

**The American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island**

**The Policies and Procedures  
of the  
Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry**

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**The Policies and Procedures  
of the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry  
for the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island**

**I. Organization**

- A.** This Committee is a standing committee of the Board of Ministries and is appointed by the President with the approval of the Board of Ministries.
- B.** Composition
1. Three lay persons and three pastors shall be appointed for a three-year term each in such a manner that the term of one layperson and one pastor will expire annually. Two (2) representatives of the Minister's Council, one (1) representative of Rhode Island Baptist Education Society (RIBES), and one (1) representative of the Pastoral Leadership Team shall also serve on the committee. The Executive Minister shall be ex officio with vote. Appointed members shall be eligible for one additional three-year term and be eligible for a new appointment after the lapse of one year.
  2. The chairperson shall be appointed annually by the ABCORI president from among the ordained members of the committee.
  3. The chairperson or a designee shall be a voting member of the Board of Ministries.
- C.** Committees of the Standing Committee on Ministry
1. The Committee may set up subcommittees, which will assist it in the carrying out of its various functions.
  2. A subcommittee may be composed of:
    - a. Members of the Committee.
    - b. Persons asked only to serve on a specific committee and who are not necessarily members of the Committee.
  3. Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry members will chair the various committees.

**II. Duties of the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry**

- A.** The Committee shall work closely with the Executive Minister and shall seek to coordinate its work with the Professional Ministries Team of the Office of the General Secretary, ABC-USA, or its equivalent.
- B.** The Committee shall have responsibility for establishing and maintaining standards. The Committee shall:
1. Recognize as regularly qualified and ordained (i.e., having standing) those ministers meeting the criteria of the ordination procedures as outlined in these standing rules.
  2. Maintain a correct listing of ministers associated with the American Baptist Churches of RI in the Yearbook of the American Baptist Churches of RI.
  3. Examine prospective candidates for ordination from a church which is affiliated with the American Baptist Churches of RI.
  4. Examine persons ordained by other denominations or independent Baptist churches who desire to have their ordination recognized by the American Baptist Churches of RI.

5. Prepare and make available the appropriate preordination license and ordination certificates.
- C.** The Committee shall have responsibility for ministerial discipline. The Committee shall:
1. Assume responsibility for ministerial discipline, seeking to be guided by the Gospel mandate of God's justice and mercy.
  2. Maintain procedures giving every minister who may be charged with professional incompetence, or moral, ethical or financial delinquency, the right to a fair, impartial and confidential process where all pertinent information shall be thoroughly and prayerfully considered.
  3. Have the right to withdraw standing temporarily or permanently from those found to be either incompetent or delinquent under the above sections. Such persons who have had their standing removed shall have the right of appeal to the Board of Ministries of the American Baptist Churches of RI.
- D.** The Committee shall have responsibility for preordination licensing. The Committee shall:
1. Maintain procedures for preordination licensing.
  2. Maintain a correct listing in the Yearbook of the American Baptist Churches of RI of persons who have received preordination licenses from their churches, but are not yet ordained.
  3. Become a resource for persons who have decided on church vocations, to guide them in their plans for preparation, in anticipation of their future preordination licensing and ordination.
  4. Assure compliance with the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island procedures for ordination.
- E.** The Committee shall encourage continuing education. The Committee shall:
1. Promote continuing education with the Minister's Council, Regional Ministries, and other appropriate organizations.
  2. Encourage ministers to take advantage of opportunities for continuing education.
- F.** The Committee shall have responsibility to provide information about counseling. The Committee shall:
1. Provide information and referral services regarding counseling.
  2. Make contact with various counseling resources for those ministers who may be in need of and receptive to such services.

## **Procedures for Preordination Licensing, Ordination, and Recognition of Standing**

### **Preamble:**

The Christian ministry is a high calling. God calls men and women as ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as instruments of God's work for the salvation of humanity. Those who respond enter a spiritual tradition that goes back to the early church and the preaching at Pentecost.

To be ordained to the Christian ministry is one of the highest privileges and greatest responsibilities that can come to an individual.

