

MINISTERIAL RECOGNITION PRACTICES FOR OPEN BAPTISTS

About This Paper (the one page summary)

Open Baptists is developing a framework for how we recognise, support, and hold accountable the pastoral workers in our churches. This paper sets out the Board's current thinking and invites response from the wider membership before any final decisions are made.

The paper addresses four interconnected questions:

- **How should we talk about this?** The word 'accreditation' has meant quite different things in different Baptist associations. In most associations it developed as an accountability process distinct from ordination, but in NSW/ACT it originated instead as a pragmatic workaround for a denominational failure to support the ordination of women, resulting in a usage that is out of step with Baptist practice in most other places. These different histories have made our conversations harder than they needed to be. This paper proposes new terminology — Ordination, Endorsement, and Registration — as a fresh start.
- **Who are we currently missing?** Our existing accreditation framework was designed for pastors who meet a high bar of formation and qualification. Pastors who don't meet that bar can currently serve in our churches with no denominational accountability at all. The paper identifies this as a problem that needs addressing.
- **How many categories do we need?** The Board's current inclination is toward three categories of ministerial recognition rather than two. The paper explains the reasoning, presents the alternatives, and asks for the membership's view.
- **What would this look like in practice?** The paper describes what each of the three categories would require, how ordination and endorsement differ from each other both vocationally and liturgically, and what principles should guide Open Baptist ordination practice. To summarise the recommendations of the three categories:
 - *Registration* is given to anyone working in a pastoral role who meets the basic ongoing safety and supervision expectations.
 - *Endorsement* is given to those who have also fulfilled our formation and discernment requirements and are therefore commended to all our churches.
 - *Ordination* is given to those who we believe are also called to pastoral ministry as a long-term primary vocation, and are ready to take vows to that effect.

The paper also addresses the use of the title 'Reverend' by those who are ordained, and closes with a set of questions the Board is asking the membership to consider.

A theological and historical appendix on Baptist understandings of ordination and pastoral ministry is included for those who wish to explore the background. Readers who are less familiar with Baptist history may find it helpful to read the appendix first.

The Board warmly invites your responses to the questions at the end of the paper, and is planning discussion forums to explore these issues together.

MINISTERIAL RECOGNITION PRACTICES FOR OPEN BAPTISTS

*A Discussion Paper prepared by the Board of Open Baptists
29 April 2026*

Introduction

How should Open Baptists recognise, support, and hold accountable the people who serve as pastors in our churches? That question has several dimensions, and this paper attempts to address them together rather than in isolation — because, as our Board discussions have repeatedly demonstrated, decisions made about one dimension tend to constrain or complicate the others in ways that are not always anticipated.

The immediate occasion for this paper was practical. The Open Baptists Committee for Ministry (CfM) and the Board recently approved the recognition of two experienced pastors who had not previously been ordained or accredited by any Baptist association or Christian tradition. This gave rise to immediate questions: should such pastors also be ordained, and if so how and by whom? Would they be entitled to use the title 'Reverend'? Attempting to answer those questions made it clear that Open Baptists did not yet have a coherent framework for thinking about them.

The dimensions of that framework are these:

1. The question of ordination: whether Open Baptists should ordain pastors, and if so, what ordination means, what it requires, and how it is conducted.
2. The question of other forms of recognition: what the association should offer pastors who are not ordained — whether because they do not believe in ordination, understand their calling as belonging to a particular season rather than a lifelong vocation, or do not yet meet all the prerequisites for ordination.
3. The question of accountability: how we ensure that all pastoral workers serving in our churches — including those who may not qualify for our higher categories of recognition — are subject to some meaningful level of denominational oversight, particularly in relation to the safety of the people in their care.
4. The question of terminology: the words we use to describe these categories have meant different things in different Baptist associations, and until that is named clearly, people will struggle to hear each other in this conversation.

These questions cannot be neatly separated. The meaning we assign to ordination shapes what other forms of recognition can or should mean. The reach of our accountability framework determines whether our recognition processes cover everyone they should. And the terminology we use shapes whether we can even discuss the other questions clearly.

Open Baptists already has an Accreditation Guidelines document, developed early in our life together to meet an urgent practical need. That document has served us well, but it was developed before these questions had been fully considered, and it has, in some respects, already answered them — not always in the direction we might now consciously choose. Part of what this paper does is name that, and propose a framework the Board has deliberately considered rather than inadvertently inherited.

