



From Call to Settlement

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No effort of this sort is done alone. The notes in the following pages indicate the debt I owe to past writers on polity. And certainly no contemporary effort can ignore the pioneering work done by A. Vaughan Abercrombie and Henry David Gray.

I am especially grateful for the review of this manuscript by Rev. Dr. A. Vaughan Abercrombie, Rev. Dr. John Alexander, the Rev. Dr. Donald Bentley, Rev. Dr. D. Elizabeth Audette, the Rev. Robert H. Fleischmann, Hannah Wing Hall, the Rev. Martin W. Hall, Anne Kuester, Rev. Dr. Steven A. Peay, the Rev. Karl D. Schimpf, and Rev. Dr. Walter J. Vernon. Each has read the text and many made helpful and constructive comments. In some instances these have resulted in what I hope is clarification and in others an expansion of the original ideas. While several of my colleagues indicated that their style would differ from mine – no doubt – there was no fundamental divergence on what these matters mean for the Congregational Churches or how we ought to do things. The final result, of course, is entirely my responsibility. I am also indebted to Rev. Dr. Douglas L. Lobb and the Rev. Phil Jackson of the executive staff of the NACCC who asked me to undertake this task.

I would be seriously remiss, too, if I did not acknowledge the contribution made by my ministerial colleagues at Plymouth Church (Hannah Wing Hall and John E. Canter) who made the time available to me for this pursuit; and to the Church itself which shares with me the conviction that fellowship includes service to one another.

As witnessed by the predecessors in these efforts, our way is always one in which we try to balance the best of our tradition with the realities of contemporary expression. And, as with the earlier efforts, my attempt is always to describe that way best suited to allowing Christ's direction of the Church and preserving the integrity of that Church to bring honor to God.

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I. FOREWORDS

Autonomy

Any statement issuing toward one Church's yielding of authority to any other – including a body of related Congregational Churches – runs immediately into the arguments for preeminent autonomy. They (the Churches of the fellowship) have “no right to tell us what to do.”

The debate becomes troublesome in the Congregational Christian Churches of the United States at the end of the 20th century because of the inability to perceive authority in any other than a statutory way. To have authority is believed to hold some power of enforcement, to be able to impose sanctions.

The authority of an Ecclesiastical Council of the Vicinage¹ is of a different order. It is closer to what authority means when Matthew says of Jesus, “he taught them as one having authority, and not as one of their scribes.” The authority does not receive its power from its capacity of enforcement by ecclesiastical or secular court, but from the wisdom imparted as God acts through this agent. Jesus' words have authority because they are perceived to be the words of God. The result² of a Council finds its authority in the prayer-directed communication of Christ's will.

Autonomy grants no power to defy the will of a Council – merely to be very, very serious about recognizing whether the result is consistent with faith and scripture. Only if the Church is faithfully

¹ From here on simply referred to as a “Council,” is a body of Congregational Churches invited by a Congregational Church (or, in some circumstances, individuals) to consult on a particular matter.

² The statement of conclusion reached by the Council on the question(s) before it.

convinced that the result is in error does it possess the power to act in any manner contrary to the result. Henry Martyn Dexter's word on Robert Browne's attribution of authority to Councils remains contemporary.

“That by the word ‘authority’ here he meant just what every true Congregationalist always means by it in such a connection – the authority of Christ, the great Head, revealing itself through such advice of His servants, as may be the result of their examination of the facts under the guidance of the Holy Spirit – is made beautifully clear...”³

Or as we read in the Cambridge Platform:

[Cambridge, XVI, 5] The Synod's directions and determinations, so far as consonant to the word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission; not only for their agreement therewith (which is the principal ground thereof, and without which they bind not at all:) but also secondarily, for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God appointed thereunto in his word.

The obverse side of the obligation to seek the advice and counsel of sister Churches in any matter affecting the wider fellowship is the response that is made when asked to provide that Council. How many Churches are needed before we believe the results of the Council speak for all of us? When any of us fails to respond to the Letter Missive, we proclaim to the world that ordination (or installation) among us is a matter of small import. To receive a Letter Missive is not to receive an invitation to an “open house” where so many are invited that the Church's presence or absence is indifferent. It is, rather, to receive a plea to give counsel on the most

³ Henry Martyn Dexter; *The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years*; Burt Franklin, NY, 1970; a re-print of the edition of 1880 which was based on the Andover Lectures of 1876-1879; p 109

solemn and sacred of matters. The communion (fellowship) of the Churches requires our presence.⁴

Generally Accepted Standards

Sections II (The Personal Call) and III (Response and Preparation) will deal with the specifics of what preparation is normally expected of a Congregational Minister. As with much of our Way, these standards represent an accepted norm. Should an individual Church find that a particular candidate for ordination has been prepared in some other manner, and a Council find that the alternative is adequate, the standards suggested need not pose an insurmountable obstacle.

Any “substitutions,” however, do present the Church and Council with the most serious obligations for evaluation. Almost certainly, if alternative preparation is to be considered, it will be in the area of academic studies. We assume that academic preparation is within the range of expectations when a candidate presents a baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university and a Master of Divinity degree (or its equivalent) from an accredited school of theology or seminary. In any other pattern of academic preparation the responsibility for determining “equivalency” rests with the ordaining Church and the consulting Council.⁵

In most instances, notable deficiencies in academic preparation should lead to exploration of status as a Lay Minister or Certificate

⁴ Hall, Lloyd, “Advice Sincerely Sought and Taken” in Peay, Steven, editor; *A Past With A Future*; The Congregational Press, 1998; p 103

⁵ “Strong emphasis should be placed upon thorough academic preparation for the ministry; *i.e.*, both college and seminary courses. Any tendency to waive this standard should be resisted.” (Charles Emerson Burton, *Manual of the Congregational and Christian Churches*; Congregational Publishing Society; Boston – Chicago; 1936; p 63)

Minister.⁶ Such standing does nothing to diminish the status of the individual as the Pastor of the Church to which he/she has been called, nor should it affect peer relationships in associational life. Preserving the highest standards for ordained ministry, however, is a responsibility we have been given with respect to the other ordained Congregational ministers and the fellowships of Congregational Churches.

Ordination and Installation

The steps detailed in the ensuing pages apply to candidates for ordination, candidates being ordained and installed at the same moment, and previously ordained men and women being installed in a new setting. The procedures and services are virtually identical.

A service of installation would not be accompanied by the laying on of hands. A Council would not review the academic and other preparatory history of a minister previously ordained in the Congregational tradition with a Vicinage Council, but would want to explore those matters for ministers-elect coming from other traditions. With respect to installation we are assuming, of course, that the matters of Divine Call and personal response, preliminary ecclesiastical steps, and academic preparation are matters of history for the ordained clergy person. These, and any other minor distinctions, are pointed out as the process unfolds.

Since installation has profound implications in our polity – and potentially in law – there is no historic basis for the installation of

⁶ For an outline of this status, see Henry David Gray, *Congregational Worshipbook*; American Congregational Center; Ventura, CA: 1990; p 726f. The role a Council or Association should take in registering this status should be similar to that taken during ordination inasmuch as this, too, impacts the fellowship of the Churches. In these instances, the status is valid only for the Church in which the individual is serving as is not transferable to other Churches or associations.

Lay Ministers. Joining the Church in celebration of the settlement or call of a Lay Minister would be a fruitful activity for the Churches of the vicinage but should not be characterized as an installation. Conversely, an ordained minister in a “tent-making” relationship with a Church would be a proper candidate for installation.

All recent authorities are in agreement, too, that there can be no installation without a Council of the Vicinage or Association. The Church may alone celebrate the settlement in any way that it wishes, but it is a dis-order of the Congregational Way to characterize a unilateral ordinance as an installation. The requirements of fellowship in installation are as profound as in ordination.

Inasmuch as a Council acts for all of the Churches⁷ when proceeding to an ordination, it is not necessary for the Council convened for an installation to review the preparatory (ecclesiastical or academic) records of the candidate. A certificate of ordination or copies of the minutes of the Council are sufficient. When the candidate for installation comes from a different tradition, the presentation of records is the same as if she had never been ordained, though, all else being equal,⁸ the Church and Council will accept the previous ordination and will not re-ordain.

