

# The Interview Guide: Goals, Assessment, and Questions

## General Guidelines

The overarching goal is to discern whether the candidate for credentialing within the Mennonite Church brings to their ministry a clear sense of Christian commitment in their theology and life, an understanding of the unique ministerial role to which they are being called, and a desire to grow in the love and knowledge of God.

This interview guide is correlated to the “Questionnaire for Interview Preparation.” In this way the candidate’s preparation prior to the interview is directed toward the expectations of the church of those who would serve in a ministerial leadership role.

While we should approach this interview in the spirit of being sisters and brothers in Christ, everyone should be mindful that this is more than a friendly get-acquainted visit. There is important work to do during a short period of time. The committee should remember that almost all candidates approach this interview with high expectations. They bring to it a desire to disclose with honesty and openness their faith, their theological understanding, and their vision for ministry.

The interview goals and assessment questions identify what the committee is seeking to learn in this interview. The interview questions are designed to be examples of questions that may help to gain the necessary insight. However, it is always important for the interviewing committee to create its own questions in addition to or in place of those in this guide. In other words, following this guide in a legalistic, literalistic manner is not to use it in the way intended.

Questions which can be answered by *yes* or *no* are not the most helpful. Design questions that will encourage thoughtful responses. Invite personal stories. Ask experience-based questions: not “what would you do if . . .” but “what have you done when. . .”

In every good interview, there are two listening processes going on at the same time. At the first level, the committee is listening attentively to the direct answers given to the questions asked. At another level, the committee ought to be listening to the indirect but revealing insights that the process yields about the character and competence of the candidate. This second form of listening may yield the more significant and important information.

After the credential interview, the committee will want to process what they have heard and observed. The assessment questions may help you consider the more important issues in your decisions regarding the credentialing process. The committee will need not only to make a decision regarding the granting of a credential but will also decide to whom and how this decision will be communicated. The candidate should be informed promptly.

If this interview is for the purpose of deciding on the credential of Licensing toward Ordination, the committee will also need to: 1. Identify special expectations of the candidate to be met during the licensing period. 2. Identify, together with the ministerial candidate, a mentoring pastor who will meet with the candidate on a regular basis for this period.

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### **A. For Licensing Toward Ordination**

What is God like?

Describe some of the highlights of your walk with Christ. What have been some of the struggles?

Is there a moment in your life that you would describe as a conversion? Is there more than one such moment?

What do you do to nurture your relationship with God?

When and how did you know that God wanted you to be a minister?

Name one person who has been a model of Christian faith for you and explain how that person has influenced you.

Who is your favorite Bible character, and why?

In what settings are you sharing your faith walk with others?

With what streams of spiritual life and expression do you identify?

Tell about a time you related to Christians who are different than you?

### **B. Additional Questions for Ordination**

What have been the faith-shaping events of your ministry?

How has your relationship with God been influenced by your ministry?

What intentions do you have to nurture your relationship with God throughout your ministry?

### **C. Questions for Licensing/Commissioning for Specific Ministry**

Any of the above with language appropriately adapted.

## Interview Goal No. 1:

### PERSONAL FAITH

***To discern whether the candidate's relationship with God is appropriate to the ministerial calling.***

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### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Does the candidate have a living and growing relationship with God?

Can he/she talk about that relationship in a way that is helpful to others?

Is she/he able to hear and accept others' faith experiences?

Does the candidate know and accept God's grace for him/herself? For others?

Does the candidate have an adequate sense of call to ministry?

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### **A. For Licensing toward Ordination**

When someone from a non-church background asks you, "What must I do to become a Christian?" how do you answer?

The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* describes what the Mennonite Church believes, but most church members have a few differences with it. Where do you want to debate, challenge or state things differently than the Confession does? Should the Confession be used as a test of faith?

Specific questions on any section of the Confession are appropriate.

Describe one example of what you think would be a heresy.

On what theological issues have you changed your mind from what you had believed in the past?

What one or two hymns capture the central affirmations of your faith?

What uncertainties are there in your own theological understanding?

What writers and teachers have shaped your understanding of theology?

What experiences in your life have shaped your understanding of theology?

### **B. Additional Questions for Ordination**

How has your experience in ministry affected your theology?

What artistic expressions of theology (music, literature, drama, visual arts, etc.) touch you?

