

Practices and Procedures:

(i) Names and Titles:

In the Baptist Association of Belize churches, four offices are recognized in the local church. These are:

- (a) Pastor
- (b) Deacon
- (c) Teachers
- (d) Missionary

Where the office of deacon is concerned some churches choose to only recognize males to serve.

In the Baptist Association of Belize churches, names and titles are used in recognition of those who **serve** as leaders in the congregations and management committee.

1. **Pastor** - male person called by the local congregation to carry out the functions of equipping the saints and leading in the administration of the church business.
 1. a The title of '**Reverend**' precedes the name of the pastor in recognition of his ordination.
 1. b **Lay Pastor** - Some congregations are led by men who have not received formal training as pastor but have been recognized by the church to carry out the normal functions of a pastor. At some later date they may be called officially by the congregation as its pastor.
2. **Deacon** - Person called out by the local congregation to serve along side their pastor. Terms of service is determined by the individual congregation.
3. **Teacher** - Usually refers to the person with responsibility of giving instruction in the Sunday school class.
4. **Missionary** - Refers to person called and sent out by the church to take to Gospel through an area of ministry.

Organizational titles:

1. **President** - The elected head of the Baptist Association of Belize is given the title of President.
2. **Chairman** - The elected regional leader is given the title of Chairman.

Committees, Boards and Councils are also headed by a chairperson.

(ii) Church Membership in Baptist Association of Belize

1. All churches which were started by Southern Baptist missionaries on assignment in Belize as well as all churches started by Conservative Baptist missionaries on assignment in Belize became the first members of the Baptist Association of Belize when the Baptist Church of Belize was incorporated on 9th October 1976.

2. Above mentioned churches became "mother churches", therefore all churches started by these churches were/are "born" into the Baptist Association of Belize family and became/become members of the Baptist Association of Belize.

3. There are and will be other Baptist churches in the country which do not fall under 1 or 2 above, for these the Constitution states: "Any Baptist church of like faith and practice in this country may be admitted to the association upon official application and majority vote of member churches, and the fulfillment of all requirements that may be requested." (Baptist Association of Belize Constitution, Article I Admission, see Article II for information on Withdrawal/dismissal).

Official application shall be in writing addressed to the President and shall be presented at the Annual General meeting for members to vote on.

4. The office of the Baptist Association of Belize shall present to every member church a Certificate of Membership.

(iii) Classification of Congregations

1. **Mission Point:** Group led by members of an established church. Group is engaged in Bible study, evangelism and worship on a semi-regular basis. Group does not have a set meeting place nor have they identified persons within the group who are capable to begin to lead in the group's activities. Involvement of members of the mother church is primary for its continued existence. The Evangelism process is being applied. The Discipleship process is in its beginning stages.

2. **Mission:** Group meets regularly for Bible study, evangelism and worship, has identified and is meeting in a set place and has identified and is using members of the group to lead in the group's activities. Involvement of mother church is secondary for its existence. The Evangelism and Discipleship processes are integral parts of the group's activities. Mission congregations are considered for Association business as a "church". i.e. they participate as a church with all Association privileges and responsibilities.

3. **Church:** Group meets for regular Sunday and midweek worship and continues to be engaged in evangelism. Has identified and is meeting in a set place. Has identified and is using members from the group to carry out its activities. Mother church involvement is in cooperative spirit facilitated by the Association. Evangelism and Discipleship processes are integral parts of the group's activities.

It is the desire of the Association that all congregations move to the "Church" classification as soon as possible. However, this process can only be facilitated and not forced. Once the congregation has moved to the "Church" classification, it is expected that the congregation will be facilitated by the Association to organize its members and become constituted as soon as possible. A copy of the church's constitution and other documents related to its functioning as adopted by the congregation should be forwarded to the Association's office for filing.

(iv) Calling of a Pastor in the local Church of the Baptist Association of Belize:

Every congregation is at liberty; guided by the Holy Spirit to recognize and call as its pastor that or those persons God has prepared to take up the office of Pastor.

Where the local congregation does not have available, specific steps to be taken in carrying out such procedure, the following is recommended by the Baptist Association of Belize.

1. The secretary of the church shall call a special meeting (or during the church's regular business meeting) and a pulpit committee shall be elected from within the membership.

This committee shall be comprised of at least five persons, one of which will be named moderator by the congregation.

2. This committee shall meet regularly for prayer as it deems necessary.

2. The committee shall then meet and all names of candidates shall be made known.

4. The committee shall meet not less than five days later to cast votes for a nominee. All votes shall be by secret ballot.

Voting shall continue until the committee is satisfied that they have a majority in agreement of the nominee.

5. The moderator shall then approach the nominee to make known the committee's decision to submit his name to the congregation for him to be called as pastor.

6. The moderator shall also make known to the Chairman of the Region and Chairman of the Regional Pastors Council, the committee's decision.

7. The Pastors' Council shall thereafter meet with the congregation and make known its recommendations as to the church's decision to call the nominee as pastor. Only those nominations which the Regional Pastors Council supports shall be eligible for ordination and marriage license approval by the Baptist Association of Belize. Notwithstanding this, the congregation may proceed with calling of a nominee without the support of the Regional Pastors Council.

8. The congregation shall meet in a special meeting or regularly scheduled business meeting to cast votes for the calling of the nominee as pastor.

In the event that a congregation does not have a decision to fill the post of pastor at the end of the above procedures, the congregation shall allow the church board to administer and carry out the ministry of the church. A deacon or leader recognized by the congregation shall lead the board.

The Regional Executive and Pastors Council shall at all time be available to the congregation to provide recommendations.

Advice shall include but not be limited to:

(a) organization of the church board,

(b) calling of a lay pastor.

(v) Marriage Officers:

1. Only ordained pastors who have been licensed by the Government of Belize at the request of the Baptist Association of Belize shall have the authority to conduct marriage ceremonies.

2. Marriage Officers are to ensure that: every couple (male and female) requesting marriage,

(a) Are permitted to do so in accordance with the Marriage Laws of Belize,

(b) Are in possession of a valid marriage license or

(c) Publication of banns has been duly carried out in accordance with the Marriage Laws of Belize.

3. Marriage officers shall take on the responsibility to provide to the couple premarital counseling sessions.

4. Marriage Officers shall fill out and file in accordance with the Marriage Laws of Belize all necessary forms.

The following is suggested as normal procedures to be followed by all Marriage officers and churches in relation to those who request marriage ceremony.

(a) That the couple first agrees to attend premarital counseling sessions before the date of the marriage is announced.

(b) That the pastor or marriage officer be responsible to provide said counseling for up to six sessions prior to the ceremony.

(c) That the marriage officer shall not be obligated to conduct marriage ceremony where there is a personal concern with:

(i.)The time and date,

(ii.) Age of any or both of the parties even if legally allowed to be married,

(iii.)Issues which the parties involved refuse to address and the marriage officer clearly identifies as detrimental to the relationship,

(iv.)Parties requesting marriage ceremony are of a different denomination or Baptist congregation.

Documentation required for pastors requesting Marriage Officer License:

(a) Letter from the congregation and Pastor to the President of the Baptist Association of Belize requesting for the pastor to be granted marriage officer license.

(b) Receipt of possession of Marriage Laws of Belize along with a statement signed by the pastor in which he makes known that he is familiar with the Marriage Laws of Belize or requires further assistance in interpreting the Laws.

(c) Duplicate copies of Ordination certificate, birth certificate and identification pages from passport.

All the above shall be submitted to the Association's office for processing.

For more information on ordination, see the Policy Manual of the Baptist Association of Belize.