

Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference

Ministerial Policy

Approved by the Pastoral Leadership Committee, 3/25/06
Affirmed by Conference Board, 4/29/06
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In keeping with various previous policy statements¹, it is the policy of the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference (PSMC) that:

1. **Affirmation of Denominational Polity:** The PSMC affirms the document, “*A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership*” (Faith & Life Press: 1996) as the foundational document for understanding ministerial credentialing in the PSMC.
2. **Affirmation of Sexual Misconduct Polity:** The PSMC reaffirms the document “*Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures*”² as the foundational document for ministerial sexual ethics. A minister shall not enter into sexualized behavior with a person with whom the minister has a professional relationship. A minister is always responsible to prevent such behavior. The Conference sanctions ministers who engage in such misconduct. Conference Ministers are authorized to bring allegations of sexual and other kinds of misconduct³ they believe to have taken place to the attention of the Pastoral Leadership Committee for investigation and action.
3. **Definition of All Other Policies in this Document:** All other policies contained in this document represent amendment or elaboration of either or both of these documents.
4. **Defining the Credentialing Process:** Ministerial credentialing in the PSMC is granted only through a collaborative process that involves the candidate, a PSMC congregation, the District Elders and/or Conference Ministers, the Pastoral Leadership Committee, and the Conference Board of Directors. Credentialing to ministry is not a “right”. Ministerial credentialing is a privilege and a responsibility. All persons under consideration for ministerial credentials in the PSMC need to demonstrate exemplary Christian character and a commitment to a relationship of mutual accountability within the framework of the PSMC, and a growing professional competence. The PSMC defines this character, commitment, and competence as:
 - a. Taking personal responsibility for knowing the ministerial credentialing policies of the PSMC, and staying abreast of changes in these policies⁴.
 - b. A stated commitment to hold to the teaching positions as articulated in the “*Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*” (Herald Press: 1995).
 - c. A demonstrated commitment to live out the values articulated in the document, “*Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love*” (adopted by Mennonite denominational assemblies in 1995).
 - d. An active participation in the life and welfare of the PSMC, including attendance at PSMC delegate assemblies and positive relationships with PSMC leadership.

¹ This document replaces PSMC Policies #1994-09, 1996-15, 2000-22, and 2005-30, and all Pastoral Leadership Committee policies with respect to operations and District Elders. It also amends the Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure Document (version 9.12.00)

² Version 9.12.00, which was adopted by the PSMC delegates in 2003.

³ See “*A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership*” (Faith & Life Press: 1996), p. 125, for a representative list of pastoral misconduct

⁴ See Section #5, “*Procedures for Ordination in the PSMC*”, contained below in this policy document

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- e. Completion of all steps toward licensing and ordination, and maintaining the ministerial credential by completing mandatory ethics training as prescribed by PSMC policy.
 - f. An active stance of learning and continuing education, measured by willing completion of the minimum educational standards for ordination as outlined elsewhere in this policy document.

5. Procedures for Ordination in the PSMC

- a. **Step One – Licensing toward Ordination (LTO).** This is a process of at least one year and no more than two years of discernment and training fulfilled in ordination. A person may be affirmed for a License toward Ordination by the PSMC Pastoral Leadership Committee upon completion of the following:
 - i. A letter of request for licensing, addressed to the Conference Minister, from the governing board of a PSMC member congregation that has agreed to sponsor the candidate for ministerial credentialing.
 - ii. The completion of the Ministerial Leadership Information (MLI) form by the candidate. Candidates are strongly urged to complete the MLI form electronically.
 - iii. Interview of the candidate. This interview is conducted by a member of the PSMC Pastoral Leadership Committee and a person holding an oversight ministry role in the PSMC (i.e., Conference Minister and/or District Elder).
 - iv. The member of the Pastoral Leadership Committee will present a report on the interview and make a recommendation to the Pastoral Leadership Committee. Should the Pastoral Leadership Committee not approve the request for license, the candidate and congregation shall be provided, in writing the reasons approval was withheld, and the steps, if any, that may be taken to allow for a reconsideration of the request for licensing.
 - v. A licensing service, officiated by either the Conference Minister or their designee shall take place following approval by the Pastoral leadership Committee.
- b. **Step Two – Ordination (Active with Charge – OAC).** This is a lifetime status conferring authority for ministry in Mennonite Church USA. It is granted at the sole discretion of the PSMC on behalf of the rest of the denomination. A person may be approved for ordination by the PSMC Board of Directors no sooner than twelve months following the conferring of a Ministerial License by the PSMC, and upon completion of the following:
 - i. Prior to Licensing and during the period the candidate for ordination is seeking ordination, the candidate for ordination shall be engaged in a ministry recognized by the sponsoring congregation and the Conference Minister with oversight authority.
 - ii. The candidate for ordination will complete academic requirements for ordination as outlined elsewhere in this policy⁵.

