of Belief.*

### **Final Vote by the Local Church**

1. **The vote of the local church.** The local church makes the final decision by a vote of the church upon receipt of the Ordination Council's recommendation.
2. **Setting the time for ordination.** It is recommended that a period of 27 days minimum be allowed to elapse between the session of the examining council and the ordination service. The date should be only tentatively set, pending the outcome of the Ordination Council. It should not become customary to automatically expect an affirmative recommendation from the council, and such is the implication if the date of the ordination service is publicly announced prior to the examination, or is planned to immediately follow it. Sometimes it is decided that distance and the participation of delegates requires that ordination be conducted on the same day as the examination. However, as desirable as it may be, the examining body and the ordaining body do not need to be composed of the same people. The two functions are separate in purpose.

### **The Ordination Service**

The local church conducts the ordination service and decides who shall preside. Sometimes this is the moderator of the church, the moderator of the Ordination Council, the pastor of the church (if other than the candidate), or a visiting minister. The order of the service varies according to the will of the church and the circumstances. The following is presented as a guide since it includes all the usual elements.

1. **Worship.** This service may be similar to a Sabbath morning worship service, or varied according to the wishes of the ordinand and the church. Often those especially close to the ordinand are invited to take part. It is customary for there to be special music, the particular selections often being requested by the ordinand.
2. **Affirmation.** A member of the Ordination Council should be designated by that council to make a statement affirming that the candidate has met every requirement and is ready for ordination.
3. **Ordination Sermon.** The preacher is often requested by the ordinand.
4. **Charge to the Candidate.**
5. **Charge to the Church.**
6. **Consecrating Prayer.** It is at this point that the act of laying on of hands is ordinarily performed. Usually the ordinand kneels.

7. Welcome to the Ministry. This is usually given by an ordained minister.
8. Benediction. The benediction is usually pronounced by the ordinand as his first act as a newly ordained minister.

### **Records and Certificate of Ordination**

The clerk of the Ordination Council and the clerk of the church should keep detailed records of the entire proceedings, seeing that they are entered into the permanent records of the church. A copy should be sent to the Council on Ministry so that it will be on file when accreditation by General Conference is sought. A Certificate of Ordination should be provided to the ordinand. A blank certificate is available from the Director of Pastoral Services of the Council on Ministry. It states:

#### Certificate of Ordination

*This is to certify that after a satisfactory examination by a duly called council as to his (her) Christian experience, call to the ministry and religious faith, \_\_\_\_\_ was consecrated to the Christian ministry by the Seventh Day Baptist Church of \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, [Year].*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Church Moderator*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Church Clerk*