



WHEN YOU CONSIDER ORDINATION

CONSERVATIVE
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CONFERENCE

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WHEN CONSIDERING ORDINATION TO CHRISTIAN MINISTRY



It is a great and awesome privilege to be ordained or to help someone prepare for ordination. This pamphlet has been designed with candidates for ordination and ordaining churches in mind to help them understand what is involved in the ordination process. To candidates, God's Word says, "If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task" (I Tim.3:1). Our prayer is that God would raise up and call many into His service who are scripturally qualified, Spirit-filled, and zealous for His name. To churches, God's Word says, "*Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way*" (I Cor. 14:40). When we follow this Biblical admonition, we are a model to the candidate, and we reflect the importance we place on ordination.

According to By-law VI, Section 2 of our Constitution and By-laws, "A candidate for Ordination to the Christian Ministry and subsequent ministerial membership in this Conference will be expected to have a life which is bearing the fruit of the Spirit, and which is marked by deep spirituality and the best of ethical practices. The candidate may be disqualified by any habits or

practices in his life which do not glorify God in his body, which belongs to God, or which might cause any brother in Christ to stumble.”

By-law IV, Section 2, states: “A ministerial standing in this Conference shall require:

- (1) A minimum academic attainment of a diploma from an accredited Bible institute or the equivalent in formal education or Christian service. However, this Conference considers a seminary training to be desirable.
- (2) A vocational call to a specific place of service that involves the ministry of the Word.
- (3) Acceptable ordination to the Christian ministry, as determined by the Credentials Committee.
- (4) Reception into membership in the Conference in the manner provided by the Constitution (Article V). Furthermore, it states that “Good and regular standing of ministers shall indicate that they do hold Conference membership and are not under disciplinary penalty as a result of charges against them.”

We openly share our Conference’s position with you because ordination to the Christian ministry is a high calling and must not be treated lightly. Our prayers go with you as you prepare for ordination, whether as the candidate or the church. If there are questions that you have or other ways in which you would like help, know that the CCCC is here to serve and assist you. Please do not hesitate to contact us.

WHAT IS A CALL TO THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY?

While all Christians are called to be servants of Christ, not all are called to the Christian Ministry. A calling to such service begins as a private matter between the individual and God. It is not merely a vocational choice that causes one to prepare and be available to be used by God as a Christian Minister, but an inner call by the Holy Spirit that is later confirmed by an outer call coming through a church or an arm of the Church. This public call comes in the context of a church assuming its responsibility to seek out those who are gifted and whose aptitude of learning, caring, and leading suggests that they might have the capacity to serve in Christian Ministry. Having given opportunity for ministry and having observed the spiritual gifts exhibited, the church's call serves as a confirmation of the individual's inner call from God.

WHO SHOULD BE ORDAINED?

Because ordination is a solemn and holy calling from God to a completely committed life, involving the whole person, this step should be taken only after prayerful consideration, humble dedication and adequate preparation. Candidates should, early in life, prepare themselves for this ministry. Their lives should bear out the validity of their profession as indicated in By-law VI, Section 2. Their dedication should enable them to give themselves unreservedly to the work of the "high calling of God in Jesus Christ."

No one should be ordained simply because they desire ministerial standing, nor because they think they would like to "try" the ministry. Individuals should be considered for ordination only after their education has been completed and they have been called to serve in the capacity of a Christian minister. The

minimal educational standard of the Conference for ordination and ministerial standing in the Conference is set forth in By-law IV, Section 2, Paragraph A.

Never should one be ordained simply as the “next step” from the status of lay preacher or even licensed minister. Let us never assume that because persons are licensed by our Conference they are automatically ready for ordination. We must keep in mind that ordination is for life and we must take every precaution to be sure we are publicly setting apart a person whom God has chosen - not just someone with a noble desire. Let us not be guilty of doing a disservice to our ministers and churches by lowering the high and noble calling of God through a service of pretense.

THE LOCAL CHURCH’S RESPONSIBILITY

Because ordination to the Gospel Ministry is the responsibility of the local church, it is up to the church to prayerfully determine when a person is ready for ordination. This process may be initiated by the church or by the candidate. At this point, it is appropriate for the church to form an ordination examination committee to evaluate the candidate’s readiness for ordination. It is recommended that the candidate be licensed prior to this, and that the church observe the candidate’s ministry for at least a year before considering ordination.

