

## *Ordination Handbook*

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In years of ministry experience we have known a number of good men who were fruitful missionaries, pastors and evangelists, having never undergone the process of ordination to the Gospel ministry. But we have also met men who went through the process merely to gain the marginal benefits allowed by the government in the form of housing allowance and Social Security exemption.

Then there is the obvious question: “Do Ordination Councils and churches make a man a Gospel Minister, or does he receive his calling from God alone?” It is a fact that good men have been rejected by Ordination Councils, and in spite of this and have gone on to effective ministries.

A man can be approved by God without being ordained by men. There are some men who have passed ordination who later bring disrepute on the Gospel of Christ, disgracing their church and family with their flagrant sin. But there are also Godly men serving the Lord faithfully for many years, intimidated beyond measure at the thought of facing an Ordination Council of their peers, and perhaps even frightened by the possibility of failure.

Let’s think about some of the benefits of submitting to an ordination exam and being publicly affirmed for the Gospel Ministry:

- An ordination exam as well as the ceremony itself affords a candidate a great opportunity to give good testimony to his Divine calling to the Gospel Ministry.
- An ordination exam demonstrates a man’s qualifications for the Gospel Ministry to his peers. A Council of seasoned ministers should have the authority to affirm his preparedness for ministry.
- An ordination exam will also demonstrate a man’s weaknesses in doctrine or practice, allowing the Committee Council to make kind recommendations to the candidate toward further study.
- The ordination process demonstrates to the (home) church the fitness of the candidate for ministry. (We require a recognized testing for doctors, nurses, lawyers, school teachers, real estate agents, etc. Most professions require some form of over-all testing process as a prerequisite to allowing a practice of that profession. Why should a Gospel Minister not undergo a commonly recognized exam process?)
- Preparing for an Ordination Council and their questions helps a candidate solidify his doctrinal statement as well as his positions on practical matters.
- Ordination is recognized by those outside the church as a process that sets a man apart for a holy life of study and helping others.
- Ordination is recognized by our State and Federal government, giving the minister certain tax breaks on housing allowance and Social Security exemption (the latter if he should apply as a conscientious objector to the government’s SS system).
- Certain mission organizations, denominations and even local churches may require ordination of their ministers as a prerequisite to ministry.

## **The Process of Ordination**

It is not our intention at BRM for a candidate to approach the exam in fear and trembling, but face it with confidence in a Christ-honoring way. Neither do we recommend the oversimplification of the oral exam. An examining Council and a local church should be able to ascertain the candidate's preparation, call to ministry and recommendations for further study, without placing him under needless stress and anxiety. But a candidate should certainly prepare in such a way as to make the task of the Examining Council enjoyable and encouraging to all involved. Such men serve as volunteers to sit on this type of Council, and the time and effort they take to affirm the candidate should not be taken lightly.

With consideration for the Examining Council and the candidate as well as the local church, we thought it best to walk through the process step by step to promote the most efficient (and effective) means of properly examining a candidate and getting him through the ordination process.

## **The Local Church**

Men are not ordained by Bible colleges, seminaries, or denominations. Ordination and the call to the Gospel ministry should be (biblically) affirmed by the local church (Acts 13:1-3; 14:23). This affirmation must begin at the leadership level.

- 1) A candidate seeking ordination should file a written request with the Board of Elders or Deacons of the church where he is an active member. Though this step may be waived if the candidate is the pastor of the church, a local church should also have such a directive written within its Constitution and/or By-Laws.
- 2) The Official Board of the church should then seek to determine the fitness of the candidate for the office he may one day assume. The Board can determine his call to the ministry, his gifts and educational qualifications, his demeanor amongst his peers, and his testimony within and without the church. In questioning the candidate, it may be advisable that the Board enlist help from a seasoned pastor or two within the community. Outside counsel can prove to be invaluable. The church board should write down a brief statement of their findings along with their recommendation to the church membership as well as the Ordination Council.
- 3) A meeting of the congregation should be called for the specific purpose of entertaining a motion and vote of consent to call an Ordination Council to examine the candidate.
- 4) The candidate should begin working on a short paper containing his personal Testimony and call to the ministry, along with a Doctrinal Statement. If possible the paper should be condensed down to four to six pages. This statement should be reviewed and edited one heading at a time in the presence of at least one seasoned pastor over the course of the weeks preceding the Ordination Exam. All statements made on this paper should be as concise and clear as possible, as the Testimony and Doctrinal Statement will be used by the Council as an outline for the proceedings during the Ordination Exam.
- 5) The above mentioned paper should contain at least the following main headings:

