



The procedure for licensing is as follows:

1. The church board must take action in one of their official meetings to approve having the candidate licensed. The Church Clerk or other church official writes a letter on church stationery stating you have been **stating that the church has taken action to license the candidate to Gospel Ministry**
2. The pastor then takes the letter to the local county courthouse and files for a *Certificate Of Filing*.
3. There is a small fee for this service payable to the county.

To follow is an essay that may be helpful to you in the process.  
Give us a call if you have any further questions.

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"License to Preach" (revised March 2006) is a part of a 1976 Ordination publication of the Minnesota Baptist Conference. It contains suggestions for consideration.

## License to Preach

The "license to preach" is not unique to Baptists. It was begun in early America as a form of probation for a man who felt worthy of the call, was deemed worthy, and served a time of trial and improvement of his gifts. "This means," wrote Sidney Mead:

that he would be 'received by the churches as an accredited and regular preacher' although he could not 'administer sacraments.' Among Congregationalists and Presbyterians licensure was the prerogative of Associations and Presbyteries, among Methodists of the Quarterly Conference, and among Baptists of the local church – which might as in the case of William Miller of Adventist fame most eloquently state that

We are satisfied Brother Miller has a gift to improve in Public and are willing he should improve the same wherever his lots may be cast in the Zion of God.

The licentiate was under the scrutiny both of lay people in local congregations and the ordained men whose fraternity he aspired to enter – and subject to the approbation or censure of either or both. Hence in effect during the period of probation, the candidate was under constant examination by the church regarding the genuineness of his 'call.'"<sup>72</sup>

The practice of licensure expanded with the westward movement when churches were strung across the frontier, established by Methodist and Baptist circuit riders. Trained and ordained clergy were few. The Methodist practice was to use "local" or "lay" preachers. They were given licenses which only gave the man the privilege of preaching. Ordination, on the other hand, extended the right to administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper and to perform weddings.

There was a time in our history when men were ordained by the local church and for that church alone. When he moved to another church, his ordination was no longer valid and he was re-ordained by the calling church. Finally the practice fell into disuse and the serve of installation took its place. The installation of a new pastor today ought to be recognized as fulfilling this function.

Today there are places where a person's service will and should be limited to one particular church. Maring and Hudson suggest that in such special situations, where churches have been unable to secure pastors with even minimum educational requirements, they have proceeded to ordain in spite of denominational usage. "To

regularize this situation, it is proposed that these (people) be ordained as **local ministers** who, outside the context of the particular congregation by whom they were ordained, would resume their lay status. All the privileges of the regularly ordained pastor would be accorded such a person during the tenure of (his or her) relationship to the particular congregation."<sup>73</sup>

Through Baptist history, while the ordained clergy have not been seen as the constitutive element of the church (as in the Anglican and Roman Catholic tradition), they have been regarded as very important – almost necessary. In times of need, however, Baptists, being practical people, said that the church could use lay persons to perform the work of ministry. They were not ordained but were given the authority to do so. Baptists were concerned about regular church order. Maring and Hudson speak of the value of restoring the category of **lay preacher**, basically for pulpit supply. As a representative of the church, he or she should not, however, exercise his or her gifts publicly without the approval of the church. "Occasionally, the license to preach, which represents a step toward ordination, has been misused for the purpose of giving some type of certificate to the lay preacher. Instead of misusing the license to preach...they could be commissioned as lay preachers and would be available to fill the pulpits of neighboring churches as occasion demands."<sup>74</sup>

Lay licensure is part of the past. It really should not be used today. If, in some remote area, it is impossible to get a regularly trained (person), "local ordination" as already pointed out is a wiser step.

Today, licensure to preach is generally a step toward ordination and should be given to those planning on ordination, generally a student in training.