The Board has worked through several drafts of this paper and has reached some preliminary conclusions, which are set out here. These are not presented as settled decisions, but as the Board's current thinking, offered for feedback and discussion by the wider membership before any final decisions are made.

The paper proceeds as follows:

1. A note on terminology, addressing the different meanings 'accreditation' has carried in different Baptist associations, and introducing the new terms this paper proposes.
2. The coverage gap: a potential gap in our current framework that leaves some pastoral workers without any denominational accountability.
3. The key structural decision: whether our framework should have two categories of ministerial recognition or three, with the Board's current inclination stated.
4. A proposed framework: what a three-category model might look like in practice.
5. The distinction between ordination and endorsement: what separates the two higher categories, vocationally and liturgically.
6. Ordination practice: principles for how Open Baptists would conduct ordinations.
7. The title 'Reverend': who should be entitled to use it and why.

The paper closes with a set of questions for discussion and response.

Supplementary material on Baptist understandings of ordination and pastoral ministry is provided in an appendix. Readers who are less familiar with that history may find it helpful to read the appendix before returning to the main paper.

1. A Note on Terminology

Before describing the framework this paper proposes, it is necessary to address a problem of terminology that has complicated our discussions and is likely to complicate the wider conversation if it is not named clearly.

The word 'accreditation' has been used by different Baptist associations in Australia to mean quite different things, and those differences carry significant historical and ecclesiological weight. In most state associations, accreditation was introduced primarily to meet the demands of safe church practice and, increasingly, the legal obligations of the wider society. Previous ordination practices had included rigorous discernment and formation but had no mechanism for ongoing monitoring of a pastor's continuing fitness and safety. Accreditation was developed as an ongoing accountability process to fill that gap, and it was generally understood as distinct from, though related to, ordination.

In NSW/ACT, however, the story is quite different. Accreditation was introduced there not primarily as a safe church or accountability measure, but as a political compromise to resolve an impasse over the ordination of women. The solution was to separate the rite of

ordination — which was handed to the local church — from the process of formal recognition by the association, which was called accreditation. Critically, the substantive requirements for ordination and accreditation were not different; the distinction was purely about who performed the act.

The effect of this arrangement was not simply to change what 'accreditation' meant, but to change what 'ordination' meant. When the same person, with the same formation and the same role, could be either ordained or accredited depending solely on whether their local church or the association performed the act, ordination ceased to function as a distinct category of recognition. For those shaped by this history, ordination and accreditation are not two different things; they are two names for the same thing, administered by different bodies. That is quite different from the way either word functions in most other Baptist contexts — or indeed in wider professional usage, where accreditation typically denotes an ongoing compliance process, while a separate act of recognition marks entry into a vocation.

Since members from NSW/ACT make up the majority within Open Baptists, this history matters enormously for how our conversations about ordination and accreditation have been heard. When others have been speaking about accreditation as a lower-bar safety process distinct from ordination, NSW/ACT members have often been hearing something quite different.

For this reason, the Board has concluded that the word 'accreditation' carries too much varied baggage to serve us well in building a new framework. This paper therefore introduces new terminology for the categories of ministerial recognition that Open Baptists will maintain. The three categories proposed are:

- Ordination — the most comprehensive category, described more fully below.
- Endorsement — the middle category, for pastors who meet the same substantive prerequisites for ministry but are not ordained.
- Registration — the baseline category, providing a minimum accountability structure for all pastoral staff serving in Open Baptist churches.

The Board acknowledges that these names are also not without their histories and connections, and invites feedback on the terminology as part of the wider consultation. If 'Endorsed' were not accepted, 'Registered' could move up to fill that role, with 'Listed' serving as the baseline category. The Board is not wedded to these specific words, but is committed to finding a terminology that is fresh enough to carry new meanings without being weighed down by old ones.

The terminological history outlined above has a further practical consequence. If one reads the definition of accreditation in our current guidelines, and examines the standards and requirements it sets out, it is difficult to identify what additional requirements ordination would need to impose. In other words, our accreditation process already functions, in practice, as an ordination process would. This is not a criticism of the guidelines — they were developed carefully and with good reason — but it means that if we wish to maintain (or from a NSW/ACT perspective, reintroduce) a genuine and meaningful distinction between ordination and other forms of recognition, we will need to revise those guidelines as part of this process. This revision will have practical consequences not only for the shape of ministerial recognition, but also for the question of whether we are able to extend meaningful accountability to all pastoral workers in our churches, regardless of their qualifications — something addressed further in the next section.

