# GENERAL INFORMATION AND SUGGESTIONS ABOUT

# MINISTRY ORDINATION AND LICENSING

Every Southern Baptist church is autonomous and establishes its own policies in the process of ministry ordination and licensing. However, there are some traditional practices which seem to be followed by many of our churches. Each local church determines who they will ordain. Associations, state conventions, or the Southern Baptist Convention do not ordain; this is an action taken by a local church with a member who has been called to the ministry. Churches should check their church constitution and bylaws or policy manuals for possible specific instructions or guidelines the church has for ordaining or licensing someone to the ministry. In general, the license to preach is an initial action of a church to recommend that a man can be received as a preacher/minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Ordination is the official action of a church of setting apart a God-called preacher/minister for a particular ministry calling, office, or assignment.

The action of ordaining someone to God’s call upon their lives through the “laying on of hands” has an ancient and deep history. For example, in the Old Testament:

* In Genesis 48, Jacob bestowed his blessing while laying his hands on Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, shortly before his death.
* In Leviticus 1:4, worshippers were instructed to lay hands on the head of the animal sin sacrifice before being offered in worship, thus identifying with the sacrifice being offered, seeking God’s forgiveness of sin in this act of confession and repentance.
* In Deuteronomy 34:9, Moses laid hands on Joshua in an act to commission and anoint him as his God-called successor to lead the nation of Israel to enter and conquer the Promised Land.

In the New Testament, the concept of ordination through the laying on of hands is done in the sense of formally appointing someone to a particular ministry office, calling, or task. Such examples include:

* The choosing and calling of the first deacons of the church in Acts 6:1-7.
* The commissioning of Paul and Barnabus as missionaries by the church at Antioch in Acts 13:1-3.
* The setting apart of Timothy to his ministry calling as described in I Timothy 4:11-14.

Therefore, when a church ordains a man to the Gospel ministry, they are:

* Recognizing and celebrating God’s call upon his life;
* Identifying with the candidate and God’s call upon his life by placing the church’s stamp of approval and recommendation on him; and
* Prayerfully requesting God’s blessing and release of the Spirit’s power on his ministry and committing to support, encourage, and give watchcare to the candidate in their ministry.

As one can see, the action of ordaining and licensing men to the Gospel ministry carries with it a huge responsibility of doing our best to ensure the minister is truly called of God and can be entrusted to be faithful and Christ-like in fulfilling this high calling. As I Timothy 5:22 warns, *“Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.”* Once a church ordains or licenses someone to the Gospel ministry, this begins a life-long relationship of prayer, encouragement, and watchcare of ministers as they serve in churches and in God’s Kingdom. Churches should pray for and support the minister in his service and celebrate with him as God works in and through his life and ministry. Churches should also consider reaching out in love, redemption, and guidance when the minister faces struggles in ministry, or if the minister experiences a moral or theological failure in their life and ministry. If a minister is unrepentant about the moral or theological failure, the church can lead in the process of church discipline as described by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17, lovingly and prayerfully seeking to guide them to repentance and correction. If the minister remains defiant and unrepentant to the moral or theological failure, the church may consider taking the church action of rescinding their ordination or licensure of the minister.

# Licensing to the Ministry

Licensing a man to ministry is the church’s tentative approval for a man to serve until he has proved himself to be qualified for ordination. In regard to the practice of granting a license for a minister the following steps are usually taken:

1. The person to be licensed makes a public decision in the church and expresses his feeling that God is specifically calling him to ministry.

1. He requests that the church license him to the ministry.

1. The church leadership discusses and reviews this request, makes a recommendation to the church, and then the church votes on the request to license him to the ministry as an official action of the church in a called business meeting.

1. A “Certificate of License” (which can be purchased at a Christian book store or purchased/printed from online sources) is filled out and presented to the minister at a special service, or during a special moment in a service, recognizing and celebrating this important occasion.