The usual procedure which leads to ordination begins with licensing a (person) to preach. This act of the local church in effect represents a notification to other churches that it would like to have them give (him or her) an opportunity to preach as occasion permits, so that (his or her) gifts can be tested. During this period (he or she) is also expected to pursue a program of study in preparation for the pastoral ministry. When (his or her) education is completed, (he or she) applies to the local church for ordination. <sup>75</sup>

John M. Harris perceives four stages of the pastor's pilgrimage. (1) **church membership** – the ceremony is baptism and the title is "lay Christian"; (2) **licensure** – the ceremony is licensing and the title is "lay preacher"; (3) **ordination** – the ceremony is ordination and the title is "clergy"; (4) **beginning the church-minister relationship** – the ceremony is installation and the title is "pastor." He sets forth six specific points regarding licensure, out of a Southern Baptist context:

1. The purpose of the ministerial license is to provide a time of testing, trial, and development in the ability to **function** as a minister. This time of preparation is similar to the engagement period of marriage and is a time of actual training in the working roles of the minister.
2. Considerable vocational and developmental clarification should take place during this time before major commitments are made and vows spoken.
3. Licensure should be a time for specific, supervised experience and training under the direction of the pastor and an appropriate committee of the church. (The deacons, church council, or a special committee appointed for this purpose could assist the pastor in this supervision and periodic evaluation.)
4. This should be a period of extensive and intensive study of the biblical and historical perspectives of the ministry as a whole as well as an exploration of personal motives and general fitness of the (person) for the ministry.
5. If proper progress is not made in the ability to function as a minister, or if the licentiate wishes to discontinue the process toward ordination, the license should be allowed to expire or be revoked.
6. The ministerial license should expire after a period of four years. If licentiate and church are both in agreement the license could be renewed every four years. <sup>76</sup>

Harris, in writing licensing standards for the American Baptists, makes the following summary:

The candidate for ordination should be licensed by the church in which he (or she) holds his (or her) membership, in cooperation with the proper association or state convention body, at least six months prior to his (or her) ordination. This provides the opportunity and the impetus for the Church, both on the local and the wider level, to be involved not only in the final "setting apart" of a candidate for ordination but also in his (or her) preparation for that ordination.

i) Significance

- (a) A local church, well acquainted with the candidate, is making public the fact that he (or she) apparently possesses the ability and the spiritual and emotional qualities necessary to fit him (or her) for the ministry, and that he (or she) is presently receiving the academic training required for ordination.

ii) Duration

- (a) It shall be made clear to the candidate that the license is granted in anticipation of ordination. The license shall be valid for a maximum of three years, unless the local congregation revokes it.

The following procedure has been adopted by the Minnesota Iowa Baptist Conference:

1. The candidate makes his or her desire to be licensed known to his or her pastor and his or her local Board of Deacons, which interviews him or her to determine his or her eligibility for licensing.
2. In most churches it is the vote of the church that grants to the candidate the "license to preach."
3. The local church shall present to the candidate a letter or certificate stating the church has taken action to license the candidate to Gospel Ministry.
4. The candidate is then authorized to record the church's action by recording the letter or certificate with the Clerk of the District Court in the county in which the church is located, thus allowing the candidate to be recognized for official functions such as weddings.

The Baptist General Conference suggests that prior to ordination, the candidate spend one year in full-time pastoral work. During that time he or she is licensed. Of course, if he or she has a student pastorate, at whatever time he or she assumes it, he or she should be licensed. The general procedure for licensing in the Conference is to have the candidate ask the local church (his or her home church or the student pastorate he or she has assumed) for the privilege of licensure. This is followed by a questioning period by the board of deacons as to his or her sense of call, his or her plans for future ministry, and general statement of Christian doctrine. Upon their satisfaction, a recommendation is made to the church, and upon favorable vote, a brief recognition service and prayer of blessing by the church chairman is held at a worship service. The candidate is presented with a certificate of license, which should be in force for four years (see Appendix 5). The aspect of counsel and watchcare during the period of licensure needs to be strengthened.

## Certificate of License

This is to certify that \_\_\_\_\_  
Name

is the \_\_\_\_\_  
of \_\_\_\_\_  
Position

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Church

located in \_\_\_\_\_  
City, County, State

At a meeting of the church on \_\_\_\_\_, the  
church \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

voted to license him/her to perform ministerial duties in the church and to  
register these credentials with the local government officials.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Church Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Church Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title