

SUGGESTIONS FOR LICENSING A MINISTER

INTRODUCTION

The Consolation Baptist Association recognizes and affirms the autonomy of the local church and goes on record as believing that no one has the authority to dictate to any church how it must conduct its affairs. This document is submitted as a suggestion to aid churches in dealing with the purpose, procedures, and the proper questions that should be addressed when one is being considered as a candidate for licensing. There is much confusion and many interpretations of the qualifications and procedures of licensing a minister; therefore, the Association felt that there needed to be a study of the history and biblical bases of licensing. In the search of history it was discovered that there was a time in which a man was not licensed into the Gospel Ministry until he proved that he was biblically sound in his doctrine and that he had given evidence in his life to his call to ministry. We found that in the past that pastors (many still hold to this) would not admit a man from outside his congregation to preach behind the pulpit unless the man's church legitimized his calling and put their own reputation on the line by licensing him. During this time the church that licensed a man was held responsible for licensing that man to the gospel ministry. Today, it seems that in some instances that all a man has to do is to announce that he has been called and the church immediately licenses him to the gospel ministry. Early Baptist actually encouraged a man who felt called to the ministry to spend two years being mentored by a mature pastor before being licensed. If churches do not take their responsibility seriously, they end up licensing men who are not accountable, unprepared, and too spiritually immature to go outside their church to preach.

There may be some, whom we greatly respect, who may disagree with our suggestions; they have that right. However, we sincerely ask that each one consider and respect us for our motive. We believe that by holding men accountable to their lifestyle, Christian examples, and doctrine that it will protect our churches from unsound doctrine being preached (which only brings forth discord in the church and causes great pain for the pastor). We believe that it would also protect our churches from bad examples of Christian living being observed by our members, especially our youth and children. With churches practicing caution and taking their time to spiritually discern each situation in regards to licensing a man to the gospel ministry, it will protect their church and other churches from division that could take place when an unworthy man has planted a seed of discord through unsound preaching or hurt the cause of Christ when a man whose lifestyle is not in accord to the Word of God.

THE PURPOSE OF LICENSING A MAN

We agree that a man's qualification for licensing is not the same as one being ordained. We understand that some ministers, who we respect, may disagree with this statement. However, we state this for the following reasons:

1. A man who has just been called to the gospel ministry more than likely will not know biblical and church doctrine, nor have the experience of a man that could be a candidate for ordination.
2. Some men may be called to the gospel ministry who will never become a pastor. God will use them as a lay-minister. These are men who are needed to fill-in when the pastor is out or even fill in at a nearby church.
3. There are some men who have been called into the gospel ministry who may never meet the qualifications to be a pastor. Not all men called to preach should be a pastor. Some men have made mistakes in their past that would hinder, or disqualify, them as a pastor. However, we believe such men may still be used of God in other areas of the gospel ministry.
4. If a man has been guilty of something in his past that would make him unqualified to be a pastor, he still needs to be held accountable for his ministry today and his ministry needs to be legitimized. This is accomplished by his church going on record through the process of licensing that his calling, life style, and doctrine are in accordance to God's Word.

The purpose of licensing a man is that it's a means by which a man's calling is confirmed. Licensing is the church's stamp of approval of the man's preaching abilities, his soundness in doctrine, and his Christian lifestyle so that other pastors and/or churches may with a clear conscience invite that man to preach.

THE CHURCH'S SUGGESTED RESPONSIBILITY

The church and/or pastor have a responsibility to see that the candidate studies Baptist doctrine (we recommend the Baptist Faith & Message 2000) and church ministry. The church and/or pastor should examine the candidate's lifestyle and give him opportunities to minister within the church. Example of such is allowing the candidate to preach during cottage prayer meetings and other opportunities within the church. If the church does not have a regular pastor at the present, the chairman of deacons may be a good source to help develop the candidate and make any recommendation.

Once the church and/or pastor feels that the candidate has shown evidence of maturity in each of the above areas, the church should start the process of licensing. However, it should be pointed out that the church has the right and obligation to keep the candidate accountable to his calling, even after licensing him. The church that licenses a man to the gospel ministry has the right to revoke that man's license. Recently, a Southern Baptist Church in the Altamaha Baptist Association revoked a man's license. A letter was written to the Probate Court informing the judge of the revoked license who made a note of it because of marriage license. We find the precedent in the 1958 edition of the Encyclopedia of Southern Baptist. Vol. 2, p. 1057.

Following is a list that the church and/or pastor or chairman of deacons should check when a candidate is being observed for licensing:

1. The candidate's lifestyle has been observed for evidence of calling, salvation, and spiritual growth.
2. The candidate can demonstrate knowledge of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. It should be noted that we refer to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 simply because that is the confession of belief that Southern Baptist has gone on record overwhelmingly a few years ago to accept. The other reason is that according to the by-laws of the Consolation Baptist Association we are to adhere, as an association body, to the Baptist Faith & Message 2000. However, each church is autonomous and may use whatever doctrinal statement they care to use.
3. Make sure the candidate's wife supports her husband's call to the ministry.
4. It is suggested that enquiry be made as to what is the candidate's plans for future systematic study of the Words of God. Is he going to Bible College or Seminary? Is he completing some study through Lifeway's Diploma Program? Is he completing a study through one of the Georgia Baptist Conventions Continuing Education Programs such as their Association Center or Bible Institute? Or are they planning to be tutored by the pastor or other person at your church?

SUGGESTED PROCEDURE

1. When the pastor, or if a pastor is not available the chairman of deacons, feels that the candidate is ready for licensing, he will call for the licensing of the candidate.

2. A date will be set for the candidate to meet with a licensing committee (usually the pastor, deacon body, and other ordain ministers who are a member of the church).

3. During the meeting enquiry should be made of the candidate's salvation, calling, doctrinal beliefs, and future plans of study.

4. When the licensing committee is satisfied, they will make a recommendation of licensing during the church conference. It is suggested that when the church votes to license a man that the vote be at least 80% in favor. However, if your church by-laws are different, you should go by your by-laws.

5. If the candidate receives the votes required in order to be licensed, he should be given a certificate of license and there should be special prayer of commission for the man and his wife.

SUGGEST QUESTIONS FOR THE LICENSING COMMITTEE

It is suggested that those on the committee take a copy of the Baptist Faith & Message to the meeting.

It is recommended that the candidate be ask the following:

1. To please share with us your salvation experience.
2. To please share with us your call to ministry from God.
3. To share your wife's salvation and does she supports your call to ministry?
4. What are your plans for future systematic study of the Word?
5. Do you believe in the inerrancy of the Scripture?
6. How would you describe God?
- 7 Who is Christ?
8. What do you believe about the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ?
9. When do you receive the Holy Spirit?
10. What is the work of the Holy Spirit?
11. Do you believe-in what some refer to the slaying of the spirit, holy laughter, and other such charismatic teaching?
12. What does it mean to be saved and why do you need salvation?
13. Do you believe in the doctrine of Eternal Security?
14. What are the two spiritual officers of the Baptist Church?
- 15 As a licensed minister will you recognize the spiritual position of the pastor and work with him?
16. Have you read the Baptist Faith & Message 2000? If so, do you feel you can affirm it or is there any portion that you disagree with?