

Ministerial Credentialing with Brethren in Christ U.S.

Introduction

In its broadest sense, the term “minister” applies to all Christians. Each and every follower of Jesus is called to use his or her gifts in service to the Kingdom of God. In its more restrictive sense, “minister” refers to men and women who have been recognized by the Church as having a more specific call from God, and have the appropriate character and gifts to fulfil that call.

Credentialing for ministry within the Brethren in Christ U.S. (BIC U.S.) follows one of two distinct paths. The first is the process to become a Licensed or Ordained Minister. The second is the process to become a Commissioned Minister.

Path #1: Licensed or Ordained Ministers

A licensed or ordained minister is a person who has been recognized by the Church as having met the requirements for serving as an assigned minister in a ministry position within BIC U.S. or serving as an assigned minister in a ministry position recognized by BIC U.S. This credentialing includes the following steps:

- A. **Three-year Provisional License.** A three-year provisional license is issued to persons who have completed the ministry application and screening process and have also been assigned to a ministry position with or recognized by BIC U.S. The provisional license is valid for three years and cannot be renewed. Please see section 1 below for more information.
- B. **Six-year Ministry License.** A six-year ministry license is issued to persons who, while holding a provisional license, met the criteria established by the Church to be issued a six-year ministry license. The six-year ministry license is renewable for as long as the minister meets the criteria established by BIC U.S. Please see section 2 below for more information.
- C. **Ordination.** Ordination marks the affirmation of the Church to the calling, preparation, character, gifts, and effective service of the minister. Ordination is given to persons who, while holding a six-year ministry license, met the criteria established by the Church to be ordained to Christian ministry. Ordained status is subject to renewal every six years for as long as the minister meets the criteria established by BIC U.S. Please see section 3 below for more information.
- D. **Retired Ministers.** A *retired minister* is a person who retired at age 62 or older and held an assigned ministry position in the 10 years immediately before retirement. A retired minister is no longer subject to the six-year renewal of ministerial credentials. Please see section 4 below for more information.

1. Three-Year Provisional License

1.1 Contact the Regional Conference Bishop

A person considering the possibility of ministerial credentials and/or a ministry assignment with BIC U.S. should contact the bishop of the region in which he or she resides. The bishop, as the BIC U.S. regional overseer/leader, will conduct the initial assessment of compatibility for credentialed ministry with BIC U.S. The bishop may involve the Commission on Ministry and Doctrine (CMD) member from the region in the screening process.

1.2 Assessment of Compatibility with BIC U.S.

The bishop will provide the candidate with a questionnaire titled *This I Believe*. The purpose of this questionnaire is for the candidate to express his or her theological views.

The bishop shall review the completed *This I Believe* questionnaire and decide if the candidate's theological views appear to be consistent with those of the Church. If the bishop feels the candidate should continue in the application process, the bishop will provide the candidate with the current edition of *The Manual of Doctrine and Government* of BIC U.S. (MDG) and a selection of readings that articulate the doctrine, core values, and various positions of BIC U.S. The purpose of these readings is for the candidate to gain a better understanding of BIC U.S.

Upon completion of the readings, the candidate will inform the bishop if he or she feels compatible with and able to support the beliefs, values, and ministry of the church, and if he or she desires to continue in the licensing process. If the candidate desires to continue, the bishop will provide the candidate with the *Personal Profile*. The candidate will complete the *Personal Profile* and return it to the bishop.

1.3 Interview with the Bishop

Following a review of the candidate's *Personal Profile*, the bishop will decide if the candidate should proceed to an interview. If married, the candidate's spouse will be encouraged to attend the interview. During the interview, conversation will occur regarding the doctrine, core values, perspectives, and polity of BIC U.S. Particular attention will be given to issues of concern or uncertainty regarding the candidate's understanding of, and agreement with, these items. Together, the bishop and the candidate will discern if the candidate is ready to proceed in the credentialing process and to be recommended for a three-year provisional license. If the sense is that the candidate should proceed, the candidate will sign a statement indicating his or her understanding of and compatibility with the BIC U.S. Articles of Faith and Doctrine, core values, and positions, and willingness to serve under the polity of the Church as expressed in the *Manual of Doctrine and Government*.

1.4 Three-year Provisional License

The bishop will submit to the Commission on Ministry and Doctrine (CMD) the candidate's *This I Believe* questionnaire, the *Personal Profile*, the signed statements from the candidate, and the confirmation from the bishop that the candidate has met the requirements for a three-year provisional license and assignment to a ministry position with BIC U.S.

The provisional license will be issued upon assignment to a ministry position and will be valid for three years from the date of issue. The provisional license cannot be renewed. In order to receive a six-year ministry license when the three-year provisional license expires, the minister is expected to complete the criteria established by the Church to be issued a six-year ministry license.

2. Six-year Ministry License

The following criteria has been established by the Church in order for a six-year ministry license to be issued:

- continuing to serve appropriately in an assigned ministry position;
- completion of at least one *Core Course* during the first year of the provisional license;
- completion and submission of the *Doctrinal Questionnaire* (DQ) during the first year of the provisional license;
- completion of at least one additional *Core Course* before the provisional license expires; and
- completion of the oral exam that follows the submission of the DQ.

