

**ORDINATION WITHIN  
THE AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF  
THE ROCHESTER GENESEE REGION**

Ordination in the ABC Rochester Genesee Region is a **shared venture** involving the **candidate**, the **local church**, and the **Rochester Genesee Region**. Ordination grants recognition to the person's calling, fitness, and preparation for a ministry and confers upon such person its approval of her/his place among peers. Ordination has tended to be the "setting apart" to perform special functions of ministry, on behalf of the community of faith.

Persons planning for service in the following categories may be considered for ordination:

- Parish ministry, including all staff who exercise pastoral functions
- Mission service on the home or foreign field in which pastoral functions will be exercised
- Specialized ministries: institutional, military, and academic chaplaincies; pastoral counseling; or staff membership in a church-related institution where preaching, teaching, and/or pastoral work is required
- Staff service, involving educational or pastoral functions of an American Baptist agency, a council of churches or some other ecumenical ministry appropriately related to the American Baptist Churches USA

Any candidate whose proposed type of service does not fall into one of the above categories may consult with the Ordination Review Committee. If an ordained person serves outside one of the above fields or moves membership outside a ABCRGR church, that person shall notify the Executive Minister of ABCRGR to determine his/her ordination status. Failure to do this will result in removal from the denomination's Professional Registry.

**ORDINATION REQUIREMENTS**

**THE CANDIDATE:** The candidate seeking recommendation for ordination through the American Baptist Churches of the Rochester Genesee Region must have evidenced a calling and preparation for ministry and have met the following requirements.

**Local Church Membership**

- The candidate must be a member in good standing, for at least one year, of an ABCRGR church which is in good standing.
- The candidate must be commended in writing by that local church.
- The candidate should proceed into a process of ordination at least a year before a Permanent Council for ordination can be called.

### **Educational Requirements**

- Graduation from an ATS accredited seminary with a M.Div. or equivalent
- Successful completion of an approved course in Baptist history and polity [Note: These courses may not be offered every year so plan ahead]
- Successful completion of one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education
- Successful completion of Field Education
- A candidate enrolled in seminary must send the Executive Minister an official copy of his/her transcript by June 30 of **each year**

### **Additional Requirements**

- A Center for Ministry Review at an ABCRGR approved center
- Participation in either the ABCUSA Orientation to ABC life (*\*Note that this is **not** provided on an annual basis*), attending a region gathering, or an ABC Biennial Mission Summit.
  - Prepare and submit to the Executive Minister within 30 days of participation a post experience reflection paper (no more than 5 pages)
- Submission of signed the Background Check Authorization and the ABCRGR Code of Ethics at onset of the process
- Candidates have four years (starting from the date of the letter of commendation) to complete the ordination review process if candidate remains in active conversation with mentor and region during the four years. The ORC is empowered to grant one extension (generally not longer than twelve months) to candidates who **have been active** in completing the review process, who face extenuating circumstances (i.e., accident, health, military active duty, etc. that prevent the completion of the process within four years.)

### **Fitness for Ministry**

Fitness shall be evaluated on the following criteria:

- Commitment to Christ and the propagation of the Christian gospel
- Concern for people and an unselfish commitment to their needs
- Ability to communicate with others effectively
- Evidence of and commitment to maintain emotional stability, maturity, and competence
- Commitment to maintain a high level of intellectual discipline
- Evidence of competent formation of pastoral leadership
- Adherence to professional standards regarding ethical behavior
- Ability to articulate clearly a call to ministry

The ORC acknowledges that these criteria are subjective. We want the candidate to realize that once this process has begun the candidate is held accountable for his/her past and present actions. A candidate is evaluated throughout the process.

The above criteria will be assessed based on dialogue with the local church, information from Field Education, Clinical Pastoral Education evaluation, Center for Ministry review and discussions with the Ordination Review Committee. The candidate shall submit a signed release of evaluations to be sent to the Executive Minister. These documents are retained only for ordination.

### **The Mentor**

The Ordination Review Committee (ORC) will assign a mentor to each candidate. The mentor will be a resource throughout the process as the candidate explores his/her calling and strengths for ministry and prepares the ordination paper. The mentor will:

- Engage the candidate as he/she explores his/her calling and strengths for ministry
- Review candidate's plans for continuing growth in areas in need of development.
- Help candidate get oriented to American Baptist life
- Assist candidate in preparing ordination paper prior to the full ORC review
- Approve in writing draft(s) of ordination paper before the paper is presented to ORC
- Review the major themes to be covered during the meeting with the ORC
- Attend ORC meeting(s) with candidate when possible

The mentor should anticipate making a commitment to meet with the candidate a minimum of three times each year.

