**U.S. CONFERENCE OF MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCHES**

U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches

**ORDINATION AND LICENSING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

**MINISTRY AND CREDENTIALING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

**FOR ORDINATION AND LICENSING**

Philosophy of credentialing

We believe that God has given to certain people gifts for various ministries, and that the church should recognize and acknowledge the gifts in these people. In particular, pastors, evangelists, and missionaries should be “marked out” and affirmed by the church. We do this by the practices of ordination, licensing, and commissioning. This document describes the credentialing process for ordination and licensing. Because the government allows certain tax advantages to ministers, and because state governments allow certain legally significant duties to be performed by ministers, this credentialing process satisfies the government's requirements for identifying ministers.

Ordination is a process of recognizing, examining, and credentialing a man whose life work is to serve the church in vocational ministry. Ordination is the normal credential for a man who will serve as a senior pastor or an equivalent position. The credentialing process for ordination is under the authority of the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, in coordination with the District Conference in which the person is serving. The ordination credential remains in effect throughout a person's life.

Licensing is a process of recognizing, examining, and credentialing a man or woman who will serve in a particular ministry, in a particular location and time. USMB policy confirmed by conference delegates is that women may be licensed for any ministry role other than lead pastor. Licensing, like ordination, is appropriate for people who will be performing sacerdotal duties. The credentialing process for licensing is under the authority of the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren, but will be administered by the District Conferences. The license credential remains in effect as long as the person is serving in the ministry for which he or she was licensed.

Commissioning is a process by which a local church can recognize any in its midst who will serve in a particular ministry. While this is not a denominationally endorsed credentialing process for U.S.M.B. pastors, the local church may commission people for particular projects, such as a short term missions trip. The commissioning process is under the authority of the local church.

1. PREAMBLE:

We believe that setting people apart for ministry is a biblical practice. It's an action of the local church that recognizes and affirms ministry gifts, and communicates the blessing of God and his people upon the candidate. It's a personalized “marking out” for the blessing of God for a ministry. In the Bible it is always associated with prayer and involves the setting apart of people for specific services. We do not hold that the “laying on of hands” is a sacrament by which people are given a special gift or position, but an act by which they are authorized to serve in the church's name (Acts 6, 13; I Tim. 3; II Tim. 1). The “laying on of hands” as an affirmation for ministry, should be done by the church’s leaders in the name of the church.

We believe that pastors, Bible teachers, evangelists, missionaries, and others who are asked to serve in some specific ministry in the name of the church should be “marked out” and affirmed by the “laying on of hands.” We expect our churches to identify those whom God had given gifts for various ministries and to encourage such persons to develop these gifts and to put them into the service of God, and to affirm such persons by the “laying on of hands.” Where such persons are married, the church should make sure that both marriage partners affirm and/or share in the call to ministry and support one another.

We believe that since the New Testament Church practiced the “laying on of hands” for a variety of purposes, our practice will also reflect this diversity. For this reason we distinguish between ordination and licensing. Whereas these terms are not found in the New Testament, we have found them useful in distinguishing some of the ministries for which church members may be “marked out” by the “laying on of hands.” Therefore, we expect that our U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches affirm people for ministry in the following ways:

1. Licensing.

Licensing by the “laying on of hands” is the act of the local church and the District and National Conferences, affirming those called by God for the ministry of the gospel. Normally licensing calls for an examination of the candidate by the local church, and the District Board of Faith and Life or its designee. The person to be licensed shall subscribe to the M.B. Confession of Faith. Where a person is to be licensed to the gospel ministry, the spouse (if married) should share with him/her the commitment to that calling. Ideally, the candidate and spouse should both be present at the examination and at the service of licensing if such is held.

Those licensed will be expected to attend the National Pastor’s Orientation the first time it is offered within their tenure. In extenuating circumstances, a request for deferral to the next available National Pastor’s Orientation may be brought to the District Minister.

1. Ordination.

Ordination by the “laying on of hands” is the act of the local church and the District and National Conferences, affirming those called by God for the ministry of the gospel. Normally ordination calls for an examination of the candidate by the local church, the District Board of Faith and Life (or its equivalent) and a representative of the National Board of Faith and Life. The person to be ordained shall subscribe to the M.B. Confession of Faith. Where a brother is to be ordained to the gospel ministry, his wife (if married) should share with him his commitment to that calling. Husband and wife should both be present at the examination and at the service of ordination. We expect that all our churches will follow the procedure outlined later in this document.

Ordination should ordinarily not take place until a person has been licensed and in ministry for a minimum of two years.

Those who are ordained to the ministry of the gospel should manifest a spirit of servanthood and not be lords over the church. The church, on the other hand, should respect their leaders, encourage and support them as those who have been called of God to teach and to guide the church and to watch over the souls of its members.

Commissioning.