If the ordination examination committee determines that the candidate is indeed ready for ordination, it should express its approval before the congregation and ask for a confirming vote to call a Vicinage Council. If the church votes to call a Vicinage Council, it is recommended that the ordination examination

committee invite the Area Representative of the CCCC to meet with them for advice and counsel.

The purpose of the Vicinage Council is to recommend to the local church whether to proceed with a candidate's ordination. It may offer other recommendations regarding the candidate also, such as further study in specific areas. While the recommendations of the Vicinage Council are not binding on the local church, it is assumed that the church will give them serious consideration and in most instances follow them.

The local church assumes hospitality responsibility necessitated by calling and convening the Council. They establish the date and send out the call regarding the ordination examination approximately six weeks before the date the Council is asked to convene. This call should be sent to at least fifteen churches including the CCCC churches in the area. At least eight of these fifteen should respond favorably by sending their pastor and two delegates to be a part of the Vicinage Council.

The church should send copies of the candidate's paper two weeks in advance to all delegates who respond favorably to the invitation to attend the Vicinage Council.

On the day that the Council convenes and at the time set for the beginning of the meeting, the moderator of the local church calling the Council will call the meeting to order with prayer. After the prayer the moderator shall proceed to have the assembled body elect a moderator of the Council and a secretary who will keep a record of the proceedings.

After the Council has completed their examination, the church will act upon their recommendation. If the candidate is approved, the church will set the date and arrange for the participants to

be involved in the ordination service. It is strongly recommended that the ordination service not be held on the day of the examination by the Council, although a tentative date for the ordination service may be suggested in the call of the Council. If the announcement is made prior to the examination that the hour of ordination will be the same day as the Council, it may prove embarrassing if the candidate is not approved. Furthermore, such an announcement may place the Council under pressure to approve a candidate who is not fully qualified.

The church and candidate should retain copies of the proceedings and a record of the fulfilled recommendations of the Vicinage Council. The following documents should be kept by the church and the candidate and should also be sent to the CCCC and if desired to the Congregational Christian Historical Society and Library, 14 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108:

- A copy of the written call to the Vicinage Council
- A copy of the minutes of the Vicinage Council including a roster of the churches and ministers attending
- Any papers presented by the candidate at the Vicinage Council
- A bulletin copy of the service of ordination
- A copy of the ordination certificate

THE CANDIDATE FOR ORDINATION



The candidate for ordination should be a person called of God into the Ministry of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Adequate preparation and training should be completed. This should normally include at least a year's experience as a Licensed Minister. The candidate should be a Pastor of a local church or member of the home church or supporting church which calls the Vicinage Council.

The candidate should be ready for the examination by having written beforehand a statement of their conversion experience, call to the ministry, educational preparedness, and doctrinal beliefs. The doctrinal statement written by the candidate should be clear and in reasonable detail. The candidate's personal convictions should be supported through Scriptural authority. Even in areas where differences of opinion are accepted, some definite statement should be made.

PREPARATION OF ORDINATION PAPER

The following guidelines are designed to standardize the format of doctrinal papers presented to the Vicinage Council by the candidate for ordination.

- All papers must be typed, on one side of the sheet only, on white paper of good quality, and on standard size (8.5 x 11). Legal size paper should not be used.
- All lines should be double-spaced, even in direct quotations.
- Ample margins of at least 1.25 inches are to be used on all edges of the paper. This will make the readability and work of the examiners easier.

Guidelines for Conversion Section

The conversion section should include the circumstances of your conversion, the realization of your sinfulness and insufficiency to redeem yourself, and your gospel solution to your sinfulness. Include how the gospel came to you, what the message was and how you responded.

The candidate's conversion statement should also include the evidences of conversion that are present in your life at this point, the things that are changed in your life since coming to Christ and how you presently deal with ongoing sin in your life.

Guidelines for Call Section

The call section should present a clear testimony of your call from God to the Christian Ministry, and an account of your call to your present place of service. You should also relate how the

Word of God has worked in your life since the time of your conversion, your personal evaluation of your gifts for ministry, examples of individuals who have grown under your ministry, and why you have chosen to serve the Lord in “the Congregational Way”.

Guidelines for Educational Preparedness Section

The educational preparedness section should list the schools you have attended and the degrees you have earned. A transcript of your studies could be included. You should also outline your plan for continuing education, list the books and Christian periodicals you are currently reading, and present your plan for ongoing Bible Study.

Guidelines for Doctrinal Section

The doctrinal section should give a clear presentation of your theological beliefs.