⁷ “...the Council in secret session decide whether they are ready – on its request – to set the candidate over the church, and to assume the responsibility on behalf of the churches whom they immediately represent, and of the denomination for whom all act, of introducing him into the Congregational ministry.” Henry Martyn Dexter; *A Hand-Book of Congregationalism*; Congregational Publishing Society, Boston; 1880; p 100)

⁸ Dexter’s caution at this point is worth remembering. “... the expedient too many times resorted to, of endorsing men supposed to be ‘coming toward us,’ in the large charity of the expectation that they will prove to be in the end loyal to our faith and useful in our ministry, has not been such in its results as to encourage a blind confidence in its beneficence.” (Dexter; *Three Hundred Years*; p 580f)

II THE PERSONAL CALL

God Speaks

If the call to become a minister of Christ issues from anywhere other than the mind of God, it is a false call and ought to be rejected.

It is not enough to be swept up into the romance of ministry, appreciating the art, the music, the literature, and the liturgy. Ministers will all be, to some extent, “romantics.” There is beauty in the worship and music of the Church, there is mystery in preaching, and there is pleasure in doing good.

Seven years of higher education and an internship is a high price to pay for professional standing. Recognizing the “green ceiling” of ministerial remuneration might make us wonder if the time and money are worth it.

Real experience in the Church teaches us quickly that the challenges outstrip our capacities, the personal spiritual emptiness can be frightening, the “status” conferred by the community is a mixed blessing, and there is often more energy needed than there is strength within us to do.

There are – to be sure – many positive things about life as a minister. It is a joyous servitude.

But there is no rational excuse for entering ministry unless we are absolutely certain that this is the path to which God has called us. If that is the case, no urging of reason, rationality, or reality will be sufficient to deter us.

We Listen

Whatever our stage of life, not yet launched on a career or well into one, God is always speaking to us of our vocation. What we do in life is most fulfilling when it is serving God's purposes – specifically. For some few, that vocation is full-time Christian ministry.

Any number of things may seem to argue against yielding up to God in this matter. There are the practical concerns, especially if we already have a family. There are the economic realities that ministry may pay a living wage but will not compete with corporate America. There are long hours, high demands, and expectations that are hard to meet. But if ministry is where God wants us to be, we can never be content or fulfilled unless that is where we are. As with all of God's demands, we have the freedom to say "no." And as with God's others demands, when we decide to say "no" we pay a price.

Ultimately the decision to enter the ordained ministry is not so much something that we have decided to do with our lives as it is the trusting "yes" to what God keeps calling us to do.

III RESPONSE AND PREPARATION***Unavoidable "yes"***

When it becomes certain in our minds and spirits that God is calling us to the gospel ministry there is an awesome temptation to "jump right in." There is so much need in the Churches that many men and women eschew the periods of formal preparation and serve – sometimes quite effectively – in roles that are essentially those of Lay Ministers.

There are sound professional reasons for the more traditional approach. Certainly the formally educated and trained minister comes to the field with a broader expanse of knowledge and technique than is usually available to the autodidact. The high regard for education in our Churches will certainly place limits on the minister who is perceived as being less prepared.

More fundamentally, it is the minister's task to open the scriptures in accurate, enlightened, and relevant ways. This encompasses not only the preaching and teaching but also the other ministries of the Church. Being as prepared as possible is intrinsic to our positive response to God's call. Expecting that standards will be lowered to accommodate our desires is really a "yes, but..." to God. We may do nearly as much damage to the call when we neglect our preparation for service as we might in simply rejecting it at the outset.

Normal educational preparation

Henry David Gray repeats the absolute consensus of American Congregationalism:

In academic terms, training procedure has varied throughout the world... In the United States the common requisites are:

- (a) College B.A.
- (b) A Seminary M.Div. or B.D.⁹

If we have the blessing of being called to ministry before pursuing our college degree, there are more options open to us.

⁹ Gray, *op. cit.*, p 728

1. It is important to select a college or university that has full accreditation with the appropriate accrediting body for academic institutions.
2. Our majors and minors can be selected with our professional goals in mind. This does not mean that a religion or pre-ministerial major is necessarily the best choice. A broad based liberal arts education that will bring intellectual familiarity with a number of fields may serve us better, knowing that religious studies will be what Seminary is about.
3. An advisor can walk with us through the degree program. This ought to be someone in addition to the academic advisor provided by the college since the issues are not the same. We need someone who will help us complete a course of study that will best equip us for the work ahead. This ecclesiastical advisor may well be someone who is assigned through the In-Care process (see below)

If responding to the call comes at a time that will require a career change and the college work is already completed, the B.A. (or B.S. or other) is a requirement already met. If a degree was not completed or the work comes from an unaccredited institution, the candidate for ordination should seek counsel on the appropriate course to follow. Admission requirements for Seminary will be a strong determinant here.

The Seminary selected ought to meet the accreditation requirements of the Association of Theological Schools of the United States and Canada.

1. Not “any seminary” will do. The seminary selected needs to meet the student’s personal and professional needs. It needs to provide an academic challenge that will help to achieve without defeating. The “culture” of the seminary needs to be one with which the student is comfortable.

2. The theological range of expression among the Seminary’s faculty and students ought to be broad enough to confront the student but with sufficient support for her place in the spectrum (granting that that may change before graduation).
3. The Seminary ought to be strongly geared to equipping men and women for the type of ministries to which they have been called. Preparation as a graduate-level teacher of religion may not be the best preparation for a parish minister. Seminaries have different strengths and this should be part of the decision-making process. Again, the ecclesiastical advisor should be of great help.

Internship

Students who are enrolled in the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies (and all students in many seminaries) will need to meet an internship requirement for certification. Other students should provide certification of similar experience in a ministerial setting and an evaluation of the work by a qualified supervisor.

“Ordination,” writes Burton, “should not normally be sought until after the candidate has held a license to preach for at least one year; during which, evidence of capacity for such service has been shown.”¹⁰ The late Professor Marion Bradshaw of Bangor Seminary argued forcefully that no one should be ordained before having spent at least one year of full-time service in a Church.

The general agreement that candidates present practical experience, accompanied by evidence of competence, emphasizes the fact that ordination is not simply one more stamp on the

¹⁰ Burton, *op. cit.*, p 62

seminary diploma. Ordination should not occur without a proper educational foundation but that foundation alone is insufficient warrant for ordination.

The internship experience serves an important function in helping to apply the lessons of the seminary years, to put things into perspective, to demonstrate that both the call and the gifts are commensurate with ministry, and to permit a time for final reflection before seeking ordination. It is, then, important that this be an activity during, or immediately after, seminary training, rather than prior to the initiation of that academic course. Was I hearing God correctly? Is this my vocation? Do fruitful work and the affirmation of parishioners and supervisors confirm my conviction?

Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies¹¹

Students looking toward ordination in the Congregational Churches should, if possible, participate in the program of CFTS. There are no requirements for admission to the program that should not be expected of any person pursuing ministry in the Congregational Way.

The personal advantages to CFTS participation are manifold. The CFTS Dean will monitor the work and assist the securing of aid throughout the preparatory years. Fellowship with other Congregational students across the country may establish bonds that will last throughout the professional years. A student is challenged to maintain strong academic progress and is provided with those external supports that are needed. The CFTS program provides a contemporary and historical insight into the ways of the

¹¹ For information about the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies, contact the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, PO Box 1620, Oak Creek WI 53154-0620 or www.naccc.org (e-mail to naccc@naccc.org)

Congregational Churches and basic instruction in Congregational polity.

The Foundation also has financial resources that are available to fellows as grants or loans; and is a conduit for several independent seminary scholarships.

NACCC member Churches who have a strong conviction about the Congregational Way and about a thoroughly trained ministry often show a preference for CFTS graduates.

Ecclesiastical steps

In-Care

As soon as a student in late high school or college, or an older person in other work, is sure of God's call and is firm in a positive response to that call, he ought to seek status as a "Student In-Care."¹²

Normally, the first step would be to discuss this with the home pastor. Every pastor is delighted to have someone in the congregation called to ministry and is anxious to help. If there is solid reason to proceed, the student writes to the Board of Deacons (Diaconate) informing them of her call to ministry, the intention to prepare for ordained ministry, and requesting that she be taken "in-care." If the pastor is not well grounded in Congregational polity, consultation should be sought with a neighboring pastor who is, or the student should be referred to a qualified clergyperson.

