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southern counties baptist association

Regionally Recognised Leaders

A guide for local churches
in the discernment and
commendation of individuals
to regionally recognised leadership



What is a REGIONALLY RECOGNISED LEADER (RRL)?

Baptists have a tradition in which leadership and oversight – whether pastoral, pioneer or evangelistic – has been exercised not only by those whose primary calling in life is ordained ministry on behalf of the wider union of Baptist churches, but also by those who live out their Christian vocation in a secular context and exercise leadership in a part-time capacity, whether stipended or (more often) voluntary. Previously these have often been designated as ‘Lay Pastors’ but increasingly it is recognised that leadership and oversight while always pastoral may include others of the so-called fivefold gifts of Ephesians 4 gifts and may take place in missional groups or contexts beyond a single congregation.

This document is an introduction to this leadership ministry and a guide for churches in seeking to discern the possible call to regionally recognised leadership of one of their members. While an individual has their own sense of call to ministry recognition of this call and gifting will also come from other Baptist Christians. In church meetings and gatherings members recognise and affirm each other’s gifts. A careful and prayerful consideration of a candidate’s potential and call is a vital part of developing and recognising leaders since it is within the local church that a gift for leadership ministry is first discerned.

The Regionally Recognised Leadership Vision: Healthy Churches in Relationship for Mission

SCBA are committed to the wider Union vision to ‘grow healthy churches in relationship for mission.’ Identifying and developing Regionally Recognised Leaders is one strategic way of fulfilling this vision. Regionally Recognised Leaders are tested, trained and formed within the Association and their exercise of leadership will be among

the churches and communities of the Association. As a church seeks to discern a possible call by one of their members to this ministry it is important to grasp that such leadership is different to that of ordained and accredited ministers. It will be given more through influence than being structural or as an 'office-holder'. They would not always have an official role in the structures of their local church (eg elder or deacon) although they might; nor would they have a structural role in the Association. But their gifts, training and formation will make an important contribution to re-imagining and re-shaping for mission among our communities. Regionally Recognised Leaders may take on overall oversight within a congregation, but the general expectation is that they will work alongside and with the oversight of others either within or local to the group or church with which they are involved. Their role may well be in a community or work-place position where they are able to exercise strategic and spiritual leadership.



Association Recognition and Process

SCBA are able to recognise and commission such ministry and it is to the Association that a candidate is commended. A candidate should be encouraged to ask their Regional Minister for details of the recognition process and training. The Association and Regent's Park College will work together with the candidate and church to test the call, and provide training, formation and support. Those seeking to be Regionally Recognised Leaders will need the commendation of their

local church and be interviewed by a group set up by the SCBA Leadership and Ministry Development Strategy Group. The candidate's sense of calling is tested first by those who know him/her well and who have seen him/her at work in the local church and community, and then secondly by a group of people who do not know him/her at all but who are experienced in discerning the call of God on a person's life.

Applicants for this recognition will normally have been baptised as believers and will need to have been in membership of a Baptist Church for two years.

- The normal process of training and formation will be two years at *Footsteps* (a part-time course which is a partnership between the Association and Regent's Park College), including the written assignments, together with experience and practice gained in the local church and beyond. Prior learning from those within the Association and those moving in from other areas will be judged on a case by case basis. Each person will have a mentor for these two years, either from another local church or sometimes from within, who will help them reflect on the practice and their learning.
- Those seeking to be Regionally Recognised Leaders will complete a *portfolio* (see below) which will combine elements of study, reflection, evidence of competencies and commendation by others.
- SCBA will commend, as appropriate, those who move into other Associations, who will then have the opportunity to fit into the categories a different Association might use.

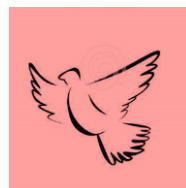
- The Association will offer continued support and encouragement to Regionally Recognised Leaders, and as part of this it will maintain a list. Regionally Recognised Leaders will be expected to engage in ongoing development through being part of ongoing leadership development groups and training, as a requirement for the continued commendation of the Association.
- The Association will work with churches who commend such people to be trained and formed, so that their gifts and learning can be used in the ongoing mission of the church.