Biblical references should be used to verify points of doctrine throughout the paper. The candidate should not assume the readers know where something is to be found. Scripture references should ordinarily be included in the text itself, enclosed in parentheses. Care is to be taken to cover each topic adequately, but not exhaustively. State your position clearly, defending it from Scripture.

- The paper should normally be from ten to twenty-five pages long.
- The paper should cover the heads of doctrine found in the table of contents of a standard systematic theology book, to include the following:

- (1) REVELATION
 - a. Universal and Special
 - b. Scripture: Nature, Authority and Usage

- (2) GOD
 - a. -Nature and Attributes
 - b. -Creation and Providence
 - c. -The Trinity

- (3) HUMANITY AND SIN
 - a. Image of God and Freedom
 - b. The Fall and Consequences

- (4) PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS CHRIST
 - a. Incarnation
 - b. Life, Death and Resurrection
 - c. Atonement

- (5) PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
 - a. Regeneration
 - b. Fruit and Gifts (including “Sign” Gifts)

- (6) SALVATION
 - a. Predestination and Adoption
 - b. Repentance and Saving Faith
 - c. Justification and Sanctification
 - d. Perseverance and Glorification

- (7) THE CHURCH
 - a. Nature and Mission

- b. Relationship to Kingdom of God and World Religions
- c. Governmental Order: Local and Denominational
- d. Sacraments / Ordinances: Baptism: Mode and Subjects, The Lord's Supper

(8) SUPERNATURAL BEINGS

- a. Angels and Demons
- b. Satan: Nature and Destiny

(9) LAST THINGS

- a. The Return of Christ
- b. Millennial and Tribulational Views
- c. Personal Eschatology:
Death and Intermediate State, Resurrection Day,
Final Judgment
- d. Eternal State: Heaven and Hell

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

In preparation for ordination, the CCCC Credentials Committee recommends the following books on Systematic Theology as resources for a theological overview and development of a theological framework for the ordination candidate. The Committee recommends that the candidate has at least one of these volumes in his/her possession for future study and theological reflection.

Erickson, M. J., *Christian Theology. 3rd Edition.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013.

Frame, J., *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief.* Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2013.

Grudem, W., *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

Horton, M.J., *A Systematic Theology for Pilgrim's on the Way.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.

Ryrie, C. C. *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth.* Colorado Springs: Victor, 1986.

THE EXAMINATION BY THE VICINAGE COUNCIL



The moderator of the local church calls the Council meeting to order with prayer. After prayer the moderator should proceed to have the assembled council elect a moderator of the Council and a secretary. The Council moderator should preferably be a mature minister who is able to grasp the significance of such a meeting and who can keep the meeting in order. The newly elected moderator then calls the Vicinage Council to order and states the purpose of the meeting.

The first order or business is to establish a roll call of churches and a listing of all churches and delegates who are present. Next the candidate is presented and introduced. The process leading to this point, including coming under Conference Care, Licensure, etc., should be explained.

The candidate is then called upon to read the first three parts of his paper – Conversion, Call to the Ministry, and Educational Preparedness – and to relate the steps that were taken to facilitate this call.

The council then proceeds to examine the candidate and to determine whether qualifications have been met in these areas. In the event that the candidate's qualifications are lacking in these initial areas, it is the responsibility of the Council to terminate the proceedings and to instruct the candidate to complete these requirements before any further action will be taken.

If this part of the examination is successfully completed, the candidate is then requested to read the doctrinal sections of the paper, and if questioned by any member of the Council to defend the positions stated. The Council, by examination, seeks to learn of the candidate's ability to understand the Scriptures and to defend them. By means of questions and answers the candidate's understanding of the Word of God is discerned. Upon satisfactory completion of this part of the examination the candidate for ordination is dismissed temporarily while the delegates to the Vicinage Council consider whether to approve or disapprove the candidate's ordination.

Visitors to the Council may be excused at this time. The Vicinage Council may vote to terminate the proceedings because of the candidate's lack of qualifications and to recommend to the candidate specific steps to be taken before qualifying for ordination at a later date, or it may vote to recommend to the local church which called the Council to proceed with the candidate's ordination and determine time, place, and arrangements for the Ordination Service. The candidate is then brought back and notified of the decision of the Vicinage Council. If a decision is made to proceed with the ordination service, the Vicinage Council meeting is adjourned to reconvene for the public service of ordination of the candidate at a subsequent time. The council meeting will then close with prayer.