¹² Gray opens this status to seniors in high school, largely on the basis of a needed status for draft deferment (not relevant in 1999). He also limits the body taking the student in-care to the Church. Abercrombie (*Way of Inter-Church Fellowship*; p 32ff) designates it "In Care of Association," which reflects the contemporary reality that many associations have formal procedures for supporting the Church and the student in this status.

The Deacons will need to understand that while this does not necessarily (usually does not) imply any financial obligation, there is a serious obligation for the Church, usually through its Pastor and Diaconate, to be continually engaged with the student through the college years. Prayers will need to be offered regularly and contact made frequently. Opportunities should be found for the student to participate in ministry in the Church as time permits. The Church has the opportunity to nurture one who is called. Following an affirmative vote and recommendation by the Diaconate, the Church, in meeting, should vote to take this student “in-care.” For the Church it means an affirmation of the course in which the student is engaged; and a pledge of prayer, fellowship, support, and guidance during the preparatory years.

That level of support will be increased once the student enters seminary. At this point, many Churches feel it is orderly to provide an annual scholarship for “their” seminarian. Certainly this is a help for a very expensive professional education but it is also a way for the Church to be a practical participant in the process of insuring competent and educated clergy for our Churches.

If local conditions permit, it is advisable to ask the local association of Congregational Churches and/or Ministers to assist the Church in this matter.¹³ The association should have provision to provide an advisor (who may be the student’s pastor) to the student. This advisor is responsible to help the student make appropriate academic and work choices, but more importantly to provide the friendship of a more experienced person who may become a colleague. It is very important that this designation – whether by Church or association – be made so that the responsibility is conferred intentionally.

¹³ Possible wording for appropriate motions and other detailed information is included in the appendices.

In each instance, in-care status should probably, as Gray suggests, be limited to one year and be renewed as conditions warrant.

Licensure

“Licensure,” writes Abercrombie citing *The Congregational Christian Ministry, ...1953*, “is the status through which a candidate in training for the ordained ministry of our churches is certified by the Association as qualified to preach the Gospel, and as a licentiate to serve a church.”¹⁴ Gray also is clear that Licensure is not a matter that should be reserved solely to the action of a Church, but involves thorough examination and action by the local association.

Taking place usually after the first or second year in seminary, at a time when the student is assuming ministerial duties in a Church, the student is again the first actor. Informing his home Church Diaconate of his placement, he requests that his status be changed to that of Licensed Minister. The Deacons, followed by Church action, will now need to say that they share this student’s conviction that she has the call, character, and gifts for ministry.

Because this action inherently involves the good name of the Churches, it is incumbent upon the licensing Church (today probably the home Church and not the Church the student will be serving)¹⁵ to invoke the participation of the local association. Associations have varieties of mechanisms through which they act on matters of licensure so the details will vary from place to place. Uniformly, the purpose is to continue that level of support implied by the in-care status, but to confirm that preparation is proceeding at a satisfactory rate, that everyone still anticipates that this

¹⁴ Abercrombie, *Inter-Church Fellowship*; p 34

¹⁵ All actions pertinent to ecclesiastical standing need to be initiated by the Church of which the person (student, candidate for licensure, ordinand) is a member.

individual will continue toward ordination, and that this person can safely be commended for ministerial service. There is valid tradition in granting licensure only for one year at a time, allowing for a yearly review of progress and assurance of the candidate's continuing compliance with expectations.

If the student was not in-care and, therefore, did not have an advisor from the association appointed, that needs to be done now. The opportunity for questions will grow and preparation for ordination will encounter more unknown territory. The association is obligated to provide support at this level (again, not necessarily financial). The role of the advisor from the association is different from that of the intern supervisor appointed by CFTS or the fieldwork supervisor appointed by the seminary.

Call to a Church

Approximately six months prior to the time that a student anticipates completing all preparatory work (seminary degree requirements, CFTS requirements, internship), the initial steps should be taken toward securing a call to a Church. This work will probably be done in close association with the NACCC Associate Executive Secretary for Ministerial Development and Service. It is not the purpose of this booklet to outline that procedure.

It is important to note, however, that while there may – under extremely extenuating circumstances - be some “negotiating” on the matter of academic preparation, there can be no negotiating around 1) membership in the ordaining Church and 2) a call to a specific ministry. Some Church (or if an alternative ministry, some institution) must have formally and properly invited the candidate to assume ministerial duties within its province.¹⁶

¹⁶ “This ordination we account nothing else, but the solemn putting of a man into his place & office in the Church whereunto he had right before by election, being like the installing of a magistrate in the commonwealth. Ordination

There are ministries other than those in the local Church for which ordination is appropriate. They would include institutional or military chaplaincy, service as a missionary, or work as a Church Planter. While it has proven valuable to have the services of ordained clergy in the executive positions of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, these are not, strictly speaking, ministerial functions and it would not be appropriate to ordain a person to accept such a position. No matter what specific ministry the individual may be entering, ordination will be effected by the Church of which she is a member with the assistance of a Council and will be predicated upon a legitimate and recognized call to that ministry.

Sometimes Associate Ministers and Assistant Ministers are employed by Church Councils, Cabinets, Prudential Committees, or some other subordinate body within the Church. If that provision is made in the Church's constitution Councils will probably not quibble. However, the VOTE to ORDAIN must be made BY A CHURCH in a duly called and held meeting.¹⁷

The reason for rigidity at this point is that local autonomy, as it is practiced among the Congregational Churches, means that the only appropriate actor in matters of this significance is the Church. Only a Church can vote to ordain. It is not a responsibility that can, in Congregational polity, be delegated to another body.

therefore is not to go before, but to follow election. “ (Cambridge Platform, IX, 2; Williston Walker; *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*; The Pilgrim Press, Boston; 1960; p 215)

¹⁷ In the matter of a person already ordained who is being called (other than by the Church) to serve as an Associate or Assistant Minister, it would be unusual to convene a Council for the purpose of installation unless the person's ordination is in another denomination. In that case, it is most desirable that the vote to call and the vote to convene the Council be made by the Church. In any event, the call to convene a Council will need to be by a vote of the Church. This would be the way in which an individual from another denomination could become recognized as a Congregational Minister.

THERE CAN BE NO UNIT OF ORGANIZATION SUPERIOR TO THE CHURCH (WITHIN OR WITHOUT).

If the ordaining Church is not the Church issuing the call to the candidate, a copy of the letter of call is part of the candidate's records, as is his affirmative response to the Church. If the calling Church and the ordaining Church are the same, the records of call and response are part of the Church's presentation of records.

IV THE INTER-CHURCH COUNCIL

While there are increasing instances in which Councils consider other matters, the majority are convened for the purpose of ordination or installation. Formally, this inter-Church council is an Ecclesiastical Council of the Vicinage ('vi-s^on-ij, 'vis-nij / a neighboring or surrounding district: VICINITY). That is, it is a convocation of Congregational Churches from the area; and the Council, in these instances, is always convened at the invitation of a Church. Reality often makes that neighborhood very large and it legitimately expands beyond geographic boundaries to embrace other Churches that may have a special interest in the matter at hand. It is often, for instance, orderly for the ordaining Church to include the calling Church on the list of invited Council members even if that Church is not part of the local association.

The Church's Decision to Ordain

With all of the preparatory steps in place, it is time to look toward the consummating moment. Ready to begin the work full time¹⁸

¹⁸ "Full time" may not reflect the reality of a person who is called to a tent-making ministry. The question to be resolved by the candidate, the Church, and the Council is whether the person is a contractor who preaches on Sunday (etc.), therefore a Lay-Minister; or a minister whose stewardship is, in part, to gain support for himself and his family by working as a contractor on the side.

and to be "labeled" as one of Christ's ministers, to confirm publicly what God has done, the prospective Ordinand makes a formal request to the Church for ordination. This request must be made to the Church of which the candidate is a member.

Strong tradition in recent years has been for the ordaining Church to be the Church that has nurtured and supported the candidate through the years of preparation. If that has not been a strong and continuing bond, it is more orderly for the candidate to move her membership to the calling Church and seek ordination and installation there.

