



Mennonite Church
USA

Mennonite Church
Canada

Ceremonies of licensing, ordination and Licensing/Commissioning for specific ministry

Credentialing Packet

Introduction

Licensing and ordination recognize the important covenant of ministry. It is a covenant made in the presence of God between the minister, the congregation, and the church conference. Ceremonies for licensing and ordination provide the church with the opportunity to honor these occasions in the life of a minister, but are also important for the congregation and the church at large.

Licensing and ordination ceremonies occur in a worship service and involve planning and participation by the candidate, the congregation, and a conference representative (conference minister, bishop, overseer, or member of the ministerial leadership committee). Others from the wider church community may also be invited to attend or participate.

I. Licensing

“Within the context of a worship service in the congregation, an appropriate ceremony recognizing the granting of the licensing credential should be observed. A person representing the area conference ministerial leadership committee should be present and participate in this recognition. Because of the preliminary nature of this credential, this ceremony is normally minimal, anticipating the greater observance in ordination.” *

The licensing ceremony, which may also happen simultaneously with an installation, shall be arranged by the conference minister, bishop, or overseer in consultation with the congregational chairperson (or elder/deacon chair) and with the candidate. It generally occurs as a special part of the regular worship service of the congregation, following the sermon. The conference minister or a representative of the area ministerial leadership committee shall lead the licensing ceremony.

In planning the licensing service, special attention may be given to having someone other than the person being licensed preach the sermon, perhaps the area conference minister or overseer. Scripture and hymns lifting up the high calling, privilege, and responsibility of leadership and the mission of the church are appropriate. Inviting a representative of the area conference ministerial leadership committee and other persons significant to the candidate to bring special greetings, read a scripture, or have a prayer may lend meaning and significance to this occasion.

During the licensing ceremony, the conference minister or overseer shall ask the candidate particular questions in order to affirm commitment to Christ, devotion to the church, and faithful service in ministry. If a spouse so desires, the candidate’s spouse may be invited to stand alongside the candidate during this ceremony as a symbolic gesture of support. A prayer of blessing, a statement of declaration, and a handshake follow the questions. (See *Minister’s Manual*, pp. 166-169, “Licensing of a Minister Toward Ordination.”)

II. Ordination

“Within the context of a worship service in the congregation, the ceremony of ordination should be celebrated as a special and significant occasion for both the congregation and the person being ordained. A person representing the area conference ministerial committee—usually the conference minister, overseer or bishop—shall be present and participate in the ceremony. Other pastors and persons representing the larger church community should be invited as well.”*

The ordination ceremony, a full worship service, shall be planned by the conference minister, bishop, or overseer, and the congregational chairperson (or deacon/elder chair) in consultation with the candidate. Even more than a licensing ceremony, ordination becomes a high point in the life and ministry of the candidate. It is a time for great rejoicing by the congregation and wider church community. For the candidate, it is an opportunity to make a reaffirmation before God and the congregation of one’s call to ministry.

Together with the area conference, the congregation also has the privilege of affirming that call and the candidate’s gifts for ministry as they have been experienced throughout the licensing period. In calling for the candidate’s ordination, the congregation and conference are commending this person to the entire church as one called and capable of Christian ministry. It is an important and special occasion for the candidate, the congregation, and the conference.

Service Design and Planning

Together with the congregational chair (or elder/deacon chair) and in consultation with the candidate, the conference minister, bishop, or overseer shall initiate plans for the ordination worship service.

A date shall be set and advance notice of the ordination should be given so that all those with an interest in the candidate's ministry may be present. It may be advantageous to have the service at a time other than the regular Sunday morning service so that colleagues from other congregations may participate—perhaps Sunday afternoon or evening.

The conference representative should talk directly with the candidate's spouse prior to the planning of the ordination service to discern the level of involvement the spouse may wish to have in the ordination service. (See “Form for Spouse of Candidate for Ordination” in this packet.)

Ordinations include worship design and expressions ranging from liturgical solemnity to holy celebration in order to honor the significance of this event for the one being ordained, for the local congregation, and for the larger church. Care should be taken to plan and incorporate elements of worship with special meaning to the candidate. The traditions of the congregation and the conference should also be given due respect in planning for the service.

A common pattern for an ordination service includes: hymns, scriptures, a sermon (or series of shorter meditations), litanies, and prayer. The ordination ceremony led by the conference minister, overseer, or bishop, includes the presentation of the candidate, examination questions, the laying on of hands by significant persons represented (while the candidate kneels), a prayer of consecration, and presentation of a Bible. (See *Minister’s Manual*, pp.144-162, “The Calling and Setting Apart of Leaders.”)

Special attention may be given to additional creative or artistic dimensions of worship in planning the service—special music, the use of banners, a worship center with symbolic colors or arrangements, liturgical readings, or dance.

A traditional sermon may be preached by someone the candidate specially invites, or as an alternative to a sermon, several persons important to the candidate may be invited to share. Including the participation of other persons significant to the candidate (family, mentors, former pastors, teachers, colleagues, other ordained pastors from the conference or community, conference representatives, etc.) through readings, prayers, music, in giving greetings or blessings, personal sharing or in the laying on of hands, will add meaning and significance to this important occasion.

The focus, however, should remain on the worship of God and blessing the ordained for ministry in the church rather than on reciting his/her biography or eulogizing his/her qualifications for the office.

Traditionally a congregation will find ways to enhance the celebration of the event by hosting a meal or a reception.

III. Licensing/Commissioning for Specific Ministry

“Within the context of a worship service in the congregation, an appropriate ceremony recognizing the granting of the licensing/commission credential should be observed. A person representing the area conference ministerial committee should be present and participate in this recognition.”*

The licensing/commissioning service shall be arranged by the conference minister, bishop, or overseer, in consultation with the congregational chairperson (or elder/deacon chair) and if pertinent, a representative from the ministry for which the candidate is being licensed/commissioned. This service generally occurs as a special part of the regular worship service in the congregation of the one being licensed/commissioned. The conference representative shall lead the licensing/commissioning ceremony portion of the service.

It may be especially appropriate to invite the candidate for license/commission to offer that day's sermon. Scripture and hymns lifting up the mission of the church could be used. Inviting a representative of the area conference ministerial leadership commission, a representative from the ministry for which the person is being licensed/commissioned, or other persons significant to the candidate will be a meaningful part of this occasion. They may be invited to bring special greetings, read scripture, or have a prayer.

During the licensing ceremony, the conference minister or overseer shall ask the candidate particular questions in order to affirm commitment to Christ, devotion to the church, and faithful service in ministry. (If desired by the spouse, the candidate's spouse may be invited to stand alongside the candidate at this time as a symbolic gesture of support.) A prayer of blessing, a statement of declaration, and a handshake follow the questions. (See Minister's Manual, pp. 170-174, "Licensing/Commissioning for Specific Ministry.")

Traditionally a congregation will find ways to enhance the celebration of the event by hosting a meal or a reception.

* Quotations taken from *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership*

Resources

A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership, Everett J. Thomas, Editor; Faith and Life Press, 1996.

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Hymnal: A Worship Book, Rebecca Slough, Managing Editor; Brethren Press, Faith and Life Press, Mennonite Publishing House, 1992.

Ordination, Licensing, and Installation: Worship Series No. 13, John H. Mosemann, Faith and Life Press, 1983.

Ordinal: Ministry and Ordination in the General Conference Mennonite Church, GCMC Ministerial Leadership Services, 1987.

Minister's Manual, Heinz and Dorothea Janzen, Editors, Faith and Life Press, 1984.