⁵ See Section #8, “*Educational Standards and Academic Expectations for Ordination*,” contained below in this policy document

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- iii. The candidate for ordination will complete the Ordination Statement. This document is to be presented in a neatly typed format, 3-5 pages in length. The candidate for ordination may write this document in the language of their choice, but they must present the Pastoral Leadership Committee with an accurate English translation. The Ordination Statement responds to the following four questions:
 1. What are the central themes of the Anabaptist movement, and why are those themes important for today?
 2. What are your areas of agreement and/or disagreement with Anabaptist-Mennonite theology?
 3. What is your understanding of the role, office, and function of pastoral leadership in Mennonite Church USA?
 4. What is your vision for Mennonite Church USA in the 21st century?
 - iv. The candidate for ordination will participate in a formation process as determined in each region by the Conference Minister.
 - v. Upon completion of these steps, the governing board of the congregation shall reaffirm their desire for ministerial credentialing of the candidate by sending the Conference Minister a letter reaffirming their commitment to, and requesting, the candidate's ordination
 - vi. Second interview of the candidate. An interview committee, led by the Conference Minister, and including the regional member of the Pastoral Leadership Committee, plus one other ordained person (OAC), appointed by the Conference Minister shall interview the candidate. Others may be invited to attend this interview by the Conference Minister.
 - vii. The Conference Minister shall make a recommendation on ordination to the Pastoral Leadership Committee, which shall discern the merits of the request. The Pastoral Leadership Committee may recommend ordination, decline to recommend ordination, or forward the request for ordination with no recommendation, to the PSMC Board of Directors. Should the Pastoral Leadership Committee not approve the request for ordination, the candidate and congregation shall be provided, in writing, the reasons a recommendation was withheld, and the steps, if any, that may be taken to allow for a reconsideration of the request for ordination.
 - viii. Upon receipt from the Pastoral Leadership Committee of a recommendation for ordination, or a forwarding of a request for ordination with no recommendation, the Conference Board of Directors shall take up the matter for action at the next meeting of the Board of Directors.
 - ix. An ordination service, officiated at by the Conference Minister shall take place, and a Certificate of Ordination shall be presented at that time.
 - x. At the next delegate assembly of the PSMC, the chairperson of the Pastoral Leadership Committee shall led in a service of consecration for those who have been ordained since the last delegate assembly.

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- xi. Any person first licensed toward ordination prior to January 1, 2001, and having not, as of January 1, 2006, completed the ordination process shall be required to complete the ordination process as described in this policy.