However the Church's machinery works, the request of the candidate comes to someone (usually the Diaconate) and must be acted upon. The body receiving the request for ordination needs to make certain that all preparatory steps have been taken. This includes a call to a specific ministry. There is a natural and understandable desire on the part of seminary seniors to look toward ordination immediately after graduation. But ordination inherently means induction into office and that requires a call.¹⁹

Careful consultation between the candidate and the Diaconate may enable the ordination to be scheduled before a formal call has been issued but this is always a risky business and should be discouraged. A lifetime of ministry allows adequate time to wait until a call has been issued before voting to ordain. A call to a specific ministry by a people of God is the *sine qua non* of ordination. That, and not the level of preparation, is the affirmation of God's ordination.²⁰

¹⁹ See Footnote 16 but note that this notion has, in our polity, been expanded to embrace other ministries than those of the local Church alone

²⁰ "The power which sets the new Pastor over his Church, is Christ, the Great Head, speaking through the Church. Therefore, the power which should formally call the new officer to his work, should be the Church speaking for Christ its Great Head." (Henry M. Dexter; *Congregationalism: Why It Is Better Than Any Other Form Of Church Government And Its Consequent Demands*; Third Edition, Revised And Enlarged; Noyes, Holmes, And Company; Boston

Satisfied on the one hand that all necessary preparation has been accomplished and, on the other, that the candidate is truly gifted and called to ministry, the Diaconate should recommend to the Church that the candidate be ordained and that a Council be convened to “examine the candidate, review our proceedings, and advise us in reference to the same; and, if judged expedient, to assist in the Installation [Ordination] service.”²¹

The Church must then meet in a duly called and held meeting, consider the recommendation of the Diaconate, and vote to proceed or not. The call and minutes of this meeting should be a part of the Church’s presentation to the Council.

When the Church calls a person to his first office as a minister, and before he is ordained, the matter to be considered by the Church and referred to the Council is **Ordination and Installation**. All records and procedures required for ordination and for installation will apply.

For the **Installation** of a person previously ordained in the Congregational Way (by vote of a Church and participation by a properly convened Council), there only needs to be inquiry relating to the call to the Church, the acceptance, and the faith and experience of the minister-elect. If ordained in some other fashion or in another fellowship, the procedures should be identical to those of Ordination and Installation except that there will be no laying-on-of-hands during the public service.²²

²¹ Dexter; *Hand-Book*; p 152

²² We have a long tradition of honoring the ordinations of other Christian denominations when appropriate standards have been met. Churches and Councils ought to make careful inquiry as to a minister-elect’s status with respect to a previous denomination affiliation. Is the ordination still recognized? Has there been disciplinary action or surrender of credentials? Sometime ordained clergy, no longer recognized as such by their previous denomination, would warrant careful examination and would need to be ordained according to our way.

The Letter Missive

This letter is the formal request for the Churches of the Vicinage to meet for the purposes outlined. It consists of four critical parts: 1) the name of the Church calling the Council; 2) the time and place of the meeting; 3) the precise business to be presented to the body with the details of quorum and voting; and 4) a full list of the Churches who are to compose the Council.²³

It would be well for the candidate, the Diaconate, and the pastor of the ordaining Church (if the candidate is not the pastor) to devise the list of Churches to be invited as part of the recommended action. The action recommended to the Church should also include the terms for the Council. Building upon the traditional wisdom that a Council should consist of no fewer than seven Churches²⁴, that would be the normal quorum to be required, not counting the inviting Church which is never a member of the Council. The Letter Missive should specify either “a majority of the invited Churches” if at least thirteen Churches have been invited, or “seven Churches” if the invitation list is shorter.

The challenges presented for Churches who are remote from neighboring Congregational Churches are significant. When feasible, it might be wise to schedule ordination Councils in conjunction with regular meetings of the local association when delegates are expected to be present anyway. If even that possibility would fail to garner a sufficient number of Churches, the use of the annual meeting time of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches might be considered. Electronic communication holds out some interesting possibilities

²³ cf. Barton William E; *The Law of Congregational Usage*; The Puritan Press: Sublette IL; 1916; p 262

²⁴ “...the quorum should be a majority or not less than seven...” (Burton; *op. cit.*; p 33)

for us. Telephone conferences for this purpose are wholly inadequate. Some form of video conferencing (now often available through local institutions of higher learning) is perhaps the best “remote” technology. This should become increasingly available in the near future – as will other technologies as bandwidth increases for the public at large.²⁵

It is equally important to be specific about how the votes are to be cast. While it seems that a vote for every member of the Council (*i.e.* one vote for the Pastor and one vote for each delegate of each Church) has been the prevalent historical practice, modern Congregational usage has much to commend. The practice of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches is for each member Church to have one vote. That is also a custom practiced in many regional associations – at least on critical votes.²⁶

Honorary members of the Council are individuals who are not representing invited Churches but who bring special interest or insight to the proceedings. Honorary members should be formally “seated” at the Council by its own vote after it is organized. Honorary members will have the right to voice in both the public and private sessions of the Council but will not have the right to vote.

The Letter Missive should be sent in plenty of time for Churches to work the meeting into their schedules. It is not unusual for a Church to send out a letter to the invitation list even ahead of the Letter Missive (perhaps two or three months before the Council

²⁵ Taken from Hall; *Especially for Light and Peace*, prepared for the Division for Ministry at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, Cromwell CT, June 28, 1999; footnote p 18
²⁶ *ibid.*; p 20; “I think that this custom of every member’s voting has come down to our time...” Dexter; *Three Hundred Years*; *op cit.*; p 544. [But compare the Boston Platform: “In voting, it was an ancient and laudable custom that each church give its vote as a church, and not that the messengers vote as individuals.”]

meeting) as an indication that the Letter Missive will be coming “so please hold the date.” Longer notice – even if the Letter Missive will arrive 4 to 6 weeks ahead of time – gives Churches a better chance to promote and schedule the event. This is both thoughtful and helpful.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL OF THE VICINAGE

Even before the Council is formally organized, it needs to be called together. The Call to Order can be done either by a “senior” minister from an invited Church or by the inviting Church’s Moderator. In either instance, the person so charged needs to know of that responsibility before arriving for the session.

In consultation with the advisor and the person who has been asked to Moderate the Council, the agenda should have been prepared before the meeting day. Copies should be made and distributed to the participants as they arrive.

Immediately, the Council should turn itself to prayer. This is, after all, a piece of God’s most sacred business and we are dependent upon the divine presence. Someone from among the senior clergy should be tapped for this awesome responsibility. Again – not by surprise! This person should be asked well ahead of the meeting.

The Reading of the Letter Missive is probably best done by the Clerk of the Church. This reminds everyone present of the reason for the assembly and the terms by which it may organize. This is, if you will, the Council’s constitution. All actions and procedures from this point forward are governed by the terms of the Letter Missive. The restriction on variance from the terms is the presumption that Churches have responded to the Letter based on the conditions and agenda outlined. To alter procedure or content is to move away from action that, by sending messengers, the Churches have embraced.

Since the Clerk has risen to read the Letter, they just as well go forward with the calling of the Roll. Because the request went to Churches, it is the response of Churches that is of interest. The Council will, of course, want a full accounting of all the individuals present and the Churches from which they come. The Response to the Roll, usually recorded, is “present by Pastor,” present by Pastor and delegate(s),” or “present by delegate(s).” Ultimately, the Clerk needs to know how many Churches – in any way – are present. If the number meets the quorum requirement, that should be reported to the presiding officer who will proceed to organize the Council.²⁷

The presiding officer then requests nominations for the Permanent Moderator of the Council. While the Council is always free to elect whomever it may wish, it is customary to have previously asked someone who is well versed in moderating Councils if they would be willing to so serve. If someone is present who has been asked and is willing, the printed agenda distributed before the meeting often carries a note to the effect that “The Rev. ???? is willing to serve as Moderator if nominated and elected.”²⁸ Nominations are made, the election is held, and the meeting is turned over to the Permanent Moderator.

The election of a Scribe proceeds in the same fashion. Again, preparation and prior notice is helpful. Often those asked to Scribe these Councils will have the agenda already entered into a laptop or notebook computer so that taking the minutes is almost a matter of “filling in the blanks.” This is considerably easier for Scribes than hand writing the notes and transferring them later. It also has

²⁷ A failure to meet the quorum requirement must also be reported. In that event, the only action open to the assemblage is to “fix the time to which to adjourn, adjourn, recess, or take measures to obtain a quorum.” (Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised, 9th Edition, Perseus Books, Reading, MS; 1990; p 342)

²⁸ Tradition and experience usually lead to the Moderator, and often the Scribe, being ordained clergy but there should be no hesitation in selecting qualified lay persons.

the distinct advantage of providing completed minutes very quickly after the conclusion of the Council. Completed and printed minutes are almost certain to be available before the public service if the Council precedes it by a week or more. If someone has agreed to serve, the agenda should include that note.