2. The Coverage Gap

One of the main reasons many Baptist associations have developed accreditation processes in recent decades has been to meet the expectations of safe church practice and, increasingly, the legal obligations of the wider society. Previous ordination processes included rigorous discernment and formation, but they had no mechanism for ongoing monitoring of a pastor's continuing fitness and safety. Accreditation was developed to fill that gap.

However, most Baptist accreditation policies, including our own, appear to have been modelled on the practice of traditions where ordination is a prerequisite for pastoral appointment. In those traditions, accreditation and ordination apply to the same pool of people. In Baptist life, however, a congregation may appoint as its pastor, or to its pastoral team, a person who lacks the educational qualifications that ordination (or our current high-bar accreditation) would require. At present, such a pastor simply operates outside our accreditation framework, and the association therefore has no role in evaluating their ongoing safety and suitability.

This gap is a genuine problem. If our concern is the safety and wellbeing of the people in our churches, we should be seeking meaningful accountability for all pastoral staff, not only those who also meet the prerequisites for ordination.

Closing this gap is likely to require extending the reach of some form of denominational accountability to all pastoral workers serving in member churches — and urging member churches to ensure that they participate in it.

The question of whether such a requirement can be made mandatory in a Baptist associational context, given the tradition's strong commitment to congregational autonomy, is a genuinely contested one. Some Board members have argued that the association cannot mandate such things for its member churches. Others have noted that the direction of external legal obligations and/or insurance prerequisites is likely to make this a requirement regardless, and that it is better for the association to lead on it than to be forced into it.

The Board has not yet resolved this question, but flags it here as a significant issue requiring further discussion.

3. The Key Decision: Two Categories or Three?

The most important structural decision facing Open Baptists in this area is whether our framework for ministerial recognition will involve two categories or three. The Board's current inclination is toward three categories — Ordination, Endorsement, and Registration — but it is presenting both options to the wider membership for genuine consideration.

The Three-Category Model

The three-category model maintains a clear distinction between all three levels of recognition:

- **Ordained pastors:** those who have been through full formation and discernment processes and are commended by the association to the whole family of churches, and have demonstrated a sense of long-term pastoral vocation and made vows to that effect in a rite of ordination.

- **Endorsed pastors:** those who have been through full formation and discernment processes and are commended by the association to the whole family of churches as meeting the substantive prerequisites for ministry, but are not ordained — whether because they do not believe in ordination, see their ministry as a calling for a particular season rather than a long-term vocation, or simply have not yet sought ordination.
- **Registered pastoral workers:** those who are serving in a pastoral role in an Open Baptist church and are participating in a baseline accountability process, but who do not meet the full prerequisites for endorsement.

The Board favours this model because it reflects a genuine threefold reality in pastoral ministry: there are those who are called and formed for long-term ordained ministry; there are those who are fully qualified but for various reasons are not ordained; and there are those who are serving as pastors but are at an earlier stage of formation or have a different kind of calling. Trying to collapse these three into two categories tends to be somewhat artificial, and the history of Baptist attempts to do so — including the NSW/ACT experience described above — suggests that the distinctions have a way of reasserting themselves regardless.

The Two-Category Model

For completeness, the Board notes that there are two quite different versions of a two-category model, and that they represent genuinely different ecclesiological positions.

Version A collapses the top two categories together, treating Ordained and Endorsed as effectively equivalent — the same recognition under two names, differing only in whether a formal rite has been conducted. This is a coherent position for those who hold a rigorously non-sacramental view of ordination, for whom ceremony cannot do theological work that substantive formation has not already done. On this view, the only meaningful distinction is between those who are fully qualified (whether ordained or endorsed) and those who are at the registration level.

Version B collapses the bottom two categories together, treating Endorsed and Registered as a single broader category of recognised but non-ordained pastors. This preserves a meaningful distinction between ordained and non-ordained ministry, but at the cost of losing the distinction between fully-qualified and baseline-accountability pastors within the non-ordained group.