All pastors, churches and delegates present at the examination should be present for the public service of ordination if possible, with as many pastors as possible participating in the service. After this public service an Ordination Certificate should be presented to the newly ordained minister signed by all of the delegates present. A duplicate copy of this information should be sent to the CCCC office. It is proper at this time for the newly ordained minister to request the Conference through the Credentials Committee, to recognize the ordination and to ask for full Ministerial Standing.

Individuals and churches considering ordinations are urged to take care that the utmost diligence are exercised in fulfilling the requirements of an acceptable ordination. Furthermore, churches are urged to be in consultation with the proper Conference officials when anticipating the ordination of one of their members, and whenever possible it is recommended that an official CCCC representative share in the Vicinage Council.

SOME SUGGESTED FORMS

To Call a Vicinage Council

Date: _____ .

The _____ Church of _____ .

To the _____ Church of _____ .

Dear Friends,

You are requested to send your pastor and two lay delegates to sit with us in Council (date) at (time) to consider and advise as to the expediency of publicly setting apart to the work of the Gospel Ministry (Name) . The Council will meet in (Place) .

The following Churches are invited:

- 1.
2. *etc.*

Please reply by no later than (date) with names and mailing addresses of those who will attend so we may send in advance copies of the ordination paper that will be reviewed by the members of the council.

By order of the Church

_____, Church Clerk

Minutes of a Vicinage Council

Date: _____ .

An Ecclesiastical Council, called by the _____
Church, convened at _____ this day,
at _____ o'clock. The council organized by selecting
_____ Moderator, and _____ Clerk.
Prayer was offered by _____.

The credentials of pastors and delegates were presented.
The following churches were represented by the following
delegates:

Church/Delegates

- 1.
2. *etc.*

The records of the Church relating to the call of the Council
were read; also the letter sent showing the object of the
Council. (*Then follows a faithful record of the proceedings as
they transpired*).

The Council was dissolved (or adjourned).

_____ Moderator

_____ Secretary

Some Suggested Orders for the Vicinage Service

1. Ordination Service of:

Prelude

Invocation

Hymn/Song of Worship

Statement of the Moderator

Scripture Reading

Ordination Sermon

Hymn/Song of Worship

Vows of Ordination

Special Music?

Right Hand of Fellowship

Charge to the Candidate

Charge to the Congregation

Closing Song

Benediction

2. Ordination Service of

Prelude

Processional Hymn

Invocation and the Lord's Prayer

Report of the Ecclesiastical Council

Scripture Reading

Choral Number

Ordination Sermon

Hymn

Charge to the Candidate

Vows of Ordination

Prayer of Ordination and Laying on of Hands

Welcome to the Ministry

Hymn

Benediction

Postlude

- It is customary to use as many ministers as is possible during the service and to invite all of the ministers present for the “laying on of hands.”
- The desires of the candidate are followed as closely as possible regarding the participation of ministers in the Ordination Service.
- The newly ordained minister will always pronounce the benediction.

Some Suggested Vows of Ordination

Minister: name, do you believe in your heart that you are truly called, according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the Christian Ministry?

Response: I do

Minister: All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete and equipped for every good work. Will you diligently give yourself to the study of the message of the Holy Scriptures, that all who hear may be instructed unto abundant and eternal life?

Response: I will

Minister: Do you promise to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of your personal devotional life with our Lord, to keep yourself unspotted from the world, to live a life of purity of heart, and of daily prayers so that you may minister to others of that which first of all you yourself shall have received through fellowship with God?

Response: I do

Minister: Do you accept the faith, fellowship and order of evangelical congregational churches, and do you promise to be a faithful minister in the work of this fellowship in Christ?

Response: I do

Minister: I charge you in the presence of God, to preach the Word. Never lose your sense of urgency, in season or out of season. Convince, rebuke, and exhort with all the patience that the work of the ministry requires. Will you thus do the work of a Christian Minister?

Response: I will

Minister: Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant, even as the son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many. Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life, where unto you are also called. Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. If you remind the church of these things you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ.

CONGREGATION: We then, representing the fellowship of this church in testimony of this high purpose, do now solemnly ordain you and set you apart for the work of the Christian Ministry, pledging you our love, our prayers and our steadfast support, that whether together or apart we will mutually labor in the Kingdom of God. Amen.

For more information:

Contact:

The CONSERVATIVE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN
CONFERENCE

8941 33rd St North
Lake Elmo, MN 55042
651-739-1474

homeoffice@cccusa.com

www.cccusa.com