6. Additional Forms of Ministerial Credentialing in the PSMC

- a. **Licensing/Commissioning for Specific Ministry** – This is a credential granted by the Pastoral Leadership Committee for the duration of a specific ministry. Persons seeking this credential shall complete all parts of step one of the process for ordination⁶.
- b. **Minister-in-Charge** – in special circumstances, a person who is ordained in another denomination outside Mennonite Church USA or Mennonite Church Canada may provide service to a PSMC congregation for a term. In those circumstances, the PSMC Pastoral Leadership Committee may grant a Commission for Specific Ministry as a “Minister-in-Charge”. Such persons will agree to the following:
 - i. They will present the Conference Minister with a copy of a certificate of ordination, and a letter documenting good standing in that denomination, or a letter documenting the circumstances around the failure to achieve “good standing” within their ordaining denomination.
 - ii. They will honor the congregation’s membership within the PSMC.
 - iii. They will preach, teach, and administer the sacraments in accordance with the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective and PSMC polity.
 - iv. The governing board of the congregation which calls a Minister-in-Charge will provide the Pastoral Leadership Committee with a copy of a resolution, adopted by the appropriate congregational body, taking full legal responsibility for the actions of the Minister-in-Charge, and agreeing to hold the PSMC, and all its affiliates, harmless in the event of legal liability.
 - v. The Minister-in-Charge shall not be entered into the Mennonite Church USA database
 - vi. The term of a Minister-in-Charge shall be for three (3) years from the date of installation. If a person is still serving as a Minister-in-Charge at that time, they must enter into a transfer of ordination to the PSMC⁷.
- c. **Ministry Associates** – Persons who are commissioned, licensed, or ordained for specialized ministries in the church or in the marketplace⁸ may be designated as “Ministry Associates” of the congregation. In the case of persons ordained and in good standing within Mennonite Church USA, and residing in a part of Arizona, California, Nevada, or Hawaii, which does not have ready access to a PSMC congregation which worships in a similar language, or in other special cases, a “Ministry Associate under the care of the Conference Minister”, may be recognized. Such a designation is contingent upon the candidate holding membership or associate membership in a PSMC member congregation, and letter of affirmation from the Conference Minister to

⁶ See Section #5, “*Procedures for Ordination in the PSMC*”, contained above in this policy document.

⁷ See Section #7b “*Transfer of Ministerial Credentials and Other Miscellaneous Provisions for Managing Ministerial Credentials*”, contained below in this policy document

⁸ See pages 88-90 in *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership* for a description of specialized ministries.

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the PLC. In all cases, Ministry Associates commit to embodying the character, commitment, and competence for ministry as outlined in this policy⁹. Also, all Ministry Associates agree to an annual meeting with the Conference Minister and/or their designee, to review their continued standing as a Ministry Associate.

7. Transfer of Ministerial Credentials and Other Miscellaneous Provisions for Managing Ministerial Credentials

- a. **Transfers within Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada** – With the advent of the denominational ministerial database, a detailed transfer protocol is unnecessary. All active ministers in good standing (OAC¹⁰, OAW, and OIN status) who transfer ministerial credentials to or from the PSMC shall be granted such transfer upon request and the transfer effected via the electronic database. Licenses do not transfer. Suspended (OSU), Withdrawn (OWI), and Terminated (OTE) credentials do not transfer. Credentials on Probation (OPR) will transfer, but the Conference Minister shall send an accompanying letter to the receiving area conference disclosing the Probation status.
- b. **Transfers to and from other denominations** – Persons seeking to transfer their ordination to another denomination are advised to consult the appropriate authorities of the receiving denomination. Requests for letters of endorsement and/or file material should be made in a timely manner. Last minute requests may not be able to be accommodated. Ministers ordained in other Christian denominations are required to complete the same process as anyone who seeks credentials for Mennonite ministry.¹¹
- c. **Extension of licenses toward ordination** – The standard license toward ordination in the PSMC is valid for up to twenty-four months. Sometimes circumstances prevent a candidate for ordination from completing the requirements for ordination within the standard twenty four month period. In such cases, the Conference Minister, in consultation with the Chairperson of the Pastoral Leadership Committee, has the option of authorizing an extension of the license for a period of time of at least six months and not to exceed eighteen months. As of July 1, 2007, failure to complete requirements for any existing candidacy for ordination within the maximum of forty-two months (i.e., any licensing toward ordination granted before January 1, 2004) shall void the existing credential. At the discretion of the Conference Minister, a License for Specific Ministry may be granted to those whose license toward ordination has expired. A new process as outlined above (see #5) may be started at that point.

8. Educational Standards and Academic Expectations for Ordination

a. Background Statements

- i. The completion of certain academic requirements is understood to be a part of the process of formation for Ordination to the Ministry within Mennonite

⁹ See Section #4, “*Defining the Credentialing Process*”, contained above in this policy document

¹⁰ See pages 90-91 of *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership* for a glossary of the three-letter acronyms of ministry categories.

