

# Baptist Ordination Process

Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention

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## INTRODUCTION

Southern Baptist churches are autonomous and establish their own policies regarding ordination. Ordination is therefore an act of the local congregation and not of the denomination. Sister churches and the denomination assist each other in this process at the direction and request of the local church. We recognize the larger body of Christ as we partner together in the selection and affirmation of our leaders. Christian leadership is of too great an importance for us not to include the larger Body of Christ in the examination and affirmation of new pastors.

## WHAT IS A PASTOR?

There is some confusion in the church over the New Testament terminology of what is commonly called a pastor today. Three biblical terms are used to describe this role, but they are descriptive of the same church servant: elder, overseer/bishop, and pastor (1 Peter 5:1-3). Each term emphasizes a different aspect of what a pastor does. For instance, elder emphasizes the leadership aspects of a pastor's role. Overseer emphasizes the administrative and management side of a pastor's role. Pastor emphasizes the chaplaincy or caring side of the role. All facets are leadership from a slightly different perspective.

It is interesting to note that the 1925 Baptist Faith and Message read of the church, "Its Scriptural officers are bishops, or elders, and deacons." By the time of the Baptist Faith and Message 1963 the terminology had changed, "Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons." The 1963 language was sustained in the 2000 edition.

### *Elder (πρεσβυτερος)*

The most common of the three terms (elder, overseer, pastor) used to describe New Testament church leaders is *elder*. *Presbuteros* and its cognates appear sixty-six times in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> Bauer notes that *elder* designated an official. "Among the Jews (the congregation of a synagogue in Jerusalem used *πρεσβυτεροι* to denote its officers before 70 AD)."<sup>2</sup> Further, elder is used "for

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Akin, "The Single-Elder-Led Church" in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, eds. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 42.

<sup>2</sup> W. Bauer, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. by W. Arndt and F. Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 700.

members of local councils in individual cities” and “for members of a group in the Sanhedrin.”<sup>3</sup> Kittle notes that from the time of the Seleucids (223-198 B.C.) the term “delineated supreme ruling body of the Jews with its seat in Jerusalem the “council of elders.”<sup>4</sup>

Of particular interest to informing a biblical church polity is that *elders* always appears in the plural form. The only exceptions are references to a specific individual or to the collective office.

#### *Overseer/Bishop (επισκοπος)*

The second most common name for a church officer in the New Testament is overseer. The Greek word *επισκοπος* occurs five times in the New Testament. Kittle notes that the word is best rendered “overseer” or “watcher,” “protector,” or “patron.”<sup>5</sup> Bauer notes that the pre-Christian use of overseer was “of persons who have a definite function or a fixed office within a group.”<sup>6</sup> The Septuagint uses *episkopos* in the same twofold way as secular Greek. On the one hand it denotes God, and on the other it has the general sense of supervisors in different fields.”<sup>7</sup> Hawthorne makes the definition practical:

Greek *episkopos* also was used of humans who had functions to perform or who filled established offices—tutors, inspectors, scouts, army officers, watchmen, superintendents, officials associated with the temple, treasurers, and so on, were called *episkopoi*. Although this single word could describe so many different offices and functions, yet the one idea of “oversight” consistently ran as a common thread through all these various titles.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 700.

<sup>4</sup> Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. VI trans. by, Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968.), 658-659.

<sup>5</sup> Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol II. trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 617.

<sup>6</sup> Bauer, 299.

<sup>7</sup> Kittle, Vol. II, 614.

<sup>8</sup> G. F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1983), 8.

### *Shepherd or Pastor (ποιμην)*

The last word used of church leaders in the New Testament is *pastor*. This term nuances the rich Old Testament imagery of the shepherd caring for, protecting, and leading his sheep. In the more common verbal form, ποιμαινω, Bauer notes the meaning as to “tend a flock” and then extrapolates the verb to mean an “activity that protects, rules, governs, or fosters.”<sup>9</sup> In the noun form, ποιμην, this word is used three times referring to Jesus (Mark 14:27, Hebrews 13:20, 1 Peter 2:25) and once in Ephesians 4:11 referring to a leader in the church.

