

2022 General Conference changes to Licensure and Ordination in the Brethren Church

The 2022 General Conference made significant changes to the requirements of a lead or sole pastor in a Brethren Church. As a limited congregational denomination, individual churches have significant liberty in many congregation matters. However, when Brethren delegates at a General Conference, representing their churches, voluntarily choose for the good of the collective church to specify particular procedures, doctrines, or practices, it is the role of the National Office, the regions, and the National Board of Oversight to implement these agreed upon areas, and for local churches to support this oversight.

Brethren churches, pastors, regions, National Office, and the National Board of Oversight need to respond and implement the changes in the Manual of Procedure approved by the delegates at the 2022 General Conference pertaining to the now required licensure or ordination of sole or lead Brethren Pastors. All current and future Brethren sole, or lead pastors will fall under one of the below situations:

- 1) **BRETHREN ELDERS PRIOR TO GENERAL CONFERENCE 2022:** These sole or lead pastors and ordained Brethren elders were not affected by the 2022 General Conference MoP changes. No action needed.
- 2) **BRETHREN LICENSED PASTORS PRIOR TO GENERAL CONFERENCE 2022:** These Sole or Lead Pastors now have the option to A) Continue to pursue ordination immediately or at some point in the future or B) Remain Licensed indefinitely. **While they are licensed, they will be under the supervision of a Supervising Ordained Brethren Elder assigned by the region, and their license will need to be reviewed and renewed annually by their region. They will need to either A) complete the written examination for licensure and all licensing requirements within two (2) years from the end of General Conference 2022 to remain licensed or B) remain licensed under the previous ordination procedure and become ordained within five (5) years of their initial licensure. After the five years, if not ordained, they will then need to be licensed under the new procedure.**
- 3) **BRETHREN COMMISSIONED PASTORS PRIOR TO GENERAL CONFERENCE 2022:** If a Sole or lead pastor was commissioned **prior to General Conference 2022,** they are to be immediately licensed by their region. They will not be required to complete the written licensure exam but will still need to be assigned a Supervising ordained Brethren Elder, annually reviewed and renewed, and follow all other guidelines of the MoP regarding licensure. **This is the ONLY group exempt from following the full process for licensure. However, should a pastor in this group in the future seek to be ordained, they will need to first complete the licensure process and exam, as this is a prerequisite for ordination.**
- 4) **ALL OTHER BRETHREN SOLE OR LEAD PASTORS:** they will need to receive an initial licensure from their region within six months of call or hire, or if already a Sole or Lead pastor and not covered under items 1 – 3, they should be interviewed by the region as soon as possible to receive an initial licensure. After initial licensure, they will have two (2) years to complete the licensure process and licensure exam to remain licensed, with annual review and renewal by the region.

Pastors that do not receive initial licensure within six (6) months of initial hire or call will not be eligible to continue to serve as sole or lead pastors of a Brethren Church.

Licensed Brethren Sole or Lead pastors that do not complete the licensure process and the licensure exam within two (2) years of initial licensure will no longer be licensed and will become ineligible to serve as sole or lead pastors of a Brethren Church.

Churches that do not follow the Manual of Procedure in this area are subject to receiving counsel, interaction, and oversight by their respective region, with the possibility of having their status as a Brethren Church in good standing being lost. Please see regional responsibilities below, items E, F, and G.

Regions have the following responsibilities:

- A) Complete the annual list of commissioned, licensed and ordained pastors annually, completing all required information on all pastors, including supervising elders if licensed, and the date of their last three-year contact survey.
- B) Interview and issue initial licenses to Brethren Pastors serving as sole or lead pastors, and others who may pursue licensure as their first step to ordination and assign them a Supervising Brethren Ordained Elder for oversight.
- C) ANNUALLY review and renew the licenses of all licensed pastors, making sure they make progress in completing the licensure process within two (2) years of initial licensure. This should include a report from their supervising Brethren Ordained Elder.
- D) Interview and prepare those who are seeking ordination by making sure they complete the ordination exam and process BEFORE they apply to be interviewed by the NBO for ordination. A Brethren pastor is to be licensed a minimum of one (1) year before seeking ordination.
- E) Oversee that Brethren churches in their region understand the requirements for Brethren sole or lead pastors to be at least initially licensed within six months of hire, and that the entire licensing process and exam must be completed within two (2) years.
- F) Brethren churches that fail to submit to the current Manual of Procedure in this or any other required area receive council and interaction by the region to reconcile the congregation to the Brethren Church.
- G) Regions also are responsible for determining whether Brethren congregations are in good standing, and if a church is unable or unwilling to be reconciled, to notify the church and the national office that the congregation is not in good standing.

This document seeks to clarify the issues surrounding the changes to licensure and ordination made by the 2022 General Conference. The Executive Board of the Brethren Church, The National Office, Regional Resource Coordinators, Regional Leadership Teams, Regional National Board of Oversight representatives, and the officers of the National Board of Oversight are all available to answer questions and to assist in helping churches navigate these changes that were approved by the delegates representing their congregations.

Approved by the National Board of Oversight

Approved by the National Office

Approved by the Executive Board of the Brethren Church