

**Growth and Orientation of Licensed Pastors**

Credentialing Packet

**Introduction**

Being licensed for ministry is the entry point into what is normally a life calling for pastors. It is a sacred step in the experience of the minister and his/her family, as well as the congregation to which one has been called. Generally, the period of licensing extends for two years, although this may be longer if either the candidate or area church deems it wise. This two-year period in ministry provides an important opportunity for intentional reflection on one’s self as a ministering person and the style of one’s ministry. It also allows special attention for personal growth and the formation of good practices for effective ministry throughout a lifetime of service.

The area church is very interested in the well-being of new pastors and doing everything possible to see them succeed in their assignments. The goal is that new pastors will experience a deep confirmation of God’s call in their lives, and receive the support they need to make ministry a joyful and fulfilling way of life. These pages describe the various activities, expectations, and opportunities being offered to licensed pastors.

**General Expectations**

During the period of a ministerial license the area church should consider the following expectations for licensed pastors:

1. To participate in the regular activities of the area church, such as meetings with pastoral peers, area church sessions, and pastor/spouse retreats.

2. To fulfill the continuing education expectations for new pastors (defined below).

3. To participate in the Transitioning into Ministry (TiM) program which includes meeting regularly with a mentor.

4. To prayerfully consider the possibility of ordination to long-term ministry, and if there is both inner and outer confirmation, to prepare for this new commitment to Christ and the church.

**Transitioning into Ministry (TiM)**

TiM provides a three-year formational experience for beginning pastors or pastors new to MCEC to assist them in integrating their seminary training into the life and ministry of a congregation and to develop faithful habits and practices. It also draws on the wisdom of experienced pastors and provides them with the opportunity to help equip and support the next generation of leaders.

* **Beginning and new to MCEC pastors** receive enriched mentoring, spiritual formation, teaching sessions, group coaching, and group retreats. They will experience a safe, collegial environment where they can develop networks of peer support as they explore concerns and questions, and grow in ministry.
* **MCEC congregations** of beginning pastors will have a congregational resource person to assist them to develop a hospitable environment, and faithful practices that support growth in ministry.

**Education and Experience Expectations**

New pastors may bring a variety of backgrounds regarding education and preparation for ministry. While Mennonite Church polity suggests the Master of Divinity is the “standard” of training for pastors, this level of training is not possible for all those called to ministry. Area churches do well to be clear regarding educational expectations for pastors who serve in their context. Minimally these expectations should include a college or seminary level course in:

* Anabaptist/Mennonite history and theology,
* Anabaptist/Mennonite hermeneutics, and
* Mennonite understandings of leadership, authority, and polity.

In addition, a given pastor may need training in particular areas of ministry (such as preaching, administration, pastoral care, vision casting, etc.) which he/she will be expected to carry out.

A variety of programs are available for pastors with limited training. These include Pastoral studies through distance education offered through seminaries or church-based institutions, any of the [Anabaptist Learning Workshop](https://uwaterloo.ca/anabaptist-learning-workshop/) courses, or full/part-time studies in an MTS program.

In connection with granting a ministerial license, the area church needs to develop an understanding with the pastor regarding its educational expectations and a schedule for completing this work. Some of the courses may require more time than the licensing period allows for the study expected. A long-term plan for continuing education for the pastor will be helpful both during the licensing period and in his/her continuing ministry.

In some cases, the area church may wish for a potential pastoral candidate with little prior exposure to the Mennonite Church to actively participate in a Mennonite congregation for a determined period of time before being granted a ministerial credential.

**Preparation for Ordination**

At least six months before the end of the period of licensure, the area church minister should be in touch with the new pastor and congregation where he/she serves to begin the process of discernment and review in preparation for the possibility of the pastor’s ordination. Details of this preparation are spelled out elsewhere in this packet. (See “Congregational Discernment for Ordination.”)