## **SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR ORDINATION**

### **Baptist Faith and Message 2000**

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

### Biblical Examples

#### **Acts 6:5**

So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a convert from Antioch. <sup>6</sup>They had them stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Acts 14:23**

When they had appointed elders for them in every church and prayed with fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

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<sup>9</sup> Bauer, 683.

<sup>10</sup> There is some debate as to whether the men set apart in Acts 6 are deacons or elders. Regardless, this Scripture gives us a picture of what ordination looked like whether for an elder or a deacon.

## Qualifications

### **1 Timothy 3:1-7**

This saying is trustworthy: "If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble work." <sup>2</sup> An overseer, therefore, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup> not an excessive drinker, not a bully but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own household competently and have his children under control with all dignity. <sup>5</sup> (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God's church?) <sup>6</sup> He must not be a new convert, or he might become conceited and incur the same condemnation as the devil. <sup>7</sup> Furthermore, he must have a good reputation among outsiders, so that he does not fall into disgrace and the devil's trap.

### **Titus 1:6-9**

An elder must be blameless: the husband of one wife, with faithful children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion. <sup>7</sup> As an overseer of God's household, he must be blameless: not arrogant, not hot-tempered, not an excessive drinker, not a bully, not greedy for money, <sup>8</sup> but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled, <sup>9</sup> holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it.

## Duties and Responsibilities

### **Acts 20:28**

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.

### **1 Peter 5:1-5**

I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and witness to the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory about to be revealed: <sup>2</sup> Shepherd God's flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but willingly, as God would have you; not out of greed for money but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. <sup>5</sup> In the same way, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because

**God resists the proud  
but gives grace to the humble.**

### **Acts 15:22-23**

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,<sup>23</sup> and they sent this letter by them,

“The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.<sup>11</sup>

### Call to Respect the Elders

#### **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13**

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction,<sup>13</sup> and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

#### **1 Timothy 5:17**

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES** (Franklin M. Segler<sup>12</sup>)

1. Ordination may be defined as the act by the church in a ceremony of worship of setting one apart to an office of leadership in the Christian ministry.
2. The responsibility for ordination rests with the church, God's people. The functioning church is represented by the local congregation, but it is related to God's people as a whole and should not be exclusive.
3. Ordination is an act of commitment in the presence of God's people on the part of the individual who feels God has called him to minister in a full-

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<sup>11</sup> Notice that the elders were involved in making the important decisions at the Jerusalem Council.

<sup>12</sup> Franklin M. Segler, *The Broadman Minister's Manual*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1968), 88.

time church-related vocation.<sup>13</sup> On the part of the church this ceremony is an act of approval, not an act of bestowal. It is an acknowledgement that God has bestowed certain gifts and has called the individual to service. It symbolizes what God has already done as a work of grace in the life of the person called. Ordination does not impart any rights or qualifications which God has not already bestowed.

4. The church should not be hasty in ordaining an individual. It should be certain that he has the qualifications to serve in the office whether it be as pastor, as deacon, or as any other leader. The candidate should first prove himself qualified in character and in gifts for such ministry.
5. Once an individual has been ordained, he should live an exemplary Christian life and show himself to be a maturing leader in the service of Christ. He is responsible primarily to Jesus Christ as Lord and secondarily to the church in functioning as a leader and his behavior should reflect his sense of responsibility.<sup>14</sup>

## **DEVELOPMENT OF A PASTOR/ELDER**

Jesus called His church to “make disciples.” He showed us what that process looks like through the development of His disciples. As a church makes disciples they should experience the development of Christian leaders. From these leaders God will call men into the ministry of proclaiming the Gospel as pastors/elders/overseers of the church (1 Peter 5:1-4). Pastors should be spiritually sensitive to what God is doing in the lives of their people. They should be discipling and mentoring young men they believe God might use as pastors or elders. As God works in the lives of these men, God will call some to serve as pastors. The call to pastor is a call to nurture (or pastor) people to God's vision for their lives.