Being a Regionally Recognised Leader involves **discernment, formation and on-going development**

Discernment

The process of discerning and testing whether an individual is called by God to this leadership ministry will involve a number of steps:

- An inner, personal openness to God's calling for this ministry.
- The testing and confirmation of your call and gift by the local Baptist church of which you are a member.
- An initial testing of your call and potential for this kind of missional ministry by the Association. This first interview, early on in the process, is important. It may prevent



years of misdirected time and energy in study, as well as disappointment at the end of the process.

- At the end of the course and after two years of leadership ministry experience, the final testing of skills and character will be an interview with the Association arranged by your Regional Minister to test skills, calling and character.

If commended by the Association, the candidate's name will be added to the Association List of Regionally Recognised Leaders.

Formation

Responsibility rests on those who serve as RRLs among God's people to be as well-equipped as possible for their ministry. A candidate may be impatient to get on with the work, but taking time now to lay a good foundation will yield returns later when busyness tends to squeeze out space for study and when good habits of reading, reflection and devotion are harder to establish.

It is vital that the candidate develops and nourishes their relationship with God. This involves disciplines which enable a person to grow and mature as a Christian. These disciplines will include a sustained commitment to the study of the Scriptures, a life of prayer and an arrangement for an ongoing mentoring-type relationship.

As part of this formation process candidates will need to put together a portfolio, which will include:

- Application form (copied to Association and College)
- Church commendation
- References (Four, at least one of whom must be a minister and two should have heard you lead/speak/preach). If you have

relevant previous or current college formation/training, please include the Principal as one of your referees.

- Association interviews
- 14 written assignments
- Reports from a mentor
- Spiritual journal
- Child protection training
- Two reports from observation of practice (eg leading a group or service, preaching, leading an event)

A requirement of the process is that the candidate is formally observed in contexts of both **communication** and **facilitation**. These might involve giving a presentation or leading worship/preaching and enabling a team to work together. A visitor appointed by the Association will attend both occasions and write a report which must be received at least one month before the date of the interview. It is therefore very important that you liaise with the candidate and the Association to ensure that a suitable opportunity is found within the required timescale.



In Service Development

There is need for ongoing study, for continuing reflection both upon the word of God and the world, both individually and with the help of a mentor or accompanier. The Association will be able to advise the candidate of helpful courses and conferences to assist in your development as an RRL.

In Summary

The testing and confirmation of the candidate's call and gifts will follow the following stages:

- A recognition of their call by their local Baptist Church where they have been in membership for two years. The candidate will normally have been involved in a leadership role for a two year period before the church can commend them.
- A first interview with the Association will help discern the candidate's sense of call to this ministry and will recommend a course through one of our Baptist Colleges. The Association will inform the College that the candidate is in the process of recognition. If the candidate is already enrolled on a course, then the Association will need to ensure that the College understands that (s)he is applying for regional recognition. *The Association are looking at a candidate's potential at this point.*
- After two years' experience of leadership ministry and training, the candidate will once again meet with the Association for a second interview. The Association will use references to help them assess engagement with the formation process (Regent's Park College Community Learning Tutor or equivalent), and to test the candidate's leadership and pastoral ability, looking also at calling, as well as character and spiritual and intellectual development.



Who are we looking for?

There is no blueprint for ordained ministry and those called by God are very different, but there will be a number of things that such people have in common, which could be called 'marks of ministry'. We are looking for people who both show these marks and the potential for them to be developed

MARKS OF LEADERSHIP MINISTRY *POTENTIAL*

(including competencies and expectations)

Clear evidence of a call that originates from God. This will be supported by personal testimony and attested by other mature Christians who know the candidate well.

A personal maturity and deepening of a candidate's relationship with Christ. A growing personal Christ-centred, prayerful, biblically informed spirituality which reveals a significant self-awareness and integrates work, church, family and self as a life embodying and lived in relationship with the Triune God.