The Board's view is that both versions of the two-category model lose something that is worth preserving, and that the three-category model better reflects the actual diversity of pastoral ministry in our churches. However, the Board recognises that this involves a judgment on which reasonable people may disagree, and genuinely invites the membership's response.

4. A Proposed Framework

If the three-category model is adopted, the following is offered as a possible structure for what it might look like in practice. It is not a final proposal, but is intended to help focus the discussion.

Ordination would be the most comprehensive category, signifying a long-term pastoral vocation formally recognised by both the association and the local church. It would require:

- A current pastoral appointment in a Baptist church or agency.

- A demonstrated sense of long-term pastoral vocation.
- Appropriate theological and ministry formation.
- A demonstrated skill set for ministry.
- Psychological evaluation.
- All the requirements for registration.
- A rite of ordination conducted in partnership between Open Baptists and the pastor's local church.

Endorsement would be the middle category, for pastors who meet the full substantive prerequisites for ministry but are not ordained. It would require:

- A current pastoral appointment in a Baptist church or agency.
- A genuine sense of pastoral vocation (which may be understood as a calling for a particular season rather than a primary and defining long-term commitment).
- Appropriate theological and ministry formation.
- A demonstrated skill set for ministry.
- Psychological evaluation.
- All the requirements for registration.

Registration would be the baseline category, oriented primarily toward safety and accountability. It would require:

- A current pastoral appointment in an Open Baptist church or agency.
- Satisfactory character assessment and alignment with Open Baptist Principles.
- Current police and Working with Children checks.
- Participation in safe church training.
- Participation in professional development and supervision.

All three categories would be subject to the same ongoing requirements: regular safety checks, professional development, supervision, and continued alignment with Open Baptist Principles. Endorsement and Registration would not be conditional on ordination. Ordained pastors would automatically meet the requirements for endorsement.

The table on the next page illustrates how the current requirements in our Accreditation Guidelines might be distributed across the three categories:

Criterion	Prerequisites for Ordination	Prerequisites for Endorsement	Prerequisites for Registration	Ongoing (all)
Pastoral vocation	Long term, vowed	Current		
Pastoral appointment	✓	✓	✓	
Character	✓	✓	✓	
Theological/ministry qualification	✓	✓		
Ministry skills	✓	✓		
Psychological evaluation	✓	✓		
Alignment with Open Baptist Principles	✓	✓	✓	✓
Police & Working with Children checks	✓	✓	✓	✓
Safe church training	✓	✓	✓	✓
Regular professional development	✓	✓	✓	✓
Supervision	✓	✓	✓	✓

The Board is also of the view that member churches should be urged to ensure that all pastors they appoint are at least registered, and to be aware that it may not be long before we are either legally compelled to require it, or uninsurable if we don't. Requiring it would close the coverage gap identified earlier, and ensure that all pastoral ministry in Open Baptist churches is subject to some level of denominational accountability. The Board acknowledges that such a requirement would be in tension with the tradition of congregational autonomy, and invites discussion on how that tension might best be navigated.

5. The Distinction Between Ordination and Endorsement

Both ordained and endorsed pastors are fully recognised by Open Baptists and are equally commended to the whole family of our churches. The difference between them is not one of adequacy, rank, or status. An endorsed pastor is not a pastor who has fallen short of ordination; they are a pastor who has met all the substantive prerequisites for ministry and has been formally recognised as such by the association, but for whom ordination is not the appropriate or desired form of that recognition.

The distinction between ordination and endorsement is best understood in terms of two related but separable questions: the nature of the pastoral vocation being expressed, and the kind of act by which the association recognises it.

On the vocational question, ordination expects pastoral ministry to be the candidate's primary and defining vocational commitment — the centre around which their working life is oriented, even if other work is possible alongside it. An endorsed pastor may hold their pastoral vocation alongside other vocational possibilities without pastoral ministry

necessarily being the defining centre. This might be because they understand their calling as belonging to a particular season of life rather than as a permanent orientation, or because they are at an earlier stage of discernment about the long-term shape of their vocation. However, the vocational distinction is not the only reason a person might appropriately seek endorsement rather than ordination. Some pastors hold a sense of vocation that is as strong and centred as any ordained pastor's, but reject ordination on theological grounds, typically because they hold a rigorously non-sacramental view — that is, they do not believe that a rite can be as spiritually formative as ordination claims to be.¹ The endorsed category is therefore genuinely heterogeneous, and is designed to honour both kinds of pastor without conflating them.

