

Congregational Discernment for Ordination

Credential Packet

Suggestions for the Congregational Chairperson

Ordination is a long-term ministry credential that is granted by an area conference of the Mennonite Church. It grants a minister the privileges and responsibilities of the office of ministry. Ordination usually follows the period of time known as the licensing. Licensing is a two- to four-year period of time in which the candidate's call and readiness for ministry is tested within a ministry role. An affirmation of that call and readiness for ministry by the minister, the congregation, and the area conference initiates the ordination process.

While the area conference is responsible for the ordination credentialing decision, the ministerial leadership committee of the area conference needs and values counsel from others who have experienced the ministry of the candidate in order to make a good decision about whether to ordain. The congregation is one of several groups or individuals from which the ministerial leadership committee receives counsel regarding the confirmation of a call and readiness for ministry on the part of the ordination candidate. During its discernment process, the area conference ministerial leadership committee will give consideration to a candidate's personal faith and theology, character, relational skills, ministerial functioning, commitment to the Mennonite Church, and understandings of the office of ministry and of ordination.

Congregations with a pastor or member being considered for ordination will need to engage in a congregational discernment process which enables the leadership of the congregation to determine whether or not to affirm the candidate's call and readiness for ministry. With a decision to affirm that call and readiness for ministry, the congregation will then make their recommendation to ordain to the area conference ministerial leadership committee. The following steps will usually be taken by the congregational chair (or chair of the elders/deacons board).

Letter of Request. The ordination process in the congregation begins with a letter from the congregational chair to the area conference minister requesting that the conference begin the ordination process for their pastor (or member.) The conference minister will respond to that letter in order to help the congregation begin a discernment process. This letter of request will usually be received by the area conference after a full year of licensed ministry or at least six months before the current license is to expire.

Congregational Discernment. With the help of the area conference minister, bishop, or overseer, the congregational chair shall guide the ordination discernment process in the congregation. It is important to keep the ordination candidate fully informed of the actions and steps that are planned. This congregational discernment process may occur in any of a variety of ways:

1. The deacon/elder board might process it and act on behalf of the congregation in making a recommendation for ordination (a) through personal reflection within the elder/deacon group; (b) by making selective inquiries of members; and (c) by writing a

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recommendation for ordination of the candidate and then asking for affirmation or feedback from the congregation.

2. With guidance from the deacon/elder board, small groups within the congregation might process the ministry call and readiness of the ordination ministerial candidate in order to seek a congregational consensus to recommend this ordination.
3. With the conference minister or overseer present, the entire membership of the congregation might process the call and readiness for ministry of this pastor (or member) in order to seek a congregational consensus to recommend this ordination.
4. Other ways determined by the local deacon/elder board and the minister.

Key Questions the Congregation Should be Asking in this Discernment Process. Keeping in mind the differing roles and responsibilities of the congregation and the conference in the discernment process, the congregation should focus on the following questions.

1. Is there an acceptable level of competence to carry out the essential tasks of ministerial leadership, not only in this congregation but throughout a lifetime of ministry?
2. What qualities of character (listening to others, teachability, mutuality, integrity, authenticity, love, etc.) does this person demonstrate in order to provide effective leadership and to maintain meaningful relationships?
3. Does the church recognize in this person one who leads the church and one who represents the church in the community and the world?
4. How has the church experienced the grace and love of God in Jesus Christ through the ministry of this person?

Letter/Report of Recommendation. Following the congregational discernment process, the congregational chairperson shall report the recommendation (or failure to recommend) to both the candidate and the area conference minister or overseer.

Ordination Interview. Upon receipt of a letter of recommendation to ordain, the area conference minister, bishop, overseer, or the chair of the ministerial leadership committee shall consult with the congregational chair and the candidate about a time and location for an ordination interview with the candidate. The congregation will be invited to send a representative to that interview with the candidate, and it is the responsibility of the congregational chair to ensure that a representative is appointed.

Ordination Date and Planning. Following the successful outcome of the ordination interview with a decision by the area conference ministerial leadership committee to ordain, the conference minister or overseer shall consult with the candidate and the congregational chair (or elder/deacon chair) regarding an ordination date. With a date determined, the conference minister or overseer shall also help the congregation and the candidate begin planning for the ordination service, which shall be hosted by the congregation.

Responsibilities the Congregation will Likely Assume:

1. Arranging the date with the candidate and conference minister.
2. Posting the date on the church calendar and making related announcements.
3. Inviting other clergy persons in the community to the ordination.
4. Inviting other Mennonite ministers in the cluster or area conference to attend.
5. Forming a worship committee to work with the candidate and the conference minister in planning the worship service.
6. Planning the celebration meal or fellowship time following the ordination service.
7. Submitting an announcement of the ordination service to the local newspaper.

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