2.1 Doctrinal Questionnaire

The DQ is a written questionnaire that will be sent to the minister at the time the provisional license is issued. It is to be completed and returned within twelve months of the issuance of the provisional license.

The DQ shall be reviewed by the bishop and the CMD member for the region, and by a number of other ministers who have been appointed to the task of reviewing DQs. The review of the DQ may lead to further conversation and/or reading/writing requests for the candidate to undertake.

2.2 Core Course

BIC U.S. requires all credentialed ministers to complete four *Core Courses*. These courses provide an understanding of BIC history, doctrine, and leadership and structure. At least one *Core Course* must be taken during the first year of the provisional license, and at least one additional *Core Course* must be taken before the provisional license expires.

2.3 Oral Examination

Upon submission of the DQ and completion of at least one *Core Course*, the candidate will meet with the bishop, the CMD member for the region, and several other ordained persons for an *Oral Examination*. The purpose of this examination is to investigate further the possibility of ongoing credentialed ministry with BIC U.S. Satisfactory completion of the oral exam and at least two *Core Courses* are necessary for a six-year ministry license to be issued

2.4 Six-year Ministry License

The minister who holds his or her first six-year ministry license is expected to complete the remaining two *Core Courses* and attend the BIC U.S. Leadership Orientation. It is also expected that the minister will continue to demonstrate the character, calling, gifts, and service that are expected of BIC U.S. ministers.

The six-year ministry license is renewable for as long as the minister meets the criteria established by BIC U.S. In considering renewal, the CMD, in consultation with bishops, gives attention to five aspects of a minister's life and ministry:

- a. a ministry assignment with (or affirmed by) Brethren in Christ U.S.,
- b. ongoing theological compatibility with BIC U.S.,
- c. exemplary godly living,
- d. faithfulness in commitment to the church, and
- e. fulfillment of the expectations for lifelong BIC learning.

3. Ordination

Ordination marks the affirmation of the Church to the calling, preparation, character, gifts, and effective service of the minister. Ordained ministers are eligible to serve the Church in the roles of Bishop and National Director, and may also serve as members of the Commission on Ministry and Doctrine.

Ordination may occur when an individual has:

- completed degree at an appropriate seminary, Bible college, or college with a Bible, religion or Christian Ministries major, **or** the *Directed Study Program*;
- completed the four *Core Courses*;
- completed the BIC U.S. Leadership Orientation;
- held a six-year ministry license;
- is approved for ordination by the local congregation or other appropriate body;
- is approved for ordination by the bishop who oversees the minister; and
- is approved for ordination by the Commission on Ministry and Doctrine and Leadership Council of BIC U.S.

Ordained ministers must renew their ordination credentials with BIC U.S. every six years. In considering renewal, the CMD, in consultation with bishops, gives attention to five aspects of a minister's life and ministry:

- a. a ministry assignment with (or affirmed by) Brethren in Christ U.S.,
- b. ongoing theological compatibility with BIC U.S.,
- c. exemplary godly living,
- d. faithfulness in commitment to the church, and
- e. fulfillment of the expectations for lifelong BIC learning.

4. Retired Ministers

The periodic review and renewal of ministry credentials is no longer required when a credentialed minister in good standing with the Church retires from assigned ministry at age 62 or older and has served in an assigned ministry role for at least the 10 years immediately prior to retirement.

Path #2: Commissioned Ministers

A *commissioned minister* is a person called by a congregation to serve in a supportive staff position with one or more ordained or licensed ministers who carry the primary responsibility for preaching, teaching, and discipling in the congregation. A commissioned minister serves under the authority of the senior pastor with the knowledge and consent of the bishop. A commissioned minister credential does not qualify a person to be assigned by a bishop to an assigned ministry position.

The candidate for commissioning shall apply to the regional conference bishop through the senior pastor of the congregation. The applicant shall complete the BIC U.S. *Personal Profile*, which shall be submitted with the senior pastor's recommendation to the bishop. The senior pastor's recommendation shall include the nature of the staff position, a sense of the candidate's fit with BIC U.S., a statement about the candidate's spiritual journey and personal character, and the endorsement of the governing board of the congregation.

If the bishop is in support of commissioning, he or she will forward to CMD the applicant's *Personal Profile* and the senior pastor's recommendation, along with a statement of the bishop's support. CMD will contact the candidate to continue the commissioning process in which the candidate will complete and submit the following forms:

- *This I Believe*
- *Affirmations and Accountability*

All documents (*Personal Profile*, *This I Believe*, and *Affirmations and Accountability forms*) will be reviewed by the bishop and CMD.

Upon satisfactory completion of the process, the candidate shall receive confirmation from CMD that he or she may serve as a commissioned minister.

Approved by Leadership Council and the Commission on Ministry and Doctrine – October/November 2016

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