Ordination within the American Baptist Churches of RI is understood to be a threefold process. First, there is a response by an individual to the call of God to the Christian ministry. Second, there is a time of preparation in order to be properly equipped for the vocation of ministry. Third, preparation for ministry is followed by testing to ascertain that the individual has clearly understood the call of God to ministry and that the individual has been adequately prepared for the vocation of ministry.

Within the fellowship of the American Baptist Churches it is understood that the local congregation ordains individuals, since the local church is a self-sufficient gathering of the priesthood of believers. However, no individual Baptist church can claim to ordain a minister to the gospel of Jesus Christ on behalf of and for all other American Baptist churches without the consent of those congregations. Ordination to the gospel ministry on behalf and for all American Baptist congregations is a covenantal relationship. Such covenantal relationship is recognized and maintained through the American Baptist Churches of RI. The American Baptist Churches of RI is empowered, through covenant with local American Baptist churches, to ascertain on behalf of all American Baptist congregations that all individuals seeking to be ordained ministers are truly called of God to the Baptist ministry and have had the proper preparation for such a calling and ministry. The process by which the American Baptist Churches of RI grants standing, i.e., recognition, or ordination for the American Baptist Churches in RI and vicinity is set forth in the following procedures.

### **I. Procedures for the Recognition of a Preordination License by the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry**

A. Persons planning to become ordained ministers recognized by the American Baptist Churches of RI must secure a valid preordination license from the churches of which they are members. It is suggested that those seeking ordination hold a preordination license for at least one year.

1. The following is suggested as the procedures for securing a preordination license.
  - a. Candidates shall apply to the minister and diaconate of the local church with three references, two of which should be members of the church.
  - b. The minister and the diaconate shall meet with the candidate to see that the candidate has met the required standards.
  - c. The minister and the diaconate shall formally present the candidate to the church membership with an opportunity for preaching and/or conducting worship.

- d. A motion shall be made to the congregation that the candidate be granted a preordination license. A vote shall be taken
  2. When an affirmative vote is taken, the church shall formally notify the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry of the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island.
- B. Persons wishing to have preordination licenses recognized by the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island must:
1. Be persons who have accepted Christ as Lord of their lives.
  2. Be stable persons of good reputation in their community
  3. Be enrolled in a seminary or be seminary graduates or seeking equivalency for seminary education (See Section III) in actual preparation for church related vocations.
  4. Be interviewed by the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry.
    - a. Candidate shall submit a paper (minimum of two pages) expressing his/her faith journey and articulating his/her call to the ministry thus far.
    - b. Candidate shall provide documentation of B.3.
    - c. Candidate shall be accompanied by a representative of his/her church to speak to 1 and 2.
- C. When the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry is satisfied with the validity of a person's preordination licensing procedure, the Committee shall:
1. Submit the name of the candidate for inclusion in the list of Preordination Licentiates in the records and yearbook of the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island.
  2. Provide for the local church a certificate of preordination licensing which shall be presented to the candidate.
- D. If the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry is not satisfied that the requirements and/or the procedures have been met, the committee may ask the candidate to be interviewed by them again for acceptance or rejection from the list of recognized Preordination Licentiates.
- E. The Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry shall notify the churches having Preordination Licentiates each January of the need to review the preordination license of those who hold such licenses. Generally a Preordination License is granted for three years, renewable twice, and the status of the candidate is reviewed annually.

## II. Ordination Standards and Procedures

### *Requirements Common to All Tracks*

Persons wishing to be ordained and/or have their ordination recognized by the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island, must give evidence of moral integrity and a dedication to the cause of Christ. In addition, they must:

- A. Present a valid pre-ordination license
- B. Provide evidence of graduation with a Bachelor's degree or its equivalent from a regionally or nationally accredited institution of higher learning.
- C. Provide evidence of completion of a program of study that includes a course in Baptist polity, history and theology. This can normally be satisfied by a seminary-level course, the course offered by the Baptist Historical Center of Rhode Island on Baptist History and Polity, a course offered by a sister region of American Baptists that has been approved by the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministries, or in