It is then up to the Council to seat the Honorary Members. Someone from the inviting Church should be ready to indicate which of the individuals listed on the Letter Missive are present and should be seated. If extenuating circumstances have occurred that justify it, the inviting Church or members of the Council may add to the list of honorary Members (but not voting members). A motion and vote of the Council accomplish this.

You will note that the inviting Church has no further “authority” in what transpires. That Church has defined what can happen and who can do it. The convening Churches have agreed to those terms and they are now responsible for their own actions.

The Moderator will call on the Clerk of the Church to present the Church’s records that are pertinent to the matter at hand. These records should consist of:

Records of the Church

ITEM	ORDAIN	INSTALL
Record of the Church’s action in voting to ordain, ordain and install, or install	Yes	Yes
Whether presented as full minutes or an extract of minutes, this record must be signed by the Church Clerk and must (a) demonstrate that the meeting was regularly called and held; (b) must include the full text of the motion as passed; and (c) include a record of the vote (unanimous, yeas and nays, etc.)		

ITEM	ORDAIN	INSTALL
<p>Record of the Church's action in voting to call an Ecclesiastical Council of the Vicinage</p> <p>Whether presented as full minutes or an extract of minutes, this record must be signed by the Church Clerk and must (a) demonstrate that the meeting was regularly called and held; (b) must include the full text of the motion as passed; and (c) include a record of the vote (unanimous, yeas and nays, etc.)</p>	Yes	Yes
<p>Record of the Church's vote to call the candidate to office</p> <p>This may be presented in the minutes form as indicated above OR may be a copy of the letter of call sent to the candidate by the appropriate Church officer</p> <p>NOTE: If a "home" Church rather than the Church to which she is called is ordaining the candidate, this record and the letter of response (next) will be part of the candidate's records.</p> <p>If the candidate is serving as an Assistant or Associate Minister and was not called by a Church,²⁹ the record should be the appropriate minutes (or extract) and a copy of the document that grants to a subsidiary board, committee, or person the power to engage a minister for the Church on the Church's behalf.</p>	Yes	Yes

²⁹ This practice is not recommended since a minister's standing rests in the call to office by a Church, which, in Congregational ecclesiology, can only be done by the Church in meeting. The practice of allowing Church Councils, Cabinets, or other bodies to call ministers is, in the words of R. W. Dale, "intra-Congregational Presbyterianism."

ITEM	ORDAIN	INSTALL
<p>Record of the candidate's letter of response to the Call</p> <p>This should be a copy of the letter sent to the calling Church in response to the letter of call</p>	Yes	Yes

The members of the Council may ask for clarification of some points before voting to find the presentation sufficient. This vote is not approbation of the records but merely acknowledgment that the Council has enough information to make a judgment when it is by itself.

The Moderator will then ask for the presentation of the records of the candidate. This step is to provide a certifiable paper trail that testifies to the candidate's personal, academic, and ecclesiastical preparation. The Council will take into consideration the sources of the documents as they evaluate them. Records from disparate sources of recognized competence will establish a base line of adequate preparation. When accredited colleges and seminaries, the Church by vote of the membership, and the association through its machinery have independently testified through certification of accomplishment and/or status, the Council will feel comfortable in proceeding.

Records of the Candidate

ITEM	ORDAIN	INSTALL
<p>Certification of Church Membership</p> <p>This may be a membership certificate or a signed note from the Church Clerk attesting to the date of admission to the Church and the active standing of the candidate</p>	Yes	Yes

ITEM	ORDAIN	INSTALL
<p>Record of In-care status certified by the Church Clerk (and Association Secretary if relevant)</p> <p>This may be a copy of the pertinent Church minutes OR an extract of those minutes certified by the Church Clerk, such certification to include the motion as passed and assurance that the meeting was properly called and held OR a duly executed and signed certificate</p> <p>NOTE: If in-care status was conferred by the Church and recognized by an Association, similar Association records should be submitted</p>	Yes	No
<p>Record of Licensure certified by the Church Clerk (and Association Secretary if relevant)</p> <p>This may be a copy of the pertinent Church minutes OR an extract of those minutes certified by the Church Clerk, such certification to include the motion as passed and assurance that the meeting was properly called and held OR a duly executed and signed certificate</p> <p>NOTE: If Licensure was granted by the Church and recognized by an Association, similar Association records should be submitted</p>	Yes	No

ITEM	ORDAIN	INSTALL
<p>Certification of baccalaureate degree</p> <p>The original diploma should be available to the Council</p>	Yes	No
<p>Certification of seminary degree</p> <p>The original diploma should be available to the Council</p> <p>NOTE: Would be presented in Installation if previous ordination was non-Congregational</p>	Yes	No
<p>Certification of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies (if relevant)</p> <p>Present the CFTS certificate</p>	Yes	No
<p>Certification of Ordination</p> <p>Certified evidence of ordination from the ordaining body along with evidence of current standing</p> <p>NOTE: In some instances a "certificate of standing" or other record may be available from a Congregational Association in which the minister has been previously</p>	No	Yes

ITEM	ORDAIN	INSTALL
serving.		
Letters of recommendation	Yes	Yes
The candidate MAY present letters of recommendation from seminary faculty, local Church officers, internship supervisor(s), or others who have a connection with the candidate in areas that would reflect on the calling, preparation, and capacity for ministry.		

The items above are the normal expectation from those individuals being ordained or installed in the Churches of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. Inability to produce any item is not an automatic disqualification for ordination but each item should be supported by an “equivalency” (the merit thereof to be determined by the Council). Any issues should be discussed thoroughly IN ADVANCE with a knowledgeable and senior minister who is familiar with the procedures and standards of the local association.

After any necessary clarifications, the Council will vote to find these records sufficient. That is, the Council has enough data upon which to base its conclusions.

Presentation of faith and Christian experience

Much as the sermon provides the heart of worship, this presentation provides the heart of the Council meeting. We have learned everything we can learn from the words and certifications

of others. Now is the moment when the Council has the opportunity to see the incarnation of that faith, call, and preparation. In not much more than forty minutes or so, the candidate has the opportunity and responsibility to tell us who she is.

This introductory part of the candidate’s presentation is intentionally autobiographical. What are the factors, the people, and the circumstances through which God has worked to bring him to ministry? He tells of his call to ministry to help the Council understand the nature of that ministry. Specifically, what is God asking him to do? It is tempting to let this time become one of saccharin sentimentality in which we romanticize our personal crises, mountaintop experiences, and those who have surrounded us for better or for worse. Don’t do it!

Let this be a time that demonstrates both how God has worked (is working) in her life and what the call means for her right now. There will be time in less formal settings surrounding the ordination for her to express her gratitude. Obviously, something this intensely personal will have an emotional content – and should. The Candidate should make certain, in preparation and presentation, that “style” doesn’t overwhelm “substance.” This portion of the presentation should not take more than ten minutes.

The remainder of the paper ought to be both concise and systematic. The classical categories of theology need to be covered but it can avoid barrenness by always making clear what difference a particular truth makes to him and/or the Church. (e.g. What the Council needs to hear is not a distillation of creedal statements about God but a clear description of “his” God.)

This part of the paper might have three (not necessarily equal) segments.

I. The classical categories

- A. God (Theology) – *Deus ex machina*, immanent, transcendent? Personal?
 - B. Christ (Christology) – When, where, and how do we encounter the Christ? Why? To what extent is Christ distinguishable from the historic Jesus? What is the meaning of the Cross? The atonement?
 - C. The Holy Spirit (Pneumatology) – When, where, and how do we encounter the Holy Spirit? What is the role of the Holy Spirit?
 - D. Scripture (Bibliology) – What is its authority, how do we read it, how do scholarship and tradition relate to it?
 - E. The Church (Ecclesiology) – What is it, how is it created, what drives it, what is its mission? What is the role of the Church in individual lives, in society? What, specifically, is the Congregational Way of being Church?
 - F. Salvation (Soteriology) – What does it mean? Who gets it and how? How does it relate to eschatological questions?
- II. Pastoral Theology
- A. Matters relating to pastoral care, worship, teaching, and preaching – how does she approach these responsibilities and what difference does it make?
 - B. His stance on social ethics and social justice – What will he do about concerns in these areas?
 - C. The Sacraments – How many sacraments? What are they? Describe their administration, participation, and efficacy.
 - D. What are the minister's responsibilities to the congregation, her family, her calling, the Congregational Way, the official duties of the office?