**Personal Testimony**  
**Call to Christian Ministry**  
**Doctrinal Statement**

The Bible  
 The Godhead  
 The Person and Work of Jesus Christ  
 The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit  
 The Nature of Man  
 Angelology  
 Salvation  
 Eternal Security  
 The Christian Life  
 The Church (Universal and Local)  
 The Gifts of the Holy Spirit  
 The Second Coming of our Lord  
 Eternal Human Destiny  
 Evangelism and Missions  
 Baptism, the Lord's Supper & Marriage

- 6) The church Board (and staff if there is one) along with the candidate will together determine who will sit on the Council. Elders and leaders of the church should be a part of the Council. A candidate may request a certain professor from a school where he attended. A pastor of a home church may also be invited by the candidate. Be sure to invite the President of the Region or Denominational Regional Representative. Neighboring pastors from like-minded churches would also make good Council members. Do keep in mind that the invite list of those outside the church should perhaps be twice as many as the number you wish to have in attendance. Not all neighboring pastors can make themselves available in the time slot necessary for the exam. However, smaller Councils operate more efficiently and are easier for the Moderator to manage.
- 7) When the list of potential Council members is complete, enlist the help of the church secretary or a volunteer to mail out invitations to each invitee. The invitation should be in a letter form on church letterhead stating the name of the candidate, intent of the church regarding the oral exam, and the request for the addressee to be a part of the Council. Be sure to state how long the exam will take, and that the Council is invited for lunch at the conclusion. A medium sized self-addressed stamped postcard should also be included with the following on the reverse side:

I Plan to attend and participate in the Ordination Exam [ ]

I am sorry but cannot attend the Ordination Exam [ ]

I plan on staying for lunch directly after the Exam [ ]

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

- 8) The candidate and the church Board should determine ahead of time who might best serve as a Moderator of the exam proceedings. Likewise a Clerk may be selected for the purpose of taking notes during the exam. Someone proficient with a lap-top computer might be preferred, and perhaps even the church Secretary or official church Clerk. This saves valuable time during the oral exam and allows the Moderator and Clerk to prepare ahead of time for the task they have agreed upon. After the exam the designated Clerk will present the candidate and church with a record copy of the exam proceedings.
- 9) If possible a copy of the candidate's Testimony and Doctrinal Statement may be sent to each man who has responded to the invitation to serve on the Ordination Council. This allows Council members to familiarize themselves with the material which will be the basis of their questioning during the exam.
- 10) The candidate likewise should be most familiar with the positions and subject matter of his statement of faith. He must study each sentence he has constructed and be prepared to prove such by use of Scriptural reference. It may be well for the candidate to meet with an experienced pastor or two and allow them to ask *sample questions* based on his Doctrinal Statement, with the objective of getting him ready for the oral exam. Such an exercise is profitable for the candidate's preparation for questioning by the Ordination Council.

## **The Ordination Exam**

The day chosen for the exam should be around the middle of the week to insure the best attendance by ministry people. The church Board and Staff should be present and prepared to participate. An open invitation may be extended to the general congregation. Though the congregation will not be able to engage in the questioning, it is profitable for them to be present and witness the proceedings. The Moderator and Clerk should arrive early, and help set up the room as it would be best suited for the exam.

The time of the exam will work most efficiently if it is set between the hours of 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM. The Council will deliberate after 12:00 Noon at the conclusion of the questioning. Their conclusion and recommendations may be declared directly after brief deliberation, and the church hopefully will be serving lunch at about 12:30 PM. An Ordination Certificate should be obtained and brought to the premises, so signatures of the Council members can be obtained in medium black ink (preferably with the same pen) after the candidate is affirmed. Our BRM website has a sample Ordination Certificate that can be downloaded and printed out on parchment paper for the occasion at [www.biblerelatedministries.org](http://www.biblerelatedministries.org).

The day's preplanned Agenda should look somewhat like this:

### **Agenda**

9:00 – 9:08	Introduction Prayer and Hymn
9:08 – 9:30	Candidate's Testimony and Call to Ministry (Doctrinal and Practical Questions)
9:30 – 9:40	The Bible
9:40 – 9:50	The Godhead
9:50 – 10:00	The Person and Work of Jesus Christ
10:00 – 10:10	The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit
10:10 – 10:20	The Nature of Man
10:20 – 10:30	Angelology
10:30 – 10:40	Salvation
10:40 – 10:50	Eternal Security
10:50 – 11:00	Break
11:00 – 11:10	The Christian Life
11:10 – 11:20	The Church (Universal and Local)

11:20 – 11:30	The Gifts of the Holy Spirit
11:30 – 11:40	The Second Coming of our Lord and Eternal Human Destiny
11:40 – 11:50	Evangelism and Missions
11:50 – 12:00	Baptism, the Lord's Supper, & Marriage
12:00 – 12:25	Deliberation of the Council (Candidate, Spouse and Spectators are Dismissed)
12:25 – 12:30	Public Recommendations of the Examining Council
12:30 ?	Prayer of Dismissal and Lunch at the Church

\* Be sure to have the Moderator, Clerk and participating Council sign the Ordination Certificate on the appropriate blanks with the same pen, preferably black ink. Not everyone on the Council will be able to attend the Ordination Ceremony. The Certificate of Ordination should be completed on the day of the exam, while all participants are present.