- extraordinary circumstances, by a rigorous self-study course approved and monitored by the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministries.
- D. Provide a written response to the Identity Statement of American Baptists (1998).
  - E. Since ordained ministry involves more than academic attainment and calls for ongoing pastoral competence, emotional and spiritual maturity and consistent Christian character, candidates for ordination will complete a comprehensive career and candidacy assessment program sponsored by or in consultation with an American Baptist related Career Development Center within five years prior to examination by the regional department of ministry.
  - F. The candidate's professional ethics and intention of cooperation must be affirmed by accepting the Covenant and Code of Ethics of the Ministers Council of the American Baptist Churches. When a candidate appears before the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry for the exit interview he or she shall give evidence of a depth of understanding and acceptance of the code of ethics. The conversation with the candidate shall cover areas such as professional boundary issues, relationships, confidentiality, ethics in financial matters and other related issues which can dramatically affect the relationship between pastor and people.
  - G. Completion of an approved course in Ministerial Ethics/Healthy Boundaries Training within five years prior to the final examination by the Committee
  - H. Presentation of a written statement concerning:
    - (1) Christian experience
    - (2) Call to ministry
    - (3) Doctrinal understandings including:
      - i. The Triune God, including specific statements concerning each person of the Trinity
      - ii. The Bible
      - iii. Sin and Salvation
      - iv. The Church
      - v. The Ordinances
      - vi. Baptist Polity
  - I. The request for ordination must come from the candidate as well as a cooperating American Baptist Church of Rhode Island of which the candidate is a member.

### **Track I**

- A. Persons seeking ordination and standing as an American Baptist minister shall:
  - 1. Ask the church of which they are members to request the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry to interview the candidate in preparation for the Ordination Council. Consideration cannot be given without such a request.
  - 2. Present at the interview written certification of a valid Preordination License.
  - 3. Present written documentation of completion of a Master of Divinity degree from an accredited seminary or graduate school of theology. A theological degree which is neither a Master of Divinity or a Bachelor of Divinity degree must be certified by the granting institution as to its equivalency.
  - 4. Have a representative of the church calling the ordination council at the interview.
- B. The Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry shall form a subcommittee to counsel and assist the candidate regarding the nature and content of the ordination paper that is to be presented to an Ordination Council.

- C. When the candidate has satisfied the above requirements the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry shall recommend to the local church that an Ordination Council be convened on behalf of the candidate.
- D. The Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry may ask for supplementary materials or preparation for the Ordination Council. If such materials and/or preparation is not completed within one year, the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry's recommendation to call an Ordination Council shall be considered null and void.

## **Track II Standards and Procedures for Using Experience As an Equivalent for Seminary Education**

- A. The education requirement for recognition of ordination within the American Baptist Churches of RI is to be a Bachelor's degree or its equivalent and three years of seminary (the A.B. and M.Div. degrees or their equivalents). "College" and "seminary" or "higher education" are terms used throughout this document to mean post high school study in regionally or nationally accredited institutions of higher education program. "Their equivalent" may mean an experiential equivalent verified by the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry of ABCORI as is described below.
- B. Exceptions to the educational prerequisite are not encouraged but, in certain instances, individuals may request approval for calling of an Ordination Council or standing without having completed the above seminary education requirement.
  - 1. Experience as an equivalent to seminary preparation is granted on the basis of three years of satisfactory professional growth and full time (20 hours per week or more) ministerial performance for every one year of seminary preparation that is lacking in the candidates background.
  - 2. The maximum experiential seminary equivalency which may be granted shall be six (6) years, the equivalent to two (2) years of seminary education, plus one (1) year of satisfactory professional study.
  - 3. To merit consideration as an exception to the educational prerequisite, the candidate's professional experience must meet the following criteria:
    - a. It must have been within the broad range of professional leadership categories recognized by the registry of Professional Leaders of the ABCUSA. Any requests to consider these experiences must include substantiating evidence from third parties.
    - b. It must be verified as to length and satisfactory professional growth and ministerial performance by the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry. "Satisfactory professional growth and ministerial performance" is understood to include:
      - i. Satisfactory learning through the work experience;
      - ii. Satisfactory growth in self-understanding and in understanding the nature an work of ministry
      - iii. Satisfactory competence in leading the church community.
  - 4. Provide Evidence of Competency in academic and practical theological areas that would be covered in traditional M.Div. studies including:
    - Hebrew Scriptures,
    - New Testament,
    - Pre and Post Reformation Church History,
    - Christian Theology,
    - Worship,

- Pastoral Care,
- Evangelism,
- Community Ministry,
- Family Systems Theory and Church Dynamics,
- Transformational Leadership, and
- Spiritual Formation.

