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| SLOUGH BAPTIST CHURCH POLICY | Testing of Calling |
| POLICY NUMBER: SBCP-28 | |



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| Primary Responsibility: | Pastor | |
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| Issued: | 7 th July 2025 |
| Status: | Final |
| Review Period: | 5 years |
| Next Review Date: | July 2030 |

DISTRIBUTION

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| Original | Slough Baptist Church Office |
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Purpose and Scope

This “testing of calling” describes the process between when a person expresses a sense of calling and when the church formally supports that person.

It is not intended to imply that God only calls people privately, or that the church does nothing unless and until somebody says “I’m called”. There will be times when the Holy Spirit guides the church as a body to set people apart for a particular work, or when folk within the church recognise particular gifting in someone else, and so nominate people to take on roles.

The aim of this “testing of calling” process is to discern whether a candidate has a real calling, which involves the church as a community working out what God wants and responding to it in this situation. Equally, the process aims to support the individual throughout – whether the call is confirmed or not. The steps listed are the formal process that will occur, but it is expected that a lot more discussion & prayer will continue throughout the process. If at any stage it is decided that the church will not support the candidate’s application at this time, then the interviewers will feed back to them the reasons for the decision.

Wider implications

This start-point assumes an understanding of how God calls. This requires the church’s teaching and discipleship programmes to be effective in equipping Christ’s people for works of service. While further training or experience may be necessary, it is primarily the responsibility of the church to prepare candidates for service.

It also assumes that those who approach the leadership to explore a sense of calling are already both fully-committed Christians and church members or associates.

The leadership of the church should be encouraging and challenging members where appropriate toward serving God beyond the bounds of Slough Baptist Church. There is a role for the Mission

Links team in this respect, to present the needs and opportunities for service outside our church, and to actively encourage members to regularly seek God's direction for their lives.

Process

1. *First contact – foundations*

The candidate who feels called has an informal meeting with two people from the Trustees, Ministry Staff or Mission Links Team as appropriate. This will include praying together.

The purpose of this discussion is for the candidate to explain how they feel called, and for the leadership to explain the way the church proceeds. The discussion will also look at:

- **Calling** – what are they being called to and how did this call arise?
- **Character** – is there evidence of Christian character, for example, how do they live up to the requirements for Elders or Deacons in the Bible?
- **Current situation** – is there evidence of appropriate gifting and that God is speaking/working through the candidate in our church (or their previous church), their work and their neighbourhood?

Perfection is not expected in any/all of these areas, but they will give an indication of suitability for further consideration. The outcome will be to decide jointly whether to continue to the formal process.

2. *Formal interview – focus, fit, formation*

This interview is conducted by two or more people from the Trustees, Ministry Staff or Mission Links Team. Again, this will involve prayer.

The interview looks at three areas:

1. **Focus** – whether the calling is clear and specific. What organisation will they serve with? If the candidate has not already got an agency or missionary society in mind, then this interview will recommend contacting appropriate organisations.
2. **Fit** – what is the candidate's **SHAPE**?¹:
 - **Spiritual gifting**
 - **Heart**
 - **Abilities**
 - **Personality**
 - **Experiences**Where there are gaps, training or further experience will be advised. The interviewers will also look at how the calling fits with the church's vision and mission.
3. **Formation** – does the candidate exhibit the **MARKS** of a disciple?²:
 - **Mature disciple of Jesus**
 - **Accountable**
 - **Relational approach to leadership**
 - **Kingdom-focused**
 - **Servant-hearted and sacrificial**

¹ Based on the concept described in *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren, which is summarised here: <https://www.pastorrick.com/current-teaching/devotional/find-your-calling-in-your-shape>

² BAPTISTS TOGETHER – Marks of Ministry
<https://www.baptist.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=244139&view=browser>

The outcome will be to decide whether to propose to the church members that we support this calling, or whether to wait (for example, to wait until more information is available, or until further personal development has taken place).

3. *Recommendation to the Church Members' meeting – church support*

At this stage, the people who conducted the formal interview will propose to the membership that the church should support the candidate in their calling. This will typically involve two church members' meetings.

The first meeting will be for presenting information about the candidate and their calling. There should be time for questions and time for prayer, both in that meeting and afterwards.

Before the second meeting, the interviewers will need to finalise what sort of support the candidate will require from the church in terms of training and funding.

Then, at the second members' meeting, members should take a formal vote confirming that the church both recognises the calling and commits to support the candidate in that calling. The candidate will be encouraged to build a support group within the church to oversee their financial, spiritual and emotional support.

Similar to previous stages, the outcome may instead be to recommend further preparation before the church commits support.