III. Spiritual Life

- A. How does he relate personally to God in prayer, devotional life, etc.?
- B. How does her spiritual discipline affect her ministry?

DO NOT (just) ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS. A simple short answer approach to this outline will fail to convey who the candidate is and what God has called him to be. Nor should one expect to be able to treat each subject of the outline with anything like sufficient response in the limited time available.

It might be helpful to use this outline as an exercise. Quickly jot down responses to the questions and topics and then put the answers aside. Think about what has been written; meditate on the items that seem most troublesome or foggy. As clarity increases, begin to write the paper – WITHOUT reference to the outline or initial responses. After the first draft it will be desirable to re-work the paper to make it more orderly or systematic and possibly to review the outline to insure that nothing has been omitted that would be important in helping the Council to understand the candidate and her faith.

Experienced clergy who have attended many Councils for ordination would “weight” the paper in different ways. There is agreement that this portion of the paper should be systematic, orderly, and revelatory of the candidate's beliefs and faith. The Council will not be enlightened by a “laundry list” of responses to these – or other – questions. Rather, the presentation should demonstrate the candidate's orderly exploration of a personal faith, leaving room for elucidation and discussion during the question period.

The paper in its entirety should be written and available to the members of the Council. Copies will also accompany the minutes

when filed. Candidates usually distribute copies to Council members before the Council is called to order so that they may follow along. Occasionally, a candidate has preferred to distribute copies after the presentation.

Roll Call for Public Questioning

After the paper is presented, the Council Moderator, with the assistance of the Scribe, will call the roll again. Each participating Church, in the person of each of its representatives, will be given the opportunity to ask questions. The schedule should allow ample time for multiple and follow-up questions. After the Churches have had their turn, the Moderator will normally offer the same opportunity to the honorary members and guests present. The purpose of this questioning is not to “trip up” the candidate or to argue. The questioning is for the purpose of elaboration and clarification. There may be questions that flow from something presented in the paper – or not presented in the paper. Questions may ask about specific approaches to specific Church problems or challenges. There may be an effort to learn more about where the candidate stands on theological or social issues. This is an enriching and stimulating time that challenges us to know where we stand and to defend that position. So long as the responses lie within the broad spectrum of Christianity in the Congregational Way they do not become issues of potential disqualification.

The Council By Itself

The candidate, all members of the inviting Church and all others who are not from invited Churches will retire, leaving the members of the Council alone. Honorary members and non-delegate members of invited Churches remain with voice but not vote. This is the time when the Council will weigh all of the material that has been presented.

The Church’s procedures, the candidate’s process and preparation, the candidate’s faith and character will all be discussed. Has the Church discerned well the candidate’s call from God? Is there, in the candidate, the spiritual maturity required? If this is an installation Council, have the Church and candidate discerned well the potential for a mutually beneficial ministry? Are the terms of the call appropriate and supportive? In either instance, is this a person who will bring credit to Christ’s ministry and favor to the Congregational Way?

If there are shortcomings or concerns, the Council will have to determine the severity of the failure. Is it something that simply needs to be brought to the attention of the Church or candidate? Is it something that needs to be rectified before the Council can join the Church in the service of ordination? Is the failure so grievous as to prevent the Council from ever joining with this Church and/or this candidate in ordination?³⁰

Ultimately, a vote by the Council will be taken on a specific finding. The Council will express itself clearly as to what its position will be with respect to proceeding. That finding will be the key result of this Council and will be incorporated in the minutes.³¹

Appointment of Notification Committee

Assuming that everything is in order – and, with proper preparation, there is no reason that it would not be – the Council will vote to proceed with the Church.

³⁰ Or installation.

³¹ “The record of the Vicinage Council ... admits the Minister to all rights, duties, responsibilities and privileges of an Ordained Congregational Christian Minister...” (Gray, *op. cit.*; p 691)

In that happy circumstance, the Moderator will appoint a committee of one or two members of the Council to bring the candidate, members of the inviting Church, and guests back into the room. This committee is usually composed of individuals who are personally close to the candidate. If the result is less than salutary, the Moderator may wish to appoint some very senior members who can help to lay the groundwork for what must be a disappointment.

Concluding Business

After the Moderator has formally announced the finding, the Council will want to review the minutes as they are currently written. The Scribe should be asked to read the minutes to this point. After hearing the yet incomplete minutes, if there are no objections, the Council will vote to approve the minutes so far and to authorize the Moderator and Scribe to complete and file them.³²

The candidate will then be asked to present the order of worship for the public service. This should be done through the distribution of draft copies of the proposed order, indicating what individuals will be participating. Since the Council will be party to this service, the Council will need to “find it satisfactory.” It would be rare for any other result at this point.

In its final act of business, the Council will vote to stand in recess and to be dissolved with the Benediction at the conclusion of the public service.

³² Minutes should be filed with the candidate, the inviting Church, the Congregational Library in Boston, the West Coast Congregational Library, the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, and the regional fellowship or local association. This latter may occasionally – though should not – be an association of ministers if that is the local custom. It has also been a thoughtful custom for the Church calling a newly ordained minister to send a copy of the minutes to the ordaining Church.

The meeting of the Council is almost always followed by a fellowship meal. This is a good time for personal comments, plaudits, and thanksgivings.

ANOTHER CHURCH MEETING

Since the Church has asked the Council for advice that is relevant to whether or not the Church will proceed with an ordination or installation, provision must be made for receiving that advice. If the results of the Council are positive, the Church need not hold a special meeting but provision for a meeting should be made in the planning. In the event that there is a negative response, it is incumbent upon the Church to hold a special meeting to hear the result and to respond to it.

The best order would be for the Church to have scheduled a special meeting to follow, as soon as possible, the meeting of the Council. If the result has been favorable, the meeting only needs to hear that report and be adjourned. If negative, the Church has the opportunity for a prompt response.

There must be a planned time for a special meeting of the Church between the time of the Council and the scheduled public service. Here is another reason for scheduling the public service no sooner than one week following the Council.

THE PUBLIC SERVICE

A contemporary public service for ordination or installation will not vary much in outline from the form suggested by Dexter:³³

³³ Dexter; *Hand-Book*; p 154. More contemporary examples can be found in Gray, *Worshipbook*, p 705ff; in Abercrombie, *How to Gather and Order...*, p 65f.

1. Brief preliminary statement from the Moderator, followed by the reading of the Result of Council by its Scribe.
2. Invocation, and reading of a few passages of appropriate scripture.
3. Singing
4. Sermon
5. Prayer of Ordination, with laying on of hands (or of Installation, without the laying on of hands, if the candidate have [*Sic.*] been ordained before).
6. Singing
7. Charge to the Pastor
8. Right Hand of Fellowship
9. Singing
10. Concluding Prayer
11. Benediction, by the Pastor

The 'Address to the People,' which was for a time considered well, it is thought better to omit; as apt to repeat, for substance, much contained in other parts, and unduly to prolong the service.

This last disclaimer by Dexter is an important caution though not a rule for the order. If the service is to include a sermon, a charge to the minister, and a charge to the people there needs to be clear communication among those delivering the respective parts. They need to have at least enough knowledge of what the others are doing so that they are not redundant, and they need to be given - and adhere to - strict time limits for the presentations. A twelve minute sermon followed by two four-minute charges will probably not "unduly prolong the service" and may be useful. If those limitations seem unreasonable, it would be wise, as Dexter suggests, to eliminate one or more of them. Contemporary congregations seem to expect a service to last an hour, accept a special service that runs to an hour and fifteen minutes, and think by ninety minutes "this should have already ended."

This service belongs to the Church and is a service of worship. **While** the candidate for ordination is very much at the center of **what** occurs here, we are primarily engaged in recognizing what **God** is doing and giving thanks. We are lifting up this **consecration** so that it will not only attest to the personal **accomplishments** but also will engage and submit to the divine **power** as we "set apart" this person for ministry. And it is a service of celebration, and the glory is God's.

The liturgical traditions of the ordaining Church should be honored. The order of worship should not be markedly different from the order normally followed. To be sure, more attention will be paid to the scope of music, the number of participants will be greater, and there will be somewhat more "pomp and circumstance." That is as it should be. Leaving this service we should all know that something unusual and wonderful has happened; but we shouldn't have felt lost while it was happening.

