

## **Correctional Chaplain**

Chaplains for incarcerated people are involved in prisons and jails at all levels of the government (federal, state, county and city) and with private corrections companies. Correctional chaplains serve in adult and juvenile facilities. In addition to SBC General Endorsement Requirements, the minimum qualifications of Correctional Chaplains vary according to the type of confinement facility and state.

### **Local and County Facilities**

Chaplains at local confinement facilities are usually volunteers. The local facilities set their own requirements, which are often minimal. Formal accredited theological education and ordination are often not required. A background check is expected. Those desiring to provide ministry in these situations should consult with the local authorities for requirements.

### **State Facilities**

Most chaplains at state prisons are required to have a theological degree. Experience often is credited for some educational requirements. After employment, two units of Clinical Pastoral Education may be required for promotion.

### **U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons**

Requirements for those desiring to work at federal correction facilities are more comprehensive:

- Ordained minister by or recognized by an SBC Church
- Valid SBC endorsement
- The normal age limit to apply is 37. (Exceptions are made based on experience.)
- United States Citizenship
- Undergraduate degree from an accredited institution
- Master of Divinity/Theology degree or the equivalent education from an Association of Theological School (ATS) accredited residential seminary or school of theology: 20 graduate hours of theology; 20 graduate hours of sacred writings; 20 graduate hours of church history or comparative religions and 20 graduate hours of ministry courses
- At least 2 years of autonomous experience as a religious/spiritual leader in a church or specialized ministry setting. (Clinical Pastoral Education may satisfy up to one year of experience.)
- Pass a background investigation
- Pass physical requirements and examination by the Federal Bureau of Prisons

## General Endorsement Requirements

When using vocational or volunteer chaplains, each institutional agency and organization sets specific requirements for their hiring criteria. In addition, the Southern Baptist Convention has its own denominational requirements for endorsing chaplains. All chaplains endorsed by the SBC must meet these minimum requirements:

- Demonstrate the call, competence and character for ministry as a chaplain.
  - › The applicant must demonstrate a call to the ministry. This involves not only the written communication, but actions showing a personal commitment to Christian ministry.
  - › The applicant must have proven character in line with his or her call to chaplain ministry. Chaplains are expected to live their personal and professional lives with the highest practice of integrity in accordance with the *NAMB Code of Conduct and Covenant of Support*. A chaplain's personal character must be consistent with the spiritual leadership required to work with people.
  - › The applicant must undergo a background check that includes credit, criminal, and sexual offenses.
- Be a member in good standing with an SBC church for a minimum of one year. All endorsed chaplains are expected to maintain membership in a Southern Baptist church and develop an accountability relationship with a Southern Baptist church. This accountability should relate to the chaplain's personal life, as well as his or her exercise of ministry in his or her ministry context.
- Submit references, including one from applicant's SBC Pastor, ministerial staff, or Director of Missions/Associational Mission Strategist.
- For vocational chaplains, be licensed, commissioned, or ordained by an SBC church or church of like faith recognized by the applicant's current SBC church. This recognizes the role of the local church in affirming the ministry of the applicant.
- Hold theological beliefs currently adopted by the SBC as represented in [\*The Baptist Faith and Message 2000\*](#). Additionally, applicants and endorsed chaplains are to affirm compliance and support of the following policies:
  - › If divorced, the applicant will be assessed with grace and mercy on an individual basis in accordance with NAMB policy.<sup>1</sup>
  - › The applicant must agree to the *NAMB Code of Conduct and Covenant of Support*.
- Vocational chaplains should have accredited theological training consistent with their projected ministry assignment. A Master of Divinity degree or equivalent is often required for vocational chaplains.
- Volunteer chaplains are expected to be actively engaged in chaplain-specific training.
- Meet requirements of employing agency, institution, or professional organization. The Chaplain Commission will not endorse a chaplain who does not meet the requirements of these agencies or organizations.
- Must receive approval from the Chaplains Commission.