### **Ordination Paper:**

Ordained leadership as defined in the ABCRGR includes, but is not limited to the following competencies:

- An understanding of the world, including its social, political, and economic dimensions to which the gospel speaks and the ability to articulate that understanding
- An understanding of the nature of the gospel, including its texts, traditions, and trajectories, and the ability to teach, preach and witness to that gospel
- An ability to understand and articulate the role of the church and to function as a leader of the church in the movement of the gospel into the world

Consequently, each candidate for ordination is required to write an ordination paper of approximately 15-20 pages to reflect these competencies and the broad categories listed below:

### **Questions for the Candidate**

- Introduction Write a concise statement of your personal journey, Christian experience, and your call to the ministry. Explain why it is that you are pursuing ordination within this Region and ABCUSA.

- The world to which the gospel speaks  
Include your understanding of the relationship between God and humanity. Questions to consider in writing this section would include:
  - Who is God to you?
  - Who are you in relationship to God?
  - How do you understand God's relationship to the created order?
  - How do sin, evil and freewill factor into your understanding of humanity's relationship with God?
  - What is God's and humanity's relationship to creation?
  
- The nature of the gospel  
Describe your understanding of the nature and purpose of Jesus Christ. Questions to consider in writing this section would include:
  - What is the Good News to you?
  - Describe your personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
  - What must one do to be saved and to become a disciple?
  - How has the truth of the gospel been revealed to humankind?
  - How are the Scriptures authoritative for you and for the life of the church?
  - Where are the gifts of the Holy Spirit manifested in your life?
  
- The movement of the gospel into the world  
Discuss your beliefs about the nature and purpose of the church. Questions to consider in writing this section would include:
  - How do you sustain and maintain your relationship with God?
  - What is the mission of the church?
  - What is distinctive about American Baptist belief?
  - How do you see the local church's relationship to the ABCUSA, and to ecumenical and interfaith expressions of faith?
  - What are the challenges and opportunities facing the church at this time and what steps will you take in responding to them?
  - What is a significant social justice concern for God's people? Speak to the biblical and theological imperatives which draw you to this concern and reflect on how you might lead the church in addressing this challenge.

### **Paper's Format**

- The Ordination Paper should be approximately **15-20** double-spaced **typed** pages.
- \*The lines should be numbered
- A 11 or 12-point font (Arial or Times New Roman) should be used
- The paper may be printed double-sided
- Copies should be sent electronically to the Executive Minister for distribution to the members of the ORC at least **three weeks** prior to a scheduled review session.  
\***Note:** Pastor and Mentor must review and sign off on paper before it is sent in for Ordination Committee Review.

\***Paper format** –To number lines in MS Word – go to Page Setup – Line Numbers - Continuous

## The Local Church

### **FITNESS FOR MINISTRY**

As a part of the shared responsibility for preparing candidates sponsored for ordination, the local church is expected to play an active role in assessing, monitoring and evaluating the candidate's "fitness for ministry." In addition to routine updates on the academic progress of a candidate in seminary, the local church should review information from field education and clinical pastoral education evaluations, and candidate meetings with the Ordination Review Committee, with attention to the assessing the following:

- Commitment to Christ and the propagation of the Christian gospel
- Concern for people and an unselfish commitment to their needs
- Ability to communicate with others effectively
- Evidence of and commitment to maintain emotional stability, maturity, and competence
- Commitment to maintain a high level of intellectual discipline
- Evidence of competent formation of pastoral leadership
- Adherence to professional standards regarding ethical behavior
- Ability to articulate clearly a call to ministry

**Source: ABC R/GR Ordination Guidelines**

### **Any church sponsoring a candidate shall assume certain responsibilities:**

**Source: ABC R/GR Ordination Guidelines**

- The church shall provide the Executive Minister with a letter of reference indicating endorsement by the church, stating that the candidate is a member in good standing, has the gifts for ordained ministry, and has the desire to pursue ordination through the Region's process **BEFORE** the candidate meets with the ORC. [Affirmation of Sponsorship Form]
- The pastor and/or designee shall monitor and nurture the candidate, engage in a dialogue regarding the ordination paper, and provide assessment of fitness of the candidate for ordination as part of an annual update from the church sent to the Executive Minister by June 30 of each year.
- The sponsoring church will help the candidate to defray the cost to have a Center for Ministry Review and attendance at the ABC USA Orientation to ABC life
- The pastor and/or designee shall endorse in writing, the final draft of the Ordination Paper. The paper must be submitted so that ORC members receive the paper **three** weeks prior to the review meeting.
- Following the ORC's approval, the church shall request in writing a meeting of the Permanent Council on Ordination to examine the candidate for ordination.
- The church will email or mail the ordination paper to the members of the Permanent Council through the region offices.  
The paper must be received at least **two** weeks prior to the meeting of the Permanent Council.
- A date shall be set for the ordination service only after the examination by and recommendation of the Permanent Council on Ordination.

