

Guidelines for Congregations Relating to Candidates for Ministry

Offered by
The Commission on the Ministry
American Baptist Churches of Connecticut

“The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...”

Ephesians 4:11

Introduction – By virtue of our baptism all Christians are called and gifted for ministry. In Christ, God calls some to pastoral and professional ministry. That call and response is often supported, tested and shaped by the local congregation in which the candidate lives out his/her faith during the years of formal preparation for ordained ministry. In this way the church becomes a partner with the candidate and Holy Spirit in formation for ministry.

In response to requests from congregations relating to the role and responsibility of a congregation, the following guidelines are offered (see also *Procedures for Ordination, Commissioning and Recognition for the Christian Ministry*, pp. 11-13):

1. Form a committee or ministry team, or designate an individual who will relate to and mentor the candidate, or assign this role/responsibility to the diaconate or other appropriate board/group.
2. Meet regularly with the candidate to hear updates on their preparation, their journey of faith and questions, concerns and joys related to their call.
3. Develop a plan to insure the candidate is regularly invited to people's homes for a meal and/or times of fellowship so that the congregation can come to know and be available to the candidate in settings other than “church.”
4. Move to license the candidate, giving formal expression to the congregation's conviction that this candidate is a person of good character, and is appropriately gifted for professional ministry.
5. Engage the candidate in further discerning and shaping their gifts for ministry by inviting him/her to take formal leadership responsibilities in the congregation. Insure that, as they are able, they have opportunity to participate in the formal worship life of the congregation.
6. As able, the congregation might offer tangible means of support such as monies towards academic costs, transportation, small gifts that recognize holidays and significant dates in the life of the candidate (i.e. birthdays, anniversaries, birth of a child, etc.)
It is expected that a congregation will offer tangible support by contributing at least \$100 toward the cost of a two-day candidate evaluation at the Center for Career Development and the Ministry in Dedham, MA. All candidates for ordination within the American Baptist

Churches of Connecticut are required to participate in this evaluation. In 2006, the cost of this program is \$1,450. The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board will pay \$1,000; ABCCONN will pay \$250. If the local congregation contributes \$100, the cost for the candidate will be \$100, plus travel, lodging and meals while at the Center.

7. Drop notes or e-mails to a candidate that offer a word of support, encouragement, challenge or affirmation.
8. Work with the candidate to plan ceremonial occasions as they arise. These might include licensing, ordaining, or installing a candidate in and by your own congregation or another.
9. Pray regularly for the candidate, both privately and publicly.

Your strong involvement as a congregation will help “smooth the way” for a candidate and for the work of ABCCONN’s Commission on the Ministry with the candidate. Together we journey as vital partners with candidates in their continued discernment of God's call and their formation and preparation for ministry.

Licensing a Candidate for Professional Ministry

When a congregation votes to license a candidate for professional ministry, it is giving formal expression to its conviction that this candidate is a person of good character, who gives evidence of being called by God to professional ministry, and is appropriately gifted to respond to that call.

“A local church, well acquainted with the candidate, is making public the fact that the individual apparently possesses the ability and the spiritual and emotional qualities necessary for ministry, and the academic training required for ordination is being received.” (See *Procedures for Ordination, Commissioning and Recognition for the Christian Ministry*, p. 6.1.a.).

It is an important primary step in the candidate’s journey of preparation for ordination within American Baptist Churches of Connecticut (which will be nationally recognized by the American Baptist Churches, USA). The act of licensing assumes that a congregation has sufficient knowledge of the candidate as a person, a baptized Christian, and the ways in which they have been led to live out their commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This action of licensing shall be good for a maximum of four years unless the congregation revokes it. There is benefit in affirming it on a yearly basis. At the end of four years, if necessary, it may also be renewed. Candidates should be licensed at least one year prior to the expected date of ordination.

A certificate of license can be prepared by the congregation, or secured from the ABCCONN office, and presented with words of explanation and thanksgiving by the Diaconate or other appropriate group in the context of congregational worship.

Definition of Terms

Ordained Minister – While every Christian is called to ministry by virtue of their baptism, some are called to a specific ministry whereby they are recognized by the church to have particular gifts and training. Types of these professional ministries are listed in *Procedures for Ordination, Commissioning and Recognition for the Christian Ministry, page 8*. Ordination is the worship service in which this call is celebrated and recognized.

Commissioning – In the process and act of commissioning, women and men are recognized and validated by the American Baptist Churches of Connecticut for designated ministries. Commissioning recognizes a particular call, in a particular setting, for the duration of that call, or otherwise specified period of time.

InCare Candidate – A candidate for ordination, commissioning, or recognition of a non-ABC ordination is said to be “InCare” when they begin a relationship with ABCCONN’s Commission on the Ministry. This relationship is guided and sustained by the candidate, the Commission, and InCare Pastor, and the local congregation to whom the candidate is related. InCare status can last from 6 months to 3 or more years.

Mentor/Sponsor/InCare Pastor – Terms used interchangeably to mean a person designated by the Commission on the Ministry who walks with, guides, and supports the candidate in the process of ordination, commissioning or recognition of non-ABC ordination.