Evidence of Competency may be provided by completion of a formal course of study approved by the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry or by interviews approved by the Committee or its designees.

- C. Satisfactory evidence of professional, ethical conduct and support of ABCUSA.
- D. Evidence concerning the individual's periodic involvement in professional continuing education experiences is required. The number and extent of such experiences will be considered by the Committee and utilized as one index of the candidate's seriousness in pursuance of professional competency.
- E. All other procedures must be in accordance with Article II *Requirements Common to All Tracks*.
- F. The Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry shall form a subcommittee to counsel and assist the candidate regarding the nature and content of the ordination paper that is to be presented to an Ordination Council.
- G. When the candidate has satisfied the above requirements the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry shall recommend to the local church that an Ordination Council be convened on behalf of the candidate.
- H. The Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry may ask for supplementary materials or preparation for the Ordination Council. If such materials and/or preparation is not completed within a year, the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry's recommendation to call an Ordination Council shall be considered null and void.

### **Track III Regional Training Track**

- A. Candidates must be sponsored by an American Baptist congregation in cooperation with the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island..
- B. Candidates must qualify under one of the following requirements:
  - 1. Satisfactory completion of seminary or comparable equivalent for ordination in another country, or
  - 2. Evidence of academic competency and experience as outlined below:
    - a) Provide Evidence of Competency in academic and practical theological areas that would be covered in traditional M.Div. studies including:
      - Hebrew Scriptures,
      - New Testament,
      - Pre and Post Reformation Church History,
      - Christian Theology,
      - Worship,
      - Pastoral Care,
      - Evangelism,
      - Community Ministry,
      - Family Systems Theory and Church Dynamics,
      - Transformational Leadership, and

- Spiritual Formation.

Evidence of Competency may be provided by completion of a formal course of study approved by the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry or by interviews approved by the Committee or its designees, and

- b) Completion of at least ten years of ministry service (deemed satisfactory by the region) as a pastor/lay minister of a church with at least three of those years in the region of the ordaining church.
- C. Evidence concerning the individual's periodic involvement in professional continuing education experiences is required. The number and extent of such experiences will be considered by the Committee and utilized as one index of the candidate's seriousness in pursuance of professional competency.
- D. All other procedures must be in accordance with Article II *Requirements Common to All Tracks*.
- E. The Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry shall form a subcommittee to counsel and assist the candidate regarding the nature and content of the ordination paper that is to be presented at the ordination council.
- F. When the candidate has satisfied the above requirements SCOM shall vote to recommend to the local church that an Ordination Council be convened on behalf of the candidate.
- G. The Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry may ask for supplementary materials or preparation for the Ordination Council. If such materials and/or preparation is not completed within a year, the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry's recommendation to call an Ordination Council shall be considered null and void.

### III. DUTIES AND FUNCTIONING OF AN ORDINATION COUNCIL

- A. An Ordination Council shall be called:
  - 1. On a date established by a letter sent by the clerk of the church in which the candidate is a member
    - a. The letter shall state the place, date, time and purpose of the Ordination Council.
    - b. The letter shall include a fact sheet provided by the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry stating the duties of an Ordination Council member
    - c. The letter shall be mailed at least 30 days prior to the Ordination Council.
  - 2. When the letter of the church clerk is sent to twenty-five nearby American Baptist Churches associated with the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island, the minister(s) and two members of the laity shall serve as delegates to the Ordination Council.
  - 3. Mail at least one copy of the ordination paper to invited churches a minimum of 15 days before the Ordination Council.
- B. An Ordination Council shall be convened by the chairperson of Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry or the person designated by the chairperson
- C. The clerk of the church shall read the letter convening the Ordination Council, call the roll of churches and act as secretary of the Council.
- D. A quorum for the Ordination Council shall consist of a delegate or delegates from a minimum of twelve churches to be present and voting.
  - 1. Guests to the Ordination Council may be seated at the discretion of the Council and may be dismissed at the discretion of the Chair.