On the question of the kind of associational act involved, ordination and endorsement differ significantly in kind. Ordination is a full liturgical rite, normally conducted as a stand-alone service, with two central foci: the making of vocational vows, in which the ordinand commits themselves before God and the gathered community to pastoral ministry as their primary calling; and the laying on of hands, which symbolises both the setting apart of the pastor for this vocation and the reception of God's blessing upon it. Ordination is conducted in partnership between Open Baptists and the pastor's local church, because it concerns both the pastor's relationship to the whole family of churches and to their particular congregation.

Endorsement, by contrast, is essentially an associational act — the formal mechanism by which Open Baptists recognises that a pastor has completed the required formation and commends them as suitably qualified for pastoral ministry in our churches. Its natural ceremonial register is closer to a graduation or professional commissioning than to an ordination. An endorsement would typically take the form of a brief rite embedded within a larger association event, focusing on the formation that has been completed, the formal presentation of the association's recognition, and prayer for the pastor's ministry. There are no vocational vows, because endorsement does not insist on the particular vocational commitment that ordination requires. Open Baptists will prepare guidelines for the conduct of endorsement rites, as well as a model ordination service, to help our churches and association mark these occasions appropriately.

6. Ordination Practice

Regardless of the number of categories, if the chosen model includes ordination, Open Baptists will need to develop an ordination practice. The following principles reflect the Board's current thinking:

- Open Baptists — while not making ordination a prerequisite for endorsement, registration, or pastoral appointment — should honour and encourage ordination for those who believe themselves, and are believed by their churches, to be called to pastoral ministry as a long-term primary vocation, and are ready to make vows to that effect.
- Where a pastor has been previously ordained under similar standards by another Baptist association or another Christian tradition, Open Baptists will normally recognise the continuing validity of that ordination, unless the Board has specific grounds for concern about the tradition or the circumstances of the ordination.
- Where an experienced but unordained pastor meets the prerequisites for ordination and wishes to be ordained, or a new candidate completes the prerequisites, Open Baptists should encourage, support and provide for their ordination.

¹ Traditionally understood, ordination claims to have the same sort of sacramental efficacy that baptism and marriage are usually seen as having. It is not a claim that the rite bestows any new powers, but that making life-changing vows in public and seeking God's blessing on that vowed life is spiritually transformative and strengthening.

- Ordination services should be conducted as a demonstrable partnership between Open Baptists as an association and the pastor's local church, with both actively participating in the rite.
- Open Baptists should prepare and approve a model ordination rite, with some elements fixed (including the ordination vows) and others adaptable to local context.
- The Board should appoint one or more representatives to guide the planning of ordination services and to approve adaptations of the model rite.
- Ordination should be regarded as normally valid for life, including in retirement. Recognition of ordained status would be withdrawn only if: the person renounces it; the person is stripped of it for misconduct or other serious disciplinary reasons; or the person has permanently abandoned Christian ministry with no intention of resuming the living out of their ordination vows.

7. The Title 'Reverend'

The title 'Reverend' is, in most ecumenical usage, a marker of ordained status. The Board's current inclination is to authorise (but not require) its use by those who are ordained, whether by Open Baptists or by another tradition whose ordination we recognise. Pastors who are endorsed or registered, but not ordained, may use the title 'Pastor' instead.

The Board acknowledges that this is likely to raise questions for any non-ordained pastors from NSW/ACT who have been using the title 'Reverend' under their existing accreditation, and who may feel that this framework asks them to relinquish something they currently hold. The Board is sensitive to that concern, and notes that it is partly addressed by the fact that there is already a significant overlap between those who prefer not to have a sacramental ordination rite and those who prefer not to use the title 'Reverend' in any case. Nevertheless, this is a matter on which feedback from the wider membership would be particularly welcome.

The Board also acknowledges that there is broader diversity of practice and sentiment around this title, including discomfort in some quarters with any title that could imply a hierarchy.

Next Steps

The Board is now circulating this paper and holding discussion forums with the wider membership, using the questions below as a guide. If the Board's direction is endorsed through this consultation process, the following steps would then be required:

1. A revision of the Accreditation Guidelines, to be undertaken jointly by the Board and the CfM, in light of the agreed framework.
2. The preparation of a model ordination rite for approval by the Board.
3. The formulation of prerequisites and processes for ordination and endorsement.