Clear evidence that a candidate is someone whom others naturally trust and follow.

Clear sense that God's purposes matter more to a candidate than personal goals and aspirations.

A sense of belonging to the Body of Christ in all its diversity. With pastoral ability to listen effectively, to relate to others who are different, for example, culturally, theologically and to offer appropriate care both to those within and without the church.

A proven ability and adequate humility to listen and learn.

Showing ability to think through issues with care and insight, to make connections between the Bible and life in the mission of the church, and help others to think in this way. A necessary pre-requisite is the ability to apply experience and learning to new situations.

Measurable leadership potential. Demonstrating ability to offer positive influence in a variety of ways, to work well with others both within and beyond the local church and to help the church to be mission-minded and forward-looking. This includes the ability to communicate, whether leading worship or preaching or other contexts, to handle the Bible faithfully, to recognise the contemporary cultural and mission context and to facilitate groups of varying size. By no means all regionally recognised leaders will major on worship-leading and preaching but all will show the ability to communicate with, present to and facilitate various groups.

Tenacity and character in the face of disappointment and struggle.

What do we do as a local church?

If there are individual(s) in a church who are sensing that God might be calling them to this kind of ministry or who the church are encouraging to consider this ministry, then a number of things are important.

1. Minister/Leadership Team read these guidelines.
2. Minister/Leadership Team meet with the potential candidate to

- i. hear the story of the candidate's call to recognised regional leadership
 - ii. explore *evidence of potential* in marks of leadership ministry which are listed above.
 - iii. explore with the candidate what it might mean for them to engage with the SCBA process of formation as a regionally recognised leader.
3. Following this meeting, two leaders give constructive feedback regarding the calling, gifts and continuing ways forward for the candidate to grow in and exercise ministry *whether or not the potential for regionally recognised leadership is identified*.
4. If the call and potential to be formed as a regionally recognised leader seem to be present, further prayerful consideration to take place at a church meeting including a description of what a regionally recognised leader is and an opportunity for the candidate to briefly outline their sense of call.
5. At a *subsequent* church meeting, the whole church to consider and decide whether they share the sense that God may be calling this person to train for ministry. An explanation of this is provided on the next page 11**. This will be affirmed by a formal commendation from that church meeting to the Association Leadership and Ministry Development Group

Further help

We hope this gives relevant information. Further help and advice will be available from your minister or your Regional Minister (contact web-site).

** At this subsequent church meeting, the members will draw on their previous prayerful consideration to discern whether they recognise that there is this particular calling on this person's life, and whether they are happy to commend them to go forward for interview. We would suggest that following a brief explanation/introduction the candidate is invited to share a testimony of their sense of calling and why they want to take this step. People may wish to ask questions which is fine. The candidate should then leave the meeting, along with their spouse and any other close family members who may be present.

The remaining church members should then discuss the matter – the following questions could guide the discussion:

- Does the candidate have a suitable character for this ministry? Are they humble and teachable, but showing gifting in wisdom and leadership?
- Is the candidate sufficiently spiritually mature to be ready for regionally recognised leadership formation?
- Has the candidate demonstrated leadership ministry gifts amongst us and in the local community or their workplace? In what ways has this fellowship and this community been blessed by them?
- Does the candidate have a heart for mission in the local area, for reaching those who do not yet know Christ? In what ways have we seen this demonstrated?
- Do we as a church sense that there may be some sort of ministry calling upon this person's life?

If the church is able to answer 'yes' to these questions then we would ask that a resolution is voted upon, worded along the following lines:

"We as members of [church name] commend [candidate name] to go forward for interview for SCBA regionally recognised training."

Confirmation of this in writing will be needed by the Association at least one month before the date of the candidate's likely interview. A simple letter on church-headed paper confirming the date of the meeting and the church's wish to commend [name of candidate] is all that's needed. Please address the letter to _____ and send it to the address shown below.