Maintaining order and keeping the Council Exam on target is in the hands of the Moderator. Keeping the pre-printed Agenda on target according to the time schedule is solely his responsibility. Therefore the choice of an *authoritative* Moderator is of the utmost importance.

Before questioning begins, allow everyone on the Ordination Council to briefly introduce themselves and the church they represent. A sign-in list of all participants should be furnished to the Recording Clerk.

The Moderator may open the questioning with these simple rules of clarification:

- 1) When anyone on the Ordination Council asks a question, the question should be preceded by stating their last name.
- 2) Each question asked should be restated by the candidate or redirected/restated by the Moderator for the purpose of clarification and properly recording the question.
- 3) It should be made clear from the onset that it is NOT the responsibility of the Council to instruct the candidate, but to examine him to ascertain his qualifications as to the Gospel ministry.
- 4) Council members should not ask a question of the candidate if they themselves do not know the answer.

... And any other guidelines the Moderator believes necessary to insure a well rounded and thorough examining process.

## **The Ordination Ceremony**

It is wise to plan several weeks of space between the Ordination Exam and the Ordination Ceremony. Though this author believes that if the preceding directives are observed the margin of failure will be nearly non-existent, it would be most embarrassing for a candidate to fail the oral exam on a Wednesday after he has sent out printed invitations to his family, friends, pastors, church congregation and seminary professors to attend the planned Ordination Ceremony on the following Sunday afternoon. It is most wise to have the actual Ceremony three to four weeks after the Ordination Exam, with the knowledge that the candidate already has the full blessings of the church and the Ordination Examining Council.

The Ordination Ceremony is a great time of public recognition and testimony to the candidate's knowledge of the Scriptures and call to the Gospel Ministry. It is a time for family and friends to come together in celebration, and to invite special pastors and ministry people to share a part in the ceremony. The candidate and his wife should be thinking about how the ceremony can be best arranged, along with choices of participants who will share in special parts of the service.

For the purpose of encouraging attendance of those ministry people who served on the Ordination Council it is best that the Ordination Ceremony not be held during the regularly scheduled Sunday services. It would probably be wiser to have the Ordination Ceremony either Saturday or Sunday afternoon. If the church can encourage more participating "fellow pastors" of the candidate's peers to be present in support of the "laying on of hands – prayer" part in the ceremony it will be most encouraging and challenging to the candidate and the church. The affirmation of his peers at this juncture in a young man's life can have a most humbling effect, and memories of that special moment will challenge him to stand steadfast during those difficult future seasons of ministry. A press release may also be sent to the community newspaper notifying the editor of the local event. Pictures of the event can later be sent to newspapers and Denominational headquarters.

Be sure to secure the consent of those special persons who you will ask to participate in the Opening Prayer, Charge to the Candidate, Charge to the Church, Special Music and other segments of the service deemed suitable for other participation. The planning of the ceremony is mostly the responsibility of the candidate, with some possible input from the Staff or Board of the church. It should be the candidate's responsibility to reimburse traveling expenses for those friends who come a distance to share a part in the ceremony (such as the ones participating in the Charge to the Candidate and Church, and perhaps special musicians).

Bulletin folders can be secured already printed, or can be made with the aid of desktop publishing and clip art programs. As the folder is opened, on the right hand page (or back page if inside pages are crowded) a short copy of the candidate's biographical sketch, testimony and call to the ministry would be most appropriate.

A workable sample of the Ordination Ceremony order of service can be as following:

**ORDINATION SERVICE OF** \_\_\_\_\_

CONGREGATIONAL SINGING	“Victory in Jesus”
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE	Elder _____
PRAYER OF INVOCATION	Rev. _____
READING OF CHURCH BY-LAWS	Deacon _____
READING OF SCRIPTURES	1 Timothy 3:1-7
SPECIAL MUSIC	_____
ORDINATION MESSAGE	Rev. _____
CONGREGATIONAL SINGING	“Amazing Grace”
CHARGE TO THE CANDIDATE	Rev. _____
CHARGE TO THE CHURCH	Rev. _____
LAYING ON OF HANDS AND PRAYER OF ORDINATION (Ordained Ministers, Staff and Elders)	
SPECIAL MUSIC	_____
PRESENTATION OF CERTIFICATE	Dr. _____ Rev. _____
SPECIAL OFFERING (For the purpose of furnishing the new minister’s personal library)	
CLOSING COMMENTS	The new Rev. _____
BENEDICTION & PRAYER FOR REFRESHMENTS	Rev. _____
(Refreshments are served directly afterward in the church fellowship hall)	



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