

Called to be a Lay Pastor

What is a Lay Pastor?

Baptists have a tradition in which pastoral ministry has been exercised not only by those whose primary calling in life is pastoral ministry, but also by those who live out their Christian vocation in a secular context and exercise pastoral leadership in a part-time capacity. These have often been designated as 'Lay Pastors'.

This brochure aims to introduce you to pastoral ministry; how you prepare for that ministry and how you may receive recognition of your call and gifting from other Baptist Christians. In the church meeting, members recognise and affirm each other's gifts. It is within the local church that your gift for pastoral ministry is first discerned.

National Denominational Recognition

Your Association has been asked to share in the national recognition of Lay Pastors and it is to the Association that your church will commend you. You will find it helpful to ask your Regional Minister for details of the recognition process and training for Lay Pastors.

The Baptist Union currently maintains a list, published each year in the Baptist Union Directory, of those who are recognised as called and gifted by God for pastoral ministry among the churches of the Union.

Applicants for national denominational recognition will normally have been baptised as believers and will need to be in membership of a Baptist Church for two years.

Steps towards denominational recognition

- An inner, personal openness to God's calling for this ministry.
- The testing and confirmation of your call and gift by the local Baptist church of which you are a member.
- An initial testing of your call and potential for pastoral ministry by the Association Ministerial Recognition Committee. This first interview, early on in the process, is important. It may prevent years of misdirected time and energy in study, as well as disappointment at the end of the process. It is at this point that a candidate will be directed to a Baptist College to fulfil the study required by the National Ministerial Recognition Committee, which includes the study of Baptist History and Principles.
- At the end of the College course and after two years of pastoral ministry experience, the final testing of skills and character will be arranged with the local Ministerial Recognition Committee by your Regional Minister. This second interview will be arranged to test skills, calling and character.

Approaches to the following colleges are recommended:

Bristol Baptist College
Regent's Park College
Northern Baptist College
South Wales Baptist College
Spurgeon's College

(See the leaflet 'Baptist Training Partnership' available from the Baptist Union).

Training

Responsibility rests on those who serve as Lay Pastors among God's people to be as well equipped as possible for their ministry. You may be impatient to get on with the work, but taking time now to lay a good foundation will repay you later when busyness tends to squeeze out space for study and when good habits of reading, reflection and devotion are harder to establish.

Personal Growth

It is vital that you develop and nourish your relationship with God. This involves disciplines which enable you to grow and mature as a Christian. These disciplines will include a sustained commitment to the study of the Scriptures and a life of prayer.

In Service Development

There is need for ongoing study, for continuing reflection both upon the word of God and the world. Your Association will be able to advise you of helpful courses and conferences to assist in your development as a Lay Pastor.

In summary

The testing and confirmation of your call and gifts will follow the following stages:

- A recognition of your call by your local Baptist Church where you have been in membership for two years. You will have been involved in pastoral ministry for a two year period before the church can commend you to the Association Ministerial Recognition Committee.
- This first interview will help discern your sense of a call to pastoral ministry and will recommend a course at one of our Baptist Colleges. The Committee will inform the College that you are in the process of recognition. If you are already enrolled on a course, then the Committee will need to ensure that the College understands that you are applying for national recognition and therefore will ensure that you undertake the necessary assignments. The Association are looking at potential at this point.
- After two years of pastoral ministry and training in which to gain experience, you will once again meet with the Association Ministerial Recognition Committee for a second interview. The Committee will use references to help them test the candidates pastoral ability and will look also at calling, character and spiritual and intellectual development.
- Once commended by the Association, your paperwork will then be sent on to the Baptist Union of Great Britain Ministry Department for your name to be taken to the National Ministerial Recognition Committee.

Further help

We hope this gives relevant information. Further help and advice will be available from your minister, your Regional Minister or from the Ministry Department, contactable at Baptist House by e-mail or letter. The website will give you the telephone numbers as well as more detail about the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

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