At what points does your congregation disagree with the Confession? Where do you find yourself on those points?

What parts of the Bible and what doctrinal themes have predominated in your preaching?

How do you intend to keep growing in your understanding of Christian doctrine?

### **C. Questions for Licensing/Commissioning for Specific Ministry**

Any of the above with language appropriately adapted.

## Interview Goal No. 2:

### THEOLOGY

***To discern whether the candidate has and can express an adequate understanding of Christian doctrine that is compatible with the understandings of the Mennonite Church.***

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### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

What evidence is there that the candidate holds both universal Christian and unique Mennonite theological convictions?

Does the candidate understand *A Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* and can he/she endorse it with integrity even if not agreeing with every line and word?

Can she/he talk about theology intelligently and coherently enough to express it to both believers and unbelievers?

Is there evidence that this person's theological understandings and convictions, while orthodox, at the same time are alive, active, and creative?

Is there enough "give" in the candidate's theology to be able to minister to and with others who hold different views?

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### **A. For Licensing Toward Ordination**

Which of the tasks of ministry excite you? Which do you dread?

What are the particular gifts you bring to ministry? How do you want to exercise those gifts? What is your plan for enhancing them?

What aspects of ministry are the greatest challenge for you? What is your plan for strengthening your ability to do those tasks?

Name someone whom you hold as a model for good ministry. What would you like to emulate about this person's way of functioning?

In the midst of endless needs and opportunities for ministry, what plans do you have in place for taking care of your personal needs (physical, financial, mental, emotional, and spiritual) and for your family commitments?

### **B. Additional Questions for Ordination**

What surprises have you experienced in what you have been asked to do as a pastor? Have you had any disappointments about what you have not been asked or permitted to do?

What has your congregation said to you about the way you do ministry? What have your colleagues said? What does your family say? Do you agree with them?

In what continuing education programs have you participated? How have you chosen these? What plans for continuing education do you have for the future?

What have you learned through your mentoring relationship?

Describe how you have managed the balancing of family, personal, and congregational demands on your time. What would you like to do differently with the tensions between these priorities with respect to your time management?

Describe a situation in your ministry that you would call a conflict. How did you deal with it? Do you want to change anything about your conflict management style? How would you do that?

Are there any personal or family financial issues that arise from being a pastor? How do you deal with these?

### **C. Questions for Licensing/Commissioning for Specific Ministry**

Any of the above with language appropriately adapted.

## Interview Goal No 3:

### PASTORAL FUNCTION AND TASKS

*To discern how well the candidate understands and is able to perform the complex set of tasks and functions expected of a pastoral minister.*

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### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Does the candidate demonstrate a lively interest in the range of activities of the ministry to which she/he is being called?

Are particular areas of responsibility being rejected?

Does the candidate demonstrate an ability to function in the key areas of administration, public ministry and pastoral care?

Is the candidate aware of his/her functional strengths and weaknesses in ministry? Is he/she taking appropriate steps to develop or compensate for inadequacies and also to develop areas of strength and nurture special gifts?

Can this person maintain an appropriate balance between self-care, family commitment and the work of ministry?

Does she/he have a commitment to and a plan for continuing education?

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### **A. For Licensing Toward Ordination**

Tell us about your family of origin and your place in the family. What are your primary memories of your growing up years? What do you appreciate about your family? What do you wish had been different? What steps have you taken to be at peace with those things that you wish had been different?

How do other people see you? Are they right in their perceptions?

What experiences have influenced your personal growth in the past five years?

Where or to whom do you look for support and encouragement? How is that support expressed?

How do you handle failure or those times when things do not go well?

Is there anything in your past that, if it came to light, would be detrimental to your ministry? How have you dealt with those events?

What attitudes or actions should disqualify a person from ministry? What steps will you take to protect yourself from falling into those?

What are your career aspirations?

### **B. Additional Questions for Ordination**

What have you been learning about yourself during the experience of ministry? How have you learned these?

What aspects of ministry have you found the most fulfilling? What about ministry gives you energy and joy? What has been most disappointing? In what ways do these aspects surprise you?

To what will you want to give special attention for your personal growth in the coming years? How will you keep your "being" and "doing" in appropriate balance?