¹¹ See page 92 of *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership*.

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Church USA through the credential granting authority vested in the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference. Completion of academic standards, while required for consideration, should not be understood as guaranteeing Ordination in and of itself.

- ii. Completion of the academic assignment demonstrates certain competencies and personal disciplines which are important to ordained ministry. Therefore, all academic work required by the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference must be for academic credit. No audited work will be considered as adequate for meeting the academic standards for ordination.
- iii. Persons who are ordained or are seeking Ordination to Ministry within the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference are encouraged to further their training in ministry by availing themselves to continuing education opportunities. The local Conference Minister and/or District Elder providing oversight ministry is a valuable resource in helping persons in ministry identify continuing education opportunities and potentially assisting in finding funding for such endeavors.

b. Approved Pastoral Training Venues

- i. The Master of Arts and the Master of Divinity degrees from a Mennonite seminary holding active accreditation in the Association of Theological Schools (i.e., Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, or Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary) are normative educational preparation for ordination within the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference.
- ii. The Associate of Arts and Sciences degree in Pastoral Ministries or Youth Ministries from Hesston College also qualifies as normative educational preparation for ordination within the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference.

c. Minimum Academic Standards for Ordination and Additional Avenues to Achieve Standards

- i. All other candidates for ordination within the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference shall, as a part of the larger process of pastoral formation, licensing for ordination, and in order to complete the process for ordination, show evidence of successfully completing, for academic credit, the following minimum academic achievements:
 - 1. A college-level course(s) which provides training Anabaptist-Mennonite theology, history, confessional tradition, and polity.
 - 2. A college-level course(s) which provides training in interpreting the Bible (Hermeneutics) from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective.
 - 3. A college-level course(s) which provides training in addressing social-ethical issues in mission and peacemaking from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective.
 - 4. A college-level course(s) which provides training in understanding and articulating a theology and practice of the church (Ecclesiology) from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective.
- ii. The Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference has established a relationship with the Center for Anabaptist Leadership, it's School for Urban Mission, and

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the Hesston College Pastoral Ministries program to offer courses annually which satisfy the minimum academic achievements required by the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference as part of the process toward ordination. Successful completion of these four courses through the Center for Anabaptist Leadership's School for Urban Mission will be awarded a Certificate in Urban Mission from the Hesston College Pastoral Ministries program.

- iii. Candidates for ordination may choose other options for fulfilling the minimum academic standards. Options approved by the Pastoral Leadership Committee include:
 1. Completion of a Masters degree at an accredited other-than-Mennonite seminary provided the course work includes at least one course in Anabaptist History/Theology.
 2. Completion of a Certificate in Theological Studies at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, or Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, provided the course work includes at least one course in Anabaptist History/Theology, one course in Biblical Studies, one course in Mission, and one course in Church Ministry.
 3. Completion of a Bachelors degree from an accredited Bible Institute, college, or university, provided the course work includes at least one course in Anabaptist History/Theology, one course in Biblical Studies, one course in Mission, and one course in Church Ministry.
 4. Completion of the Pastoral Studies Distance Education program – a five unit course of study administered by Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary.
 5. Completion of the Diploma program in the Instituto Biblico Anabaptista program – a program for Spanish language candidates for Ordination administered by Mennonite Mission Network and the Ministerial Leadership staff of Mennonite Church USA.
 6. An independent course of study for academic credit, through an accredited college, university, or seminary, which has been formed by the candidate for Ordination in consultation with the local Conference Minister, meets the minimum academic standards articulated in this policy, and is approved in advance by the Pastoral Leadership Committee of the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference.

d. **Implementation**

- i. This policy took effect on March 1, 2005. All persons who have not completed their Ordination process as of July 1, 2006 will be required to meet the standards articulated by this policy, as interpreted and implemented by the Pastoral Leadership Committee and the Conference Minister staff of the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference. The Pastoral Leadership Committee of the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference has been delegated by the Conference Board with the final authority to implement this policy. Persons who can