Just as there is a temptation to become too personally emotional in the presentation of the paper, there can be a temptation to "Barnumize" the ordination service. Determine the order and then identify the participants, the music, etc. Let each element serve its appropriate function in worship. No matter how spectacular the choir and organ might be, they will be most effective if what they do enhances the worship experience and helps to lift us toward God. This is one of those celebratory services when we can legitimately "pull out all the stops" – provided that every stop serves our purpose in gathering and is not merely for show.

There is often some question as to the appropriate garb for the clergy. Tradition usually provides for a processional of all the clergy in attendance, whether participating in the service or not. "Customary pulpit attire" is normally the order of the day. The use of academic hoods is equally appropriate as we worship in a context of also honoring a "learned ministry." Some clergy will

almost always opt for the use of stoles. For their benefit, it is helpful to define the color that the Church will be using for this occasion (if the Church utilizes liturgical colors in any way).³⁴

Another issue of usual concern is the question of who will participate in the laying on of hands. The ancient tradition certainly leans toward the participation of only those previously ordained clergy who are in attendance. This would seem to preserve some sort of clerical continuity though it has a fairly rough fit into contemporary Congregational polity. The tradition is to be commended for the spiritual power that is concentrated by the laying on of hands by those who have previously been set apart. However, honoring the fact that it is not the gathered clergy but the Church, acting at Christ's directive, that is ordaining, it seems orderly for the Church to be a participant. The Church's Moderator and Diaconate Chairperson often join the clergy in this crowning moment. The laying-on-of-hands is no longer observed in services of installation, ordination having taken on a lifetime characteristic.

Because the service will be slightly unusual and the number of participants greater than normal, it is important to plot and "choreograph" the service. "Walk through" the service. How did the participants (and non-participating clergy) get into place? Where did they assemble and upon whose directive did they begin to process? As the service moves forward, who has to cross what to get to where? How should the participants be arranged for the greatest smoothness of operation? Who will recess? When? How will they know when to go?

Plan to assemble all of these folks before the service so that instructions can be given and questions answered. The processional should begin to assemble about thirty minutes before the service unless instructions have been given at some previous time.

³⁴ The rubric of 1570 interpolates white for ordination and this retains popularity

SOCIAL AMENITIES

It is important to provide opportunities around this singular event that enhance the celebration and give participants an opportunity to react in less formal settings.

The meal following the Council meeting is provided for the participants in the Council, including guests, but is not intended as a public gathering. There may be no reason to provide any program opportunities at this meal – just a time to enjoy good food and fellowship. The Church will make its own decisions as to how the meal is to be provided ("pot-luck," catered, otherwise). Attention to the setting and the meal will help to enhance the atmosphere surrounding the ordination.

The time for a celebration meal or reception follows the public service. It is especially fitting after an ordination to provide not only a first class meal but a time for programming in which those who have been part of the ordinand's life have an opportunity to share memories informally, a time for the presentation of gifts, and a time for the new minister to say "thank you" to those gathered. The social time following an installation may be less elaborate, especially if the minister is already fairly well known among the area Churches, though full celebrations of major events in a Church's life are always beneficial.

Depending upon how events are scheduled and how many "out of town" guests are involved there may be other opportunities when the Church or the candidate might want to offer hospitality. As with all such events, part of the success of the Council and public service will be the efforts made to demonstrate the importance of what is happening, to express our gratitude for those who have come to participate, and to provide opportunity for real fellowship.

Thorough planning, attention to detail, and careful observance of the tradition of our Way will insure that everyone involved will emerge from this experience filled by God's Spirit and convicted in the knowledge that we have been about Christ's business.

APPENDIX A - CHRONOLOGY FOR PLANNING

ORDINATION PLANNING

ITEM	TIME (Days before event)	Purpose
Request To Deacons	126	Candidate requests ordination by the Church
Action By Deacons	112	Deacons act on the candidate's request
Notice Of Church Meeting	105	Proper notice for a meeting to consider the Deacons' recommendation (assuming two week notice requirement)
Meeting Of The Church	91	Meeting to act on the recommendation
"Heads Up" Letter And Phone Calls	90	Advance notice to those who will be invited, soliciting their support.
Design Ordination Worship	84	The design of the service permits the determination of discrete assignments
Identify Participants	84	Participants are identified for the service of worship, the potential Moderator and Scribe, the constituting prayer, and other prayers
Public Service Music	84	Allow adequate time for planning and preparation of music.
Contact Participants	63	Participants are requested to serve. Make sure of a positive response.

ITEM	TIME (Days before event)	Purpose
Church Hospitality Plan	63	If out-of-town guests will be present and in need of hospitality, how will this be handled? Should a hotel list be provided?
Letter Missive Written	56	To insure that the draft letter meets all requirements.
Personal Invitations Written	56	Invitations to individuals whom we would like to have present, including any who will be honorary members of the Council.
Personal Invitations Sent	49	
Letter Missive Sent	49	
Confirm Council Moderator	42	Just double-checking to be sure.
Confirm Council Scribe	42	Just double-checking to be sure.
Responses & Follow-up	35 (28)	Check with any Churches who were invited and who have not responded to the Letter Missive with reservations.
Notice Of Special Meeting	21	Notice for the Church meeting to receive the result of the Council.
Ordination Certificate	45	To be prepared or purchased so that it is prepared by the time of the Council meeting.

ITEM	TIME (Days before event)	Purpose
Vicinage Council Hospitality	14	Refreshments available as delegates gather.
Vicinage Council	14	To examine the proceedings of the Church and the qualifications of the candidate
Vicinage Council Lunch	14	Fellowship
Special Meeting Of The Church	7	To receive the result of the Council.
Ordination Service	0	The solemn "setting apart" for ministry.
Reception	0	An option; or may be scheduled in addition to the banquet if there will be many attending the service who will not proceed to the meal.
Ordination Banquet	0	Praise God and CELEBRATE.

This is about as tight as the schedule ought to get. Six to nine months would allow for even more careful planning.

INSTALLATION PLANNING

ITEM	TIME (Days before event)	Purpose
Request To Deacons	126	Candidate, at the time of accepting the call, requests installation

ITEM	TIME (Days before event)	Purpose
Action By Deacons	112	Deacons act on the request of the minister-elect
Notice Of Church Meeting	105	Proper notice for a meeting to consider the Deacons' recommendation (assuming two week notice requirement)
Meeting Of The Church	91	Meeting to act on the recommendation
"Heads Up" Letter And Phone Calls	90	Advance notice to those who will be invited soliciting their support.
Design Ordination Worship	60	The design of the service permits the determination of discrete assignments
Identify Participants	60	Participants are identified for the service of worship, the potential Moderator and Scribe, the constituting prayer , and other prayers
Public Service Music	60	Allow adequate time for planning and preparation of music.
Contact Participants	60	Participants are requested to serve. Make sure of a positive response.
Church Hospitality Plan	60	If out-of-town guests will be present and in need of hospitality, how will this be handled? Should a hotel list be provided?

ITEM	TIME (Days before event)	Purpose
Letter Missive Written	56	To insure that the draft letter meets all requirements.
Personal Invitations Written	56	Invitations to individuals whom we would like to have present, including any who will be honorary members of the Council.
Personal Invitations Sent	49	
Letter Missive Sent	49	
Responses & Follow-up	35 (28)	Check with any Churches who were invited and who have not responded to the Letter Missive with reservations.
Confirm Council Moderator	28	Just double-checking to be sure.
Confirm Council Scribe	28	Just double-checking to be sure.
Notice Of Special Meeting	21	Notice for the Church meeting to receive the result of the Council.
Vicinage Council Hospitality	14	Refreshments available as delegates gather.
Vicinage Council	14	To examine the proceedings of the Church and the qualifications of the minister-elect
Vicinage Council Lunch	14	Fellowship

ITEM	TIME (Days before event)	Purpose
Special Meeting Of The Church	7	To receive the result of the Council.
Installation Service	0	The "settling" of the minister
Reception	0	An option; or may be scheduled in addition to the banquet if there will be many attending the service who will not proceed to the meal.
Installation Banquet	0	Praise God and CELEBRATE.