When do you feel you will be emotionally and relationally vulnerable in ministry? Do you ever feel "out of control"? How do you deal with these situations?

### **C. Questions for Licensing/Commissioning for Specific Ministry**

Any of the above with language appropriately adapted.

\*Ethical standards are identified and discussed in *A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership*, pp. 55ff

## Interview Goal No 4:

### CHARACTER

***To discern whether the candidate's character of person is suitable for pastoral ministry.***

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### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Is the candidate appropriately self-aware and growing in this awareness?

Does she/he express a sense of authenticity and genuineness about herself/himself?

Is there adequate evidence of ethical standards\* befitting a Mennonite Christian leader?

Does the candidate have a healthy awareness of how others perceive and experience him/her?

Does and will the candidate maintain appropriate boundaries and self-differentiation in personal relationships?

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### **A. For Licensing Toward Ordination**

(For a person who has been a Mennonite from childhood)  
What are your earliest memories of consciousness of being a Mennonite?

(For a person who came to be a Mennonite as a youth or adult) Tell us about the factors that persuaded you to become a Mennonite.

How do you feel when you are with people who think that being a Mennonite means dressing strangely and driving a horse and buggy?

What cultural characteristics distinguish your congregation from other Mennonite churches or from non-Mennonite churches?

Which of the stereotypes about Mennonites would you like to change?

How have you seen the regional church/area conference deal with conflict? Are you comfortable with the role the regional church/area conference played?

*A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership* is the official definition of how the Mennonite Church understands ministry. What parts of that document do you especially like? What makes you uncomfortable?

### **B. Additional Questions for Ordination**

What aspects of the life of your local community have you especially enjoyed?

How have you used the *Minister's Manual* (Herald Press/Faith and Life Press, 1998)? What has been especially helpful? What other comparable resources have you used?

Has your congregation really received you (and your family) as a part of it? How would you want to change that relationship in the next five years?

In what regional church/area conference or denominational activities have you participated? Do you feel that you belong in those settings?

### **C. Questions for Licensing/Commissioning for Specific Ministry**

Any of the above with language appropriately adapted.

## Interview Goal No. 5:

### COMPATIBILITY

***To discern whether the candidate is sufficiently compatible with the ethos of the Mennonite Church and the calling congregation to gain acceptability as a legitimate minister.***

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### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Is the candidate familiar with and sympathetic to the Mennonite ethos (values, style, history, and culture) as it is experienced and expressed in this particular community?

Does the candidate understand and respect "how we do things" in this regional church/area conference and the denomination?

Does he/she have an underlying love and respect for the church in its local embodiment?

Has the candidate entered (or is she/he able to enter) into the life and work of the community and its people?

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### **A. For Licensing Toward Ordination**

Tell us about the most significant teachers you have had during your preparation for ministry. What was empowering in their role and relationship with you?

What power does a minister have over congregational members?

To whom is a pastor accountable?

If you were asked as Jesus was, "By what authority do you do these things?" what would you answer?

Many people think a minister preaches on God's behalf and relates to people as one of God's representatives. What does this mean to you as a minister?

Describe your expectations of a regional church/area conference minister in their relationship to you and your congregation?

When would you hope not to act differently or be treated differently than others because you are a minister?

### **B. Additional Questions for Ordination**

How has your ministry affected your spouse and children?

Have your relationships with friends changed since you became a pastor?

Describe your typical interaction with people after Sunday morning worship.

What have you been learning about power and your ways of handling power?

Describe an experience where you felt empowered by the pastoral role to do something that you would otherwise not have done?

What has most surprised you about your identity as a minister?

Are you comfortable with being a pastor?

### **C. Questions for Licensing/Commissioning for Specific Ministry**

Any of the above with language appropriately adapted.

## OFFICE OF MINISTRY

***To discern whether the candidate has a sufficient understanding of and claim of the church's office of ministry to be able to "carry the mantle" of ordination.***

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## ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Does the candidate have an adequate but not undue respect for the office of ministry?

Is there adequate recognition of the potential for abusing the power and authority that comes with the office of ministry?

Does the candidate recognize that the ministerial office is both given and earned by one's attitude and actions?

What level of reflection has occurred about the meaning of ordination and its relationship to the role of a representative leader in the church?

Does she/he understand authority both as one having authority and as one under authority?