

When You Consider Ordination

Beijing International Christian Fellowship

WHEN CONSIDERING ORDINATION TO CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

It is a great and awesome privilege to be ordained or to help someone prepare for ordination. This paper is to guide candidates for ordination and ordaining churches to better 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.

A candidate for Ordination to the Christian Ministry and subsequent ministerial membership in the BICF will be expected to have a life which is bearing the fruit of the Spirit, 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.

A ministerial standing in the BICF shall require:

1. faithfulness to a BICF Church.
2. a minimum academic attainment of a diploma from an accredited Bible institute or the equivalent in formal education or extensive Christian service.
3. a vocational call to a specific place of service that involves the ministry of the Word.
4. acceptable ordination to the Christian ministry, as determined by the BICF Council.

Your ordination will remain in good standing as you reply to periodic questionnaires sent from the BICF so that we might encourage and support you.

We in the BICF believe 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.

AS YOU CONSIDER ORDINATION

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. Their lives should bear out the validity of their profession. 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.

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 to preach, or hired for a ministry team, 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 active in the ministry of the BICF prior to this, and that the church observe the candidate's ministry for at least a year before considering ordination.

If the congregational elders determine that the candidate is indeed ready for ordination, they should forward their opinion to the BICF Council for examination and consideration. If the BICF Council believe that this person is indeed ready for ordination they should call an Examining Assembly.

The purpose of the Examining Assembly is to recommend 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 Examining Assembly are not binding on the BICF Council, it is assumed they will give them serious consideration and in most instances; follow them.

The candidate's church assumes hospitality responsibility necessitated by calling and convening the Assembly. Once they are given approval by the BICF Council, they establish the date and send out the call regarding the ordination examination approximately six weeks before the date the Assembly is asked to convene. Ordination to the Christian ministry is into the wider global church. So, candidates are encouraged to get letters of recommendation from churches they may have served in other places.

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 Examining Assembly.

On the day that the Assembly convenes and at the time set for the beginning of the meeting, the moderator of the Examining Assembly 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 Assembly and a secretary who will keep a record of the proceedings.

After the Assembly has completed their examination, the BICF Council will act upon their recommendation. If the candidate is approved, the BICF Council 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 Assembly, although a tentative date for the ordination service may be suggested in the call of the Assembly. If the announcement is made prior to the examination that the hour of ordination will be the same day as the Assembly, it may prove embarrassing if the candidate is not approved. Furthermore, such an announcement may place the Assembly 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 Examining Assembly. The following documents should be kept by the church and the candidate and should also be sent to the BICF:

1. A copy of the written call to the Examining Assembly
2. A copy of the minutes of the Examining Assembly, including a roster of the churches and ministers attending
3. Any papers presented by the candidate at the Examining Assembly
4. A bulletin copy of the service of ordination
5. A copy of the ordination certificate

THE CANDIDATE FOR ORDINATION

The candidate for ordination should be an individual 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 in full time ministry.

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 Examining Assembly by the candidate for ordination.

- All papers must be typed on the computer, printed on one side of the sheet only, on white paper of good quality and A4 size paper, 12 pt. font.
- 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 as an Ordained Minister.

GUIDELINES FOR EDUCATIONAL PREPAREDNESS SECTION

The educational preparedness section should list the schools you have attended and all the degrees you have earned. A transcript of your theological 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:

- I. REVELATION
Universal and Special
Scripture: Nature, Authority and Usage
- II. GOD
Nature and Attributes
Creation and Providence
The Trinity
- III. HUMANITY AND SIN
Image of God and Freedom
The Fall and Consequences

- IV. PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS CHRIST
 - Incarnation
 - Life, Death and Resurrection
 - Atonement

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

- VI. SALVATION
 - Predestination and Adoption
 - Repentance and Saving Faith
 - Justification and Sanctification
 - Perseverance and Glorification

- VII. THE CHURCH
 - Nature and Mission
 - Relationship to Kingdom of God and World Religions
 - Order: Local and Denominational
 - Sacraments/Ordinances: Baptism: Mode and Subjects, The Lord’s Supper

- VIII. SUPERNATURAL BEINGS
 - Angels and Demons
 - Satan: Nature and Destiny

- IX. LAST THINGS
 - The Return of Christ
 - Millennial and Tribulational Views
 - Personal Eschatology:
 - Death and Intermediate State, Resurrection Day, Final Judgment
 - Eternal State: Heaven and Hell

THE EXAMINATION BY THE EXAMINING ASSEMBLY

The moderator calls the Assembly meeting to order with prayer. After prayer the moderator should proceed to have the assembled Assembly elect a moderator of the Assembly and a secretary. The Assembly 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 Examining Assembly to order and states the purpose of the meeting.

The first order or business is to establish a roll call of pastors and a listing of all churches and delegates who are present. Next the candidate is presented and introduced; including a review of the process leading to this point, including their ministry in the BICF.

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 Assembly 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 Assembly 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 Assembly to defend the positions stated. The Assembly, 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 Examining Assembly consider whether to approve or disapprove the candidate's ordination.

Visitors to the Assembly may be excused at this time. The Examining Assembly 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 congregation which called the Assembly 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 Examining Assembly. If a decision is made to proceed with the ordination service, the Examining Assembly meeting is adjourned to reconvene for the public service of ordination of the candidate at a subsequent time. The Assembly 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.

Individuals and congregations considering ordination are urged to take care that the utmost diligence be exercised in fulfilling the requirements of an acceptable ordination. Furthermore, churches are urged to be in consultation with the BICF Council when anticipating the ordination of one of their members.

SOME SUGGESTED FORMS

TO CALL A EXAMINING ASSEMBLY

Date _____

The _____ Church of _____

To The _____ Church of _____

Dear Friends,

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

The following pastors and congregations are invited:

- 1.
2. etc.

Please reply by no later than ___(date)___ with names and email 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 Assembly .

By order of the Church

_____, Church Clerk

MINUTES OF A EXAMINING ASSEMBLY

Date _____

An Ecclesiastical Assembly , called by the _____ church, convened at _____ this day, at _____ o'clock. The Assembly 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
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- 1.
2. etc.

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

The Assembly was dissolved (or adjourned).

_____ Moderator

_____ Secretary

SOME SUGGESTED ORDERS OF THE ORDINATION 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 Assembly
- 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 study the message of the Holy Scriptures, that those you instruct may find abundant and eternal life?

Response: I will

Minister: Do you promise to be faithful and diligent in 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 from what you yourself have received through fellowship with God?

Response: I do

Minister: Do you accept the statement of faith and vision of the BICF, 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 do the work of a Christian Minister?

Response: I will

Minister: Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant; and whoever will be chief among you, let him be your slave, even as the son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many. Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life, where 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 mindful 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.

Adapted for the BICF from Conservative Congregational Christian Conference.