

## Why Ordination?

“The earliest churches recognized and honored persons designated and set apart as leaders with particular responsibilities in the Church's ministry (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Corinthians 16:15-16; Romans 15:7-22; James 3:1; Hebrews 13:7; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Romans 16:1-16; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 2 Timothy; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 13:1-3; 20:17-35.)...The primary tasks of leaders were to serve the Church and equip its members for the whole work of the ministry. In so doing they were to preach and teach the word of God, admonish, exercise authority in the Lord, care for the Church and model life in Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

God has called and equipped certain individuals to be set apart within local churches, and ordination is the public recognition and affirmation by a local church of a pastor's calling and competence. Among early Baptists, “the belief was that Christ had endowed some with the gifts for ordained ministry, and that a congregation of Christians sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit could discern who had these gifts. Ordination was, in effect, a ratification of God's call of the individual to ordained ministry. It was necessary that the call be tested.”<sup>2</sup>

Ordination “is a vocation which is called into being for the life of the community of faith, a vocation in which some persons are recognized by the church as its representatives, to be entrusted with the task of mirroring back to it the Gospel by which it lives, to teach, preach, guide, comfort, and encourage by reliance on the Spirit's power by which the church lives.”<sup>3</sup>

Ordination is an acknowledgment that the local church is placing this trust in an individual they have tested and approved as a faithful minister. This acknowledgment of trust can also be extended beyond the local church when the ordination is recognized as part of a process involving that church's association and region. The American Baptist Churches of Maine have a process by which an ordination can be recognized within the entire region. This process is initiated by the local church upon its discernment of the calling and gifting of an individual in its midst. It invites ABCOM's Committee on the Ministry to assist the candidate for ordination and the local church in further discerning that individual's calling and competence to serve as a faithful minister. If the Committee affirms that calling and competence, the local church is then encouraged to further test the candidate at a local ordination council, along with representatives of other churches in its association. If the council also recognizes the candidate's calling and competence, the local church is encouraged to ordain that individual, affirming their calling and gifting publicly, traditionally by the laying on of hands. Such ordination is recognized by churches throughout the region and so can benefit the local church, the one ordained, and the region and denomination as a whole.

### Benefits of Ordination Recognition for the Local Church

- **Valuable Training.** Courses in Pastoral Ethics and American Baptist History and Polity are prerequisites for the ordination recognition process. These topics are often not covered in other ministerial training, and they equip pastors to better serve churches in the American Baptist family.

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<sup>1</sup> “American Baptist Policy Statement on Ordained Ministry,” <https://www.abc-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ordain.pdf>, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 5.

- Independent Review. The process of ordination recognition provides a congregation with an independent examination of the calling and competence of their pastor(s) by fellow pastors and other representatives of other churches in their association.
- Ethical Accountability. Clergy members who have an ABCOM-recognized ordination have pledged to serve with ministerial integrity, as summarized in the *Covenant and Code of Ethics for Ministerial Leaders of American Baptist Churches*. In the event of an allegation of unethical conduct on the part of someone with a recognized ordination, the Committee on the Ministry can assist the local church in determining whether the charges are credible and what measures should be taken if necessary.
- Community Recognition. A recognized ordination can bolster the credibility of a pastor's ministry in the church's community.

#### Benefits for the One Ordained

- Opportunity for Growth. The ordination recognition process provides an opportunity for a pastor to reflect deeply on matters of theology and philosophy of ministry, as well as one's testimony of conversion and call. Discussing these topics in a focused way can provide a measure of clarity and open doors for further exploration.
- Ethical Accountability. The *Covenant and Code of Ethics* provides direction in ministerial integrity, as well as an opportunity to explain these commitments to one's congregation. If someone with a recognized ordination is falsely accused of an ethical breach, a process exists by which they can be exonerated. If the accusation is well-founded, that process can potentially lead to restoration after repentance.
- Regional Resource. If the time comes when a pastor senses God's calling to transition from one field of ministry to another, a recognized ordination can be an aid in communicating one's calling and competence for ministerial service.

#### Benefits for the Region and Denomination

- Strengthened relationships between pastors, churches, and the ABCOM family.
- Greater awareness of the areas of gifting among pastors in the region. The ordination recognition process helps familiarize the region with new pastors.
- Ordination recognition can open doors for service on a regional level.
- Mutual accountability between ordained clergy, who together have pledged to uphold the *Covenant and Code of Ethics*.
- Protection of ABC churches. In the tragic event of a serious breach of pastoral ethics, resulting in discipline, regional notifications safeguard against repeat offenses.