Commissioning by the "laying on of hands" is the act of the local church by which a person is “marked out” and affirmed by the congregation for a specific service for a shorter period of time. Those commissioned by the church should be members of that local church and subscribe to the M.B. Confession of Faith. Though we encourage local churches to commission such workers, we do not view commissioning as an acceptable alternative to licensing or ordination.

1. LICENSING PROCEDURES
2. Initiation of the Licensing Procedure:
   1. The local church may initiate the request for licensing for a ministerial candidate. The leadership board of the church guides this procedure and requests the candidate to share his calling with the local church. It is necessary that the local church affirm this calling.
   2. Missionary boards or agencies may initiate conversation with a local church to request that the church proceed with the licensure of prospective workers.
3. Evaluation and Examination of the Candidate for Licensing:
   1. When a local church has affirmed a person for licensing, the District and National Boards of Faith and Life (or equivalent) are notified. The District Board (or committee) then provides the candidate with the “Ministry Licensing Application and Covenants” to be completed and made available to its members, the National Board of Faith and Life, and to the local church pastor and/or leadership board.
   2. The District BFL and a representative from the National BFL examine the prepared questionnaire and conduct a personal interview with the candidate, and spouse (if possible). In this meeting the candidate’s views and positions regarding doctrine, the M.B. Confession of Faith and attitudes toward ministry and to conference loyalty are ascertained.
   3. When the examination committee has evaluated the candidate and recommended licensure, the local church is notified and may then proceed, if they desire, with plans for a licensing service. The local church should not proceed with licensing before the examination committee has recommended the candidate.
4. The Licensing Service (if desired)
   1. The licensing service is planned and conducted by the local church.
   2. Appropriate District and National representatives may be invited to affirm the candidate as a minister in the conference.
   3. The licensing service may include charges to the candidate and the local church, the laying on of hands, prayer of dedication to the ministry, and a response by the candidate. The spouse should always accompany the candidate (if married) for licensing in these procedures and may also respond.
   4. It is advisable to invite neighboring M.B. and/or other churches to the licensing service.
   5. The person having been duly licensed should receive from the district a certificate of license.
5. ORDINATION PROCEDURES
6. Initiation of the Ordination Procedure:
7. The local church may initiate the request for ordination for a ministerial candidate. The leadership board of the church guides this procedure and requests the candidate to share his calling with the local church. It is necessary that the local church affirm this calling.
8. A person sensing the call to the ministry may initiate the ordination procedure by sharing his calling and conviction with the leadership board and with the local church. It is necessary that the local church affirm the calling of the candidate.
9. Missionary boards or agencies may initiate conversation with a local church to request that the church proceed with the ordination of prospective workers.
10. Evaluation and Examination of the Candidate for Ordination:
11. When a local church has affirmed a person for ordination, the District and National Boards of Faith and Life (or equivalent) are notified. The District board (or committee) then provides the candidate with an “Ordination Questionnaire” to be completed and made available to its members, the National Board of Faith and Life, and to the local church pastor and/or leadership board.
12. The District BFL and a representative from the National BFL examine the prepared questionnaire and conduct a personal interview with the candidate and his spouse (if possible). In this meeting the candidate’s views and positions regarding doctrine, the M.B. Confession of Faith and attitudes toward ministry and to conference loyalty are ascertained.
13. When the examination committee has evaluated the candidate and recommended ordination, the local church is notified and may then proceed with plans for the ordination service. The local church should not proceed with ordination before the examination committee has recommended the candidate for ordination.
14. The Ordination Service
15. The ordination service is planned and conducted by the local church.
16. The appropriate District and National representatives affirm the candidate as a minister in the conference.
17. The ordination service includes charges to the candidate and the local church, the laying on of hands, prayer of dedication to the ministry, and a response by the candidate. The spouse should always accompany the candidate (if married) for ordination in these procedures and may also respond.
18. It is advisable to invite neighboring M.B. and/or other churches to the ordination service.
19. The person having been duly ordained should receive from the district a certificate of ordination.

Addendum

1. OTHER PRINCIPLES
2. Standards of ministerial credentials are to be practiced by each congregation and their respective conferences in a spirit of mutual accountability that includes:
   1. Persons who discontinue serving in a recognized position and enter another occupation should not use their ordination or affirmation for personal or financial reasons,
   2. Persons with credentials who are found guilty of sexual sin, financial fraud or other forms of the abuse of power and authority should voluntarily surrender their credentials or by appropriate action have them rescinded by conference or/and congregational leadership,
   3. Persons in retirement may retain their credentials for purposes of gaining legitimate government allowances,
   4. Persons who are involved in misuse of their credentials may be consulted with an appeal to their ethical conscience for surrender of their credentials and if necessary the rescinding of the credentials by appropriate procedures.
3. The District Board of Faith and Life with the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies arrange for a system whereby records of ordination/affirmation are compiled and updated and periodic reviews are solicited.