## **The Ordination Review Committee**

The Ordination Review Committee bears several responsibilities in its work with candidates for ordination. The ORC is charged with monitoring the progress of candidates as they move toward completion of their theological training and ordination. This process necessitates both supportive and assessment functions. Formally, the ORC shall:

- Provide an opportunity for interested candidates to meet with the ORC
- Provide a written overview of procedures, requirements, and expectations to each interested candidate
- Name a mentor in consultation with the candidate the ORC
- Meet at least yearly with each candidate to review progress and to monitor any concerns and problems
- Review the ordination paper with the candidate. Note: candidates should anticipate meeting with the ORC at least twice to finalize any revisions)
- Communicate to the church the readiness of the candidate to appear before the Permanent Council on Ordination
- Authorize the church to call for the convening of the Permanent Council
- Receive a written request from the sponsoring church to convene a meeting of the Permanent Council

The Ordination Review Committee is charged with monitoring the progress of candidates as they move toward completion of their theological training and ordination. This process necessitates both supportive and assessment functions. Consequently, the ORC is empowered to suspend and/or end the review process when there are concerns regarding a candidate's evidence of call, preparation and fitness for ordained ministry. In addition to the ORC discussions/meetings with the candidate, the Ordination Review Committee will consider feedback from the local church, recommendations from the Executive Minister, and evaluations from Field Education, Clinical Pastoral Education, and/or Center for Ministry review to suspend the review of a candidate in process.

## **Executive Minister**

The Executive Minister shall:

- Provide an initial meeting with all interested and prospective candidates
- Discuss and review and secure signatures for the Criminal Background Check and the ABCRGR Code of Ethics
- Communicate with the sponsoring church regarding the letter of sponsorship, conveying the expectations and guidelines for the church's work in monitoring and nurturing the candidate and in the preparation of the ordination paper
- Schedule candidates to meet with the ORC
- Receive evaluations for Field Education and Clinical Pastoral Education, as well as the Center of Ministry Review
- Review curricula of American Baptist Polity Courses to assure that pertinent material is included.

### **The Permanent Council on Ordination**

The Permanent Council on Ordination of the Region shall have the final responsibility for assessing the calling and readiness of the candidate for ordination

The Permanent Council on Ordination shall evaluate the candidate along the following criteria:

- Possession of gifts and attitudes that qualify the candidate for ministry
- A basic knowledge of the Bible, understanding of the gospel, and ability to articulate and defend the theological assertions in the paper
- A stance of openness before God, one's community, and the world
- An understanding of Baptist history, polity and beliefs

### **Voting members of the Permanent Council on Ordination include:**

- All active and retired ABCRGR recognized ordained clergy
- The one lay member of each ABCRGR church
- The members of the ORC

### **Alternative Review Process for Congregations More Than 200 Miles from Rochester**

- A local Advisory Committee that mentors and prepares candidate for ordination will be established (No less than: Pastor/Mentor/Lay Delegate of sponsoring Church)
- ORC meets virtually with candidate and advisory committee to review final draft of paper and authorize the convening of the Permanent Council meeting
- Permanent Council examination held in the congregation with virtual participation of the R/GR delegates, who will approve or disapprove the request to ordain.
- A member of the Ordination Review Committee will preside over the Permanent Council meeting.
- In addition to retaining the option to participate in the existing ordination review process, at the church's discretion candidates sponsored by R/GR churches located more than **200** miles from Rochester may convene a local and permanent council committees where three or more ABCRGR congregations are in close proximity. Whenever possible an electronic connection will be established for fuller participation of the Permanent Council members. Candidates must meet and comply with **all** the prevailing R/GR requirements. The Executive Minister will collect and retain custody of the candidate credentials. ABC R/GR churches interested in having an out of geographic region review process will:
  - Submit a proposal to the Executive Minister to convene a Permanent Council of at least **six** ABC ordained clergy who are graduates of ATS accredited seminaries.
  - The proposal should provide and document comparable support, mentoring and feedback as the related R/GR process
  - The ORC will have a virtual meeting with the candidate and advisory committee to review the final draft ordination paper. **Note:** The final draft ordination paper must be received by the ORC members at least **three** weeks before the meeting.
  - The sponsoring church will be responsible for coordinating and defraying the related technology cost for the virtual meeting(s).
  - With the ORC's approval of the final draft of the paper (or Statement of Faith for recognition candidates) the sponsoring church will coordinate with the Executive

Minister to convene a meeting of the Permanent Council to ~~virtually~~ examine the candidate.