---

<sup>1</sup> For specific details, see Chaplaincy Endorsement Manual, "Divorce and Remarriage," 31.

## **Duration of Endorsements**

An SBC Chaplaincy endorsement is to a specific chaplain ministry position. Any change in chaplain status or employment requires an update of endorsement. Some ministerial training programs, such as a clinical pastoral education residency, have a specified duration. When the chaplain completes the training, the endorsement terminates. Certain endorsements have a specified time for which they are valid. This termination date is usually stated on the endorsement and/or is expressed by the institution's policy. If an endorsement is no longer required, the endorsement will terminate until an update is requested. A chaplain may request the withdrawal of endorsement at any time. A chaplain may lose his or her endorsement at any time due to circumstances such as doctrinal stance, moral failure, or other substantial issues.

All endorsements terminate when the chaplain is no longer affiliated with the organization to which he or she was endorsed and/or the chaplain no longer meets the SBC requirements for endorsement.

## **Endorsement Updates**

Periodically, the institution will ask that the chaplain have an updated endorsement. It is the responsibility of the chaplain to initiate the process for updating an endorsement. Also, a chaplain should contact the SBC Chaplaincy Team to request an endorsement update when his or her status or ministry location changes. Endorsement update requests can be made through the chaplain's portal ([mynamb.net](http://mynamb.net)).

Chaplains can have more than one endorsement if an individual is actively serving as a recognized chaplain in respective institutions.

Chaplains can request an update by contacting the SBC Chaplaincy Team or through the Chaplain portal at [mynamb.net](http://mynamb.net). Once started, the chaplain will need to complete an Endorsement Update Application and send proper supporting documents. When requesting an updated endorsement, chaplains are to ensure their current profile, SBC church membership, pastoral reference, and Quarterly Report is current. When a chaplain requests an update to a vocational endorsement from a volunteer endorsement, the basic requirements/guidelines for that chaplaincy category and status applies. Please allow up to six weeks for the endorsement update process to be completed.

## **Transferring an Endorsement**

A chaplain can only be endorsed through one endorsing body. However, a chaplain can change ecclesiastical endorsement at any time for a variety of reasons.

Any transfer of endorsement to another religious ecclesiastical organization requires the chaplain to inform their current endorsing agent. The ecclesiastical endorsement process, requirements, and timeline differ among the various religious ecclesiastical organizations.

As a general rule, SBC Chaplaincy allows a 90-day transition period for transferring endorsements to another ecclesiastical body and will include either a with or without prejudice comment.

## **Oversight and Supervision**

Chaplains typically serve in a secular institutional setting that authorize and hold them accountable. Chaplains are also sent to the field by faith groups that endorse them. A chaplain maintains his or her endorsement, and therefore employability, by staying in affiliation and good standing with his or her faith group. However, it is the secular institution that employs and authorizes chaplains as their religious leaders and official representatives.

The Chaplains Commission, through the administrative actions and pastoral care of the SBC Chaplaincy Team, retains ecclesiastical oversight of the chaplain's work and life as a representative of the SBC. The Chaplaincy Team members are available to respond to any questions or concerns.

Each applicant for denominational endorsement by the Chaplains Commission is expected to understand, accept, and support the Commission's policies and purposes.

## **Discipline and Withdrawal of an SBC Endorsement**

An SBC-endorsed chaplain may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including withdrawal of endorsement when he or she violates a law (local, state, federal, including the Uniform Code of Military Justice), agency policy, SBC general expectations as stated in [\*The Baptist Faith and Message 2000\*](#), *NAMB Code of Conduct and Covenant of Support*, a personal or professional ethic that impacts his or her effectiveness, or is an embarrassment to the cause of Christ, Southern Baptists, NAMB, or sending SBC church.

The Chaplains Commission desires that justice, grace, and mercy be exercised in all situations for personal redemption and restoration. However, withdrawal of endorsement may result from any situation deemed by the Chaplains Commission to warrant such action.