## **DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S CALL**

A candidate should be able to express their own salvation experience and a conviction of God's call to pastoral ministry. The Bible teaches that every person is called to do ministry; however, some individuals are called to a special ministry as expressed in 1 Peter 5:1-5. This sense of call should be affirmed by other pastors/elders/overseers and ultimately affirmed by the congregation that calls that individual to the office of pastor.

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<sup>13</sup> Baptists today do ordain part-time or volunteer pastors.

<sup>14</sup> See Revocation of Ordination, p. 12.

## **CHURCH ENDORSEMENT TO BEGIN THE PROCESS**

Generally, a man shows commitment and fidelity to the Lord through ministry within his own church. Perhaps he serves as a teacher or ministry leader under the oversight of a pastor. When this pastor observes the demonstration of a call and gifting to ministry he might ask the church to license this man to the ministry. Licensing is a sort of development and observational time period through which a man continues to develop as a ministry leader prior to being ordained. At times, licensing is formal, and a certificate of license is issued by the local church. Other times, this process is informal, and no certificate of license is issued.

A church may ordain a man to the ministry prior to his call to serve a church as its pastor, but preferably a man would be ordained by the church that calls him to be their pastor. Frequently, the church that helped to develop the leader and the church that calls the leader will cooperate in the ordination process.

One, the other, or both churches will need to make a formal recommendation to proceed in the ordination process. At this time, the church should request the assistance of a key pastor, associational missionary, or denominational leader to guide the rest of the process.

## **CHURCH DUE DILIGENCE**

Whether licensing or ordaining an individual, the church should be careful to investigate the candidate's character. A background check is essential, for others will assume you have carefully vetted the candidate's character, 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Contact your association, state convention, or church insurance company and require a background check that could produce evidence of criminal convictions and/or sexual misconduct.

## **CHURCH'S REQUEST FOR AN ORDINATION COUNCIL**

After the church votes to proceed with the ordination and identifies a person to lead the process, the selected leader should send out a notice to the other pastors and deacons of sister Baptist churches inviting them to participate in an ordination council meeting where the candidate will be examined doctrinally and theologically.

This meeting should be scheduled at least one month before the planned ordination service. Saturday afternoon ordination councils are common in our region as they allow sister churches to travel and participate in the ordination council.

The candidate should be sent a copy of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 and a list of potential questions that the council may use to guide their examination and discussion.



## **SUGGESTED ORDINATION QUESTIONS**

The following are suggested questions, but the council will likely have additional questions to explore. These questions should be given to the pastoral candidate four weeks prior to the ordination council meeting.

1. Share with us how you became a follower of Jesus Christ.
2. What is the gospel?
3. How did you come to believe you are called to the pastoral ministry?
4. What do you believe about the nature, authority, and reliability of the Bible?
5. What do you believe about the doctrine of the Trinity?
6. What do you believe about Jesus Christ, his preexistence, birth, life, death, and resurrection?
7. What do you believe about the Holy Spirit and his work?
8. Describe what you believe Jesus means by "making disciples?" (MT 28:19)
9. Do you believe in the doctrine of eternal security?
10. What are the scriptural officers of the Baptist church? Describe their roles.
11. Explain the two ordinances of the church.
12. What is the nature and purpose of the church?
13. What do you believe about Christian stewardship?
14. Do you believe that churches should support missions beyond their local context? Do you affirm the SBC Cooperative Program funding channel for supporting global missions?

15. Do you have any habits or behaviors that might bring disgrace upon your Christian testimony? How is God continuing to sanctify and strengthen you?

16. Describe for us your devotional life.

17. Is your present marriage your first marriage?

18. What do you believe about heaven and hell?

19. What do you believe the Bible teaches about human sexuality?

20. Describe what you believe a biblical home looks like. What is the role of the husband? What is the role of the wife?

21. What do you believe about cooperating with other churches of "like faith and practice?"

22. Do you affirm the Baptist Faith and Message 2000? Is there any portion you disagree with?

23. Will you represent your church in your local Baptist association, the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention when given the opportunity to do so?