- The sponsoring church will be responsible for coordinating and defraying the related technology cost for the virtual examination(s).

A. **REQUIRE A SIGNED AFFIRMATION OF SPONSORSHIP FOR R/GR CHURCHES SPONSORING CANDIDATES FOR ORDINATION**

As a part of the shared responsibility for preparing candidates sponsored for ordination, the local church is expected to play an active role in assessing, monitoring and evaluating the candidate’s “fitness for ministry.” In addition to helping to defray the incremental expenses a candidate incurs associated with the ordination process, the local church should review routine updates on the academic progress of a candidate in seminary, the local church should review information from field education and clinical pastoral education evaluations, and candidate meetings with the Ordination Review Committee, with attention to the assessing the following:

- Commitment to Christ and the propagation of the Christian gospel
- Concern for people and an unselfish commitment to their needs
- Ability to communicate with others effectively
- Evidence of and commitment to maintain emotional stability, maturity, and competence
- Commitment to maintain a high level of intellectual discipline
- Evidence of competent formation of pastoral leadership
- Adherence to professional standards regarding ethical behavior
- Ability to articulate clearly a call to ministry

**Source: ABC R/GR Ordination Guidelines**

**Summary of Guidelines for Ordination in ABC Rochester Genesee Region**

The following summary is given to help you in your preparation for ordination. The Ordination Review Committee is available in many ways to facilitate your preparation for ordination into the Christian Ministry. Please feel free to consult with the Executive Minister or the Chair of the Committee at any point in the process.

**Ordination Requirements**

- Local church membership
- Recommendation by local church providing there will be at least one year of membership prior to ordination by pastor or local church governing board (or Deacons) [See – Affirmation of Sponsorship]
- Center for Ministry review at an ABC approved center
- Successful completion of an approved course in American Baptist history and polity [**Note:** These courses may not be offered every year so plan ahead]
- Successful completion of one unit of CPE
- Successful completion of Field Education
- Graduation from ATS accredited seminary with a M.Div. or equivalent
- A written ordination paper approved by the Permanent Council on Ordination
- A well articulated call from God

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- Attendance at the orientation to ABC life provided by ABCUSA (*\*Note that this is **not** provided on an annual basis*), Region Meeting, or ABC Biennial Mission Summit with reflection paper.
- Background Check Authorization and the ABCRGR Code of Ethics at onset of the process

## Summary of Process for Ordination

- Candidates must meet with the Executive Minister to get acquainted, to review the requirements and to sign the Background Check Authorization and Code of Ethics before meeting with the ORC
- Be a member of a local ABCRGR church in good standing with the region prior to a Permanent Council
- Be recommended by local church after at least one year of membership by pastor or local church governing board (or Deacons)
- Local church appoints a committee to monitor candidate's progress and to offer support and encouragement
- Meet with Ordination Review Committee annually to get acquainted, project a time line, and check progress
- Complete Field Education and provide evaluation to Executive Minister
- Complete CPE and provide evaluation to Executive Minister
- Take at least one approved course in American Baptist history and polity. (**Note:** These courses may not be offered every year so plan ahead)
- Participation in the ABCUSA Orientation to ABC life [*\*Note that this is **not** provided on an annual basis*]
- Participate in Center for Ministry Review
- Submit transcript showing completion of Master of Divinity degree
- Notify Executive Minister of readiness to write the ordination paper in last year of seminary or upon completion of all the requirements
- ORC appoints mentor to work with the candidate.
- Meet with pastor and/or local church committee to discuss ordination paper
- Distribute paper to ORC members at least three weeks before meeting.
- Meet with ORC to discuss paper and make necessary revisions
- Following approval by ORC the ORC Chair notifies the local church of approval to request a meeting of the Permanent Council
- Pastor or chair of governing board requests the calling of the Permanent Council to examine the candidate
- The region sends paper electronically to each church and pastor for distribution to members of the Permanent Council so it arrives at least two weeks before the Council.