# Ordaining to the Ministry

Ordaining to the ministry usually takes place when a minister begins serving in a ministry position in a church. In regard to ordination, many churches follow these traditional steps:

1. A church calls a minister as pastor or to a specific ministry role (e.g. education, music, youth, etc.), and the minister requests that the church take them through the process of ordination.
2. The church who calls the person may perform the ordination, request the minister’s home church perform the ordination, or conduct the ordination as a combined effort between the two churches.
3. The pastor, a minister, or the chairman of deacons of the ordaining church presents the request to the church body and asks for permission to convene an Examining Council or an Ordination Council. The church should not be hasty in ordaining an individual. It should be certain he meets the Scriptural qualifications and spiritual and ministerial readiness to serve as a minister. The candidate should prove himself in ministry for a time before being considered for ordination.
4. If the request is approved, a time and place is established for the Ordination Council, and ordained persons (ministers and deacons) in the church, community, and in the minister’s life are invited to participate. These individuals may be members of that particular church, as well as ordained persons from other churches in the surrounding community, association, and state. Either a formal invitation/announcement, a letter, or digital announcement of invitation should be sent to neighboring Baptist churches inviting all ordained persons to participate in the Ordination Council.
5. The pastor, a minister, the Associational Missions Strategist, or the chairman of deacons should preside over the Ordination Council until a chairman is elected. The chairman leads and oversees the questioning of the candidate. Usually the candidate is seated so that he is facing those who are asking questions. Any person who is present may ask questions. Usually the person being ordained is asked to briefly tell of his conversion experience and baptism, and also his call to the Gospel Ministry. Questions may include inquiries about Biblical theology and doctrinal understanding; faithfulness in church membership and service; faithfulness in stewardship of their finances, talents, and time; personal ethics and morals; sexual purity; personal beliefs; ministry philosophy and service; and seminary/college and ministry training, etc. **Many religious and denominational leaders are now suggesting that churches should conduct an official background check of the candidate to assess thoroughly the potential minister before a church ordains them, and as a protection against potential “past incidents” of which the church and the Ordination Council may be unaware.**
6. After the questioning of the candidate concludes, the Ordination Council votes on whether to recommend that the church proceed with the ordination of the candidate. The council may choose to proceed with the ordination, delay the ordination, or even reject the candidate. **Some churches combine the Ordination Council and the ordination service into one or schedule to hold on the same day. The disadvantage of this method is that there could be great embarrassment for the candidate and to the church if the Ordination Council voted not to recommend ordination.** **Instead, a church could hold the ordination council on a Saturday, and then if the council recommends that the candidate be ordained, hold the ordination service on Sunday. Another option would be to schedule the Ordination Council and the ordination service one week apart.**
7. If the Council votes to recommend ordination, the pastor or chairman of the Ordination Council presents the recommendation to the church, either at the start of the ordination service, or at a regular business meeting or a called business meeting, for church approval. **(SEE APPENDIX B FOR A SAMPLE RECOMMENDATION FOR ORDINATION)**
8. If the church approves the recommendation to ordain, the ordination service can them proceed, or a date for an ordination service can then be set. The service follows the order of a regular worship service with certain modifications. Someone (or two people) may give a “charge to the candidate” and a “charge to the church.” Appropriate music is selected. Someone may preach an ordination sermon. Someone will pray an ordination prayer and ordained persons will then “lay hands on” the candidate as they pray for them and their ministry, and offer words of support and encouragement. The person being ordained may be presented a Bible or special gift, and along with his wife and family (if applicable), receive the congratulations of the people after the benediction. The service should be about one hour in length. **(SEE APPENDIX A FOR A SAMPLE ORDER OF WORSHIP FOR AN ORDINATION SERVICE) (SEE APPENDIX C FOR AN EXAMPLE OF VOWS OR ORDINATION TO BE USED IN AN ORDINATION SERVICE)**
9. A Certificate of Ordination is presented at the end of the service in recognition and celebration of this important moment in the life and ministry of the minister (may be purchased at a Christian book store or purchased or printed from online sources).

**APPENDIX A**

**Sample Order of Worship for a Ministry Ordination Service**

**Prelude** Church Musicians

**Welcome to Church Family and Guests**  Church Pastor or Minister

**Fellowship Chorus**

**Church Called Into Conference and Vote on** (Pastor/Moderator/Ordination Clerk)

**Recommendation from the Ministry Ordination Council**

**Scriptural Celebration, Words of Encouragement, and Opening Prayer**

**Song of Praise**

**Personal Testimony of Faith and Call to Ministry** (Candidate and/or Personal Friend)

**Song of Celebration**

**Charge to the Minister** (Pastor or Special Guest Pastor or Minister)

**Charge to the Church** (Pastor or Special Guest Pastor or Minister)

**Worship in Song**

**Worship in Ordination Sermon** (Pastor or Special Guest Pastor or Minister)

**Vows of Faith and Service by the Minister** (Pastor or Church Minister or Leader)

**The Prayer of Ordination** (Pastor or Special Guest Pastor or Minister)

**The Service of the Laying On of Hands** Ordained Ministers and Deacons

(Music can be played or shared quietly during this time)