2. Guests cannot vote and may be dismissed for the discussion and vote.
- E. The business of the ordination council shall proceed as follows:
1. Introduction of the candidate who shall present a written statement concerning:
    - a. Christian experience
    - b. Call to ministry
    - c. Knowledge upon matters of doctrine and policy, including statements on:
      - i. The Triune God, including statements concerning each of the three persons of the Trinity
      - ii. The Bible
      - iii. Sin and Salvation
      - iv. The Church
      - v. The Ordinances
      - vi. Baptist Polity
  2. After the candidate's presentation of the ordination paper, the floor shall open to questions to help ascertain:
    - a. The candidate's experience
    - b. The candidate's ability
    - c. The candidate's attitudes and viewpoints
  3. After examination of the candidate, the candidate shall be dismissed from the meeting so that the Ordination Council may debate, recommend and vote that:
    - a. The church proceed to ordain the candidate, or
    - b. The church postpone action pending clarification of some stipulated contingent, or
    - c. The church should not ordain the candidate
  4. After a majority vote of the Ordination Council is taken:
    - a. The candidate shall be informed of the vote
    - b. The council shall move to dissolve itself, except in the case of 3b when it must adjourn to another date for the continuance of business under consideration.
- F. The clerk of an Ordination Council shall have the minutes of the Council in order and within 30 days shall submit copies to the candidate, the church of the candidate, and to the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry of the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island.
- G. The Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry shall record these proceedings and shall:
1. Make proper certification of them to the candidate
  2. Make proper certification of them to denominational agencies and publications of the American Baptist Churches USA as it deems advisable.
  3. Offer counsel to the local church on the proper procedures for ordaining the candidate.

#### **IV. The Recognition of Standing of Non-American Baptist Ordinations**

- A. Upon written request of a local American Baptist church, the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry shall consider recognizing the ordination of persons ordained by another denomination or independent church who desire to have standing with the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island.
- B. The request from the local American Baptist church shall be accompanied by the following written documentation from persons desiring recognition of standing:

1. Ordination and good standing in their former denomination or group with indication that the ordination was affirmed by an ordination council that was comparable by constitution and action as an Ordination Council as described by these policies and procedures.
  2. Educational background
  3. Reason(s) for wishing to be granted standing by the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island.
  4. Evidence of completion of a Ministerial Ethics/Boundaries Training course within the previous 5 years.
- C. After receiving the above request and documentation, the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry will interview persons desiring recognition of standing. The Candidates will be questioned concerning their conversion and Christian identity, their call to the ministry, biblical and theological convictions (including Baptist history, polity, structure and function) pastoral competence, character (including ministerial ethics and spiritual disciplines) and their commitment to support and cooperate with the denominational relationships and ministries of the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island and the American Baptist Churches USA.
- D. Complete of an approved course on Baptist polity. (See section II. C. of Procedures for Preordination Licensing, Ordination, and Recognition of Standing)
- E. Provide a written response to the Identity Statement of American Baptists (1998)
- F. Affirm their professional ethics and intention of cooperation by accepting the Covenant and Code of Ethics of the Ministers Council of the American Baptist Churches.
- G. Upon the completion of the above requirement, the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry shall vote whether or not to grant ministerial standing in the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island.

#### **V. The Recognition of Standing of Local Church Ordinations**

- A. Individuals who are locally ordained by a member church of the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island without the recognition of the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry and desire to have their ordination granted Regional standing shall:
1. Follow all procedures as stated in Section II of these standing rules, and
  2. Stand before a duly constituted Ordination Council called for by the Standing Committee on Ordained Ministry as set forth in Section III of these standing rules.