

purpose: to reflect God's love in our church,
community and world.

called to serve

exploring a calling to ministry

All Christians are called to ministry the moment they become a follower of Jesus Christ. We are all called to be ministers in our homes, our work places, our families and our communities. A calling to serve as a teacher, a nurse, a civil servant or a homemaker is just as important and valid as a calling to serve as a pastor. However, some people are called by God to work full time in ministry. This may be as a pastor, an evangelist, a youth worker or an overseas missionary. Others are called to these posts but to work part time or whilst doing another full time job. These callings are a great privilege but must not be undertaken without serious thought and prayer. It is the church meeting that ultimately recommends a candidate to go forward for training for ministry and so the church is involved in the process of discerning the call right from the beginning.

At Tabernacle we have a long history of sending men and women to train for ministry at home and abroad. We have a lot of experience of what is good practice and works well, and what does not. This document sets out the procedure that a candidate wishing to offer themselves for ministry will normally follow. Confusion sometimes arises when candidates try to 'go it alone' by applying to colleges, the Baptist Union or the Baptist Missionary Society, and then later asking for references or recommendations from the church. For the well being of the individual candidates, their families, the fellowship at Tabernacle and the wider church, all candidates for ministry are expected to follow the outlined procedure.

Tabernacle has appointed the Global Mission Committee, which is part of the church's Mission Group, to take a lead role in helping people discern their calling. Their job is to facilitate people discovering their vocation and make appropriate recommendations to the leadership and church meeting. The Global Mission Committee do not have the final say on who is commended for ministry, and they do not decide which names are brought to the church meeting for consideration. However, the church meeting will always take seriously their

recommendations, and appreciates the work that they do behind the scenes in helping people to explore their calling.

The following qualities will be looked for in those who apply for ministerial training:

- a strong Christian commitment;
- evidence of growth in Christian maturity;
- a compelling sense of call to ministry;
- a personality suitable for ministry;
- evidence of necessary gifts and graces;
- the recommendation of the Church Meeting
- perseverance and an ability to see tasks through to completion;
- an ability to relate to people of all ages;
- an aptitude for learning.

In seeking to test a call to ministry an applicant will need to have been baptised as a believer, and will have been baptised and in membership of a Baptist Church for at least two years. At Tabernacle we will not normally consider starting the process with someone who feels called to ministry until they have been in membership with us for at least two years, even if they have been a member at another Baptist Church for longer than that. In such cases we will want to work with the members of the previous church to help discern the calling.

If you are convinced in your own mind that the Lord is calling you towards recognised ministry then it is important to test that calling with people you trust and with the wider church. Sometimes this process can take many months, and even years – but it is vitally important that the right decision is reached both for you and the church.

- First of all you should talk to your family and close friends who know you well. Are they surprised by your

sense of vocation, or do they bear witness to it in their spirit? **Are they supportive of your call?**

- The next step is to speak to the senior pastor and spend time praying with them. The senior pastor will be one of the people who will write a reference for you at a later date, and you will find it very difficult to proceed without their support.
- The pastor will pass your name to the Global Mission Committee who will begin to discuss your sense of vocation, pray for you, and who will invite you to come and meet with them. They will ask you some tough and searching questions and pray with you about the way forward. It may be necessary for them to meet with you several times as you seek God's plan for your life, and if you are married or engaged they will normally ask to meet with your spouse or fiancé to assure themselves that you have their support. During this time it might be appropriate to start looking at colleges, talking to the Regional Minister or BMS, and exploring the financial implications of training for ministry.
- In due course the Global Mission Committee will bring your name to the Church Meeting. You will be asked to share the story of your calling. There may be questions from the Church Meeting, and again the Church will join you in prayer. Once the candidate has made their presentation and answered any questions that may have arisen, they will be asked to absent themselves from the meeting. We would normally ask immediate family members to also leave the meeting to allow a

full and frank discussion to take place. A period of up to two months will then be left until the next church meeting to allow people the opportunity to ask you questions, to pray and to talk together. This is a serious decision and we are in no rush to complete the process! When the meeting feels ready, a decision will be reached. Usually this will be by secret ballot, and in accordance with the requirements of our constitution.