APPENDIX B

Detailed Schedule for the Vicinage Council

An example

DAY	TIME	ITEM
Thu	9:00 AM	Set up
Fri	6:30 PM	Dinner & fellowship for personal guests
Sat	9:30 AM	Reception & greeting of Council Delegates/Church Members
	10:30 AM	Vicinage Council Physical prep Organizing & Roll Call Convening Prayer Council Moderator Council Scribe

	12:15 PM	Lunch for Council attendees Prayer
The First Saturday		Council meeting
The First Sunday		Special meeting of the Church
The Second Saturday or Sunday		Public service

Detailed Schedule for the Day of Ordination / Installation

An Example

DAY	TIME	ITEM
Sat	2:00 PM	Set up
	2:45 PM	Music Rehearsal
	6:00 PM	Dinner & fellowship for overnight guests
Sun	8:30 AM	Chancel Choir rehearsal
	10:00 AM	Morning Worship Worship Leader Liturgist Preaching
	3:00 PM	Organize processional
	3:30 PM	Service of Ordination / Installation Music Choir Director Acolyte Marshall Report from Council Call to Worship

		Prayer of Invocation Scripture Sermon Charge to Minister Call to Ordination Ordination Vows Prayer & Laying-on-of-Hands Declaration Sacrament of the Lord's Supper Benediction
	4:45 PM	Receiving line and hors d'oeuvres
	5:30 PM	Reception
	6:00 PM	Ordination Dinner Host Master of Ceremonies Prayer

APPENDIX C

Motions Regarding the Candidate

MOTION: That (N) be taken under care of this Church as a Student for the Christian Ministry for a period of one year and we request the (N) Association to join us in this action.

MOTION: That (N) be granted the status of Licensed Minister, authorized to conduct any and all services of the Church; that this License be granted from (date) to (date); and that the (N) Association be advised of this change of status and asked to join us in this action.

MOTION: That in response to his/her expressed call and the leadings of God's Holy Spirit we do set apart (N) for the Christian Ministry through the solemn act of ordination.

Motion Regarding the Vicinage Council

MOTION: That

1. We bid the below named Churches, by Letter Missive, to be present, by Pastor and a delegate (or two delegates if there is no settled Pastor), at (time) on (day), the (date dd/mm/yyyy), at our Meetinghouse in (municipality), to review our proceedings with respect to the ordination [or Installation] of (N), to meet and hear the candidate, and to advise us with reference to the same; and if judged fitting, to proceed with us to the Service of Ordination [or Installation] to be held at (time) on (day), (date dd/mm/yyyy). Each invited Church shall be entitled to one vote and a quorum for the Council shall be present if seven invited Churches answer the roll call.

The Churches to be invited are: (a complete list follows)

We authorize (candidate), the Church's Pastor³⁵, Moderator, and the Chairman of the Board of Deacons to develop the list of those to be invited to sit as honorary members of the Council; and

We direct the Pastor, the Chairman of the Board of Deacons, the Church's Moderator, and the Church Clerk to prepare and send the Letter Missive.

³⁵ The Church's Pastor will be listed here and in item 3 only if not the candidate.

APPENDIX D – TEXT FOR THE LETTER MISSIVE

[Letterhead]

(Date)

The (Inviting) Church of (City), (State), sends Christian Greetings to (Church Name) of (City), (State)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The Great Head of the Church has united us in determining to set apart (N) for the Christian Ministry through the solemn act of ordination.³⁶

We therefore request your attendance at our Meetinghouse in (City), by your Pastor and a delegate (or two delegates if there is no settled Pastor), at (time) on (day), the (date). We ask that you review our proceedings, meet and hear the candidate³⁷, and advise us with reference to the same. If judged fitting, we then ask you to proceed with us to the Service of Ordination³⁸ to be held at (time) on (day), (date).

Light refreshments will be available prior to the convening of the Council and a luncheon will follow. Dinner will be offered at (place) following the public service. Please indicate on the enclosed card the number of individuals whom we can anticipate. We are certain that you understand that our request for official representation of Pastor and delegate is the norm. Others who are interested are welcome to attend as well. It is imperative that we have meal reservations no later than (date).

³⁶ The Great Head of the Church has united us in the choice of the Rev. (N) as our Pastor and Teacher. Our invitation to that office has been accepted. [For use if the call is for installation]

³⁷ Installation = Minister-elect

³⁸ and/or Installation

A quorum for the Council will be present if seven³⁹ invited Churches answer the roll call. Voting in the business of the Council will be by Church. We attach the complete list of invited Churches and we respectfully request that those individuals listed separately be seated as honorary members of this Ecclesiastical Council.

Wishing you grace, mercy, and peace
We are fraternally yours,

Moderator

Clerk of the Church Chairman of the Board of Deacons

APPENDIX E - Agenda for the Council

The Call to Order	Moderator of the Inviting Church
The Constituting Prayer	Selected Senior Clergy Person
Reading of the Letter Missive	Clerk of the Inviting Church
Roll Call of the Churches and Declaration of Quorum	Clerk of the Inviting Church

Nomination and Election of Permanent Moderator Moderator of
the Inviting Church
(N) has agreed to serve if nominated and elected)

Nomination and Election of a Scribe for the Council Moderator
(N) has agreed to serve if nominated and elected)

³⁹ or "a majority of the"

Seating of Honorary Members of the Council

MOTION: To seat the Honorary Members of the Council with voice but not vote.

Presentation of the Records of the Church Clerk of the Inviting Church

- Minutes of the Church's actions regarding ordination⁴⁰
- Minutes of the Church's action to call an Ecclesiastical Council

MOTION: That the presentation of the records of the Church be deemed sufficient.

Presentation of the Records of the Candidate⁴¹ Candidate

- Record of Church Membership
- Record of In-care status
- Record of Licensure
- Certification of Baccalaureate Degree
- Certification of Seminary Degree
- Record of CFTS Certification
- Letters of Recommendation
- Certification of Call to (N) Church

MOTION: That the presentation of the records of the candidate be deemed sufficient.

Presentation of faith and Christian experience. Candidate
Roll Call for Public Questioning Moderator and Scribe

⁴⁰ For installation, with or without ordination, records should be presented of the Church's call, including the record of the votes and terms and conditions of the call

⁴¹ Ordained candidates for installation will need to present only 1) record of Church membership; 2) certification of ordination (preferably with a copy of the minutes from the ordination Council); and 3) copy of letter of positive response to the Church's call. Candidates not ordained with a Congregational Council should present academic records and, if from another denomination, certification of "good standing" in the previous denomination.

MOTION: That the presentation by the candidate be deemed sufficient and that the Council sit by itself.

(The candidate, all members of the inviting Church, and all guests will retire, leaving the members of the Council alone. Honorary members and non-delegate members of invited Churches may remain with voice but not vote.)

MOTION: That the Council find the records and procedures satisfactory and proceed with the (N) Congregational Church to the ordination and installation of (N) as (office).

Discussion

Roll Call of the Churches (each Church voting) Moderator and Scribe

Appointment of Notification Committee

(Candidate, Church members, and guests are invited to return to hear the result.)

Review of the Minutes so far

MOTION: That the Moderator and Scribe be authorized to complete the minutes of the Council and to forward copies, each duly signed, to (candidate), the (inviting) Congregational Church of (municipality), the Congregational Library in Boston, the West Coast Congregational Library in Los Angeles, the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, and the (local) Association

Presentation of Program for the service of Ordination

MOTION: That the program be deemed satisfactory.

Motion to recess and dissolve

MOTION: That the Council now stand in recess and be dissolved with the Benediction at the conclusion of the public service.

APPENDIX F - Banquet Program

HONORING
THE REV. (N)

Master of Ceremonies:

WELCOME

PRAYER

DINNER

PRESENTATION OF GUESTS

INTRODUCTION OF PARTICIPANTS

GREETINGS FROM THE NACCC

GREETINGS FROM (N) ASSOCIATION

GREETINGS FROM INDIVIDUALS

NOTES AND LETTERS RECEIVED

PRESENTATION OF GIFT(S)⁴²

RESPONSE FROM NEW MINISTER

PRAYER OF ADJOURNMENT

⁴² This time should be reserved for family or institutional gifts of special note and should not be opened for spontaneous presentations.

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FROM CALL TO SETTLEMENT:

The Preparation, Ordination, and Installation of
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Including

The Call to Ministry

In-Care Status

Licensure

Ordination

Installation

Lloyd M. Hall, Jr.