**Presentation of Ordination Certificate and Gift** (Pastor or Church Minister or Leader)

**Closing Prayer** (Pastor or Special Guest Pastor or Minister)

**Extending the Hand of Christian Support to the Minister** (People in Attendance)

**Postlude** Church Musicians

**APPENDIX B**

**Sample Ordination Recommendation to be Voted on by a Church Family**

A ministry Ordination Council of ordained men from our church, area, and other interested parties met together on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (day), \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (date), at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (time) at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (place of council) for the purpose of examining and encouraging \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (name of minister) as a candidate to be ordained to the Ministry of the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. After hearing his testimony of salvation and faith in Christ, and the testimony of his call to the ministry, we engaged in an examination and discussion with him of issues of importance in faith and ministry, and offered him words of encouragement and instruction. After this examination of his readiness and abilities to serve as a minister, we found him an excellent candidate for ministry who is ready and able to serve, and we recommend to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (church name) that we take the official action to ordain \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (name of minister) as a Minister of the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Humbly and Faithfully Submitted,

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Moderator or Clerk, Ordination Council

**APPENDIX C**

**Sample of Vows to be Used in an Ordination or Licensing Service**

(Minister being ordained answers “I do”)

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (name of minister), before God and by his grace,

* Do you covenant to keep watch over your life, seeking to live in a manner pleasing to God and worthy of his calling? ([Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts%2020.28); [Ephesians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph%204.1))
* Do you covenant to love, watch over and pray for the flock of God entrusted to your care as one who must give an account? ([Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts%2020.28); [Hebrews 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb%2013.17))
* Do you covenant to love, guide, and care for God’s people — not by constraint, but from a willing spirit; not motivated by personal gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to us, but rather being an example to the flock? ([1 Peter 5:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Pet%205.2-3))
* Do you covenant to set an example for other believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity? ([1 Timothy 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Tim%204.12))
* Do you covenant to love your family, to raise your children in the training and instruction of the Lord, to manage your own household well, and to maintain a good reputation and witness in the community? ([Ephesians 5:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph%205.25), [6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ephesians%206.2); [1 Timothy 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Tim%203.4),[7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Timothy%203.7))
* Do you covenant to study the Scriptures that you may teach what is in accord with sound doctrine and handle God’s Word correctly to the best of your ability? ([2 Timothy 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2%20Tim%202.15); [Titus 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus%202.1))
* Do you covenant in your teaching to show integrity, and seriousness and soundness of speech worthy of the Word of God? ([Titus 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus%202.7))
* Do you covenant to preach God’s Word, to be prepared in season and out of season, to correct, rebuke and encourage — with patience and careful instruction? ([2 Timothy 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2%20Tim%204.2))
* Do you covenant to proclaim the whole counsel of God from the Scriptures without fear or hesitation? ([Acts 20:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts%2020.27))
* Do you covenant to discharge faithfully all the duties of your ministry in a manner that is honorable and pleasing to both God and man? ([2 Timothy 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2%20Tim%204.5))

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (name of candidate), we praise God and thank you for promising to fulfill these calls to be a faithful minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the love and grace of God, asking for God’s grace to fulfill them and for God’s forgiveness and transformation when we fail or fall short.

Ordained ministers, deacons, and servants here today, do you accept into the fellowship of the Gospel ministry this servant of God, and promise to pray for him, support him, serve with him, and encourage him in all the pursuits and plans that God has for his ministry, life, and service?

(IF SO, SAY “WE DO”)

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (church name) family of faith, and friends and guests here tonight, do you promise to support, encourage, and stand with this minister and servant of God as he seeks to know, teach, do, and pursue the will of God in his ministry and life, by praying for him, serving with him with your time and gifts, and loving and supporting him in Christian friendship?

(IF SO, SAY “WE DO”)