- The next step is to explore your vocation with the wider Baptist family. Depending on the specific ministry you are offering yourself for you will need to formally apply to the South Wales Baptist Association (SWBA) or a missionary society (usually BMS in this church). In either case the Regional Minister or the BMS Candidate Secretary will guide you through the process and help you with your applications for recognition and training.
- For pastoral ministry in the UK, once the Association has recognised your calling through the Ministry Recognition Committee (MRC) you can be interviewed by one of the six Baptist colleges. If the college are convinced of your call they will offer you a place in training. At the end of this time the College will be asked to commend you for ministry. On completion of college training and on commendation from the Association, the final test is a call from a local church. Once called to a local church pastorate, the newly accredited phase of training begins. This is normally for three years. During this time a mentor will be appointed to accompany the Newly Accredited Minister through this time. Further studies will be required. On completion of the probationary period, a further interview will take place in order to

ascertain that the Newly Accredited Minister has made 'proof of ministry'. When this assurance has been given, the Minister is transferred to Fully Accredited status.

- For ministry overseas training will be undertaken (normally for one year with the BMS and during that time the society will help you find an appropriate posting in another country).

All applicants seeking to train for full time pastoral ministry will need to:

- Complete a course of studies on Baptist History and Principles
- Have undergone a medical examination
- Submit a self declaration in relation to criminal records and be in receipt of a current Enhanced Disclosure
- Sign the Declaration of Principle and acceptance of the Ministerial Recognition Rules
- Have permission to work, either as a UK/EU national or with the necessary permission if not.

Timeline

College courses for training start in the autumn, usually the beginning of October. In order that the Association and MRC can do their work in time for this, including securing funding for your training, they have placed a cut-off point of the beginning of February for applications from people wishing to commence training that year.

This means that the latest that the church can consider making a recommendation for ministry is in the church meeting in January.

As a consequence, the latest that the process of considering someone for ministry can start is usually sometime around the September of October in the year prior to the planned commencement of training. The recommendation process may take even longer if the Pastor, Global Mission Committee, Leadership

Council or Church Meeting want to explore some aspect of a person's vocation further, or have some questions about the calling.

Further Help

The process for exploring and confirming a call to ministry is long and can seem complicated. Further help and advice is available from the pastor, members of the Global Mission Committee, the deacon responsible for the Global Mission Committee, the Regional Minister or from the Ministry Department at Baptist House in Oxford.

The Policy For Supporting Ministerial Students.

1. Those undertaking studies will only be supported if they have been through the church process for testing their call i.e. seeing one of the Ministers, Global Mission, Leadership Council and church meeting and have received the recommendation of the Church.
2. They must have been a member of Tabernacle for at least 2 years and have attended services regularly and played a full part in the life of the Church BEFORE beginning the discernment process with the church.
3. Once they have started their studies they must supply the Elder with responsibility for mission, for the attention of the mission hub and Pastors, with a short report each term detailing how they have settled in, how their studies are progressing, whether they have a church placement and if so how that is going, and generally how God is working in their life during this period of study.
4. Once they have started their studies they must normally attend a minimum of 6 services per year at Tabernacle.
5. Tabernacle will contribute to the tuition fees of all students approved by the Church provided the above is adhered to. The amount is in the discretion of the Church as expressed through the Leadership Council.
6. Tabernacle will contribute to the living expenses of all students approved by the Church unless they are receiving a stipend from a church as part of church-based study, provided the above is adhered

to. The amount will depend on the means and circumstances of the candidate and are always in the discretion of the Church as expressed through the Leadership Council.

7. Funding is reviewed annually and the student will be notified of the decision.

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