

Leadership Essentials

A strategic priority of the General Association of General Baptists is to multiply godly and competent pastoral and lay leaders for today and for each new generation. Every group needs strong leadership, and every leader must be called by God and affirmed by the church. The church must discern and cultivate those who have abilities and character qualities for pastoral leadership. The church is also called to encourage those who, by the use of their spiritual gifts, give evidence of potential for spiritual oversight as consecrated deacons.

It is our firm conviction that all leaders are learners. When a leader stops learning, he/she stops leading. Every church and its leadership that wishes to join us must also carry this same conviction. While every association carries its own educational standards, we strongly encourage the constant pursuit of personal education.

It is because of that conviction that we are committed to helping every lay leader and local pastor to grow in their educational endeavors. Throughout the year we offer various pastoral and lay leader events. These events will enable and encourage you and your church in the process of reaching your community for Christ.

The following two sections explain our standing on leadership in the church.

I. Pastors

It is biblical for the church to set apart and ordain particular individuals for the special task of pastoral leadership. These individuals understand and are answering an inward call of the Holy Spirit. They are examined and set apart by public ordination, including the laying on of hands after the pattern of the early church. Although the church must discern and cultivate those who have such endowments, ordination is always first and foremost an act of God's calling and anointing.

These men/women are called to provide Spirit-filled leadership in the local church and to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Ordained ministers commit themselves to equipping the whole body of believers to these ends. Biblically and historically, they are set apart for the study and proclamation of the Word of God, intercessory prayer, the winning of persons to Christ, the administration of the sacraments, and the defense of the gospel.

Within the General Baptist heritage, this ordination may take place within each local church. However, it is common practice among our associations to assist and ordain each candidate through the associational presbytery or ordaining council.

Qualifications for Pastoral Ministry

A person called by God enters a vocation that carries significant responsibilities. An ordained pastor is responsible for dealing with the souls of people. Leading the church in making disciples requires spiritual discernment, character, integrity, and a desire to lead (1 Tim 3:1-7).

Ordained ministers should examine themselves in light of these qualifications.

1. Spiritual Qualifications

- called to ministry
- committed to Jesus Christ as Lord
- evidence of integrity through holiness of heart and life
- displays the fruit of the Holy Spirit
- receives and gives forgiveness
- possesses healthy self-esteem and maintains a positive attitude
- demonstrates faith, creativity, and initiative
- respects people regardless of race, gender, or economic status
- models a teachable spirit

2. Personal Characteristics

- practices spiritual disciplines
- gifted for leadership
- models a balanced life and a healthy self-discipline
- engages in lifelong learning
- submits biblically to authority
- seeks professional and personal accountability
- support from his/her spouse, if married

3. Pastoral Care

- responds appropriately and warmly to people
- embodies a passion for making disciples
- ensures appropriate care for the people of God
- builds up people and inspires hope

4. Communication

- handles the Word of God correctly
- calls people to faith in Christ
- understands the culture, community, and congregation
- utilizes effective means of communication
- affirms and articulates General Baptist history and theology
- prepares thoroughly for public presentation
- persuades people to make godly, life-changing decisions
- challenges the status quo in love, when necessary

5. Leadership

- leads out of personal and corporate prayer
- articulates and casts a vision from God
- sets strategic goals to accomplish the vision
- instills congregational ownership of vision and goals
- mobilizes resources to fulfill the vision
- practices sound principles in accomplishing change
- identifies, attracts, and equips leaders
- participates in the denomination's mission
- promotes involvement in world evangelization

Local churches and associations are encouraged to publicly review their pastors yearly in order to evaluate each ordained minister.

II. Deacons

Not all who express a sense of call are spiritually gifted to be the pastor of a local congregation. There is great diversity in ability, gifting, and in the call of God. Pastors are responsible for preaching God's Word and giving oversight of the congregation in fulfilling the mission and expected outcomes of the church. Many pastors serve as the senior pastor. Others serve as associate pastors with ministry focused to a particular segment or aspect of church life and ministry. All work as a team to fulfill the vision and mission of the church.

There are still others, however, who are called by the church to serve as consecrated deacons. This New Testament office is best defined in terms of servant leadership, assisting the pastor in congregational ministries and service in the world. Deacons complement the work of the pastor. They serve in a particular church and are not available for appointment elsewhere. Their gifts are most suited for a support role, though they may give leadership to a segment of the congregation.

Every deacon should be committed to fulfilling the mission and vision of the church. Senior pastors and local boards are encouraged to exercise great wisdom as they counsel those called of God toward ordination or consecration as a deacon. Pastors are encouraged, at the beginning of the mentoring process, to clarify the role of each deacon. Those who are called by the church and feel gifted to serve in this manner as a deacon begin preparation toward consecration as a deacon. (See "Deacons: Partners in Ministry and Growth," a video training series by Jim Henry. This is available through the General Baptist Congregational Ministries office.)

1. Deacons are members in good standing of the local churches. Deacons must remain active, regular members in their churches. They are people of good reputation and wisdom and filled with the Spirit of God whose gifts and calling have been confirmed by the local church.
2. Deacons are servant-leaders who serve the local congregation according to the gifts and graces given them by God. The deacon is to assist the local pastor to help the church fulfill the Great Commission in its community.
3. Possible area of service for a deacon
 - Worship leader
 - Administrative assistant
 - Sunday School teacher
 - Care and Outreach pastor
 - Spiritual counselor and guide
4. Under the guidance of the pastor and local board any person called to serve as a deacon will be mentored, trained, guided, and examined.

Note: Each association has its own standards and practices for the role of deacon.