

**Congregational Discernment for Ordination**

**Suggestions for the Congregation**

Ordination is a long-term ministry credential that is granted by an area church of the Mennonite Church. It grants a minister the privileges and responsibilities of the office of ministry. Ordination usually follows the period of time known as licensing. Licensing is a two- to four-year period of time in which the candidate's call and readiness for ministry is tested within a ministry role. An affirmation of that call and readiness for ministry by the minister, the congregation, and the area church initiates the ordination process.

While the area church is responsible for the ordination credentialing decision, the leadership council of the area church needs and values counsel from others who have experienced the ministry of the candidate in order to make a good decision about whether to ordain. The congregation is one of several groups or individuals from which the leadership council receives counsel regarding the confirmation of a call and readiness for ministry on the part of the ordination candidate. During its discernment process, the area church leadership council will give consideration to a candidate's personal faith and theology, character, relational skills, ministerial functioning, commitment to the Mennonite Church, and understandings of the office of ministry and of ordination.

Congregations with a pastor or member being considered for ordination will need to engage in a congregational discernment process which enables the leadership of the congregation to determine whether or not to affirm the candidate's call and readiness for ministry. With a decision to affirm that call and readiness for ministry, the congregation will then make their recommendation to ordain to the area church minister.

**Congregational Discernment**. With guidance from the area church minister or regional minister, the congregational chair will guide the ordination discernment process in the congregation. It is important to keep the ordination candidate fully informed of the actions and steps that are planned. This congregational discernment process may occur in any of a variety of ways:

1. The deacon/elder board might process it and act on behalf of the congregation in making a recommendation for ordination (a) through personal reflection within the elder/deacon group; (b) by making selective inquiries of members; and (c) by writing a recommendation for ordination of the candidate and then asking for affirmation or feedback from the congregation.
2. With guidance from the deacon/elder board, small groups within the congregation might process the ministry call and readiness of the ordination ministerial candidate in order to seek a congregational consensus to recommend this ordination.
3. With the area church minister or regional minister present, the entire membership of the congregation might process the call and readiness for ministry of this pastor (or member) in order to seek a congregational consensus to recommend this ordination.
4. Other ways determined by the local deacon/elder board and the minister.

**Key Questions the Congregation Asks in this Discernment Process.** Keeping in mind the differing roles and responsibilities of the congregation and the area church in the discernment process, the congregation will focus on the following questions.

1. Is there an acceptable level of competence to carry out the essential tasks of ministerial leadership, not only in this congregation but throughout a lifetime of ministry?

2. What qualities of character (listening to others, teachability, mutuality, integrity, authenticity, love, etc.) does this person demonstrate in order to provide effective leadership and to maintain meaningful relationships?

3. Does the church recognize in this person one who leads the church and one who represents the church in the community and the world?

4. How has the church experienced the grace and love of God in Jesus Christ through the ministry of this person?

More information about what ordination means and the ordaining process can be found in *A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership: Polity Manual for Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA.*