

Why Have a Policy?

The purpose of the church's Licensing, Ordination and Commissioning document is to provide written clarity on the circumstances under which each calling will be confirmed. We also believe it's important to outline the general process we will follow to confer each recognition.

What Is Licensing?

We believe that licensing is specifically attached to those called to gospel ministry and preaching. This will usually happen soon after a person is called to preach or pastor as a precursor to ordination. While this is usually a call to full-time ministry, a person will often be licensed before they have actually stepped in to a full-time vocational role at a church or ministry. Some who are licensed and ordained remain in part-time roles for their entire ministry (E.g. Bi-vocational Pastors).

What is Pastoral Ordination?

Pastoral ordination (to be differentiated from deacon ordination) will most often be granted to a licensed minister who requires ordination to pursue an immediate full-time pastoring or preaching position. It may also be granted to one who is a Bi-vocational (part-time) Pastor.

Pastoral ordination is the only ministerial recognition requiring a council. Once the Lead Pastor determines pastoral ordination is appropriate, he will ask for an ordination council to be convened for the purpose of hearing testimony, God's call into ministry and knowledge of Bible doctrine and practices.

What Is Commissioning?

We believe that commissioning is akin to licensing, and that it is conferred in situations where the person called to ministry will not preach or pastor. Since the role of pastor in Scripture is that of an elder, we believe that this role is limited to males who exhibit a clear calling to that specific ministry role.

Which Recognition is More Significant?

Every recognition is important because an individual's call to vocational ministry is affirmed and recognized. We believe that each recognition—licensing, ordination and commissioning—is different and will be applied in different circumstances to recognize God's specific call to ministry among his people.

How Are Individuals Recognized?

First West will license, ordain and commission individuals for ministry in accordance with the church's Constitution and Bylaws and Statement of Faith. Bylaw Article III states that licensing, ordination and commissioning: "...shall be under the authority of the church and the joint leadership of the Lead Pastor and the Deacon Fellowship" (Bylaws, First Baptist Church of West Monroe, LA).

The Deacon Fellowship, acting on behalf of the church, will vote to license, ordain or commission an individual.

What About Ministerial Recognitions from Other Churches?

We don't automatically accept licensing, ordination or commissioning recognitions from other churches. This position is a safeguard for the church and its theological position. We will consider licenses, ordination certificates and commissions given by other churches who share common theology, beliefs and faith traditions to our own. The Lead Pastor and Senior Lead Team will make a final determination to accept or reject certifications provided by other churches.

What Is a Minister?

Every member and leader of the church is a minister. Some of us have experienced a vocational calling to serve Jesus and His church. This group includes Pastors and Ministers who serve on our Staff Team.

The IRS defines ministers this way: "Ministers are individuals who are duly ordained, commissioned, or licensed by a religious body constituting a church or church denomination. Ministers have the authority to conduct religious worship, perform sacerdotal functions, and administer ordinances or sacraments according to the prescribed tenets and practices of that church or denomination" (IRS Publication 517, p. 4).

Are Ministerial Recognitions Limited to Full-Time Employees?

Both full and part-time employees qualify to be licensed, ordained or commissioned. With regard to the housing allowance, it cannot exceed the reasonable compensation for the minister's services, but can be 100% of the minister's compensation, especially if the minister is part-time, has a very small congregation, or has another source of income (Warren vs. Commissioner, No. 00-71217, Decided: August 26, 2002).

How Are Housing Allowances Processed?

To qualify as an excludable housing allowance, the amount must be officially designated in advance of payment. This amount must be specified in the minister's employment contract, the church minutes, the church budget, or any other officially-written document, indicating an official action had been taken. The housing allowance must be paid every year. Unless the designation is set as a permanent amount, the church must repeat this process and establish this allowance each and every year for all qualified ministers ("Housing Allowance" by Summit Accounting Group, p. 1).