Questions for Discussion

The Board invites responses to the following questions from our churches, pastors, and members:

1. Does the three-category framework (Ordained / Endorsed / Registered) described in this paper seem workable and appropriate for Open Baptists? If not, which of the two-category alternatives would you prefer, and why?
2. The paper introduces new terminology — Ordination, Endorsement, and Registration — to replace the existing language of ordination and accreditation. Do these terms work for you? If not, what alternatives would you suggest?
3. Do you think the existing Accreditation Guidelines should be revised to create a clearer distinction between the categories? What concerns, if any, do you have about such a revision?
4. Should Open Baptists require member churches to ensure that all their pastors are at least registered? How do you think the tension between this requirement and congregational autonomy should be navigated?
5. What do you think ordination means, or should mean, that is distinct from endorsement? Does the understanding of ordination as involving a particular sense of long-term pastoral vocation resonate with you? (See the appendix for background on this and other understandings.)
6. Are there pastors or ministry contexts in your church or network who would fall through the gaps of the current accreditation framework? How should Open Baptists seek to cover them?
7. Do you think the use of the title 'Reverend' should be restricted to ordained pastors? Do you have any concerns about how this title is understood or used?
8. Are there aspects of the ordination practice outlined above with which you agree or disagree? What would you want a model ordination rite to emphasise?

APPENDIX

Baptist Understandings of Pastoral Ministry and Ordination

Baptist Understandings of Pastoral Ministry

Baptist convictions about pastoral ministry arise from our understandings of the nature of the church and the nature of shared discipleship. Baptist ecclesiology centres on the autonomous local congregation, rather than on a denominational hierarchy, and holds that the authority for the full range of Christian ministry is located in the gathered local congregation as a whole, rather than in a status conferred on any individual within it. One implication of withholding baptism until a person makes their own life commitment to discipleship is that baptism becomes a kind of ordination to the shared ministry of the church. One Anglican scholar went so far as to observe that Baptist ecclesiology might be seen not so much as abolishing the clergy but as abolishing the laity (by making quasi-clergy of all).

Indeed, Baptists have consistently championed the doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers, though — under the influence of modern individualism — they have frequently misinterpreted it as the priesthood of each believer. The doctrine was never meant to imply that every believer is individually a priest, but that priesthood is conferred communally upon the whole gathered church. Priesthood will often be exercised by individuals, but the specific ministries of individuals are always to be understood in relation to the shared ministry of the whole body.

Nevertheless, like most churches, Baptists have recognised that within that shared ministry, different people have different gifts and callings, and that some are gifted and called to lead and guide the church through a specific ministry of Word and Sacrament. Baptists have frequently spoken of ‘setting apart’ certain people to this role. The phrase does not imply that pastors are no longer within the congregation, but that the calling to which they are set apart has its origin in Christ rather than only in the church. As the Baptist Union of Victoria describes it, Baptist ministers accept their office from the Lord of the Church, and while they are ‘servants of the Church’, the Church is not master over them.

This means that a pastor is both insider and partial outsider, and may sometimes be pulled in two directions. This tension is to be worked out relationally in the shared search for the mind of Christ, not resolved by asserting power. The pastor’s role might be likened to that of a playing coach in a sports team: the coach has a particular role at training during the week and a quite different one on match day — and on match day it need not be obvious to a spectator which player is also the coach. The pastor’s aim is to encourage and develop the gifts of all members so that the ministry of the whole is an integrated communal offering. The more successfully a pastor does this, the less conspicuous the pastor need be. Baptist ministry should be overtly the activity of the people, and should be free from hierarchical patterns that are more than a recognition of differing gifts and functions.

Baptist Understandings of Ordination

Given this ecclesiology, Baptist ordination practice has been understood as a matter of ‘intrinsic gift instead of extrinsic office’. It is a recognition of gifts and an affirmation by the church that a person is called, equipped and trusted to fulfil a particular role, but is not seen as enabling a person to do things which they could not otherwise have done as part of the congregation.