## **AGENDA FOR THE ORDINATION COUNCIL**

A suggested agenda for the ordination council would look like this:

### **Call to Order & Scripture** \_\_\_\_\_

(Frequently done by the Pastor if ordaining a deacon  
or by the DOM or a senior pastor in the ordination of a pastor.)

### **Overview of the process & selection of Council servants**

Council Moderator: \_\_\_\_\_ (runs the council meeting)

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ (will guide the examination)

Clerk: \_\_\_\_\_ (will record the

recommendation of the council so that it might be read to the ordaining church when it makes the final decision to ordain the pastor.)

### **Prayer for the candidate and for the church**

#### **Interview of the candidate**

Candidate's testimony  
Prepared questions  
Follow up questions

#### **Council discussion** (candidates dismissed)

**Council decision** to recommend (or not recommend) that the church proceed with the ordination. The local church ultimately holds the power and makes the decision to ordain or not to ordain.

## **PLANNING OF THE ORDINATION SERVICE**

Sometimes the ordination council will proceed to plan some parts of the ordination service. Other times, the local church will plan the entire ordination service. Either way, leaders should be selected who will make sure that the following items are taken care of.

Date selection: \_\_\_\_\_

Sunday afternoon ordinations are popular as they allow sister churches to participate. Churches may decide to have maximum attendance of their own congregation and hold the service at their normal worship time. Do what seems best for you and your congregation.

Church Moderator: \_\_\_\_\_

(person who guides the service, explains the process, receives the motion from the ordination council, and calls for the church vote)

Testimony of the candidate to be ordained.

Recommendation of the Council: \_\_\_\_\_

This can be done by either the Ordination Council clerk or the church clerk may read the recommendation of the ordination council.

Church vote to ordain

Laying on of hands by the ordained men of the congregation

Special Music (often a favorite of the candidate)

Ordination Sermon(s): \_\_\_\_\_

(the congregation may choose to have two sermons: one sermon, or charge to the congregation and one sermon, or charge to the candidate being ordained. If there are two messages, each should be no longer than fifteen minutes)

Selection of the person making the Presentation of certificate and/or gift. It is customary to present the new pastor with a very nice Bible or a lasting gift as a memento of this significant day. A gift for the pastor's wife would also be affirming.

Church Fellowship Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

The church should decide what kind of reception or meal they will have after the ordination service and ask for a leader to lead the preparation.

Invitation Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

This leader should send out invitations to the candidate's friends & family and to other sister churches inviting their participation in the celebration.

Favorite hymns/chorus of the candidates  
(to be used in the ordination service):

\_\_\_\_\_

Person who will say the closing Prayer: \_\_\_\_\_

## **SAMPLE ORDINATION SERVICE**

Call to Worship

Favorite Hymn or Chorus

Welcome and Explanation of the Process

Prayer

Worship Song

Favorite Hymn or Chorus

Testimony of the Candidate

Recommendation of the Ordination Council

Final Vote of the Congregation to Proceed

Prayer and the Laying on of Hands

Charge or Message to the Candidate

Charge or Message to the Congregation

Closing Hymn

Closing Prayer

Favorite Hymn or Chorus

Invitation to the Fellowship Meal or Reception

### REVOCATION OF ORDINATION

In the event that an ordained pastor falls into disqualifying sin that brings shame on the church and our Savior Jesus Christ, the ordained person shall return their ordination certificate to the ordaining church.

Charges against a pastor are very serious. 1 Timothy 5:19, *“Don't accept an accusation against an elder [pastor] unless it is supported by two or three witnesses. Publicly rebuke those who sin, so that the rest will be afraid.”*

It is the shared responsibility of the fallen pastor's church (if he was serving a church), of the ordaining church and the pastors involved in the ordination council to recommend to the ordaining church that a pastor's ordination be revoked. A full investigation of the charges should be done, and if warranted, ordination revoked. Accusations should be handled in the biblical manner Jesus gave us in Matthew 18:15-17.



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