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document meeting the academic training requirements through institutions outside the USA will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

9. The Pastoral Leadership Committee shall follow the following procedures in reviewing all requests for ministerial credentials:

- a. Consideration for licensing, or recommendations for ordination shall be done, whenever possible, at a face-to-face meeting of the Pastoral Leadership Committee. In the event a face-to-face meeting is not feasible, the Chair of the Pastoral Leadership Committee, at their sole discretion, shall convene a teleconference of the Pastoral Leadership Committee for consideration of ministerial credentials and any other business.
- b. While data files related to ministerial credentials may be transmitted by electronic means, all consideration of credentials shall be through a face-to-face, or teleconference meeting of the Pastoral Leadership Committee.
- c. Copies of all documents related to ministerial credentials shall be maintained in the PSMC Office.

10. Shared Oversight Ministry in Southern California – In response to the growth of the number of churches and ministers in the Southern California region of the PSMC, the PLC has created the role of “District Elder” to serve with the Regional Conference Minister in a ministry of shared oversight. The Regional Conference Minister shall have the discretion to discern the composition of the districts to be served by District Elders.

- a. **Appointment:** District Elders are appointed by the Pastoral Leadership Committee of the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference (PSMC), and commissioned by the Delegates of the Conference, upon the recommendation of the Regional Conference Minister.
- b. **Call:** District Elders are called to serve terms that are two (2) years in length. A District Elder is called to serve in a collegial relationship with the Regional Conference Minister in providing the ministry of oversight, as understood in current Mennonite Church USA polity and PSMC practice.
- c. **Duties:** A District Elder will serve with the Regional Conference Minister in the shared oversight of a small cluster of no more than five (5) congregations. A reasonable investment of time is 12 hours per month, not including time invested in prayer or freeway driving.
 - i. **Connections**
 - I. DISTRICT ELDERS WILL
 - a. Pray for the congregations under their care on a daily basis.
 - b. Make contact with the Lead Pastor of at least one of the congregations under their care each month. The purpose of these contacts are:
 - i. To encourage and strengthen pastors in their ministry, offering spiritual friendship

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- ii. To inform pastors of PSMC ministries, events, and services (The Regional Conference Minister will send a monthly eMail with calendar updates)
 - c. Work with the Regional Conference Minister in developing and implementing a collaborative plan of action in responding to congregations facing transition, conflict, and/or crisis.
 2. DISTRICT ELDERS SHOULD
 - a. Find it is useful, but not mandatory, to try to visit each congregation under their care at least once each calendar year.
 3. DISTRICT ELDERS MAY
 - a. Make contact with other pastoral staff and congregational leaders as often as feasible.
 - b. Form, when possible, a pastoral colloquium within their cluster for the purpose of mutual support.
- ii. **Credentials**
 1. DISTRICT ELDERS WILL
 - a. Lead all parts of the process in taking an emerging leader through the credentialing process up to, and including their License toward Ordination (LTO), as detailed in Mennonite Church USA polity, and PSMC policy and practice.
 2. DISTRICT ELDERS SHOULD
 - a. Officiate when possible at licensing services.
 - b. Work with the candidate for ordination to have a plan for completing all requisite steps toward ordination in the PSMC, according to current policy and practice.
- iii. **Community**
 1. DISTRICT ELDERS WILL
 - a. Meet together four (4) times each calendar year in what is known as a “Quarterly Council”, which is led by the Regional Conference Minister. The purpose of these Quarterly Councils are:
 - b. To build identity and competency as District Elders
 - c. To discern with the Regional Conference Minister on topics of concern
 - d. Hold individual meetings with the Regional Conference Minister at least four (4) times per year for purpose of mutual information sharing and exchanging ideas.
 2. DISTRICT ELDERS SHOULD
 - a. Attend together one Pastoral Leadership Committee meeting annually for the purpose of reporting, and attend Delegate Assemblies of the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference.
 3. DISTRICT ELDERS MAY
 - a. Plan and carry out a group “quiet day” or other form of group spiritual retreat annually.