It is important to ask what the church is ordaining people to, and how that is distinguished from the shared ministry into which all are baptised. There have been two main schools of thought. One, exemplified by British Baptist Paul Beasley-Murray, holds that 'leadership is the distinguishing mark of the ordained'. The difficulty with this view is the risk of it sliding toward a pastor-as-ruler model that most Baptists would regard as a betrayal of their tradition. The alternative, longer-established view — more widely accepted among both Baptists and their ecumenical partners — is that pastors are ordained to feed Christ's people through the ministry of Word and Sacrament. As British Baptist theologian John Colwell writes:

Ordination is specific to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament, to the proclaiming of the 'unsearchable riches of Christ', to the tending of God's flock. It may be appropriate for some ordained ministers to act as leaders of local congregations. It may be appropriate for some ordained ministers to utilise counselling skills. It may be appropriate for some ordained ministers (in true servant spirit) to stack chairs or to sweep floors. But none of this is either the focus or the essence of ordained ministry.

This view still recognises that the ministry of Word and Sacrament does not 'belong to' the ordained pastor, but to Christ and his Church. Other people may exercise these ministries too, but ordained pastors are called and set apart to specialise in them.

Four Strands of Thinking and Practice

While there is broad agreement on some foundational convictions about pastoral ministry, Baptist practice on ordination itself has varied considerably. Four main strands can be identified.

Ordination equated with accreditation. This increasingly common view has emerged as accreditation processes have been developed to meet safe church and legal requirements that previous ordination practices did not address. In some associations, the concept of ordination has been effectively subsumed into accreditation. One indicator of this is when pastors are required to cease using the title 'Reverend' if their accreditation lapses, rather than only if they are stripped of their ordination. The BANSWACT practice is an example of this strand, although they arrived at it for a different reason – as a compromise position to break a deadlock over the ordination of women.

Ordination equated with induction. An older strand, which has existed as a minority view through most of Baptist history. On this view, ordination has no meaning apart from the holding of a particular office in a particular local congregation. Pastors who conclude one ministry appointment would cease to be ordained until ordained again to another.

Ordination as entering a vowed life. This view, probably the most widely practised, distinguishes between ordination, induction, and accreditation. In ordination, pastors make vows to exercise the ministries of Word and Sacrament in service of Christ and his church for life. In induction, they commit to living out those vows with a particular congregation. In accreditation, they submit to ongoing accountability for their fitness for ministry. On this understanding, ordination is analogous to baptism or marriage: a public commitment to a lifelong pathway defined and shaped by vows. Ordained pastors carry their ordination into retirement, because it is part of who they are, not only what they do. This view is sometimes described as more 'sacramental', though only in the same sense that Baptists often speak of marriage as sacramental — a significant life-changing public vow.

A pragmatic view. Some Baptists see no strong theological reason for ordination but maintain the practice for pragmatic reasons: the title 'Reverend' opens doors in some community contexts; a culture that values rites of passage finds it meaningful; and ordination practices that share common ground with other traditions make ecumenical cooperation easier.

Who Does the Ordaining?

In most of Baptist history, and most of the world, ordinations have been carried out by local churches, sometimes with representatives of the association or neighbouring churches present as witnesses or participants.

In Australia, the associational involvement has generally gone further, with ordinations authorised and conducted by the associations, while representatives of the local congregation are involved in the key symbolic action of the laying on of hands. This practice has generally been regarded as expressing the commendation of pastors to the whole family of churches, and as thereby strengthening the credibility of their ordination.

In NSW/ACT, this trend was reversed and ordination was returned to local churches — though, as noted in the main paper, for the entirely pragmatic purpose of breaking a deadlock over the ordination of women, rather than for principled theological reasons.

The four understandings outlined above have some bearing on this question. The ordination-as-accreditation model fits naturally with association-conducted ordination, since accreditation processes are associational. The ordination-as-induction model favours local church ordination. The ordination-as-vowed-life model and the pragmatic view can comfortably accommodate either.

This appendix draws on the following sources among others:

- Paul Beasley-Murray, 'The Ministry of All and the Leadership of Some' in *Anyone for Ordination?* (Marc, 1993)
- Paul F. Bradshaw, 'Patterns of Ministry', *Studia Liturgica* 15 (1981)
- John E. Colwell, 'The Sacramental Nature of Ordination' in *Baptist Sacramentalism* (Paternoster, 2003)
- Paul S. Fiddes, 'Authority in People-Pastor Relationships' in *Baptist Faith & Witness* (Samford, 1995)
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